

## SHARPNESS CANAL



**NEAREST TOWN** – Gloucester

**REGION** – Southwest

**O.S. SHEETS** - 162 Gloucester & Forest of Dean

**START** – Purton SO 692044

**FINISH** – Parkend Bridge SO 777106

**TYPE OF WATER** – flat water. No locks but low swing bridges

**Licenses** - A license to paddle the canal is included in the Canoe England membership fee. Otherwise licenses can be obtained from <http://www.britishwaterways.co.uk/license-it> or <http://www.waterscape.com/>

(Take your Canoe England membership card with you as it is your license as well)

### DISTANCE

16 miles (to Gloucester) – this could easily be spread over 2 days.

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Keep a lookout for ships, as seagoing vessels use the canal

### VEHICLE SHUTTLE REQUIRED

Yes

### PORTAGES

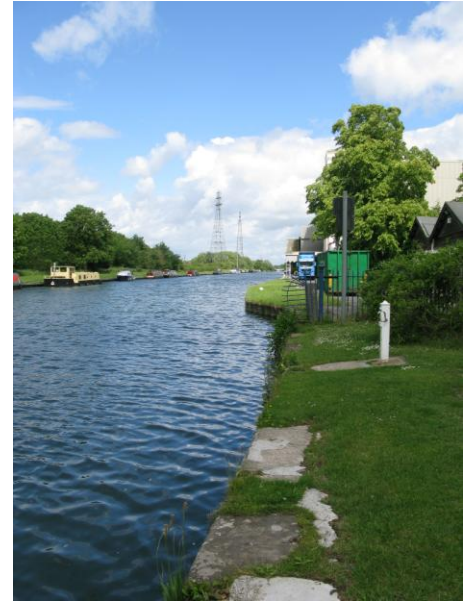
None

### LOCAL FACILITIES

Very good access, as there is a towpath for most of the canal. Easy road access from both A38 and M5. Good provision of toilets and places to stop.

### DESCRIPTION

The Sharpness to Gloucester canal is a new experience for



most English canoeists – much more like a continental European Canal, or like the Caledonian Canal in Scotland, easily wide enough to avoid anglers' lines, and with large ships going up to Gloucester docks at times. At weekends, the paddle steamer 'Oliver Cromwell' plies up and down.

The canal was built and opened in 1827, after a period from 1793 of stops and starts on the project due to ongoing financial difficulties. The purpose was to by-pass a long and dangerous bend on the Severn estuary at Arlingham.

The heyday of the canal as a commercial freight and oil carrying route was between 1905 and about 1955. By the mid-1980s, trade had come almost to a standstill, the closure of the Gloucester oil depot making a large difference.

It is an excellent place for a first canoe or kayak trip – little traffic, very quiet, wide enough not to hit anybody.

The route is described for the whole way, but could be broken down into in three parts, for three possible separate days out; Purton, either down to Sharpness docks, or up to Slimbridge, the famous Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Reserve founded by Peter Scott, or Splatt Bridge; Splatt Bridge (SO 743067) via Saul Junction to Parkend Bridge; and Parkend (SO 777106) to Gloucester.

At Sharpness, the docks are unable to be explored. River Severn can be glimpsed from this lower part of the canal, with hulks (old, disused barges) sunk into the bank to strengthen it. The paddle from Purton to Sharpness and back is about 3 hours.

Purton is usually very quiet and deserted, and has a landing stage next to a car park, £1 for four hours. Otherwise, access can be from banks next to the swing bridges, unless there is traffic coming through the bridges.

From Purton northwards, there are fields on both sides, and in the distance, the Forest of Dean can be glimpsed on the left (west) side, and the Cotswolds on the east side. It is two and a half miles up to Slimbridge, (one hour) which has a café and toilets next to the canal. The Centre is half a mile up the road towards the Severn, and this area is the busiest on your route, with much traffic going up the road to see the birds, and many boats moored.

Two miles further is Splatt Bridge, with a small car park, and this middle section is perhaps the least interesting, very flat fields. Another mile, and Saul Junction has a large car park and cafe, and launching. Again, many boats tethered to the bank. The village just inland from here is Frampton, not large, but signposted from the A38.

From just after Saul village, the (former) Stroudwater Navigation leaves to the east, long closed, and able to be paddled for about 500 yds. It is paralleled by the River



Frome, also small, heading north-west to join the Severn.

A mile afterwards, Parkend bridge is included here, as if you want to go nearer to Gloucester, the docks are closed to canoes and kayaks, and so a visit up to the edge of the city has to be made from here (parking next to the canal by the bridge). This is the quietest part of the canal, as there is no towpath, and the waterway takes you slowly through wooded banks. Lovely wildlife here, including kingfishers. About 4 miles, and maybe two hours to float gently up here, into industrial land and housing estates at Quedgeley.

There are pubs at Sharpness, Purton, Slimbridge, Frampton and Hardwicke. Cafes at Slimbridge and Saul.

### **NEARBY VISITOR ATTRACTIONS**

Gloucester Docks are the main place to see in this area;

[www.gloucesterdocks.me.uk/index.htm](http://www.gloucesterdocks.me.uk/index.htm)

[www.glos-sharpness.org.uk/](http://www.glos-sharpness.org.uk/)

[www.waterscape.com/canals-and-rivers/g](http://www.waterscape.com/canals-and-rivers/g)

#### **Swing Bridges**

This trail does have some swing bridges and we would advise that you ensure you have considered, the craft you are in, the river levels and the potential need to portage. If you do go under these bridges please look out for any nuts and bolts protruding below the bridge