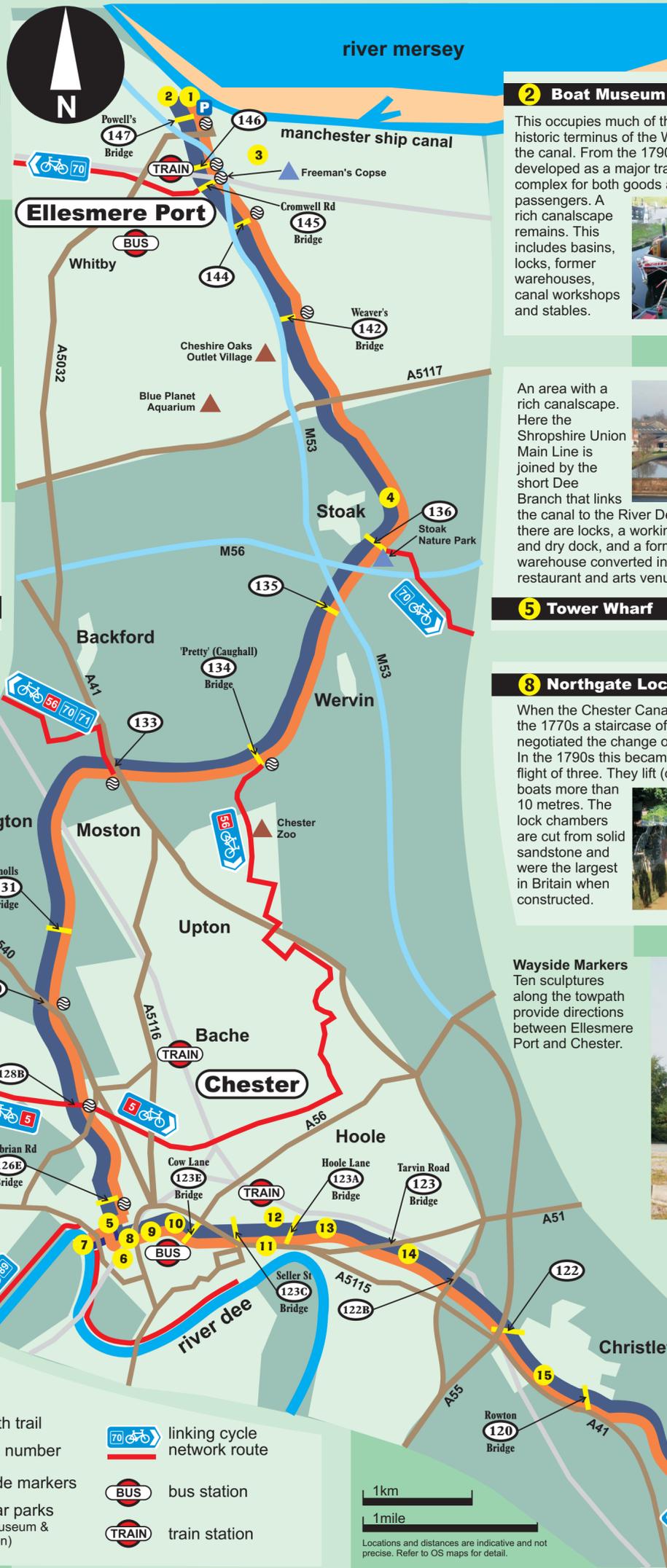


Canal Towpath Trail



1 Manchester Ship Canal

Officially opened in 1894, the 'Big Ditch' allowed ocean-going vessels to reach Manchester via massive locks at Eastham on the River Mersey. Its construction meant that the Shropshire Union Canal connected with this great waterway rather than directly with the River Mersey (as it did previously). The Ship Canal is still a working seaway used by some 3,000 ships per year. It became, in effect, a 36 mile linear port between Eastham and Manchester Docks, including Ellesmere Port and Stanlow. A platform next to The Boat Museum car park provides spectacular views of the Ship Canal and beyond to the Mersey Estuary.



In rural sections the canal is punctuated by picturesque humped back bridges. These were built in the 18th century to allow landowners to access their land either side of the new waterway and to provide passage for local traffic and farm animals. These brick bridges (such as those at Stoak) still retain some of their traditional grey paint characteristic of the Shropshire Union. Not all the bridges take this form, for example, the 'Pretty Bridge' at Caughall which has a wrought ironwork span. All the bridges along the canal have been numbered by the canal company: Egg Bridge is No.119 and Pretty Bridge is No.134.



4 Humped Back Bridges

7 Dee Lock

The canal was linked directly to the River Dee by a tidal basin. In 1801 the lock was constructed so that craft in the basin could remain afloat when the river was at low tide. Today the basin has been largely filled in and redeveloped. From Roman times the river had made Chester an important port. However, over time trade declined as the river could not take the increasingly larger ships. Also, the build up of silt remained a problem.



It is said that King Charles I stood at the top of this tower on 24th September 1645 and watched his army flee from the Parliamentary forces after its defeat at the Battle of Rowton Moor. Here the canal passes under the tower's massive sandstone ramparts.

10 King Charles Tower

12 Lead Shot Tower

This is the only remaining historic shot tower in Britain. It was built in 1800 to produce shot for British muskets during the Napoleonic Wars. Molten lead was poured through a sieve at the top of the tower and fell under gravity into a tank of water at its base. As it fell the molten lead became spherical in 'free-fall' to solidify as shot.



An example of a pound lock (having gates at the top and bottom of a chamber). A bypass weir (which here passes under the former lock keeper's cottage) drains surplus water from the canal above the lock into the section below it. It is named after a factory that produced the chemical naphtha, which once stood nearby.



13 Chemistry Lock

Key

- canal
- towpath trail
- bridge number
- wayside markers
- free car parks (Boat Museum & Waverton)
- linking cycle network route
- bus station
- train station

This round building is located next to Tarvin Lock. It was the hut used by a 'lengthsman', who was the person who looked after a length of canal. It stored tools and materials used to maintain and repair the lengthsman's section of canal and towpath. Alongside it is the narrow channel of the bypass weir.



Lengthsman's Hut 14

A working mill until the 1970s, when it produced mainly animal feedstuffs. However, it had previously had its own bakery. Now residential apartments, the building retains a wooden gantry that overhangs the canal. From this a hoist once lifted grain from boats that had travelled from Ellesmere Port.



Butler's Mill, Christleton 15

2 Boat Museum

This occupies much of the former historic terminus of the Wirral Line of the canal. From the 1790s this developed as a major transhipment complex for both goods and passengers. A rich canalscape remains. This includes basins, locks, former warehouses, canal workshops and stables.



An area with a rich canalscape. Here the Shropshire Union Main Line is joined by the short Dee Branch that links the canal to the River Dee. Here there are locks, a working boatyard and dry dock, and a former warehouse converted into a bar, restaurant and arts venue.



5 Tower Wharf

8 Northgate Locks

When the Chester Canal was built in the 1770s a staircase of five locks negotiated the change of level here. In the 1790s this became the present flight of three. They lift (or lower) boats more than 10 metres. The lock chambers are cut from solid sandstone and were the largest in Britain when constructed.



Wayside Markers
Ten sculptures along the towpath provide directions between Ellesmere Port and Chester.



11 Steam Mill

Stanlow Refinery Complex 3

In 1924 Shell opened a small bitumen plant here next to the Manchester Ship Canal. The area has grown into a vast petroleum complex refining some 12 million tonnes of crude oil per year. Refined products are now distributed by pipeline and road tanker as well as by ship.



When built in 1322, this tower stood as a fortification in the waters of the Dee. Then it was known as the New Tower. Its purpose was to protect the harbour and city from a ship-borne attack. It has long since been left high and dry. The tower stands testimony to the changing course of the river over the ages.



Water Tower 6

9 Bridge of Sighs

North of Chester the canal passes through a deep sandstone ravine. High above is the slender 'Bridge of Sighs'. Condemned prisoners once crossed this from the city gaol (located in the medieval Northgate which still existed when the canal was built) to receive their last rites in the chapel on the other side.



The so-called 'Steam Mill', now offices, was formerly a seed warehouse. The 'real' steam flour mill was on the adjacent site. The original mill was powered by one of the first ten of James Watt's ground-breaking rotative ('sun and planet') steam engines, a technology patented in 1782.



Other Sculptures

These include this canalside sculpture near to Hoole Lane Bridge (No. 123A), which is inspired by canal boat tillers.



14 Victoria Mill, Waverton 16

A survivor of a former cluster of commercial premises that had developed around Egg Bridge in Waverton. Now residential apartments, this building was once a mill where flour was ground from grain brought via Ellesmere Port. Previously nearby were coal, tile and cement depots and a rubber works.



Curious finds along the trail include ropemarks - here in metal posts on the side of Seller Street Bridge (No.123C) in Chester. They were made by the taut towline between the horse and boat repeatedly passing over such nearby structures.



Local Information

About connecting **Cycle Routes** visit: www.cheshire.gov.uk/countryside/cycling, and the **National Cycle Network** visit: www.sustrans.org.uk
About local **Buses and Trains** contact Cheshire Traveline on: 01244 602666 or visit: www.cheshire.gov.uk/transport; and about **Car Parks in Chester** visit: www.chester.gov.uk
Tourist Information Centres: Ellesmere Port contact: 0151 356 7879 and Chester contact: 01244 402111.

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