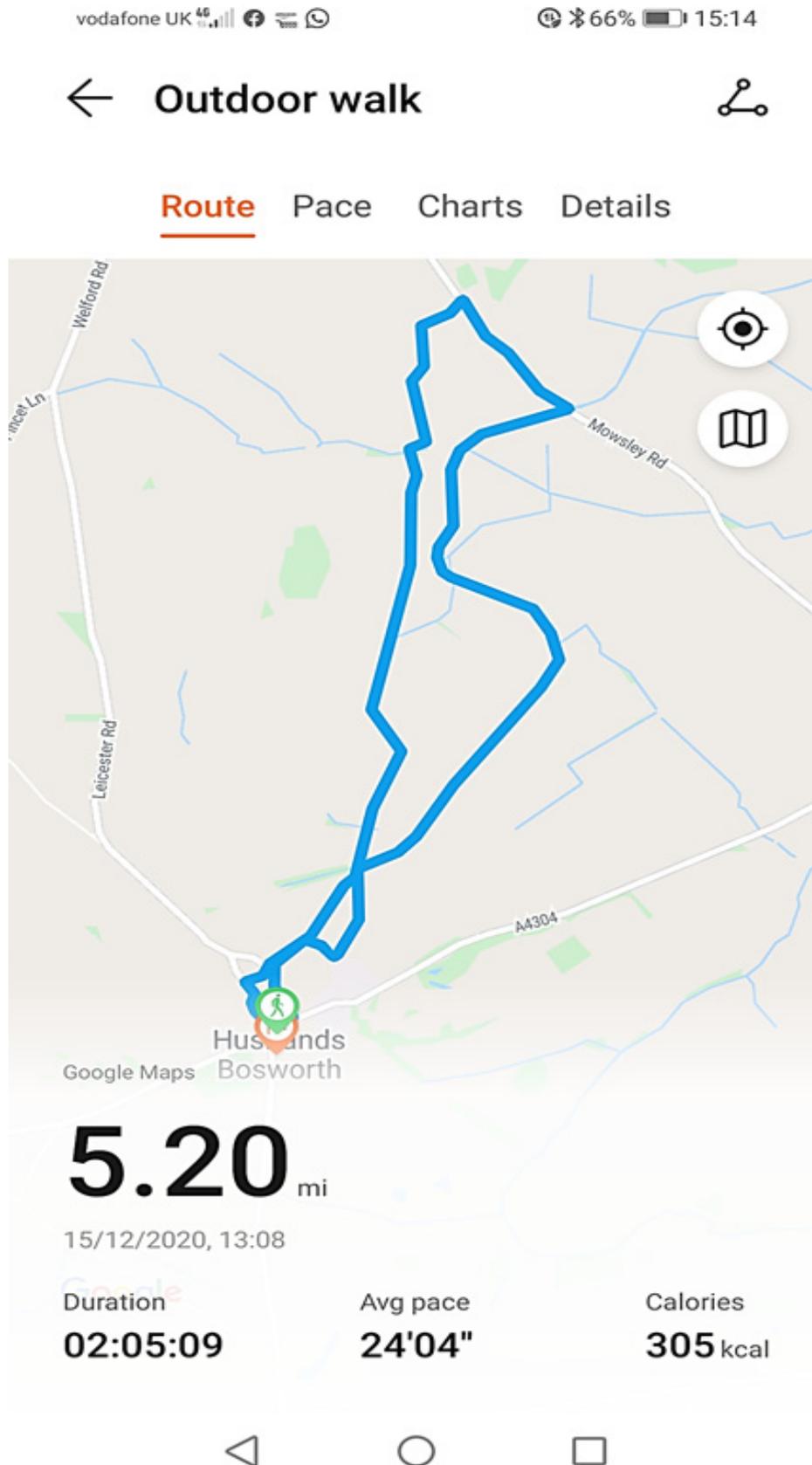


# WALK ABOUT BOSWORTH

## 3. BRIDLED PASSIONS...

Easy going mainly, canal towpath can be muddy in parts.



# WALKS AROUND BOSWORTH

## 3. Bridled passions...

### **This walk starts and ends at the The Green.**

*[There is limited car parking near The Green and Turville Hall car park - please park considerately]*

Mainly easy going, though canal towpath can be muddy and narrow in parts. 5.2 miles (8.36km)

### **Cross over the pedestrian crossing and walk down Bell Lane**

Carry on down Bell Lane for about 150 yards and turn down Green Lane. Green Lane has a bit of an identity problem... Whilst ostensibly a through route, the county council in their infinite wisdom decided that the number of vehicles following sat-navs getting stuck where the lane narrows warranted the installation of a No Through Road sign. Significantly there is no sign at the other end, so it's apparently not a No Through Road from that direction!

### **Cross over Berridges Lane to the Public Footpath**

This is Dag Lane, which was once probably a much more important thoroughfare than its current lowly footpath status - sunken roads such as this often betray Iron Age or Bronze Age origins. The meaning of 'dag' has been lost in the mists of time, but Dag Lanes are found in several Midland villages and locally in North Kilworth and Mowsley.

At the 'elbow' bend in the track carry straight on through the hand gate in the direction indicated towards Mowsley, with the horse paddock on your right and down the slope. For years, before this field was divided into paddocks, whenever it snowed it became the village sledging field! Emerge onto the Mowsley bridle track through the kissing gate in the lower corner.

### **Turn left along the track**

The track leads to the village of Mowsley and, before the Turnpike Act upgraded the present Leicester road, was possibly a main route from Welford to the villages to the north and Leicester. Today the route is built up through the village but soon reduces here to a bridle track and unmade status. We cross over line of the disused London and North Western Railway branch line from Rugby to Stamford, which crossed here on a gated level crossing.

### **Cross over the canal bridge**

Peer into the leafy cutting and you may be able to spot the eastern portal of 1160 yard long Husbands Bosworth tunnel. The canal here was opened in 1815 as the Grand Junction Canal, which provided a link between the ill-fated Leicester and Northampton Union Canal and the Grand Union Canal. The 12½ million bricks for the tunnel were made in a brickyard where the fishing lakes are today.

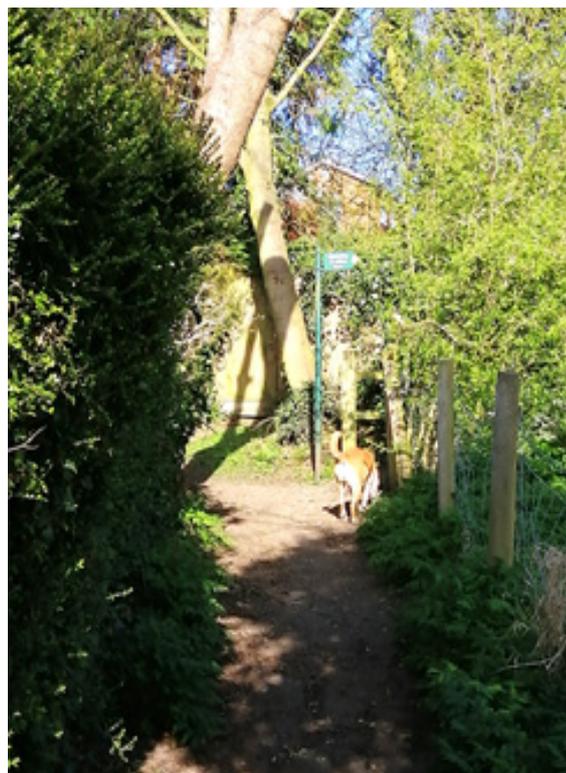
### **Continue up the bridle track**

Note the stone hare on the little bridge head wall - incorporated as a whimsy when the bridge was refurbished many years ago! Follow the footpath signs as we emerge into open fields.



Note the neatly round-topped hill, with a black plastic water trough on the brow, to your left. Early maps show that there was a corn mill on the top of the hill here. There are no obvious remains, which suggests that this was probably a wooden post mill. The field is called Step Mill to this day.

Follow the gravel track as it veers to the left and up a slight rise. After a couple of hundred yards the right of way carries straight on where the gravelled farm track veers off to the right. Keep left and pass through a gate and downhill towards a ramshackle hovel. Look out for a slightly wider verge on your right before you get to the buildings and you may spot a substantial metal cover with a handle, in the grass. This is a stop valve chamber for an oil pipeline that supplied fuel to the former USAF air base at Bruntingthorpe (*More of this later in our journey!*).



These derelict buildings are all that remain of a farmstead - Days Lodge. With no mains services the farm was abandoned in the 1960s and the house and buildings subsequently demolished.

Linger a while here and you may be rewarded by the unexpected sound of gun shots or even the angry growl of a Centurion battle tank or the sight of a Ferret scout-car breaking cover from the woodland in the middle distance to your right - this is the 'playground' of the Armourededdon Tank Paintballing Centre!

### **Walk up the track past the big round tank - an above-ground slurry store**

Over the brow of the slight rise in the track you will note that the bridle track, perhaps a bit illogically, leaves the line of the farm track through an electric fence line. (*Unhook the insulated handle to pass through, but remember to re-attach it securely!*)

As you descend the slope to the metal hand gate in the tree line note the field on the opposite slope of the valley in front of you. During World War II this was the site of a practice bombing range. Bombing crews from the local aerodromes would drop light charge, dummy bombs or flares onto a fixed target, the accuracy of their endeavours assessed by triangulation from two sighting stations.

### **Go through the hand gate and over the little bridge**

Follow the path signs, firstly right and then left up the side of the field, keeping the hedgerow on your right. At the top of the hill the track slips through a metal gate to your right to continue on the other side of the hedge. Follow around the edge of the field, now keeping the hedgerow on your left.

### **Pass through another metal gate and it is a short way to the metalled road**

Pause at the roadside gate and look across the road up the grassy slope opposite. Lying half hidden towards the top of the rise, in the sward and gorse, is the Mowsley Stone, a 5 foot long megalithic glacial erratic (an Ice Age deposit), an ancient 'mark stone' parish boundary marker. Legend has it that the Mowsley Stone will turn over if Theddingworth church clock strikes thirteen! [*There is no public access to the Stone.*]



### **Turn right and walk down the road to the canal bridge**

This road can be a busy 'rat-run' at times, so be aware of oncoming traffic. The slight undulating ridge of high ground in the middle distance to your right here are the Laughton Hills, a protected landscape character area, formed by the retreating ice sheet during the last Ice Age.

### **Drop down to the canal and follow the towpath in a westerly direction**

Through the canalside hedge you may catch a glimpse of a thatched cottage, a Grade II listed building dating back in part to the 16<sup>th</sup> C, predating the canal by 300 years, amongst the extensive buildings of Theddingworth Lodge Farm. We see the canal corridor today as picturesque in our eyes but the stark scars of the canal thrusting through these quiet rural backwaters in the early 1800s must have been like the swathe that HS2 cuts today. Early maps show an inn or beer house on the canal close to here, opposite the modern farm buildings near bridge 49. Remote from any services or access but presumably favourably placed to pick up passing boating trade, there is no trace of the building today. These days you may be lucky to catch a glimpse of farm traffic crossing the bridge or cows ambling lazily across at milking time!

### **Follow the canal towpath**

Much work was done here a few years ago to stabilise the embankment where badgers had undermined the structure. Badgers are a legally protected species and after much official paperwork, were successfully relocated and the fencing along this stretch was erected to stop them returning.

The canal here is the Grand Union Canal - Leicester Line, completed in 1815, that runs from Norton Junction near Daventry to the Soar Navigation at Leicester. This section is part of the 22 mile level summit pound between Foxton and Watford. With lock water draining away down the lock flights at both ends as traffic moves, the summit pound has always suffered from water supply problems and in the 1920s investigations were carried out assess the potential for making a new reservoir in the slight valley before bridge 49. A worthy lengthsman was tasked with recording the daily flow through the culvert under the canal here. Thankfully for the local countryside his findings showed an inconsistent flow, and with the added decline of traffic, the idea was quietly shelved. The entire length of the canal here is a linear Conservation Area and a protected heritage and wildlife site. Look out for the soft coir mat banking, laid especially for the water voles. You may even spot the resident otter family!

If you peer into the bushes on the offside at bridge 48 you may be able to spot a curious concrete marker post, which identified the boundary of the exclusion zone surrounding the bombing range that we noted previously.



The towpath from here onwards can be tricky in places but you will soon come to a wide, sound length of bank - a favourite sunny spot for canal boat moorers... Look out for the culvert marker post, into which, in idle moments, a boater has carved a cheery Sun King effigy!

### **Follow the towpath around the corner**

Soon a metal pipe bridge comes into view. This carries the pipeline we came across earlier, which supplied fuel and oil to the former U.S Airforce Base at Bruntingthorpe. The pipeline, which was installed in the late 1950s, runs cross-country from the oil storage depot beside the Market Harborough to Northampton railway at Kelmars and was part of a secure network that supplied all the major airfields and Cold War air bases in the country. Although this section of pipe was presumably stopped off when the Americans left in 1962 the spider's web of pipelines still supply 40% of all aviation fuel used in England, including Stansted, Manchester, Heathrow and Gatwick and *'significant military establishments..'*

### **You are on the 'home run' now...**

Follow the towpath as it progresses back towards Bosworth. Look out for a small densely wooded area beside the towpath, hiding a series of strange

overgrown earthworks. The area is within the boundary of the canal land but the reason for these lagoons is unclear. However, when the tunnel was dredged some years ago the dredgings were deposited here to drain, so this may have been why the lagoons were originally built. Village children who played here years ago knew the area, for some obscure reason, as the Three-by-Threes - a secret place to play!

A little way further on look out for a metal canal mile post in the hedge declaring the distance, 23 miles, to Leicester along the canal. Curiously this marker is a Grade II listed structure!

Just before you take the rise up off the canal look out for a dinner plate size concrete disc in the towpath. This is the sighting pintle for the tunnel, and if you stand on the base you will see that you are looking through Honeypot Bridge and directly down the centre of the tunnel bore beyond. There is an identical sighting point at the far end of the tunnel, enabling the canal maintenance team to check the alignment of the bore. I wonder what the Canal and River Trust would do, if when surveying the tunnel one day, the two ends didn't line up? *[There is much more on the history and background of the canal where it passes through the parish in Walk about Bosworth 2 and 4.]*

Make your way up the track, crossing the former track bed of the Rugby to Stamford railway, opened in 1850 as Market Harborough's first railway connection and closed in 1966, a victim of Dr. Beeching's economic scalpel.

Passing the village's extensive sewage plant, mercifully hidden behind a tall, thick, hedge, carry on up Broad Lane and back to civilisation!

Turn right at the footpath sign just past the row three cottages, down a sunken trackway. This is the other end of Dag Lane. Continue forward and you will soon be back to your original route. Retrace your tracks back up the path and turn left up Berridges Lane. At the top turn right at the junction onto High Street and you will soon be back at your start point on The Green.

