



2 : TRENT VALLEYS

Changing Courses, Gaps & the Ice Age

Rivers are one of the most significant linear features in the landscape, both physically and culturally, forming corridors with their own natural processes and ecology that have interacted with human societies from the earliest times. Archaeological remains from over half a million years ago indicate that early hominids used the main river valleys of south-eastern Britain to navigate and colonise the interior of what was then a peninsula of Europe. The ‘Bytham River’, which crossed southern Lincolnshire prior to the Anglian glaciation, is an important example. Later, despite the risk of flooding, rivers attracted permanent settlement at key crossing and trading points, some of which developed over time into our most important towns. This chapter focuses on the River Trent – including its previous courses through Ancaster and Lincoln – and investigates how the river’s evolution during the Ice Age has influenced the landscape across Lincolnshire.

The River Trent is sometimes seen as rather peripheral to Lincolnshire or, at most, as boundary territory with neighbouring counties. However, excepting the estuarial River Humber, the Trent is easily the largest river draining territory in Lincolnshire today. As explained later, it also has

FACING PAGE: **River Trent from Trent Cliff at sunset**

RIGHT: **Lincoln Gap at dawn.** The River Trent flowed through the Lincoln Gap for at least 200,000 years up to the end of the Ice Age.

previous courses dating to the Ice Age that affected much of southern and central Lincolnshire. At various points in the Trent’s history, its tributaries have included the Witham, Till, Sleas, Glen and Bain, and even the Welland and Nene probably joined it before entering the North Sea until relatively recently (Bridgland, 2014). Today’s Trent, conjoined with the Ouse to form the Humber, receives the River Ancholme and also affects patterns of silt deposition on Lincolnshire’s coast. In short, very little of Lincolnshire is without some Trent influence on its landscape.

