

# The Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation – Canoe trail

## General Information

This independent little waterway was engineered by the great John Rennie between 1793 and 1797 and is the only waterway in the country that is still owned and operated by its original Company of Proprietors, although it is currently managed by Essex Waterways Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Inland Waterways Association. Being separate from the main waterway network of Britain it was probably forgotten when the waterways were nationalised! It was a barge canal with wide locks, and carried freight (mainly Scandinavian timber in its latter days) well into the 1970s – horse-drawn until the mid 1950s. Now it more resembles a midlands canal, as recent decades have seen its discovery by increasing numbers of narrowboaters with their colourful craft. Its route is almost entirely rural, with just a short industrial section through Heybridge village.



## The Trail

Most of the first 12 miles is on an “improved river” navigation with locks every mile or so. The waterway meanders through water meadows with an increasingly hilly and wooded backdrop, and is remarkably quiet and rural despite being in the heart of the much maligned landscape of Essex. After a couple of miles, Sandford provides a typical canalscape in its “cut” between two beautiful mellow brick bridges. Paper Mill, halfway along the trail, has many moored boats, and fascinating old canal buildings, including the barges’ bothy and the old stables (now a tea room). There are quieter moorings at tranquil Hoe Mill, and true Constable Country between there and Rickett’s Lock (the artist’s family milled here, as well as in the more famous Dedham Vale). At Beeleigh there is a wonderful confluence of waters, as the Navigation meets the River Blackwater, the derelict Langford Cut, and the top of the tideway. After this the Long Pond, a true canal now, carries the C&BN for the last couple of miles to its own salty little seaport at Heybridge Basin, where waterside pubs provide the opportunity to raise a glass to the completion of a beautiful canoe trail.



**Maps covering the area** - OS Explorer Map No. 183

## Difficulty

The water is easy in standard summer conditions but leading to difficult in increased flow conditions

## Accessibility

No particular provision is made, but assistance is usually available at Paper Mill, Hoe Mill and Heybridge Basin and paddlers with restricted physical ability are known to enjoy the waterway. Passing locks may present problems.

## Ease of access to the water

Public car parking close to the waterway at Wharf Road, Chelmsford and Daisy Meadow, Heybridge Basin. Otherwise roadside parking usually possible where roads are in close proximity to the waterway. Launching is easy at Springfield, Sandford, Paper Mill, Hoe Mill and Heybridge Basin. Other access points may require launching from banks without stages.

## Portages

The locks on the trail are large and fierce, so canoes / kayaks are not permitted to use them for safety reasons but portaging around them is reasonably easy.

## Licences

This trail is currently not part of the Canoe England licence scheme and licences are required

Details can be found on

[http://www.waterways.org.uk/essex\\_waterways/boating/essex\\_mooring\\_charges](http://www.waterways.org.uk/essex_waterways/boating/essex_mooring_charges)

Or ring the Moorings Manager on 07910 558465



## Access Agreement

There is no access agreement at present, except with Chelmsford Canoe Club. It is a major user of the waterway, and its members are covered by an access agreement with Essex Waterways Limited.

(<http://www.chelmsfordcanoecub.co.uk/>)

## Approximate duration

Springfield to Heybridge Basin approximately 4 – 6 hours of gentle paddling you can return the same way to so a car shuttle need not be required. However return by bus possible as there are bus links also available (Chelmsford – Maldon; Maldon – Heybridge Basin)

Approximate distance - 14 miles

## Start

Start immediately below Springfield Lock. Access by a short lane from the far end of Wharf Road car park (Grid Reference TL 717063). Cross footbridge to access landing stage. Trail

follows the full length of the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation via 14 miles and 11 locks to Heybridge Basin. Paper Mill Lock, midway along the trail, has refreshment facilities and WC.

### **Finish**

Finish at the trip boat landing stage by Daisy Meadow car park, Heybridge Basin (Grid Reference TL 871059)

### **Additions to the trail**

The upper waters of the Chelmer, Can and Wid join the top end of the Navigation and can be canoed (no licence required) for a few miles above Chelmsford when water levels permit. The rivers through Chelmsford town centre are easy to paddle.



There is the possibility of doing the trail over a couple of days or starting from Paper Mill Lock .. the choice is yours. There are many places to stay in the area .

Check out the local websites –

Maldon <http://www.maldon.co.uk/> ,

Chelmsford <http://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=8390>

### **Additional information**

Waterside refreshment facilities are few and far between. There are two pubs within a short walk of Barnes Lock; a teashop, serving soup, sandwiches and snacks at Paper Mill, and pubs and cafes at Heybridge village and Basin. Otherwise pubs and shops are usually a mile's walk up the valley sides.

### **Further links**

<http://www.chelmercanaltrust.co.uk/cct.htm>

The Chelmer Canal Trust Limited is a registered charity, and voluntary group whose main focus is The Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation and its environs.

The Susan Trust - <http://www.susantrust.btik.com/>

Paper Mill Lock - <http://www.papermilllock.co.uk/>

