

3 Grand Western Canal



This is a lovely peaceful cycle route, often along the towpath, beside this tranquil stretch of waterway through the heart of Devon between Tiverton and the Somerset border. The Grand Western Canal forms part of the West Country Way Cycle Route (NCN3) which runs from Padstow in Cornwall to Bristol.

This is a flat, easy, mainly off-road section of NCN3, and ideal for families with children. There are open views of superb landscape on the way, varying between sheltered woodland and sweeping views of the Blackdown Hills.

The Devon section of the Canal was completed in 1814, and rather than using locks, the engineer, John Rennie, felt it was more efficient commercially to follow contours and construct embankments and cuttings to make it as flat as possible. This makes it ideal cycling territory. The Canal was closed as a commercial waterway in 1925, as the railways took over transport. Restored as a Country Park in 1971, it is now enjoyed by walkers, anglers, cyclists and passengers on boats and a horse-drawn barge run by the Grand Western Horseboat Company. There are picnic areas and pubs along the way.

The Route

The directions describe a circular route following the Canal towpath from Tiverton Parkway station, near Sampford Peverell to Tiverton and then NCN3 on and off the towpath back to Tiverton Parkway. The route can be amended to start in Tiverton or Willand rather than Tiverton Parkway.

From Tiverton Parkway Station, leave the station along the access road. At the main road turn right and after 30 metres turn left along a track that leads to the Link Road Bridge and a boat-launching slipway. Turn left and follow the towpath through Sampford Peverell, taking particular care to give way to pedestrians in this pretty village. The stretch of Canal from Sampford Peverell to Halberton has excellent views across to the Blackdown Hills, and during late spring and summer is home to important populations of Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers.

Just before Rock Bridge is Rock House, built at the same time as the Canal for Captain John Twisden – the engineer who succeeded James Green in extending the Canal to Taunton. The name ‘Rock’ relates to the fact that the bedrock is very close to the surface at this point, and it was a remarkable achievement for a cutting to be chiselled out by hand by the navvies. Equally impressive is the beautiful oak tree on the offside of the Canal near Rock House that has grown to a tremendous size with its roots sprawling over the bedrock.

After passing over Swing embankment with its wonderful views, you pass under Swing Bridge. This is an ‘accommodation bridge’ built to link up land that was split by the construction of the Canal. Further on through a large cutting is Greenway Bridge. A little way up the hill along the road that passes over the bridge is a car park and Abbotshood Cycle Hire.

For the next mile, the Canal sweeps out on a large loop called the ‘Swan’s Neck’ which keeps the Canal on a level contour above Halberton. Beside Milestone 3 are Tiverton Road Car Park and the Dudley Weatherley Jubilee Bridge. This lift bridge was built in 2002, the Queen’s 50th jubilee year, and is named after a well-known local artist who was prominent in the campaign to save the Canal back in the 1960’s and early 1970’s. Sadly Dudley died in 2004, but this elegant lift bridge will help to keep his memory alive for generations to come.

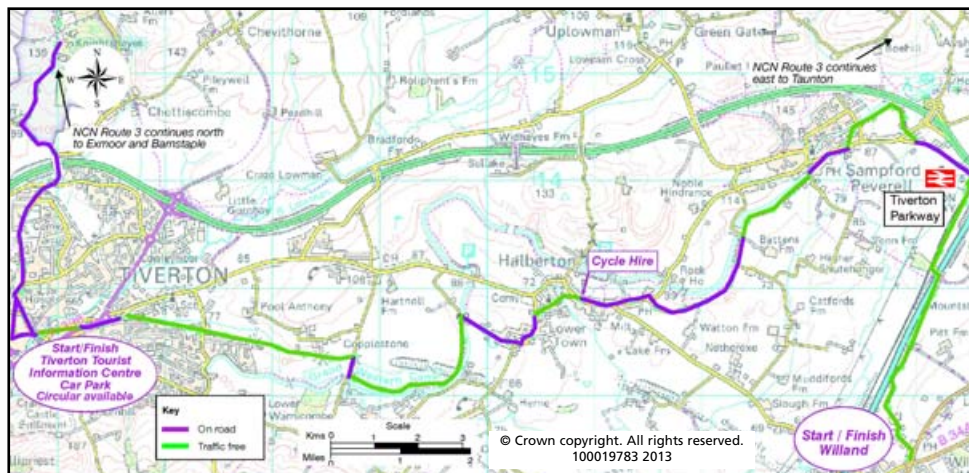
At Crownhill Bridge (also known as Changepath) the towpath crosses the bridge and continues on the opposite side. The towpath crosses over an Aqueduct that was built in 1847 as part of the construction of the Bristol and Exeter Railway branch from Tiverton Parkway to Tiverton. Two arches were built to allow for future expansion, but only one line was ever used and this closed in 1967.

The section from East Manley Bridge to the Basin in Tiverton is where the horse drawn passenger barge operates twice daily from Easter until the end of October (Tel. 01884 253345), and so extra care is needed. It is particularly important to dismount and walk under bridges and to dismount and wait for the horse to pass, should you meet it.

For the last mile of the Canal, the route passes through a residential area before arriving in the Tiverton Basin where you will find the Tea Gardens, a visitor centre a floating shop and café and public toilets. When busy in the basin it is advisable to dismount and walk.



Views from the West Country Way

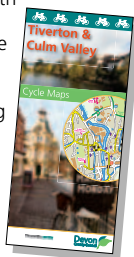


From the Basin the route follows Canal Hill down to a mini roundabout and then right, to Great Western Way. The return route along NCN3 bears right along to Blundell's roundabout where the cycle path cuts across the adjacent green and follows the disused railway line. However, if you turn left onto Great Western Way and then right onto Station Lane, this will lead you into Tiverton town centre where you will find a large array of shops, services and parking. A little way along the pedestrianised Fore Street is Phoenix Lane, at the bottom of which you will find the Tourist Information Centre.

Switching back to the return route along the disused railway line, this eventually ends at Manley Lane. Turn right along the road until you reach Manley Bridge, where you turn left onto the towpath. At Crownhill Bridge follow the road to the right, NCN 3 signs will lead you through the pretty village of Halberton.

The route rejoins the Canal at Battens Bridge, before leaving the towpath again at Chains Road on the edge of Sampford Peverell. Follow the road through the village until you reach the turn off for Tiverton Parkway on the right.

An extension to the route from Tiverton Parkway to Willand follows a purpose-built cycle path which crosses the M5 and terminates at The Halfway House PH. Another possible extension or alternative route from the Link Road Bridge at Sampford Peverell would be a 10 mile return trip out along the towpath to the northern end of the Canal at Lowdswells Lock, near Holcombe Rogus, and back. This is a quiet, scenic route passing a number of fascinating historic structures including a 14th Century Chapel, and wharves and limekilns dating back to when the Canal was built.



Tiverton & Culm Valley leaflet
(see page 24)

Facts & Features

The Route

Tiverton is served by regular buses from Exeter as well as services from North Devon. Furthermore, for those wishing to arrive by train, Tiverton Parkway is a main stop on the Exeter – London Paddington railway line. For timetable details call National Rail Enquiries on 08457 484950 or visit Traveline at www.traveline.org.uk.

Route Length: Tiverton Parkway to Tiverton town centre is 14.5 miles. Tiverton parkway to Willand is 3 miles (one-way), mostly traffic free.

From the centre of Tiverton it is a short distance further on this route (NCN3) to Knightshayes Court (National Trust - reduced entry for those arriving by bicycle) and Tiverton Castle. It is a flat, east, mainly off-road route, and ideal for families with children.

Facilities:

Car parking and refreshments are available in Willand, Tiverton Parkway station, Sampford Peverell, Halberton and Tiverton. Cycle hire is available at Abbotshood Cycle Hire beside Greenway Bridge in Halberton (Tel. 01884 820728) and the owner is happy to deliver or collect cycles to any point along the Canal with prior notice. Cycle shop at Tiverton.

Maps:

'West Country Way' –published by Sustrans (available from Devon County Council price £3.99) Tiverton and Culm valley cycle routes (free)

OS maps:

Explorer (1:25,000) No. 114 Exeter and the Exe Valley; No. 128 Taunton, Blackdown Hills. Landranger (1:50,000) No. 181 Minehead and the Brendon Hills; No. 192 Exeter, Sidmouth.

