

Education

Foxton Locks offers an excellent learning environment that extends beyond the classroom and helps schools deliver learning opportunities to inspire in a creative and authentic way.



Foxton and Beyond

(Extract from Chapter 12, 'Journeys of the Swan' by John Liley. Published by Allan and Unwin in 1971)

At Foxton stands a very steep hill, with one canal at the bottom and another at the top. By means of a ten staircase locks, these two are connected.

Swan lay in the pool below the lowest dock, ready once her crew had mustered, for the assault. Bright sunlight had replaced the rainclouds of the day before and tempted out a group of locals, who were leaning on the parapet of the bridge above us.

Staircase locks are not separated by short stretches of water. The top gate of one lock is also the bottom gate of the next. Thus, a narrow boat needs no steering whatsoever. Unfortunately, a boat going up a staircase cannot pass another coming down and so, at Foxton, the builders divided the works into two staircases of five locks each, with a short pool in between.

Alongside is the site of the celebrated Foxton Incline Plane which was dismantled shortly after its opening in 1900. Two great tanks would trundle sideways up and down a ramp on the hillside, the one counterbalancing the other. Ideally each caisson would contain two narrow boats, but traffic was sporadic, even then.

We wanted to explore the site of this phenomenon and accordingly thrashed about in the bramble bushes which had grown on the ramp. Little remains, apart from the odd culvert and foundations of the engine house. The linking arm at the top is now dry and only retains a few patches of treacly swamp.

At the bottom of the plane, the arm to Market Harborough was barred by a fence and a Private Property notice. Viewed from beyond the barrier this area looks positively amazonian in its luxuriant vegetation.

The summit level of the LeGrand Union Canal is both winding and enthralling. A few roads come near it; there are no large towns. In a downpour it can seem the loneliest place on earth - not necessarily a criticism. I rode my bike to Husbands Bosworth. The towpath was so little used and in places the hedges so thick that riding proved difficult. There were no anglers, and no litter. Dragonflies flicked above the water as I slowly pushed on beneath the blazing sun.

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