

Location & Access

OS: 130 • **GR:** TF 077 190 • 3.00ha

(7.60 acres) • Management

Agreement 1993

Habitat type: Scrub and Grassland

The reserve lies south-west of Bourne on the A6121 Stamford road, about 1km (0.6 miles) from the A151 junction. Limited roadside parking is available by the entrance to the west cutting and in a small lay-by adjacent to the east cutting. Access to either cutting is from the roadside. Access to the track level is by steps.

Description & Management

Part of the former Bourne-Saxby railway line linking the Midlands to the East coast, the reserve consists of two deep cuttings and the land over the 300m long tunnel. The track level of both cuttings can become very wet in winter, the east cutting particularly so.

An all-weather raised path in the east cutting has been constructed. The mixture of scrub and open areas with species-rich grassland provides a diverse range of habitats. Whitethroat and willow warbler are regular nesting species, while in winter there are often large numbers of fieldfare and redwing. 21 species of butterfly have been recorded.

Management mainly consists of maintaining areas of dense hawthorn and blackthorn scrub while restoring some areas of permanent grassland.

A short history of Toft Tunnel by Jonathan Smith

Toft Tunnel (or Bourne Tunnel as it is occasionally called) was part of the last railway into Bourne - the line which linked the industrial Midlands with the

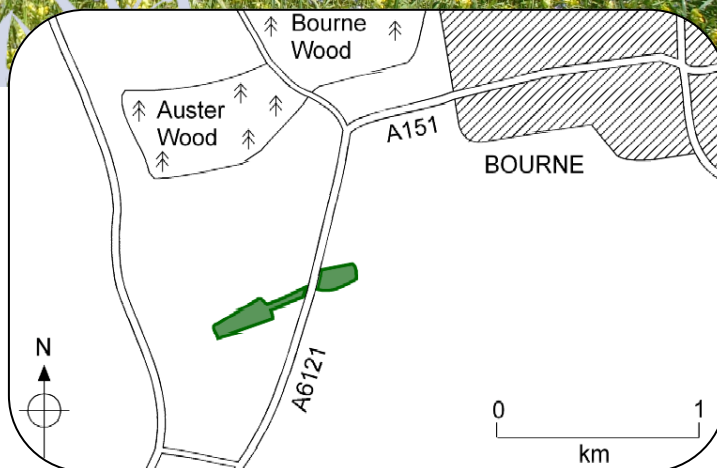
East Coast resorts.

The Bourne to Saxby Railway Act was sanctioned on June 24, 1889, and was to be a double track section under joint Midland Railway and Great Northern Railway control. The contractor for the Bourne to Little Bytham section was William Mousley of Eccleshall, Staffordshire, with George MacDonald as resident engineer.

The Bourne to Little Bytham section was the most difficult part of the route. West of Bourne, the terrain rises in a series of ridges, which although not spectacularly steep, combine to create a climb from a mere 35 feet above sea level at Bourne to a high point of 439 feet above sea level between Wymondham and South Witham.

The escarpment which overlooks Bourne was too steep to allow the line to be taken over it and Toft Tunnel had to be driven through it. Preliminary work on the tunnel started in November 1890, with tunnelling work starting in earnest in February 1891 - the initial workforce of about 100 men soon increasing to about 400.

Clay from near the tunnelling operation provided raw materials for one million of the 2.5 million bricks needed to line the tunnel - which were ordered from Henry Kingston of Bourne. Spoil removed from the tunnel and cutting at its eastern end was taken to Spalding to form the embankment for the new loop line, and some was used to create the Spoil Banks in Bourne.



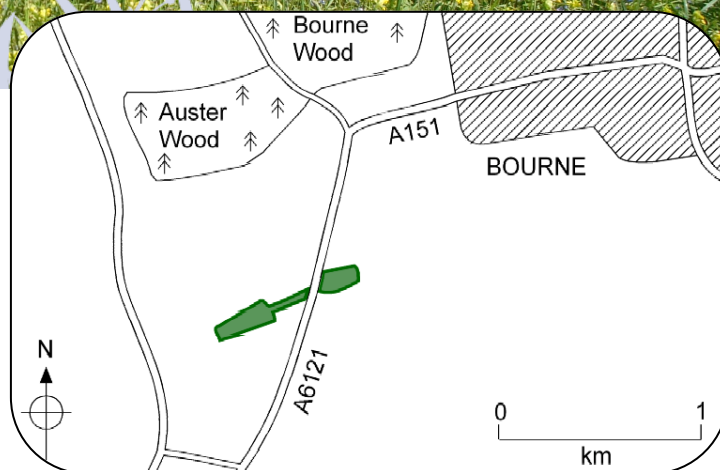
Work on the tunnel took over two years, and at the end of February 1893 large scale work was still continuing, ready for the line to open to goods trains in June 1893. The first goods train from Leicester reached Bourne at about 7am on Monday, June 4, 1893, en route to South Lynn yard - it was the first of 30 goods trains that day.

A special excursion train from the Midlands to Lynn used the route on June 25, 1893, but passenger traffic did not officially start until Tuesday, May 1, 1894, when the new passenger facilities had been built near the Red Hall, Bourne.

Although not a great engineering feat, the 330 yard long, twin track Toft Tunnel was the only tunnel on the Midland and Great Northern joint system. The line was used extensively during the summer months to transport passengers from the industrial Midlands to the East Coast resorts.

Passenger and goods services on the line stopped on Saturday, February 28, 1959, despite a fight by the then Bourne Urban District Council to save the link. Work on removing the track between Castle Bytham and Bourne started in the Spring of 1962.

Toft Tunnel



Toft Tunnel

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