



SHROPSHIRE CANAL TRAILS



Shrewsbury Canal (Trench Branch) Wombridge Canal

A 19 mile (30 km) trail by car or bike, passing features on the Trench Branch of the Shrewsbury Canal plus the Wombridge Canal. The Wombridge Canal was opened in 1788 and went from Old Yard Junction at Donnington Wood to the coal mines at Wombridge. The Trench Branch of the Shrewsbury Canal was opened in 1794 and went from Old Yard Junction to Wappenshall Junction. The Wombridge Canal sold the section between Trench Lock and Old Yard Junction to the Shrewsbury Canal so both share that section. The Trench Inclined Plane ceased working in 1921 and both of these sections then closed.



The trail starts at Wappenshall Junction but you can join or leave it at various points en route. More information and photographs for the sites can be found on the website below. Most of the walking part of the route is on good footpaths or level grass that can be accessed by wheelchair. There are, however, two sections at Turnip Lock and Old Yard Junction that might be difficult for disabled. The trail should take about 3 hours to complete.

<http://shropshirehistory.com/canals/sites.htm>

To get to Wappenshall, leave the M54 at Junction 6 and head north on the A5223. Turn right at the 5th roundabout signed for Bridgnorth A442 and take the first turn left on an unsignposted road, just before a layby on the right. Go past Wappenshall Farm and, as you come into Wappenshall, look for a narrow drive on the left

1	WAPPENSHALL JUNCTION NGR SJ662145
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This was a major junction between the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals, as well as a branch heading south-east to join up with the other canals around Telford. There are two warehouses still existing, together with other buildings and a roving bridge. The site is now managed by Shrewsbury & Newport Canal Trust, who are in the process of refurbishing it.

Head back the way you came and turn left on the A442 (0.8). At the roundabout (1.5) take the 3rd exit and park in a layby on the left just before the houses 1.8). Walk towards the houses and turn left along a footpath. At the end of this you will see the obvious wooden frame of a lock.

2	HADLEY PARK LOCK & BRIDGE NGR SJ672132
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This is a guillotine lock on the Shrewsbury Canal where the lock gates were raised vertically instead of being moved sideways. The wooden frame and pulley are still standing and the only other one still existing is at Turnip Lock to the south. There is also a bridge which can be seen by pushing through the trees on the other side of the path. The lock is Grade II Listed.

Follow the footpath that heads south to the right of the lock. Opposite the 4th wooden seat, push through the trees on the left to see another lock frame.

3	TURNIP LOCK NGR SJ674131
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This is another guillotine lock with the wooden frame still standing. It is of a slightly different design with two metal pulleys. The far lock gates are closed and usually have water flowing over the top. It is Grade II Listed.

Go back to the car and head back to the roundabout (2.1). Take the 4th exit onto the A442 and straight across the next roundabout (3.1). Go straight across the next double roundabout (3.5) onto the A442 dual carriageway. Take the first exit signed Dawley B4373 (4.1) and turn right at the roundabout signed Wombridge B4373. Take the first turning left (4.6) and turn left at the T-junction

(4.7). Turn left onto Wombridge Road (4.8) and park on the left next to a church (5.0). Walk towards the park and note the overgrown area on the left.

Very early canals used Flash Locks, where there was a single gate and a boat was taken through with the water flow when opened. Going upriver, a boat had to be pulled through. The Pound Lock was invented in China in AD 983 and this had a rectangular chamber with two Guillotine Gates, which were opened vertically. The Mitre Gate was invented by Leonardo da Vinci in the 15th Century. This has V-shaped gates held together by the water pressure and the first one in Britain was introduced on the River Lee at Waltham Abbey in 1574. Both Guillotine and Mitre Gates were used on the Telford canals.

All of the Shrewsbury Canal locks were built with mitred top gates and guillotine bottom gates. The purpose behind this was that gates opening inwards took up space and the use of a lifting guillotine gate allowed four tub boats in at the same time. The gate-lifting mechanism consisted of a wooden gantry with pulleys and chains. A windlass was used to raise the gate and there was a counterweight to equalise the weight, originally this was simply a box of stones or scrap iron. The guillotine gates were tricky to move as they stuck in frost and had to be prised free with bars. They also had a habit of bouncing off the slotted sill which meant more work at the windlass.

4	WOMBRIDGE TUNNEL PORTAL NGR SJ690115
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This is where the Wombridge Canal emerged from a 60 yard tunnel but the portal has been infilled and only traces of the canal bed remain. The tunnel is a bit of a mystery since there seems to be no reason why one was needed. In addition, old maps show the canal ending here. It was built to carry coal from the Wombridge mines but these are further on. Was the coal carried to a wharf here - who knows?

Turn right out of the car park and immediately left onto Priory Road. Turn left onto Church Parade (5.3) and turn left just after the orange seat on the field. Park where the road narrows to one lane (5.4). Walk diagonally left between the wood and houses and keep to the left of a line of trees.

5	WOMBRIDGE CANAL NGR SJ693115
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There is a short section of the Wombridge Canal here and there is water flowing but only the bed remains. It continued to the left towards the tunnel but this section has all been built over. To the right it has been infilled.

Head back to the road and follow it to the left as it becomes a footpath. Turn right under a modern bridge where the canal once passed under a railway. Turn left after the bridge and follow the footpath to the left of the houses.

The footpath follows the original line of the canal until it bends to the right and has been built over.

Go back to the car and turn right at the T-junction. Turn left at the T-junction (5.6) and turn left onto Leonard Street (5.7). Turn left at the end (5.8) and follow this road to a T-junction, where you turn left signed Telford Town Centre B4373 (6.4). At the traffic lights turn right (6.6) and just before the Bridge pub turn left onto Teagues Crescent (6.8). Turn left onto Juniper Drive (7.0) and immediately right onto Capewell Road. Follow it to the Blue Pig pub (7.3).

6	TRENCH INCLINED PLANE NGR SJ691112
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Where the road starts to bend right was the top of the Trench Inclined Plane. The mound on the left was actually a mine shaft and nothing to do with the canal. The incline was on the Shrewsbury Canal, which continued from the bottom of the incline towards the Turnip Lock already visited. The incline was opened in in 1793, being 669ft long and climbing a height of 75ft. The road follows the line of the inclined plane down the hill to the pub. Eight boats per hour was the maximum number that could be handled, to do which required an engineman and boy at the summit, and a man at the lower level.

7	THE BLUE PIG NGR SJ687123
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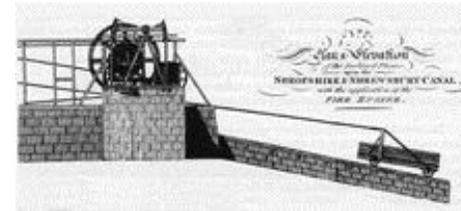
This pub used to be called the Shropshire Arms and was obviously a popular port of call for the canal workers. When this trade ceased, it catered for workers at the nearby ironworks and this is how it got its name. The ironworks produced pig iron, so called because the shape of the ingots resembled an upturned sow. The iron went a bluish colour as it cooled and the workers got covered with blue dust, which they took with them to the pub. In time, the name of the house changed as a result. Why not take the opportunity for a break and get refreshments here.

8	TRENCH POOL NGR SJ684125
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The large reservoir next to the pub used to be a major water supply for the Shropshire Canal.

The Trench Inclined Plane consisted of twin railway tracks, each of which held a cradle. Boats would be floated onto the cradles, which had larger wheels at the back to keep the boat level. A third set of wheels were mounted at the front, which ran on extra rails in the dock, to prevent the cradle tipping forwards as it ran over the top sill. Although the plane was partially counterbalanced, with loaded boats going down the plane pulling empty boats up, a steam engine was also provided, to pull the boats over the top sill.

To ensure that the boats remained in a horizontal position on the incline the wheels on the lower end of the cradle were larger. At the top side of the cradle there were two vertical posts between which a "bridle chain" was slung. The long rope which hauled the cradles was attached to bridle chains. As most of the traffic was coal, which was going down the plane (traffic going up was mostly wheat for the Donnington Wood Mill), the cradles worked by counterbalance. At the lower end the rails went into the water so that the boats could easily be floated on and off the submerged cradle. The complication was at the top where the cradle had to negotiate a sill, without upsetting the boat.



The engine house was at the top of the incline, its roof extending out over the sill. Under this roof was a large drum onto which the rope which hauled the cradle, wound on and off. Behind the drum was a pair of wheels which the rope passed over and under before going onto the drum. The rope drum was supported by three stone piers, the cradles passing into the docks of the top basin on either side of the centre pier. This pier housed the brake which controlled the speed of the cradle, and to this pier were attached two heavy winding chains. To both sides of each dock there were long pieces of wood, slightly tilted towards the water, which served as rails.

As the ascending cradle approached the sill the brake would be applied. A winding chain was then attached to the cradle and the engine really came in to play, hauling the cradle over the sill. At that point the main rope and bridle chains would fall slack, a third set of wheels on the side of the cradle would run along the wooden rails attached to the side of the dock, taking over support from the smaller wheels on the cradle. The winding chain would prevent the cradle going too far. Boats could then be floated off and on. The process was then reversed with the winding chain being used to pull the boat over the sill before the cradle was stopped to allow it to be removed.

Head back up Capewell Road. Turn left onto Juniper Drive (7.6) and immediately right onto Teagues Crescent. Turn left at the T-junction onto Wombridge Road (7.8). The Bridge Inn is modern and had no connection with the canal but the line of conifers just after it on the left mark where the canal crossed. Turn right onto Richmond Avenue (7.9) and right at the end onto Church Road (8.2) Opposite a cemetery, stop in the car park of a large building on the right (8.3).

The standard boat used on canals is termed a “narrowboat”. This is because it should be built no more than 7ft wide to be able to negotiate the locks. To compensate for this, they are relatively long and can be up to 70ft in length. As a result, they look narrow and hence the name

Another development was the smaller tub-boat, which was made of either wood or iron. It was used on the Duke of Bridgwater’s Canal and thus adopted by Lord Gower for his Donnington Wood Canal. Since narrowboats would be too big for inclined planes, tub-boats were subsequently adopted for the local canals. The Shropshire version was square, 20ft long and 6ft 4 inches wide. Those used on the Ketley Canal could carry 8 tons but those on the other canals were not so deep and only carried 5 tons. They were connected together in trains pulled by a horse and one horse could pull 12 tub boats carrying some 60 tons of coal. The locks on the Shrewsbury Canal were designed so that four tubs could fit into them.

9	DONNINGTON WOOD MILL NGR SJ698125
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This has now been converted into flats but it was once a corn mill. The canal ran next to it and wheat was brought here along the Shrewsbury Canal. In fact, the traffic to this mill was the only thing that kept the canal open towards the end. The last journey on the canal before it closed in 1921 was 18 tons of wheat carried in 4 tub-boats.

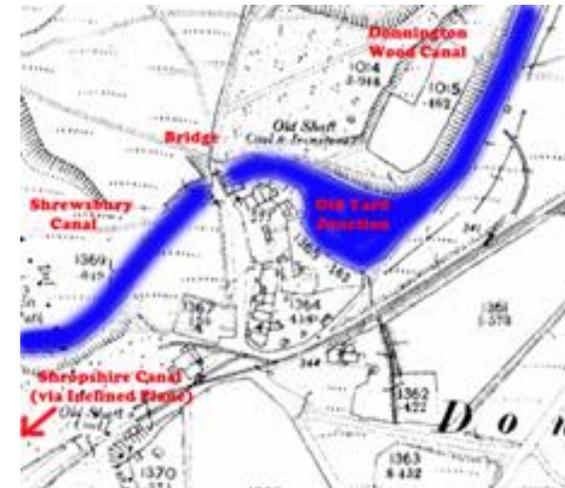
The next section is optional.

Between the mill and the school is a footpath that follows the original line of the canal as it looped around the contours. It passes along the back of the school and, where the path turns right, the canal continued straight on to loop around what is now the running track of the leisure centre. Where the path turns right again, it picks up the line of the canal to emerge at Teagues Crescent opposite the Bridge Inn. There is no trace of the canal along the footpath as it has been infilled.

Back at the car, turn right out of the mill car park onto Church Road and turn left on Wade Road (8.5). After a short distance, a wide pedestrian only road can be seen on the right. This is Canal Side and, as the name suggests, it follows the route the canal took. The footpath on the left also follows the route through to Church Road. Carry on and turn right onto Dickens Road (8.6) and right at the end onto Furnace Lane (8.7). Turn right at the T-junction onto Oakengates Road (8.8) and turn left onto Smith Crescent (8.9). Follow this to the end and park next to a gate (19.1). Go through the gate and turn right through a stile along a footpath. Where there is a bench on the right with metal swan legs, go through the trees behind it and down into the depression.

10	OLD YARD JUNCTION NGR SJ704124
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This was Old Yard Junction and was once filled with water. It was an important junction where the Shrewsbury Canal, Donnington Wood Canal and Shropshire Canal all met up. At the side nearest Smith Crescent, you will find a bridge that brought the Shrewsbury Canal into the Junction. The other side has been infilled but you can look through the grille. To the left is some broken brickwork that is probably the remains of a building.



The ground level just south of the bridge has been lowered and the continuation of the Donnington Wood Canal has been buried from work to create the adjacent industrial estate. A short tramway connected the junction to the bottom of the Wrockwardine Wood Inclined Plane. The route of this has been buried under the houses.

This is the end of the trail so return to the car.