

# STOKE TO MIDDLEWICH TRENT AND MERSEY CANAL

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TRIP TYPE: SOLO CYCLE

OBJECTIVE: CYCLE FROM THE CENTRE OF STOKE ON TRENT TO MIDDLEWICH ALONG THE TRENT AND MERSEY CANAL. TAKE THE TRAIN BACK FROM WINSFORD TO STOKE.

DISTANCE: 24.6 MILES

TIME: 3.25 HOURS, 7.6 mph

NICHOLSON: GUIDE 4, PP 155-163, 109

COSTS: FREE PARKING IN STOKE. TRAIN FROM WINSFORD TO STOKE £10.20 (1 PER HOUR).

DIFFICULTY: MODERATE

OVERVIEW: An interesting ride with lots of industrial heritage to ogle at. The first part of the ride is FAIR, up to the Hare-castle Tunnel. After navigating over the tunnel conditions gradually worsen, and there are steps to climb when leaving the Shropshire Union Middlewich Branch heading to Winsford Station.

## 1. STOKE TO HARECASTLE TUNNEL SOUTH ENTRANCE (4.9 MILES)

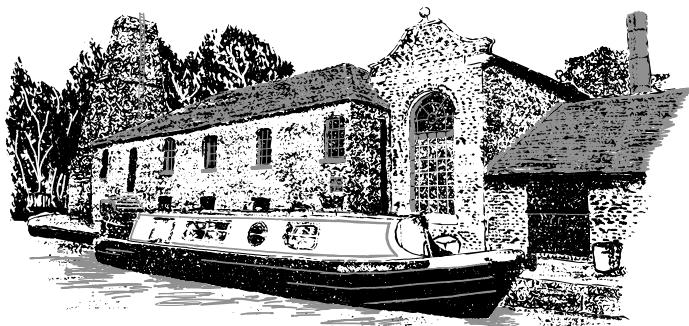
Park your car on North Street, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 7DP. This is a leafy side road with plenty of free parking. Cycle back to Shelton Old Road AS006. At the end turn left on the one-way system. Continue straight as the road (now called Stoke Road) crosses Queensway, then drop down the zig-zag path on the left to the canal towpath and turn left (north, with the canal on your right).



The scenery is very industrial to start with, with a lot of low road and rail bridges crossing the canal. The towpath is tarmaced but there are plenty of cobbles and tree roots

to impede progress. For this section all the locks are rising.

You arrive at Etruria Industrial Museum, where there is a flight of locks going up to the summit level, and the Caldon Canal heads off to the right (west)

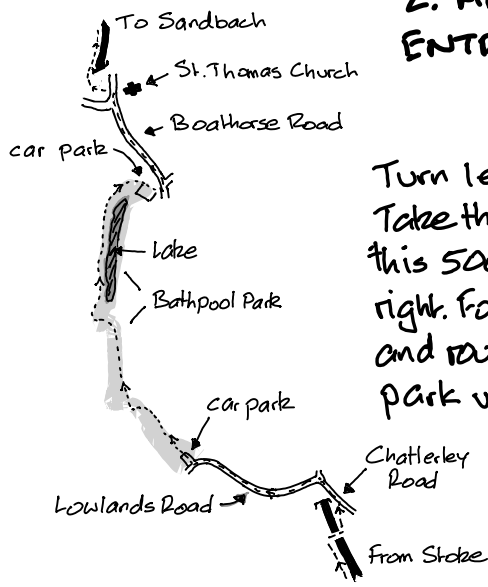


Etruria Industrial Museum  
Trent & Mersey Canal

at the top. At bridge 117, where the A53 crosses, and just before the Black Prince marina, the towpath changes sides for a short while, changing back at bridge 119.

As you approach Harecastle Tunnel south entrance, take the footbridge to the right bank 100m before it, and take the track uphill to the road.

## 2. HARECASTLE TUNNEL, SOUTH ENTRANCE TO NORTH ENTRANCE (2.6 MILES)



Turn left on the road to the roundabout. Take the first exit, Lowlands Road. Follow this 500m to Bathpool Park car park on the right. Follow the tarmac trail through the park and round the left side of the lake. Exit the park via the northern car park and turn left on Boathouse Lane (the old horse track over the tunnel). At The Avenue T junction turn right, then take the signed path

opposite St. Thomas Church, which leads you back to overlook the north tunnel entrance. You will notice the water is bright orange, due to iron oxide leaching from the tunnel.

### 3. HARECASTLE TUNNEL NORTH ENTRANCE TO MIDDLEWICH (13 MILES)



Waiting to pass: Harecastle Tunnel North Entrance  
Trent & Mersey Canal

Continue on the towpath which is on the left-hand side. Shortly the Macclesfield Canal goes off to your left (it crosses the Trent and Mersey 500m further on to head east). At lock 41, by the junction, cross the road bridge and down the

slope to the towpath on the right. lock 41 is the first of the double locks, now going down from the summit level.

The towpath continues to gradually worsens. Firstly compacted earth and gravel, then just grass. There is a particularly nasty section of shale at Thudwood. Where the M6 crosses there are large cobbles under the bridge (why do they do that?).

Things improve as you circumnavigate Sandbach, where there is a series of locks, but respite is brief. As the A533 runs alongside the canal into Middlewich going is very tough, and taking the road is an easier (if more dangerous) option. Once you reach Kings lock by the junction, the worst part is over (and there is The Kings lock Inn close by if you need reviving).

# 4. MIDDLEWICH TO WINSFORD STATION (4.5 MILES)

Turn left onto the Wardle Canal, controversially described as the shortest canal in Britain, although I'm sticking with the Ulverston Canal as this is a proper canal, not just the tag end of another one. In the twinkling of a goat's whisker you are on the Shropshire Union, Middlewich Branch, heading up the locks on a decent surface. Although the towpath goes back to grass after a while, it is only 2 miles to Clive Green Bridge 24, where you leave the canal up steep steps to the road, and turn right on Clive Green Lane.



Continue to the junction with the A34. Turn left at the traffic lights to Winsford Station. If you already have your ticket take the path down by the Brighton Belle p/b to your platform, as the ticket office is on the far platform, and there is no lift (although you can always take the road bridge back over the tracks if necessary).

Trains are 1 per hour. Change at Crewe for Stoke (platform 3). No booking necessary on the trains. Turn right out of Stoke Station to Glebe Street, A52. Turn right under the railway, and left into the small car park after crossing the canal. Cut through to the canal towpath and turn left back under the A52. After passing under the next bridge (Stoke Road, A5006) take the zig-zag path up the slope. Cross Queensway on the pavement and continue to North Street. Turn right back to your car.

