

HALESOWEN TO KIDDERMINSTER

MULTIPLE CANALS

1

TRIP TYPE: SOLO CYCLE

OBJECTIVE: TAKE THE TRAIN FROM KIDDERMINSTER TO OLD HILL, AND RETURN ALONG THE DUDLEY NO. 2, DUDLEY NO. 1, STOURBRIDGE, AND STAFFORDSHIRE & WORCESTER CANALS TICKING OFF VARIOUS SHORT BRANCHES ALONG THE WAY.

DISTANCE: 28 MILES

TIME: 3.5 HOURS, 8.6 mph

NICHOLSON: GUIDE 2, pp 113, 117, 132, 133, 138

COSTS: FREE PARKING AT KIDDERMINSTER. TRAIN FROM KIDDERMINSTER TO OLD HILL \$5.10 (2 per hour)

DIFFICULTY: FAIR (MODERATE IF YOU TAKE THE OLD HILL TO HALESOWEN STRETCH)

OVERVIEW: A very enjoyable ride with both urban and rural scenery, plenty of activity on the canals, lots of industrial heritage, and a particularly lovely stretch down Stourbridge Locks.

There are just 2 hindrances to heavy / electric bikes: the steps down from Old Hill station, and the footbridge as you approach Hawne Basin at Halesowen. You can skip the Hawne Basin bit (or stop at the footbridge which is less than half a mile from the basin) to make life easier as it is not the most exciting stretch of canal anyway.

Towpaths are generally very good, mostly metalled, except the last section down the Staffs & Worcester, which is mainly earth, undulating, may be muddy when wet, but still very pleasant and rideable in the dry.

1. KIDDERMINSTER TO HAWNE BASIN (4.3 MILES)

Park your car on Park Lane, Kidderminster, DY11 6TG for free (note: there is a restriction of 2 hours parking near The Weavers pub, so park further along).



Cycle along past The Weavers to the junction with Castle Road, turn left over the bridge, then left at the lights along New Road. Turn right at the mini-roundabout onto Oxford Street. Go straight across the big roundabout and take the A14+8, Comberton Road, up the steep hill to the railway station.

Trains are 2 per hour, no reservation required, and it is a 20 minute trip to Old Hill.

There are steep steps to carry your bike down from Old Hill station - no step free access. Turn right on Station Road, which runs alongside Dudley No. 2 canal. Once under the bridge the road starts to climb as the canal to your left enters the Gorsty Hill Tunnel. The steep climb ends at the junction with Coombs Road. You can see steps heading down the other side. Either take these, or it is easier to head 100m right down Coombs Rd., turn left onto Coombswood Way, then where the steps you saw emerge, turn right down the slope to the canal. The towpath is flat wide earth, and easy to ride.

The iron footbridge is where you must stop if you can't lift your bike up the steps. Otherwise cross the canal using the steps (no ramp) and continue on the towpath on the left hand side. As the canal bends to the right to the basin the footpath continues through a wood to emerge at an innocuous factory yard entrance. Well at least you've done it. Turn around and head back.

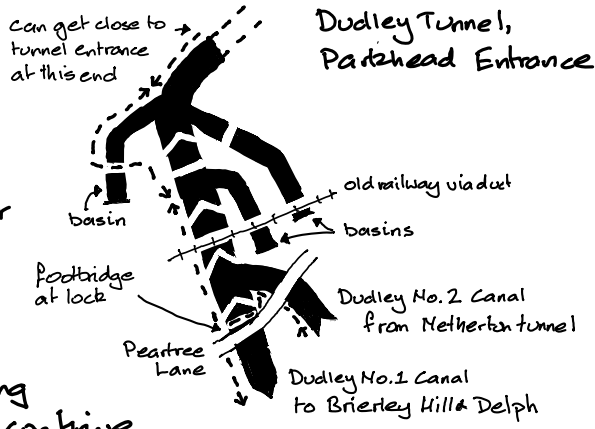
2. HALESOWEN TO PARK HEAD JUNCTION (3.5M)

Return the way you came, over the footbridge (the path through the heath and woods and upwards doesn't follow the line of the canal). Once over Gorsy Hill and back on Station Road, bear right onto the towpath as the canal bends away from the road just before Old Hill station.

The contour canal winds along with no locks. Continue to Windmill End Junction, close to the entrance to Metherton Tunnel. Turn left.

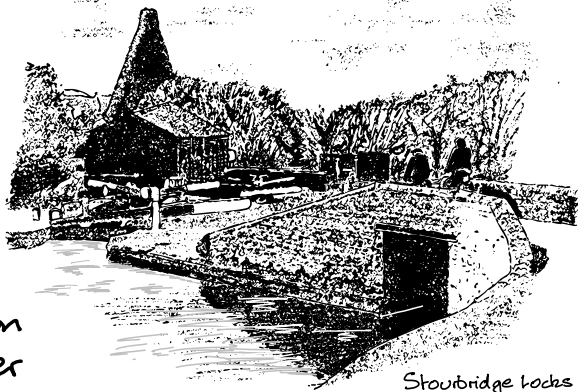
At the first footbridge cross to complete the Bumblehole Branch which is about 400m long, with moorings at the end. Return over the bridge to the Dudley No. 2 Canal and continue west. After a couple of miles the canal bends north to join Dudley No. 1 Canal near the Dudley Tunnel south entrance - Park Head Junction.

Turn left at the junction and cross the bridge at the lock. Double back and head up Park Head locks to Dudley Tunnel. Unlike at the north end you can get right up to the entrance. Return down the locks to Park Head Junction. Crossing back over the footbridge, continue down the locks on the Dudley No. 1 Canal.



3. PARK HEAD JUNCTION TO STOURTON JUNCTION (10.6 MILES)

As you approach Merryhill Shopping Centre the towpath is much improved, and paved. Continue down Delph locks to the Tenth lock pub at the foot. The area around this lock can flood at times (I have experienced it while on a narrow boat). Unless you are yearning for another visit to The Vine (turn left on Delph Road up the hill) continue on what is now the Stourbridge Canal until you reach Leys Junction, where the Fens Branch heads off to the right. Cross the canal using the bridge at the lock just to your left, then head up the Fens Branch, taking in the 400m long Stourbridge Extension Branch on your left as you do so. The Fens Branch ends at Pensnett Road, BU17 9 - the section beyond this is just a feeder from Grave Pool. Return to Leys Junction and continue down the very scenic 16 Stourbridge locks.



Stourbridge locks



Bonded Warehouse, Stourbridge

At the foot of the locks at Wadesley Junction cross the footbridge onto the Stourbridge Town Arm. It is approximately 1 mile to the basin in the town centre, which features an unusual bonded warehouse. Return to the junction and turn left over the footbridge.

The scenery immediately becomes more rural, the canal winding its way amongst meadows and woods. The towpath continues to be good.

Halfway down the Four Locks, which take the canal down to the level of the Staffs & Worcester, the towpath switches sides to the left. Cross the footbridge at Stourton Junction and turn left to head south.

4. STOURTON JUNCTION TO KIDDERMINSTER (11 MILES)

The towpath is now earth with undulating sections which can easily become puddled. There are nettles to tickle the ankles too but I would still class it as FAIR as there are not significant potholes, tree roots or rocks to unbalance you.

After 1/2 a mile is the 25m long Dunsley Tunnel, which has a wide enough footway and a handrail.

At Kinser there is a short detour round a canalside house, which is signposted. You can cut back immediately to the towpath, or continue on the track until it rejoins by the lock. After The Vine pub at Dunsley towpath conditions worsen to a narrow earth strip on grass, but still decent.



The Cookley Tunnel is longer, with a slightly narrower walkway, and I 'scoted' through this one to avoid scraping my knuckles on the wall.

You pass some interesting sandstone outcrops around which the canal curves, cutting through the rock. Approaching Kidder-

minster the towpath is better, although there is a section of deep gravel which feels uncomfortable and slippery to ride on.

Continue to Kidderminster lock, which is under the ringroad. At 56. Cross the canal at the lock and take the slope down to the towpath which passes under the road. It's now not far to Caldwell Hall Bridge, Castle Road, which you crossed earlier when heading for the station. Cross the bridge, turn right onto Park Lane back to your car.

A pint at The Weavers is recommended (no children, in capital letters). Several good ales, and a port pie dominated menu. Opens at 4pm during the week - perfect!