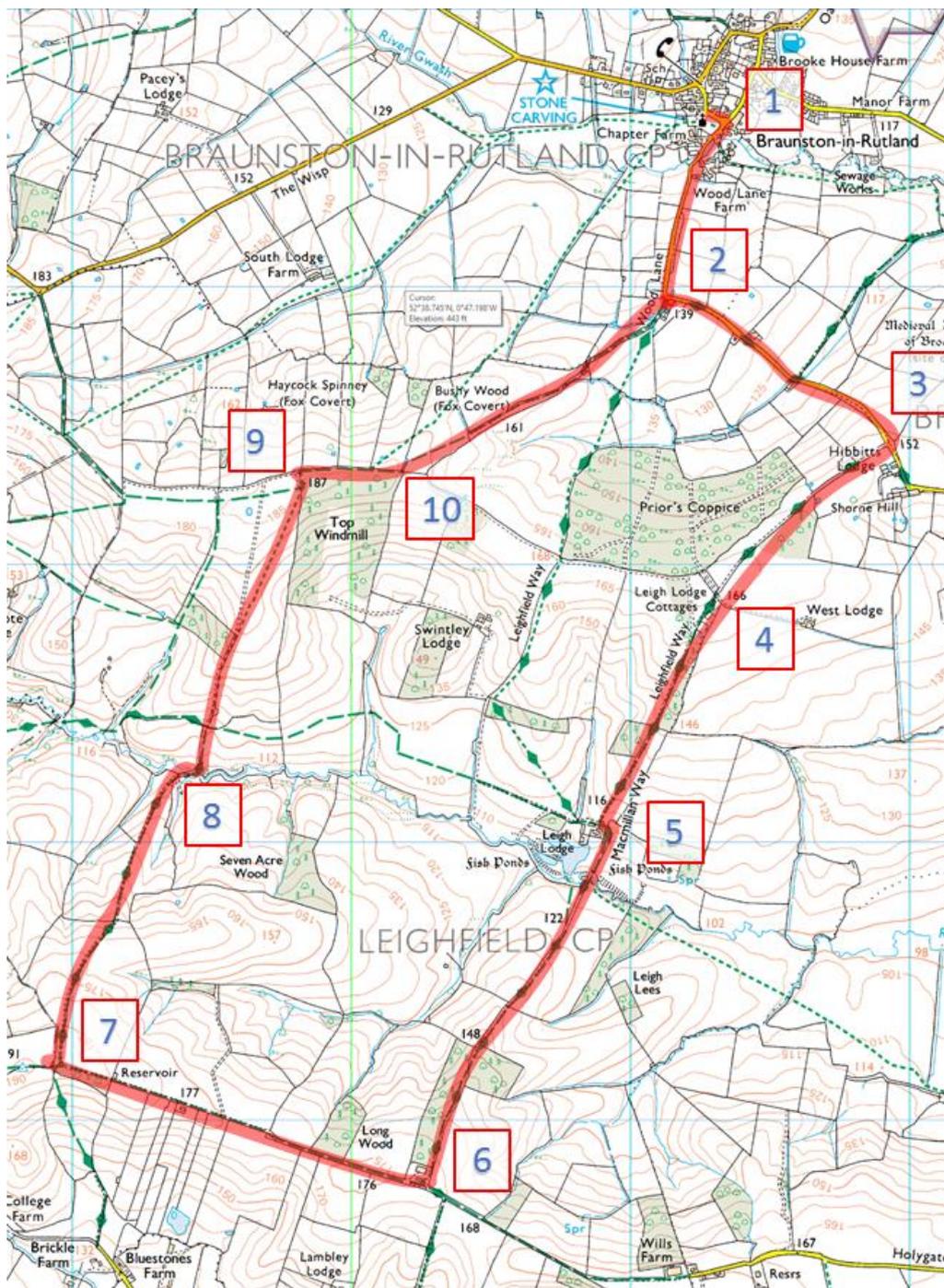


Blue Ball Cycle Ride #2

Mountain bike (or walking) route from the Blue Ball around Leighfield and back.

This peaceful route takes you up and down a set of hills and valleys to the south of Braunston. The first couple of miles are on-road, the rest is predominantly on well-surfaced tracks but also on wide, grassed ways. There are gates, but no stiles to cross.



The Route: Ride Time 1 hour, Elevation Gain: 705 ft., Distance 7 miles

Park near the Blue Ball (1) then, if you're standing at the pub looking towards the churchyard, head off left and then immediately downhill to the right, following the signpost to 'Leighfield and Ridlington'. Passing the stream to your left, keep on the road and head up the hill. You are now on Wood Lane which you will need to follow for about another mile. At the top of the hill (2), follow the road left and then go down the next hill. As you cycle up the following hill, you will see road sign near the crest. At the sign, you will see that the right-hand turn is signposted 'Leighfield Lodge, No Through Road' (3), take this turning and carry on.

When you come across a gate in the road (4), go through the gap just to the right and continue heading straight down the tree-lined avenue that is Leighfield Way.

At the bottom, you will find yourself at Leigh Lodge (5). Here you must follow the zig-zag in the road, left and then right. Down a little further and you will go over a small bridge that crosses a stream which feeds some ancient fish ponds. Continue following the road up the mile-long incline, enjoying the views to either side. During this stretch of the route, the road changes from tarmac to hardcore, but it is reasonably surfaced and not muddy.

At the top of the hill (6), you will come to some farm buildings and a track running at right-angles to you. At this point, as you pass between the large pair of stone gate-posts, you may opt for a longer route and head down to Belton-in-Rutland with the possibility of nipping in for a swift at the Sun Inn. That route is not documented here, so if you choose to go that way, you will need to navigate yourself there.

To continue on our ride, you need to turn right at this point and follow the track straight for another mile along the ridge. During this section, you are two or three miles from any trafficked road and in a particularly peaceful part of the county. With any luck, you should see some wildlife such as foxes, hawks or buzzards and so on. Whilst there may be the odd couple of riders on horseback, you may not actually come across another soul for the next few miles of the ride.

Eventually, after riding along the ridge for a bit, you will come to a right turn (7). This is the junction of a footpath and bridleway. To the left is a route down to Belton-in-Rutland, the one you could have taken back up the hill, had you opted for the longer route above. Straight on will take you to towards Launde Abbey, but we're heading off to the right, downhill for another mile or so again.

Towards the bottom of the hill, the track bears to the right and you need to go through another gate to get to a small bridge crossing a stream (8). This is a particularly interesting place to stop for a moment. During the Second World War, prisoner of war camps were set-up in a number of places in this region. Billesdon had one, the site of which is now a nature reserve. There was also one just south of Melton Mowbray and one in Stamford. POWs were often put to work in various ways such as in the construction of new homes and farm work. Apparently, this bridge was constructed by German prisoners of war. There is an inscription in the concrete which is not too difficult to see, but unless you've been cycling with wellies on, you'll either need to go for a paddle or kneel over the centre of the left-hand side of the bridge (balancing carefully!) to see it. The spelling mistake is confirmation for me that this was constructed by someone to whom English was a second language.

History lesson over, you can now carry on up the track, continuing straight on when it turns into a grassed way, the next mile to the top of the hill.

At the top (9), follow the wide grassed way to the right for another three or four hundred yards until you see a way marker and small footbridge on the left. Unless you want to carry your bike over a few stiles and head down this route back to the pub, ignore this and carry on another hundred yards or so until you find a gate, again on the left-hand side of the route (10). Go through the gate and follow the track downhill for another half mile.

Eventually, you will find yourself back on the tarmac of Wood Lane at the top of the first hill you cycled up (2). Head down the hill, find the pub and treat yourself to some well-earned hospitality!



Summer Views Back to Braunston