



Olde black and white England

Stratford-upon-Avon Canal - Lapworth to Stratford

Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon is one of Britain's top tourist attractions but, luckily for walkers, few of the bard-seeking visitors who pilgrim here spot the canal quietly ambling past town. The poet himself knew not how romantic the canals be, since their arrival came too late for his pen.

This walk along the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal treads the heart of Shakespeare's own territory, beyond the River Avon, disappearing into the deepest greens of real Warwickshire countryside far away from over-English shops choking on souvenired clichés. Genuinely quaint black and white cottages blend with canal structures painted in the traditional black and white colours of the Canal & River Trust. Green smells of earth are only mildly blighted by the occasional hum of the distant motorway.

Mary Arden's House is only a short diversion from the water at Wilmcote if you need a Shakespearian fix, but you will meet some unusual canal features along this walk that will vie for your undivided attention.

Mini aqueducts hang like chunky bathtubs over roads with cars passing underfoot. The aqueducts' towpaths are weirdly low, letting you stand with

the water at waist height while you peer over the metal sides into the canal.

Then there are mysteriously shaped barrel-roofed lock keepers' cottages that line the water. The truth behind the quirk is purely practical: engineers building the Stratford Canal knew more about building bridges than houses, so when they had to build lock cottages for the lengthsmen, they adapted their skills, resulting in cottages with these curious barrel-shaped roofs (look out for the barrel-roofed garden shed erected on the canalside lawn of a local resident with a sense of humour).

Like most canals, the Stratford has at times faced struggles for its survival. In 1959 passionate protests riled against the canal's closure and gutsy restoration work from teams of enthusiastic helpers led to this section of the canal being reopened in 1964. Scattered along the canal, you'll spot the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal Society's (Sonacs) plaques commemorating the canal's reopening. British Waterways (now the Canal & River Trust) became increasingly involved in the ongoing struggle to maintain and operate the canal, eventually taking full charge of the canal's southern section in 1988.

Improvements to any of Britain's canals are usually welcome, and some decisions are inevitably controversial. When Bancroft Basin was recently improved and enhanced for visitors, the David Hutchings Footbridge (famously built with the help of prisoners at Wormwood Scrubs and Birmingham) had to be removed, and many regret the loss.

Where the walk ends in Stratford town, you can admire the Royal Shakespeare Theatre on the waterside, with those lurking gangs of Montague geese and Capulet swans. Then, after your day's peaceful walk it would almost be rude not to join tourists lolling on the grassy space on the banks of the River Avon and grab refreshments from the Baguette Barge or the floating ice-cream van in the Basin!





Highlight of the walk

The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal has three unusual aqueducts – at Yarningale, Wootton Waven and Edstone (also known as Bearley). The towpath is level with the base of the cast-iron canal trough and, as you walk across, your eye is level with boats which appear to be sailing as if perched in a bath tub. Each of the aqueducts has an ornate display board.

Did you know?

The footbridges on the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal were built in two halves with a 1-inch gap to allow ropes to pass through so that, in the days of horse-towed narrowboats, the boatman would not have to untie his horse from the boat as he walked along the towpath.

Fascinating fact

David Hutchings was appointed to manage the restoration of the southern section of the Stratford Canal by the National Trust (the custodians at the time). From 1961 to 1964, volunteers from societies, the Boy Scouts, the Army and even prisoners from Winson Green in Birmingham worked to restore the canal. It was finally reopened in 1964 by the Queen Mother.



Start:

Lapworth Locks
OS Grid ref: SP178714

Finish:

Stratford-upon-Avon
OS Grid ref: SP204548

Distance:

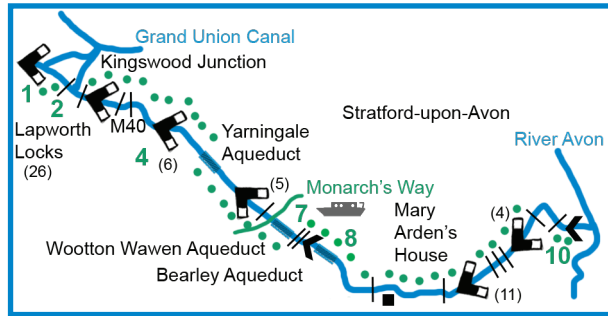
13 miles (10 to Wilmcote)

Terrain:

Flat easy walking. Can be muddy after rain.

OS Explorer Map

- 220/205



The walk - step by step

1. The 26 locks of the Lapworth Flight spread nearly two miles, with the first & last four straggling away from the main flight.
2. Halfway down the flight, busy Kingswood Junction, with its moored boats, split bridges and white-washed cottages, connects the Stratford Canal to the Grand Union via a short boat-filled branch line.
3. The M40 crosses the canal just before Lapworth Bottom Lock though its noise can be heard for some time before and after. Peace soon returns as the canal continues its way through a landscape of fields, trees and sheep.
4. A traditional 'lengthsman's' cottage available for holiday lets is next to Lock 31, and the Fleur de Lys pub opposite provides a welcome break.
5. Past private moorings and the next two locks, is the first of Stratford Canal's unique aqueducts, Yarningale.

6. A mile further on, below Preston Bagot Bottom Lock, the surroundings turn ever more rural with just bridges, locks and the occasional house to distract your thoughts until you reach Wootton Wawen.
7. Just past the wide basin, home to Anglo Welsh Boats and the Navigation Inn, Wootton Wawen Aqueduct carries the canal over the main A34.
8. Back in rural landscape for nearly four miles, the only break is Bearley (or Edstone) Aqueduct, the longest of the three (and the longest in England), which carries the canal over a river, a road and the railway.
9. The canal then passes through the outskirts of Wilmcote before descending towards Stratford via the 11 Wilmcote Locks.
10. The towpath is wider and better-surfaced from Lock 40. The outskirts of Stratford are visible from Lock 44 onwards and the canal meets the river Avon in Bancroft Basin.

Where to eat

Boot Inn

Lapworth. Near Lock 14.
T:01564 782464
www.bootinnlapworth.co.uk

Navigation Inn

Lapworth. Canalside by bridge 65 on the Grand Union Canal.
T:01564 783337

Fleur de Lys

Lowsonford. Canalside near Lock 31.
T:01564 782431
www.fleurdelys-lowsonford.com

The Crabmill

Preston Bagot. Short walk from bridge 47A.
T:01926 843342 www.thecrabmill.co.uk

Navigation Inn

Wootton Wawen. Canalside by Wootton Wawen Aqueduct. T:01564 792676
www.the-navigationinn.co.uk

Mary Arden Inn

Wilmcote. Short walk from bridge 59.
T:01789 267030 www.mary-arden.co.uk

Masons Arms

Wilmcote. A short walk from bridge 59.
T:01789 297416

Pen & Parchment

Stratford-upon-Avon. Near Bancroft Basin.
T:01789 297697 www.pen-parchment-stratford-upon-avon.co.uk

Red Lion

Stratford-upon-Avon. Canalside near Bancroft Basin. T:01789 266858

The Encore

Stratford-upon-Avon. Opposite Bancroft Basin.
T:01789 269462
www.theencorestratford.co.uk

Baguette Barge & The Elizabeth (Avon Ices)

Stratford-upon-Avon. Moored in Bancroft Basin
T:07963 956720

Best picnic spot

In Bancroft Basin, where canal meets Avon.

And more

Large choice of pubs and cafés in Stratford.

Where to stay

Canalside B&Bs

Gables Cottage & The Bach
Wilmcote. A short walk from bridge 59.
T:01789 296358
www.gablescottage.co.uk

Canalside cottages

Lengthsman's Cottage
Lowsonford. Owned by the Landmark Trust. Canalside by Lock 31.
T:01628 825925
www.landmarktrust.org.uk

Acanthus Cottage & Apple Loft

Wilmcote. Both 4-star. Short walk from bridge 59.
T:01789 205889
www.peartreecot.co.uk

4 Bancroft Place 3-star

Stratford-upon-Avon. Canalside studio.
T:01920 871849
www.4bancroftplace.com

Canalside pubs & inns

Mary Arden Inn
Wilmcote. Opposite Mary Arden's Farm, a short walk from bridge 59.
T:01789 267030
www.mary-arden.co.uk

And more

There's also a good choice of self-catering, B&B and hotel accommodation in and around Stratford-upon-Avon.
www.discover-stratford.com



How to get there

Train info

Lapworth (short distance from start of walk),
Wilmcote & Stratford-upon-Avon
National Rail Enquiries T:08457 484950

Bus info

Traveline T:0871 2002233

Parking

Roadside

Local Tourist info

Stratford-upon-Avon Visitor Info Centre

T:01789 264293 www.discover-stratford.com

Canal & River Trust

Use the Canal & River Trust website to find
specific local information.

www.canalandrivertrust.org.uk

Stratford-upon-Avon Canal Society (Sonacs)

Formed in 1956, the society works in
partnership with the Canal & River Trust
on the continuing maintenance and
improvement of the Stratford-upon-Avon
Canal. T:01564 783672

www.stratfordcanalsociety.org.uk

Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC)

Stratford-upon-Avon.

T:0844 8001110 www.rsc.org.uk

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Stratford-upon-Avon.

T:01789 204016 www.shakespeare.org.uk

Mary Arden's Farm

Wilmcote. T:01789 293455

www.shakespeare.org.uk

Boats

Anglo Welsh Waterways Holidays

Wootton Wawen. Holiday & day boat hire.

T:0117 3041122 www.anglowelsh.co.uk

Countess of Evesham

Stratford-upon-Avon. Cruising restaurant
boat.

T:07836 769499

www.countessofevesham.co.uk