

3 Miller's Bridge Guided Walk

By Virginia Willcocks

Approx distance: 4.25 miles stile-free if you do the full-length walk
Estimated time: 2 hours (approx)

As you walk you will see views of the railway, the riverbank and canal, farmland in the floodplain of the River Soar, a marina, woodland plantings and some allotments.

Directions begin at the old station car park at the roundabout end of High Street. **P**

From the car park turn right on to Bridge Street admiring the floral Jerusalem roundabout and continue over the Soar Bridge on the road to Quorn.

1 Turn right at the other side of the bridge on to the path beside the river and follow this riverside path. This path can be wet and muddy in the winter months.

It is worth taking a moment as you enter the gateway leading on to the riverside path to look back at Barrow Bridge. It was built in 1845. This date is engraved, in roman numerals, inside the tunnel of the central arch. The path was the original towpath used by the barges. Their horses would be attached to the narrow boat by a strong rope so they could haul the boat, along with its cargo, as well as the bargee's family, through the water. In many places along this stretch of towpath you can still see the original cobblestones of the pathway. Notice how the river has silted up in places on this side of the riverbank. It would have been kept clear when the barges were in use. Note, also, the arches carrying the railway along the river cliff. These were made when the railway was extended to 4 lines in 1868. The stonework you see through the arches is the original supporting the first pair of lines opened in 1840.

Continue along the towpath towards Pilling's Lock.

On your way take note of the various riverside plants, including Bullrushes, Waterlilies and also the invasive floating Pennywort, which spreads like wildfire. You may even see mink, foxes and herons. There are also indentations or "swims" amongst the riverside shrubbery to give access to the anglers.

After about half a mile you will see the footbridge over the canal at Pilling's Lock. Notice the flood displacement weir to the right of this bridge. At this point the canal and the river part company for a while. The canal continues into Loughborough; the river makes a big arc round through Cotes. The two meet again north of Loughborough.

Pilling's Lock has its gates shut from October to March, the period when the river is likely to flood, and doing this assists the Canal & River Trust (once British Waterways) with its management of the water here. It is worth taking a few minutes to read the BW notice. There used to be a house here where the lock keeper, named Pilling, and his family lived. It was demolished in the 1957.

At Pilling's Lock cross over the bridge (Bridge No. 31) to the towpath on the other side of the canal. Continue to follow the canal path towards Loughborough. The path here is much easier for walking.

Just past Pilling's Lock, on the opposite side is Pilling's Lock Marina. **1** It has moorings for over 300 boats, a restaurant, licensed café and accommodation for hire.

This area was cleared and re-laid in 2002 and is now much safer for walkers as previously there were places where it had almost fallen away into the water. When the new path was established fresh water vegetation was also planted including bright yellow flags or iris, which have spread and these look magnificent in the early summer months. Note the tree planting in the fields either side of the footpath here. It is part of the National Forest.

The first bridge along here is Top Bridge (Bridge No. 32). Walk under the bridge and continue along the path and you will fairly soon see the next bridge (No. 33) spanning the canal. This bridge doesn't have a name written on it but according to the map it's Woodthorpe Bridge. **2**

If you want to shorten the walk you should cross over this bridge and follow the path to point (4).

To continue the full walk, pass under the bridge and walk towards Loughborough. The footpath here is not of such a high standard; care must be taken as, in places, it is very narrow and uneven. After walking for about 10 minutes you will arrive at Miller's Bridge (Bridge No. 34 – rebuilt in the winter of 2005/6). The outskirts of Loughborough can be seen quite clearly from here.

The granite low down on the arch has several grooves worn into it by the tow ropes of the barges.

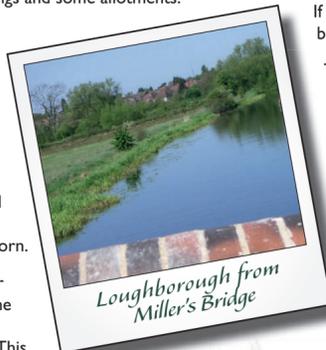
At the junction of the footpaths, head half-left alongside the hedge (which runs parallel to a lake which was formed by the extraction of sand and gravel for the A6 bypass). The path leads to a spinney. Then, after leaving the shelter of the evergreens, it is just a short walk across the next field. Head for the way marker and cross the gate into Flesh Hovel Lane. If you are ready for refreshment turn left and walk along the road a short way to the entrance of Pillings Boathouse. **1**

Flesh Hovel - a strange name. It is believed that the name relates to the fact that when the Quorn Hunt was stabled at Quorn Hall there was a building here where animals were slaughtered and hung until required for feeding the hounds!

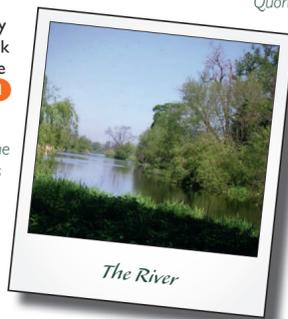
5 Continue along this lane, beside the well cared-for allotments to the main road. Turn left, following the pavement to the roundabout and cross the road to the opposite pavement, where you will see "Three Corner Spinney" - a small collection of pine trees dating from when the road originally allowed traffic in three directions, to Barrow, Quorn North or Quorn South, and before the A6 bypass was constructed.

"The Lodge" is situated at the end of an avenue of Horse Chestnut trees. If you walk along this avenue you may notice, in places, the old cobbles of the original road. There is still standing, a cast-iron post from one of the old gas lamps, which, it is believed, lit the way for the coaches travelling to Quorn Hall. The way is now blocked by the Quorn/Mountsorrel bypass.

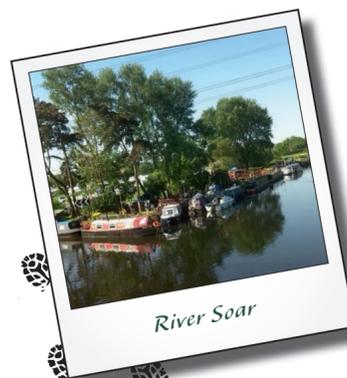
Continue into the village and up Bridge Street passing two possible refreshment stops The Boat House and Soar Bridge Inn. **2 3** Bear left at the roundabout, and onto High Street, your original starting point.



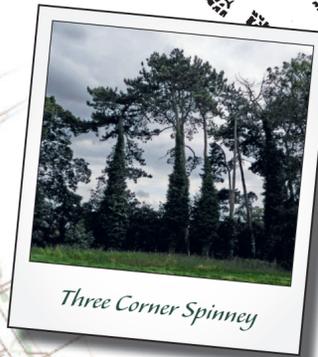
Loughborough from Miller's Bridge



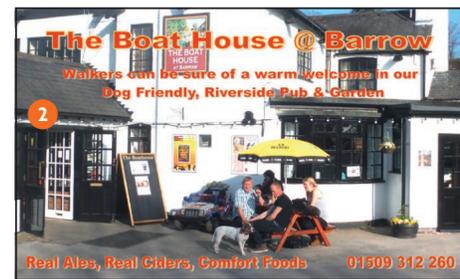
The River



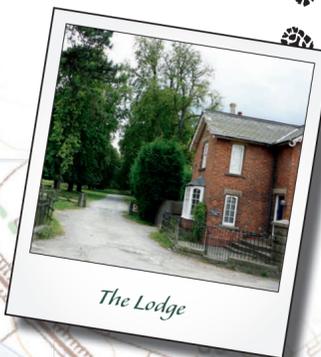
River Soar



Three Corner Spinney



Several grooves worn into the stone



The Lodge



Pilling's Lock



Soar Bridge

Do not pass under the bridge; leave the towpath at this point. **3** Go through the gate on your right and, crossing over the bridge to the other side of the canal, turn back towards Barrow by taking the gate on the left and walking down the steps into the field.

In Spring this field is a carpet of lady's smock flowers (also known as Cuckoo Flower or Milkmaid). In May you can enjoy pink swathes of the now rarely seen Ragged Robin.

Head for the way markers on the opposite side of this field and the fields beyond. This path is well walked and can always be seen clearly, whether the fields have been planted with crops or left as meadow land. Continue over two more fields, in a straight line, until you reach a junction with the footpath to Woodthorpe Bridge and the Bull-in-the-Hollow farm on the A6 to Loughborough.

Point **4** – the short cut footpath rejoins here.

Many years ago the Romany gypsies would come, at least once a year and set up camp in the spinney for a few days. They would bring their canvas covered caravans drawn by their horses and arrange them in a circle. They would build a campfire but when they left all that remained would be a patch of dead grass to show where they had been. There was never any debris left behind.

Walk left towards Barrow, keeping the granite wall on your right. This wall forms the boundary of Riverside Park, the ground used by Barrow Town Football Teams. As you reach "The Lodge" the footpath becomes a raised walkway known as "the flood path", named thus for obvious reasons. When the river floods across the road here, which it used to do every year in the past, using this path helped to keep you dry sometimes!



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Guided Walks
 1 Miller's Bridge
 2 Swithland Reservoir
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 Barrow upon Soar WALKS
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Guided Walks
 3 Miller's Bridge
 4 Swithland Reservoir
 5 Seagrave/Sibley
 These three circular walks take you through the historic countryside of the Soar Valley, by fields, woods and river footpaths.

Guided Walks
 3 Miller's Bridge
 4 Swithland Reservoir
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 Barrow upon Soar WALKS

4 Swithland Reservoir Guided Walk

By Bob Mudge
Approx distance: 8 miles
Estimated time: 3.5-4 hours (approx)

An interesting walk taking in the river, woods and footpaths from Barrow upon Soar, via Mountsorrel, Swithland reservoir, Buddon Brook path and Quorn, returning to Barrow upon Soar.

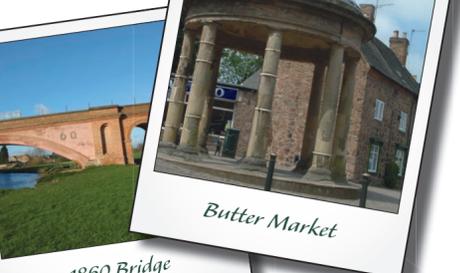
Directions begin at the old station car park near the roundabout end of High Street, where you will find free parking. From the car park cross High Street and turn left on to South Street from the floral Jerusalem roundabout. Turn right on to Mill Lane and down the hill to The Navigation public house. Cross over the canal bridge and take the track on the left through "Barrow Boating" and on to the footpath which crosses the weir.

The canal came to Barrow upon Soar in 1794 and the Barrow Weirs were built at the same time, showing clearly that there must have been a natural waterfall of some kind here before. Floods have always been a part of Barrow life and, although greatly improved in recent years, they can still cause problems. 1912 saw the highest floodwater for a hundred years and the old brick horse-bridge over the weir was swept away by floods in March 1971.

Follow the towpath alongside the Soar, around the bend in the river, under the Quorn/Mountsorrel bypass until a footbridge is reached. Cross over this footbridge and continue along the river, under the 1860 bridge, eventually crossing a stile and emerging on to a road opposite the Waterside Inn at Mountsorrel.

In 1860, a railway branch line was constructed to take rock from the quarries around the village. This was a condition of allowing the Great Central Railway to be built on land belonging to local landowners and by 1863 the line was carrying 200 tons of granite per day. The 1860 bridge now bears the conveyor which transports rock from the quarry to the works at Barrow upon Soar.

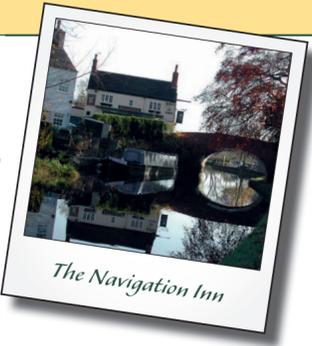
Turn right over the river bridge and walk up past the War Memorial Park (The Peace Garden), turning left into the Market Place. Turn right by the Butter Market, which replaced the old Market Cross in 1793, into Watling Street. After about 20 yards take the signposted footpath which runs between the houses on the left. Follow the path up Castle Hill, the site of a now destroyed Norman Castle, ignoring a stepped footpath to the left.



Archaeological evidence suggests that the site of Mountsorrel Castle had already been used by both the early Britons and the Saxons. The site itself is a granite crag rising to its highest point in the north and with a very steep east side. It is thought that the name Mountsorrel may come from the French "Mont-sur-eau" "the mount on the water", or possibly "Mont-Sorrel", the sorrel coloured hill - from the colour of the local stone. Many people, however, believe that it comes from an old folk tale about a famous giant called Bel who mounted his sorrel horse at this point before his famous ride.

The castle is reputed to have been built in 1080 by Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester and nephew of William the Conqueror. This was a prime site and the castle held a dominant position overlooking the important Soar Valley. Access was by a winding path to the north.

Holding such a strategically important position, the comparatively short history of the Castle records it being involved in many struggles of national importance. One of the most significant was what has been called the first English Civil War, between the competing royal claims of King Stephen and the Empress Matilda.



Passing the beacon on your right, continue over the crest of the hill, then bear slightly right to cross a drive and then meet a road. Turn right and then left along Cufflins Pit Lane, which is signposted "Leicestershire Round" (a long distance trail). Follow the track uphill keeping the old quarry fence on your right. You can make a short detour by taking a track to your right that leads to a kissing gate and way marker. Pass through and walk to the interesting Albert Stone. This sculpture immortalises a Victorian cobble maker and stands as a tribute to the workers whose toil helped make the Mountsorrel quarry a success. Return to the path. At the end of the track keep straight on along the road and over an old railway bridge.

The quarrying of granite in Mountsorrel dates back to Roman times, when it was used for local buildings. However, much of this was taken from hills and the open countryside rather than being deliberately quarried. Mountsorrel granite is actually "granodiorite" which is a little darker than true granite.

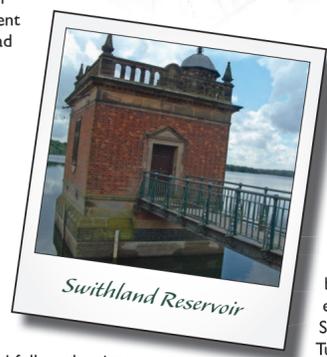
From the 18th century, granite chippings from Mountsorrel were used for surfacing the majority of local roads and it was around this time that quarrying began in earnest. This was largely due to the then quarry owner and Lord of the Manor Sir John Danvers who, in 1758, won contracts from the Harborough to Loughborough turnpike for road surfacing. The irony of this success was that the weight of transporting the quarried granite badly damaged the roads around Mountsorrel itself. This problem was only solved when granite transport moved from the roads to the newly constructed canal in 1794.

Turn left at the T-junction at the end of the road and then right on to Kinchley lane, following the road to the right at the bottom and alongside the reservoir.

Swithland Reservoir was built between 1894 and 1896 by damming Buddon Brook. It is linked to Cropston Reservoir and supplies water to the City of Leicester.

Cross the dam, noting the "Victorian Monumental" style of water treatment buildings to the right. Follow the road to the left at the other side of the water towards the Great Central Railway line.

Do not cross over the railway bridge but take the footpath to the right, keeping the railway on your left. The footpath bears right after about 200 yards, following the edge of a wood on the right. It is then very clearly routed over a stile and bridge and then between a hedge and fence which mark a field boundary. At the end of this fenced section cross over a stile and follow the signs and a well worn path. Then join a farm track which will bring you out on to Chaveney Road in Quorn.



In 1893, the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway received the Royal Assent for the construction of the new mainline from Annesley, 12 miles north of Nottingham, to London Marylebone. The line opened for coal traffic in July 1898. The following March, the Great Central Railway ran its first passenger train from Marylebone Station, and soon lived up to its slogan, "Rapid Travel in Luxury". However, the motor car began to have a serious effect on the railways in the 1950's and long stretches of the line were closed in 1966.

Today, the Great Central Railway is one of the few railways in the world where scheduled full size steam trains pass in motion on a double track. In 1969, a group of enthusiasts decided to recreate for future generations the magic and nostalgia of the great British age of steam. Eventually it is hoped to link Nottingham and Leicester.

Turn right on to Chaveney Road, first left on to Elms Drive, and then first right on to Cradock Drive. At the end of Cradock Drive, carry straight on down a signed bridleway/footpath. The footpath ends on Sanders Road. Turn left, then immediately right, and follow a footpath to High Street. Cross over High Street; turn right, past Rawlins School then left into Church Lane. Keep straight on, passing the Church on your left, and exit from the churchyard on to Station Road, turning left. Continue forward, passing Stoop Lane and the Apple Tree public house on your right hand side. Look out for an unsigned footpath on the right. Follow it through to Victoria Street.

5 Barrow, Seagrave, Sileby and Mountsorrel Guided Walk

By Tony & Ann Williams
Approx distance: 9 miles
Estimated time: 4 hours (approx)

An interesting and varied walk from Barrow upon Soar, via Seagrave, Sileby and Mountsorrel, returning along the river valley.

Directions begin at the old station car park near to the roundabout end of High Street where you will find free parking.

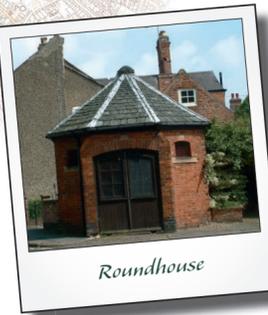
From the car park turn left, cross the High Street and walk up Church Street past the Roundhouse and church.

The Roundhouse is actually octagonal and was previously used as the village lock-up (a small gaol) as well as for funeral bier storage. The single storey building behind it was once the village smithy.



Turn right past Hall Orchard School down the footpath. (There is no official footpath sign!) Walk straight on into New Street, where, in the distance, you may see water vapour rising from the chimney of the British Gypsum plant. At the T-junction, turn right into Melton Road and then, almost immediately, cross the road, turning left into the footpath directing you towards Gypsy Lane, Seagrave. At the end of this footpath is another T-junction. Turn left here into Breachfield Road, where very soon you should cross the road and turn right on to an indicated footpath over Fishpool Brook. At the time of writing this edition (June 14) the land you have entered is scheduled as a housing development. Look for new signs to the footpath network. You will walk uphill, following a well-used footpath, to another field.

Continue uphill (ignoring an alternative footpath that branches to the right) and go through the hedge where a bridleway goes left (back towards Melton Road). Ignore this and carry straight on along the ridge. After about six way-marked stiles and gates and two farm tracks, the path turns half-right, crosses the next field, (not a very well used path) to the corner diagonally opposite. You won't see the way marker until you reach the corner. Turn left up a narrow footpath which ends with two stiles very close together.



At this point proceed about quarter-right across the field (footpath now not very apparent); the way marker post will be visible in the fence towards which you are walking. Pass through the gate at this point and head straight on towards the way marker. After passing through a gate, take the right fork (the left goes to Walton) and then over a stile.

The impressive buildings and clock tower that can be seen to your left at this point were formerly the Quorn Hunt buildings. The Quorn Hunt was founded in 1696, by Mr. Thomas Boothby of Tooley Park, Leicestershire, although hunting the fox had taken place on a more informal basis prior to that date. The Hunt takes its name from the village of Quorn, where the hounds were kennelled from 1753 until 1904, at which time it moved to Barrow upon Soar. In 1990 the Hunt moved again to newly built kennels in Kirby Bellars, where it is currently situated. The Quorn is perhaps the most famous hunt in Great Britain, and is widely known far outside the sphere of hunting with hounds.

Now proceed half-right across the field to a point near the opposite corner. (Alternatively, if in doubt, or wishing to be "farmer friendly", go fully right and walk round two sides of field.) Go through the hedge, where a way marker directs you along the edge of the next field and across a private tarmac road (leading to the Gypsum works). In the summer you should be able to enjoy a glimpse of the wild flower-rich verges of this road.

Pass through the hedge, turn half-right and proceed diagonally across the next field. Again, a way marker post will become visible, indicating the stile which should be crossed for access into the next field. This field is also crossed diagonally before passing over a stream bridge and meeting the main Seagrave/Walton road. Turn right over another bridge and follow the path through woodland to a gate. Go through and walk up the field to a way marker post. Pass through the gate to walk along the road to Seagrave.

Seagrave is a village which was given to a mercenary leader as a reward by William the Conqueror. His last direct descendant, Sir Henry Segrave, was the first man in the world to travel at over 200mph on land (1927). He was killed in 1930 whilst attempting to break his own water speed record on Lake Windermere.

Shortly after passing Church Street on your left, where there is a welcome refreshment stop called "The White Horse", turn right at the indicated footpath sign. After passing through several gates, one farm track and two stream bridges, you will arrive in Sileby. Proceed straight on, along well indicated footpaths through parks and housing, until reaching Swan Street at a T-junction.

Turn right here, then almost immediately left, to walk along King Street. At the end of King Street, after passing under a railway bridge, turn left on to High Street.

Almost immediately after crossing the road, via a controlled pedestrian crossing, turn right, along the indicated footpath, which will take you across two fields to Mill Lane.

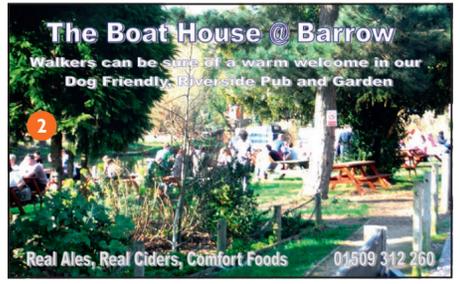
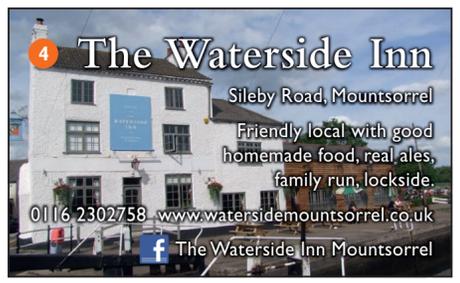
The buildings on the left as you walk along this footpath used to be a Maltings and Brewery until their closure in 1923. They are now scheduled to be developed into residential dwellings with the facade being retained and restored.

At Mill Lane, turn left and walk towards Sileby Mill boatyard. Cross the River Soar (few signs but path obvious) and turn very sharply right (U-turn) after the last bridge by the lock gates and then on to the towpath.

Sileby Mill boatyard has been in existence since the 1960s, but a mill situated here was mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Keep to the towpath all the way through to Mountsorrel, where there is another welcome refreshment stop - "The Waterside Inn".

The origin of the name Mountsorrel is, according to ancient legend, the place where a devil named Bell mounted his sorrel horse before going in "one leap" to a village now called Wanlip; in another leap to land where he burst his girths [Birstall]; and finally in a third leap to a place where he was finally buried - Bell's grave i.e. Belgrave).



A more mundane explanation is that there was a Norman Castle here called Montsoreau or Mont Sorrel. Another possibility is that it is a corruption of the French phrase meaning "sorrel coloured hill" - (after the colour of the rock here). We don't know for certain which, if any, of these suggestions are correct.

Continue along the towpath, passing under the "1860" conveyor bridge and over the footbridge, through land owned by Barrow Meadowlands (purchased by local residents to prevent development), over a weir. (At this point, you will leave the R. Soar to walk along a stretch of the Grand Union canal).

The "Grand Union Canal" was formed between 1929 and 1932 by the amalgamation of many old canals. This particular stretch is part of a 15 1/4 mile canal with 10 locks, which links the Loughborough Navigation and Leicester. The construction of this section was authorised by an Act of Parliament in 1791 and the canal was fully opened in 1794.

Go past "Barrow Boating" (with another possible refreshment stop at the "Barrow Boating Café" or at the "The Navigation" pub), finally reaching Barrow Deep Lock.

At this point, leave the towpath, turning right on to Proctor's Park Road and shortly after, turn right on to Bridge Street passing The Boat House and Soar Bridge Inn. Walk up to the floral Jerusalem roundabout, bear left on to High Street to reach your original starting point.

