

Hi, I'm Ollie the otter. I will be guiding you along the canal today!

This canal is the Stroudwater Navigation. It was officially opened in 1779 and its main cargo was coal. It is 8 miles in length and rises 31.22m. Despite competition from the railways the canal continued to be profitable until 1922. It was finally abandoned in 1954.

So, how do you make a canal boat go up and down 31.2m?

You use locks! A lock is a chamber that holds water. It has gates at each end. To go up a hill you enter the chamber when it is nearly empty, release the water from the other side into the chamber. This lifts the boat up to a higher canal level. When the level is the same in the chamber as the direction you want to travel, you open the gate at the other end and cruise out. To go down hill you enter the chamber and release the water so that you are level with the water in the canal below and then open the doors and cruise out.

The water is released via paddles in the locks which are raised and lowered. This is done by hand with a special tool called a windlass from the side of the canal. In the past people were employed as lockkeepers whose job it was to open and close the locks for any boats coming through. Now boat drivers usually have to do this themselves. The ladders in the chamber of the lock are not just in case people fall in but also so that boat drivers can exit the lock to open the gates.

2. Dock Lock

This lock took its name from the nearby dry dock in the Stroudwater Company's maintenance yard. Within the yard there was a carpenter's shop, a blacksmith's forge and a saw pit.

The area behind dock lock is actually a little island as there is a channel of water, known as the back brook, that runs along the other side of it. The building you can see through the trees is the old Eastington workhouse. The back brook would be used to transport stone to the workhouse to be broken up for road building. This work would be done by men, women AND CHILDREN!

Can you find the spill weir?

This acts as a way for water from the canal to escape so that it doesn't overflow, just like the overflow hole in a sink.

Pike Bridge & Lock

3. Pike Bridge & Lock

Originally this lock was named after the nearby village but it's name changed to Pike Lock in 1803 after the Victorian house built next to it was called Turnpike House. The road that runs along here was formerly the main road and was called Turnpike Road.

In 1803 the Pike Lock gates had to be replaced after they were used for target practice by the local militia. Their musket balls had completely penetrated the heavy wooden gates.

4. Blunder Lock

Right from the very start Blunder Lock has lived up to its name:

John Gleeve's worst day at work:

The lock is called Blunder Lock after John Gleeve, the engineer in charge, who made a mistake in the calculations when designing the lock. Instead of just fixing the problem and forgetting about his error, the canal company chose to name it Blunder Lock to remember his mistake forever.

In April 1834 a loaded boat entered Blunder Lock too quickly and struck the gates at the end really hard causing them to burst open. The pressure of the immense body of water flung the boat completely out of the lock. The woman at the helm was fortunately not harmed but the accident shut the canal down for a fortnight until it was repaired.

Luck wasn't on the side of Blunder Lock again when in August 1940 a stray bomb destroyed the upper gates.

Have you heard the stories being told at Blunder Lock? Find the audio post and hear what life was like living and working near the canals.

I hope you have had an otterly amazing day!

5. Newtown Lock

Newtown Lock is named after the small hamlet adjacent to the lock.

See if you can find the boundary stone that marks the distance to Stroud. You might need to look carefully as over the years they have broken off and are now much smaller than they would have been.

Blunder Lock

Newtown Lock

Westfield Bridge & Lock

Dock Lock

Western Depot

1. Westfield Bridge & Lock

Westfield Bridge was due to be destroyed with the construction of the M5 motorway but a local farmer objected. Mrs Christine Martin wanted to keep the bridge as it had always been part of her farm. The shape and slope of the bridge meant it was perfect for herding cattle if they needed to be taken in a lorry or treated by a vet. The Stroudwater Company agreed that it could be kept.

One morning she heard a loud explosion from the bridge. She rushed to the site to find that workmen had demolished part of the lock. She could see her bridge was next as they were making a hole and filling it with explosives. She pleaded for them to stop but they refused. She stood on the bridge all day until it was time for the men to go home. The next day she was able to speak to whoever was in charge and stopped the demolition from happening and Westfield Bridge was saved!

BANG

Safety Warnings

- Please do not stand close to the edge of the canal or the lock gates.
- Be careful when crossing the busy Spring Hill Road.
- Watch your step when walking along the towpath - it can be uneven/slippy!

Can you spot where the canal stops?

This is known as the 'Missing Mile'. This section of the canal was filled in when the M5 motorway was built in 1970.