

Stamford & Barnack

Start:	<i>Free car park at Barnack Hills & Holes Nature Reserve</i>
Nearest Post Code:	<i>PE9 3EY</i>
Grid Ref	<i>TF073048</i>
what3words	<i>seatbelt.button.roaming</i>
Refreshments	<i>Numerous possibilities in Stamford (mid-point of walk), also coffee shop in Morrison's supermarket (on entering Stamford).</i>
Getting there:	<i>Barnack lies on the B1443 4m SE of Stamford. The nature reserve is on Wittering Road, signed right at minor crossroads in the village.</i>
Distance:	<i>8.5 miles / 12.8 km</i>
Route Description:	<i>An easy, almost level walk along field paths, tracks and parkland, with some road walking through Stamford. A walk of historical interest with much industrial archaeology to be seen. An optional starting point is the long stay pay & display car park in Wharf Road (PE9 2DU) in which case start walk at [D].</i>

The Walk

Leave the car park, turning right along the road, then left at crossroads into Stamford Road. Bear left at next junction and look in a short distance for a footpath on the right, just beyond the 'Old New Inn' and follow it, boundary right, into a second and third field. Climb a stile circumventing a pumping station [A], then re-join your original route, following the driveway to a road. Turn left along the road, passing the remains of a railway bridge, then over a level crossing.

The demolished bridge carried the Stamford (East) to Wansford line, originally operated by the GNR, which opened in 1864 but closed to passengers in 1923 and freight in 1929 after failing to regain the traffic lost during the general strike. The current line is the Stamford (Town) to Peterborough route, originally owned by the LMS. The two lines ran parallel for the first couple of miles from Stamford.

Just beyond the crossing, go through a gate in the hedge on the left waymarked 'Torpel Way' (linking Stamford with Peterborough). Now walk down the centre of the field, ignoring a stile on the right, to reach a gate on the right beneath power lines. Turn left along the road for a short distance, crossing the River Welland, then going through a gate on the left where an information board gives details of the Welland Canal [B].

Opened in 1673, the canal is thought to be the earliest, post Roman, canal built in England. It lost out to the railways in 1863.

You now follow a narrow, muddy path with the remains of the canal right, and views of the river Welland left, eventually with distant views of Burghley House beyond. On reaching a stile with footbridge on the right, climb over and turn left, following a fence for a short distance to a stile/footbridge combination that takes you over the River Gwash. In the following meadow, walk ahead, noticing the depressions that fill in wet weather, and an oxbow lake on the left [C]. Your route takes you onto a raised bank with allotments right, and then to a gate. Go through and follow the track, passing Hudd's Mill, a Grade II listed 17th C building, converted to a house in 1990. Follow the lane bearing right to reach a road where you turn left.

You are now standing on a bridge that carried the road over another defunct railway, Stamford (East), operated by the GNR to Essendine. The line, opened in 1856, was important as the trains running through Essendine to London were also operated by the GNR. This company did not want to give business to its rival the LMS, which would have been the case if travelling from Stamford (Town) to Peterborough and changing there. The route closed in 1959 and its route here is now lost to new housing.

Now follow the road, passing Morrison's to your right (coffee shop, sandwiches etc) and keep left at the roundabout, signed Burghley House, and passing the early 12th-century St Leonard's Priory on the left. Continue, passing Cherryholt Road left, then take the next left, Wharf Road. Stay on this road, passing Brownlow Street, Belton Street and Gas Street on the left, to reach a car park [D]. (This is the optional starting point for the walk.) Now go left into Albert Road and walk to the footbridge taking you over the River Welland. On the far side, turn left along Water Street to the point where it bends right.

More history here. On the right, before the bend, Hunts Brewery operated from 1814. Originally named Stamford New Brewery, Hunts were also carriers and maltsters. It was taken over by Mowbray's of Grantham in 1927 but closed later that year. The building on the corner (Welland House) was Stamford (East) station, owned by the GNR. It was from here

that the trains to Essendine and Wansford began their journey. The station closed to passengers in 1957. Look right, across the road where, on the pediment above the corner window, faded lettering reads 'Great Northern Hotel'.

Continue to the end of the road and cross to the entrance of Burghley Park. Beyond the cattle grid, bear right towards the trees where a small gate gives access to Burghley Lane. Walk ahead, turning left at the main road. Follow this out of the town, (this was once the Great North Road) and follow it for a little over half a mile, passing an entrance to Burghley Park on the left [E], finally reaching a driveway on the left – the entrance to a golf course. Follow this tarmac drive, with the clubhouse on the right.

This is the route of Ermine Street, an ancient road and trackway that ran from London to York. The Romans adopted and further established this route as a major thoroughfare during their occupation of Britain and its successor, the A1, takes a parallel route just south of here. This is also the route of the 'Hereward Way' a 110-mile path linking the Viking Way with the Peddars Way.

Continue in a straight line with the golf course to your right, eventually reaching a junction where a gated driveway running through Burghley Park meets yours [F]. Here, keep left following the waymarks and park wall to your left, reaching a cattle grid is a few yards. Climb the stile on your right, then follow the waymarks, initially keeping left, then climbing several stiles to reach woodland. Cross a footbridge and further stile, before emerging from this belt of conifers, then follow the well-defined path across the field, over a track on the far side and passing through a hedge to continue over another field and entering woodland [G]. Beyond the woodland, follow a field boundary on your left, where there are good views of Barnack Mill, a former corn mill over to the left. At the far side of this field, pass through a gap in the hedge and cross the final field to reach a road junction. Walk straight over and continue along the road in roughly the same direction as before, ignoring a road left, to a bend in the road with a wall corner on the left. Here, take the footpath left, wall on the right, eventually passing through a gate to enter the Barnack Hills & Holes nature reserve (and dog toilet) [H]. The information board shows where you have parked your car (unless you started in Stamford), but I defy anyone to memorize the route across this undulating landscape, with its many fences and gates!

Quarrying for limestone created the hummocky landscape of the Hills and Holes. The stone, known as Barnack Rag, was a valuable building stone first exploited by the Romans over 1500 years ago. Quarrying continued in mediaeval times when many abbeys used Barnack stone, and the monasteries frequently argued over the rights to it. Blocks of stone were transported on sleds to the river Welland and loaded on to barges that travelled down the river Nene and other fenland waterways. Most famously, stone from Barnack was used to build Peterborough and Ely Cathedrals. By the year 1500, all the useful stone had been removed, and the bare heaps of limestone rubble gradually became covered by the rich carpet of wild flowers that can be seen in summer.

After going through a gate, take the path ahead, keeping the fence on your left in sight. The route twists and turns, but the well-defined path will eventually lead you the car park and your transport.

