

GRAND UNION: NORTON JUNCTION TO FOXTON LOCKS

TRIP TYPE: 2 CARS REQUIRED

OBJECTIVE: CYCLE FROM NORTON JUNCTION ON THE GRAND UNION TO FOXTON LOCKS ON THE LEICESTER BRANCH

DISTANCE: 28 MILES

TIME: 4.5 HOURS, 6.5 mph

NICHOLSON: GUIDE 3 pp 89-95

COSTS: PAY & DISPLAY PARKING AT FOXTON LOCKS, FREE PARKING AT TRACK / PUB AT NORTON JUNCTION

DIFFICULTY: HARD

OVERVIEW: A tricky ride as the towpath is poor for much of the distance, either compacted earth and gravel, or grass. Many sections are narrow, sloping, with tree roots and greenery growth restricting passage. There are 2 tunnels to navigate over. A few hundred yards of towpath near Foxton locks must be walked. Very difficult when wet underfoot.

Park Car 1 in Foxton locks Top car park (Gumley Road) LE16 7RR (£3 per day). Park Car 2 on the track to the British Waterways yard at Norton Junction, close to the New Inn NN6 7PW, which is on the A5. Or park at the pub if you prefer.

There are many marinas on this section, and a couple require bikes to be carried over a footbridge as they are on the towpath side. There are also 2 sections where the towpath has eroded and the footpath is carried by a temporary walkway.

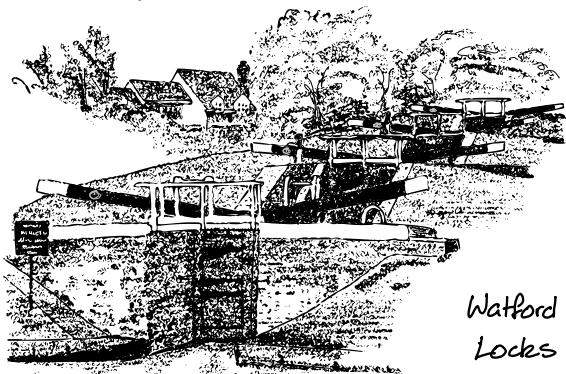
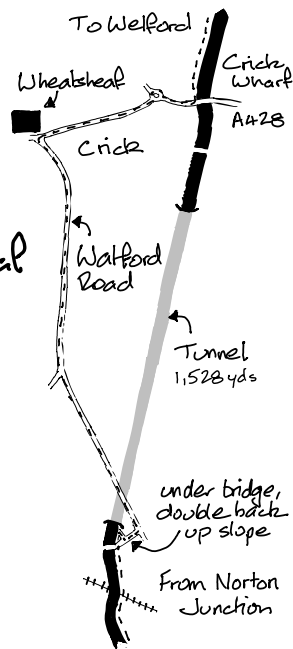


1. MORTON JUNCTION TO WELFORD (17.5 MILES) ²

If you time this right you can arrive at The Wharf Inn, Welford, in time for lunch (we didn't!).

The section is notable for Watford Locks, an 8 lock flight with a partial staircase. Also, the canal weaves between the M1, the A5, and the mainline railway, providing a contrast to the hustle and hubbub. There is a good view of Watford Gap services whose name comes from the low-lying land between 2 hills, which explains why so many arterial routes pass through the area, and have done since Roman times.

At Crick tunnel the slope cuts back up once under the bridge and close to the tunnel entrance. Turn left (east) at the top and follow a short track to the road. Turn left and follow the road to a T junction, then turn right to Crick. At The Wheatsheaf turn right and continue to the roundabout (by-pass). Turn right, and shortly drop down steps to the canal.



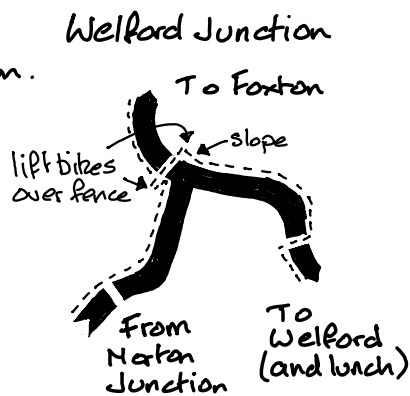
Watford Locks

The canal follows the land's contours for several miles to Welford Junction.

This is tricky, as you have to lift the bikes over 2 stiles/fences on the bridge to get onto the Welford Arm.

From there it is 1.75 miles and 1 lock to Welford, and hopefully lunch.

There is a short diversion around the marina just before the basin.



2. WELFORD TO FOXTON LOCKS (10.5 MILES)

Return by the same route to Welford Junction. Navigate the 2 stiles again. Continue North.

Husbands Bosworth tunnel is next: the towpath continues up the slope on a good track. At the road cross straight over, then weave left/right at a disused railway bridge. The track drops back down to the towpath.

There are some very poor sections next, you may have to walk where the path is narrow, sloping and tree-rooted. Once at Foxton Top lock, make sure you cycle down to the foot of the locks, both to take a look at the fantastic engineering of the locks and inclined plane, but more importantly there are 2 pubs: The Foxton Locks Inn (a foodie pub) and Bridge 61 (basic boater pub for decent beer and a chat).

Alternative Route: if 28 miles on a poor track is too much, you could skip the Welford Arm, giving you a ride of about 24 miles.