

NAPTON JUNCTION TO BANBURY OXFORD CANAL

1

TRIP TYPE : TWO CAR RIDE

OBJECTIVE : CYCLE FROM NAPTON JUNCTION TO BANBURY ALONG
THE OXFORD CANAL

DISTANCE : 23 MILES

TIME : 4.25 HOURS, 5.5 mph

NICHOLSON: GUIDE 1, pp 165-171

COSTS : FREE PARKING IN BANBURY. FREE PARKING AT
NAPTON JUNCTION (IF YOU ASK NICELY)

DIFFICULTY : HARD

OVERVIEW: There is no suitable train station near Napton Junction, and so I recommend two cars for this ride.

Extending the ride to start from Leamington Spa makes it too far (for me at least), given the difficulty of navigating the Oxford Canal towpath in its Northern sections.

The ride is so challenging that I actually did it over 2 days, despite it only being 23 miles in total. Do not attempt it in poor weather, or when the ground is sodden, as this will only add to your problems, which already include potholes, collapsed banking, long undergrowth, nettles and brambles, stones and earth on a narrow path. I would recommend doing the ride in spring, when the vegetation is at its lowest.

1. NAPTON JUNCTION TO WHARF INN, FENNY COMPTON (12 MILES)

Park Car 1 in Queens Road, Banbury, OX16 0ED, free of charge and no restrictions (or Banbury station car park, which is closer to the canal, is £10 for the day).

Park Car 2 at your start point, Napton Narrowboats, CV47 8HX. There is a large car park but please ask at reception to check it's ok.

From Napton Narrowboats return to Tomlow Road, turn right, and join the towpath on the far side of the canal bridge. Turn north east (left as you approach the towpath) and navigate the few hundred metres to Napton Junction, to join up with the adjacent Leamington Spa to Rugby ride. This section is very narrow, and it is easiest to leave your bike at the bridge and walk it.

Returning from the junction to Tomlow Road Bridge, continue along the towpath which is in very poor condition, overgrown, grass or earth, potholed and generally slow going. You will need to walk several sections.

Things are better as you approach The folly (a cracking free house but perhaps a bit early in the ride to stop here at this point), and up Napton locks. Lock 15 at Marston Doles has steep steps going up. Once past lock 16, Napton Top lock, the canal reaches its summit level and winds along the contours for many miles more than it needs to if the designer, James Brindley, had picked another option.



Conditions remain difficult. As of June 2025, HS2 works hinder progress north of Wormleighton, where there is a half mile diversion round the site.

After the big bend round Wormleighton Hill you approach Fenny Compton, and The Wharf Inn, at which point I split