

Fishtoft & North Sea Camp

Start: Car park at Cut End (TF322422). This is on the bank of The Haven, south east of Boston. Alternatively, park at the Red Cow, Fishtoft (TF380391) with owner's permission.

Distance: 8-9 miles.

Refreshments: Red Cow, Fishtoft

An easy, level walk along riverbank, field paths and tracks, but with some road walking. The route passes through H.M. prison – where one inmate said to me “it’s nice to get out”!

From the small car park at Cut End, climb the bank and turn left along it, crossing a stile. In a short distance, where the low ground on the left is bisected by a bank, take the path left and cross a stile **POINT A**. Continue to a further stile and path junction beyond. Go right here, keeping to the bank to reach North Sea Camp, an ‘open’ prison **POINT B**. Climb the stile ahead, then in a short distance another to reach a driveway. Follow the drive, noticing the narrow gauge railway tracks embedded in the concrete.

In 1935, a group of teenagers arrived here from a borstal in Stafford, and over the next year they constructed a new camp on farmland in the lee of the old sea bank, for which they were paid a nominal sum. Once complete, the lads were instructed to set about reclaiming the saltmarsh for agricultural land. Steel trolleys loaded with soil to form a new sea bank were run on the rails and emptied out on the marsh.

In 1963, the camp changed its role from borstal to detention centre, but the reclamation work continued with the help of diesel engines to haul the trolleys. The work was completed in 1979 with 970 acres being protected by a new sea bank, the reclaimed land being used for farming until it was sold in 2004. In 1988, North Sea Camp became an adult Open Prison, but maintenance work on the sea defences continues to ensure the land is not lost once again to the sea.

Follow the driveway until you reach a path climbing the bank on your left. Take this, going right at the top and climbing a stile. Now follow the top of the bank with the driveway down to your right. The drive splits and climbs to cross the bank and here, cross the stile by the old gun emplacement. A little further, stay with the bank as it bears left, the driveway continuing ahead. When the bank bears right **POINT C** drop down left to a stile and footbridge, beyond which you join a track and walk right, the track becoming a lane. Continue, passing the fine Miramar House on the left **POINT D**.

You have reached the hamlet of Scrane End, known as Crane End in the Domesday Book. The Grade II listed farmhouse was constructed in the late 18th century, with a redesigned façade being added around 1823.

Some unavoidable road walking now as you follow the tarmac to a road junction. Turn right, then at the next one, go left into Grovefield Lane. At a sharp right bend, leave the road and walk ahead along a track marked ‘Permissive Cyclepath’. This useful route saves further road walking — for the moment! Follow the track as it turns right, then left, to reach a watercourse. This is Hobhole Drain, one of a number of channels dug in the early 19th century to aid land drainage and prevent flooding.

Turn left and walk a short distance to reach Nunn’s Bridge. Constructed in 1948, this was the first pre-stressed concrete structure in Britain. Cross the bridge to a t-junction and turn right, following the road into Fishtoft, where, beyond the school, the Red Cow makes a convenient refreshment stop.

Between school and pub runs Old School Lane, along which, the walk continues. On reaching a property, veer right and walk with the property boundary on the left. Now, follow waymarks on a little-used path, going left, over a ditch to reaching a purple-painted post **POINT E**. Turn right before it and walk with ditch right. When walked in the summer, this path was in an appalling state, heavily overgrown and with fallen waymark posts — doubtless a victim of LCC’s mowing policy (or lack of it, as detailed in ‘Lincolnshire Rambler Autumn 2010 page 7). The route closely follows water-filled ditches, but the reeds in the water merged with those on the path making it impossible to walk safely. Better to drop down into the field and follow the field edge.

Continue as the path goes left, heading towards grey warehouses in the distance **POINT F** and the Boston Stump away to your right. The path reaches a road via an overgrown bridge in front of the warehouse. Turn left along the tarmac for a few yards, then go right, walking with the building on your right. Cross a footbridge and climb steps beyond. At the top, ignore a path immediately left, but continue to a path junction where you go left.

You eventually reach the path alongside The Haven, where you continue, river right, to sewage works. Here, keep to the bank, ignoring a path down to the left. Climb stiles before and after the works and continue, passing a path joining from the left. Eventually, you go through a gate to reach a car park where an information board tells you that this is the Havenside Country Park **POINT G**.

The Haven is Boston's tidal river, providing access for shipping between Boston Deeps in The Wash and the town's dock. It also serves as the outfall into the sea of the River Witham. The channel originally meandered and frequently silted up, making the port of Boston unusable, so in 1800 the engineer John Rennie was commissioned to solve the problem. By 1884, the channel had been dredged, straightened and shortened by four miles, ensuring the viability of the docks.

From the Havenside Country Park, follow the footpath passing the Pilgrim Fathers' memorial to your left.

This small granite obelisk mounted on a granite block, commemorates the Pilgrims' first attempt at finding religious freedom. In September 1607 they attempted to escape to Holland by chartering a Dutch vessel to transport them. The attempt was thwarted when the captain betrayed them to the local authorities, as trying to leave England without permission was illegal at the time. The memorial was erected by Boston Council in 1957, on the 350th anniversary of the event.

Keep to the path closest to the river, going through a gate from the memorial, then over two stiles and passing the long-defunct 'Jolly Sailor' pub on the left **POINT H**. With its now-silted wharf and redundant coastguard station and cottages to the rear, this hostelry would have been bustling in the 19th century.

The path now bears left, crossing the Hobhole Drain outfall, then right, to pick up the coastal path again. Ignore a path left (an old sea bank **POINT I**) and continue to Cut End Lane and the walk's end.

