

RIVER TRENT AND TRENT & MERSEY CANAL

NEAREST TOWN – The trip lies within a triangle bounded by Lichfield to the south, Rugeley to the west, and Burton-upon-Trent to the north-east

O.S. SHEETS - 128 Derby & Burton upon Trent

START and FINISH – Alrewas SK 169152, at hump-backed canal bridge

TYPE OF WATER – Easy river (Grade 1) and canal

LICENCES - A licence 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 licence as well)

DISTANCE – 14 mile round trip

IMPORTANT INFORMATION – Look out for some old, broken weirs, one weir at Alrewas, and overhanging trees. Paddlers should possess some moving water experience.

VEHICLE SHUTTLE REQUIRED

No

PORTRAGES

9 locks on the canal, most at Fradley Junction, and at Alrewas weir. With this amount of portaging, and the lift from canal to river at Armitage, a portage trolley is highly recommended.

LOCAL FACILITIES

The villages are all small, but Alrewas has been developing services for the many narrow boats that pass through. Toilets in both Alrewas and Armitage

DESCRIPTION

This is a pleasant trip in the middle Trent valley, and a round canoe paddle is recommended because parking near to the canal and river meeting in Armitage is



difficult. This means getting the hard work involved over first with the canal and the locks, and then proceeding down a delightful small rural river.

The area has been much more prominent since the National Arboretum and Memorial has been opened just over the other side of the A38 at Alrewas.

The start point is at a preserved hump-back bridge in Alrewas, (the name means 'alder washes', used in basket-making with alder), that is not signposted – it is more a case of working north through the village from the junction of the A38 and A513 until coming across water. There are about half a dozen parking places here. The canal is a few yards away, the trip heading south-east through the village and the very small river is the mill lade below Alrewas weir, not the main river. The return route will be down the canal from the other direction, after the main river flowing downstream has met and joined the canal. This is one of the few places in the U.K. where this happens.

After the picturesque village of Alrewas, with many black-and-white houses, the first lock



is reached at the A513 bridge. After this, Bagnall Weir is alone after a long straight, and then in another half mile, the first of the Fradley locks appears. The paddler now has to negotiate Locks No. 14, Common Lock, Fradley Bottom, No. 15, Hunt's Lock, No. 16, Keeper's Lock, and then Fradley Junction Lock No. 17.

Fradley is said to be the second busiest junction in England, where the Coventry canal joins, and the 'Swan' public house stands at a great place for business.

Then follows Fradley Middle Lock No. 18, Shade House lock No. 19, and Wood End Lock No. 20.

The hard part is now over – the remaining 4 miles to Armitage are level. The canal now reaches the southern-most point of its travels, and the spire of Lichfield cathedral can be clearly seen two miles to the south. The A515 road bridge says you have now done all of 3.2 miles. Villages can be seen ahead, first Handsacre, and then Armitage, almost joined up. The former has a pub, shop, and fish and chip shop.

If Armitage is a familiar name, it is because of the old-established firm of Armitage Shanks, known world-wide for 'sanitary ware'. The village is quite industrial, and the canal winds under a railway bridge, and alongside the factory on its left bank. The canal comes near to the river, but with the railway in between. The route to the river is out on the right bank, walking under the railway by a tunnel, and out on to a footbridge (SK 079164).

You now join the river just after the Mavesyn Ridware railway bridge, and one will find that most bridges on the Trent have a vague bit of fast water underneath them, many where there was once a former weir.

Half a mile on, the river quickens up under High Bridge, where the B5014 passes over. There is an island, old bridge, and small rapid downstream. This bridge has no real parking place in order to access here.

The hamlets of Pipe Ridware and Nethertown follow on the left bank, nothing on the right bank, and then the river divides, and you take the left branch, with a small weir. The right has little water, and an awkward portage through undergrowth at an old mill.

The water on your right side is former gravel workings, a favourite industry in the Trent valley.

The two branches re-form just before Yoxall bridge, and the river winds pleasantly through green countryside. Near Wychenor Park on the left bank, there is a short divide, with a broken weir on the right branch.

Alrewas Mill is the next feature, with a portage on the left bank, to follow the left branch under a farm bridge. This branch, carrying much more water, soon re-joins the other mill stream, and under a long footbridge, joins the Trent and Mersey canal. This only lasts for about 200yds, and the Trent can be seen leaving to the right over a weir.

For this trip, you turn sharp right into the canal, and paddle back towards Alrewas, portaging at the last lock just before the bridge. This area is usually very busy with moored narrow boats, and you will have plenty of company in the summer.



NEARBY VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

The National Arboretum is on the east side of Alrewas, the other side of the A38, and is open every day of the year, free, except for Christmas Day. There are the usual facilities here, including for people with disability, and a gift shop etc. The River Tame, a Birmingham river, joins the Trent just outside the Arboretum area.

Lichfield is a pleasant cathedral town, and Burton-on-Trent is famous for its breweries.

www.thenma.org.uk

www.thenma.org.uk/visit/visitorinformation

www.alrewas-staffs.info

www.alrewas.org.uk/

www.canalguide.co.uk/canals/britain