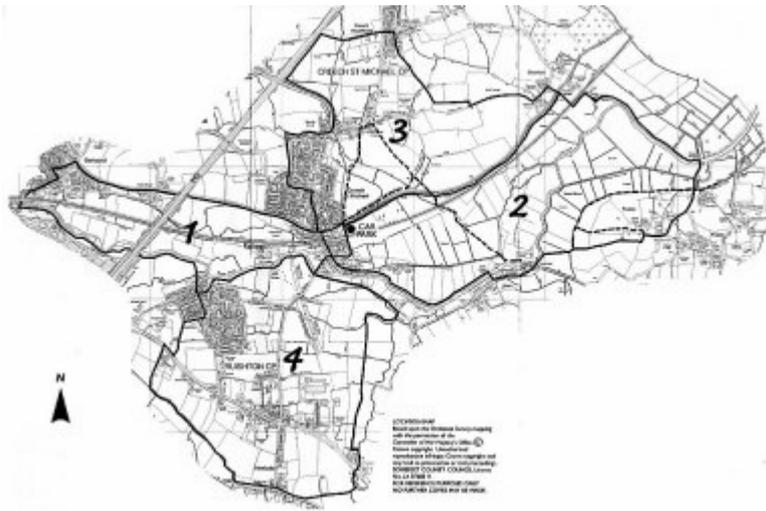


Bridgwater & Taunton Canal Circular Walks



Circular Walks from the Car Park

From the car park here at Creech St Michael, four short circular walks begin by using the canal towpath, selected local local footpaths and quiet country lanes. The walks go through local villages, hamlets, alongside the River Tone and across varying countryside, from the quiet areas of the Somerset Levels and Moors, to the built up areas of Hankridge and Bathpool.

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 & 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 - commercial traffic ceased in 1907.

Restoration

The West Country branch of the Inland Waterways Association lobbied for many years for the canal to be restored. This led to Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council working jointly with British Waterways to bring 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 of the 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.

The Canal Today

Nowadays the canal is used as an important recreational resource. Informal activities like fishing and cycling take place - Sustrans use the towpath 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 canal is also a link that joins the River Tone in Taunton and the River Parrett in Bridgwater.

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. It is an excellent example of a wetland habitat, with clear unpolluted water that supports much 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.