

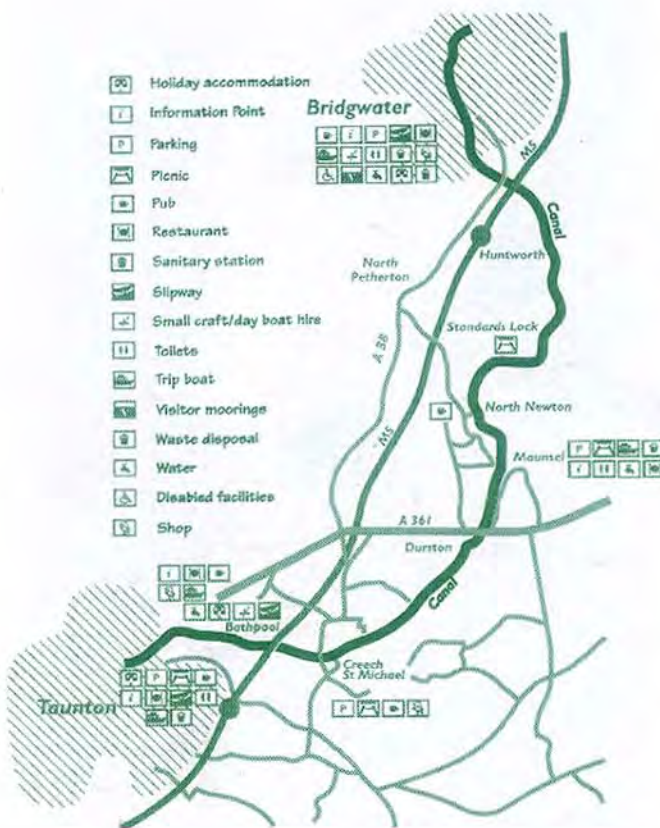
Circular Walks from the Car Park

All these walks begin at the Canalside Car Park at Huntworth, next to the Boat and Anchor public house. Huntworth is a delightful hamlet with modernised canal cottages that retain their original appeal. Huntworth Canal Bridge was rebuilt in the 1920's to ease the gradient for today's heavier traffic.



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FACILITIES ALONG THE BRIDGWATER AND TAUNTON CANAL



Bridgwater & Taunton Canal Circular Walks Huntworth



A History of the Canal

The Bridgwater and Taunton Canal was part of an ambitious 19th century scheme to create a route between Exeter and Bristol, which would avoid the treacherous sea route around Lands End. Sadly the great link never materialized though the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal opened in 1827, joining the new docks at Bridgwater in 1841, and making its total length 15 miles.

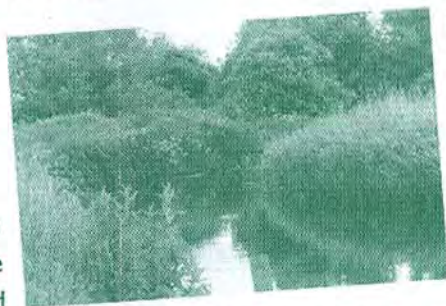
The canal was used mainly for the transportation of coal, timber and limestone that was brought into Bridgwater Dock and then transferred to barges and small tub-boats. The commercial success of the canal ended when the Bristol and Exeter railway opened, the company that eventually bought the canal, and commercial traffic ceased in 1907.

Bridgwater Dock was once ranked fifth amongst Britain's ports and was a safe haven for schooners. A visit to Blake Museum in Bridgwater will provide you with some fascinating history on the town.

Restoration

Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council working jointly with British Waterways brought about the restoration of the canal for amenity purposes between the years 1980 and 1995. The replacement of 14 low bridges was the main part

of the restoration programme (the original swing bridges were removed in wartime to create a line of defence). Seven bridges were replaced by swing bridges and seven by raised bridges, and this, along with the restoration of six locks, brought the canal back to life - it was reopened to navigation in June 1994.



Conservation and Wildlife

The canal is an important ecosystem for wildlife because it represents a thin ribbon of land and water in an environment that is used intensively for agriculture outside the urban areas.

The canal is an excellent example of a wetland habitat, with clear unpolluted water that supports plant, fish, bird and insect life.

Vast stocks of roach, pike, perch, carp, bream and trench can be spotted, with kingfishers, herons, dragonflies and damselflies flying overhead. The fringes of the canal are home to much interesting flora and fauna.



The Canal Today

Nowadays the canal is used as an important recreational resource. Informal activities like fishing and cycling take place - the towpath is used by Sustrans as part of their National cycle Route that runs from Padstow to Bath/Bristol. Sections of the towpath are also used as part of the River Parrett Trail that runs from Chedington in South Dorset through to Bridgwater and beyond. Environmentally the canal is used as a water supply for Durleigh reservoir - it acts as a drainage system to take surface water run off from agricultural land and storm water in urban areas.



The original route of the canal ran from Taunton and joined the River Parrett at Huntworth. To increase the length of the canal an Act was obtained in 1837 authorising the extension from Huntworth to Bridgwater, and the building of the dock and its entrance lock to the River Parrett.

Bridgwater

Bridgwater has a rich industrial past, with activities that include brewing, glass making, engineering and foundries, the manufacture of bricks, tiles and Bath Bricks, Cellophane and textile industries.

During the eighteenth century Bridgwater flourished through its coastal trade and local industries but it was the Industrial Revolution that fuelled the spectacular rise of the Somerset brick and tile industry. In the nineteenth century the brick industry became truly intercontinental. Bridgwater bricks and tiles can be found in the West Indies as well as North Africa and other Mediterranean coastal areas.

The last surviving kiln at the former Barham Brother's yard at East Quay is a poignant reminder of the brick and tile industry that was so important in the county. The kiln, which has been repaired by Somerset County Council with the help of Sedgemoor District Council, is the heart of the Somerset Brick and Tile Museum. The new museum building and kiln is open to the public every Thursday and Friday.

The Bath Brick was another Bridgwater product to find its way to all corners of the British Empire. The Bath Brick was fine abrasive grit that was deposited on 'slime batches', banks of silt on the Parrett between Burrowbridge and Bridgwater. When they were made into blocks these 'bricks' were used for scouring iron and steel cutlery.



Walk No. 1 - 4km/1.75 miles

This easy walk takes you along the canal and River Parrett with the main Taunton to Bristol railway line running in between. From the Canalside Car Park take the towpath to your left when facing the canal. Continue along this towpath until reaching Huntworth Canal Bridge and road. Leave the towpath and on reaching the road take a left turn (be aware of passing vehicles at this junction) crossing a railway bridge. On reaching a bend (facing the River Parrett) take a left turn and walk along the bank with the river on your right. This pleasant walk takes you back towards Bridgwater with a fine view of the Polden Hills to be seen on your right. Continue over two stiles and on reaching the third take a left turn. Carry on down this track (Screech Owl Nature Reserve is on your left) until reaching the railway. Take great care when crossing the railway line and please make sure the gates are secured behind you. The Boat and Anchor public house and Canalside Car Park will be seen directly ahead.

LOCATION MAP
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Walk No. 3 - 3.2km/2 miles

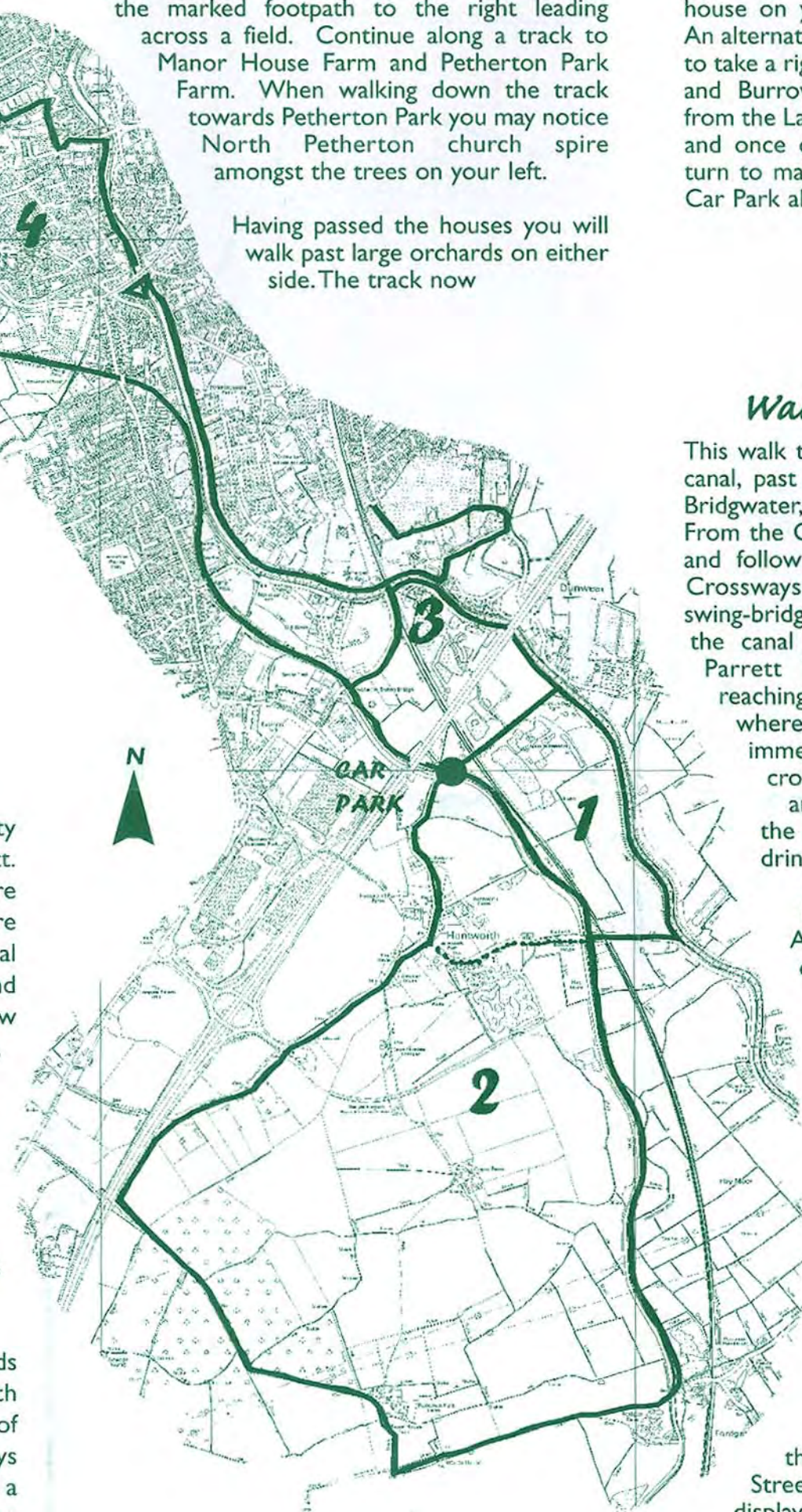
This walk visits Dunwear Ponds, a County Wildlife Site, on the far side of the River Parrett. The ponds cover 15 hectares of land and are sited on former clay pits. Large clay pits were formed when the clay was dug out for the local brick and tile industry. They were flooded and have formed the lakes and ponds that have now become a rich habitat for flora and wildlife, especially bird life. The habitat of woodland, scrubland, reedbed and open water have become home to many birds, mammals and butterflies. Many people use this delightful setting for recreational purposes such as fishing and walking although no cycling is permitted and dogs are allowed around the site only if on a lead.

From the Canalside Car Park turn right towards Bridgwater and follow the canal towpath alongside some canal cottages. At the end of the towpath turn first right, leaving Crossways Swing-Bridge on your left, and continue down a concrete and gravel track. On reaching the River Parrett cross over the pedestrian bridge, adjacent to the railway bridge and turn right. Continue along the path until reaching a stile. Turn left and carry straight on into Plum Lane turning right at Chess Farm. Continue along this minor road and take a left turn on reaching a road. An immediate left turn will take you into Dunwear car park and ponds.

Walk through a stile beside a wooden five-barred gate and follow the path to your left until reaching the end (it is not a circular route so the same path will return you to the car park).

This scenic route takes you along the canal towards Taunton, across countryside to the outskirts of North Petherton and back into the village of Huntworth. Taking a left turn towards Taunton, along the canal towpath, continue for approximately 2 miles until reaching Fordgate Swing-Bridge, opposite Canal Cottage. Along the route watch out for the planet Uranus, one of the planets in the Somerset Space Walk which is a true scale model of the solar system with the planets placed along the towpath. Cross over the bridge towards Fordgate Farm and take the marked footpath to the right leading across a field. Continue along a track to Manor House Farm and Petherton Park Farm. When walking down the track towards Petherton Park you may notice North Petherton church spire amongst the trees on your left.

Having passed the houses you will walk past large orchards on either side. The track now



Seating has been provided at various points along the way to enhance your enjoyment of the area. On leaving Dunwear Ponds take the same route back to the railway bridge and having crossed the pedestrian bridge take a left turn. Continue along this path, passing under the motorway bridge, and continue along the riverbank towards Burrowbridge. On reaching a stile take a right turn down a track that leads to a railway line. Take great care when crossing making sure that the gates are secured behind you. Once over the crossing the Boat and Anchor public house and Canalside Car Park will be seen.

Walk No. 2 - 8.4km/5.25 miles

turns into a minor road leading to North Petherton and just before reaching the motorway bridge take a footpath on your right. Take the steps down to the field edge, turn left and continue a short distance until reaching a stile. Once over the stile keep to the edge of the field, next to the motorway, until reaching another stile. Continue along a minor road that takes you onto the main Huntworth road. Leaving Bridgwater Lawn Tennis Club on your right walk through the village of Huntworth until reaching the Boat and Anchor public house on your right (over the swing-bridge). An alternative to walking back along the road is to take a right turn at the signpost to Moorland and Burrowbridge (approximately 300 yards from the Lawn Tennis Club). Carry on this road and once over Huntworth Bridge take a left turn to make your way back to the Canalside Car Park alongside the canal.

Walk No. 4 - 7km/4.3 miles

This walk takes you into Bridgwater along the canal, past the docks, through the centre of Bridgwater, and back along the River Parrett. From the Canalside Car Park take a right turn and follow the canal towpath until reaching Crossways Swing-Bridge. Cross over the swing-bridge turning right and continue along the canal towpath (also part of the River Parrett Trail) through Bridgwater until reaching the end at Bowerings Animal Feeds where you will see Bridgwater Docks immediately in front. Take a right turn, crossing another swing-bridge, and take an immediate left turn to the end of the Docks, here you can take a cool drink in the Admirals Landing. Follow the pavement towards the centre of Bridgwater, along Northgate, past Admiralty Quay on your right, and cross at the traffic lights opposite Sedgemoor District Council Offices. Continue down this road, leaving a large car park on your left, and on reaching the end turn right into West Quay. In the 19th and early 20th Century the quay would have been crowded with shipping. Continue on down the street looking out for the medieval water gate somewhere on your right. This is a simple Norman Arch (c. 1200) through which supplies were taken into the castle. Carry on down the street until reaching the library and Blake Gardens. If you would like to know more about the town visit Blake Museum in Blake Street, a small museum full of objects, displays and descriptions of Bridgwater. Continue through the gardens and follow the path leading under the road. Once on the other side continue straight ahead turning right to go around the houses and back onto the main road. Take a right turn, walk across Blake Bridge taking a right turn into Salmon Parade. Continue along the riverbank and take the cycle track (opposite the Bridgwater Fire Station) where you continue along the river bank until reaching the railway. Take the pedestrian bridge adjacent to the rail crossing turning right at the end. Follow this concrete and gravel track back to Crossways Swing-Bridge on the canal. Just before the swing-bridge turn left and follow the canal towpath back to the Canalside Car Park.