

SLEAFORD AND THE RIVER SLEA, INCLUDING NORTH AND SOUTH RAUCEBY

The starting point for this walk is Moneys Yard, Sleaford. [A] Once known as Gladstones Yard (the name still over the archway leading out into Southgate) this was where the Sleaford Navigation began. On completion of the wharves it became an “island” within a turn-around cut for the boats which had travelled up from the River Witham. The wharves here and around the main basin by Carre Street thus effectively marked the transition of the River Sleas into the Sleaford Navigation in 1794. The massive seventy feet high Moneys Mill was built within two years of the Navigation opening, and had three sets of millstones. It was restored by the Sleaford Civic Trust in 1986.

As you walk along Southgate note the “Nine Foot River” which is crossed before reaching the shopping precinct where we come alongside the Sleas itself. The estate agents office cantilevered over the river occupies the site of a former watermill. There was another mill where the former fire station now stands bearing the dates stones of the original and present buildings, 1829 and 1900.

Beyond Westgate as we head out of town we see something of Sleaford’s railway history. [B] The footpath passes under a bridge carrying the Great Northern and Great Eastern Joint Railway line to Lincoln, opened in 1882. We leave the Sleas at a disused railway bridge. The line was built by the Admiralty in 1917 to supply the Royal Naval Air Service airfield at Cranwell. Closed in the 1920’s, it was briefly used again during WWII.

Leaving the Admiralty railway we join Drove Lane, an ancient route connecting Sleaford and North Rauceby. [C] Having arrived at North Rauceby we are able to see some exhibits from the NKDC Sculpture Project, which aimed to place works of art with a local cultural relevance within the countryside. By the entrance to Rauceby Hall is “The Sleeping Shepherd” with his dog and a lamb (note also the mint carved around the back!) by Simon Todd. Another sculpture, this time by Anne Alldread, depicting local agriculture is in Church Lane. A third work themed on local history and wildlife (this time in metal by Richard Farrington) is seen in Southgate Spinney as we leave South Rauceby heading back towards Sleaford. Rauceby Hall itself dates from 1842/46 and the little school across the road is dated 1842. Up the road from the Hall is the base of North Rauceby’s ancient village cross, restored with a new shaft in 1861. St. Peter’s Church nearby has a particularly fine example of a south Lincolnshire speciality, the broach spire.

To reach South Rauceby [D] we pass by Glebe Farm with sweeping views across the valley of The Beck as it flows down towards Boiling Wells to form the source of the river. South Rauceby is an estate village, mostly built shortly after the Hall. The magnificent brick tower windmill dates from 1841, and the Bustard Inn is so named because the last bustard in Lincolnshire was shot nearby.

On the way back to Sleaford we pass Bully Wells Farm [E] where a short detour can be made to see the Boiling Wells site – though only at a distance, for the springs lie on private farmland. A public footpath however runs close by down to The Beck.

Following the River Sleas we rejoin our outward route briefly to reach Westgate again. [F] Once a busy industrial area it had once been considered as a possible Head of Navigation but it was found that, for commercial purposes, a terminus in the town centre was sufficient, and in any case the promoters ran out of funds. There had been a corn mill here by the river since the Middle Ages, which by the early C18th had been converted into a hemp mill and a ropewalk established where Electric Station Road now stands. For many years the Sleas was navigable upstream to Boiling Wells and flat bottomed boats were operated by local building firms to transport stone, both for building and lime burning at a kiln here. The electricity sub-station was built in 1901 as a generating station for the town.

The area to the south was for centuries undrained fen. This was the start of “Nine Foot River”, which also siphoned off some of the Sleas’s water, which supplied the castle moat before flowing through the town to rejoin the river again. The name Castle Causeway suggests that an artificial way was needed over the marshy ground.

Finally we pass the site of Sleaford Castle [G], built by Bishop Alexander of Lincoln in the early C12th to protect his local estates. Though never attacked or put under siege, it was abandoned and falling apart by the C16th. Only one small section of wall now remains. More of its history can be found on information boards within the grounds.

SLEAFORD TO NORTH AND SOUTH RAUCEBY.

A circular 8¼ miles (13 km) walk starting at Money's Yard car park, Sleaford (Grid Ref. 069457). The walk is mainly urban and country footpaths, farm tracks, green lanes, meadows and one arable field. There can be some short muddy sections on the walk. Some variations to this route appear in a NKDC "Stepping Out" leaflet. Take special care when crossing the Sleaford by-pass.

Refreshments can be found in various inns and cafés in Sleaford and also the Bustard Inn, South Rauceby. Alternatively you could picnic in South Rauceby quarry.

MAPS: OS Landranger 130 (Grantham) Explorer 272

ROUTE INSTRUCTIONS.

(1) Exit Money's Yard into South Gate. (Note the "Sleaford Navigation 1792" ornamental paving under the "Gladstone's Yard" archway.) Turn right, use the crossing and continue to the Riverside shopping precinct. Turn left here but keep close to the river. After passing the old fire station continue along West Banks.

(2) At the end cross West Gate onto a footpath beside the River Sleas. Go under a railway bridge, staying by the river to a second railway bridge and there turn right onto a surfaced track. At the next junction turn left along Drove Lane.

(3) Cross the by-pass into the lane opposite and in 250 yards take the track on the right and when it divides keep ahead through a group of trees. At the next track junction bear left beside a hedge. On reaching some electricity wires turn right onto another track going uphill past woods and on reaching a wide green lane turn left. This is another section of the ancient Drove Lane; follow it for a mile to the public road at North Rauceby and take a well-earned rest on the stone bench set into the wall corner.

(4) [Our walk goes right here but first turn left for 100 yards to The Park entrance opposite the school to see the "Shepherd" sculpture.]

(5) Return and walk towards North Rauceby church, going left at the village cross into Church Lane. Continue beyond St. Peter's, passing another sculpture and with views north to the RAF College at Cranwell, before taking the signposted lane on the left for Glebe Farm. At the end go through a field gate and turn left on a grass track to a second gate. (This section has extensive views across "The Beck" valley towards Wilsford.) From the second gate keep ahead for a 100 yards then veer right to pass round the garden wall of a large house, cross the access drive and then steer gradually leftwards to a sports pavilion in the bottom corner of the

field. Another gate nearby leads onto Main Street, South Rauceby. Turn left to reach the inn.

(6) Continue downhill from the inn and when you reach Pinfold Lane turn left. As Pinfold Lane bends to the right look ahead for a few yards for a footpath sign pointing right into Southgate Spinney. Take this path and on reaching a metal sculpture bear right to skirt an old quarry and emerge onto a broad field edge path that has views all the way back to Sleaford. Continue forward until alongside a poultry farm. [After the first sheds a waymarked right of way goes off to the right. From it you can glimpse the site of the Boiling Wells - on private land below the farm buildings - and you can down walk to The Beck in the valley bottom. Return.]

(7) Continue on the fenced path past the farm to a stile and then slant right over an arable field down to the River Sleas. Follow this to the by-pass, re-cross it and continue by the river until you meet the outward route. Walk back to West Gate.

(8) Now turn right along Castle Causeway and after visiting the castle site take the footpath on the left immediately before the railway crossing. Back in South Gate bear left, re-cross to Gladstone's Yard archway and return to the start.

