

River Soar – Soar Tour Itinerary

updated October 2016

Miles Km

Start in **Jubilee Park**, Narborough GR: SP551985

Car parking with height restriction barrier. Launch at confluence with the River Sence.

- 1.6 2.6 A563 **Soar Valley Way** road bridge; can portage up onto Grand Union Canal
- 2.3 3.6 **Packhorse Bridge** - Roman river crossing. Pass under one of the furthest arches and turn left. River becomes a navigable section of GU from here through Leicester. Option to go right on canal through Kings Lock to complete loop using the River Sence.
- 2.4 3.8 **Great Central Way Bridge** cycle path on route of disused railway
River Biam exits on left bank before bridge. A road bridge follows by the dog kennels.
- 2.8 4.5 Renovated canal footbridge and new housing by Aldi store. On the site of the former PEX Socks.
- 3.2 5 **Aylestone Lock**. Small weir to right leading to backwater which can be paddled although it is shallow with a low bridge and other constraints.
Car park to left as part of Aylestone Meadows Nature Reserve.
Can be used as start point for various loops using R.Biam and, for a longer trip the R.Sence.
- 3.4 5.5 Backwater rejoins right.
- 3.6 5.9 Gas holders both sides of the river. Gas Museum on Aylestone Road to the right.
- 3.8 6.1 **St Mary's Mill Lock** with weir to right under footbridge can be shot after close inspection for debris. Mill factories to left are part of Dunlop's original industrial units before Fort Dunlop on the edge of Birmingham.
- 3.9 6.3 River Biam joins under footbridge on left. Weir backwater joins right.
Railway bridge with line heading out to Coalville.
Followed by **Power Station Weir** on right behind pontoon safety barrier. This is the highest and longest weir on the Soar and is a steep sloped drop **almost 3 meters** to a shallow pool. Can be shot sideways with care. Called Power Station although that and the 'meadow' have both now gone to be replaced by Leicester City Football Club stadium.
Ahead is **Freemans Meadow Lock**. Portage on the none towpath side to the right of the lock using the installed ladders down to the side of the weir.
Relaunch from the platform below on the island.
- 4.3 7 The original river exits left under an iron footbridge by the rowing club.
From the previous lock there is an engineered section of river called the **Mile Straight**, hence the rowing club. This passes under four road bridges

through the centre of Leicester and in the heart of the redeveloped student accommodation for De Montfort University.

- 5 8 The Mile Straight ends at the A47 **King Richard's Road Bridge** by Castle Gardens and St Nicholas Circle.
- 5.2 8.3 The original river returns under a long low bridge. This backwater can be paddled making allowance for the low clearance of some of the bridges. The distance is the same.
- 5.3 8.5 **Kirby & West Weir** (named after the milk delivery company on the left bank) or **Evans Weir** is directly ahead with a long footbridge over it as the canalised section turns right under Soar Lane.
- 5.4 8.7 400 meters from the weir and beyond the bridge is a set of steps and boat launch on the left hand bank. This can be used to re-launch if the weir is portaged or as an egress point. Rally Park at the back of the steps was once the sidings for the Great Central Railway.
- 5.7 9.2 **Frog Island Bridge** is in the heart of what was the industrial centre of the city. Many mills are in the process of decay around this area. Hitchcock's Flour Mill has the side weir from the canal named after it and there is a mill race off the canal that used to provide water power, later converted to steam.
- 5.9 9.5 St Margaret's Way crosses the river. The footbridge just after is the entrance to Abbey Park.
- 6.2 10 A second ornate stone bridge follows just prior to **Abbey Park Weir**. The main route in all but high flows is directly after the bridge, with the island to the left. In high waters a second weir to the left between the two islands has less of a tow back at the base. The pool below the weirs is now very silted and a haven for water foul but used to be the municipal boating lake and a venue for the November firework display.
- 6.3 10.2 Abbey Park road bridge; the deck of which still has the tram tracks buried under the tarmac. The corporation tram station was to the right on the island formed between the river and canal.
- 6.6 10.6 New footbridge to serve the redevelopment of the Wolsey Knitwear site. The National Space Centre can be seen on the left.
- 6.8 10.9 **Swans Nest Weir** is a long shallow weir that disappears in higher water. To the right is Belgrave Lock which marks the return of the canal to the river. Paddling loops of various sizes can be completed by turning back towards the city along the canal.
- 7 11.3 Footbridge known as the '**A**' **Bridge** because of the way the deck is suspended. To the right of the bridge is TS Tiger one of two sea cadet units on the waterway.
- 7.3 11.8 **Thurcaston Road Bridge**. This is a scheduled monument with the remains of a terminus for canal traffic on the upstream side. The vandalistic addition

- of exposed pipes and footbridge detracts from the stature of what was called Seven Arch Bridge (now has only six to accommodate boats).
- 7.5 12.1 **Loughborough Road Bridge** and the Leicester Outdoor Pursuits Centre. Overnight camping available by arrangement.
- 8 12.9 **Watermead Way Bridge** beyond bridge on right is the start of Watermead Country Park.
- 8.5 13.7 Birstall side weir (one man plank) on right. Portage point upstream of Armco barrier down onto the natural river course. There is an option to continue on to Birstall drop weir; this is the remains of the most recent water mill on a site dating back to Saxon times.
- 8.8 14.1 River rejoins navigation and mill stream just past the White Horse PH. An attractive willow lined section follows leading to a sharp left hand turn
- 9.4 15.2 **Raynsway Marina** entrance to the right. Sharpe turn towards **Thurmaston Lock**. The County section of Watermead park has the left riverbank as its boundary.
- 9.6 15.4 Thurmaston 'W' weir and lock. The weir is shootable; exercise caution regarding the low footbridge and the shape of weir cheeks. Otherwise portage just prior to the lock. Relaunch from the platform directly opposite the lock on the weir stream.
- 10 16.1 **Johnson's Canal Bridge (17)**. The side weir on the left with a footbridge over it takes the river to the west side of King Lear's Lake in Watermead Park. A very pleasant backwater paddle, on a section of river in its natural state and width. This portage from canal to river can form part of various circular trips if approached from the north.
- 10.5 16.9 The navigation beyond Bridge 17 is a straight section of canal with some evidence of the infrastructure that was once part of the sand and gravel excavation operation that produced the current water park. Public toilets are just inside the park on the tow path side half a mile along from the bridge.
- 10.9 17.6 Hope & Anchor PH beyond Road Bridge
- 11 17.7 A46 road bridge
- 11.3 18.2 Small canal bridge followed by Syston marina and boat workshop
- 11.4 18.4 River Wreake enters on right. This was once navigable to Melton through a series of now derelict locks. With rainfall, the river can be paddled still. The new bridge at the junction has been raised to allow narrow boats under in line with the aspiration to reopen a section of the river. There are plans for a café and possibly a bunk house on the site of a former isolation hospital at the junction.
- 11.7 18.8 **Junction Lock** and weir. A large tree at the foot of the weir has the potential to upset paddlers. In higher water the footbridge on the backwater can also

be a consideration. Portage the weir on the left through the field and launch by the coppice of trees below on the installed platform.

12.2 19.6 Most OS maps show a non-existent bridge over the canal. There are sections of a Bailey Bridge in the fields on both sides.

12.4 20 The canal rejoins the river; to the right the river goes under a footbridge towards **Cossington Weir**. This is an enjoyable and uncomplicated step weir good in all but the highest flows. The lock can be portaged on the left, none towpath side.

The backwater river route from Thurmaston, has a small metering weir at Wanlip, which can be portaged right or shot in the centre. This route also goes past Leicester's main sewage works with its own new wind turbine. Surprisingly, both routes to Cossington are the same distance.

13.1 21.1 The navigation continues north alongside the A6 past a much smaller sewage works to a small island; keep to the left main channel. The building on the island has something to do with a scouting in disrepair for many years, it is now being renovated.

13.9 22.4 **Sibley Mill Lock** and weir. The backwater goes off to the left under a low footbridge. The first weir to the right of the lock can be shot with care and accuracy if the water level is high enough to stop the piling metal from damaging the bottom of the boat. The entry point below the lock is quite high and there are cross currents from the weirs. There is an interesting workshop (Candle Works) selling metal art in part of what was the mill. There is a small chandlery and marina just after the lock and followed by a footbridge. The backwater rejoins on the left in the middle of an exposed 'S' bend.

14.5 23.4 Mountsorrel backwater weir is on the right of a left hand bend. Portage prior to the weir into the field to re-launch below the weir. The weir can be shot if you pass between the Armco barrier and wall holding onto the barrier and drawing your boat to the centre support for the footbridge, then turn down the weir. In high water the bridges on this backwater can be significant hazards. If you are not sure, keep to the navigation through Mountsorrel.

14.6 23.5 A6 road bridge; the first of many occasions that the A6 passes over the river as it meanders across the wide flood plain.

14.8 23.9 **Mountsorrel Lock (50)**; bounded on the right by the refurbished Waterside Inn. A very tricky portage across the road by the humped back bridge on a blind bend, extreme care should be exercised. To the left of the lock entrance the river runs around to a wide 'W' weir which can be shot with care.

15 24.1 Conveyor belt bridge built in 1860 to carry granite from the quarry for processing. At 90 feet it is one of the widest brick arches in the country.

- 15.5 24.9 The second A6 road bridge of the elevated bypass that was completed in 1991 at a cost of £37m to alleviate the congestion through the villages between Leicester and Loughborough.
- 15.8 25.4 Mountsorrel backwater rejoins the navigation on the right, ahead of Meadow Farm Marina. A selection of large properties look down on the river following a left hand bend.
- 16.5 26.5 **Barrow New Weir** on the left takes the original course of the river off towards Quorn. This is a wide step weir with a footbridge over it. A gap in the Armco barrier allows craft to shoot the weir; in high water the clearance under the footbridge can be a consideration. Portage is from the towpath after the weir but be aware of the draw of water onto the weir when approaching the portage point. Continuing on the navigation takes you past Barrow Boating (a small seasonal café and hire facility) and to Barrow Deep Lock just before rejoining the river. A circular paddle up the canal and back on the river is a very popular 2.5 mile trip.

Continuing below the weir on the river course.

- 16.7 26.9 Metal footbridge after a dense reed bed. In flood conditions the bridge can have little or no clearance. It can be seen from the right hand bend 60m upstream and a portage on the left bank can avoid the obstacle.
- 16.8 27.1 A6 road bridge.
- 17 27.4 Power line followed by Duke of Bridgewater narrow boat; one of two boats brought upstream in flood conditions for use as residential accommodation.
- 17.9 28.8 Recently restored Grade 2 listed footbridge, **Santa Maria Bridge**, followed by Quorn Hall. Originally built for Quorn Hunt and as stabling and kennels for the hounds. Until recently owned by the County Council and run as a residential centre and canoe base linked to Beaumanor Hall. It is now a private residential school.
- 18.1 29.1 The fourth A6 road bridge; the road has progressed 1.5 miles since the first crossing of the river, which in turn has travelled 3.5 miles. A right hand bend is followed by a left hand bend with a cutting going under the deck of the A6 to off-line moorings on the right bank.
- 18.4 29.6 Barrow-upon-Soar road bridge the navigation joins on the right with the lock being visible. **Barrow Bridge** is also Grade II listed. The Boat House pub is on the right after the bridge. Camping and parking in the field on the left is possible by arrangement with the pub.
- The field can also be used as a start point for the Barrow loop or the longer Loughborough loop.
The pub also has a canoe club and will hire boats.
- 19.1 30.7 **Pillings Flood Lock (52)** is just after a large automatic sluice and access to the step weir on the right. **Pillings Weir** has three gentle steps followed by a larger step affected by water level. Stone filled gabions (cages) below make this an awkward weir

to shoot, particularly at low levels.

Continue through the stop lock (open for most of the year) on to the canal.

- 19.3 31.1 **Pillings Marina** entrance left including café and toilets
- 19.4 31.2 Portage right using the tunnel under the railway. Relaunch to left or right using unoccupied fishing stations onto the original line of the river. This portage point is just after the winding hole on the left but before the traditional canal bridge (No.32)
- 20.1 32.3 Beautiful stretch of river that includes a small island; pass left over small riffle.
- 20.9 33.6 Sharp right hand bend as the river approaches Cotes Mill. A reed bed follows.
- 21 33.8 **Cotes Bridge**; the third arch from the left is often the best passage. Water is very shallow under the bridge and has a metal piled edge. Scraping the bottom of your boat in low water can be avoided by stepping out under the bridge and lining over lip.
- 21.4 34.4 A barbed wire cattle fence encroaches on the river on the left in the middle of an 'S' bend in the river, requires caution.
- 22.1 35.6 River splits around **Stanford Island**. To the right is shallow, under a footbridge and over a ford. To the left is more interesting over a little rock riffle, under a footbridge and down a stretch of faster flowing water. The island is a good point to stop for a break.
- 22.3 35.9 Both channels converge under the railway bridge followed by **B589 Meadow Lane Road Bridge**.
- 23.3 37.5 Railway bridge.
- 23.7 38.1 **Loughborough Canal** joins the river on the left. A circular route back through the town on the canal is possible using The Boat House at Barrow or the car park at Staples in Loughborough (LE11 5XH, SK530204) as the start and end point.
- 24.5 39.4 **Normanton Church** and site of former rope ferry.
- 24.7 39.8 **The Plough Inn**, Normanton upon Soar. A jetty and launch to the side of pub provides access to the river. Considerate parking close to the wall keeps access available for others. Please do not use pub car park without patronage and permission.
- 24.9 40.1 **Normanton Boat Club** which includes a canoe club section. Overnight camping can be arranged here.
- 25.2 40.5 Zouch weirs; narrow stretch of canal. Keep right past automatic sluice, side weir and footbridge on left. The shootable weir is to the left under another footbridge just before the road bridge. Be very mindful of other river traffic

in this area; all will want to avoid the strong pull of the weirs. Continuing under the road bridge to the lock is the option to avoid the weir.

Zouch Side Weir is immediately left after footbridge; a stepped weir best shot in the middle.

- 25.8 41.5 A6006 **Zouch Bridge** marked in render is the county boundary between Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.
- 26 41.8 Zouch Cut rejoins the river just past the rowing club.
- 26.7 43 Island with 'Devil's Elbow' to the left, which is almost impassable. Main channel is to the right.
- 27.6 44.4 **The Otter Pub**, followed by a small marina and boat engineers are on the left.
- 28.2 45.4 The river splits left from the navigation at **The Hermitage**, a beautiful period house, formally a religious retreat. A difficult set of weirs further down the river should be avoided; passage should be made using the right hand cut.
- 28.5 45.9 **Kegworth Deep Lock (56)**; portage right. To the left can be seen the remains of a second lock chamber.
- 28.9 46.5 Station Road Bridge and **Kegworth Stop Lock (57)**. If closed, use left hand channel past moored boats to rejoin the canal after the lock under a footbridge.
The car park off Kingstone Lane by the Stop Lock can be used to finish your trip although it is often busy with fishermen.
- 30.1 48.4 Ratcliffe on Soar backwater. Take 2nd right channel by house and footbridge. The weir is directly after a small footbridge. In higher water this channel can be quite fast and overgrown. Alternatively continue under A453 bridge to **Ratcliffe Lock (58)**
- 30.5 49.1 A453 **Remembrance Way Bridges** on backwater
- 30.9 49.7 Two channels rejoin; there are long lengths of online mooring on right of river as part of Redhill Marina.
- 31.7 51 **Redhill Stop Lock (59)**; normally kept open. Back water has a chain barrage under footbridge.
- 32.1 51.7 River Soar joins River Trent; proceed upstream and cross the Trent to the Erewash Canal junction, watching for motor and sail traffic at this busy junction.
- 32.4 52.1 **Trent Lock** at the end of the Soar Tour.
Several pubs, ice cream van, café and large car park await you.

By Soar lane bridge on the canal – restricted passage under bridge Stevenson’s lifting bridge (steam) carried Swannington Railway over the navigation. Removed in 1966 now on display at Snibson Discovery Park. Rail tracks still visible on left bank

The Hermitage

From The Old Cut River Soar Navigation. Kegworth reports an unusually high number of ghosts and The Hermitage is reputedly haunted by the white lady. Derbyshire Life of 20th July 2012 reports the

case in the 70s, of a workman who fled the cellar having encountered a lady in white, though the then owner, Dr Bedford, assured him she was friendly, having lived with her for several years.