



Wellingborough Circular walk

Northamptonshire rivers and lakes, up to four villages and one of England's finest Saxon churches.

Length 28.0 km for the Main Walk (17.4 mi), 31.5 km for the Long Walk (or 18.4 km with a bus from Earl's Barton) and 21.2 km for the Short Walk.

OS Maps OS Explorer 224.

Wellingborough station (Grid reference SP903681) is in Northamptonshire.

Toughness 4 out of 10.

Features This long but easy walk, with Short and Long alternatives, explores the waterways, lakes, fields and villages to the South and West of Wellingborough. A word of warning – there have been extensive quarrying activities in this area, and even on-line maps are not necessarily up to date! It is effectively a figure of eight walk, with the two loops coming together where Grendon Road crosses the River Nene, South of Earl's Barton. The short walk does the large Eastern loop only, whereas the Long Walk does an extended Western loop. Both loops are described clockwise, though they could be reversed. Another good option would be to follow the long version as far as Earls Barton, then catch a bus. Much of the walk follows the River Nene, but there are short climbs to each of the four villages visited.

You walk South to join the Nene, which you then follow to the South-West, soon leaving Wellingborough behind. Leave the river at Wollaston Lock to walk around Summer Leys Nature Reserve, then cross a series of fields among fishing lakes and quarry works, to come out on Grendon Road. From here you can head East on the Short Walk, but the Main Walk follows the Nene again, West to Whiston Lock and then turns North to Earl's Barton, the recommended lunch stop, with its magnificent Saxon church. The Long Walk, which is well worth doing if you have the time and the legs, stays on the Nene past fishing lakes before heading North over the A45 to Ecton (the first of four villages with lunch possibilities) and East across the fields to Earl's Barton. Return down Station Road and Grendon Road, rejoining the Short Walk and now following the Nene Eastwards. Leave the river at Hardwater Road and head North to Great Doddington and Wilby, both

possible lunch or tea stops. Return to Wellingborough from the West by Swanspool Brook. You pass close to the town centre with several pubs and cafes.

Walk Options

There is a regular bus service, 7 days a week, from Ecton (long walk only) and Earl's Barton (main and long walks) to Wellingborough, using Stagecoach bus X4, X46 or X47. The X47 goes via Great Doddington and the X4 goes via Wilby. If the Long Walk seems too far, consider catching a frequent bus back to Wellingborough from Earl's Barton.

Note that none of these buses go to the railway station, which is well to the East of the town centre. To avoid a tedious trek along Midland Road, your best bet is to get off the X47 immediately before it turns left from Doddington Road to Sheep Street. Instead, turn right on Sheep Street. The X4 and X46 both travel via Northampton Road and Oxford Street (A5128), turning left in to High Street and right in to Church Street, the main bus station. From the X4, which is a limited stop service, get off the bus at Church Street and retrace your steps by turn left in to High Street, which continues as Silver Street and Sheep Street. From the X46 you can get off opposite Morrisons and turn right from Oxford Street to Silver Street and Sheep Street. In each case pick up the walk directions for the final section from Sheep Street.

Section 2 gives the opportunity not for a shortening, but for a lengthening. You could extend the walk from the point marked +, by taking a permissive path known as Quarry Walk: 27 acres of stunning reeds, lake and wetland which together host a wide variety of birds. There is a wealth of information about this walk here: <http://reedallaboutit.co.uk/about-the-walk/4532724385>

Travel

Wellingborough is served by trains from London St Pancras. It is just outside the Network railcard area, but it is often cheaper to buy a railcard return to Bedford and a separate return ticket from Bedford to Wellingborough. Travel time from St. Pancras is 47 minutes (longer on Sundays).

Points of interest

Wellingborough

The original name of Wendlingburgh means 'the fortified place of Waendel's People' and the Waendel walking festival is still staged every May. From the 1600s the town was famed for its remedial waters, the wells became its symbol and the name changed to Wellingborough. In the early 18th century the main industry was lace making, but in the 19th century this was overtaken by the boot and shoe industry, as with much of Northamptonshire. The Wellingborough Museum complex, passed late in

the walk, includes Dulley's Baths, built in 1892 as an indoor swimming pool, which was bought in 1920 by George Cox and converted into a shoe factory (it closed in 1995; happily the company outgrew the site).

River Nene

The Nene rises near Badby and flows 110 miles to the Wash. It is pronounced 'Nen' round here, but 'Neen' further downstream and by the BBC! It has been navigable from Northampton since 1761. In 1815 it was connected with the main Grand Union via the Northampton Arm (the junction is passed late in this walk). The Nene Way runs for 67 miles from Badby to the Cambridgeshire boundary, then continues to Sutton Bridge.

Summer Leys

An old gravel pit transformed into an internationally important haven for breeding and wading birds. Popular with ornithologists and walkers alike. The site comprises a main lake with gently sloping banks, shallow areas of water and ponds, low lying islands, a large scrape and a fringe of reeds surrounded by grassland and wet woodland. This is ideal habitat for wintering birds (goosander, wigeon, gadwall, roosting lapwing and golden plover). Wading birds use the scrape and the shallow lake margins (breeding oystercatcher, ringed plover, little ringed plover and redshank and itinerant migrating whimbrel, turnstone and common sandpiper). Common tern nest on the islands, otters occasionally visit, harvest mice hide in the reeds and rushes around the lake and numerous species of dragonflies and damselflies have been recorded including the uncommon hairy dragonfly.

Northampton Round

A 51 mile circular walk which is Northampton's answer to the London Loop. Sometimes referred to misleadingly as the Northamptonshire Round.

Ecton

St Mary Magdalene Church is a large stone building from the 13th century with a distinctive tower.

Earls Barton

This lively village owes its name to Simon de Senlis, Earl of Northampton in the 12th century. The Church of All Saints has an exceptional Saxon tower, constructed in the 10th century and richly decorated by raised vertical strips, in the unique Anglo-Saxon turriform style. After the Norman Conquest these kinds of churches became rare and very few survived

unaltered. The tower also has multiple belfry openings, which is very rare for an Anglo-Saxon tower and suggests that the church always had bells.

Great Doddington

The church of St Nicholas dates from the 14th century, though the lower tower is 12th century.

Lunch

Note that you can often get a hot drink from the Wildlife Trust information centre at Summer Leys car park after 6.1 kms.

There are non-pub options close to the walk at Grendon Lakes and White Mills Marina; otherwise lunch is relatively late on all walk options. Earl's Barton is on the main walk and the long version. On the long walk there is an earlier option at Ecton. The pubs at Great Doddington and Wilby will normally be too late for the long or main walks, but they may be suitable for the short walk.

Clubhouse bar/restaurant, **Grendon Lakes**. Reached after 8.7 kms (all versions). Open to the public Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. From the point marked in the text, note (but ignore) the left turning after 400 metres, continue along the drive for another 120 metres then turn right to find the Clubhouse in 220 metres. After lunch retrace your steps to the left turning, which is now on your right, and follow this for 450 metres to rejoin the main route at *. This diversion adds 0.8 kms to the distance.

The Boathouse, White Mills Marina, 344 Grendon Road, Earl's Barton. Tel: (01604) 812057. <http://www.whitemillsmarina.co.uk> Reached after 11 kms (on the long and main walks, though it is only a short detour on the short walk). 2019 winners of the Northamptonshire Coffee Shop of the Year award. Open every day, 9am to 4pm.

The World's End, Ecton (long walk only). Tel: (01604) 414521. www.theworldsend.org . Reached after 16.2 kms on the long version. This pub (formerly The Globe) dates from the 17th century. It is thought that the current unusual name results from its time as a prison compound for royalist prisoners taken at the 1645 Battle of Naseby (their life prospects were not good). To reach The World's End, do not turn right where indicated in the text just before Ecton. Instead, continue ahead in to West Street. At a crossroads in 300 metres (opposite the war memorial and play ground, which has seats suitable for a picnic, turn left on Northampton Road (you will be returning to this point after lunch), to find the pub car park on your right in 70 metres. After lunch, from the crossroads continue on High Street (now with the war memorial and play ground on your left). In 150 metres ignore Church Way on your left and in 75 metres a black

gate on your left (these are the routes to and from the church, as set out below). In 25 metres the long walk rejoins you at a tarmac path and a sign for West Street on your right (by Nos 50/52). Resume the directions from the start of Section 6. However, if you wish to visit St Mary Magdalene Church, turn down Church Way towards the gateposts of the privately owned Ecton Hall. In 100 metres, enter the church yard through a gate on your right. The church is on your left. It is not necessary to re-trace your steps: from the gate, fork right in 80 metres when the path divides, and in 75 metres go through a black metal gate in the far corner of the church yard, then turn left to rejoin the main walk in 25 metres

The Old Swan, 8 The Square, Earls Barton (reached after 14.9 kms on the main walk and 18.4 kms on the long walk). Tel: (01604) 810044.

<https://www.theoldswan.pub/>

The Stag's Head, 25 High Street, Earls Barton (long and main walks only). Tel: (01604) 812267.

The Stag's Head, 1 High Street, Great Doddington. Tel: (01933) 222316. Reached after 15 kms on the short version, 21.8 kms on the main walk and 25.3 kms on the long version. Note the date stone inscribed 1686.

<http://stags-head.com/> . To rejoin the main route at the start of Section Nine, cross the main road, turn right and in 60 metres turn left on Top Farm Lane, which is a tarmac signposted public footpath. Pass farm buildings on both sides and in 100 metres go through a wooden gate and continue on tarmac. On your right you have sports fields and a playground with seats suitable for a picnic and there is a horse pasture on your left. In 70 metres go through another wooden gate and continue with a green metal school fence on your right. In 130 metres turn right on Church Lane then in 20 metres turn left through a barrier to follow a tarmac path to the left of the church. In 80 metres, turn right at a path junction. Ignore a path to the left in 5 metres and in 40 metres follow the tarmac path round to the left, with a wood to your right and a cemetery on your left. In 80 metres go through a wooden gate and in 30 metres turn right on Wilby Lane, with Glebe Farm Court immediately to your left, rejoining the main route at the start of Section Nine.

Tea

The Horseshoe Inn, 100 Main Road, Wilby. Tel: (01933) 272493. Reached after 17.2 kms on the short version, 24 kms on the main walk and 27.5 kms on the long version.

The George of Wilby, 117 Main Road, Wilby. Tel: (01933) 270033. Opens 8am to 4pm. The George Inn dates back to the early 16th Century, and houses an ancient mulberry tree (also known as the hanging tree for its blood red secretion of sap). Oliver Cromwell stayed in the building, and had

his last meeting under the mulberry tree before the battle of Naseby on June 14th 1645.

Ye Golden Lion, 19 Sheep Street, Wellingborough. This lovely Tudor building dating to 1540 happily re-opened in 2023 after several years of neglect. It is convenient, but in 2023 it was not serving hot drinks.

The Old House, 29/30 Sheep Street, Wellingborough. Closed on Sundays.

Horseshoe Inn, 36 Sheep Street, Wellingborough.

The Hind Hotel, 38 Sheep Street, Wellingborough. This is a fine stone building from the 17th century.

Castello Lounge, 1-2 Market Street, Wellingborough. 'Lounges' were founded in 2002 and now have about 120 sites around the UK. They aim to be local community hubs with an emphasis on design and murals that celebrate the history and spirit of each local community.

For more options, turn right from Sheep Street on Market Street.

Sandwich Station, 2 Elsdon Road, Wellingborough. Buy a takeaway drink here and you only have to carry it 300 metres to the station. Opens to 4pm.

Little R'Ale House, Wellingborough station. This is an atmospheric micro-pub, next door to the station building (reached from outside the station). It is doubtful if they do hot drinks. Opens to 6pm.

Bewitched Coffee at Wellingborough station opens until 4.30 on Saturday, 4pm on Sunday and 5pm in the week. They are an independent local chain which is fast expanding.

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By Car **Start** NN8 1NA

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Walk Directions

Section 1 - Wellingborough station to Wollaston Lock: 4.6 km

1. Northbound trains from St Pancras arrive on platform 1, by the station building. Southbound passengers arrive on platform 2 and will need to cross the bridge.
2. From the station building turn left and in 180 metres turn right past Royal Mail buildings, continuing on Midland Road (B572). In 125 metres turn left down Senwick Road. In 220 metres turn left in to Senwick Drive. When the road divides in 40 metres, turn right (South), then in 55 metres cross a metal bridge over Swanspool Brook (of which much more later). The road divides again in 70 metres and you turn right. At the end of the road in 50 metres continue on a tarmac path, with a telecommunications mast prominent ahead. In 45 metres continue on a minor road. In 30 metres turn left on to the B571 (Irthlingborough Road). Ignore Corn Mill Close on the left in 35 metres and pass the abutments of an old railway bridge in 60 metres.
3. Immediately climb the steep embankment on the right. You can either go to the left or to the right of a wooden barrier – either way it is a tricky manoeuvre. In 15 metres turn left and follow the old gravel railway line to the South (note that this is a direct route to the River Nene but it is not maintained as a right of way and it is prone to litter – probably because of the industrial estate to the right). On nearing the river in 380 metres, go round a wooden barrier but do not continue on to the blue footbridge. Instead descend to your right on tarmac, passing a metal barrier in 35 metres and turn right after a second metal barrier in 30 metres, still on tarmac. You are now following the Nene Way, with the river on your left and several seats to your right. In 200 metres you have the busy B573 close by on your right. In 180 metres you go over a brick bridge and the river turns left (South), away from the road. Follow the river through a small park with toilets and moorings to the right in 80 metres. In 220 metres go under the A509 (London Road) by a colourful Nene Way logo. The tarmac ends here and you continue on a dirt path. In 140 metres take a footbridge over a stream to the right. In 40 metres go under the A45, still following the river and soon leaving the town behind.
4. In 30 metres take a metal bridge (over nothing in particular). In 45 metres the path turns left over a metal bridge, then right. In 45 metres you pass Wellingborough Upper Lock on the left. The path turns to the left and may be very overgrown with nettles, or muddy according to the season. In 320 metres go over a wooden footbridge, with another stream on the right. In 140 metres you pass under cylindrical piping.

5. In 350 metres you go through a wooden gate, leaving the nettles behind at last to continue on easy grass in a large field. Your views to the right are dominated by Wellingborough Prison, which was surrounded by cranes in 2019/20. In 120 metres follow the river round to the right (the path takes a slightly more direct line). In 400 metres the path and the river turn to the right, then back to the left. In 120 metres you enter the next field through a wooden kissing gate under a row of pylons. In 180 metres go through a kissing gate by a metal field gate, then the river turns back to the left. Continue in the next field, with a small lake visible to the left of the river. In 250 metres go through another wooden kissing gate, by a metal field gate and in 15 metres go under telegraph wires. In 60 metres the river divides. To your left there is a narrow stream with sheds and moorings. In 180 metres ignore a path continuing ahead (which leads up to Great Doddington) and turn left through a wooden kissing gate, by a metal field gate. In 15 metres cross the stream by a brick bridge, with buildings on the right. In 50 metres go through a gate at Wollaston Lock, the first of several 'guillotine locks' which are a distinctive feature of the River Nene and continue on a gravel track.

Section 2 - Wollaston Lock to Grendon Road: 5.9 km

6. In 120 metres you take a bridge over the main river. In 35 metres ignore the metal gate to the right (which gives access to an old railway line, now a gravel path). Pass to the left of houses to reach a small car park in 350 metres. This is Summer Leys Nature Reserve, a haven for birdwatchers and their prey. Turn right here, through a metal kissing gate, then left (due South) on a wide, straight, stony path which runs close to the lake. In 10 metres you pass the Charles Towler hide and feeding station on your right.
7. In 180 metres you pass another hide on the right. In another 180 metres ignore a wooden bridge to the left and turn right. The long village of Great Doddington is visible on the hill side beyond the lake and river. In 200 metres turn left at a corner with the Paul Bitten hide on the right and continue between bushes and trees. Turn right (due West) by a wooden bench in 250 metres, now with the busy Hardwater Road parallel on your left. Go through a metal gate in to a car park in 250 metres (note that you can probably get a hot drink from the Wildlife Trust Information Centre here), turn left and left again in 35 metres on the road.
8. In 20 metres take the path on the right, marked by a bridleway sign, to the right of a green metal field gate. The path through the next four large fields is not always obvious, but your direction is a constant 210 degrees. Continue on a grassy path across the first field, heading for the far right corner, as indicated by the green finger post. In 300 metres cross a dry ditch and go through a metal field gate (there is a blue arrow on a tree here) to continue across the middle of the next field (still 210 degrees). Ignore the more obvious line to the right, which is an old field boundary. Ignore a redundant stile to your right (which carries an alternative path) and aim for a wooden gate visible ahead. In 320 metres go through the gate and

over a footbridge, then continue at 210 degrees (i.e. slightly to the left as you step off the bridge) across the middle of the next field. If the path is not clear, head towards the pair of pylons at the far end of the field. You pass under wires in 300 metres and under a set of pylons in 60 metres. Go through a wooden gate and under a second set of pylons in 65 metres. Follow the path half left, keeping parallel with the pylons to your right, towards a brick wall ahead.

9. In 380 metres go through another wooden gate and cross a drive (leading to Long Lodge Farm) to enter Grendon Lakes on another vehicle drive. When the drive turns right in 180 metres (*leading to the clubhouse, which does light refreshments at weekends – if you wish to stop here, refer to the description under Lunch below and rejoin the main route at * below*), continue on a path on the left side of the field with a hedgerow to your left. At a t-junction in 400 metres, turn right on a wide grassy path (there is a footpath arrow on a low wooden post here), again with the field boundary on your left. The view beyond is dominated by a huge electricity sub-station and there are lakes visible ahead. Follow the path round to the right and pass back under the pylons in 280 metres, then leave the field to the left in the corner.
10. In 40 metres take a concrete bridge with one railing over a water channel. *In 15 metres turn left on gravel then in 10 metres go through a wire mesh and wooden gate on your right (the handle is on the inside) to enter Trinity Lakes. In 10 metres you continue on a narrow causeway between two lakes, marked by a footpath arrow. In 220 metres go over a basic plank bridge at the end of the lake on your right. Veer left, then in 40 metres leave the path through another mesh and wooden gate on your right and continue towards a hedge. Go over another wooden footbridge in 40 metres in to the next field. The sub-station is close by to the left here.
11. (!) If the path is not apparent on the ground, ignore the exit by a yellow metal bridge in the far right corner. Instead, make for the gap visible in the far left corner (275 degrees – just North of West), heading for a pylon in the middle of the field (part of the second row of pylons and clearly marked on the map) and well to the left of a prominent quarry chute and pyramid of rubble visible ahead. In 40 metres pass under the first row of wires, well to the left of the nearest pylon. In 150 metres you pass immediately to the left of the central pylon, which has a footpath arrow. Continue towards the gap to the left of a field gate ahead. In 140 metres cross a ditch by a concrete bridge with no railings + (*you could extend the walk here, using a permissive path round a quarry lake which adds 480 metres and is highly recommended if you have the time – for this alternative, go round a gate to your right and continue with a ditch to your right at first, ignoring the yellow metal bridge (which is now on your right), then continue anti-clockwise round a quarry lake, ignoring all padlocked gates on your right, to end up on the boardwalk*). Pass to the left of the field gate in 10 metres and follow the twisting right hand field boundary, as per a yellow footpath arrow. The path veers to the left and right, returning to the

field edge, then in 140 metres it runs in a straight line (West) parallel to the line of pylons on your left (the map shows the path discontinuing here – it doesn't).

12. In 250 metres go through a hedge gap in to the next field and veer slightly right, still following the field boundary (the map suggests a more direct line, but it is better to stick to the field edge). In 40 metres ignore a wooden boardwalk leading to the right ++ (which leads to the permissive path round a quarry lake). At the corner of the field in 250 metres, with close views of the quarrying equipment and 'pyramid' on your right, veer half left with the path, now with a wire fence on your right. In 100 metres turn sharp left, now parallel with the road on your right. In 50 metres turn right over a ditch, in 5 metres go through a wooden gate, in another 5 metres cross a gravel path, go through another wooden gate in 5 metres and in 25 metres cross a chute carrying rubble by wooden steps (one short cut which is not advised). Continue on a gravel path with wire fences on both sides and cross a wooden footbridge over nothing in particular in 70 metres. In 15 metres turn right on Grendon Road opposite 'The Old Station' (the remains of an old railway bridge are just to your right here), passing the entrance to the quarry works in 60 metres. Where the road turns left in 120 metres, continue ahead and in 25 metres turn left before a private gate (for the Angling Club), in to a parking area.
13. You are nearing decision time. If you want to do the main or long walks, you may be able to cut across the rough grass to the left of the car park to the far corner, though it is usually too overgrown or under water. Otherwise, continue across the car park and in 70 metres you arrive at a marble gravestone and plaque, either side of two redundant posts. Until the summer of 2020 this gravestone was hidden from view among the trees and nettles. In its new location it conveniently marks the parting of the ways. For the short walk turn right and refer to Section 8 (unless you wish to visit the cafe at White Mills Marina, in which case continue briefly below). For the long and main walks, turn left and consult Section 3 (though you will be returning to this point later).

Section 3 - Grendon Road to Whiston Lock (long and main walks only): 1.6 km

14. You come out back on Grendon Road, by a traffic light, in 100 metres (make a mental note of this point as you will be returning this way). Turn right, immediately crossing the first branch of the river by a brick bridge, past the anglers' entrance, then cross over a stone bridge in 65 metres. In another 65 metres you cross another bridge over the navigable river, with metal railings, then turn left on the Nene Way with White Mills Lock on your left, another guillotine lock, with an information board explaining how it works (White Mills Marina, which does light refreshments, is 215 metres further up the road).
15. Go through a kissing gate in 10 metres, with the marina berths to your right, then on to a long steel footbridge in 140 metres (boats have the edge over paws here), crossing a channel which provides boat access to the marina. Return to terra firma

in 60 metres and go through another kissing gate in 20 metres. Go through a wooden kissing gate in 180 metres as the river turns to the right. In 200 metres follow the river back to the left and go through another wooden gate in 50 metres. The quarry area is now fenced off on your right; for the main walk, your onward route is visible alongside a hedge to the right of the river, marked by a line of posts (actually warning notices), but you need to cross four footbridges to get there. You may spot rubber tubes on the ground around here, used to divert water from the gravel pits to the river. Cross the first bridge in 200 metres (NB if there are signs indicating that Whiston Lock ahead is closed AND you intend to do the MAIN walk, you will have to pass BETWEEN the bridge and the wire fence on a well used path which is technically within the quarrying area - shortly you pass round the fence end again and turn right on the main route at the sharp turn away from the river in paragraph 18). Continue with the Nene now on your right. The river divides in 250 metres, with your onward route clearly visible on the far bank. In 80 metres go through a wooden gate by a field gate. In 80 metres the river divides again, so you have three branches to cross.

16. In 100 metres you reach a guillotine lock and footbridge at Whiston Lock, marked as a 'weak bridge' (GR847617). *Note that the Nene Way continues along the South bank to Cogenhoe Mill - if the bridge is closed you will have to go this way, following the directions in Walk 378 section 4, but turning right on Mill Lane; the path continues over the navigable river at the next lock, then over an old packhorse bridge heading North to shortly rejoin the Long Route in paragraph 23. The directions which follow (for the long walk) cross the river at Whiston Lock, which is a more direct route (as your onward way is to the North) and offer pleasant views not only of the river but also of the lakes to your right.* Cross the river and continue over a second footbridge in 50 metres.
17. The main and long versions part company here. For the main walk continue immediately below, but for the long walk go to Section 5.

Section 4 - Whiston Lock to Earl's Barton (main walk only): 2.7 km

18. Veer away from the river, ignoring the riverside path. The path divides and comes back together twice before crossing a long wooden footbridge in 100 metres. Your way is now dictated by the quarry works which are fenced off with warning signs, initially on your left, and takes a less direct way than indicated on the OS map, which indicates the right of way running North-East here, away from the river. In fact this line cuts across the gravel extraction site and there is no public access. A temporary alternative (about as temporary as income tax) has been provided, which initially runs parallel with the river, to the right of the fence. Turn to your right and shortly you will see the far side of the river, where you walked a few minutes earlier. The path twists and turns, staying close to the river, then in 320 metres you make a sharp turn away from the river, with a hedge to your left and quarrying lakes and activities on both sides. This section of path, which runs perilously

between two gravel pits, has been notoriously prone to flooding and has often been impassable throughout the winter. In the spring of 2021 it failed to dry out despite a prolonged drought. The contractors arranged for excess water to be pumped away to the river and the path was reinstated by a combination of gravel and soil, with two pipes placed under the footpath to maintain an even level of water in the gravel pits to either side. You may have to step over rubber tubes! In 300 metres, carefully cross a track used by vehicles, with a plethora of warning notices. In 10 metres turn right and then in 30 metres turn left towards the traffic of the A45, with another lake visible on your right. In 250 metres take an unmarked path leading up on the left, with a ruined building below on the right, to reach a long footbridge in 60 metres. From this high vantage point, Earl's Barton's Saxon church comes in to view ahead. Once off the bridge in 100 metres the Nene Way is shown following the track straight ahead, but it is more pleasant to follow the path which leaves the tarmac immediately after the bridge and winds through woods to the right.

19. The two paths come back together at the end of the wood in 180 metres and you turn right to carefully cross Northampton Road (B573) in 40 metres. Go through a gate by a field gate and a footpath signpost in to the field opposite. The line of the path should be clear from indentations in the grass; keep parallel with the right edge of the field, pass under a line of overhead wires in 35 metres and under a second line of wires in 220 metres. You start to veer to the left in 60 metres and go through two gates and over a footbridge to the right of the field corner in 70 metres. Turn left on gravel or grass, with houses on your right and the fields to your left behind a hedge. In 80 metres turn right on the gravel and in 5 metres continue ahead on Thorpe Road. Cross Compton Way in 120 metres and continue up a driveway which is just to the left (left of Nos. 44AB). In 55 metres, at the end of the small parking area, turn left on a tarmac path which runs along the back of houses. Cross a private road in 120 metres and in another 100 metres turn right on Shoemakers Close.
20. Turn left on Station Road in 45 metres. In 260 metres pass a green sign for the Bowls and Tennis Club, noting the public footpath sign pointing to a tarmac path opposite, as this is your route out of Earl's Barton. In 35 metres you pass Barkers shoe factory, a reminder that the Northants shoe industry is still alive. The Old Swan is on your left in 150 metres, directly opposite the church. For a picnic, cross the road at a break in the railings opposite and by a sign for The Square (behind Earl's Barton's Saxon church is a large green space which has limited seating and there are also two seats directly opposite the pub, by the war memorial). The bus stop outside the pub is for Northampton; cross the road for a bus to Wellingborough. *Alternatively, the Stag's Head is on the High Street, which is the road immediately to the right of the church.* The main walk continues in Section 7.

Section 5 - Whiston Lock to Ecton (long walk only): 3.7 km

21. After the footbridge, turn left with the river now on your left. In 160 metres pass Whiston Sluice (GR526179) as the river comes back together (it can be overgrown on the next short section in summer, though the path is cleared periodically). In 200 metres the river divides again and you enter woods. The next short section can be flooded after extreme weather conditions, so you may decide to return to Whiston Lock and do the main walk instead. In 160 metres go over a stile which has a white footpath arrow, though the maps do not indicate that this path is a right of way (or through the metal gate next to it, which is usually unlocked), ignore paths leading away from the river, and continue on a grassy path alongside the river, soon with a large fishing lake to your right and the church tower of Cogenhoe visible on the hill ahead. Keep to the higher ground between the river and the lake. In 550 metres you have trees close by on the right. You enter a lightly wooded area and in 250 metres the path starts to turn to the right.
22. !At the end of the lake in 35 metres, after briefly following a wide grassy path with overhead wires visible ahead, turn left through a gap and continue along the river, with another lake on your right. In 70 metres the river divides once again.
23. In 150 metres, after the second lake, follow the path round to the right, with a water channel on your left. On reaching a wider track in 140 metres, used for vehicle access to the lakes, turn left underneath overhead wires. To your right here there is a notice board and a sign for Clover Lakes. In 15 metres take a bridge over the water channel and in 10 metres go over a stile by a green barrier, then pass a sign for Ecton Complex. In 25 metres ignore another green barrier ahead, and turn right on another wide path. Continue ahead (North) over a ditch with railings in 70 metres and a stone bridge over a second ditch in 10 metres. In 120 metres you cross a third ditch, over a bridge with railings, with a white arrow indicating that this is part of the Northampton Round. Continue past a private path crossing and a bridge over another ditch to your left in 200 metres. In 225 metres the main path turns to the right by a telegraph pole, but you continue ahead past concrete blocks on an obvious path (unfortunately this area suffers from litter), with woods on your right and a ditch then a boundary hedge on your left. In 280 metres follow the path up to the left, alongside the noisy A45 and in 100 metres go round a barrier and on to a bridge over the dual carriageway.
24. Continue ahead on High Street, Ecton. In 200 metres you pass a field gate on the left and continue up the road, then in 220 metres, by a road sign indicating the village of Ecton, go over a stile by a public footpath sign on the left. Follow the path uphill, at first some way from the field edge and the road on your right, but making for a wooden stile in the top right corner of the field. The stile in 180 metres has a warning not to walk on the cricket square, but there is no evidence of this now. Go across the next field in the same direction, making for the stone wall to the left of a group of pale coloured bungalows, with the field boundary away to your right at first. Continue with a wire fence, then another stone wall, on your right. In 300 metres go through a kissing gate and to continue on the long walk turn right (*but for*

a bus stop or for the World's End pub, which adds 0.6 kms to the walk, follow the directions under Lunch below) on a tarmac path between houses, with a sign indicating it leads to High Street. This is West Street, but your direction is due East! In 100 metres turn right on the High Street (or to visit St Mary Magdalene Church, turn left then in 25 metres go through a black metal gate - the church is visible ahead)).

Section 6 - Ecton to Earl's Barton (long walk only): 2.5 km

25. Your predominate direction throughout this section is East. In 100 metres turn left in to Barton Fields and in another 70 metres go through a wooden kissing gate by a public footpath sign in to the first large field. When the path on the ground peters out, keep parallel with the metal fence to the left (and the private Ecton Hall visible beyond), in 80 metres avoiding a dip to your right (still travelling due East). In 75 metres pass just to the left of a water trough, popular with sheep, with the private property boundary remaining visible to the left, then descend towards the fence ahead. In 100 metres go through a wooden kissing gate in to a large arable field. The paths are generally well maintained here, but can be muddy or very dry according to the season and the paths can be hard to spot after ploughing. The remains of an old wall are a short distance to your left at first and when the path levels out Earl's Barton's Saxon church comes in to view ahead. In 350 metres go through a gap in the hedge in to the next field, by a white disc on a tall post, with extensive views to your right of the Nene valley and hills beyond. In 300 metres descend to go through a gap in a hedge (with a low white footpath arrow) and cross a tarmac drive under telegraph wires (leading to South Lodge on your right).
26. Drop down three steps and continue on the path across the next field, descending steeply past a tree on your right in 160 metres and two trees on your left in 30 metres. The path veers to the right in 180 metres and crosses a stream by a footbridge in 35 metres. Continue with woods to your right and a field on your left, then in 220 metres go through a wooden kissing gate. The path heads slightly to the left and after passing to the right of a telegraph pole in 80 metres, it ascends steeply. As you near the far end of the field in 200 metres, the path veers to the left. In 35 metres go through a kissing gate, a few metres to the left of a field gate, and cross Northampton Road (B573) carefully. Turn left on the grass verge and in 40 metres take the signposted public footpath on your right. In 35 metres go through a gap in the hedge and turn left on Aggate Way, then in 35 metres right on West Street (your direction is due East again), heading directly towards the church tower. In 280 metres, for a picnic, cross the road at the end of railings opposite and by a sign for The Square (behind Earl's Barton's Saxon church is a large green space which has limited seating and there are also two seats directly opposite the pub, by the war memorial). The Old Swan is on your right in 100 metres, opposite the church. The bus stop outside is for Northampton; cross the road for a bus to Wellingborough. *Alternatively, the Stag's Head is on the High Street, which is the road immediately to the right of the church.*

Section 7 - Earl's Barton to Grendon Road (main and long walks only): 2.4 km

27. From the Old Swan turn right in to Station Road, cross over and in 160 metres take the tarmac public footpath on the left, opposite a sign for the Bowls and Tennis Club. In 50 metres the tarmac path divides and you fork right. In 40 metres turn right to follow Saxon Rise downhill. In 90 metres keep on the pavement passing to the right of two trees, then continue on Wilson Way. In 120 metres turn left on Dowthorpe Hill and in 150 metres turn right on Allebone Road. At the end of the road in 45 metres, go through a gate and follow a path half right down the field, as per the signpost arrow. In 180 metres the path continues immediately to the left of residential gardens, with a wire fence to the left (it may be easier to walk to the left of the fence, parallel with the path, but if so you will have to go over a locked field gate ahead). In 55 metres turn left back on Station Road. In 250 metres you reach barriers preventing further vehicle access. You can continue ahead on a tarmac path, but in 35 metres it is better to walk on the grass which runs parallel to the right, separated from the tarmac by a hedge. In 250 metres at the corner of the grass, you turn left and then sharp right on the tarmac in 15 metres. In 50 metres go through a subway, emerging the other side of the A45 in 40 metres.
28. In 80 metres turn left by a black bin to cross the approach road. Continue on tarmac through a pocket park named on the ground as Puddephatt Park, parallel with Grendon Road on the right, passing several benches. In 60 metres turn right on another section of road (which leads to a disposal facility). In 60 metres turn left on the main road and cross over to use the pavement. In 220 metres you pass the entrance to White Mills Marina. You cross the road again in 35 metres and in 120 metres pass traffic lights. In 60 metres you cross a bridge with metal railings over the River Nene, with the Nene Way and White Mills Lock on the right (the outward route taken in Section 3). Retrace your steps, re-crossing a stone bridge over another branch of the Nene in 65 metres. In 65 metres re-cross a brick bridge by traffic lights and turn left at a footpath sign, which takes you to the left of the small car park you passed through earlier. In 100 metres continue past the marble grave stone, rejoining the short walk.

Section 8 - Grendon Road to Great Doddington: 4.0 km

29. After the marble grave stone, in 20 metres go past a sign for an angling club. Continue ahead on a wide track with the River Nene close by on your left and the quarry works seen earlier now to your right.
30. Stay to the left of all buildings (fenced off on your right). In 470 metres you go through a wooden kissing gate with a Nene Way sign, to the left of a metal gate (though the map does not show the Nene Way going this way). Continue on a wide, often muddy grass path. In 400 metres the path turns left with the river and large lakes are visible to your right, then in 140 metres the river divides and you veer right at an arrow sign on the bank (intended for the boats). In 280 metres you pass

Earl's Barton guillotine lock, where a footbridge leads past the Mill House to Mill Lane. In 40 metres you pass under pylons and continue on a narrow section of land between the river and lakes. In 200 metres the river comes back together and you turn to the right. In 130 metres you go through a wooden kissing gate to the right of a field gate. The next section closely follows the river, with a fence to your left. Later the river divides again at a weir and the navigable channel is further to the left. Finally in 800 metres you pass another Nene Way post, by a redundant kissing gate. As you pass opposite Hardwater Mill, look out for the hydro-electric power generator. Veer left to go through another wooden kissing gate and turn left on Hardwater Road in 180 metres.

31. Go over a road bridge in 25 metres and another in 45 metres. There are fine views of Hardwater Mill to the left here and there is also another guillotine lock, which is hard to spot from the road. In 30 metres turn right at a footpath sign, back on the Nene Way, now with the river to your South (right). *Note that the next short section can be overgrown in summer, so you may prefer to stay on the road for a short distance and take the farm drive to the right, picking up the directions at ** below.*
32. The path leads away from the river (ignore a possible path to the right which just leads to a berthing place), towards a fence on the left. In 300 metres cross a footbridge, go through a kissing gate (by a telegraph pole), in 10 metres cross a farm drive on the left**, then continue uphill on a wide grassy path in a large field. Your direction from here to Great Doddington is a near constant 40 degrees (North East), with houses visible to your left. In 370 metres go through a metal kissing gate in to the next field, following a green Nene Way Footpath sign (ignore a path leading back to the river) and continue uphill. There are two army green coloured barns visible ahead, at either end of a group of farm buildings. Your way is to the right of the second green barn. In 250 metres go through another metal kissing gate by a field gate in to the next field, following another green Nene Way Footpath sign. You pass the barn in 100 metres and in 35 metres you go through a high wooden kissing gate to come out at the junction of Lower Street and High Street, Great Doddington (*The Stag's Head is 500 metres to the right here – see the notes below under Lunch for advice on rejoining the main route at the start of Section 9 below, including a picnic spot, a detour which in total adds 1km to the distance*). Turn left, then in 80 metres right on Wilby Lane (*there is a bus stop on the corner here, which would be a good place to catch the X47, but see the notes below about where to get off in Wellingborough*). In 85 metres ignore Glebe Farm Court on the right.

Section 9 - Great Doddington to Wilby: 2.7 km

33. In 100 metres ignore John Gray Road to your left and continue on Wilby Lane, which is marked as a dead end. In 130 metres you go past a barrier and a footpath sign, then continue on a grass path with hedges on both sides. In 480 metres you cross a bridge above the A45 dual carriageway and immediately turn right. In 40 metres at the corner of the field, turn left and gently downhill, with the hedge field boundary

on your right and the spire of Wilby church already visible ahead. In 340 metres turn half left across the middle of the next field (North-West), heading for a gap in the trees ahead, just to the right of the church spire. There is normally a narrow path visible on the ground here, but it can be very wet after heavy rain or disappear after ploughing (if you cannot see the path, continue along the field edge and turn left at the corner until you reach the gate on your right). In 350 metres go through a wooden kissing gate in to the next field. The way is now over rough ground, more steeply downhill and veering slightly to the right, so that the church spire is more to your left ahead, with a pond closer on your left. Drop down to cross Swanspool Brook in 150 metres (of which more shortly) by a footbridge between two wooden gates.

34. ! Climb steeply on the other side of the footbridge, with the hedge to your left. In 150 metres there is a field fence to the left. In 70 metres you have a wire fence and a residential garden on your left. In 20 metres go through a wooden kissing gate and continue on a narrow path between high residential fences. In 20 metres turn right on the A4500 (Main Road) directly opposite Mears Ashby Road. The next section runs along the main road, but there is a pavement all the way, Wilby is a pleasant village with two pubs and most of the traffic now uses the A45 to the South. In 45 metres pass opposite the Horseshoe on the left and the George of Wilby is on the right in 90 metres (*with a convenient bus stop for the X4 opposite*).
35. Pass Brook Vale on the right in 570 metres and in 80 metres cross a busy roundabout, to continue in the same direction (North-East, towards Wellingborough), with Sainsburys visible opposite. In 100 metres take a tarmac cycle path and footpath to the right.

Section 10 - Wilby to Wellingborough town centre: 2.3 km

36. Continue with wooden fences to either side and following a line of street lights downhill. In 160 metres turn left on grass, stepping under or over an awkward barrier, just before a bridge (in 2021 the barrier was quite a formidable obstacle, but there is also an easy tarmac path which runs along the other side of the brook - if you go that way, remember to cross back at the first opportunity, just before a subway). You now follow Swanspool Brook (on your right) for 3 kms, i.e. almost to the station, on a path which is muddy at first. In 220 metres go over another difficult metal barrier to enter woods. Keep close to the stream and leave the woods by a wooden gate in 100 metres. Continue on the grass beside the stream.
37. In 260 metres go through a subway (under Kingsway) and enter Croyland Park, walking either on the tarmac or on the grass. There are playing fields to your left. In 300 metres you pass an old pavilion building (the more direct route is to leave the tarmac, passing to the left of the pavilion and return to the tarmac after the second footbridge below) and in 20 metres ignore a footbridge over the stream. In 250 metres fork right, closely following the stream. In 35 metres ignore another footbridge and in 120 metres pass a small play area on your right. In 200 metres

cross Croyland Road (B571). Continue on tarmac or grass, with street lights above and houses to your left. In 250 metres cross Abbots Way and enter Croyland Gardens, still following the tarmac path. In 90 metres ignore a brick bridge over the stream. In 90 metres you pass an information board about the Five Wells of Wellingborough and in 30 metres you pass below the Civic Offices and the tarmac path veers to the right. In 120 metres go through a barrier in to a car park. In 30 metres cross the road to the right, Doddington Road (Ye Golden Lion, the lovely building opposite you, re-opened in 2023 after six years of closure - it is the most convenient refreshment stop but by turning left on Sheep Street you approach the town centre with other refreshment possibilities).

Section 11 - Wellingborough town centre to Wellingborough station: 1.6 km

38. Continue to the right and in 60 metres cross Sheep Street at the traffic lights. Take the tarmac path marked 'The Castle', now with the stream on your left and a stone wall on your right, heading towards a brick factory building with the legend Geo J Cox Limited, Castle Works prominent on its side (another reminder of the Northants shoe industry). In 90 metres you pass the Old Swimming Baths on your left. In 50 metres you turn right on Castle Lane, with Wellingborough Museum and Castle Theatre on your left.
39. In 40 metres turn left on Castle Road. In 160 metres cross Castle Street. In 50 metres enter Castle Fields and continue on the straight tarmac path under street lights, or the grass to the side. Swanspool Brook is close by on your left. In 130 metres continue East at a cross paths, with public toilets and a play area to your left and a bandstand to your right. In 180 metres the tarmac path veers to the left and in 100 metres you cross over the stream, continuing uphill on Chester Road. Ignore turnings off and in 230 metres turn right on Midland Road. In 125 metres ignore Elsdon Road opposite (Sandwich Station is on the corner here) and in 30 metres cross Senwick Road, which you took at the start of the walk. Retrace your steps from here to the station. Cross the bridge to platform 2 for trains to St Pancras.

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