



An introduction to the Chesterfield Canal

Thorpe Top Treble Lock

History

The Chesterfield Canal was a bold and imaginative product of the early years of the Industrial Revolution. The prime purpose was to take Derbyshire's coals to new markets, but many other cargoes were carried. The original surveys were carried out by the celebrated engineer James Brindley, and the canal was opened throughout on June 4th 1777. For its time it was a magnificent engineering achievement, including the 2880 yard Norwood Tunnel, and at Thorpe Salvin one of the earliest examples of a large staircase of locks.



Horse drawn wooden narrow boats traded until the 1950s

The canal became a successful artery of trade through Derbyshire, South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. After a century in operation, the railways developed and boat traffic began to decline. The canal gradually deteriorated, and in 1907 the final collapse of part of the Norwood Tunnel isolated the Derbyshire section. Small cargoes of purely local traffic, horse-drawn until the end, struggled on for many years, the last commercial carrying in Nottinghamshire finishing in the 1950s.

At that time the 26 miles between West Stockwith and Workop were barely navigable. As a result of strenuous campaigning by the members of the Retford and Workop Boat Club this section was saved for leisure use.

Restoration

In July 2003 the navigable section in British Waterways' ownership was extended into Rotherham as far as the eastern portal of Norwood Tunnel, allowing boats to reach here from the River Trent.

Discussions continue to identify the funding that will allow navigation to be extended to a temporary terminus a mile further west in the former Kiveton Park Colliery site.



Building Dixon's Lock No 4 at Brimington

In Derbyshire the isolated five mile section between Chesterfield and Staveley was opened to navigation in 2002.

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Annual membership is inexpensive, and benefits include regular copies of members' award-winning magazine Cuckoo. Details of the Canal Trust can be obtained from the Membership Secretary, C/O Chesterfield Canal Trust, Tapton Lock Visitor Centre, Lockford Lane, Chesterfield S41 0TG



The Chesterfield Canal Trust

Formed in 1998 from the former Chesterfield Canal Society (founded 1976), the Trust is a charitable company and a founder member of the Partnership. Run entirely by volunteers, it gives members of the public the opportunity to participate in the canal's restoration. The Trust runs a range of activities, including two passenger trip boats, a volunteer working party, canal events and generally assists in the restoration of the canal.

All members share the belief that the canal constitutes a major natural history and heritage feature, with the potential to significantly enhance the recreational, tourism and business life of the region. The Partnership works to protect and enhance the natural history and historic value of the canal, whilst promoting the development of its business and amenity potential to benefit all sectors of the community.

The Chesterfield Canal Partnership is made up of local authorities, statutory and non-statutory bodies, the voluntary sector and private enterprise and is fully committed to the protection, restoration and development of the Chesterfield Canal.



Chesterfield Canal Partnership

Walking

While there still remains some ten miles of canal to be restored to navigation, the towing path, known as the Cuckoo Way, is available to walkers throughout its 46 mile length. The Cuckoo Way is named after the unique vessels which folklore has it were known as "Cuckoos", and which plied the Chesterfield Canal (the "Cuckoo Dyke"), in commercial days. The "Cuckoo" name had its origins in the 18th century when the river boatmen on the Trent used it to describe the canal boats, odd-looking to their eyes, which had suddenly appeared in their midst. In 1999



Shireoaks Locks

the Ordnance Survey officially adopted the "Cuckoo Way" title and it will now appear on OS maps as they are revised.

Not all of the footpath in Nottinghamshire and Rotherham is a public right of way, and walkers must be prepared to take the condition of the path "as found". Walkers will find difficulty in trading the route across the top of the Norwood Tunnel, and through Killmarsh, where the canal has been extensively built over. Information sheets explaining these routes in detail are available from the Canal Trust. From time to time other reclamation works, where the canal is being restored to navigation, may result in diversions.

Walkers must always be guided by the notices advertising diversions, and not be tempted to take short cuts.

The Chesterfield Canal Partnership has begun the publication of a series of short circular walk leaflets along the Chesterfield Canal, which are available from Tapton Lock Visitor Centre. As the length of the canal is well served by public transport, it is often possible to walk a length of canal and take the bus or train back. Many public rights of way intersect with the canal towpath, some of which can provide access to a variety of short circular walks for all the family, using the canal as one leg.

Cycling

Cycling is permitted on limited sections of the canal towing path, between Shireoaks and Manton in Nottinghamshire (contact British Waterways for details) and Chesterfield to Staveley in Derbyshire (contact Tapton Lock Visitor Centre for details). The Derbyshire section is the start of the southern link of the Trans-Pennine Trail, a multi-user route between Liverpool and Hull.



Fishing on the newly restored canal at Rhodesia

The canal is a haven for wildlife. Rabbits, hares, foxes, squirrels, stoats, weasels and grass snakes live in adjoining fields, water voles, toads, frogs and smooth newts live in the canal itself together with mussels and valve snails. Bats can be seen near Drakeholes Tunnel and Misterton. Dragonflies, vivid blue damselflies and butterflies such as red admiral, orange-tip, peacock and small tortoiseshell abound. Birds such as moorhens, coots, ducks, mute swans, herons, dabchicks and kingfishers can often be seen where the canal is in water.

Boating



Swallow Bridge, Misterton

Boats are permitted on the canal between West Stockwith and the Norwood Tunnel, for which a licence is required (contact British Waterways for details). In Derbyshire contact the Tapton Lock Visitor Centre for details of availability.

Holiday narrowboats on the canal in Nottinghamshire can be hired from the Chesterfield Canal Boat Company, based at West Stockwith. Tel: 01522 514774.

Fishing

Fishing is encouraged on the canal in Nottinghamshire, and the rights are held by various angling associations. Contact British Waterways for details. Details of fishing availability on certain sections of the canal in Derbyshire may be had from Tapton Lock Visitor Centre.

Wildlife

Useful contacts for the canal

Notts and Rotherham
British Waterways, The Kiln, Mather Road, Newark,
Nottinghamshire NG24 1FB Tel 01636 704481
Derbyshire
Tapton Lock Visitor Centre, Lockford Lane, Chesterfield,
Derbyshire S41 0TG Tel 01246 551035
Chesterfield Canal Trust, c/o Tapton Lock Visitor Centre

Public transport

Rail services- for times ring 08457 484950. Between Sheffield, Kiveton Park, Shireoaks, Workop and Retford website: www.nationalrail.co.uk
Bus services - for times ring Traveline on 08706 082608 Workop, Retford, Clayworth, Gringley-on-the-Hill, Misterton and West Stockwith website: www.ukbus.co.uk
Workop, Shireoaks, Kiveton Park and Rotherham Chesterfield, Staveley, Meadonhall and Rotherham Chesterfield - Brimington, Staveley - Renishaw - Killamarsh, Chesterfield - Workop.

Access for disabled people

Circular routes for wheelchair users have been laid down around Harthill reservoirs, which feed water into the Chesterfield Canal. Fishing facilities for disabled people have been provided by British Waterways at several locations including Workop, Forest Lock, Drakeholes and Misterton, and by Derbyshire County Council at Bluebank.



'Norwood Packet' trip boat and the Lock Keeper public house, Workop

The Norwood Packet operates in Nottinghamshire and Rotherham for charters and public trips. Details of both from the Tapton Lock Visitor Centre.

Trip Boats

The Chesterfield Canal Trust operates two trip boats on the Chesterfield Canal.

The John Varley operates on Sundays from Tapton Lock Visitor Centre near to Tesco's roundabout off the A61 in Chesterfield and is also available for private charter and school trips.

This boat is fitted with a wheelchair lift.