

Quorn Walks – No.3

Quorn Fields, Canal and Riverside

This is three of the set of six

Option A: 6.5 km (4 mile)

Option B: 7.5 km (4.5 mile)

Pubs and café at start and end.

Refreshments on route!

Terrain: Part paved; part uneven with mud in wet weather. Stiles, Raised Footbridge.

Bus stops: The Cross, Quorndon Fox, Bull-in-the-Hollow (No. 2,127,154) and Quorn Hall (No. 2).



Quorndon Hall pictured here in Victorian times is now known simply as Quorn Hall

From Quorn Cross head towards Loughborough along High Street. Immediately beyond the Quorndon Fox turn left onto the Bridleway, then right off Sanders Road following the 'horseshoe' sign. After crossing the **Tom Longs** water meadow turn right again (**Checkpoint 1 on the map**) on to the path that runs parallel to the meadow and at the edge of Caves Field home of the **Quorn Cricket Club**. Eventually emerging to cross the Woodhouse Road on to the Woodthorpe path public right of way. For items of interest to this point, see Walk 5.

Plantings across Poulney Brook that flows to the left of the path provides habitat in the spring for *willow warblers*, *whitethroat* and *linnet*. After the path leaves the brook, we pass behind 'One Ash' the house surrounded by tall trees on the right – a good spot to catch a glimpse of the colourful *green woodpecker* or to hear its loud laughing call. (For other items of interest along here including the railway, see walk 2.). Crossing the railway bridge the track is followed into **Woodthorpe** where a right turn is taken toward the 'roundabout' on the A6006 (**Checkpoint 2**). Taking care we cross this busy road to join the public right of way path that passes through the housing development to re-join the old lane (Lodge Lane) that formed the main access to Woodthorpe until 2003. At the A6, again take care crossing this busy road before mounting the stile by **Bull-in-the-Hollow Farm**. This was formally the Needles Inn and

the Bull-in-the-Hollow Inn, the bull being common in local pub names as reference to the crest of the Herrick or Hastings family of Beaumanor Hall.

After a few hundred metres a view opens up across the large 'prairie' field on the right toward the rather elegant three-storey **Lodge Farm**.



Lodge Farm built in the late 18th century. Pictured here in 1899 with owner John Moss

The field itself is frequented in winter by large flocks of *gulls*, *lapwing* and *golden plovers* and in summer by breeding *skylarks*. The low-lying ground here is drained by deep dykes along which several pairs of *sedge warblers* and *reed buntings* breed. In the late summer these fields attract large flocks of *Canada* and *greylag geese*. The fountain seen on the right is the aerator for **Lake Sara** (Quorn Lodge Borrow Pit) a man-made pond on the right that dates from the early 1990's, when it was left after gravel extraction for the A6 Quorn and Mountsorrel By-pass. It soon developed into a wildlife area supporting wildflowers, birds, amphibians and insects, including several species not previously recorded in Quorn.

At the footpath 'crossroads' (**Checkpoint 3**), turn right for **Option A** or carry on for **Option B**.

Option A: the path is a public right of way it crosses the deep dyke and passes through a narrow section of mature plantation before reaching a more recently planted area of meadow land. These plantations and meadows hold much of interest: in summer a good variety of *butterflies* and six species of *warblers* and in winter flocks of *redwing* and *fieldfare*. On joining the metalled road known as **Flesh Hovel Lane** turn right. (The flesh hovel was where old horses were slaughtered for hounds' food.) A short deviation to the left of approximately 150 meters takes you to the **Pillings Lock Marina** where refreshments are available. Along the lane, *little owls* breed in the hedgerows trees and can frequently be seen or heard *whitethroat*, *lesser whitethroat*, *linnet* and *yellow hammer* are also seen here. After about 700 metres, turn left on to the public footpath to walk through **New Hayes Farm** please keep to this footpath which passes close to the dog kennels then pass through the hedge just beyond the gateway. Cross over the main road to the **Quorn Hall Lodge** originally the North Lodge, at the driveway to Quorn Hall, it is now a private house. The property is Late 19th Century and locally 'Listed'. The Warner family crest can be seen under the apex of the gable fronting the entrance drive. Mr.W.E.Warner purchased the Hall in 1855.

Turn left along the road toward Barrow Bridge (see walk 4). In fact, we enter the parish of Barrow-on-Soar just after joining the road, at the small '**Priest's** **Bridge** named after the regular route of the Barrow priest on route to Quorn, whose church for many years a chapelry

under Barrow. By the traffic lights (**Checkpoint 4**) turn right onto '**The Slabs**' footpath (see after Option B).

Option B: continue the path which passes the *ash* plantation to the right and over the **Woodthorpe Bridge**, so named, as the track just walked was the link between the canal and the hamlet of Woodthorpe. Here we turn right over the stile to join the canal towpath eastbound towards Barrow. This is part of the **Leicestershire Navigation** opened in 1794 mainly for coal transport and which became part of the Grand Union canal in 1932. This stretch highlights a pattern of typical valley transport: first river, then turnpike road, then canal, then railway and then trunk road and dual carriageway road all squeezed in parallel ribbons through the valley. The railway here was originally part of the **Midlands Counties Railway** opened in 1840 and used in 1841 by Thomas Cook for the first venture into the travel business: A Temperance Society outing from Leicester to Loughborough. Today the passenger express services mostly operate to and from London St Pancras with local connecting services between Leicester, Loughborough and Nottingham.

Just before **Pilling's Lock**, the path runs alongside an area of willow scrub, formally one of the many *osier* beds used in the Soar Valley's basket-making industry and now a haunt for birds such as *willow tit*, *blackcap* and *garden warbler*, as well as some rare insects. The lock marks the point where the cut diverges from the River Soar which flows over the weir to the left. Mr Pilling was a 19th century lock keeper who gave his name to the Barrow Shallow Lock, a flood lock. This is only closed at the time of flood. The lock-keepers cottage was demolished in 1957. A river level Measuring Station can be seen from the bank this is part of the national flood risk monitoring system. The flow rate and level can be checked online or twitter [@PillingsLock@riverlevel](https://twitter.com/PillingsLock). Before crossing the bridge, it's worth looking for *kingfishers* at the riverside below the weir. From here to Barrow Bridge it's easy to feel you're deep in the countryside rather than just two kilometres from a large town, especially with an easterly wind to keep the traffic noise at bay. In fact we're walking by one of the best stretches of *reed-swamp* and riverbank in Leicestershire, supporting some 170 species of flowering plants and colonies of *reed warblers* in summer. *Little grebe*, *mallard*, *moorhen* and other waterfowl frequent the river here and *grey wagtails* can often be seen around Barrow Bridge. At the bridge (Checkpoint 4) carefully cross the road at the crossing. Here the routes merge once again for the route back to Quorn Cross. A short deviation across the bridge takes you to a choice of two pubs the Riverside and Soar Bridge Inns.

Continue on the public right of way known as the slabs. The name "slabs" came from the time when Sir Richard Sutton was owner of Quorndon Hall and Master of Foxhounds (1847-1855). He maintained a private railroad siding at Barrow, where hounds and horses were loaded for transport to distant meets. He built himself a quarter mile long path paved with rough slate slabs through the middle of the meadow to keep his boots dry while he walked to the train.

For details of this path and of Quorn Hall, see Walk 4. As we pass over the A6 on the raised footbridge the Hall can sometimes be visible through the trees on the left. On the right can be seen the Fenny Copse sculptures park and housing development.

For items of interest along Station Road on route back to Quorn Cross, see Walk 6.

Quorn Walk Map 3

