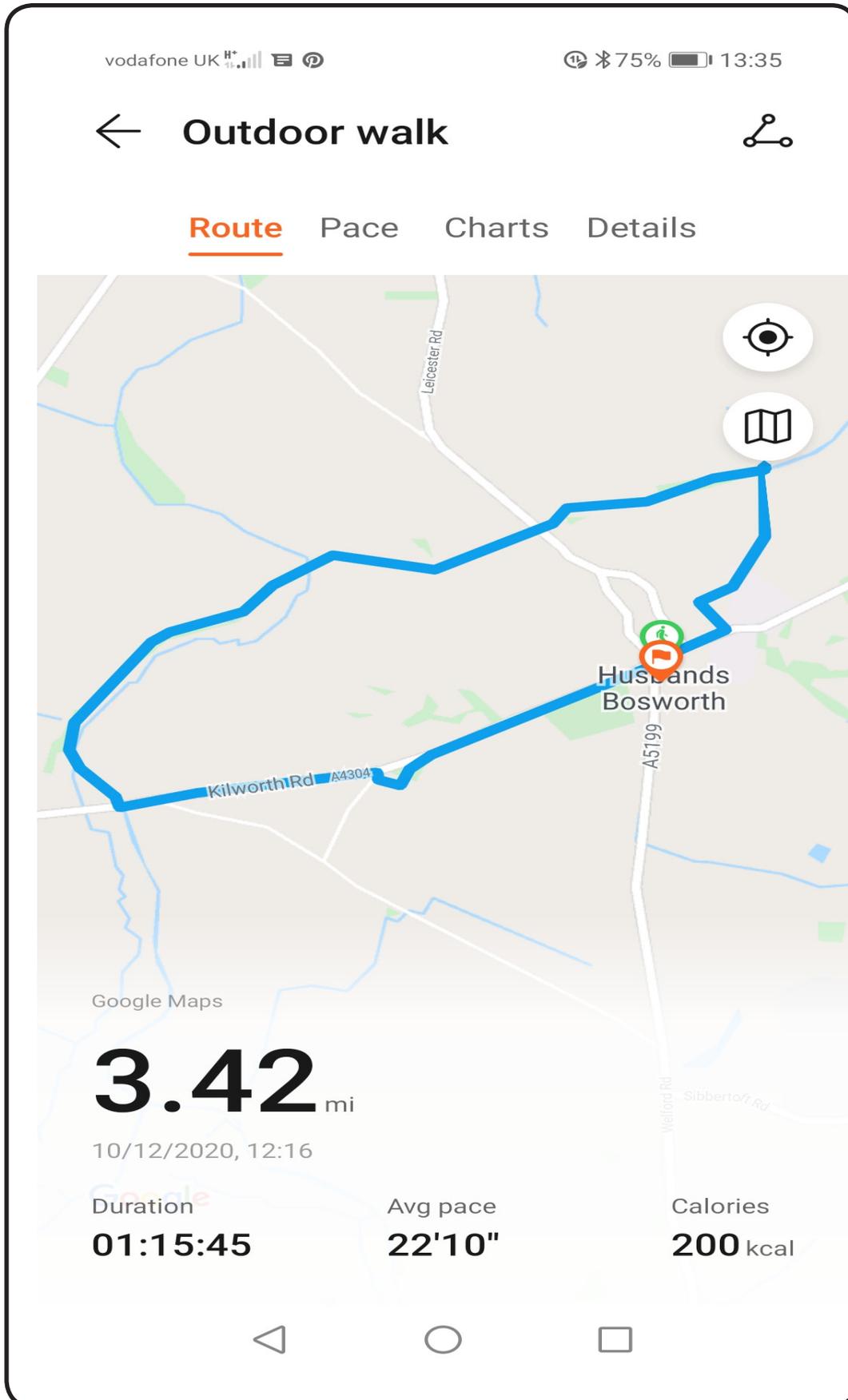


# WALK ABOUT BOSWORTH

## 2. TUNNEL VISION

A reasonably easy walk, in part along a busy road, but also some off-the-beaten-track canal towpath walking...



# WALKS ABOUT BOSWORTH

## 2. TUNNEL VISION

*Easy going, one steep gradient and descent, canal towpath can be muddy in parts. 3.42 miles (5.47km) 1¼ hrs*

**This walk starts and ends at the Turville Memorial Hall.**

*[Limited car parking here, or on The Green - always park considerately]*

### ♦ *Walk west towards North Kilworth on Kilworth Road*

The Turville Memorial Hall was built in 1895 in memory of Sir Francis Fortescue-Turville of Bosworth Hall. Originally only one room housing a reading room and library, the hall was extended later with the addition of the toilet and kitchen and Committee Room. More recently a back-stage area and prop-store were added, which also enabled access from the back of the stage - exit stage left! At the same time an anteroom was included, which the Historical Society now use as their Archive Store.

On the opposite side of Kilworth Road, on the corner of Bell Lane, is The Bell Inn, an 18<sup>th</sup> C coaching inn, substantially unaltered, with stabling in the outbuildings to the right of the side entrance. At one time the parish could boast a grand total of eight hostelries, of which the Bell and the Wharf Inn, on the parish boundary at Welford, are the only two survivors.

### ♦ *Proceed along Kilworth Road*

After the row of former Council houses on the left is the Scout Hut, children's Playground and Playing Field.



Before this field was purchased by the Parish Council, village recreation had a bit of a peripatetic existence, with sports being played variously in the grounds of Bosworth Hall, in the field at the end of School Lane and where Kemp Drive and Knights Close are today. Adjacent to the children's Playground is a Skateboard Park, the building of which was funded by a group of village children and their parents. The Skatepark replaced a BMX track that had become redundant as the BMX craze waned. A little further on, behind a high hedge, is the site of the village bowling green, now an allotment and privately owned.

### ♦ *Carry on along Kilworth Road*

Kilworth Road was once the turnpike from Coventry to Oundle, its maintenance funded by tolls along the way. As the age of motoring dawned the road was designated a Trunk Road, the A427(T), in the emerging strategic roads structure. With the building of the A14 and the anticipated lesser traffic flows, its designation was downgraded to the humble A4304. Quite what the significance of linking Coventry and Oundle has been lost in time, but the route is still called Coventry Road in both Lutterworth and Market Harborough.

On your left is the Sports Pavilion, which was built by public subscription and grant funding as a millennium project, replacing a tumble-down cricket pavilion previously on the site. The building has a small conference room, kitchen and toilet/changing facilities to league standard.

Uneven ground and field marks showing sunken roadways and raised platforms in the field on the opposite side of the road, particularly visible in aerial imagery, reveal the site of an ancient settlement. This may have been the original focus of *Baresworde*, mentioned in the Domesday survey, and was perhaps depopulated as a result of the Plague in the 1600s or simply abandoned in favour of a better site.

The small, squat building here is the gatehouse cottage to Highfield House, a grand Regency mansion, at one time the home of J.T.Mills Esq., a major landowner with estates in Bedfordshire, Norfolk and Scotland and a director of the Great Eastern Railway. The house itself fell into disrepair after being used as officer accommodation during World War II and was demolished in 1950, only the gate house, coach house and outbuildings remaining.

In the unimproved pasture of the paddock on you left is a well-preserved example of ridge and furrow, a remnant of the medieval strip farming system.

### ♦ *Walk past the ribbon development of private houses*

You will soon come to the entrance of the village's community woodland. The Millennium Wood was developed as a village initiative to commemorate the new millennium. The site was purchased from Leicestershire County

Council, with the help of community grants and Landfill Tax levies and opened in 2002.

You can either carry on down the hill along the roadside footway or escape the traffic for a while by taking the path through the hand gate into the Wood. In the Wood there are a number of made pathways to choose from through the trees or around the outside. The Millennium Wood is administered by Trustees and is lightly managed for conservation by a team of volunteers. The area was once the site of a clay pit and brickyard but today is a haven for flora and fauna - heron, mallard and kingfishers take to the waters, whilst in the spring the tree canopy is alive with rooks. There were no permanent structures here, the bricks being fired in an earth-covered clamp in layers of wood, charcoal and probably coal brought up from the canal. Over the years the volunteers have planted hundreds of native species trees around the site, constructed a labyrinth of pathways and dug a pond in the lowest part of the clay pit. You can still make out the ridge and furrow pastureland, which has been over-planted with trees. Look out for bird boxes and an owl box. Exit the Woodland through the small carpark onto Mill Lane. About a mile south is Bosworth Mill, on a site that is mentioned in the Domesday survey. The present mill, now two homes last milled in the early 1950s.

#### ***◆ Return to Kilworth Road and continue down the hill***

This hill is still known locally as Brickyard Hill and before roadway improvements in the 1960s, had a more fearsome gradient. As you walk down the hill you will see that the footway veers off to the left and it is still possible to see the remnants of the original carriageway, the empty sockets of the cats-eyes in the tarmac and even where the white lines were seared off so as not to confuse traffic on the 'new' road!

#### ***◆ You soon come to Station Road junction***

Cross over the junction, watching out for fast traffic from North Kilworth turning into Station Road.

Immediately on your left is the entrance to North Kilworth Wharf. The white cottage, now the home of Wharf



House Kennels, was once The Union Anchor Inn. The inn and the wharf were for many years the domain of the Woodhouse family; canal carriers and coal and lime merchants. Charlie Woodhouse would regularly bring coal from the Nottinghamshire collieries, down the river Soar through Leicester to Kilworth and Welford wharves, operating the two boats single-handedly the whole of the way. After a period of dereliction, as canal traffic declined following World War II, the site saw an upturn in fortunes in the 1960s, as the leisure boating industry began to blossom. Under the ownership of the ebullient Derek

Hucker, a successful boat building and hire base was established.

Today the wharf is run as a boat yard offering permanent moorings, day-boat and longer term hire, boat building and painting facilities.

#### ***◆ Cross over the bridge and go down the steps to the canal***

The canal here is the Grand Union Canal, officially the Grand Union, Leicester Section. The water here is on a level of 22 miles between the locks at Watford, near Daventry (close to M1 Watford Gap Services) and the ten-lock double staircase at Foxton. The canal was opened in 1815 after three years in the building. The original plan was to connect the town of Leicester and the river Soar with the river Nene at Northampton through Market

Harborough, but the cost of building a vast aqueduct across the Welland Valley soon put paid to that idea. After a period when the navigation ended obscurely at Debdale Gumley a new scheme was devised to take the canal over the Soar watershed and follow a level path along the contours to meet the Grand Union Canal at Norton.

#### ***◆ Carry on along under the road bridge on the towpath***

The towpath here is broken and often very muddy. On the opposite bank you will see a lively stream discharging into the canal and on the towpath side an overflow taking excess water back to the stream. The level of water in the canal is controlled by a series of weirs such as this along its length, maintaining a constant level for navigation. As the water drains down from this level at both ends of the section, at Foxton and Watford locks, a constant supply of water to keep it 'topped' up is needed. This is chiefly achieved by water gathered from as far away as a reservoir at Naseby, which is fed down the Welford Arm of the canal with additional water from Welford and Sulby Reservoirs.

The canal appears to start cutting into the hillside, however the high ground on your left is actually an embankment for the abandoned London & North Western Railway branch line from Rugby to Stamford. Opened in 1850, this line was Market Harborough's first railway connection and continued in business until succumbing to Dr. Beeching's economic scalpel in 1966. It is a little ironic that, in so many places such as this, the railways that caused the decline of the canals by robbing their traffic have themselves died, whereas the canals have survived and flourished!

♦ *Carry on along the towpath, as it gets less muddy*

The canal now does start to cut into the hillside and after a long shady section (welcome in high summer, but gloomy in winter!) you come to the western portal of Husbands Bosworth Tunnel. The route planned by the canal surveyors building this connecting waterway followed the contours, avoiding geographic obstacles and snaking languidly around the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire countryside with nary a care in the world. However, at Bosworth, in order to escape the Soar valley, a tunnel through the watershed was needed.

♦ *Follow the track to the left of the tunnel portal*

Before you rise up from the canal level see if you can spot a speck of light in the dark maw of the tunnel. The bore here is as straight as the proverbial arrow and, though it is three-quarters of a mile away, you can usually see the light at the end of the tunnel! The tunnel is about 15 foot wide at water level, so is suitable for two way traffic for narrowboats. Ponder on the fact that, before the advent of mechanical diggers the tunnel, the approach cuttings and indeed, the whole canal cut, were all dug by hand - picks, shovels and barrow-runs.... Gangs of labourers, often itinerant Irish workmen - 'navvies' - would be employed and notoriously rowdy temporary camps would be set up near the work sites.



♦ *Make your way up the slope along the track*

This is the boat-horse path. You will have noticed that the tunnel has no towpath and so, before the days of motor boats, the horse-drawn canal boats were man-handled through the tunnel, often by hired 'leggers' who would lie on their backs and 'walk' the boats along the tunnel walls. A slow and miserable job in the cold, dark and dripping bore, for six pence loaded and four pence empty! Meanwhile the towing horse would be walked over the top of the tunnel, usually by a small child, to meet the boat at the other end. There are tales of horses that would be so accustomed to this walk that they would walk themselves to the other end and wait patiently for their master and his boat to arrive!

♦ *Carry on up the slope*

You will soon notice that the gradient is getting steeper. Gird your loins, as the next hundred yards or so will be a good coronary work-out! Take a breather half way up the hill and look back over the lowland to the north and west, over the river Soar catchment area. Ground water draining from here will drain to the Soar and river Trent, to eventually find its way out to the North Sea at the Humber. The stream that we saw feeding the canal near Kilworth Wharf, on the other hand, drains to Shakespeare's Avon and finds the sea at the Bristol Channel. (Incidentally, the land on the south side of Bosworth village drains to the river Welland and hence to The Wash. So, within the parish we have waters that go in three cardinal directions - north, south and east, which led the Rev. John Mastin (1747-1829) sometime rector of this parish, to surmise that Bosworth must be the highest place in England!)

♦ *Back to tackling the hill...*

Eventually the gradient lessens and you breast the rise. Pause again before you carry on down the opposite slope and rest on the iron gate to your left, overlooking the undulating pastureland. Here you will see a series of strange mounds, topped with trees. These mark the line of the canal tunnel beneath, and are the spoil heaps drawn up from the bore by the navvies. Eight shafts along the line were dropped to the required depth. Lateral tunnels were then cut from the bottom of each shaft, like an up-turned letter T ( ), which ingeniously gave the tunnellers two working faces per shaft, to speed up the construction. With the two portals, the eight shafts gave 18 working faces. All the engineers had to do was align the side tunnels to eventually join up with each other! Many canal tunnels kept a number of these service shafts for ventilation, however the lie of the land and

the orientation of Bosworth tunnel, into the prevailing south-westerly wind, keeps the bore clear by the natural movement of air. As you descend the hill it becomes apparent how daunting Bosworth hill must have been to the canal builders.

#### ◆ *You will presently reach the main road*

Cross carefully to continue along the boat-horse path on the other side. *[To take a short-cut back to your start, walk up the hill to the village and up to the top of Bell Lane]*

Carrying on along the boat-horse path you will cross the line of the disused railway, which has been alongside us on our route over the tunnel, on a substantial over-bridge. At this point the over-bridge, the disused railway and the canal tunnel are stacked above each other, the tunnel bore being only nine feet below the track-bed! The boat-horse path continues with the old railway accompanying us, now on our right. After a while the old track-bed disappears behind a tall corrugated iron fence. This is a 'blinker' blind to stop the boat horses being startled by the passing trains, and originally lined the whole of this stretch of the path. You drop down to canal level again as the path emerges from its Stygian gloom. Look back at the northern portal, which declares the length of the bore as 1166 yards. Elsewhere the length is quoted as 1170 yards (1071 metres), the discrepancies probably accounted for by the subsequent remodelling of the portal. The tunnel is brick-lined throughout, including under-water (like an egg shape) and it is estimated that 12½ million bricks were needed.



#### ◆ *You soon come to a bridge*

At this point in the cutting the Marsh family had a boat-house from which they took boat trips on the canal. This is Bridge 46, Honey-pot Bridge. Canal bridges are usually numbered from where the navigation starts - Bridge 1 of this line being at Norton Junction. Not all bridges have survived, so gaps in the numbering are evident. Also, new bridges often slip into the series and are identified with a suffix to the preceding bridge - Na, Nb, Nc, etc.

#### ◆ *Take the steps up to the bridle track*

Just over the bridge, on the canal off-side, is the site of the brickyard that supplied the bricks for the tunnel, which is now a private fishing lake. A brickyard manager's house stood here until the 1960s.



Walk up the track towards the village, over the line of the disused railway line, which crossed here on a level crossing. One can only wonder at the amount of traffic that passed over here to warrant a permanent crossing keeper. The foundations and quarry tiled floor of the crossing keeper's cottage have recently been unearthed on your left, next to the modern farm buildings.

The crossing was the scene of a tragic accident in September 1949 when William Wells, a retired gardener of Mowsley Road was struck by a train whilst returning from his customary afternoon walk carrying firewood. The subsequent inquest surmised that Mr. Wells, being hard of hearing, had not heard the approach of the train.

#### ◆ *Walk up the gentle slope of Broad Lane*

Broad Lane, which carries on as a bridle track towards Mowsley, was probably an ancient drove road, along which livestock were driven to pasture or market. These roads were typically wide, hence 'broad', so that the tread of the animals could be spread over a wider area to lessen poaching, and also enclosed to enable the stock to graze the wide verges whilst being herded.

**Continue to the top of Broad Lane, straight on onto Mowsley Road and turn right at High Street, to return to your start point on The Green.**