At the crank of the windlass in the racks the paddle boards’ square blocks of elm are lifted in the lock head like two eyelids so water sluices through the culverts on either side of the lock’s brick chamber in swags and scallops and volutes burled and blurred and bossed and scooped like a crystal maelstrom in a bottle-neck crizzling its uprush in a double ridge till risen it overrides itself and the sky resembles its reflection on the stilled upheaval of one level

Acknowledgements

The production of this leaflet would not have been possible without the help of the following people:--
Mr Roger Bowen - Clerk to Lower Heyford Parish Council
Mr & Mrs Tim Davies - Grange Farm, Middle Aston
Paul O’Sullivan - Councillor, Deddington

Additional Information

All of Cherwell District Council’s circular walks and rides are published on the Council website and can be downloaded free. Leaflets can be purchased from Banbury Tourist Information Centre (01295 259855). For further information about circular walks and rides, guided walks and grants available for countryside access projects, please contact:-
Cherwell Valley Walks

The Cherwell Valley Walk offers you a wide choice of rural rambles through the heart of the Cherwell District, where the historic Oxford Canal parallels the beautiful River Cherwell for much of its length.

The main starting point is Heyford Station where car parking is available as well as a rail link for those without, or not wishing to use, private vehicles. Other villages en-route can also be used as starting points, but please take great care when parking along their narrow country lanes.

• The walk is designed to be followed in a figure of eight, starting off in a clockwise direction towards Steeple Aston and is 14 miles/22.5km in length.

• The southern loop, returning via the Heyfords after crossing the Causeway, is about 7 miles/11km (follow instructions 1-16 and 29-30). A shortcut heading east from Steeple Aston is 4 miles/6.5km. The northern loop, starting from North Aston and heading back north along the canal towpath after crossing the Causeway, is about 6 miles/9km in length (follow instructions 25-28 and 15-24).

• The Heyfords Circular Walk, described separately in this leaflet and devised by Lower Heyford Parish Council, is 2 miles/3.5km in length. A shortened version of this can be enjoyed by assisted wheelchair users.

The route is waymarked along its full length but it helps to follow the information in this leaflet as you go. Please take great care when crossing roads and the railway line. You are advised to wear stout, waterproof footwear. During the winter months, certain sections of the valley bottom tend to flood. Please turn back if conditions are too wet. Remember to follow the Countryside Code.

Places to Eat & Drink

The Bell - Lower Heyford
(01869) 347176
Open lunchtimes and evenings. Check for times and reservations. Ivy clad village pub serving real ales. Bar snacks. Restaurant serving modern cuisine plus traditional pub meals. Garden

Oxfordshire Narrowboats Shop
- Lower Heyford (01869) 340348
Open 9am - 5.30pm every day. Refreshments, canal crafts, groceries and narrowboat hire

Harris Stores - Steeple Aston
(01869) 340281
Open Mon - Sat 7am - 8pm, Sun 8am - 6pm. General store and Post Office

The White Lion - Steeple Aston
(01869) 340307
Open every evening plus weekend lunchtimes. Village pub serving real ales. Garden

The Red Lion - Steeple Aston
(01869) 340225
Open lunchtime Tues - Sun and every evening. Check for times and reservations. Traditional village pub serving local real ales. Bar snacks. Restaurant serving 'Honest English' cuisine. Garden

The Barley Mow - Upper Heyford
(01869) 232300
Open every evenings and lunchtimes. Village pub serving real ales. Bar snacks at lunchtimes. Garden
**Points of Interest**

The **Cherwell Valley** is an Environmentally Sensitive Area. This designation recognises that it has a special ecological and landscape character that should be protected and enhanced through sensitive farming practices. The valley retains traditional habitats including flood plain pasture and meadows, ancient hedgerows, pollarded trees and broad-leaved woodland.

A **The Oxford Canal** was one of the earliest to be built in England (1790) and was the first to connect the industrial Midlands with London. Although challenged by competition from the Grand Junction Canal (1805), and the coming of the railway in 1850, it continued to carry commercial traffic up until the 1950's and now has a new lease of life as a recreational waterway.

B **The Mill House** is late 18th to early 19th Century but is probably built on the same site as the Mill for which the course of the River Cherwell was diverted in the mid 16th Century.

C **The Eye Catcher** was one of a number of features in the landscape designed for Rousham Park by William Kent (1685-1748). Others include the Gothic Mill, also in Steeple Aston Parish, and the North and South Roundels (clumps of trees) in Lower Heyford.

To view the **Eye Catcher** more closely, go down Cow Lane from Steeple Aston and follow the waymarked route around Folly Field.

D **Steeple Aston** is a beautiful village with over 30 Grade II listed buildings in its conservation area. The name Aston (east village) reflects its position (with its neighbours Middle and North Aston) as the easternmost settlement against the river.

E **The Causeway** provided a route across the wet Cherwell meadows to Somerton Mill. It was constructed just wide enough to take horses and carts and, therefore, suffered considerable damage as a result of some use by tanks during the second World War.

F **Poem Sculptures** Sculptor Michael Fairfax and poet Jamie McKendrick worked together on a series of artworks for the Oxford canal in a project funded by Cherwell District Council and Southern Arts. For the Somerton installation Michael has inscribed Jamie’s poem ‘Lock’ onto a set of four sculptures carved from old lock timbers.

G The village green is the main focal point of **North Aston** around which a few houses are scattered. The wooden signpost on the green was erected to celebrate the Queen’s Golden Jubilee in 2002. Designed and carved in the village, it depicts the Hall, Church and notable characters from North Aston’s past. The Church of St Mary and North Aston Hall are the earliest buildings and stand in parkland. It is in this area that the mediaeval village of North Aston was located before its abandonment in the fifteenth century.

H **Grange Farm** is what remains of the ancient village of Nethercote which is mentioned in the Oxfordshire Doomsday. It is likely that the desertion and depopulation of Nethercote came late in the 15th Century when it was leased as grazing land. Physical traces of the old village remain in Sheep Field adjacent to Grange Farm, which is full of banks and hollows.
Heyfords Circular Walk
Approx 2 miles / 3.5 km

1. From the station car park in Lower Heyford, cross over the railway line using footbridge. Exit from platform and turn left onto canal towpath (do not cross or pass under canal bridge). Proceed along the canal, past the lift bridge. This southern section of the Oxford Canal was opened in 1790 and the Lower Heyford Wharf was an original feature. The tall red brick building behind the boatyard works is a classic early 19th Century Canal House. The Oxford to Banbury branch of the Great Western Railway was opened in 1850 and Heyford was one of the three original intermediate stations. The flood meadows of the River Cherwell run along this stretch and at times of flood these can resemble a lake. For those using pushchairs or wheelchairs, cross the lift bridge and follow the village route back to Heyford Station.

2. Cross the brick bridge (204) at Allen’s Lock, and follow track up to road.

3. Head straight on along Allen’s Lane and then Church Walk, past the cemetery to the left and Upper Heyford Church to the right.

4. Just past the church, bear left along track and then sharp right along the edge of green area to metal kissing gate in the corner.

5. Bear left from this point across field to another metal kissing gate on the next field boundary.

6. Turn left and then immediately right onto concrete track.

7. Cross stile and continue along track to Upper Heyford water treatment works.

8. Bear left over stile just before gates and continue along field edge. Turn right at corner of works and then left to follow field edge back to Lower Heyford (The path crosses the parish boundary from Upper Heyford to Lower Heyford at the waterworks stile).

9. Continue along this stretch of the route, which runs parallel to the canal, and then walk along the edge of the village playing field. Join concrete track and walk down to the road adjacent to the Mill lift bridge over the canal. Turn left onto Mill Lane and enter the village of Lower Heyford.

10. Turn right into Freehold Street and then right into the Market Square. After turning right into Freehold Street, White Horse Cottage can be seen on the right. This is a 17th Century cottage that as the name infers was once an inn. Just through the double bend on the left is a traditional red painted telephone kiosk, which has been listed to preserve the character of this corner. A number of interesting old buildings are passed including Paine’s Cottage, Forge House, Town House and College Farm House before reaching the Bell Inn on the corner of the Market Square. The Bell is late 17th/early 18th Century and has a most unusual narrow window extending to the full height at the rear. Markets were once held regularly in Market Square, the last being around 1900.

11. Bear left along Church Lane, past the frontages of the Church, Manor Cottage and Manor House on the right. The Manor House was built in 1669 on site of an earlier house; St Mary’s Church was first dedicated in mid 11th Century and has some interior stonework dating back to the 13th Century.

12. Head to footpath sign to left of gateway at end of lane. Continue along path between stone wall and fence and pass through a second kissing gate to see the canal once more. Turn left; stay close to the fenceline and head straight ahead towards corner of stone wall. Follow wall to next kissing gate.

13. Turn right onto main road. Pass the Boatyard and Canal Cottage and cross canal bridge back to Heyford Station.