

CHEDDINGTON TO TRING STATION

A DIY walk for those who would like to do some simple map-reading for themselves – with a little help. The route at the beginning may not be entirely obvious, but after that you just follow the canal.

You will be unlucky not to see herons, and kingfishers have been seen, and in summer terns fly up and down the canal.

Distance

7 miles (11 km)

No hills

Ordnance Survey Map

The whole of this route is on Ordnance Survey Explorer map 181, Chiltern Hills North.

Transport

Both Cheddington and Tring are on the main line from Euston to Milton and on to the Midlands. Frequent stopping trains (currently replaced by buses on Sundays) connect both stations directly with Euston, Harrow, Watford, Berkhamsted, Bletchley and Milton Keynes

The car park at Tring station is pay-as-you-enter with no change given (but free on bank holidays and at weekends). Please have cash ready (£3.50 when last checked).

Refreshments

Both the pub marked at Cheddington station and the hotel at Tring have closed.

The Three Horseshoes at Cheddington is on one of the recommended routes near the start; the Old Swan is further away at the southern end of the village.

The Duke of Wellington is on the road to Pitstone close to the bridge.

The Red Lion is on the road up to Marsworth church.

The White Lion and Bluebells tearoom are next to the B489 bridge at Marsworth, and the Angler's Retreat just down the road.

The Grand Junction Arms is on the canal at Bulbourne.

Route

Cheddington station is at Grid Reference 922185 and Tring station at 850122.

It is recommended to join the canal either at Horton Wharf or at Ivinghoe Bridge, as the stretch of canal to the east of Cheddington is attractive both for the variety of boats and for the views to the east towards Ivinghoe Beacon (especially where there are no pylon lines in the way).

However, especially with children or a large group, it is not recommended to cross the railway by the road bridge at Cheddington station, where visibility is very poor. The road route is dull anyway. The road through Horton is also very poor.

To reach Horton Wharf, take the bridleway immediately to the west of the station. (There is what appears to be a semi-official way through to it 100 yards south of the station; failing that, take the linking footpath 200 yards further south.) Follow the bridleway north and 200 yards beyond the station go under the railway and over the road, and take the footpath ahead.

If the track from the railway to the road is too overgrown try another way under the railway 300 yards further north – but please take care on the road.

There is one gateway that looks as if it could get very muddy in wet conditions.

Alternatively, to reach Ivinghoe Bridge, take the footpath southwards past the church into Cheddington village (passing close to the Three Horseshoes pub) and take the footpath nearly opposite the post office, to the B488. There is the possibility of mud under the railway bridge, but otherwise this route should be problem-free.

Points of Interest

The Grand Junction Canal, as it was originally called, was built at the end of the 18th century to provide a short cut between Braunston, near Rugby, and Brentford on the River Thames west of London. Notice the mileposts with distances to Braunston and bearing the initials of the Grand Junction Canal Company.

Built to a new, wide standard, the canal very quickly became a busy and profitable trunk route, linking London with the industrial Midlands. Attempts to persuade other companies to widen their locks and establish a similar standard capable of carrying barges of 70 tons capacity were not, however, successful. The Grand Union Canal Company was the result of an amalgamation in 1929 of a number of companies.

By the British Waterways office at Marsworth, the branch canal to Aylesbury joins from the right. This opened in 1814 and was initially very busy, with substantial trade in both directions. However, fierce competition arrived with the Cheddington to Aylesbury branch railway in 1839. By the turn of the century more sustained railway competition had arrived with the coming of the Great Central and Metropolitan Railways. The canal's decline was thus speeded up, and by the Second World War trade on the arm had become spasmodic. Commercial traffic lasted until the 1950's, but the last regular delivery of coal to Aylesbury was in 1964.

Marsworth Church has a number of points of interest, including some brasses and the early seventeenth century table tomb of Edmund West, by Epiphanius Evesham.

The reservoirs shortly after Marsworth are interesting and attractive, with abundant wildfowl and other water birds, especially in winter. There are a number of information boards, and a leaflet describing walks around the reservoirs is available from a machine in the car park.

The Wendover Arm joins the main canal on the right at the summit level of the Grand Union Canal, at 430 feet. The principal purpose of the Wendover Arm was to act as a feeder to supply water to the summit of the main canal, mainly from the Well Head at Wendover. Shortly after construction began in 1793, it was realised that, at very little extra cost, the waterway could be built to carry boats, linking Wendover and the Vale of Aylesbury with principal markets throughout the country. However, the canal was built on porous chalk, which had to be puddled to prevent leakage. These measures were singularly unsuccessful, and leaks were the main cause of the canal's failure and ultimate closure in 1904. The building opposite the canal junction is a dry dock.

The London and Birmingham Railway, opened in 1838, was the first trunk railway, not just in Britain, but in the world. The journey initially used to take six and a half hours, half the time taken by the stagecoaches. Tring railway cutting, north of the station, is regarded as one of the major engineering feats of the Victorian period, but note also the impressive depth of the canal cutting at the last bridge before Tring, and the massive structure of the bridge.