

SANKEY CANAL

1

TRIP TYPE : SOLO CYCLE

OBJECTIVE : CYCLE THE FULL LENGTH OF THE SANKEY CANAL, FROM THE JUNCTION WITH THE RIVER MERSEY AT SPIKE ISLAND, WIDNES, VIA WARRINGTON TO ST. HELENS, RETURNING BY TRAIN VIA LIVERPOOL LIME STREET

DISTANCE : 21.5 MILES

TIME : 2.5 HOURS, 8.0 mph

NICHOLSON : GUIDE 5, PP 208-213

COSTS : FREE PARKING AT SPIKE ISLAND. TRAIN FROM ST. HELENS TO WIDNES £13.30

DIFFICULTY : FAIR

OVERVIEW: This is a pleasant, mainly scenic ride along good paths, with only the last section into St. Helens town centre having slightly bumpier and less salubrious conditions. I can't classify it as easy as there are a few sections on roads and through pedestrian areas, and a couple of shallow flights of steps on footbridges. You cycle the full length of the canal, some parts of which are disused and not visible. Towards the end of the ride there is a short branch at Blackbrook to take in as well.

It is possible to cycle back to the start point (about 9 miles extra) but difficult to do it without using busy roads.

1. SPIKE ISLAND TO BROAD OAK BASIN (16 MILES)

Park for free at Catalyst Science Centre, Spike Island, Widnes WA8 0DF. The car park is close to the canal - cycle down the path and cross at the lock (the tempting path heading left past the boat club does not continue very far along the canal before it veers

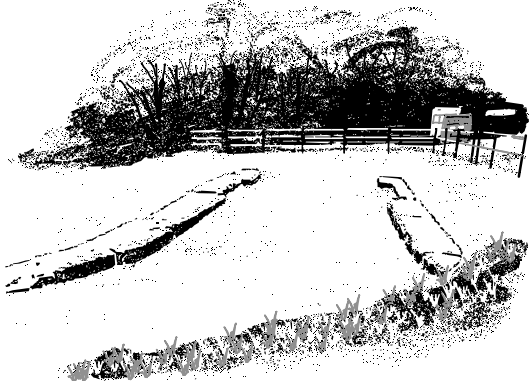


away). Cycle round Spike Island taking in the views of the Mersey Estuary and Mersey Gateway Bridge - take your pick, all the paths converge back to the canal. The canal runs parallel to the river past Fiddlers Ferry towards Warrington, with a very decent metalled or compacted earth towpath. The scenery is somewhat industrial along here.

After crossing Old Liverpool Road go through the parkland and turn left over a footbridge with shallow steps. Continue on the trail through woods, bearing left over the A57 bridge, then right back down to the canal.

At Bewsey Bridge cross to the right, then almost immediately cross back again at Bewsey Lock. Continue to another footbridge and cross it towards a housing estate. Go straight on down Gale Avenue, left on Boulting Avenue, right then left onto Summerfield Avenue, and through the gate onto a track. Turn left back to the canal and bear right to stay on the right bank (don't cross the footbridge!)

Pass under the M62 by some industrial buildings - the path goes sharp left and round the back of the buildings once under the motorway. Follow signs for the Trans Pennine Trail. Continue under the Sankey Viaduct and emerge at Earle Street, by Newton Common Lock, which is completely filled in and barely visible. Turn left at the fence just past the lock then right on a



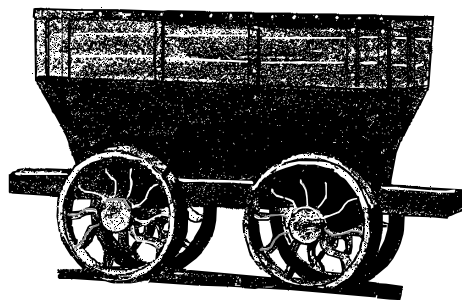
Newton Common Lock, Sankey Canal

bridleway through woods.

Cross Common Road and continue through parkland to Blackbrook Junction. Turn right onto the Blackbrook Branch. Cycle up to and cross Blackbrook Road, A58, and go through an arched metal gateway into Stanley Bank, a wooded park area. Cycle along the path for a short distance looking out for the heavily overgrown Broad Oak Basin to your left.

2. BROAD OAK BASIN TO ST. HELENS (3.5 MILES)

There's not much to see at the basin, but you can walk around it before heading back the way you came, crossing Blackbrook Rd. and taking the towpath back towards Blackbrook Junction.



Old coal truck at Stanley Bank, Sankey Canal

Cross the canal at Old Double Lock Junction Footbridge and continue straight on round playing fields. Cross Boardmans Lane and continue on a metalled path to Park Road. Turn left, along Park Road, and where the canal goes under the road cross and turn right onto the path. Cross the footbridge so you are on the left side of the canal. Follow the towpath to Merton Bank Road. Cross and continue on the left side of the canal. After 200m bear left with the canal (the right arm is a dead end). This emerges onto Waterside, by a large junction. As you turn left to the junction the path leading back to the towpath is diagonally opposite, by some red brick flats. The canal continues to Corporation Street, where you pass under the road onto a path and a filled in section of canal. Continue to Park Street. Cross and head to the right of Matalan, back

on the towpath.

Next is Vera Page Park. It is best to cross the bridge by the Workers Memorial before the bend (the next one is more awkward with a bike), then turn left and round the sharp right-hand bend. Go under the railway and finish up in a retail park by The Range. That's it I'm afraid, very uninspiring.

Heading out of the retail park car park to the roundabout, cross it to Bridge Street which is pedestrianised. Turn right on Church Street then left on Shaw Street to St. Helens Central Station. Trains to Widnes are frequent, but I would recommend you travel via Liverpool Lime Street (rather than Wigan and Warrington) to avoid Aviva trains on the mainline as they are fussy about cycle reservations.

3. WIDNES RAILWAY STATION TO SPIKE ISLAND (2 MILES)

Go up the ramp from the station platform onto Birchfield Road, B5419. Turn right and head the mile down the hill all the way to The Hub roundabout. Take the third exit, Victoria Road, which passes under the Mersey Gateway Bridge approach road and becomes Waterloo Road. Bear left on Upper Mersey Road back to the Spike Island car park.

