

Trail Name Oxford Canal: Nell Bridge to Cropredy

Trail Grading

Route Summary

This is a ten-mile paddle linking one of England's narrowest canal bridges with the site of one of the Civil War's bloodiest battles in 1644, along a placid canal, designed by James Brindley in the 18th century. This section was opened in 1790 and winds around following the contours of the Cherwell valley. There are many unusual lift bridges, found only on this canal, and there is little to spoil the tranquility apart from occasional appearances by the M40 motorway and a short but interesting stretch through Banbury town centre. The scenery is quite varied and there is usually plenty of wildlife to be seen. There are often kingfishers on the last three miles into Cropredy and early morning paddlers have even reported seeing an otter.



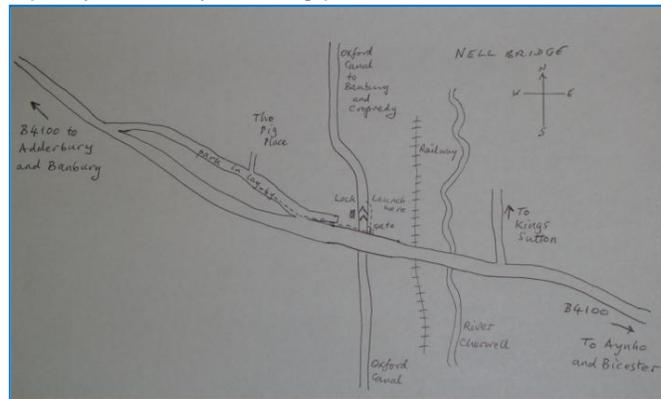
Nearest Town- Banbury, Oxfordshire

OS Sheet- OS Landranger Map 151
Stratford-upon-Avon Warwick and Banbury

Start Information

Lay-by off the B4100 near Nell Bridge Lock.
Grid reference 493343. Nearest postcode OX17 3NU which is The Pig Place, a farm shop and campsite

www.narrowboatsmallholding.co.uk It is easy to unload boats here but please be very discrete when changing as there are private houses and a busy road nearby.



Finish Information

Banbury and District Canoe Club, The Wharf, Cropredy, next to bridge 153. Grid reference 468465. Postcode OX17 1PQ Please leave cars at the Sports and Social Club, which has a free car park about 200 metres east of the canal. Cross the canal bridge then the river bridge and the car park is on the right.

Waterways Travelled - Oxford Canal

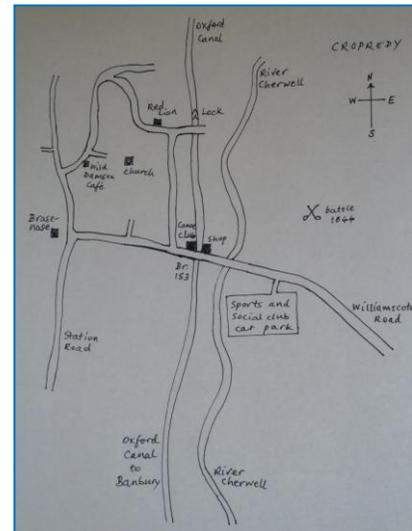
Type of Water – Canal, mostly rural.

Distance – 10 miles.

Licence Information

A licence to paddle on the canal is included in the Canoe England membership fee. Otherwise licences can be obtained from Canal and River Trust.

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



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A licence to paddle the river is included in the [Canoe England membership](#) fee. Otherwise licenses can be obtained from [Canal & River Trust](#) (Take your Canoe England membership card with you as it is your licence as well)

Local Facilities

Cafes, bars, shops and toilets in Banbury town centre, a useful shop right next to the finish and two pleasant village pubs in Cropredy.

Vehicle Shuttle Required - Yes. Unfortunately there is no public transport between the start and the finish.

Portages and Locks – 6. All straightforward.

Description

From the lay-by, carry boats along the left-hand side of the B4100, through a gate to the canal and launch just above the lock. The canal passes under the first of many lift bridges, typical of the south part of the Oxford Canal. After a mile is the first M40 bridge, but most of the scenery is rural, steep banks and trees on the left, flat grass fields and the River Cherwell on the right.

The first portage is at Kings Sutton Lock, a narrow twisty path close to the lock cottage. This is seriously remote, the only access other than the towpath being a narrow stony track a mile long. Kings Sutton railway station and the elegant church spire can be seen on the right, but there is no easy way to reach them. A bit under a mile further on is Twyford Wharf, which has road access and limited parking.



Then comes Grants Lock (portage right), the M40 again and the southern approaches to Banbury. Look out for roe deer in the fields on the left, they are quite common round here. Where



the land flattens out on the left is Bankside Park, a good picnic spot, especially under the two huge weeping willow trees, cool and peaceful on a hot sunny day. Tramway Bridge, number 168, is handy for Morrisons supermarket. Then follows half a mile of industry, Swan Foundry on the left, light industrial units on the right, walls topped with razor wire and broken glass, and in amongst it, a nice terrace of modern houses, the Sea Scouts and a kids' nursery.

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After bridge 166 is Banbury Lock. Land left to portage or right to stop at the Mill Arts Centre, good for live music and theatre, drinks all day and decent food between 12 and 2 Monday to Saturday. Leave the boats in the care of Spaghetti-Limbed Pete and head for the café bar on the ground floor.

Banbury Lock is 5.5 miles from Nell Bridge and 4.5 miles from Cropredy.

On the left above the lock, buried in a shopping centre, is a fascinating piece of canal history: Tooley's Boatyard, a dry dock in a giant glass case, near where Tom Rolt and his wife had their narrowboat Cressy fitted out in 1939. Their voyage round the canals and rivers of England, and their book *Narrow Boat* sparked a new interest in the canals, for leisure rather than work, led to the formation of the IWA (Inland Waterways Association) and helped to save the Oxford Canal and many others from closure. Banbury Museum (either side of the weird glass bridge) has some displays on the subject.



On the right is Spiceball Country Park, on the left the source of the best smell in Banbury: Fine Lady Bakeries, instant stomach rumbles. You pass under and alongside two busy main roads, then the canal bends to the right into the countryside. On the right before the railway bridge and Hardwick Lock is Grimsbury Plantation, a nature reserve. Watch for kingfishers from here onwards.

Just above the lock you pass under the M40 for the last time and the canal becomes more peaceful. On this stretch you may encounter members of Banbury and District Canoe Club out training. There are two more locks to portage, then the club is on the left immediately after bridge 153. On the last

Sunday in November, the club runs a race from Cropredy to Nell Bridge and back in memory of Ross Warland, a talented marathon paddler who died of cancer at the age of twenty. The race is the first of the serious winter events which lead up to the Devizes to Westminster Race. It attracts paddlers from all over the country.

Across the canal from the club is the Bridge Stores, a small but well-stocked shop. There are two pubs within easy walking distance: the Brasenose Inn and the Red Lion, and a café on the village green.

See www.brasenosearms.co.uk and www.theredlioncropredy.co.uk/

The fields around the river bridge were the scene of a Civil War battle in 1644. Every year around the middle of August, the village hosts the Fairport Festival, a weekend of folk and rock music with silly hats. Twenty thousand people and usually no arrests. A friendly atmosphere, but don't try driving into Cropredy! www.fairportconvention.com/cropredy.php

Useful Information

Recommended Next Trail

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

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Safety Information

Spending an afternoon canoeing can be a fun way to experience nature, get a great workout and spend time with family and friends. However, it can also be a dangerous journey, if safety guidelines are overlooked. Always follow these basic rules and comply with navigation rules- keep to the right of on-coming boats. Please be careful at points along the trail where there are sharp bends on the waterway and keep a look out at these points for oncoming traffic.

Wear appropriate clothing

Always wear shoes. Rocks, rough terrain and river beds present serious hazards to boaters without the proper attire. Nearly 90 per 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.
 - 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

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ALWAYS be certain to let others 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)

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

(May 2013)

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