

STEPPING OUT

A series of walks in the East Leake area.

This year, each month I will describe a walk over some of the rights of way in the parish of East Leake. Through the year I will cover all the 27 rights of way in the parish. So if you do the walk described each month you will cover every yard of the rights of way in our parish.

I have been told that there is to be a review of our rights of way this year. This will sort out the duplication that I referred to last month – where we have two footpaths number nineteen and two number threes. There is also a possibility that some of the connecting links on some of the housing estates will be given “right of way” status.

So far in this series I have covered footpaths nos: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 and 19.

This week’s walk takes in footpaths 8, 9 and 16. The walk goes beyond the parish boundaries and follows two footpaths in West Leake parish to complete a circular walk.

FP 8 and West Leake FP 6 to Fox Hill. Return via Stocking Lane (FP 16) and FP 9 through Meadow Park

3 miles; allow 1½hours.

Parts of this route can be virtually impassable after heavy rain. So choose dry weather.

Walk down station road in the direction of West Leake. After going under the railway bridge turn right down Birch Lea and take the left fork. This will bring you to a wooden kissing gate to an arable field. This is the beginning of footpath no. 8. Follow the footpath diagonally across two field to a bridge over the Kingston Brook.

For the last few years these fields have been ploughed and have produced crops of maize. This has led to complaints from people who have found the path difficult to walk just after ploughing. If farmers plough cross-field paths they have a legal duty to restore the surface of that path so that it is reasonably convenient for walkers to use. They also have to make sure that the path is apparent on the ground.

Farmers are encouraged to drive a tractor along the line of the path. This should achieve both purposes. It shows the line of the path and provides a reasonable surface within the wheel marks on which people can walk. Until a few years ago these fields were grass and some people have the mistaken impression that the farmer’s duty to restore the path means “restore it to grass”. This is not the case. It must be restored so that it is convenient for walkers.

From the bridge over the Kingston Brook footpath no. 8 goes up the hill with the hedge on your left to a kissing gate that gives access to an area of scrub. This kissing gate marks the parish boundary and as

you proceed up the hill you will be in West Leake parish. This is also the end of footpath no. 8. When a path crosses a parish boundary it usually has a different number. From the kissing gate as you climb the hill you will be on West Leake FP no. 6. The start of FP no. 6 is a fairly short path through the scrub but in wet weather it becomes very difficult. Having negotiated the difficulties of the muddy path through the scrub, you emerge onto an open field with a field edge path fenced in as it goes along the bottom edge of the field and then turns a sharp corner to the right to go up the hill with the hedge on your left. This is still FP no.6 and it also can become muddy in wet weather. A further problem with this path is that the hedge on the left is sometimes overgrown so that it obstructs the footpath. It is the farmer's duty to prevent the hedge from obstructing the footpath. But the farmer also has a duty not to disturb nesting birds – and that means that the hedge must be dealt with during the winter months. On reaching the top of the hill you will have a well deserved sense of achievement and the view back over the village makes the effort worth while. At the top of the hill you arrive at a T junction with the West Leake Bridleway no. 5 which is a prominent track running from the golf course all the way down to West Leake. You turn right along this bridleway and follow it to the edge of the golf course where you turn right along bridleway no. 16. This goes down hill with the wood on your right until you arrive at the parish boundary that is just before the entrance to the golf club. As you go down the hill you are on a properly made-up road that is Stocking Lane. But it is still officially a bridleway. This is one of the few cases where a path doesn't change its number when it crosses the parish boundary. Stocking Lane is bridleway no.16 all the way to its junction with Gotham Road. Turn right along the road; cross to the left side of the road and, once you have gone past St Mary's Cres., you can walk along the grass on the other side of the hedge until you reach the traffic roundabout. Here you turn right along Brookfield Way and then left along Nixon Walk with the lagoon on your right. The lagoon is what is known as a balancing pond which accepts water that, after heavy rain, runs off the hard surfaces of the new housing estate. It then releases it in a controlled way into the brook and thus prevents flooding. Nixon Way is the first part of footpath number nine which continues through Meadow Park as Kingfisher Way and then continues beyond Meadow Park to its junction with Main Street. The other way of reaching Main Street is along footpath number 20 – but that is for another month!

Dennis Fox