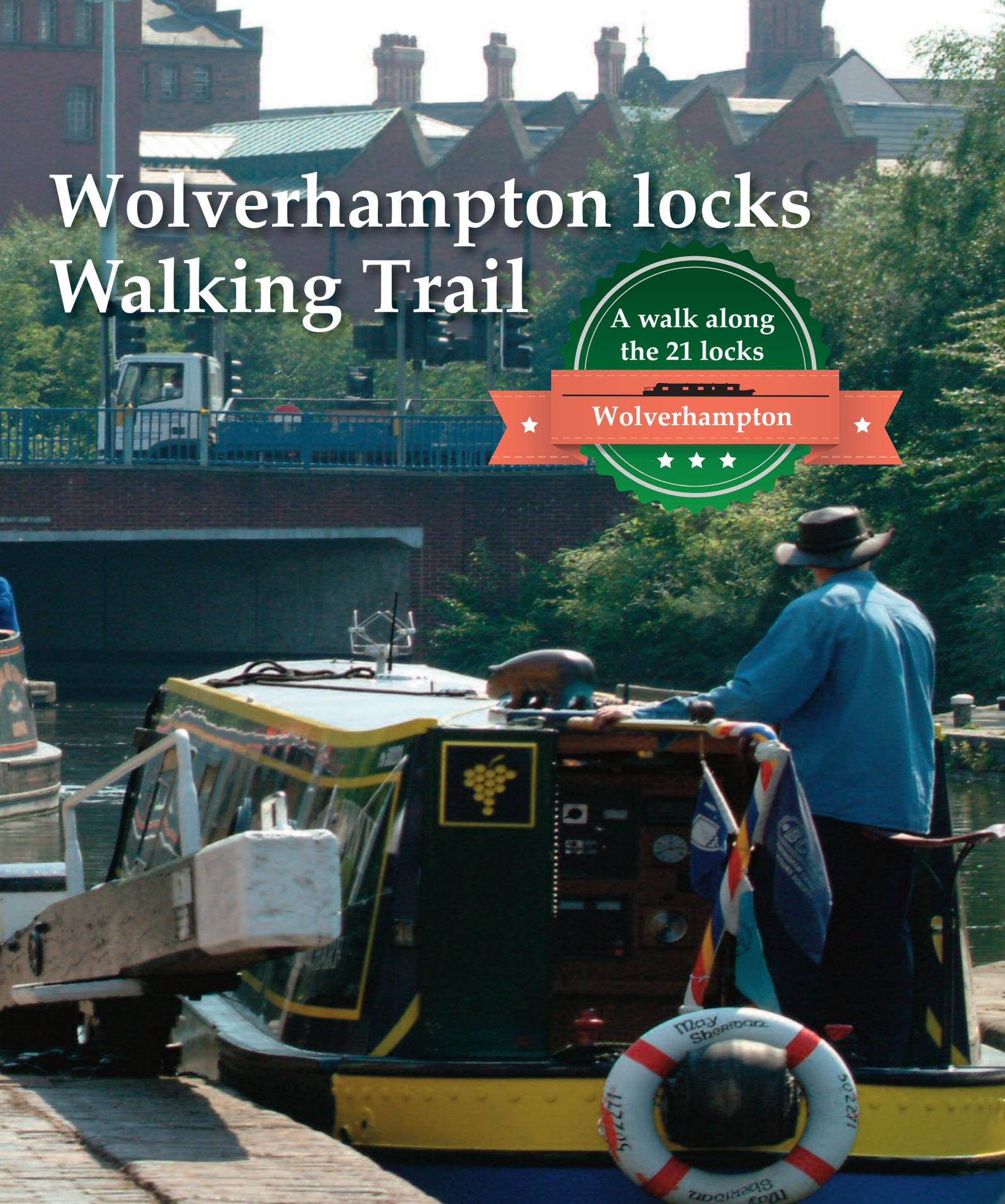


Wolverhampton locks Walking Trail

A walk along
the 21 locks

★ **Wolverhampton** ★

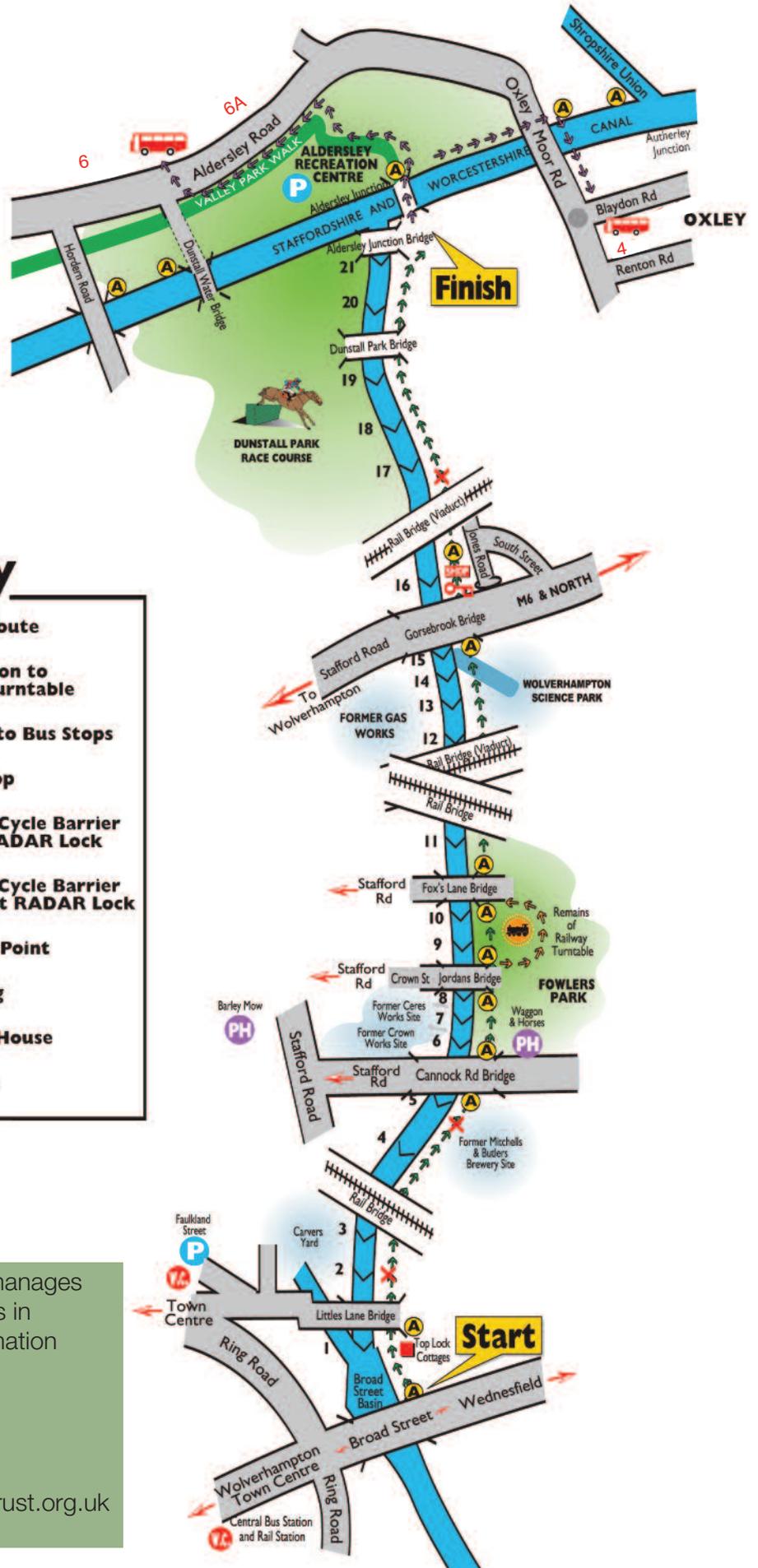


A walk along
the 21 locks

Wolverhampton

Walking is an excellent form of gentle exercise. It not only improves your fitness but also your sense of well-being.

By walking this trail you will have:
Walked (one way) 1 3/4 miles (2.8 km), taken approximately 3,500 steps and burnt 175 calories



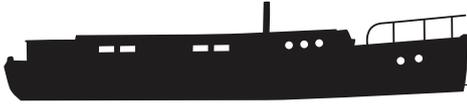
key

| | |
|--|---|
| | Trail Route |
| | Diversion to view Turntable |
| | Route to Bus Stops |
| | Bus Stop |
| | Motor Cycle Barrier with RADAR Lock |
| | Motor Cycle Barrier without RADAR Lock |
| | Access Point |
| | Parking |
| | Public House |
| | Toilets |

The Canal & River Trust owns and manages over 2,000 miles of canals and rivers in England and Wales. For more information about canal based activities visit

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

or email enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk



Welcome

The Wolverhampton Locks Trail takes you on a walk, (or a cycle ride or boat trip), along the Birmingham Main Line Canal to highlight features of interest.

The conservation and enhancement of historic buildings and environments are important objectives of the Council and this trail has been prepared to provide an enjoyable and informative experience for those with an interest in the heritage of the City.

The Trail should take about one and a half hours to complete.

Wheelchair users are advised that the ramps at the sides of the canal locks are extremely steep and difficult to negotiate. Therefore, it is suggested that wheelchair users do not attempt the whole route. However, access to the towpath can be achieved at Jones Road where there is level ground between locks.

Motor cycle excluder barriers are in place along the 21 locks and people in wheelchairs or those with buggies may find them difficult to negotiate. Some of the barriers have wide opening gates incorporating the RADAR lock. These are marked on the trail plan.

Please accompany young children to safeguard against them falling into the canal. Canals can be very isolated places and those of you who might choose to follow the trail alone should consider your safety at all times. Access points are marked on the trail plan.

All of the Locks, the cottages at Broad Street and the railway viaducts are Listed structures and are part of the Wolverhampton Locks Conservation Area.

The Trail starts at Broad Street Basin which is easily accessible from the town centre. It ends at Aldersley Junction. You may return to Wolverhampton Town Centre using local bus services. Bus routes in the vicinity of the finish are marked on the trail plan; alternatively retrace the route of the trail.

Bus users can contact 0121 200 2700 regarding bus services.



Broad Street Basin

Broad Street Basin is now a pleasant, quiet oasis, surrounded by the ring road and railway. The landscaped area to your right is on the site of Hay Basin (originally Albert Basin, it was built in 1850 and filled in during the 1970s) and was so called since hay was distributed from here in the Nineteenth Century.



Broad Street Basin

In 1850, this basin was the scene of a riot as the Shrewsbury and Birmingham Railway Company (S & BR - which later became part of the Great Western Railway Company) attempted to offload its cargo onto boats to complete its passage from Shrewsbury to Birmingham. The London and North Western Railway Company who controlled the railways into Birmingham refused access to S & BR. The Mayor was called out on a Saturday morning to “read the riot act” to the workforces of the feuding companies.

Some canal bridges, such as that which carries Broad Street over the canal, are modern structures. The original 1878 bridge over the canal was dismantled and rebuilt at the Black Country Museum, when the ring road was constructed.



Walk along the canal towpath stopping in front of the Lock Cottages

The Top Lock cottages, built in the late 18th century, are rare surviving examples of once typical canalside architecture. When the canals were commercially active, these cottages would have been the home of the lock keeper. Tolls (levies by canal companies for the use of their waterway) would have been collected here.



Top Lock Cottages

On the left is the entrance to the former Victoria Basin. Note the cast iron BCN boundary post at the entrance to the top lock. There were once scores of these marking the extent of the Birmingham Canal Navigations' company land. The initials BCN are also stamped into the concrete pillars in front of the cottages.

On your right as you look towards Little's Lane bridge, you will notice a small building, now occupied by a local welding company. This is on the site of the Boat Users' Mission. Little's Lane bridge is one of five Eighteenth Century bridges you will see on this trail.



Walk under Little's Lane bridge and continue to Lock 2

Looking back at the face of the bridge you will notice the post and rings that were used to hang a gate to prevent walkers accessing the towpath.

On the left is Carver's Yard. Until 1972 the site was used as a goods yard. The Great Western Railway Company occupied the site until 1948. Cargoes were transferred to and from boat and rail. The Victoria Basin, adjoining Broad Street basin, served this site.



Proceed to Lock 3

Here we have the opportunity to consider a little of the history of the canal. A canal link from Birmingham to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal was being considered as early as 1766. In 1767, James Brindley (born 1716, died 1772) was asked to make a survey. An Act of Parliament for the construction of the canal was passed in 1768, and work began at once under the guidance of two of Brindley's assistants, Samuel Simcock and Robert Whitworth. The canal was built initially to allow for the cheaper transport of coal. The roads at the time were in "ruinous condition", which made coal transport very expensive. The canal was built as a narrow channel and followed a circuitous route around obstructions to minimise construction costs.

Canals in the future were built as wider navigations following straighter routes, the argument being that increased construction costs would be outweighed by quicker operation in the longer term.



Proceed from Lock 3 stopping beneath the rail bridge

At this point, you see two wrought iron roller bars on the bridge abutments. These would have been installed to prevent the ropes, by which horses used to pull canal boats, from damaging the brickwork and fraying. Elsewhere on the network, corners were protected by vertical metal rubbing strips. Note also the iron band along the offside under the bridge, to protect the brick work from damage by boats.

If you look up towards the underside of the railway bridge (carrying the main line to Stafford), you will realise that it is built in what you may consider is rather a strange 'skewed' manner.

The sharp right hand bend in the canal at this point is unusual on the canal network and was necessary because the canal had to be diverted when the railway was built.

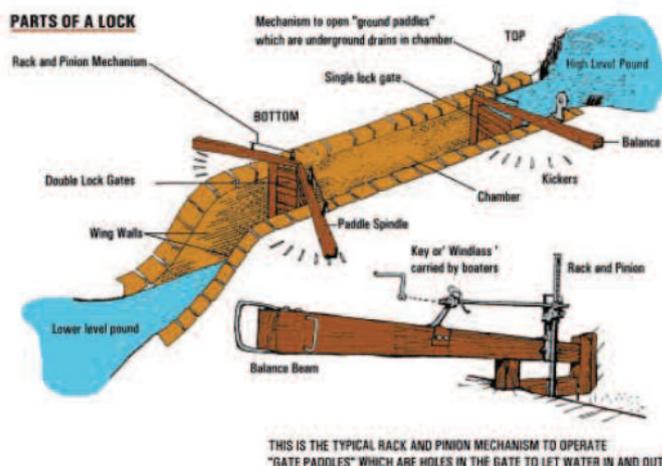
Some of the commercial narrow boats were very long. The largest known type of narrow craft were Wolverhampton's "ampton" or Wharf Boats as they were called. These were 87 feet long and capable of carrying a 50 ton cargo. They were not used on the 21 Locks - since the locks on the BCN network are on average only 70 feet long and 6 feet 10 inches wide.



Proceed to Lock 4

The names given to the parts of a typical 'Pound' lock are shown on the diagram included above. Twenty of the twenty one locks are the same but Lock 20 is unique having single gates at both ends. Most locks have a weir which would act as an overflow in times of flood. These are known as

"BY-WASH" weirs and you will notice these along the flight. A KEY or WINDLASS is needed to operate the lock mechanisms.



Puddled clay was used on the bed of the canal to make it watertight. Canals were built by hand by gangs of itinerant workmen known as navigators or "navvies".

On your right is the former Springfield Brewery (a Grade II Listed building) built for William Butler from 1873 to take advantage of high quality spring water found on the site. It ceased brewing in 1991.



Former Springfield Brewery

Between Locks 4 and 5 on the left, were previously two (maybe three) basins. The wharf on the site was occupied by the Shropshire Union Railways and Canal Company for 20 years until the early 1870s. Thereafter the site was used by an engineering company, G R Smithson Co (1896 - 1985) and now by a dairy.



Proceed to Lock 5

This lock illustrates clearly how locks were designed to maximise the use of available space. You can see the steps which were built to allow boaters to leave their boats, negotiate the lock and re-board. A typical boat crew might have consisted of three boatmen: one operating the locks, one guiding the horse along the towpath and the other steering.

The traditional narrow boat with its colourful paintwork has become a symbol of the canal. In the early days of canals, boats were unpainted and carried all male crews. When competition from railways intensified, families of boatmen began to live on the canal boats bringing about individuality by the colourful decoration of their boats.

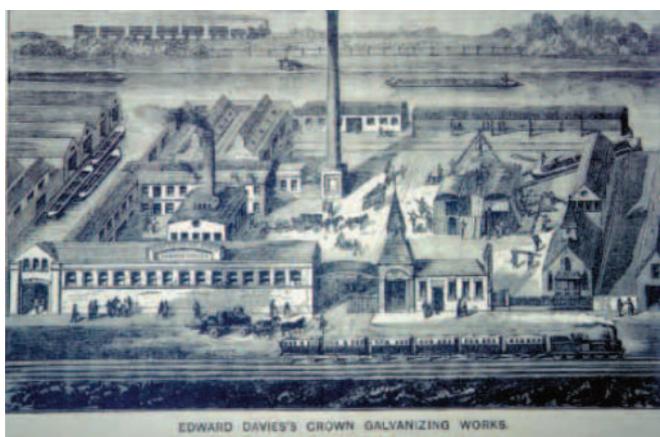


A Traditional Narrow Boat



Proceed beneath Cannock Road Bridge towards Lock 6

On your left as you emerge from beneath the Cannock Road bridge, is the site of the former Crown Galvanising Works. In the past, Crown Works had good canal facilities with wharfs above and below Lock 6, plus two canal basins, (both now infilled). The entrance to the smaller, narrow basin can be seen on your left. This was used to transport coal for use in the furnaces.



The Crown Galvanising Works circa 1870's



Proceed towards Lock 7

The entrance to the larger of the two basins was between Locks 6 and 7 where the canal widens. The basin provided a physical boundary between Crown Works and The Ceres Works on the neighbouring site.

Fowlers Park to the right would formerly have been a hive of activity where railway tracks converged. One of the lines was The Great Western Railway's line to Shrewsbury and Birkenhead. The Park attracts many species of birds including, in winter, Gulls and, in spring, Willow Warblers.



Fowler's Park

The grassed areas adjacent to locks are ideal for butterflies in summer. A bench mark is carved into the lock steps; there are several more down the flight.



Proceed towards Lock 8

Between Lock 7 and 8 is the former Ceres Works site. Ceres Works was a famous manure and acid works. The works supplied local farmers with bone meal, after which Bone Mill Lane (the road running parallel to the site) was named.

You will note six definite bricked up loading bays and four more which are disintegrating. These used to open onto a secure wharf.

Also, between Locks 7 and 8, note (carefully!) the bricks making up the edge of the canal wall. These UTOPIA bricks were made by the Aldridge Brick and Tile Company.



Proceed to Lock 9

As you walk under Jordans Bridge, note another cast iron rubbing strip on the bridge arch.

Beside the length of canal including Locks 9 and 10 is the Council's rubbish incinerator. The

site has been owned by the Council since 1872 and was initially used for both sewage and rubbish disposal.

To the right in the landscaped area between Locks 9 and 10, is a former railway turntable. Access to this site is marked on the trail map. On the raised ground, visible from the turntable, once stood the coal stage serving the GWR's Stafford Road engine shed. Before Lock 10, you may see the blocked-up entrance to the canal basin that served the Council's refuse site.



Proceed towards Lock 10 and Fox's Lane bridge

Fox's Lane bridge is another good example of once typical canal bridge architecture. On your right, behind the railings, is a pathway that leads to the former Dunstall Park railway station. Note the bricked up door adjacent to the bridge - probably this would have been a gated entry in the past allowing control over movements between the towpath and the railway station.

On the opposite side of the canal is a Night Club housed in an old converted warehouse.



Proceed to Lock 11

The two girder bridges in front of you carry several railway lines over the canal. The first bridge carries the now redundant line to the former Great Western Railway Company's Stafford Road engine shed, coal staging and turntable, and the second carries the old main line (Wolverhampton-Shrewsbury-Chester-Birkenhead).



Proceed to Lock 12



Stour Valley Viaduct

The imposing Stour Valley viaduct carries the main rail line from Wolverhampton to Stafford and the north. It has twenty two arches.

To the right is part of the former gas works which was served by the many rail lines that criss-crossed it.



Proceed to Lock 13

On the left is the original site of the gas works. In September 1862, the world record for a balloon ascent without oxygen was set by balloonists taking off from here. The balloon, "The Mammoth", flying on coal gas, reached 37 000 feet - a record that still stands.

At Lock 13, you will notice bricked surfacing, which is typical of an industrial canal, with heavy traffic. The raised brickwork gave better grip to horses' hooves.



Proceed towards Lock 14

On the right, you will see the former gas works basin recently rediscovered during land reclamation. Boats from Thomas Claytons of Oldbury were reversed down from Lock 9 so that they would be facing the right way when they returned up the locks with cargoes of coal gas tar on their way to the tar works throughout the Black Country including one at Monmore Green.



Science Park Development

Lock 14 has new bottom gates. Look for the weight of the gates clearly etched into one of them and also a plaque showing the date when the lock gates were made; (in this case, 1993 in Bradley).



Proceed to Lock 15, Gorsebrook bridge carrying the Stafford Road

On your right is the new Science Park development built on the site of part of the former gas works. Unlike so many other modern developments, the buildings actually face the canal rather than turning their back towards it.



Proceed to Lock 16

Before you is the Oxley viaduct carrying the former GWR Birmingham to Shrewsbury line over the canal - an impressive structure demanding specialised engineering.



Oxley Viaduct



Proceed to Lock 17

From this point onwards the canal becomes more rural in character leaving evidence of industry behind. In springtime, the hawthorn hedgerows are attractive with beautiful flowers and distinctive perfume. This stretch of canal is particularly attractive as a spring stopover point for the Sedge Warbler with their chattering song, and to water birds in the winter.

Note the white stump on the gatepost (the breast or mitre post). This carries the weight indicator (in kilogrammes) of the lock gates.

Note also 'BCN' cast onto the paddle mechanism of the top gates. Brickwork just below the lock indicates the position of the former Spring Bridge.



Proceed to Lock 18

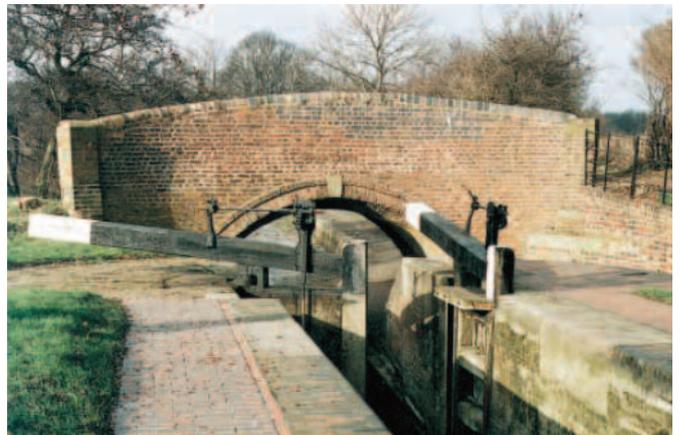
The race course on your left was relocated in 1879 from the site of West Park because it was seen by the Victorian establishment as a bad influence on working classes.

Around the locks, look out for dragonflies in the summer.



Proceed to Lock 19

Early canal engineers pioneered "cut and fill" engineering techniques and you can see the result as you pass through the cutting after this lock. Raised embankments were made from the "spoil" from cuttings.



Dunstall Park Bridge

Dunstall Park Bridge probably dates back to the opening of the canal. From here you may catch a glimpse of birds of prey such as Kestrel or Sparrowhawk.



Proceed to Lock 20

Initially, the flight of locks on the BCN was 20 not 21. Lock number 20 was the final lock to be added. The present Lock 21 was previously a very deep lock which took a long time to fill. Lock 20, which had only a single gate at each end, was added to alleviate this problem and reduce the total amount of water the flight required. Water supply to the Birmingham Canal has always posed difficulties because there is no easily obtainable river supply. Much



Below lock 20

of the water has been supplied by draining nearby mines, often by pumping engines. Ground levels between 20 and 21 were lowered and previous land levels are visible in the sandstone cutting the canal occupies. The close relationship between canals and railway is clearly illustrated at this point. Metal railway tracks have been used to reinforce the canal wall. Note the reed beds below the lock, home to water birds including moorhens and also migrating birds.



Proceed to Lock 21 and Aldersley Junction Bridge where the Trail ends

If you stand on the bridge arch, you can see the holes in the stone copings which would have

located the lamp standard lighting up this junction.



Aldersley Junction Bridge and Lock 21

This is a very important junction between the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and The Birmingham Canal Navigations. In the past, this junction would have been busy with canal traffic at all hours of the day. Now known as Aldersley Junction, it was in the past referred to as Atherley No. 1 Junction. The Junction was opened in 1772. On your left, as you approach the junction (over the bridge), is the site of the former Birmingham Canal Navigations lock keeper's office. The first lock keeper was John Brown, a carpenter who had worked on the construction of the canal. Old photographs of the site on the right, suggest a settlement of six buildings, stables and a wharf. The families here would have been isolated - since there was probably no access other than on foot or by boat. It was most likely to have been an overnight stopoff point and a place to rest horses in the adjacent stables. Apart from foundations, there is very little trace of this canal hamlet.



Aldersley Junction in the past



Look out for kingfishers during the winter months

