

River Witham Lincoln Easy Trail

Route Summary

This is a fascinating journey, even as an 'out-and-back' trip from Lincoln out into the Fens and back. Lincoln Cathedral sits aloofly on its rock, visible for many miles around, and it is worth reflecting that the joint navigation of the Fossdyke, above Lincoln, and the Witham Navigation below, is probably the oldest waterway still in use in England today. The Romans built the canals from Boston through to the Trent, (the Fossdyke has been dated as at AD 120) which is still a possible journey today, and the Normans then used the canals to transport the stone used for the cathedral in around 1080.

The navigations remained in the same state for many centuries, until in the 1700s, the Grand Sluice at Boston was built to prevent tidal flooding of the inland area, and locks were built. Grain was still transported along this system until 1972.

Nearest Town – Lincoln

O.S. Sheets - Landranger No. 121 – Lincoln and Newark-upon-Trent

Start - Brayford Pool, Lincoln – SK 972712

Finish – Same

Waterways Travelled – River Witham

Type of Water - Slow-flowing river and navigation

Distance – 16 miles return, taking about 6-8 hours (but there is the option of a one way paddle with car shuffle)

Licence Information – A licence to paddle the river is included in the Canoe England membership fee. (Take your Canoe England membership card with you as it is also your licence.)

Local Facilities – In Lincoln – there is very little habitation along the rest of the route

Vehicle Shuttle Required - No, unless wanting to stop at Bardney, east of Lincoln, TF 103700, reached by the B1180 from Lincoln

Portages and Locks – One lock in Lincoln

Description

The Witham itself rises in Rutland, and flows in a clockwise circle to Lincoln, and then Boston. It is tiny at Grantham, parallel to the Trent at Newark, and still quite small entering Lincoln at Brayford pool, joining the Fossdyke, which connects with the Trent at Torksey.

We have taken great care to ensure the currency, accuracy and reliability of this information. We cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions but where such are brought to our attention, the information will be amended accordingly. Users should be aware that environmental conditions outside of our control can change the nature of the Trail within a short space of time. It is recommended that weather and water conditions are checked beforehand, and tide timetables where applicable.

There are really two reasons to paddle on the Witham – one is to view the colossal and beautiful Lincoln Cathedral, and its medieval city, which draws tourists from all over the world, and the other is to experience the eeriness of the fens to the east of the city.

Lincoln was in Celtic 'Lindon', the 'hill fort by the pool', and becoming in Latin Lindum Colonia, and the Danes came here as well, using the Fosdyke to proceed inland on their invasion.

The cathedral has experienced two restorations, due to fire and earth tremors, and was rebuilt between 1192 and 1250 in Early English style. The very obvious central tower was completed in 1311.

The river runs straight, between high banks (dykes), so visibility is limited, the scenery only broken by occasional footbridges and farm roads. These are very flat lands, crossed by roads that run straight for miles, and then suddenly turn corners, flanked themselves by large ditches. The start is at Brayford Waterfront, on the Pool, a large lake, and this is the local centre for holiday boating. It is possible to stop and unload a canoe or kayak, and move a car, although the nearest multi-story parking will probably have an inconvenient height limit.

The Pool has pontoons suitable for launching, although it is controlled by the Brayford Trust. As with many places, a quick launch is probably in order. Immediately, the canal narrows through the city, with lovely bridges, some with buildings on them, giving a rather medieval air. Lincoln feels like a 'proper' city, with narrow cobbled streets winding up to the cathedral, with plenty of shops, pubs and restaurants. The nightlife can be quite lively.

In only half a mile is Lincoln Lock, the only one on this trip. Soon after, the built-up area is left behind, and the quiet countryside starts. If the paddler emerges to look at the scenery, mainly brown grassland occupied by cattle, the cathedral rears up, and is very obvious.

Washingborough, a large commuter village, is the main settlement in this area, and is almost invisible on the river, which is very quiet. Fiskerton lies to the north, and then Branston Booths to the south. All is very quiet and peaceful, with the occasional isolated farmhouse, until Bardney Lock is reached. The Old River Witham joins here, now a drainage ditch, and bypassed by the navigation. If bored with the scenery, a return can be made at any time. The lock is unusual in that only rough farm roads reach it, not any metalled road. About a mile further on is Bardney itself, a lonely village with an enormous sugar beet factory.

When a return paddle is made, Lincoln will be visible all the way back.

For the paddler on holiday, visiting Lincoln Cathedral is a must, and at least half a day should be set aside for this.

Useful Information

www.lincolncathedral.com
www.easterncathedrals.org.uk/cathedrals
www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/visiting/historic-buildings/lincoln
www.lincolnhistorywalks.co.uk/

Recommended Next Trail

If you have enjoyed this trail why not try out one of the many trails available.

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Safety Information

Spending an afternoon canoeing can be a fun way to experience nature, get a great work out and spend time with friends and family. It can also be a dangerous journey, if appropriate safety guidelines are overlooked. Always follow these basic rules and comply with navigation rules- keep to the right of on-coming boats. Please be careful at points along the trail where there are sharp bends on the waterway, keep a look out at these points for oncoming traffic.

Wear appropriate clothing

Always wear shoes. Rocks, rough terrain and river beds present serious hazards to boaters without the proper attire. Nearly 90per cent of all boating injuries are attributed to lack of proper footwear. Other canoe safe clothing includes hats, additional dry clothing towels, and layered items which can easily be removed.

Be sure to

- Know the weather forecast before you set out canoeing.
 - Familiarise yourself with the local area, it's sensitive places and protected areas.
 - Leave the environment as you found it. Please read [You, Your Canoe and the environment](#)
 - Take your litter home with you.
 - Follow the navigation rules for the waterway you are on.
 - Keep noise to a minimum.
 - Do not damage bank side vegetation when launching or landing. (No Seal Launching)
 - Where possible keep to any designated paths or launching points.
 - Canoe a safe distance away from wildlife.
 - Check your equipment.
 - Observe the navigation rules for this waterway.
 - Check to see if there are any events on the waterways when you wish to travel.
- Use the checklist below to make sure you have everything you need.

Checklist:

1. Boat
2. Paddle
3. Buoyancy Aid
4. Bailer/sponge
5. Small First Aid Kit
6. Penknife
7. Mobile telephone (in a waterproof bag....Please note that in some areas due to the location mobile telephone reception might be nonexistent)
8. Fresh drinking water
9. Sun cream, hat and sunglasses
10. Light waterproof jacket
11. Footwear

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12. Licence

ALWAYS be certain to let others know where you're going and when you're expected to return.

Specific Environmental Information:

Please ensure you don't remove or damage any plants or animals from the waterway as they may be protected or harmful if transferred to other catchments.

Canoeists and kayakers take very seriously environmental concerns and already follow existing voluntary environmental codes of conduct, including Canoe England's own guidance notes outlined in the "You your canoe and the environment" publication.

By following the simple steps below you can ensure your presence is not detrimental to the freshwater environment, minimize and avoid accidentally disturbing wildlife and their habitats.

- Find out about the area before you go, noting its sensitive places, species and breeding seasons.
- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home with you.
- When clearing litter left by others, handle it with care.
- Leave the environment as you find it
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- Do not "seal" launch or drag boats to avoid wearing away natural banks. Float your canoe for launching, lift out when landing and carry it to and from the water.
- Do not damage bank side vegetation when launching or landing.
- Where possible keep to any designated paths or launching points.
- On rivers, avoid paddling over gravel banks in low water conditions – they may contain fish spawn.
- Constantly assess wildlife. If you see signs of disturbance move away quietly.

Be the eyes and ears on the water. Report pollution, wildlife problems, damage, incidents etc to the relevant authorities.

Canal & River Trust - Emergencies- Telephone 0800 47 999 47

RSPCA for wildlife and animals in distress – Telephone 0990 55 59 99 (24 hours)

Environment Agency - Telephone 0800 80 70 60 (24 hours)

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