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# LLANGOLLEN CANAL ROUTE GUIDE

# TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION .....	01
ATTRACTIONS .....	02 - 05
ROUTE DETAILS .....	06 - 07
NAVIGATION NOTES .....	08



# INTRODUCTION



Llangollen Canal & Pontcysyllte Aqueduct.

41 Miles. 21 Locks. One UNESCO world heritage site.  
Two tunnels.

Two very special aqueducts and some of the most breathtaking scenery on the canal network makes the Llangollen Canal (sometimes referred to as “The Welsh”) a firm favourite with holidaymakers and seasoned boaters alike.

# ATTRACTIONS



Leaving the Shropshire Union Canal just after Nantwich, brings you on to the Llangollen Canal.

The first stop you may like to consider would be the Cheshire village of Wrenbury which is home to the beautiful, stone-built Wrenbury Hall which was used during the English Civil War as accommodation for Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentary troops as they prepared for what would ultimately be a resounding victory in the Battle Of Nantwich.

If you prefer your history to be something a little more "interactive", shall we say? Then look no further than The Cotton Arms, Wrenbury's oldest pub, which also dates from the 16th Century and is believed to be partly constructed from old ships timbers. Of course, you may prefer to make a quick pit-stop and carry on with your journey and if that's the case then the ever-popular Dusty Miller pub sits right on the canal and is perfect for a spot of lunch and some adult beverages!

For the next stop on your cruise, you may like to take the short diversion to the medieval town of Whitchurch. Set in the stunning English countryside, Whitchurch is the northernmost market town of the county of Shropshire and is dotted with many historic architectural influences including some quintessentially English half-timbered buildings. With weekly markets and a large farmers market once a month, Whitchurch offers visitors the opportunity to sample all manner of local produce, but fear not! If you miss the markets, the town is still home to a wealth of different independent shops, cafes, pubs and restaurants to suit practically any taste, as well as being a lovely stop for country walks with the Alderford Nature Reserve being one of the highlights.

# ATTRACTIONS



Cruising onwards through the countryside, you will reach bridge number 57 – the Grade II listed Ellesmere Tunnel. While certainly not the longest tunnel on the network at 295ft (90 metres) is considered by many boaters to be one of the darkest so make sure you have your tunnel light on – even if you can see other boats perfectly well, they may not see you especially during busy periods.

Exiting the tunnel you will soon find yourself in the North Shropshire town of Ellesmere. Another historic town featuring medieval streets peppered with half-timbered buildings and elegant Georgian architecture, Ellesmere has evolved over the centuries into a vibrant market town and features many independent shops and small businesses boasting “not a shopping mall in sight!”. Ellesmere features a range of Antiques, crafts, gifts, fresh local produce from the delicatessen and many other shops and the weekly market which was granted its charter in 1221 by Henry III still runs to this day. Of course, Ellesmere also features an excellent range of pubs, cafes, restaurants and bars to suit a wide variety of tastes so there are plenty of opportunities to recharge your batteries before the next leg of your cruise.

This pretty little market town actually helped birth one of the greatest canal networks in the country and features many feats that proved a challenge to the great engineer Thomas Telford, whose influence and presence will be felt in much of the rest of your journey.

As you move on, you begin to cross the border between England and Wales and, with thanks again to Thomas Telford, your journey is made both easier and more visually stunning thanks to the revolutionary Chirk Aqueduct. Completed in 1801, the Chirk Aqueduct stands 70ft (21 metres) high and spans 710ft (221 metres) across the Ceiriog Valley and was revolutionary at the time as the water is housed in a cast iron trough hidden by stone, we can only imagine that this was done to appease the traditionalists of the time who likely viewed this new construction technique with some scepticism! Standing alongside the aqueduct is the 100ft (30 metre) tall Chirk Railway Viaduct which dates from 1848 and the sight of these two marvels of Victorian engineering in the middle of the untouched countryside represents an excellent photo opportunity.

# ATTRACTIONS



The Aqueduct marks the start of an 11 mile area which was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009. As you leave the aqueduct, you will enter the Chirk Tunnel. This 1380ft (421 metre) tunnel is designed to allow for the passage of a single narrowboat so passing is not possible. Boats are required to show a light when using this tunnel and it is straight enough that an approaching boat can tell if there is already another boat in the tunnel or not. Due to the shallow, narrow nature of the tunnel and the relatively fast southbound current, it is recommended that Northbound boats maintain steady power and momentum in order to push through.

If you're feeling adventurous, the Chirk Tunnel was one of the first tunnels to incorporate a towpath through its entire length which will allow people to pass through on foot, but be sure to take a torch as there is a reason that locals call this tunnel "The Darkie"! The tunnel portals and the canal basin are collectively a Grade II\* listed structure and form part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Then it's on to the jewel in the crown of this extraordinary canal journey – The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct. "The WHERE?", you may ask! Pontcysyllte is pronounced "pont-ker-sulth-tay" and is a Welsh word meaning "Bridge of Cysyllte", Cysyllte being the township of the old parish of Llangollen in which the southern end of the bridge lies. The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct carries the Llangollen canal 128ft (38 metres) in the air to cross the River Dee giving unparalleled views across the Vale Of Llangollen – a registered Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Completed in 1805, the Pontcysyllte followed the same construction principles as the Chirk Aqueduct, in that water was carried in a cast iron trough, although in the case of the Pontcysyllte, the cast iron trough was left exposed rather than hidden by masonry.

# ATTRACTIONS



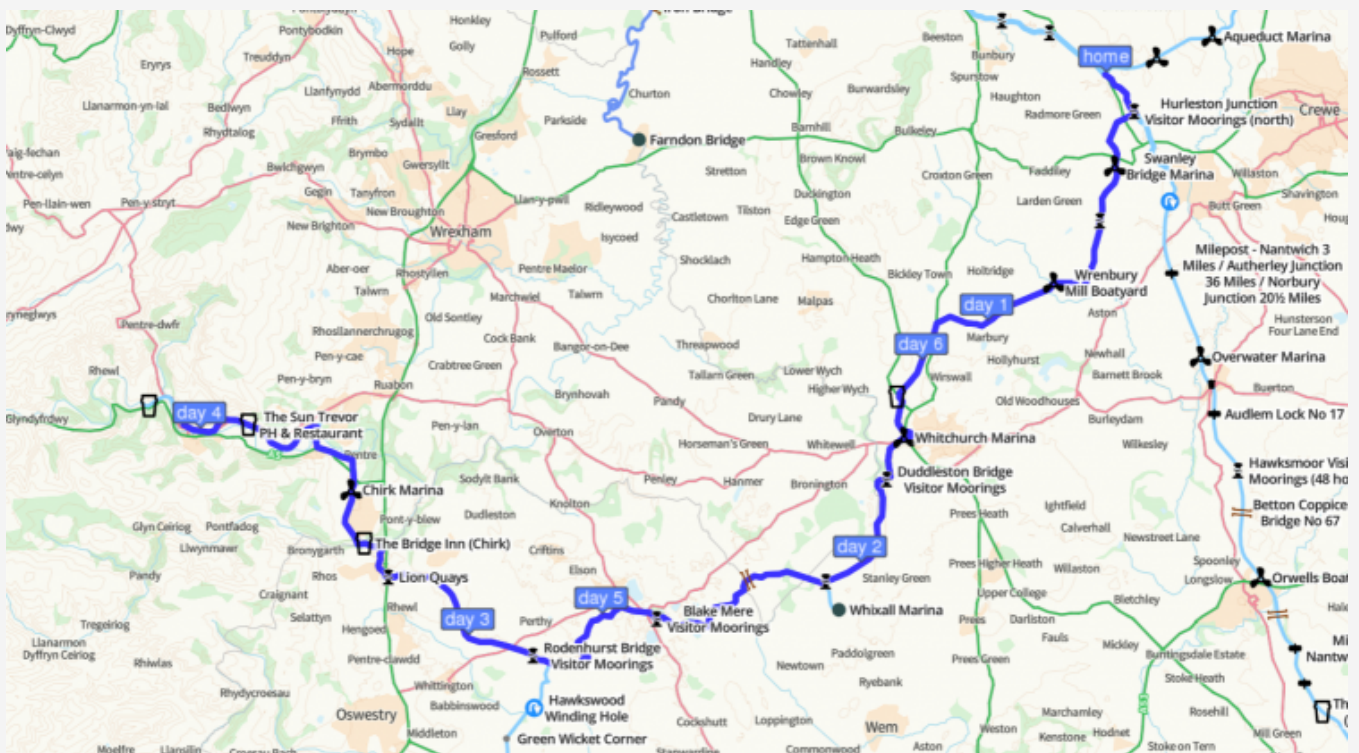
It is worth mentioning that those without a head for heights may want to remain in the cabin while crossing the “Stream in the Sky” that is Pontcysyllte, as the lack of masonry means that those crossing the bridge do so alongside a 128ft (38 metre) sheer drop! But if you do choose to stay in the cabin, do try to look out of the windows as the views and scenery are nothing short of spectacular. The Pontcysyllte is considered one of the “Seven Wonders of The Waterways” and holds the titles of longest aqueduct in the United Kingdom and highest canal aqueduct in the world, as well as the aqueduct itself being a Grade I listed structure, a Scheduled Ancient Monument of National Importance, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and forming part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

All in all, a trip along the Llangollen canal is one of those “bucket-list” journeys that most boaters want to make at one point or another and while it may be a particularly busy stretch during peak times, those who are prepared for a bit of waiting here and there have their patience and senses rewarded by the verdant scenery and pleasant surroundings which evoke simpler times and a much more relaxed pace of life.

# ROUTE DETAILS

94 MILES, 4 1/2 FURLONGS, 42 LOCKS.

TOTAL CRUISING TIME 48 HOURS, 20 MINUTES WHICH IS 6 DAYS, 6 HOURS AND 20 MINUTES  
AT 7 HOURS PER DAY.





# ROUTE DETAILS

Departing from our Middlewich base and south after the first bridge you turn west onto the Middlewich Arm of the Shropshire Union Canal. This route guide picks up from Barbridge some 3 to 4 hours cruising. Please see our guide *Seperate Guide to Barbridge Junction* for more information and details about the first leg of the route, which spans 10 miles and 4 locks, taking approximatley 4 hours to navigate.

This route is an out and back journey, therefore at the end it will be time to turn around and come back to base in Middlewich. So you get to enjoy the views and scenary twice!



# NAVIGATION NOTES

- Shropshire Union Canal & Llangollen Canal – Main Line
- There is a significant flow from Llangollen to the top of Hurleston Locks as the canal is used for transporting drinking water from the Dee to Hurleston Reservoir. This is taken into account in journey times.
- Whitchurch Branch Junction
- The junction is too tight for long boats, cruising in the direction of Llangollen, to turn into, so they should continue to the winding-hole just before Bridge 31A and wind there. Boats coming out of the arm should also wind at the winding-hole if cruising to Wrenbury.
- Maestermyn Bridge No 5W
- This Bridge has a blind approach, sounding your horn is highly recommended.
- Llangollen Narrows Section.
- There are 3 narrow sections between bridge 41 and bridge No 45, which are very narrow and are one way working.
- Boats cruising downstream won't be able to reverse against the current, so check that there aren't any boats heading downstream in each narrow section before proceeding!
- Between bridges 41 & 42 – The channel narrows to one boat width. The warning signs at each bridge refer to the narrows being 300m in length and having passing places (plural). In fact the distance between the bridges is more than 450m and there is only one passing place – about 300m from bridge 41.
- The warning signs at each end refer to the narrows being 500m in length. The distance is actually closer to 600m – 6 to 7 minutes walk. There are no passing places and the sign advises you to “send someone ahead to walk ahead to warn of oncoming boats”. Mobile phone coverage along the section is poor (2015) and there is nowhere that a pedestrian can see both ends of the Narrow Section at the same time. If you can't follow a visible preceding boat, this makes life interesting! Most steerers arrange for someone to go to the far end to ask boaters not to enter, and then proceed after approximately 10 minutes, which gives any occupying boat time to clear the section / advise of following craft. The space between the Narrow Sections at Llangollen can get congested, so it seems to make sense to give priority to boats leaving – to create room for those arriving.
- The section ends before Bridge 45 as you head towards the basin, with a passing place east of (before) the bridge hole, invisible almost until you get to it.
- Llangollen On-Line Visitor Moorings
- The on-line mooring, with a central combined sanitary station, has space for about 15-18 boats, and forms part of the 48hr visitor mooring facilities in Llangollen.
- All Llangollen mooring is subject to a fee (£6 per day in 2015), which includes individual water and electricity supply points. The 48 hr limit applies across the combined moorings, the remainder being in the basin at the limit of navigation (200m beyond the Wharf). There are no other moorings at Llangollen.
- Mooring permits are available from either the C&RT hut at the on-line visitor moorings or at the Llangollen Wharf shop, just beyond Bridge 45.
- Llangollen Narrows Section (125m)
- The section ends before Bridge 45 as you head towards the basin, with a passing place east of (before) the bridge hole, invisible almost until you get to it.