

otherwise flat landscape. What you don't see, on the other side of the hill, is Croft Quarry, which was the largest man-made hole in Europe. The current site was once two smaller quarries which have merged over time and at one stage threatened to devour the hill completely until objections from campaign groups prevailed. Like Stoney Stanton, quarrying had been taking place here since Roman times, and it has been suggested that the Romans used the stone quarried here to build the Fosse Way. In fact, the name 'Croft' comes from the Old English word 'craeft,' meaning "craft" and perhaps the "craft" in question was that of quarrying. But it was in 1872 that the Croft Stone and Brick Company was founded by brothers Samuel and Henry Pochin after Samuel acquired the existing brickworks. Henry was also an industrial chemist and inventor and became very wealthy, buying the Bodnant Estate (now a famous National Trust Garden) in the Conwy valley. Quarrying continues to this day, 2 million tons of granite being extracted every year. The site is half a mile wide and when quarrying finally finishes the bottom will be 150 metres below sea level. Consequently, they have to pump out 250,000 gallons of water every day.

The village is divided into old and new parts by the River Soar and the Leicester to Birmingham railway. The church of St. Michael and All Angels dates back to Norman times but was rebuilt using Croft stone in the 19th century. The Heathcote Arms is the village's only public house, a row of converted cottages that became licensed premises in the 1810s. The original owner, Mrs Moyer, nee Heathcote, had a brew house constructed to make their own ale but this was turned into a slaughterhouse.

- Stay on this road as it goes past The Green and turn right onto a footpath by a house called The Nook. After crossing the River Soar and passing back under the railway, keep straight on, crossing a road before turning right onto another footpath.

As you cross the railway line, you are moving into the new village. Look right towards the road bridge: there was a station here that opened in 1877 and brought day trippers in the summer who would picnic on Croft Hill. In the winter, a field belonging to villager Jonny Swaine would be flooded and visitors would come to skate on it. Jonny owned some tea rooms next to the field and these served refreshments until 1927 when they were turned into a working men's club. This in turn became Shades nightclub which now lies under housing in the new part of the village. The station closed in 1968.

- Cross the next road to continue to the left of the Croft Parish Council sign on back road. Keep straight on as the road gets narrower and narrower, eventually becoming a footpath. You will cross the Soar again at Soper's Bridge and eventually emerge onto a main road. Cross the road to take the footpath to the left of the drive to Fortway Farm (A gate immediately on your left gives access to Stanton Lakes - bar, restaurant, touring caravan site and Fosse Fox). Where the paths splits in two, take the right fork. In the next field, head straight on, turning right on the farm track.

After passing the farm, pause to look through railings on your left at Stoney Cove and off to your right where you can see Bardon Hill, the highest point in Leicestershire and Croft Hill with its right side falling away into Croft Quarry. At the main road turn left and left again to visit Stoney Cove, turning right at the sentry box, or turn right to return to Stoney Stanton.

5 Stanton Lakes

Stanton Lakes started life as a water sport venue known as Leicester Jet-ski Centre and, although many visitors suppose the Lake to be formed from a local quarry, it was in fact purpose built, dug out of farmland & construction finished in the early 90's. Jet-skiing ceased in 2015 and the Lake is now home to swans, grebes, oyster catchers, a variety of other wildfowl, birds and open water swimmers! (booking required).

6 Stoney Cove

Stoney Cove was once two quarries, Lane's Hill Quarry and Top Quarry which eventually joined. Today they are the home of the National Diving Centre. Diving began here in 1960, quarrying having ceased two years earlier, with natural spring water, such a problem for the quarry owners, filling the giant expanse naturally. That said, the Diving Centre still has to pump many gallons off each day to keep the water at bay. It has been used to train North Sea oil rig divers and police frogmen. In 2000, a tugboat, Stanegarth, was scuttled to create an artificial reef for divers practising wreck dives. The water descends to a depth of 20 metres at one end and 35 metres at the other with a 5-metre shelf around the edge. A quarry crushing house, built by Italian prisoners of war lies at the far end of the site.

- Return to Stoney Stanton via Sapcote Road, turning left at the roundabout onto New Road to get back to St Michael's Court Car Park.

With Thanks to...

Our thanks to Eddie Smallwood and Michael Dix for creating the walking routes and uncovering the heritage stories. And to Graham Luker for the illustrations.

This series of heritage walks have been designed to inspire walking across the District - we hope that you enjoy them. We welcome feedback and you can get in touch with us by emailing leisure@blaby.gov.uk. The walk uses footpaths, bridleways, permissive paths and some roads. Please respect the landowner's property and stay on the indicated paths. Please follow the countryside code. Take care when walking on roads and follow the Highway Code for pedestrians. You are advised to use the route in conjunction with the OS map for the area. This guide has been created with funds from the European Regional Development Fund and HM Government.



Find this walk, all 12 heritage trails and more on the **GoJauntly app**. Simple photo guides help you navigate while nifty tips point out things of interest and places to eat.



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Blaby
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3

Heritage Walks

Route Three

6.5 miles
10.5 km

This walk is one of a series of 12 heritage trails plus a long distance perimeter route around the whole District, see the website visitblaby.org.uk for more information.

- ◆ Stoney Stanton
- ◆ Croft
- ◆ Stoney Cove



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The Victorian rectory on your right was once the home of Nigel Lawson, the Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1983 to 89. The area around Meadow Close was once the site of clay pits for making bricks.

➤ Continue onto a footpath which runs past the water filled Clint Hill Quarry.

In 1910, the Frank's Arms, collapsed into the quarry with fortunately no loss of life or serious injury. A new pub, the Francis Arms, was built to replace it further down Long Street. Clint Hill Quarry has now naturally filled with water. There was a constant need to pump water out of the quarries, the water in Victorian times being sent to standpipes in the village as a source of fresh water. The area behind The Blue Bell was once Hall Close Quarry (now infilled and built upon).

➤ At the Meadow Close, turn right and then right again.

Opposite the Blue Bell is the Georgian Stanton House. It was built for the Lord of the Manor, Henry Townsend, and has at times been a school and a children's home. In 1887 it became a Dower House, the home of Maria, Dowager Lady Dixie, widow of the 10th Baron Dixie of Bosworth Hall.

➤ At the mini roundabout go straight over, taking the first left onto South Drive.

Across the road at the end of South Drive stands Sett House, as its name suggests, a house built almost entirely out of setts. It was the home of Carey Hill Quarry owner William Hewitt who acquired the nickname 'Billy Whip' on account of him supplying his workers with flexible, long handled pickaxes known as whipping hammers. For a while he emigrated to Australia, made a fortune mining gold, then returned to the village where he gained a reputation for being slightly eccentric, walking the streets with a loaded revolver, and building a toilet on his front lawn.

➤ Turn left and then when the road bends to the left, turn down a tarmac drive. Follow the drive until the cattle grid, then continue across the field on a footpath. As you pass Oak Lodge Farm, look for the stile tucked into the hedge. Turn right to continue on the footpath. Cross the next field to a signpost in the far corner. Cross a small bridge and head towards Croft on the hillside and another signpost. After passing through the hedge, turn left to walk along the side of the field. Pass under the railway then take the footpath on your right. After walking with the railway embankment on your right, follow the twisting path through trees then turn left before the next stile on your right. Cross a bridge and walk through a small wood that runs alongside Croft Pasture Nature Reserve on your right, cutting off to the right to walk alongside the cemetery to the road. Turn right and then second left.

3 Croft Pasture Nature Reserve

The nature reserve is the home to many rare species of plant including wild clary, upright chickweed, meadow saxifrage, common stork's-bill and subterranean clover. Lying either side of the River Soar, the area was carved by glacial movement and features a gorge, a knoll and natural crags. It is accessible from Station Road.

4 Croft

As you approach the village, your view is dominated by Croft Hill. At 128 metres, this volcanic hill can be seen for miles around in an

➤ **P 1** Park in St Michael's Court Car Park. As you leave the car park, the building facing you is the old village school, now the village hall. Cross the road to enter a memorial garden. The grassy area behind it is the site of Carey Hill Quarry.

2 Stoney Stanton

Under your feet lies basalt and granite, both hard igneous rocks suitable for setts (brick sized stone blocks), and kerbstones. For centuries an agricultural village, Stoney Stanton turned into a centre for quarrying in the 1870s although digging for gravel and stone had begun in the Parish Pit in the 18th century. The pit became Carey Hill Quarry.

➤ Recross the road to stand in front of the statue of a quarry man, sculpted from a tree that once stood here.

At one time there were railway lines running between the statue and the church, linking Hall Close Quarry which was to your right, Carey Hill Quarry and Lanes Hill Quarry (now Stoney Cove, the National Diving Centre) with the Leicester to Birmingham Railway.

➤ Continue past the millennium stone and the bench with local quarry names and turn right onto Nock Verges.

Nock Verges may well have been where medieval men and boys practised their archery as was required by law in those times – 'nock' is the name of notch at the end of an arrow which fits onto the string, 'verge' is a grassy area. There are marks on the external wall of the church north of the chancel which some believe were made by sharpening arrows although the arrows they practised with would have been 'blunts' and the marks are more likely to have been made as part of some cure for ailments: the ground stone of holy buildings were believed by many to have healing properties.