

# Southern Canal Network

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## Summary

A very small percentage of people who use the canals are boaters. However, many of those who come want to see boats both moored and moving, they add to the ambience of the scene. The key to the canal being used is that it must be navigable. This document investigates the creation of a network of navigable waterways in the south of England

The network has been given a name; it is believed that by doing this an identity is achieved. The name originally given to the network was the Wessex Waterway Network. In the region we have the North Wessex Downs and the Kennet & Avon Canal has been called the Wessex Waterway. However, in its dealings with various bodies the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust use the Southern Canal Network. There is a problem with this in that there are other navigable waterways: The lower Thames, the River Wey, the Wey & Arun Canal not associated with this particular network.

The Southern Canal Network will be 285 miles long and will have 265 locks.

Swindon is at the centre (hub) of the network. It would be great if something special could be created in Swindon to mark this.

Three long distance national trails cross the area: the Ridgeway, the Thames Path and the Cotswold Way.

The network will create long distance wildlife corridors with the water channel and towpath hedge.

The network should become very popular with both boaters and non boaters and be well used.

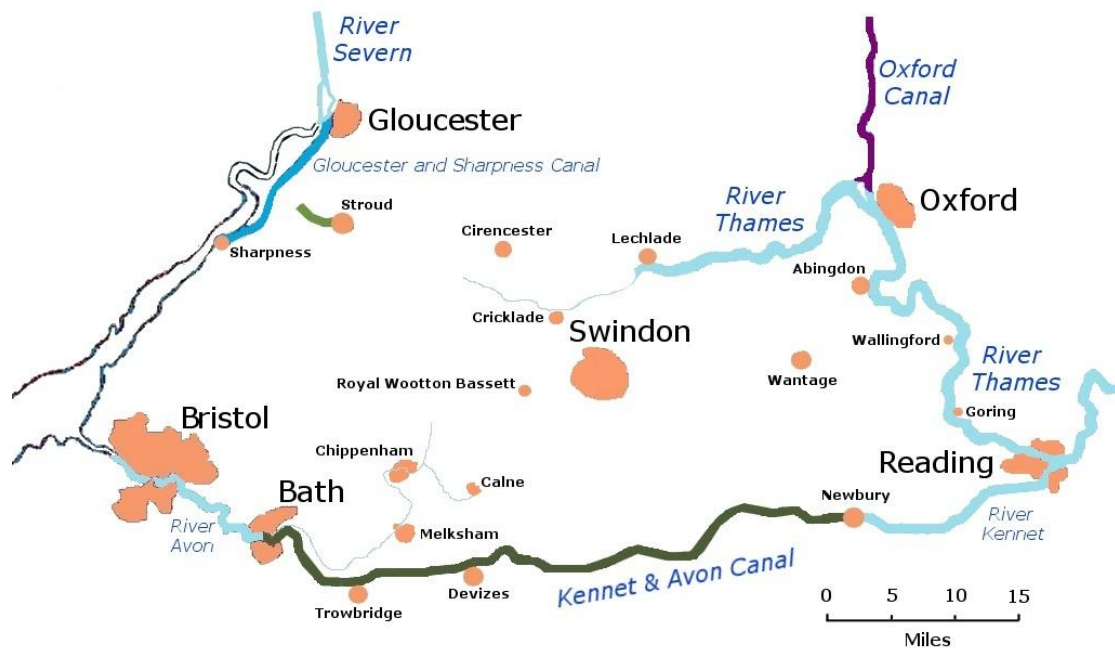
John Henn May 26<sup>th</sup> 2016

# Southern Canal Network

## Introduction

A very small percentage of people who use the canals are boaters. However, many of those who come want to see boats both moored and moving, they add to the ambience of the scene. Some people like to walk or cycle along the towpath a car free route through the countryside. Others just want to stop and stare and have a cup of tea or a glass of wine or beer. In addition, with their towpath hedges and water channels, canals and rivers are valuable wild life corridors.

The key to the canal being used is that it must be navigable. In the south of England the navigable waterways are limited. The major navigation of course is the River Thames running from its source near Lechlade all the way to the Thames barrier. The other major waterway recently fully restored is the Kennet & Avon Canal which consists of three sections; the Rivers Kennet and Avon and a canal section between Bath and Newbury. The last navigable canal in area is the Gloucester and Sharpness canal which was built to bring sea going ships to Gloucester. This can take 600 ton boats. These waterways are shown in the map below.



The main part of the canal system is in the midlands, to get to Bristol or Bath from the canal system involves either:

Travelling along the Oxford Canal to Oxford, the River Thames to Reading and a further 10 day journey along the Kennet & Avon Navigation to Bristol.

Or

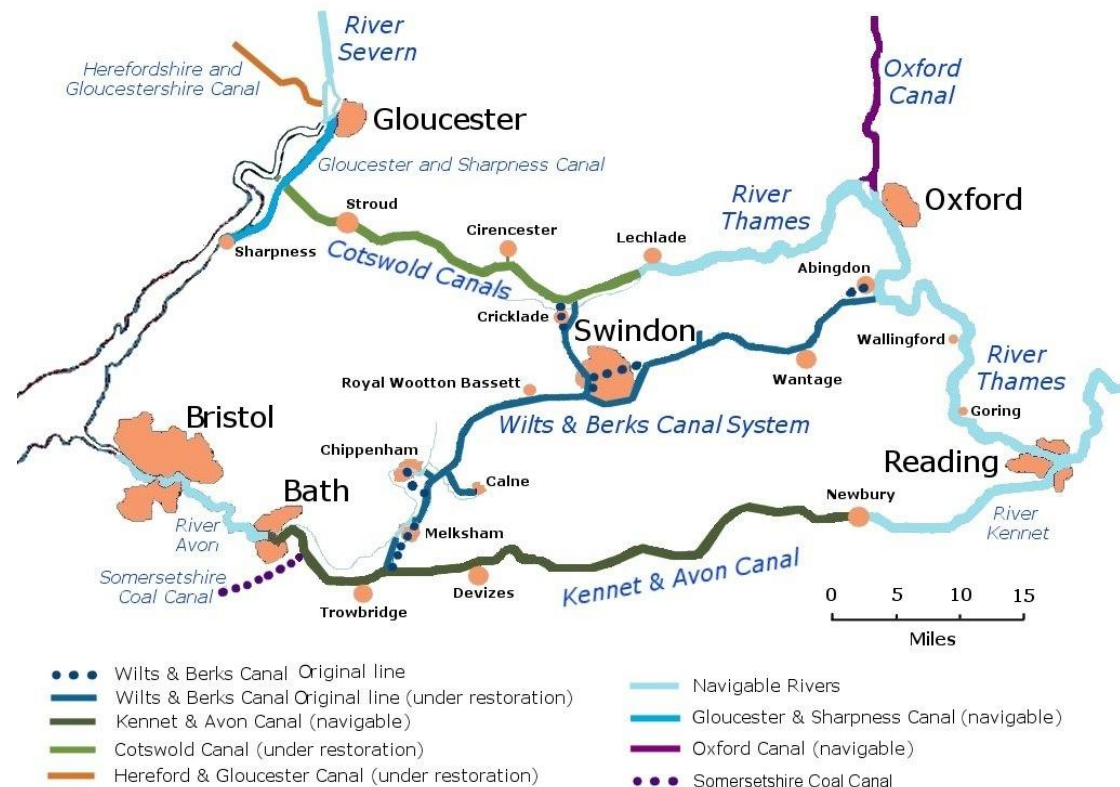
Coming down the River Severn from Worcester, the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal to Sharpness and then the tidal Severn to Bristol, a journey not for the faint hearted.

For boaters, Bath & Bristol or Gloucester & Sharpness are at the end of long journeys.

The Kennet & Avon Canal has become very popular. There are quite a few hire boat bases on the western end of the Kennet & Avon Canal. However, the Caen Hill flight acts as a barrier to free navigation. The flight consists of 29 locks in 2 miles. Usually this takes between 4 and 6 hours to negotiate, a significant amount of time if the boat is hired for just one week, thus acting as a significant barrier between the western and eastern sections of the canal.

## The Southern Canal Network

Restoration has been underway on the Cotswold Canals (Stroudwater and Thames & Severn canals) and on the Wilts & Berks Canal system. Restoration of these waterways would create a 285 mile network, unrivalled in the south of England.



The network consists of contrasting waterways:

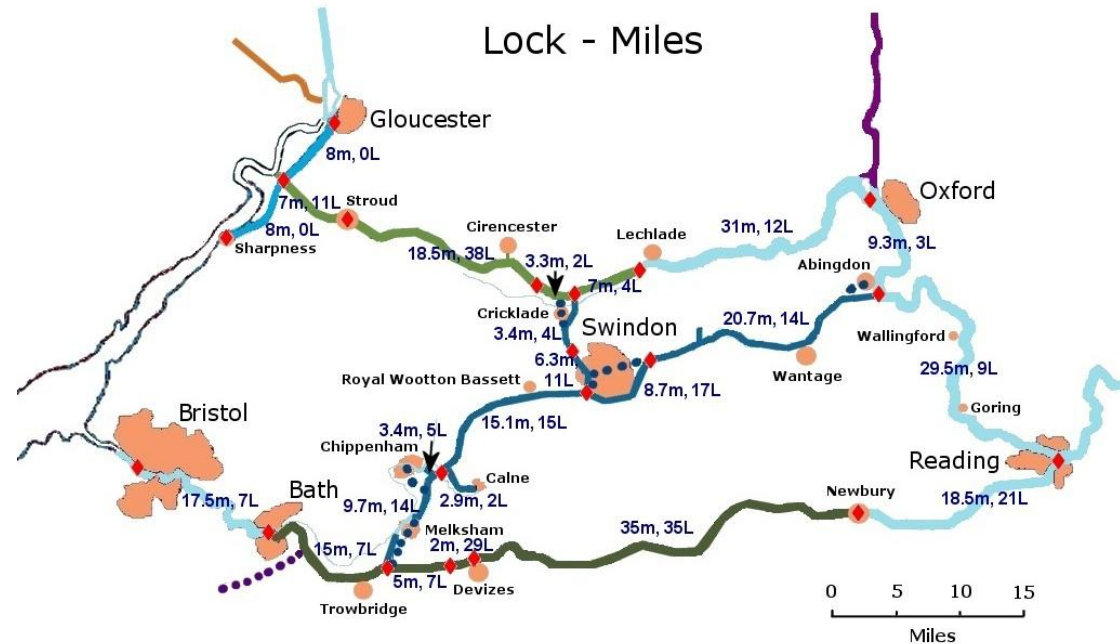
The large scale Gloucester & Sharpness ship canal; the regal River Thames flowing passed the dreamy spires of Oxford and the pretty waterside villages; the majestic Kennet & Avon Canal a broad waterway striding though the ancient landscape of the Marlborough Downs; the Cotswold Canals consist of the Stroudwater designed to take Severn Trows and the Thames & Severn Canal designed to take Thames Barges. The canal climbs 350 feet from the Severn Vale at Saul, passing through Stroud and the Golden Valley, via 35 wide locks to the 2.17 miles long Sapperton Tunnel at the summit, it then descends through remote countryside as it heads towards the River Thames. By contrast the Wilts & Berks Canal system is a diminutive canal taking only narrowboats 70 foot long and 7 foot wide. The major structure was Stanley Aqueduct, with two 12 foot arches and Coate Water Reservoir. However it is the thread that binds the network together.

Two other waterways are included for completeness the Somersetshire Coal Canal and the Hereford & Gloucester Canal.

Three long distance national trails cross the area: the Ridgeway, the Thames Path and the Cotswold Way.

The network will create long distance wildlife corridors with the water channel and towpath hedge.

The map below shows the mileage of each waterway and the locks.



**Gloucester & Sharpness Canal (formerly Gloucester & Berkley Canal) -**  
16½ miles long 0 locks can take 600 ton ships being 86 feet 6 inches wide and 18 feet deep. There are 16 swing bridges operated by bridge keepers.

**Cotswold Canals -** This consists of two canals:

**Stroudwater Navigation** – From Saul Junction 7 miles 11 locks 72ft x 15ft 6in

**Thames & Severn Canal** - 28¾ miles 44 locks 90ft x 12ft 9in.

Total for the Cotswold canals: 35¾ miles 55 locks.

**River Thames** - Inglesham to Reading – 69½ miles, 24 locks

The smallest lock is Buscot Lock 109ft 10in x 14ft 8in

**Kennet & Avon Canal** - Reading to Bristol 93 miles 106 locks

Reading to Bath lock sizes 70ft x 13ft 9in. Bath to Hanham Lock 75ft x 16ft.

**Wilts & Berks Canal** - new main line 54.2 miles 60 locks.

New North Wilts Canal 9.7 miles 15 locks

Chippenham and Calne Branches 6.3 miles 7 locks

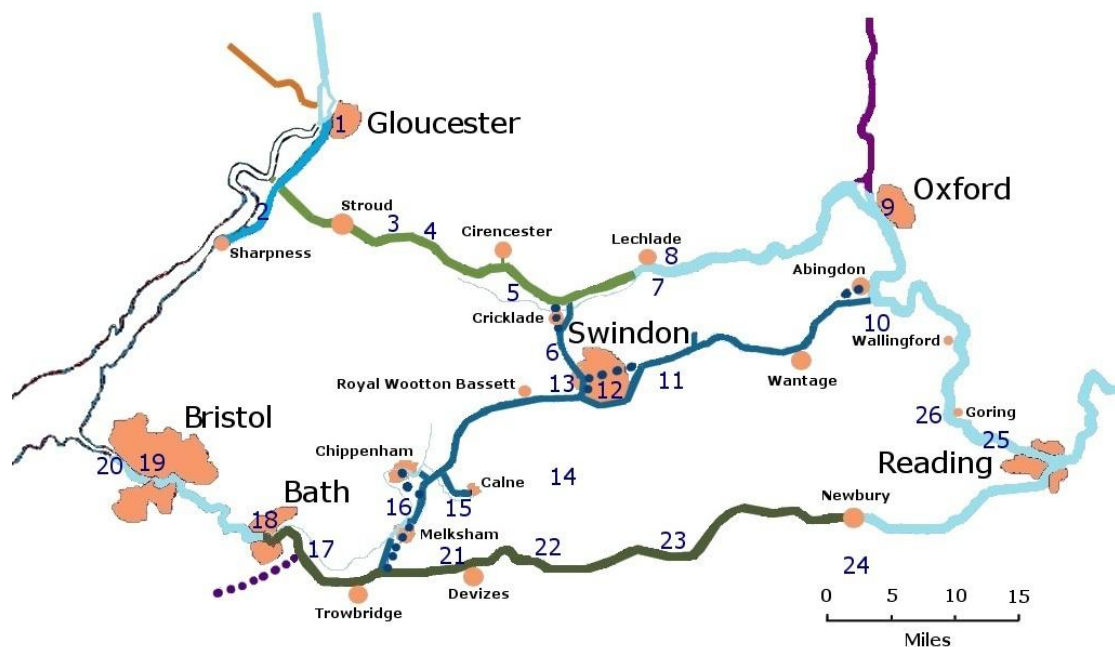
Total Wilts & Berks Canal System 70 miles 82 locks

Locks on the Wilts & Berks Canal 72ft x 7ft except the three wide locks on the Melksham Link

Total Wessex Waterway Network 285 miles 265 locks

Note that the Wilts & Berks Canal restoration is twice the length of the Cotswold Canal restoration and that Swindon is the centre (hub) of the network. It would be great if something special could be created in Swindon to mark this.

## Attractions

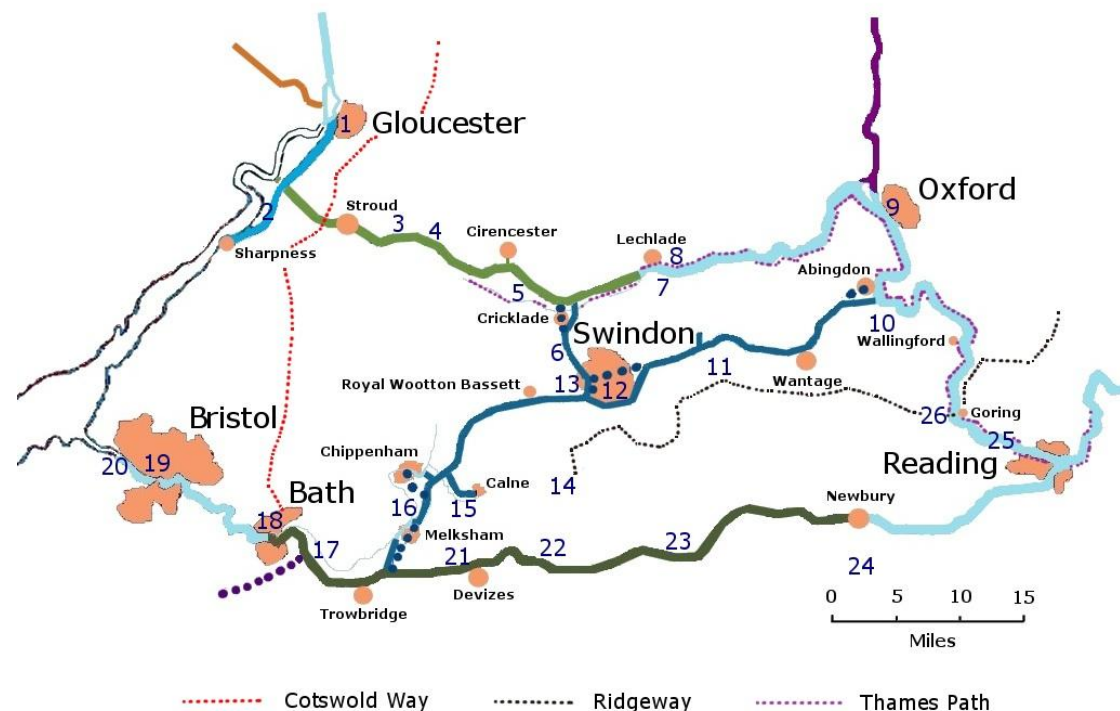


1. **Gloucester Docks:** Historic port with 14 listed Victorian warehouses.
2. **Slimbridge:** Well known nature reserve founded by Peter Scot in 1946.
3. **Golden Valley:** Attractive heavily locked valley climbing to the Sapperton Tunnel.
4. **Sapperton Tunnel:** At 3817 yards the longest tunnel on the network.
5. **Cotswold Water Park:** Many flooded gravel pits used for recreation and wildlife.
6. **Blunsdon canal/rail interchange:** Proposed steam railway and canal interchange
7. **Buscot:** National Trust village of Buscot and Buscot House and Park.
8. **Kelmscott Manor:** The Cotswold retreat of William Morris.
9. **Oxford:** Historic city and University with many attractions.
10. **Didcot Railway Centre:** A comprehensive railway museum.
11. **Uffington White Horse:** Bronze Age, part of unique complex of ancient remains.
12. **Coate Water:** Built by the Wilts & Berks Canal Company in the 1820s.
13. **Steam Railway Museum and Village** Interesting exhibits and stories.
14. **Avebury:** The world's largest prehistoric stone circle (circa 2500 BC).
15. **Bowood House and Gardens:** A good family day out.
16. **Lacock:** 13th century village, abbey and the Fox Talbot Museum.
17. **Bradford on Avon to Bath:** Avoncliff and Dundas Aqueducts, Claverton Pump.
18. **Bath:** Pulteney Bridge, Bath Abbey, Royal Crescent, Roman Baths.
19. **Bristol Harbourside:** Attractions include Brunel's ss Great Britain.
20. **Clifton Suspension Bridge:** Brunel's masterpiece.
21. **Caen Hill:** 29 locks, 16 of which are in a spectacular flight.
22. **Vale of Pewsey:** Attractive valley with a remote 15 mile long canal pound.
23. **Crofton Pumping Station:** The preserved steam-powered pumping station.
24. **Highclere Castle and Park:** A country house; park by Capability Brown.
25. **Beale Park & Gardens:** A great family day out and host to several IWA Rallies.
26. **Goring Gap:** Beautiful riverside setting with attractive views of the hills.



## National Trails

Three long distance national trails cross the area: the Cotswold Way, the Ridgeway and the Thames Path.



**The Cotswold Way** is a 102 mile (164Km) long National Trail running between the city of Bath and the market town of Chipping Campden. For most of its length it follows the Cotswold escarpment giving wonderful views of the surrounding landscape. There are wonderful views of the Cotswold Hills Area of Outstanding Beauty, you can also see the River Severn, the Black Mountains of Wales and the Forest of Dean from the route. The route passes through or near a series of market towns such as Chipping Sodbury, Wotton-under-Edge, Stroud and Cheltenham and the Roman city of Bath. Highlights on the route include the National Trust owned Woodchester Park and the magnificent Sudeley Castle.

**The Ridgeway** passes through two distinctive landscapes: the open downland of the west within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the more gentle and wooded countryside of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the east. The Ridgeway, a walking route, is in a surprisingly remote part of southern central England. It travels in a north easterly direction for 87 miles (139 Km) from the start of the Trail at Overton Hill (East Kennet) near Avebury to Ivinghoe Beacon between Tring and Dunstable. The western part of this National Trail largely follows the route of a prehistoric ridge track along the crest of the North Wessex Downs. It passes many historic sites, including Barbury, Liddington, Uffington and Segsbury Castles (hill forts), Wayland's Smithy (long barrow) and Uffington White Horse.

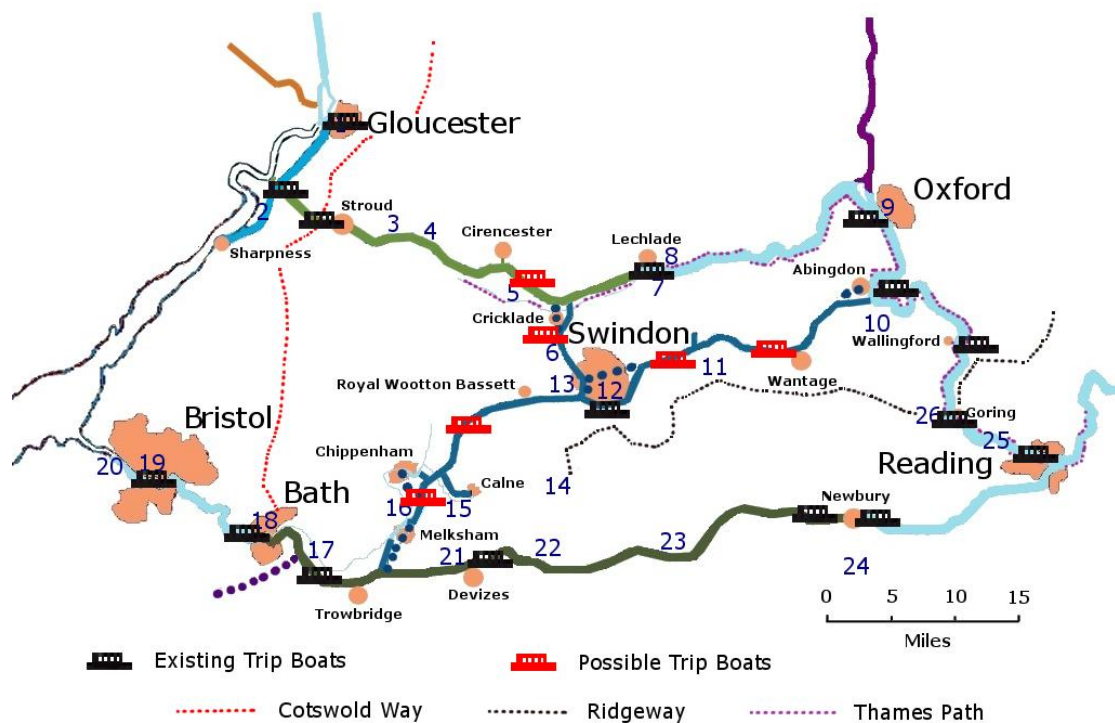
**Thames Path:** The Thames Path is unique; it is the only long distance path to follow a river for most of its length. The Thames Path starts high up in the Cotswolds passes peaceful water meadows, historic towns and cities and many lovely villages, through the heart of London to end at the Thames Barrier in Woolwich just a few miles from the sea, a distance of 184 miles. The Thames Path National Trail is a walking path, not a long distance route for cyclists. There are a few short sections that have bridleway status.

## Boating Activity

These attractions, the pretty village, historic towns and cities, the long distance trails, the areas of outstanding natural beauty make the area popular with tourists. The addition of navigable waterways threading their way through the region can only enhance.

### Trip Boats and Day Boats

As part of their holiday experience visitors will go to the attractions but also like to visit nearby water side locations. This experience could include a boat trip. The map below shows the locations of existing trip boats and possible new locations once the canals are restored.



### Trip Boat Locations

**Gloucester & Sharpness Canal:** Gloucester Docks and Saul Junction

**Cotswold Canals:** Presently at Saul Junction and Stroud.  
Future possibilities include: The Cotswold Water Park.

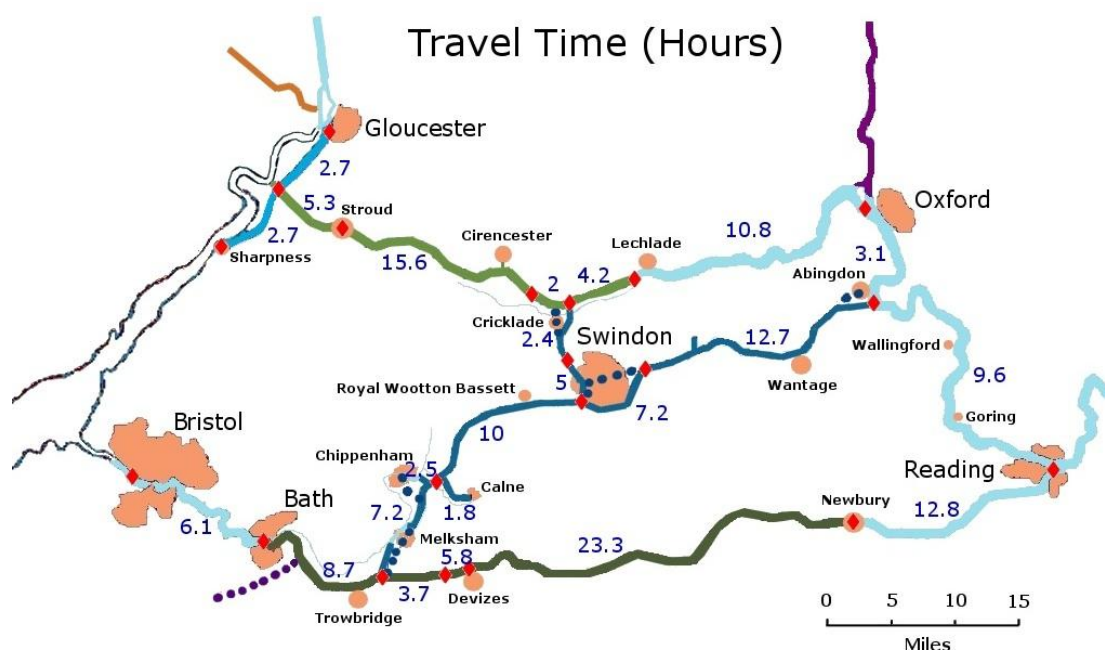
**Wilts & Berks Canal System:** Presently at Kingshill south of Swindon,  
Future possibilities include: Lacock, Dauntsey Lock, Shrivenham, Wantage/Grove and Blunsdon

**Kennet & Avon Navigation:** Bristol, Bath, Bradford on Avon, Devizes, Hungerford and Newbury.

**River Thames:** Lechlade, and Salter's Steamers run trips from Oxford, Abingdon, Wallingford, Goring and Reading.

There are numerous places where "day boats" can be hired. These include on the Kennet & Avon Canal at Dundas Wharf, Bradford on Avon, Devizes and Aldermaston. On the River Thames they can be hired at Reading and Oxford.

## Hire Boats and Hire Boat Bases



The map above shows the estimated times for travelling the different sections of the network. The calculations are shown in the appendix. The times that it takes to go through a lock will generally be faster on the narrow locks. The times will also be reduced for lock flights. The timings shown are nominal, account has been taken for the navigation, for instance average speeds of boats on the River Thames are higher than on the canals. As an example Wichelstowe to Semington could take between 13 to 17 hours cruising time. This uncertainty is half a day's cruising.

The most popular hiring periods for a boat is 1 week; however, other periods are long weekends (3 nights) and 2 week cruises.

This network will become extremely popular for boaters. There are a significant number of hire boats on the Southern Oxford Canal, the River Thames and the Kennet & Avon Canal. Can the canal through and around Swindon be made “special” to attract boaters? Being the hub of the network Swindon is the obvious place to locate hire bases. Wichelstowe to Blunsdon 5 hours and the Swindon eastern by-pass 7 hours mean that the hire bases at the different locations are best for different cruising destinations.

Attractions within easy reach of the waterways will add interest to the holiday experience. There are plenty of places to visit within easy walking distance. New technology will allow the traveller to go further a field.

## Cruising Times

**North Swindon hire boat base:** Gloucester & Sharpness Canal, Cotswold Canals and Higher Thames.

**Blunsdon to Oxford:** 17 hours one way.  
One week there and back cruise at 5.8 hours per day.

**Blunsdon to Gloucester:** 28 hours one way.  
One week there and back cruise at 9.3 hours per day.

**Blunsdon to Stroud:** 20 hours one way.  
One week there and back cruise at 6.7 hours per day.



**South Swindon hire boat base:** Wilts & Berks to Semington, Kennet & Avon Canal

**Wichelstowe to Lacock and Calne:** 15 hours one way.

One week there and back cruise at 5 hours per day.

**Wichelstowe to Bath:** 24 - 26 hours one way.

One week there and back cruise at 8 to 8.6 hours per day.

**East Swindon hire boat base:** Wilts & Berks Canal to Jubilee Junction and the River Thames

**Shrivenham to Jubilee Junction:** 12.7 hours one way.

One week there and back cruise at 4.2 hours per day.

**Shrivenham to Oxford:** 15.8 hours one way.

One week there and back cruise at 5.3 hours per day.

**Shrivenham to Reading:** 22.5 hrs one way.

One week there and back cruise at 7.5 hours per day.

**Shrivenham to Oxford and Reading:** 25.6 hours one way.

One week there and back cruise 8.5 hours per day

**As well as one way cruises there are possibilities of loops or rings.**

**Northern Ring:** Swindon, Cricklade, Oxford, Abingdon and Wantage.

45 hours - 1 week cruise at 7.6 hours per day.

**Southern Ring:** Swindon, Devizes, Reading, Wantage.

92 hours - 2 week cruise at 7.1 hours per day.

**Large Ring:** Swindon, Devizes, Reading, Abingdon and Oxford.

98 hours - 2 week cruise at 7.5 hours per day

**Figure of 8** - northern & southern rings: Swindon, Cricklade, Oxford, Abingdon, Wantage, Swindon, Devizes, Reading, Wantage, Swindon.

137 hours - 3 weeks at 6.9 hours per day

**The network will open up other long distance routes for instance:**

**Bristol to Gloucester:** 65 hours one way - 2 weeks at 5 hours a day.

There and back in 3 weeks at 6.5 hours per day.

**Bath to Oxford (via Swindon and Cricklade)**

48 hours one way – 1 week at 8 hours per day

**Stroud to Oxford:**

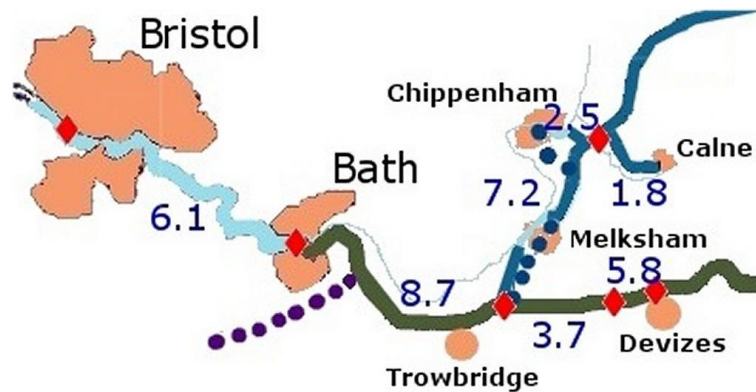
31 hours one way - One week one way cruise 5 hours a day.

There and back in 1 week at 10.3 hours per day.

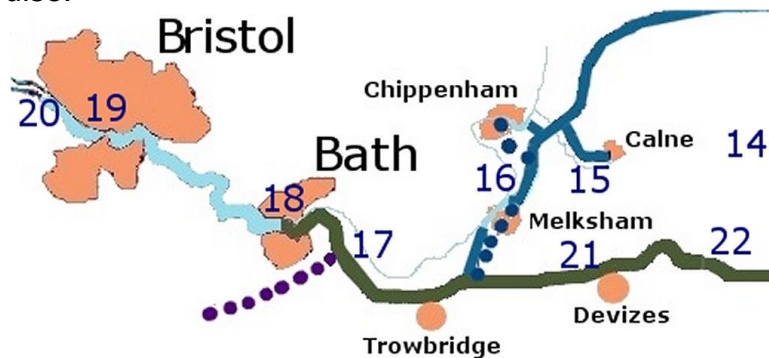
Rather than cruise for many hours a day, boaters may like to take it easy...

### Shorter Cruises: Example 1

People hiring the boats may not want to go very far. There are sections of the network that lend themselves to this. Two such areas are Chippenham & Calne area of the Wilts & Berks Canal and west of the Caen Hill Flight on the Kennet & Avon Canal. The cruising times (in hours) are shown below.



Boats hired in this area on a weeks cruising can easily get to Bath, Lacock, Calne and for the enthusiast to Bristol. This area is also good for long weekend cruise.

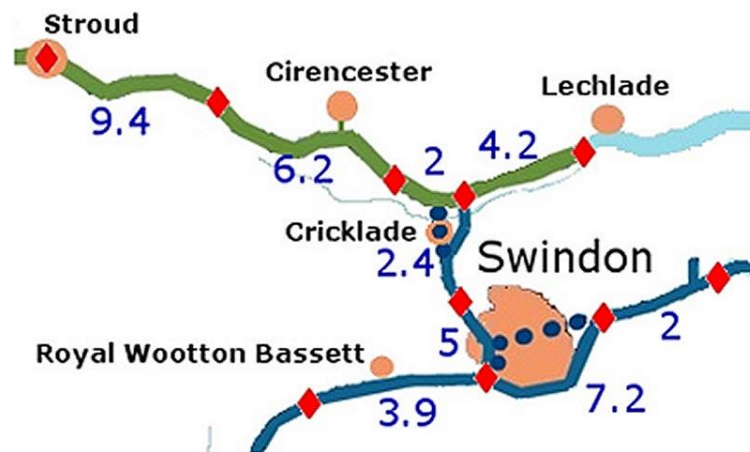


### The nearby attractions include:

- 14. Avebury:** The world's largest prehistoric stone circle (circa 2500 BC).
- 15. Bowood House and Gardens:** A good family day out.
- 16. Lacock:** 13th century village, abbey and the Fox Talbot Museum.
- 17 Bradford on Avon to Bath:** Avoncliff and Dundas Aqueducts, Claverton Pump.
- 18. Bath:** Pulteney Bridge, Bath Abbey, Royal Crescent, Roman Baths.
- 19. Bristol Harbourside:** Attractions include Brunel's ss Great Britain.
- 20 Clifton Suspension Bridge:** Brunel's masterpiece.
- 21. Caen Hill:** 29 locks, 16 of which are in a spectacular flight.
- 22. Vale of Pewsey:** Attractive valley with a remote 15 mile long canal pound.

### Shorter Cruises: Example 2

In the Swindon area of the Wilts & Berks Canal and on the eastern end of the Thames & Severn Canal and the upper reaches of the River Thames.



Boats hired in this area on a weeks cruising can easily get to Cirencester, the Cotswold Water Park, the Higher Thames and Swindon, This area is also good for long weekend cruising. Normally boaters would cruise to Sapperton Tunnel; they could then walk over the tunnel and explore the Golden valley by foot. South of Swindon, boaters may want to cruise to the top of Seven Locks.



### The nearby attractions include:

3. **Golden Valley:** Attractive heavily locked valley climbing to the Sapperton Tunnel.
4. **Sapperton Tunnel:** At 3817 yards the longest tunnel on the network.
5. **Cotswold Water Park:** Many flooded gravel pits used for recreation and wildlife.
6. **Blunsdon canal/rail interchange:** Proposed steam railway and canal interchange
7. **Buscot:** National Trust village of Buscot and Buscot House and Park.
8. **Kelmscott Manor:** The Cotswold retreat of William Morris.
11. **Uffington White Horse:** Bronze Age, part of unique complex of ancient remains.
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13. **Steam Railway Museum and Village** Interesting exhibits and stories.

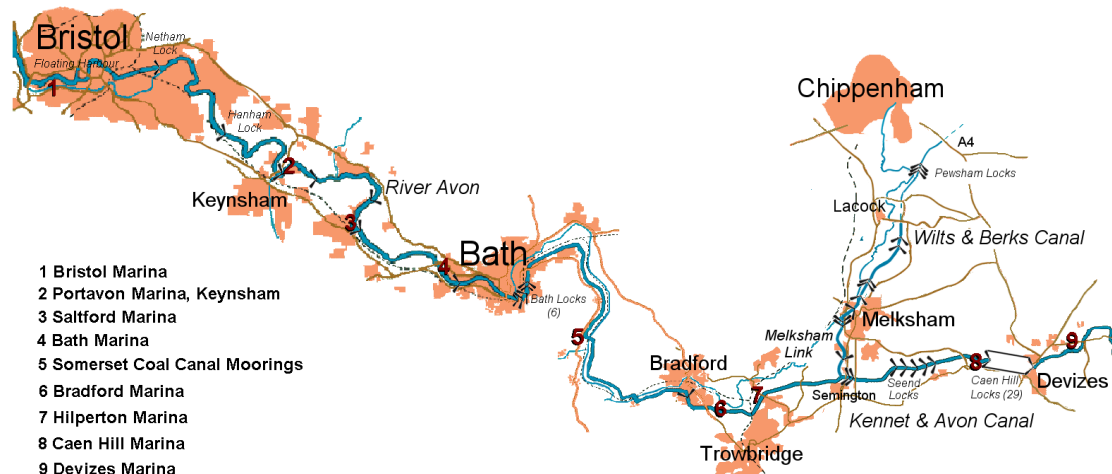
## Summary of Trip Boat Bases

- The Kennet & Avon Canal is effectively cut in two by the Caen Hill Locks. East of the flight boats will generally cruise between Devizes and Reading. West of the flight they will tend to go towards Bath and Bristol, the Wilts & Berks restoration opens up a host of new opportunities.
- The hire bases on the Thames are generally for cruisers and ply the river.
- Hire boat bases on the Stroudwater and western section of the Thames & Severn Canal have limited destinations.
- There are significant opportunities for hire boat bases on the Wilts & Berks Canal system especially around Swindon.

## Private Boats

There are far more private boats than trip boats. Generally these do not travel so far as hire boats. They tend to stay in marinas. The boats in marinas on canals tend to be narrowboats whilst those on rivers tend to have cruisers.

There is always a great demand for space. The marinas on the west end of the Kennet & Avon Canal are shown below:



A restored Wessex Waterway Network would probably result in the following new marina developments in the following locations:

Cotswold Canal: Stroud, Brinscombe Port and Cotswold Water Park

Wilts & Berks Canal System: Semington Junction, Pewsham, South Swindon, Blunsdon (north Swindon), Wantage/Grove, Jubilee Junction.

## Other Activities

The casual users will far outstrip the use of the canal by boaters

Most people who walk the canal only travel a few hundred yards. For those who are more ambitious the Southern Canal Network and the National Trails will allow long distance routes to be created which allow walkers to travel great distances, mostly off road. The canal towpath will also allow the creation of circular walks.

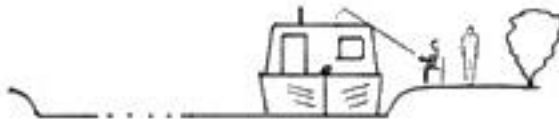
“Tourism” (Gongoozling): people just love to watch what is going on. They will frequent local hostelrys and just want to stand and stare and take photographs. “Locals” as well as visitors will enjoy doing this.

Cycling there is already a long distance cycle route based on the Kennet & Avon Canal. From Bristol to Bath it uses a railway path and from Bath to Devizes. From Devizes to Reading it uses mainly minor roads. There are already a host of railway paths in the region. The Wilts & Berks Canal system would help tie the cycle network together.

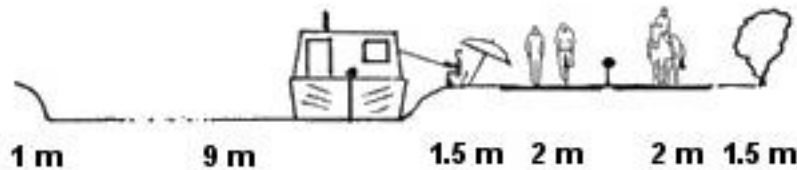
Bicycle hire can be obtained at Dundas Basin and at Bradford on Avon. Opening up the Wilts & Berks would lead to more bicycle hire places, for instance, at Melksham and Pewsham.

Fishing is one of the most popular activities associated with canals. Normally this is allowed only on the towpath side. Tockenham Reservoir, once a canal reservoir, on the west end of the Wilts & Berks Canal, is owned by anglers.

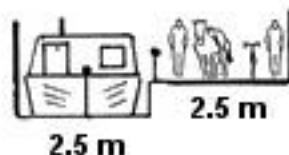
The towpaths were originally built for horses. Nowadays, horses would tend to damage the surface, and hence generally horse riding is not allowed. However in certain locations it may be beneficial for instance going under a major road.



(a) Standard canal and towpath 13.5 metres (44 feet)



(b) Minimum width for any distance 17 metres (55 feet)



Note sealed path needed for this configuration

(c) Minimum width for short distances 5 metres (16 feet)

## Various Path Configurations



## Calculation of Times

Section: G & S Canal and Cotswolds Canals	miles	locks	2mph 10minutes (hours)	3 mph 10minutes (hours)	3 mph 15minutes (hours)	4 mph 15minutes (hours)
<b>Saul Jn to Gloucester</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Saul Jn to Sharpness</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Saul Jn to Stroud</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>4.5</b>
Stroud to Cotswold Water Park	18.5	38	15.6	12.5	15.7	14.2
Cotswold water Park to NW Jn	3.3	2	2	1.4	1.6	1.3
<b>Stroud to NW Jn</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>15.5</b>
<b>NW Jn to Inglesham</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.8</b>

Total Gloucester & Sharpness canal 16 miles 0 locks

Stroudwater 7 miles 11 wide locks Thames & Severn 28.8 miles 44 locks 90x12ft 9"

Section: River Thames	miles	locks	2mph 10minutes (hours)	3 mph 15 minutes (hours)	4 mph 15 minutes (hours)
Inglesham to Oxford	31	12	17.5	13.3	10.8
Oxford to Jubilee Jn	9.3	3	5.2	3.9	3.1
<b>Inglesham to Jubilee Jn</b>	<b>40.3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>13.9</b>
<b>Jubilee Jn to R. Kennet Jn</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>9.6</b>

Total

69.8 miles 24 River Locks

Section: K & A Canal	miles	locks	2mph 10minutes (hours)	3 mph 10minutes (hours)	3 mph 15 minutes (hours)	4 mph 15 minutes (hours)
<b>Reading to Devizes</b>	<b>53.5</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>36.1</b>	<b>27.2</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>27.4</b>
Reading to Newbury	18.5	21	12.8	9.7	11.4	9.9
Newbury to Devizes	35	35	23.3	17.5	20.4	17.5
<b>Devizes to Semington Jn</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>10.8</b>
Devizes to Foxhangers	2	29	5.8	5.5	7.9	7.75
Foxhangers to Semington Jn	5	7	3.7	2.8	3.4	3
<b>Semington Jn to Bath</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>5.5</b>
<b>Bath to Bristol</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>6.1</b>

Total

93 miles 106 wide locks

Section: W & B Canal	miles	locks	2mph 10minutes (hours)	3mph 10minutes (hours)	3 mph 15minutes (hours)	4 mph 15minutes (hours)
Semington Jn to Lacock	5	9	4	3.2	3.9	3.5
Semington Jn to Stanley Jn	9.7	14	7.2	5.9	6.7	5.9
<b>Calne Branch</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>New Chippenham Branch</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.1</b>
Stanley Jn to Wichelstow Jn	15.1	15	10	7.5	8.8	7.5
<b>Semington Jn to Wichelstow Jn</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>13.5</b>
Swindon Southern route	8.7	17	7.2	5.7	7.2	6.4
Acorn bridge to Jubilee Jn	20.7	14	12.7	9.2	10.4	8.7
<b>Wichelstow Jn to Jubilee Jn</b>	<b>29.4</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>15.1</b>
Wichelstow Jn to Blunsdon	6.3	11	5	3.9	4.9	4.3
Blunsdon to T & S Jn	3.4	4	2.4	1.8	2.1	1.9
<b>Wichelstow Jn to T &amp; S Jn</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6.2</b>

Total

70.2 miles 82 locks

**Grand total "Southern Canal Network" 284.8 miles 267 locks**

## Waterways and Attractions of the Network

### Gloucester & Sharpness Canal (Gloucester & Berkley Canal)

16  $\frac{3}{8}$  miles long can take 600 ton ships being 86 feet 6 inches wide and 18 feet deep. There are 2 locks on the canal, the sea lock at Sharpness and the river lock at Gloucester. There were originally 16 bridges across the canal and one across Gloucester Lock. Now there are 18 across the canal and one across Gloucester Lock. Most of these bridges are swing bridges which are operated by bridge keepers (restricted hours).

Saul Junction to Gloucester Docks 8 miles

Saul junction to Sharpness Docks 8  $\frac{3}{8}$  miles

Saul Lock to Slimbridge about 4 miles

**Gloucester Docks [1]** - The docks were once a vital port for the transfer of cargoes between the River Severn and the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal. The 14 Victorian warehouses are listed buildings, while the Mariners' Chapel, which once served a congregation of seamen and boatmen, is still in use as a church. Occupying three floors of Llanthony Warehouse, the Gloucester Waterways Museum contains the Canal & River Trust National Collection of historic boats and canal artefacts, as well as offering boat trips. Other leisure attractions you will find dockside include shops and restaurants, the Regiments of Gloucester Museum, and the Antique Centre.

**Slimbridge [2]** is a wetland reserve managed by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust it is next to the Severn Estuary and was opened on 10 November 1946 by the artist and naturalist Sir Peter Scott. The reserve covers 3 square kilometres, of which  $\frac{1}{2}$  square kilometres has been landscaped and can be visited by the public.

**Sharpness Docks** developed in the later nineteenth century to accommodate the larger ships then coming into service that were too big to pass up the canal. Prior to this, the old entrance to the canal had no provision for cargo handling, and all ships continued up the canal to discharge at Gloucester. Warehouses were built beside the New Dock, principally to accommodate imported grain, and new houses were built on the dock estate for key workers. Sharpness Docks continues as a working port, but most of the old warehouses have been replaced by modern facilities.

## Cotswold Canals

Two separate waterways once linked England's two greatest rivers. The Stroudwater Navigation, to the west of Stroud, was opened in 1779 to connect Stroud to the Severn. Ten years later the Thames & Severn Canal extended this route to Lechlade on the Thames.

**The Stroudwater** was designed to take Severn Trows of Length 71.5 (21.81m) beam 18.25 feet (5.57 m), Framilode on the Severn Estuary to Saul Junction 1 mile 2 wide locks. Saul Junction to Wallbridge, 7 miles 11 wide locks 72 feet x 15 feet 6 inches.

**Thames & Severn Canal** was designed to take Thames Barges, which were 90ft x 12ft 9 ins. Hence the lock sizes on the two canals are different. The transshipment point was Brinscombe Port. The Thames & Severn Canal is 28  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles long with 44 locks.

Between Wallbridge and Brinscombe Port the locks were big enough to take Severn Trows, from Brinscombe Port to Inglesham the locks were designed to take Thames Barges 90ft x 12ft 9in.

Brinscombe Port transshipment point Severn Trows from the west and Thames Barges from the east. Bourne Lock Bourne Lock 90ft x 16ft 1in was suitable for both Severn Trows and Thames barges

The major feature of the Thames & Severn Canal is Sapperton Tunnel. There was also a short branch into Cirencester 1½ miles 0 locks. Another distinctive feature of the canal were the round houses. These were all constructed in 1790, the year following the canal's opening, and served as lengthsman's cottages. There were 5 of these at Chalford, Coates, Cerney Wick, Marston Meysey and Inglesham.

The town of **Stroud** is the capital of the south western Cotswolds and located at the divergence of the five Golden Valleys, so named after the monetary wealth created in the processing of wool from the plentiful supply of water power. During the heyday of the wool trade the river Frome powered 150 mills, turning Stroud into the centre of the local cloth industry. Even now, Stroud is very much a working town, and one which doesn't need its heritage in order to survive. While some of the old mills have been converted into flats, others contain factories, but only two continue to make cloth - no longer the so-called Stroudwater Scarlet used for military uniforms, but high-quality felt for tennis balls and snooker tables.

**Chalford** is the largest of the valleys attractive village which exists because of the early Industrial Revolution. It is built on ascending terraces on the south facing slopes of the 'Golden Valley'. This large village (second largest in England) consists of late 18th and early 19th century houses, most of which belonged to prosperous clothiers. These are in company with many delightful cottages once inhabited by humble weavers.

The valley of the River Frome to the east of Brinscombe is known as the **Golden Valley [3]**, an attractive vale in the Cotswolds. There are historic features, attractive woods, pools and streams. From Brinscombe the canal climbs via 20 locks to the Daneway Portal of the Sapperton Tunnel in just 5 miles. The is on the summit of the canal which is about 360 feet above sea level and has climbed 241 feet from Wallbridge in Stroud.

**Sapperton Tunnel [4]** is 2.17 miles or 3817 yards long and was completed on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1789. The tunnel burrows under the highest part of the Cotswold Hills and, at its deepest point, is 196 feet below ground. The nominal width is 14ft 4in with a minimum height of 15ft 4in. The roof can be significantly higher in parts of the unlined sections, due to the amount of rock that fell during construction blasting operations. There is no towpath in the tunnel. Thus boats had to be propelled through the tunnels by means of men lying on boards across the top of the narrowboats and literally walking (or "legging") the boats through tunnel. The Coates Portal of the tunnel, a mainly neo-classical structure was in a very poor state of repair in the early 1970s was restored and officially 're-opened' in 1977.

The restoration of Sapperton Tunnel is entirely feasible from an engineering standpoint. This will be the most complex and expensive single element of the Thames & Severn Canal restoration.

East of Sapperton Tunnel the canal passes through remote countryside.

**Cirencester** (Corinium Dobunorum) was the second largest town in Britain during Roman times. In later years it was a very prosperous medieval wool town. The town contains many interesting buildings spanning several centuries. Cirencester's market town status was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. Attractions include the Corinium Museum of the Roman past and Cirencester Park – Family seat of the Earls of Bathurst, situated to the west of the town, this is a superb example of a forest style garden (8 kilometres by 4.8 kilometres and occupying some 3000 acres and is well worth a visit.

East of Cirencester there used to be extensive gravel pits. These have been flooded and now constitute the **Cotswold Water Park [5]**. There are 150 lakes spread over forty square miles, and activities include water sports, walking, and cycling. There are several nature reserves, where the landscape is managed for the protection and enhancement of wildlife, these places are a haven for birds, bats and butterflies.

The original junction with the North Wilts Canal was at Latton Basin. A new junction is proposed some 2 miles east of this. The Thames and Severn Canal now passes through remote countryside as it heads towards the River Thames. It passes Eisey Manor and the village of Kempsford before reaching the last of five round houses which overlooks the junction with the river at Inglesham, near Lechlade.

A long distance footpath, the Thames & Severn Way, links the Rivers Severn and Thames following as closely as possible the towpath of the Stroudwater Navigation and Thames & Severn Canal.

## River Thames

### Higher Thames: Lechlade to Oxford

Inglesham to St. Johns Lock (Lechlade) 1 mile with 0 locks. The distance from St Johns Lock to Osney Lock (Oxford) is 30 miles. There are 12 locks including Osney Lock. The smallest lock is Buscot Lock 109 feet 10 inches x 14 feet 8 inches

These upper reaches of the Thames are very different in character from the more regal river which opens out beyond Oxford. This is a remote stretch winding loops meander through open meadows, peaceful fields, woody sections crossed by the occasional historic bridge. There are plenty of welcoming waterside pubs and little to disturb the tranquil scene.

**Buscot [7]** is an attractive little Thames-side village. Most of this tiny village is along a short cul-de-sac that leads from the ancient village hall to Buscot Lock on the River Thames. The parish church, St. Mary's, a short distance downstream from the lock and reached along a pleasant footpath, has some attractive stained glass windows by William Morris.

Buscot is part of the National Trust's Buscot and Coleshill Estates and many of the houses in the village are owned by the National Trust. A short distance along the road towards Faringdon is Buscot Park, an 18th century country house and estate belonging to the National Trust. The contents of the house - paintings, furniture and objets d'art are known as the "Faringdon Collection".

**Kelmscott Manor [8]** was the Cotswold retreat of William Morris. This seventeenth-century, Grade 1 listed Manor house on the river Thames - perhaps the most evocative of all the houses associated with Morris - contains an outstanding collection of the possessions and works of Morris, as well as of his family and associates that includes furniture, original textiles, pictures and paintings, carpets, ceramics and metalwork. The estate also boasts a beautiful garden with easy access to the Thames Pathway.

**Oxford [9]:** The City of Dreaming Spires, is famous the world over for its University and place in history. For over 800 years, it has been a home to royalty and scholars, and since the 9<sup>th</sup> century an established town, although people are known to have lived in the area for thousands of years. There are 5 free museums including the Ashmolean, Britain's first Botanic Garden and 37 historic colleges, Oxford merits a two-day visit and is probably best explored on foot with an Official Walking Tour guide.

The most famous stretch of river in Oxford is undoubtedly the section between Folly Bridge and Iffley Lock. It's part of the River Thames, but popularly known as **the Isis**. It is here that the college rowing crews race against each other in the two annual regattas. If you're inspired to take to the river, there's a wide choice of craft - from stately Edwardian Salters' Steamers to elegant electric launches, rowing boats and traditional punts. Passenger boats depart from Folly Bridge or Donnington Bridge.

### **Upper Thames: Oxford to Reading**

Osney Lock to River Kennet Junction (Reading) 39 miles 12 locks

This is known as the Upper Thames and along this route you can really enjoy a great mix of peace, beauty, wildlife and lovely landscape,

There are many attractive villages on or very near the River Thames and those on the river often have riverside amenities. If they are a little way from the river it is usually only a short stroll by footpath to the river bank and this usually gives the opportunity for a pleasant riverside walk. Then what better than to enjoy a pleasant lunch or drink in one of the village pubs or tea rooms?

Beyond Oxford you are still in the heart of the countryside but the river continues to widen, the willows seem to grow larger, and settlements become more frequent.

Pass several attractive Thames side towns and villages

**Abingdon** was occupied in prehistoric times by settlers of the Bronze and Iron ages. It was a flourishing town in the Roman period, which in turn gave way to a Saxon settlement. When Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries in 1538, Abingdon Abbey was the 6th richest in Britain. The Abbey Gardens and Meadow are well worth a visit. The Monday market has existed since 1556. Abingdon was the county town of Berkshire, becoming part of Oxfordshire after local government re-organisation in 1974.

Between Abingdon and Wallingford is the **Didcot Railway Centre [10]** which was based on a former Great Western Railway engine-shed, today it has been converted into a comprehensive railway museum and preservation engineering site.



**Wallingford** is a market town and civil parish. The town's royal but mostly ruined Wallingford Castle held high status in the early medieval period as a regular royal residence until the Black Death hit the town badly in 1349. The centre of Wallingford has the feel of a typical old market town, with a large open town square around the war memorial, the 17th century arcaded town hall, and numerous shops. There are some alleyways and a number of historic inns. Nearby attractions include the Castle Gardens and Meadows, the Agatha Christie Trail.

**Goring [26]:** Most people who have heard of Goring probably associate it with the attractive gap between the Berkshire or North Wessex Downs and the Chilterns known as the Goring Gap. Here the villages of Goring and Streatley stand on opposite sides of the River Thames, linked by a fine bridge which was built in 1923. The beautiful riverside setting and the views of the hills on either side make Goring an extremely attractive village. Two national long distance trails cross at the Goring Gap: The Thames Path and the Ridgeway.

**Beale Wildlife Park and Gardens [25]** is situated by the River Thames, between the villages of Pangbourne and Lower Basildon has three main areas of attraction: collections of small exotic animals, farm animals and birds; landscaped gardens and woodlands; and children's play areas. The park was founded in 1956 by Gilbert Beale as his own private park. The Inland Waterways Association's National Rally was held at Beale Park in 2003, 2006 and 2010

**Reading** is the premier shopping destination in the south east outside London with everything you could want all in one place. the two big shopping centres - The Oracle and Broad Street Mall - are located on the vibrant high street. It was an important centre in the medieval period, as the site of Reading Abbey, a monastery with strong royal connections

## Kennet & Avon Canal

Reading to Bristol 93 miles 106 wide locks one tunnel. Blakes lock is lock number 107. This is counted as a Thames lock. Locks 8 and 9 have been amalgamated in to Bath deep lock giving a rise of 19ft 5in.

Bath to Hanham Lock sizes are 75ft by 16ft.  
Reading to Bath the lock size is 70ft by 13ft 9in.

River Avon Navigation, Bristol to Bath is 18 miles and 7 locks.  
The canal section - Newbury to Bath is 57 miles long with 78 locks.  
River Kennet Navigation Newbury to Reading is 18½ miles long with 21 locks.

The majestic Kennet & Avon Canal a broad waterway built to epic proportions with Dundas and Avoncliff aqueducts, the Caen Hill flight and the Crofton and Claverton pumping stations. With the coming of the railways it fell into disrepair.

In 1948 a branch of the Inland Waterways Association was formed in Newbury and in 1951 this became the Kennet & Avon Canal Association which campaigned against the closure of the Kennet & Avon canal. In 1962 the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust was formed and restoration of the canal started in earnest. The canal was officially opened by the Queen in 1990, but a huge amount of work was still needed. This was completed with the aid of a £25m lottery bid.

West of the floating harbour is the **Clifton Suspension Bridge [20]** designed by Brunel. It opened in 1864, spanning the Avon Gorge and the River Avon, linking Clifton in Bristol to Leigh Woods in North Somerset. The bridge spans 214 metres between its two 26 metre high towers and stands 76 metres above the high water mark in the Avon river gorge. Although built for pedestrian and horse drawn traffic, the bridge was so ingeniously constructed that it is now capable of carrying millions of cars a year. Nearby is the observatory and Clifton "Village".

**Bristol Harbourside [19]:** Once a busy dock where sailors and merchants would trade goods and set sail for voyages of discovery, Bristol's Harbourside is now an attractive, modern development filled with restaurants, bars, shops and hotels. The area is alive with the buzz of Sunday markets, waterside restaurants and bars and a whole host of sports and activities including yachting, paddle boarding, cycling and rowing. Stroll around the water's edge and you will find Millennium Square acting as a fantastic central hub. Once a busy dock where sailors and merchants would trade goods and set sail for voyages of discovery, Bristol's Harbourside is now an attractive, modern development filled with restaurants, bars, shops and hotels.

The area is alive with Sunday markets, waterside restaurants and bars and a whole host of sports and activities including yachting, paddle boarding, cycling and rowing. There are major attractions such as Brunel's SS Great Britain, At-Bristol Science Centre, Bristol Aquarium, Watershed and M Shed. Bristol is host to a number of festivals including Bristol Harbour Festival and the Balloon Fiesta.

The floating harbour in the centre of Bristol marks the normal western limit of navigation for narrowboats. Once a busy commercial port, leisure activities now dominate.

River Avon Navigation, Bristol to Bath is 18 miles and 7 locks. The River is tidal as far as Keynsham. Bristol City Docks Authority runs the river to Hanham Lock. Hanham Lock marks the start of the Kennet & Avon Canal Navigation.

**Bath [18]** is known for its natural hot springs and 18th-century Georgian architecture. The museum at the site of its original Roman Baths includes The Great Bath, statues and a temple; the facility's Pump Room serves a popular afternoon tea. Bath's many iconic sights: Other sites include the magnificent Royal Crescent, The Circus, Pulteney Bridge and Bath Abbey. *Pride and Prejudice* fans take note: Jane Austen lived in Bath for many years, and much of her work was inspired by her time here. Bath has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The Bath locks mark the start of the canal section of the Kennet & Avon Canal Navigation. Bath to Newbury is 57 miles with 78 locks.

**Bath to Bradford on Avon [17]:** There is a 9 mile pound from Bath Top Lock to Bradford on Avon. The travels through Sydney Gardens, the attractive village of Bathampton and then onwards passed the Claverton Pumping Station to Dundas Aqueduct where the canal crosses the river Avon. The Somerset Coal Canal joins the Kennet & Avon Canal just west of the Aqueduct at Dundas Basin. The first ½ mile of this canal has been restored and is used as moorings. The River Avon is crossed again at Avoncliff which is an attractive little hamlet. The final mile to the lock is within a country park.

Claverton Pumping Station: Uses a 24-foot (7 m) wide wooden breastshot water wheel to drive two Boulton and Watt 18-foot long cast iron rocking beams, which power lift pumps to raise water 48 feet up to the canal.

Seven miles east of Bradford Lock is Semington, the junction of the Wilts & Berks Canal. The canal then climbs through the Semington and Seend locks to the Caen Hill Flight.

**Caen Hill Flight [21]:** The 29 locks have a rise of 237 feet in 2 miles (72 m in 3.2 km) or a 1 in 44 gradient. The locks come in three groups; the middle group has sixteen locks forming a steep flight in a straight line up the hillside and are designated as a scheduled monument. Because of the steepness of the terrain, the pounds between these locks are very short. As a result, 15 locks have unusually large sideways-extended pounds, to store water needed to operate them.

This flight of locks was designed by John Rennie as the solution to climbing the very steep hill, and was the last part of the canal to be completed. After the initial restoration Queen Elizabeth II officially re-opened the Kennet & Avon Canal in 1990 at the locks.

**The Vale of Pewsey [22]** forms a broad, low-lying landscape valley separating the two main chalk upland blocks of the Marlborough Downs to the north and Salisbury Plain to the south.

From Devizes in the west to Wootton Rivers in the east the remote 15 mile long canal pound meanders through the Vale passed the small hamlet of Honey Street which is at one of the areas where crop circles appear, the origin of these continues to be debated. Visible from Honey Street on the north side of the canal is the Alton Barnes white horse which was cut in 1812. The canal continues passed Pewsey to the attractive village of Wootton Rivers where the canal climbs to the summit and through the short Bruce tunnel and hence to Crofton.

**Crofton Pumping Station [23]:** The beam engines were built 200 years ago to supply water to the highest point of the Kennet & Avon canal, where it runs through Savernake Forest. The steam-powered pumping station is preserved and operates on selected weekends. It contains an operational Boulton & Watt steam engine dating from 1812 that is claimed to be the oldest working beam engine in the world in its original engine house and capable of doing the job for which it was installed.

From Crofton to Reading the railway is never far from the waterway.

**Highclere Castle [24]** is a country house in the Jacobethan style, with a park designed by Capability Brown. The 5,000-acre (2,000 ha) estate is about 5 miles (8.0 km) south of Newbury. It is the county seat of the Earl of Carnarvon.

Highclere Castle is the main filming location for the British television period drama Downton Abbey. It was also a filming location for the British comedy series *Jeeves and Wooster* with Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie. The castle and gardens are open to the public during July and August and at times during the rest of the year.

At Newbury the canal section ends at the River Kennet is entered. Newbury to Reading is 18½ miles with 21 locks. The navigation goes near some pretty villages and flooded gravel pits.

**Reading:** see River Thames section.

## Wilts & Berks Canal

New main line 54.2 miles 60 locks.

New North Wilts 9.7 miles 11 locks

Chippenham and Calne Branches 6.3 miles 7 locks

Total Wilts & Berks Canal System 70 miles 80 locks

Locks on the Wilts & Berks Canal 72ft x 7ft

Melksham Link: 3 wide locks 70ft by 13ft 9in down to the River Avon.

### Wilts & Berks Canal main line

The original line of the Wilts & Berks Canal has been built on so a new route using the River Avon has been identified. Three wide locks lower the navigation from the Kennet & Avon Canal to the River Avon. There is one narrow lock on the Avon and there a further 3 narrow locks will take the canal back to the original line north of Melksham. The canal passes the National Trust Village of Lacock.

**Lacock village [16]** dates from the 13th century and has many lime washed half-timbered and stone houses, was used as a location for many TV and film productions such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Moll Flanders* and *Emma*. The Abbey also featured in the recent Harry Potter films. Visiting the village is akin to taking a step back in time, owned and managed by the National Trust, it has been beautifully preserved and unchanged since it was a thriving township that traded in wool.

Lacock Abbey: Founded in 1232 and converted into a country house c.1540, the fine medieval cloisters, sacristy, chapter house and monastic rooms of the Abbey have survived largely intact. The 16th-century stable courtyard has half-timbered gables, a clock house, brewery and bake house. The Victorian woodland garden boasts a fine display of spring flowers, magnificent trees, an 18th-century summer house, Victorian Rose garden, newly restored botanic garden and ha-ha.

Fox Talbot Museum: The Museum of Photography commemorates the achievements of a former resident of the Abbey, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-77), inventor of the negative/positive photographic process and whose descendants gave the Abbey and village to the Trust in 1944.

The canal keeps climbing thorough the Pewsham Locks to where the original, now defunct, Chippenham Branch left the main line of the canal. A new Chippenham Branch using the River Avon is proposed. The junction would be just south of Stanley Aqueduct. The three mile Calne branch goes close to Bowood House and Calne is only 7 miles from Avebury.

**Bowood House & Gardens [15]:** Home of the Marquis and Marchioness of Lansdowne. It is a good family day out with extensive Adventure Playgrounds, younger children will enjoy meeting friendly farm animals at Tractor Ted's Little Farm and undercover fun in the Soft Play Palace.

There are 100 acres of beautiful parkland, designed by 'Capability' Brown, offering a lake, arboretum, pinetum and cascade. Bowood House hosts a wealth of unique items from Queen Victoria's wedding chair to Napoleon's death mask and an extensive art collection.

During the spring (late April to early June) visit the stunning Rhododendron Walks, this woodland oasis offers breathtaking vistas of colour covering over 60 acres.

**Avebury [14]:** Seven miles from Calne via the A4. At Avebury, the world's largest prehistoric stone circle (circa 2500 BC) partially encompasses a pretty village. The Alexander Keiller Museum is divided into the Stables, displaying archaeological treasures from across the World Heritage Site, and the Barn, a 17th-century threshing barn housing interactive displays and children's activities that reveal the story of this ancient landscape. Avebury Manor, on the edge of the village, was transformed in a partnership between the National Trust and the BBC, creating a hands-on experience that celebrates and reflects the lives of the people who once lived here.

Avebury is the centre of many pre-historic sites including Silbury Hill the largest man-made mound in Europe completed in about 2400 BC, and the West Kennet Long Barrow, Built in around 3650 BC.

The canal continues to climb through remote countryside passed Royal Wootton Bassett.

**Royal Wootton Bassett:** In October 2011 the town received the Letters Patent from Princess Anne on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen and became Royal Wootton Bassett. This honour was given to the town because of the support and respect given to the brave servicemen and women, flown in from Lyneham, who tragically lost their lives in defence of our country. Wootton Bassett is only the third town in British History to receive this honour.

Summit Lock, now Chaddington top lock, used to mark the start of the nine mile summit pound. However the mainline of the canal is Swindon has been built upon and a new "bypass" has been proposed to the south and east of the town. This new section of canal starts at Wichelstowe Junction and climbs to a short new summit pound. The "bypass" is approximately 9 miles long and will have 17 locks. It passes close to Coate Water.

**Coate Water [12]** is a man made reservoir built by the Wilts & Berks Canal Company in the 1820s. The reservoir was constructed by building 3 dams in order to flood the adjacent farm land. It is now a major recreational asset for Swindon and much of it is protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The canal continues its remote journey through the Vale of the White Horse. At its closest the canal is just over 2 miles from the Uffington White Horse.

The **White Horse of Uffington [11]** is thought to be the oldest hill figure in Britain. The image is a stylised representation of a horse (some would say dragon) some 374 feet in length, and has been dated to the later Bronze Age or Iron Age, between 1740 and 210 BC. It may have been a territorial marker or a fertility symbol – its function is not certain.

Dragon Hill is a low flat-topped mound situated in the valley below the White Horse. In legend it is the place where St George slew the dragon, its blood spilling on the hilltop and leaving forever a bare white patch where no grass can grow. Some suggest that the horse is a representation of St George's steed or even of the slain dragon itself.



Uffington Castle is situated some 170 metres south of the white horse at the top of the hill is an impressive Iron Age hill fort, once protected by timber walls on top of the surviving banks and ditches, and faced with sarsen stones. It is likely that the tribe who created the White Horse once lived within this hill fort.

Wayland's Smithy is an atmospheric historic site about a mile's walk along the Ridgeway from the Uffington White Horse. A Neolithic chambered long barrow, it was once believed to have been the home of Wayland, the Saxon god of metal working. Human remains found on the site indicate that 14 people were interred in an earlier burial structure between 3590 and 3550 BC. Between 3460 and 3400 BC a second far larger barrow was constructed on top. It is the ruins of this that can be explored by visitors to the site today.

The canal continues towards Grove and Wantage.

**Wantage** a lovely small market town in the Vale of White Horse, and has a good range of shops and services. Wantage was a small Roman settlement and King Alfred the Great was born in here in 849. The town's buildings are mostly 17th and 18th century with narrow cobbled streets and passages. John Betjeman, Poet Laureate, lived in the town for many years and wrote a number of poems about Wantage and the surrounding areas for example "Wantage Bells" and "On Leaving Wantage".

The Vale and Downland Museum (Wantage) has been nationally acclaimed as an outstanding example of community partnership. The site was originally part of the medieval manor of Priorshold. The plot of land and the house were leased to Wantage tradesmen after the dissolution of the priory in 1538. Archives of the Dean and Chapter of Windsor show that the site was let to Alexander Doe in 1662 and then to William Hazell, a wheelwright, in 1683.

The Thames Water Abingdon Reservoir was a proposal, made in 2006 by Thames Water, to build a large reservoir between Wantage and Abingdon, this would be on the line of the canal. In 2007 the Environment Agency noted that need for the reservoir was not proven.

The canal through Abingdon has been built upon so that a new canal line by passing the town has been identified. The new junction with the River Thames is called Jubilee Junction.

**Abingdon:** see River Thames section.

### **New North Wilts Canal**

Starting from Wichelstowe Junction the New North Wilts Canal is 10 miles long with 11 locks. A route has been identified through the centre of Swindon and this passes close to the Steam Railway Museum and Railway Village.

**Swindon** has its origin as a small market town, used mainly for barter trade until the mid-1800s. The original settlement is now known as Old Town. With the arrival of the Great Western Railway in 1840 a whole new town was created between the new railway works and Swindon Hill. The centre is fully pedestrianised and offers both an indoor and outdoor shopping experience. There are plenty of restaurants to choose from with a large array of cuisines. There is also a buzzing arts scene with many events taking place throughout the year at venues including the Wyvern Theatre, Arts Centre and Swindon Museum and Art Gallery.

The Wilts & Berks Canal was used during the construction of Brunel's Great Western Railway. The new line of the North Wilts Canal passes close to the **Steam Railway Museum and Railway Village [13]**. Between 1841 and 1842, Brunel's Swindon Works was built for the repair and maintenance of locomotives on the railway. The GWR also built a small railway village to house some of its workers. The Steam Railway Museum has many exhibits of engines and rolling stock, it also tells other stories including the social story of the railway community in Swindon and the life of Brunel.

North of Swindon the canal drops towards the Thames.

**Blunsdon Canal - Railway Interchange [6]:** There is a proposal to create a canal basin next to the steam railway to create a potentially historic canal railway interchange, which will be a unique feature on the present day canal network. The addition of a 70 foot trip boat and the potential to hire bicycles, canoes and day boats will attract tourists as well as residents of Swindon and Cricklade.

The canal through Cricklade has been lost so an eastern bypass has been proposed to a new junction with the Thames & Severn Canal.

*The following two canals are included for completeness.*

## Somerset Coal Canal

Somerset Coal Canal from the Kennet & Avon Canal at Limley Stoke to the Somerset Coal field

For such a short canal (10 miles) there is a massive history. The line of the canal was determined by John Rennie and William Smith the "Father of English Geology" was appointed as the surveyor.

The main line of the canal ran from Limley Stoke to Midford. The canal had two branches with connecting tramways to the mines. The northern branch ran from Midford to Paulton and Timsbury Basins. The southern branch was constructed from Midford to Radstock.

The 135 ft drop in level from Paulton to Dundas was concentrated at Combe Hay where it could be overcome by three 'Caisson Locks'. Each Caisson Lock consisted of a large water-filled masonry chamber, in which was submerged a long watertight box - the 'Caisson'. A boat could be floated into the box which was then sealed and, being neutrally buoyant, was easily moved to a new level before letting the boat out. For geological, rather than engineering reasons, this failed and was replaced with a gravity-operated railway, the Inclined Plane. This temporary expedient caused transshipment delays which were eventually overcome when a flight of twenty-two conventional locks was opened in 1805

On the southern branch, meanwhile, the canal had only been built from Radstock as far as Twinhoe; from there to Midford a tramway was constructed to avoid the expense of a further flight of locks. Once again, transshipment proved inefficient. The canal was also losing water due to geological problems so it ceased operation and, instead, the towpath was used as a track bed for extending the tramway. This now ran all the way from Radstock to the only remaining transshipment point at its junction with the northern line at Midford.

The canal was abandoned in 1904 when the Great Western Railway bought the canal in order to build its Limpley Stoke to Camerton branch line in 1910, which was then closed in 1951.

In 2008 the Somerset Coal Canal Society. changed its constitution to allow restoration of the canal. At that time there were no specific plans for restoration of the whole canal, but some of the preservation work involved restoring canal structures.

#### William Smith (1769 to 1839)

Was a surveyor working on both the Somerset Coal Canal and the Kennet & Avon Canal when he made an important observation. He noticed that most sedimentary rock strata contained characteristic fossils which served to place these rocks in their correct chronological order. He produced the first geological map of the Bath area in 1815. William Smith later travelled all over Britain recording the strata and became known as the Father of English Geology.

### **Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal**

34 miles 22 locks 3 tunnels including the 2192 yard tunnel at Oxenhall. The locks are designed to take boats 70 feet by 7 feet 6 inches beam. Access to the canal network is via the tidal river Severn. Maisie Moor lock (now closed) on the western channel of the Severn.

This is a mainly rural canal passing through beautiful Gloucestershire and Herefordshire countryside with Newent, Ledbury and Hereford being the only towns on the route.

The canal was completely opened in 1845, however relative prosperity was short lived and in 1862 the canal was leased to the West Midland railway and the GWR. The canal was closed in 1881 to permit the construction of the Ledbury to Gloucester railway.

The Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust was formed in 1992 with the specific aim of complete restoration.