

SLEAFORD NAVIGATION EWERBY WAITHE TO CHAPEL HILL

This eastern “half” of the two-part linear walk along the Sleaford Navigation begins from Ferry Bridge. [A] Old maps name this as “Halfpenny Bridge” and locally it is “Ha’penny Hatch”. There are two conflicting versions of how these names came about. One is that the “halfpenny” relates to the passenger toll in the days when there was a ferry, and later a toll bridge. The second tells that local children were paid a halfpenny to jump onto boatloads of hay using their weight to prevent it catching on both this and Town Bridge in South Kyme.

From Ferry Bridge the route to Chapel Hill is actually beside the Kyme Eau, originally a tidal, navigable, waterway, which terminated at Appletreeness about a mile to the west. A petition to King Edward III from Gilbert de Umfraville (Baron of Kyme) in 1343 requested the right to charge tolls in return for marking and indicating the navigable channel and building materials for Tattershall Castle, begun in 1434, were later transported along it. Immediately to the south of Ferry Bridge the navigation utilises a short section of the Roman Car Dyke, a 56 mile long drainage system (and possibly canal too) linking the River Nene in Cambridgeshire to the Witham at Lincoln. Roman pottery has been found in the vicinity.

Throughout its thirteen miles the Sleaford Navigation only flows through one village, South Kyme. [B] The area has a long settlement history for a Neolithic axe was found many years ago when the navigation was being dredged. However people could only live in the undrained fens where a few isolated “islands” occurred and the nucleus of the first village at South Kyme would have occupied the raised ground - the 5 metre contour on modern maps - where the church and Manor House now stand. The first inhabitants were probably the Coritani tribe, whom we know also had a settlement at Old Sleaford.

South Kyme first came to prominence around 1100 when the de Kyme family became lords of the manor. By 1135 they were “Barons of Kyme” and within two generations they were Sheriffs of Lincolnshire too. It was a Philip de Kyme who, around 1170, founded a small Augustinian priory here (whose members were known as the Black Canons) on the site of the present St. Mary’s church. [C] The priory was later much enlarged, first by Simon de Kyme and subsequently by the Tailboys family, and continued to prosper, surviving until the Dissolution in 1536. In 1338 the manor passed through marriage into the hands of the de Umfraville family and it was Gilbert de Umfraville who had a grand, fortified house built around 1340; of this only the Kyme Tower now remains. Gilbert had replaced an earlier wooden manor house with his “castle” and when that in its turn was pulled down around 1725 the present Manor House was built from the stone. There are earthworks for the original manor house moat in the gardens of the C18th house to the south of the church. St Mary’s church is now much reduced in size from its former grandeur. Considerable rebuilding took place in 1805 and restoration in 1888 but some fragments of early masonry still remain.

On a small green by the High Street stands a large wooden carving of a kingfisher by Simon Todd, created as a celebration of the bird’s return to the Eau during the 1990’s. Nearby an ornamental archway commemorates the 1994 bi-centenary of the navigation. Town Bridge in South Kyme has been restored to its original 1790’s appearance.

The first building of interest seen after leaving South Kyme is Terry Booth Farm. [D] This late C18th brick group includes a large farmhouse and a remarkable fully enclosed crew-yard, with a tower in west range incorporating a dovecote. The word “Booth” is Lincolnshire dialect for a temporary dwelling, especially a hut near summer pastures, which is precisely what this area would have been centuries ago. There is a second Terry Booth Farm a few yards further on the opposite bank and in North Kyme parish.

The route next visits Bottom Lock. [E] The navigation had seven locks and this was the first met by barges after leaving the Witham. Restoration was completed in 1986 by the then Sleaford Navigation Society. The lock now has traditional mitre gates with balance beams at one end and a modern guillotine gate at the other. A lock-keeper’s house once stood on the lock island and on the site now is a plaque in memory of Derek Taylor who, together with his wife Pat, worked enthusiastically towards restoration of the waterway. The lock has been renamed Taylors Lock in recognition of their commitment.

It is now just over a mile and a quarter to the end of the walk at Chapel Hill [F] where the waterway joins the River Witham [G] and the inland waterway system.

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A linear 6¼ ml (10 km) walk starting at Ferry Bridge, near South Kyme (Grid Ref. 152502) and finishing at Chapel Hill Bridge (Grid Ref. 208541). The walk is along the towpath throughout with rough, tussocky grass in places.

This is the second of two walks which cover the entire length of the Navigation between Sleaford and the River Witham at Chapel Hill. Options include doing it in one direction only, perhaps with a pre-arranged pick-up at the end; as a “there and back” outing; or combined with Walk 2 for the full thirteen miles from Sleaford. Its linear nature means that it may be easily reversed so as to end at Ferry Bridge where there is limited roadside parking.

The first two miles fall within the boundaries of three OS. Landranger maps. However because the nature of the route beside the navigation it is simple to follow and the use of all three maps is unnecessary. The whole route is shown on the Explorer map.

Refreshments can be found at either the pub at Chapel Hill or the pub in South Kyme. A good picnic spot can be found at Taylors Lock or by the River Witham.

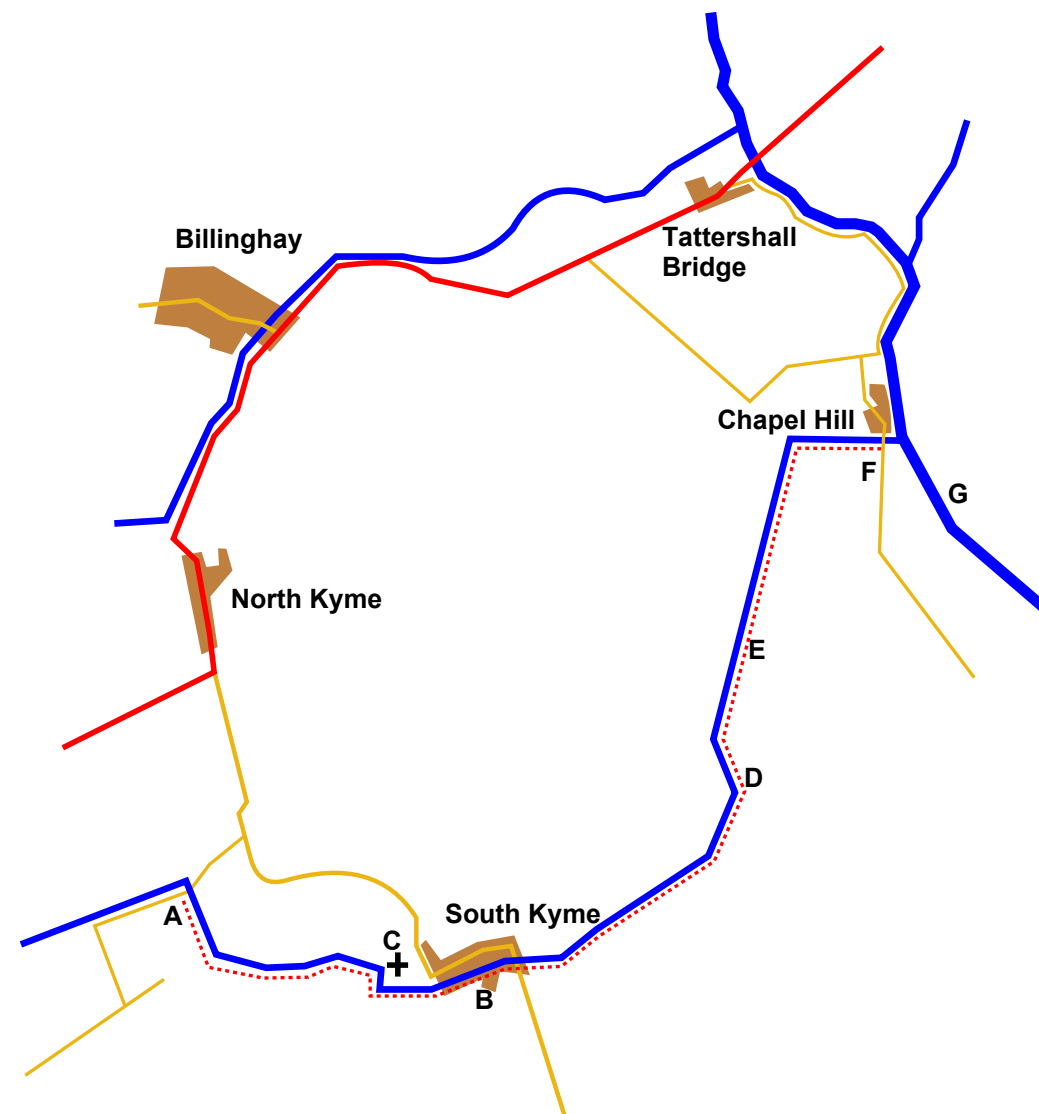
MAPS: OS. Landrangers 121 (Lincoln), 122 (Skegness) and 130 (Grantham)
OS. Explorer 261.

ROUTE INSTRUCTIONS.

(1) Leave the road by the signpost opposite the farm at Ferry Bridge, having the navigation to your left. This first straight section is part of the Roman Car Dyke, which continues southwards as the Midfodder Dike from the point where the navigation bears left at what the map names as Heckington Tunnel. Continue to the first road bridge at South Kyme. (You may wish to make a detour here to see the church and for a closer view of the Kyme Tower.)

(2) Otherwise continue by the navigation to reach the Town Bridge in South Kyme village. Cross the road here, staying by the canal, and noting the kingfisher sculpture on the opposite bank. On reaching the next road, the B1395, cross the bridge to see the Slea Navigation Bi-Centenary memorial arch.

(3) From the B1395 road continue with the navigation still to your left and a golf course on the far bank. Pass through a field gate opposite a pumping station, and three more in the vicinity of Terry Booth Farm; the other Terry Booth Farm across the Eau is in North Kyme parish. Continue to Bottom Lock.



(4) Beyond Bottom Lock is Bridge Farm and in a further mile the navigation swings round to head east towards Chapel Hill Bridge. The shop and inn are to the left in the village.

(5) For the satisfaction of fully completing the walk beside the navigation continue for a further 250 yards beside the Eau to its confluence with the River Witham.