

## Great Central Railway trackbed description

### Woodford Halse to Rugby - part 3 of 6

**This document describes the route of the Great Central Railway between the A425 near Staverton and the A45 near Willoughby. Much of this route is currently inaccessible and some of it is in water.**

The trackbed would have crossed the A425 between Lower Shuckburgh and Staverton at SP 5190 6164 on a bridge that is now missing. Immediately north of this point access is not possible, but it was possible to approach some of the trackbed from the north near Flecknoe, and so some of the trackbed can be described. The line extends northwards from the A425 on an embankment which crosses a minor stream at SP 5191 6190. This was the southernmost extent that could be reached from Flecknoe (although the satellite images on Google Maps suggest a worn footpath south of here to the A425). It looks like the stream passes beneath the embankment in a small culvert. The vegetation on the trackbed is so dense that no further progress south could be made. A view just north of where it becomes impassable is shown in Figure 1. Northwards the vegetation thins out and it is clear that a footpath has been formed. At SP 5192 6202 the surrounding land rises slightly so that the trackbed is briefly on a level with it (Figure 2), before the embankment resumes.



*Figure 1 Looking south along the trackbed where the vegetation is denser than the clearer section to the north (SP 5192 6194).*



*Figure 2 Looking north along the trackbed at the point where the surrounding land rises to meet the railway line (SP 5192 6202).*

The trackbed continues on an embankment surrounded by agricultural land. There is a clear footpath on the top of the line, although this is not shown on Ordnance Survey maps, so access rights are not certain. The path is flanked by overgrown vegetation, to the extent that the small bridge for access below, shown on the map at SP 5197 6228, was not easily seen. Somewhere near SP 5198 6230 there were neat piles of bricks and slate, including one pile of bricks that were very similar to the classic blue bricks of the GCR. Another example of the footpath along this section is shown in Figure 3. At SP 5214 6279 the trackbed is carried on a short overbridge to allow a footpath to cross below (Figure 4), and a little north of here a track crosses the embankment at SP 5216 6285, shown in Figure 5.

By SP 5218 6290 the trackbed is at the same level as the surrounding land. The line is blocked by trees and other vegetation, and it is not possible to walk any further north along the trackbed. There is a track parallel to the line to the east, from where access to this path was gained. This point is shown in Figure 6.





*Figure 3 Looking north along the embanked trackbed (roughly SP 5195 6215).*



*Figure 4 Looking west at the access bridge carrying the GCR trackbed (SP 5214 6279).*





*Figure 5 Looking north along the trackbed on the embanked walkable section (SP 5216 6285).*



*Figure 6 Looking north along the trackbed at the northernmost extent of a walkable section south-east of Flecknoe (SP 5218 6290).*



At SP 5222 6296 it is possible to see a short open section of the trackbed, that has been used as a dumping ground for metal fences and pieces of wood (Figure 7). Just north of this is the first of a series of sections where the trackbed is in water. The first section starts at SP 5223 6300, and is visible from a small overbridge at SP 5224 6305 (Figure 8). The Ordnance Survey map suggests a short gap in the water around SP 5229 6315, although this could not be seen clearly from the track to the east. At SP 5234 6327 an access track crosses the trackbed at the same level. There is water on the trackbed to the south of this point, and a short dry section to the north, which is inaccessible, before another section in water. Views north and south at SP 5234 6327 are shown in Figure 9 and Figure 10.



*Figure 7 Looking north along the trackbed at a small open section south of the water-filled area (SP 5222 6296).*





*Figure 8 Looking south from the overbridge onto the water-filled section near Flecknoe (SP 5224 6305).*



*Figure 9 Looking north along the line of the trackbed (SP 5234 6327).*





*Figure 10 Looking south along the water-filled trackbed (SP 5234 6327).*

The next water-filled section continues northwards to SP 5238 6354, where a bridleway crosses the trackbed on an overbridge west-east. No access was possible north of this bridge, but from the bridge it was clear that another water-filled section exists (not shown as water on the Ordnance Survey map). The view from the bridge is shown in Figure 11.

North of SP 5238 6354, access was not possible while the trackbed continued northwards in a shallow cutting. It is not clear for how far it is filled with water, although online aerial surveys suggest that the trackbed becomes dry shortly before it reaches a stream at SP 5244 6376, and presumably this stream passes beneath the railway line in a small culvert. North of here the surrounding land rises and the trackbed proceeds in a cutting. At SP 5244 6434 it is possible to view the trackbed from a triple-arch bridge that crosses the line (Figure 12). There is slight evidence of a worn footpath on the trackbed, but I did not attempt to access it south of this bridge, since it is clear from maps that the line follows a course to this point as just described. A view of the triple-arch bridge from track level is shown in Figure 13.





*Figure 11 Looking north from the overbridge at the water-filled trackbed near Flecknoe (SP 5238 6354).*



*Figure 12 Looking south onto the GCR cutting from the bridge at SP 5244 6434.*





*Figure 13 Looking south at the triple-arch bridge over the trackbed at SP 5244 6434.*

North of the bridge at SP 5244 6434 the line of the trackbed has been blocked by a raised trackway leading west-east, but beyond that the line continues, first on a level with the surrounding farmland, and then on a gradually increasing embankment. A view looking northwards from the triple-arch bridge is shown in Figure 14, with the aforementioned trackway in the foreground. A panoramic view of this embankment, taken from a nearby road at SP 5228 6486 is shown in Figure 15. It may be necessary to zoom in to see some of the detail in this picture, but on the far left is the northernmost extent of the line before a field boundary is reached at SP 5246 6496 (where the GCR crossed the old Braunston-Long Itchington railway); in the centre is a farm access underpass at SP 5244 6478; and on the extreme right the triple-arch bridge at SP 5244 6434 can be seen. The farm access underpass is shown more clearly in Figure 16, which also shows that the embankment to the south (right) of here might have been eroded slightly.

At SP 5246 6496 the Great Central Railway meets the line of the old Braunston-Long Itchington railway. It is possible to view some remaining brickwork from this crossing from the side of the road at SP 5244 6506, as shown in Figure 17. Having crossed the line of the other railway, the track crosses the small field shown in the foreground of this picture, before reaching the Wolfhamcote-Flecknoe road, from where the picture was taken. There is no trace of the trackbed across this field. It might have crossed on an embankment that has since been removed, but it is not clear.

At SP 5244 6506 the GCR would have crossed the Wolfhamcote-Flecknoe road on a bridge. The bridge is now missing, but supports can be seen on both sides of the road (Figure 18).





*Figure 14 Looking north along the line of the trackbed from the bridge at SP 5244 6434.*



*Figure 15 Panoramic view looking south-east at the embanked trackbed north-east of Flecknoe (camera at SP 5228 6486).*





*Figure 16 Close-up looking east at the farm access point within the GCR embankment, showing how the height of the embankment has been reduced to the right of the bridge (SP 5244 6478).*



*Figure 17 Looking south across a field that can be viewed from the side of the missing bridge support at SP 5244 6506. Across the field are traces of the intersection with the dismantled Braunston-Long Itchington railway.*





*Figure 18 Looking south-west along the gated road between Wolfhamcote and Flecknoe where the GCR would have crossed on a missing bridge (SP 5244 6506).*

North of the Wolfhamcote-Flecknoe road, the track enters a short cutting, which can be seen from a minor track road at SP 5243 6532 (shown in Figure 19), which crosses the GCR trackbed. Note that this track road is raised above the cutting, and hence blocks the line at this point. It also appears that some material has been dumped into the centre of the cutting south of this point. North of this point a short cutting continues to SP 5243 6539, where the Oxford Canal is reached south-west of Braunston (note that this portion of canal is also part of the Grand Union Canal). The railway would have crossed the canal on a bridge, which is now missing, but the bridge support is visible particularly on the south side (Figure 20).

It is possible to climb up from the canal towpath at SP 5243 6542 to the northward continuation of the railway. At first there is dense vegetation, but a path can be made out, and it is much clearer the further north you go. The surrounding land starts to fall away as the River Leam is approached, so the trackbed continues on an increasingly high embankment, over a farm access bridge at SP 5243 6567, shown in Figure 21. The embankment ends abruptly at SP 5242 6596 as the River Leam is reached. There is a gap of about 100m to a further embankment north of the river, shown in Figure 22. It is not clear to me if the railway crossed this gap on a long bridge that has since been dismantled, or if the embankment was once longer, with a shorter bridge for the river.





*Figure 19 Looking south along the trackbed from the filled in trackway that crosses the trackbed at SP 5243 6532).*



*Figure 20 Looking south-west from the Oxford Canal at the missing bridge supports that would have carried the railway across the canal (SP 5243 6540).*





*Figure 21 Looking north along the embanked trackbed north of the Oxford Canal near Braunston, just south of a short bridge where there is an access track below (SP 5243 6567).*





*Figure 22 Looking north at the end of the embankment before a gap is reached at SP 5242 6596. The River Leam flows east-west just before the trees on the far side.*

No further access to the trackbed was possible north of here for around 3km. The railway continued northwards on an embankment north of the River Leam, starting at SP 5242 6608, and continues for just over 1km to the A45 road just south-east of Willoughby. At SP 5242 6637 there is a bridge built into the embankment for access for a bridleway, shown in Figure 23, and a similar bridge can be seen about 200m further north of this for farm access (Figure 24). It was not possible to view the trackbed north of here until the A45 is reached. Judging by Ordnance Survey maps the line continues through farmland to the A45. The embankment reaches a level with the surrounding land at around SP 5241 6670, before rising again just south of the A45 crossing at SP 5240 6718, which is also embanked.





*Figure 23 The access bridge within the GCR embankment where the marked bridleway passes through it, south of Willoughby (SP 5242 6637).*



*Figure 24 Looking north-east towards an access bridge within the GCR embankment south of Willoughby (bridge at roughly SP 5242 6655).*