

GRAND WESTERN CANAL

East Trail Grading

Route Summary

Canoe through the Devonshire countryside on a placid water canal with no locks or portages. The Canal follows the natural contours of the Devon country side and is suitable for any type of canoe or kayak. Although spring fed there is no noticeable current but it is exposed in places and does catch the wind. There is no restriction on the distance and the use of canoe and kayaks is seen to be ecologically sound as their progress helps to aerate the water.

You can chose a journey to suit - a round trip to a suitable turning point , or a one way trip of varying distance according to the access points with a simple shuttle.

Nearest Town - Tiverton

O.S. Sheets - 192 Exeter and Sidmouth and 193 Taunton and Lyme Regis

Start - Tiverton Canal Basin (well sign-posted in the town) is a good point to start as there is good vehicle parking – EX16 4AQ (SS 957 129)

Finish – As above

It is easier to do an out and back trip but if you want to go one way the there are various options.

There are 14 points with road access, but not all have space for parking. Often there will be interpretation boards with maps and some local information and detail of local by-laws. Either paddle out and return, or use e.g. Fossend Bridge (ST 069 170). The road from Burlescombe to Westleigh crosses here and there is a wharf with some limited parking.

Waterways Travelled – Grand Western Canal

Type of Water - Canal – flat water.

Distance –10.5 miles one-way, 21 miles return to and from Lowdswells (ST 072 175), where there is very little parking.

Canoe Trail Grading – Easy – you can make this as long or as short as you would like.

License Information-

This was once a private canal, and now there is a small charge levied to help with the ongoing maintenance. Tickets are widely available at the Canal Basin, from shops in the villages along the route or direct in advance from Devon County Council, Topsham Rd, Exeter.

Local Facilities - The Canal is situated in rural Devon, and Tiverton has all the facilities of a small market town with many pubs, restaurants, fish and chip shops etc as well a good local and informative local museum. Tiverton Canal Basin has a public Car Park (paying) with short carry to the water's edge. Here is a grassed picnic area, toilets, tea rooms and Canal interpretation area.

Vehicle Shuttle Required – No, if carrying out an 'out-and-back trip.

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Portages and Locks - none

Description

Tiverton canal basin provides a very convenient start point, all the other parking areas being restricted, and in summer possibly full, with the vehicles of walkers and cyclists.

The first village paddling out to the north-east is Halberton, (3.7 miles) where there is free parking as the canal swings around the golf course in an area known as the Swan's Neck.

Sampford Peverell at 5.5 miles is a large and attractive village, and quite near to the M5. A car park in the centre of the village gives access over a small field to the canal bank, and there are public toilets here, and a pub on the bank serving food. Nearly a mile further, just before a main road bridge, is a new landing area, approached via an access toll road from the Minnows Caravan and Camp site.

The scenery becomes more wooded and prettier near to Westleigh (on the left bank), and Fossend bridge carries the road from Westleigh to Burlescombe. There is an obvious old wharf here, with parking, and the very obvious quarries on the hill to the left.

After here, the canal is in a deep cutting, and can be very overgrown in summer, delightful, and quite hidden from most of the public. Even seeing the canal from the road, and parking to view it, is difficult, hence the advice to paddle from Tiverton.

On the west bank you might notice an overgrown chute where quarried stone was let down to canal level. Now the Canal narrows and enters the Waytown Tunnel which carries it underneath the Hokcombe Rogus to Wellington Road. This area of the Canal often gets blocked with fallen trees but in normal circumstances it is possible to paddle through the tunnel. Quite an interesting experience!

The Canal comes to an abrupt end at Lowdswells. There is some free parking here but please beware to not obstruct the entrance to the private wharf house

Useful Information

The water is very shallow at some points, especially towards the tunnel area and there is a heavy annual growth of weed. Paddlers are advised to avoid the hot summer months. The Canal is probably at its best in the spring time.

The Grand Western Canal is no narrow boat or tub-boat canal, but was built for good sized barges. Broad and once deep with solid bridges and culverts, the Grand Western swings through the red earth of the Devon countryside as if it belongs there. The name is reminiscent of the later Great Western Railway.

The Canal formed part of an effort to save lives, ships and time lost in rounding Land's End, by providing a means to bring South Wales coal landed at Somerset ports, across Devon to Exeter. It was planned to eventually extend this Canal to form a link between the Exe and the Kennet and Avon, thereby giving an inland waterway route between London and Exeter.

Twenty years after the first section was built, another on a much smaller scale was added to extend the line from Lowdswell, to join the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal at Taunton. This long abandoned addition also included inclined planes and seven vertical lifts.

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The present Canal was only a side branch of the main canal, which would have followed a line around Cullompton to meet the Exe Estuary at Topsham, roughly following along the line now occupied by the M5 Motorway.

The Canal is now designated as a Country Park and is owned by Devon County Council following some regeneration and repair in the 1960s. It is now widely valued for its quiet footpath whilst the leisurely progress of the horse drawn barges is a often a welcome change to motorway driving and hectic modern life.

Tiverton is a lovely town, and a tourism centre for South Devon and the Exe valley,

www.discovertiverton.co.uk/

www.devonlink.co.uk/tiverton

www.tivertonpeople.co.uk/

www.tivertoncastle.com/

Further Reading

There is an excellent and widely respected book on the Canal by Helen Harris, reprinted and revised in 1996 by Devon Books. ISBN 0 86114 901 7

Recommended Next Trail

If you have enjoyed this trail why not try out one of the many trails available.

Safety Information

Spending an afternoon canoeing can be a fun way to experience nature, get a great work out and spend time with friends and family. It can also be a dangerous journey, if appropriate safety guidelines are overlooked. Always follow these basic rules.

Wear appropriate clothing

Always wear shoes. Rocks, rough terrain and river beds present serious hazards to boaters without the proper attire. Nearly 90per cent of all boating injuries are attributed to lack of proper footwear. Other canoe safe clothing includes hats, additional dry clothing towels, and layered items which can easily be removed.

Be sure to

- Know the weather forecast before you set out canoeing.
- Familiarise yourself with the local area, it's sensitive places and protected areas.
- Leave the environment as you found it. Please read [You, Your Canoe and the environment](#)
- Take your litter home with you.
- Follow the navigation rules for the waterway you are on.
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- Do not damage bank side vegetation when launching or landing. (No Seal Launching)
- Where possible keep to any designated paths or launching points.
- Canoe a safe distance away from wildlife.
- Check your equipment.

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- Observe the navigation rules for this waterway.
 - Check to see if there are any events on the waterways when you wish to travel.
- Use the checklist below to make sure you have everything you need.

Checklist:

1. Boat
2. Paddle
3. Buoyancy Aid
4. Bailer/sponge
5. Small First Aid Kit
6. Penknife
7. Mobile telephone (in a waterproof bag....Please note that in some areas due to the location mobile telephone reception might be nonexistent)
8. Fresh drinking water
9. Sun cream, hat and sunglasses
10. Light waterproof jacket
11. Footwear
12. Licence

ALWAYS be certain to let other know where you're going and when you're expected to return.

Specific Environmental Information:

Please ensure you don't remove or damage any plants or animals from the waterway as they may be protected or harmful if transferred to other catchments.

Canoeists and kayakers take very seriously environmental concerns and already follow existing voluntary environmental codes of conduct, including Canoe England's own guidance notes outlined in the "You your canoe and the environment" publication.

By following the simple steps below you can ensure your presence is not detrimental to the freshwater environment, minimize and avoid accidentally disturbing wildlife and their habitats.

- Find out about the area before you go, noting its sensitive places, species and breeding seasons.
- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home with you.
- When clearing litter left by others, handle it with care.
- Leave the environment as you find it
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- Do not "seal" launch or drag boats to avoid wearing away natural banks. Float your canoe for launching, lift out when landing and carry it to and from the water.
- Do not damage bank side vegetation when launching or landing.
- Where possible keep to any designated paths or launching points.
- On rivers, avoid paddling over gravel banks in low water conditions – they may contain fish spawn.
- Constantly assess wildlife. If you see signs of disturbance move away quietly.

Be the eyes and ears on the water. Report pollution, wildlife problems, damage, incidents etc to the relevant authorities.

Canal & River Trust - Emergencies- Telephone 0800 47 999 47

RSPCA for wildlife and animals in distress – Telephone 0990 55 59 99 (24 hours)

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Environment Agency - Telephone 0800 80 70 60 (24 hours)

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