

SLEA WALKS 5

HAVERHOLME LOCK AND RUSKINGTON

This walk follows the Sleaford Navigation only briefly before heading over fields to the charming village of Ruskington.

The start is near the partially restored Haverholme Lock and a good view of the ruins of Haverholme Priory [A] is seen from the carpark. Haverholme is the “island between two rivers” and it was Cistercian monks from Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire, who had been given land by Bishop Alexander, who founded the first priory here in 1137. The Cistercians however found the swampy, low-lying land unhealthy and not to their liking, and moved on to Louth Park within two years. So it was that in 1139 the site was offered to Gilbert of Sempringham to establish a Gilbertine priory. The Gilbertines were a much less wealthy order and could therefore not afford to be so particular, yet despite complaints and being only a small community, they stuck it out until the Dissolution in 1538.

The priory then became a private, residential property, passing through various ownerships during the next two and a half centuries. It was much extended, particularly by Sir Jenison Gordon in 1788 before coming into the possession of the Finch-Hatton family, the Earls of Winchelsea. They too altered the house, especially in 1835, and held the property until 1927 when it was demolished after the family fell on hard times and were forced to sell up. The Finch-Hatton family included several eccentric members over the generations, one of whom fought a duel with the Duke of Wellington and one who kept a tame lion on the drawing room sofa. (Though the beast was eventually dispatched to London Zoo!) Another lived in Kenya for several years around the end of WWI and became involved with Karen Von Blixen during the period in her life that she later wrote of in her book “Out of Africa”, subsequently a well-known film.

Situated near the start are the elegantly arched Haverholme Bridge and Haverholme Lock on the Sleaford Navigation. [B] The bridge dates from 1893 and it bears the arms of the Earl of Winchelsea because he agreed to fund the extra cost when the local authority would only pay for a simple flat bridge. Because a parish boundary runs along the river here half the bridge is in Ewerby and half in Ruskington. At the lock there are obvious signs of restoration with the provision of a new sluice by the Sleaford Navigation Trust. Haverholme lock (one of seven on the navigation) had the highest rise of all at nearly ten feet. (i.e. three metres) For a while following the closure of the navigation, it was roofed over by the owners of Haverholme Priory for use as a boathouse; the old winch machinery beside the lock may be related to this or part of a turbine driven water supply system for the Priory.

Approaching Ruskington the route crosses a railway [C] built jointly by the Great Eastern and Great Northern Railway Companies and opened in 1882 to link Sleaford with Lincoln. The railway is crossed again on leaving the village, this time over a delightfully old fashioned metal footbridge, painted bright blue.

Once in Ruskington village centre [D] the most obvious feature is the unusual and attractive High Street, split into “North” and “South”, along either side of The Beck. This ancient settlement was named “Rischintone” in the Domesday Book from an amalgamation of Old English and Scandinavian words, meaning a “farmstead” where “rushes grow”. Evidence of Anglo-Saxon occupation comes from an early cemetery found to the north of the village. All Saints church overlooks the High Street and the bridge that replaced a ford in 1841. In 1618 the tower, which had a spire at that time, collapsed and was rebuilt two years later. Remarkably an internal Norman tower arch remains. The east window in the south aisle dates from 1874 and was designed by the great Pre-Raphaelite artist William Morris. There are seats on the bridge and beside “The Beck”.

Across the road, on the corner of High Street North, stands Poyntell cottage dated 1669, and just along from it is the National School of 1868, built on land given by Lady Winchelsea of Haverholme Priory. Make sure you leave High Street via Jubilee Street in order to see the curiously ornate “Teatotal Houses” built to commemorate Queen Victoria’s jubilee.

On the return to Haverholme the walk re-crosses the Sleaford to Tattershall road. [E] This was turnpiked in 1795 and the tollbooth stood here near to the end of Haverholme Lane. It was sold off and removed in 1868 when the roads were taken over by local councils.

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This is a 4½ ml (7 km) walk which starts and finishes at Haverholme car park (Grid Ref. 106496). The walk takes you along the towpath, through meadows, with a short section on arable land and country lanes. It should be noted that, when leaving Ruskington some paths have been re-aligned slightly from those shown on OS. maps. Take care where the route twice crosses the busy A153 road.

There are a number of pubs and a cafe in Ruskington for refreshments and there are picnic spots beside the Beck in Ruskington and at Haverholme Lock.

MAPS: OS. Landranger 121 (Lincoln) - 130 (Grantham) / Explorer 272

ROUTE INSTRUCTIONS.

[There are two options for the early part of this walk.]

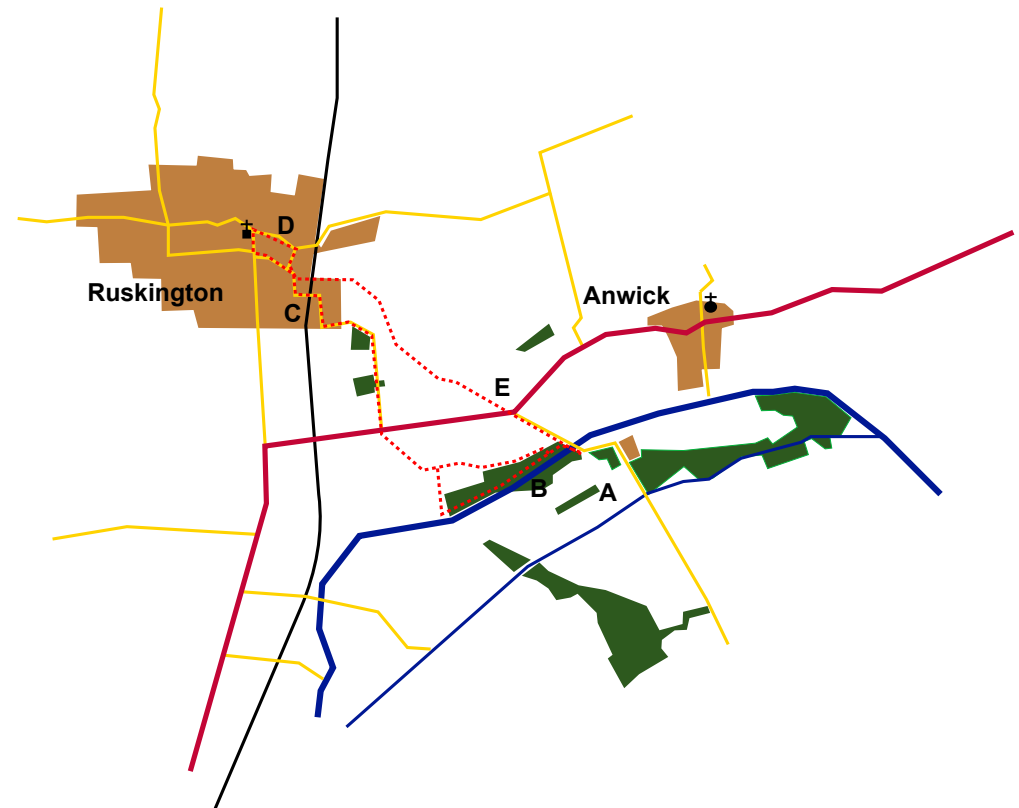
(1a) From the car park cross the road bridge and turn left beside navigation. In fifty yards, at a footpath sign, climb the stile in the fence on your right then bear left past some large trees to a footbridge with stiles built into it. Cross this and immediately go left over another footbridge. Now continue by woodland and a stream, crossing more footbridges until reaching one on your left over the stream itself. (Option (1b) joins from the left here.) Keep ahead.

(1b) From the car park cross the road bridge and turn left beside the navigation for half a mile until the footpath bears right and leaves the navigation to skirt a private garden. In a few yards another path goes right again over a plank bridge onto woods. Take this. On leaving the woods keep directly ahead over an arable field to a footbridge over a stream. Join option (1a) here and turn left.

(2) At a further footbridge the path meets a farm track and now heads diagonally right over an arable field. Aim at the electricity pole in the far corner where a footbridge provides an exit to the A153 road.

(3) Cross into the lane opposite and follow this as it zig-zags into Ruskington village. Beyond the railway bear right, then left along Station Road to reach the roundabout by the library. Turn right to reach the High Street, with the church to your left.

(4) Turn right again (either side of The Beck will do) but look out for Jubilee Street and turn right into it to see the almshouses. At the end turn left, briefly retracing your outward route to a footpath sign pointing left between houses.



(5) Follow this path to a blue footbridge over the railway and beyond that keep ahead on a track until it crosses a stream. Do not go over the stream but turn right to a footbridge by a fence, beyond which is a large meadow. Keep by the left hand hedge, go through a gap into a second field and then, staying to the right of a large chicken shed, walk over to a kissing gate by a footpath sign. Join a farm track and turn right.

(6) At a "T" junction turn left along a lovely grassy track to reach the A153. This is the old Sleaford / Tattershall turnpike road. The lane opposite leads back to the start.

(7) Before returning to your car however turn right onto the path where the walk began. This time walk along to the footbridges over the sluice and the lock, then turn left again through woods to reach the car park.