

INTRODUCTION



As the Grand Union Canal & River Soar meander through Leicestershire, they visit numerous places of interest and beauty along the way. A rich part of the county's heritage, parts of the waterways were once profitable commercial navigation routes. As early as 1776, the Soar Navigation Company began to canalise the River Soar, starting at the Soar's junction with the River Trent.

This expansion meant that industry could start to develop along the canal, as it created a vital transportation mechanism. Industries including wind and watermills, brewing and malting became established. It was also thanks to the canal that Leicesters' hosiery industry expanded so rapidly, as it needed both a constant supply of water and excellent transport links.

What became known as 'The Leicester Line' of canals to become part of the Grand Union Canal – Britain's longest route of canals linking London to Birmingham. Today the waterways offer numerous opportunities to enjoy the city and county, whether walking or cycling along the many miles of towpath, or leaving the water's edge to enjoy a wealth of facilities for recreation and leisure.

JOIN US FOR A JOURNEY ALONG LEICESTERSHIRE'S SCENIC WATERWAYS

Leave the Leicester Line of the **Grand Union Canal** at Aylestone Meadows - a nature reserve spanning 271 acres. Look out for the Glen Parva local nature reserve, accessed off Parsons Drive or over the locks from the tow path.

The meadows contain pasture, scrubland and small pools which are the habitat for many diverse species and are criss-crossed by numerous footpaths. The canal forms the eastern border of the reserve and King's Lock can be found in its southern half along with a children's play area and tea rooms.

Leicester's **Castle Gardens** are just a ten-minute stroll from the lively city centre and attractions, featuring a rock garden and mixed borders, the formal gardens are bounded on one side by the waterway. Neatly cobbled lanes house important buildings such as Mary de Castro church and the castle hall.

The **King Richard III visitor centre** is a 'must see', re-live the incredible story of the king's life, death and discovery. See the original site of his burial in the now famous car lift. The Boiler House brings the historic site to life using the latest digital technology. A network of footpaths and towpaths are ideal for both walking and cycling.

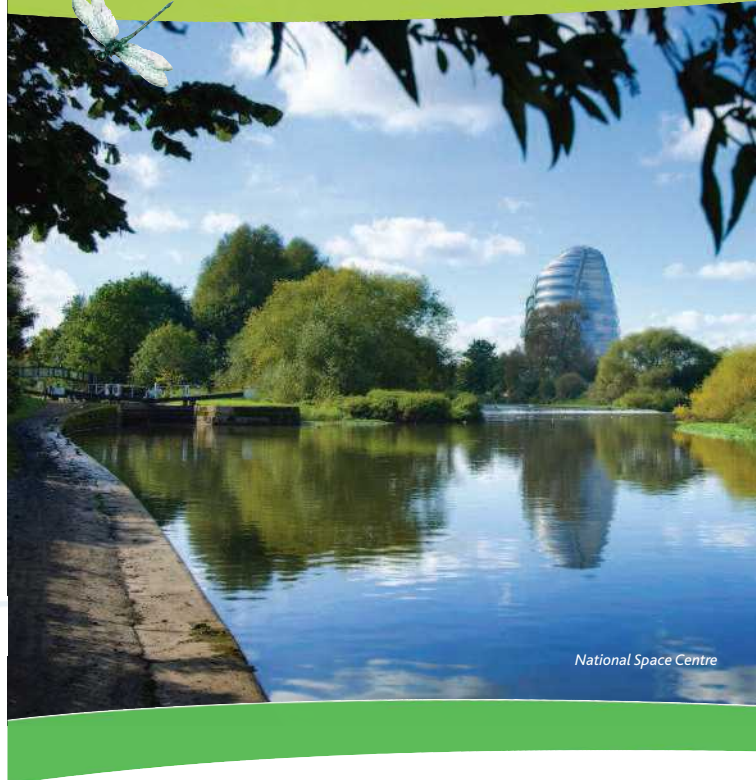
Follow the canal north to **Foxton Locks** - celebrated for its flight of 10 locks built in the early 19th Century and remains of the historic Victorian inclined plane boat lift. The Boiler House brings the historic site to life using the latest digital technology. A network of footpaths and towpaths are ideal for both walking and cycling.

Head through (or over if not in a boat) Saddington Tunnel. Around 4 miles north, is the delightful hamlet of **Wistow**. Enjoy the Maze which features a new design each summer and the thriving Rural Centre which brings together a range of eclectic shops with an art gallery, cafe, garden centre and model village. There are numerous country walks around St Wistan's Church and the countryside just minutes away from the water.



The RIVER SOAR Trail

Enjoy Leicestershire's beautiful rivers, canals, waterways and beyond



River Soar & Grand Union Canal Partnership

You could try out canoeing, kayaking, bell boating or 'katakanuing' – where the boat is a hybrid of a canoe and a bell boat. Sailing, windsurfing and stand-up paddle boarding are also available. visit www.leicestersailboardclub.co.uk, www.lrysa.org.uk, www.lopc.co.uk and www.gocanoeing.org.uk for information.

In addition, the Leicester Triathlon Club runs open water swimming sessions at King Lear's Lake within Watermead Park from May to October, if you feel like a challenge. www.leicestertriathlonclub.co.uk.

You can take a boat trip at Foxton Locks or hire a narrowboat from there or various providers along the waterways including Barrow upon Soar, Pillings Lock Marina, Union Wharf and Sibley Mill Boat Yard.

More independent 'paddlers' can find lots of routes and inspiration by visiting www.soartour.org.uk

Continue to **Abbey Park** - a haven on the northern edge of Leicester. Opened in 1882 and expanded in 1932 to include the area west of the river that had formerly been St Mary's Abbey. Large mediaeval walls are still visible today, along with ruins of the Abbey and 17th Century Cavendish House. With decorative planting, boating lake, tea rooms and miniature railway, you can enter the Park from the river near St Margaret's Pastures.

Follow the river to **Watermead Country Park** - an extensive network of lakes created from 340 acres of former gravel works and extremely popular for fishing and water sports along with walking, picnicking and cycling. A stretch of the Grand Union Canal from the River Wreake flows into the River Soar in the park, where three nature reserves celebrate the diversity of local birdlife, and include hides from which you can sometimes witness sand martins, plovers or even the elusive kingfisher. Look out for the woolly mammoth!

Leaving the river here, a walk of around 10 minutes takes you to the Leicester north terminus of the **Great Central Railway** where you can take a round trip on a heritage train and which also has refreshment facilities. Follow the river to **Watermead Country Park** - an extensive network of lakes created from 340 acres of former gravel works and extremely popular for fishing and water sports along with walking, picnicking and cycling. A stretch of the Grand Union Canal from the River Wreake flows into the River Soar in the park, where three nature reserves celebrate the diversity of local birdlife, and include hides from which you can sometimes witness sand martins, plovers or even the elusive kingfisher. Look out for the woolly mammoth!

Leave the Leicester Line of the **Grand Union Canal** at Aylestone Meadows - a nature reserve spanning 271 acres. Look out for the Glen Parva local nature reserve, accessed off Parsons Drive or over the locks from the tow path.

The meadows contain pasture, scrubland and small pools which are the habitat for many diverse species and are criss-crossed by numerous footpaths. The canal forms the eastern border of the reserve and King's Lock can be found in its southern half along with a children's play area and tea rooms.

Leicester's **Castle Gardens** are just a ten-minute stroll from the lively city centre and attractions, featuring a rock garden and mixed borders, the formal gardens are bounded on one side by the waterway. Neatly cobbled lanes house important buildings such as Mary de Castro church and the castle hall.

The **King Richard III visitor centre** is a 'must see', re-live the incredible story of the king's life, death and discovery. See the original site of his burial in the now famous car lift. The Boiler House brings the historic site to life using the latest digital technology. A network of footpaths and towpaths are ideal for both walking and cycling.

Head through (or over if not in a boat) Saddington Tunnel. Around 4 miles north, is the delightful hamlet of **Wistow**. Enjoy the Maze which features a new design each summer and the thriving Rural Centre which brings together a range of eclectic shops with an art gallery, cafe, garden centre and model village. There are numerous country walks around St Wistan's Church and the countryside just minutes away from the water.

Follow the river to **Watermead Country Park** - an extensive network of lakes created from 340 acres of former gravel works and extremely popular for fishing and water sports along with walking, picnicking and cycling. A stretch of the Grand Union Canal from the River Wreake flows into the River Soar in the park, where three nature reserves celebrate the diversity of local birdlife, and include hides from which you can sometimes witness sand martins, plovers or even the elusive kingfisher. Look out for the woolly mammoth!

Leave the Leicester Line of the **Grand Union Canal** at Aylestone Meadows - a nature reserve spanning 271 acres. Look out for the Glen Parva local nature reserve, accessed off Parsons Drive or over the locks from the tow path.

The meadows contain pasture, scrubland and small pools which are the habitat for many diverse species and are criss-crossed by numerous footpaths. The canal forms the eastern border of the reserve and King's Lock can be found in its southern half along with a children's play area and tea rooms.

Leicester's **Castle Gardens** are just a ten-minute stroll from the lively city centre and attractions, featuring a rock garden and mixed borders, the formal gardens are bounded on one side by the waterway. Neatly cobbled lanes house important buildings such as Mary de Castro church and the castle hall.

The **King Richard III visitor centre** is a 'must see', re-live the incredible story of the king's life, death and discovery. See the original site of his burial in the now famous car lift. The Boiler House brings the historic site to life using the latest digital technology. A network of footpaths and towpaths are ideal for both walking and cycling.

Head through (or over if not in a boat) Saddington Tunnel. Around 4 miles north, is the delightful hamlet of **Wistow**. Enjoy the Maze which features a new design each summer and the thriving Rural Centre which brings together a range of eclectic shops with an art gallery, cafe, garden centre and model village. There are numerous country walks around St Wistan's Church and the countryside just minutes away from the water.



Follow the river north, past Rothley Brook, Sibley Marina and Victorian building displaying Leicester's industrial and agricultural heritage complete with its magnificent original steam powered beam engines. Just north of here, a new wildlife park has been created on the banks of Leicester's River Soar as part of a major scheme to improve flood defences. Ellis Meadows is a new pond area and wetland habitat, bridged by boardwalks to encourage people to explore the aquatic wildlife for themselves.

Leaving the river here, a walk of around 10 minutes takes you to the Leicester north terminus of the **Great Central Railway** where you can take a round trip on a heritage train and which also has refreshment facilities. Follow the river to **Watermead Country Park** - an extensive network of lakes created from 340 acres of former gravel works and extremely popular for fishing and water sports along with walking, picnicking and cycling. A stretch of the Grand Union Canal from the River Wreake flows into the River Soar in the park, where three nature reserves celebrate the diversity of local birdlife, and include hides from which you can sometimes witness sand martins, plovers or even the elusive kingfisher. Look out for the woolly mammoth!

Continue to the bustling village of **Birstall**, which offers a range of local shops, pubs, restaurants and garden centre. The river runs alongside the village, just minutes from the centre.

North of Birstall is the junction of the Leicester Navigation with the River Wreake, canalised to Melton in 1797 and now under restoration. Note the former Toll House and metal corrugated isolation hospital.



THE NEXT STOP – THINGS TO DO AND SEE ALONG THE WATERWAYS

If you've been inspired by our virtual cruise along Leicestershire's waterways, here you'll discover everything you need to quickly get stuck into a wide range of activities based around the water.

1. AWESOME ANGLING

Angling is a relaxing way to experience the natural surroundings of the waterways. You must purchase an Environment Agency Rod Licence - available at any post office, or order online at www.getfishing.org.uk. It's free if you are under 16.

There are many chances to fish, but it is worth checking that the traditional 'close season' does not apply at www.canalrivertrust.org.uk before you pack up your tackle. Top recommendations include:

River Soar Loughborough. With access via Swingbridge Road, LE11 5JB, this stretch is full of silver fish and large perch. You can buy a day ticket from Netbusters on Nottingham Road in Loughborough.

Grand Union Canal at Crow Mills, South Wigston. With entry via Countesthorpe Road, LE18 4AD, and free car parking. The canal has a sizeable stock of tench, roach & carp, and you can pick up day tickets on the bank from the Wigston Angling Society's bailiffs.

For further information please visit www.getfishing.org.uk.

2. BRILLIANT BIRD WATCHING

The Soar Valley features multiple places of interest to birdwatchers. Specific picks for ornithologists in the area include Watermead Country Park as well as Wanlip Meadows and Cossington Meadows which are both Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust nature reserves. Access and parking details can be obtained from their website at www.lrw.org.uk.

Closer to Leicester city, Aylestone Meadows is another fantastic location in which to find varieties including bullfinch, willow tits, little owls, sparrowhawks and kestrels. In spring, warblers return in their droves, and this is also the perfect time of year to come across fieldfares and black redstart. More fascinating facts can be found on the Leicestershire & Rutland Ornithological Society's website at www.lros.org.uk.

3. SCENIC CYCLING

Towpaths form a network of scenic routes for cyclists to enjoy, whether for a family afternoon out or traffic-free route to work. These leafy green corridors can be relaxing and inspiring, with so much to appreciate as you pedal along.

The Canal & River Trust has a towpath code which it's useful to be aware of before you set off on your two-wheeled adventure. You can read it at www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/our-campaigns/share-the-space-our-towpath-code.

An interesting route suggested by website www.letsride.co.uk involves a steady twelve-mile circuit from Bede Park in Leicester city centre to King Lear's Lake at Watermead Country Park.

Parts of the river are also on National Cycle Route 6 – head to www.sustrans.org.uk for the full picture and local route 1 - www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/file/leicester-cycling-route1.

For times, prices and more details of all the places mentioned visit www.goleicestershire.com

Loughborough where the renovated canal basin is five to ten minutes on foot from many attractions which include the fascinating Charnwood Museum, Carlton War Memorial in spacious Queen's Park, the atmospheric Great Central Railway and numerous places to eat and shop.

A few miles on, Pillings Lock is a flood lock built to protect the Grand Union Canal route when a neighbouring branch of the River Soar floods. The nearby marina is the location of Pillings Boat House restaurant and bar which is well worth a visit in its own right.

Follow the river north, past Rothley Brook, Sibley Marina and Victorian building displaying Leicester's industrial and agricultural heritage complete with its magnificent original steam powered beam engines. Just north of here, a new wildlife park has been created on the banks of Leicester's River Soar as part of a major scheme to improve flood defences. Ellis Meadows is a new pond area and wetland habitat, bridged by boardwalks to encourage people to explore the aquatic wildlife for themselves.

Leaving the river here, a walk of around 10 minutes takes you to the Leicester north terminus of the **Great Central Railway** where you can take a round trip on a heritage train and which also has refreshment facilities. Follow the river to **Watermead Country Park** - an extensive network of lakes created from 340 acres of former gravel works and extremely popular for fishing and water sports along with walking, picnicking and cycling. A stretch of the Grand Union Canal from the River Wreake flows into the River Soar in the park, where three nature reserves celebrate the diversity of local birdlife, and include hides from which you can sometimes witness sand martins, plovers or even the elusive kingfisher. Look out for the woolly mammoth!

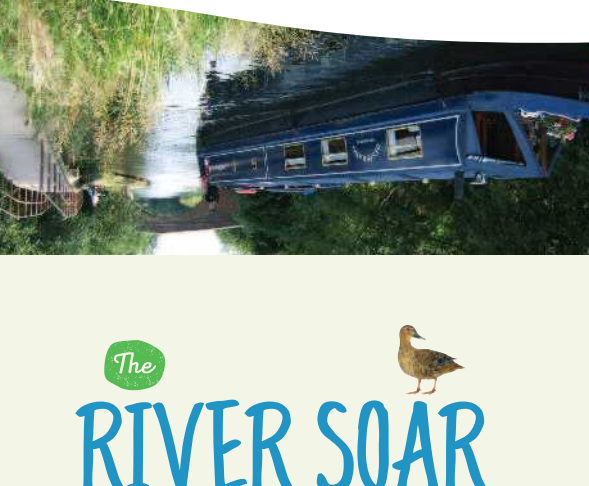


Leicester Marina where it is truly a focal point for the village, making this the perfect place to enjoy the river and surrounding meadows which are renowned for walking, cycling, bird watching, fishing, boating and picnicking.

Decade Wharf Marina where the renovated canal basin is five to ten minutes on foot from many attractions which include the fascinating Charnwood Museum, Carlton War Memorial in spacious Queen's Park, the atmospheric Great Central Railway and numerous places to eat and shop.

Union Wharf where the renovated canal basin is five to ten minutes on foot from many attractions which include the fascinating Charnwood Museum, Carlton War Memorial in spacious Queen's Park, the atmospheric Great Central Railway and numerous places to eat and shop.

Pillings Lock Marina Ltd where the renovated canal basin is five to ten minutes on foot from many attractions which include the fascinating Charnwood Museum, Carlton War Memorial in spacious Queen's Park, the atmospheric Great Central Railway and numerous places to eat and shop.



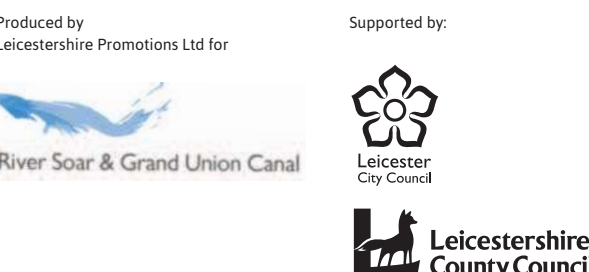
USEFUL INFORMATION

For ideas of great short-breaks and holidays in the area please visit www.stayplayexplore.com

For tourist information about Leicester visit www.visitleicester.info

For tourist information about Leicestershire including bookable accommodation visit www.goleicestershire.com

To find out about the many opportunities for getting involved with our waterways through volunteering opportunities please see the relevant section of www.leicestershirewaterways.com



© Leicestershire Promotions 2017

All information was believed to be correct at the time of printing. We cannot accept liability for any inaccuracies or omissions or subsequent alterations to any of the information included. We recommend you check all details directly with establishments before making a journey. Large print format is available. Please call 0116 225 4000.

EXPLORE AND ENJOY THE RIVER SOAR TRAIL

MAP KEY

 PLACES TO VISIT

 MARINAS

See details overleaf



ROUTE 6
MOUNTSORREL TO BARROW UPON SOAR AND BACK (4.4 MILES)

Follow the river as it meanders through the Soar Valley. Not suitable surfaces for family cycling. Refreshments available at riverside pubs.

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/riversoartrail-route6



ROUTE 7
LOUGHBOROUGH TO REDHILL MARINA (9 MILES)

Follow the full route and return by train from East Midlands Parkway, or stop at Normanton on Soar and visit the 12th century St James Church. Not suitable for family cycling.

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/riversoartrail-route7

ROUTE 3
ABBAY PARK TO WOLSEY ISLAND AND ELLIS MEADOWS (3 MILES)

Follow the canal to where it rejoins the river at Swan's Nest Weir, visit the newly created Ellis Meadows, with boardwalks over wetland areas and a picnic area, and then follow the river back to Abbey Park. Suitable for family cycling or walking, although you may need to dismount at pinch points around bridges.

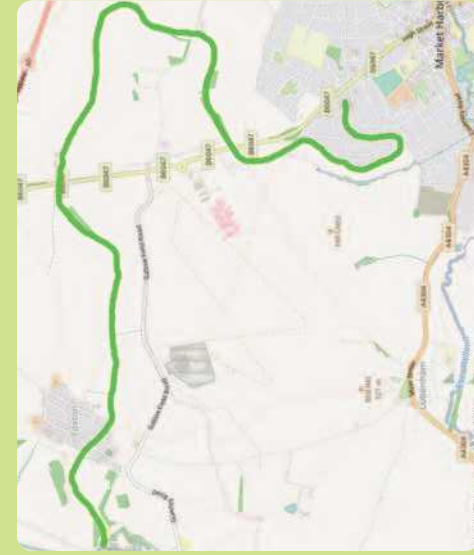
www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/riversoartrail-route3



ROUTE 1
MARKET HARBOROUGH UNION WHARF TO FOXTON LOCKS (5.5 MILES)

This well surfaced section of the towpath allows access for family cycling and walking.

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/riversoartrail-route1



ROUTE 5
WATERMEAD NORTH & SOUTH (4.2 MILES)

Starting at either Watermead North or South car parks, linked by the river. Suitable for family cycling or walking.

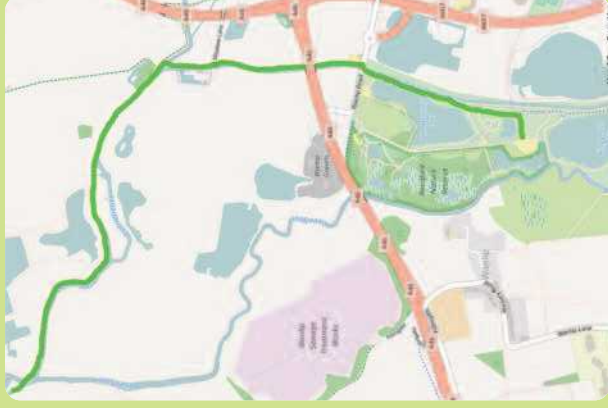
www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/riversoartrail-route5



ROUTE 4
WATERMEAD NORTH TO COSSINGTON LOCK (4.4 MILES)

This out and back route can be combined with the route above for a longer day out. Suitable for family cycling or walking.

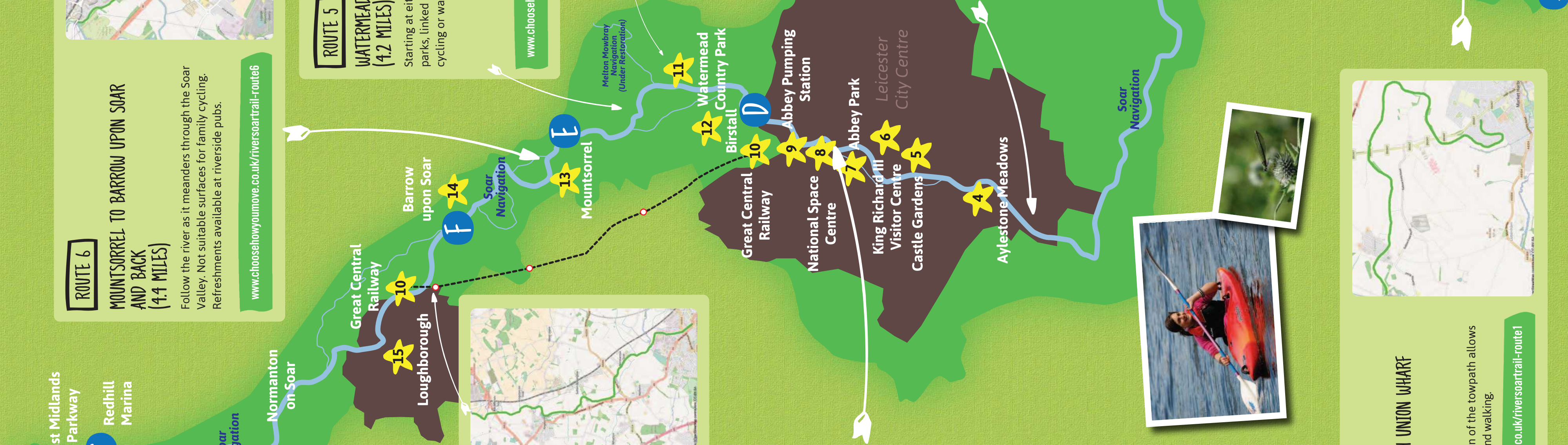
www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/riversoartrail-route4



ROUTE 2
AYLESTONE MEADOWS TO GLEN PARVA LOCAL NATURE RESERVE AND BACK VIA THE GREAT CENTRAL WAY (4 MILES)

Visit Pebble Beach and stop off at the Kings Lock Tearooms for refreshments. The towpath is muddy in places and not suitable for family cycling. The Great Central Way is fully paved and suitable for all users.

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/riversoartrail-route2



SCALE: 5 MILES