

Stamford, Hills & Holes

Start:	Free car park at Barnack Hills & Holes nature reserve (GR TF073047).
Distance:	8.5 miles.
Getting there:	Barnack lies on the B1443 4m SE of Stamford. The nature reserve is signed right at minor crossroads in the village.
Refreshments:	Numerous possibilities in Stamford (mid point of walk), also coffee shop in Morrison's supermarket (on entering Stamford).

*An easy, almost level walk along field paths, tracks and parkland, with some road walking through and beyond 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 (GR TF033070) in which case start walk at **Point D**.*

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. At **POINT A**, climb a stile circumventing a building, then rejoin 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, climb a stile 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 kissing gate on the right beneath power lines **POINT B**. 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.

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 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 **POINT C**. Your route takes you onto a raised bank with small-holdings right, and then to a gate. Go through and follow the track, passing Hudd's Mill, a converted corn mill built in 1486, then 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.

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 **POINT 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. The building on the corner 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 faded lettering reads 'Great Northern Hotel'.

Continue to the end of the road and cross to the entrance of Burghley Park. Once through the gate, follow the driveway, soon forking right to pass the Princess Diana Memorial Garden, then a cricket pitch on the right **POINT E**. The path now bears right to reach a driveway, which you follow right, leaving the park at the Bottle Lodges. Turn left along the road (this was once the Great North Road) and follow it until you reach a driveway on the left, the entrance to a golf course. Follow this tarmac drive, with the clubhouse on the right **POINT F**.

This is the route of the 'Hereward Way' (a 110-mile path linking the Viking Way with the Peddars Way). Of far greater antiquity, you are following the Roman 'Ermine Street', which ran from Lincoln to London Lincoln – its successor, the A1, takes a parallel route just south of here.

Continue in a straight line with the golf course to your right, eventually reaching a junction where a driveway running through the park meets yours and both head southward **POINT G**. Here, turn left and just before a cattle grid, climb the stile on your right, waymarked 'Hereward Way'. Follow the waymarks, climbing a stile in an electric fence, shortly followed by another by a gate. Continue, over a stile into woodland and over a footbridge and further stile, before emerging from this belt of conifers. Follow the well-defined path across the field, crossing a track on the far side and passing through a hedge to continue over another field and entering woodland **POINT H**. 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.

Go straight over and walk along the road in roughly the same direction as before, ignoring a road left and footpath right before reaching a set of white gates at a bend in the road. Here, take the footpath left, following a wall on the right, eventually passing through a gate to enter the Barnack Hills & Holes nature reserve (and dog toilet). 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.

Continue ahead initially, with the wall still to your right. After going through a gate, take a path left. The route twists and turns, but keep the fence on your left in sight, and pass a couple of gates. At a fork, **POINT I** with houses visible over to the right, go left and through a gate in the cross-fence ahead. Continue on an undulating path, fence left, with views of houses ahead and the windmill half-left. Pass a gate in the left fence, but a little further, go through the next one with a waymark post. Now follow the path, aiming towards the windmill and soon walking parallel with a fence right. You should soon see the car park down to your right, just pass through the gate to reach it!

