

RUTLAND HERITAGE TRAIL #2

FIELDS AND FOLLIES

DISTANCE: 5 miles (approximately)

START & FINISH: Oakham Road in Exton, opposite The Green.

TERRAIN: Easy going tarmac or gravel bridleways, apart from a small stretch of field footpath (grass). There are two stiles and some uphill stretches.

REFRESHMENTS: The Fox & Hounds Hotel & Restaurant, Exton

MAP DETAILS: This route is covered by the Ordnance Survey Explorer Series Numbers 15 (234) and 224.

Exton is located in the north of Rutland, close to the north shore of Rutland Water.



ALLOW ONE TO TWO HOURS FOR THIS CIRCULAR WALK WHICH EXPLORES THE VILLAGE AND OLD HALL ESTATE OF EXTON. YOU'LL NEED TO ALLOW SLIGHTLY LONGER IF YOU WANT TO EXPLORE THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST PETER AND ST PAUL.

Surrounded by a landscape of fields and woodland, Exton village has been described as one of the prettiest in Rutland. Attractive 18th and 19th century thatched ironstone buildings are grouped loosely around a shaded village green.

The village is dominated by Exton Hall with its Old Hall ruins, extensive formal grounds, garden follies (closed to the public), stone boundary walls, entrance lodges and gates. Nearby, the restored medieval parish church contains many outstanding 16th to 18th century family monuments.

Away from the village centre, the modern fields contain the evidence of their past life as the extensive landscaped grounds associated with the country house and seat of the Noel family – Exton Hall. The ornamental lakes, avenues of trees and garden follies give a glimpse of the past splendour of a 17th/18th century country house and its landscaped park.



THE WALK

Start at the Fox and Hounds Hotel (which was once a large Coaching Inn) on the village green. Find High Street and walk along it to the top where you turn left into West End.

To your right are the brick piers and tiled roof of the Old Pump House on a small green.

A little way along, turn right into a roadway that leads to Home Farm. This 'Private Road – Unsuitable for Motor Traffic' leads you past farm buildings to a cattle grid/gate with signposts for the Viking Way.

Once through the gate there is a choice of two paths – straight ahead or to the right. Turn right, following a tarmac bridleway past farm buildings and a cemetery.

On reaching a junction with another pathway, turn right (still on the Viking Way). The bridleway skirts the trees of Tunneley Wood as it veers to the right. After a while, the Viking Way footpath is signposted to your left; make sure you keep to the tarmac path marked 'Bridle Road to Fort Henry and A1'.

Continue past a large farm building to the right and head towards the trees that signal the location of Fort Henry. After about a mile you reach two lakes – Fort Henry Lake to the left, Lower Lake on the right. Soon after this, a footpath is signposted to the right.



FORT HENRY

In April 1786, a Stamford architect, William Legg, was requested by the 6th Earl of Gainsborough, Henry Noel, to provide designs for a "Gothick building by the pond". Although referred to in building records as the Pond House, the summerhouse soon became known as Fort Henry, as it was used by the Noels for the re-enactment of naval battles.

The pinnacle and turreted structure was built to replace the old boat house at the pond. It became a favourite place for Noel family picnics and parties, and a location for special events held by the Earl of Gainsborough for his Estate workers and tenants.

You must leave the hard road surface for a short while and climb the stile into the field that surrounds Lower Lake. Walk alongside the lake until you reach another stile. This takes you back onto a hard footpath that curves to the right, skirting the bottom end of Lower Lake and leads back towards Exton village.

Another footpath straight ahead leads to Horn Mill – a few steps along this and the site of the deserted medieval village of Horn is visible in the fields on your left.

The footpath begins to climb as you move away from the lakes of Fort Henry into an area quarried for ironstone in the mid-20th century.

Soon you will reach a crossroads – with a choice of two bridleways and a footpath. Take the bridleway marked to the left (still a tarmac surface). As you climb upwards, the church spire of Exton church will come into view ahead of you.

Cross a cattle grid into a field with large horse chestnut trees. Houses start to appear as you near Exton and the bridleway becomes a village street. You come into Exton on Stamford Road alongside a small green. Cross over, taking the road straight ahead to bring you back to the Fox and Hounds Hotel.

You may wish to resist the temptations of the pub for a while longer and instead visit the parish church of St. Peter and St. Paul. If so, turn left and walk a few hundred yards out of the village. The church is down a marked road on the right opposite Church Farm.

The lane to the church itself is green and shaded, passing through the great parkland of Exton Hall. Glimpses of the formal gardens can be seen through the thick hedges on your right. To your left are the remains of earlier houses, cleared in the mid-1800s.

Retrace your steps to the Fox and Hounds Hotel and your starting point on the village green.



SAFER WALKING

- Be prepared – wear suitable clothing and sturdy footwear, take refreshments and directions.
- Respect the countryside – take care in crops and be considerate of livestock.
- Take care when crossing or walking on roadways and walk facing oncoming traffic.
- Fasten all gates, keep dogs under close control and guard against fire.
- Please show consideration to village residents by parking cars responsibly and making sure all dog mess is appropriately cleared away.
- Remember to take nothing but photos and leave nothing but footprints!

