

Anderton to Boothstown 2018

Day 1

2018 was the year of the huge 'Middlewich breach', where a section of the Middlewich branch of the Shropshire Union canal suffered a complete collapse. This meant that anyone cruising from Anderton Marina wasn't able to cut through the Middlewich branch to the Llangollen canal or to visit Chester and Ellesmere Port.

I had booked a week's holiday from work to go on a canal boat from Anderton with my husband David and we decided to try a route that isn't specifically featured in the ABC Boat Hire brochure – a cruise from Anderton Marina up the Trent & Mersey canal, through the whole of the Bridgewater canal and onto the Leeds and Liverpool canal. I am not a great fan of locks so didn't want too many of them, but I do love a good tunnel and aqueducts. From Anderton to Wigan the route contains 3 locks, 3 tunnels, a swing bridge and an aqueduct. Sounded perfect!



Our route from Anderton towards Wigan

The Middlewich breach

We wanted to really take our time and not put any pressure on ourselves to get anywhere each day, so we decided to just see where we got to by halfway through the holiday and then turn to start our journey back. We were on a 47ft boat called the Reed Bunting, one of the smaller boats in the ABC fleet but perfect for two people. There's a galley by the stern, fully equipped with oven,

fridge, toaster and microwave, then a dining table and seating area with tv, followed by your bathroom with shower and a double bedroom at the front of the boat.

This was our 4th narrowboat cruise so we felt pretty confident about how everything worked, but the marina staff still checked our route with us and showed us all the safety features on our boat like gas, diesel, fire extinguishers and how to check the weed hatch. One thing that pleased us was that the tiller hadn't been fixed to the tiller arm, so we were able to take the pin out and put our own pin on!

Our tiller pin – one little piggie!



Before our trip, I had purchased a Nicholson's Guide to the North West & the Pennines. I'd spent a little time spotting all the likely stopping places along our route and where we were going to be able to find something for our evening meals. I recommend buying either a Pearson's guide or Nicholson's if you are planning a canal boat journey. They show you all you need to know about where you can turn, where all the locks are, and lots of information about local attractions, places to get provisions and of course the pubs!

Setting off at about 3pm, we turned right out of the marina basin and were soon passing the Anderton Boat Lift. The lift was built in 1875 to raise boats up 50ft from the River Weaver to the Trent & Mersey canal, and is one of only 2 working boat lifts in the UK (the other is the Falkirk Wheel in Scotland). You can travel down in the lift in a hire boat and cruise along the River Weaver and back.



The Anderton Boat Lift

Having passed the Boat Lift, we cruised on to the first of the 3 tunnels on this route – the Barnton tunnel. All of the tunnels on this part of the Trent & Mersey canal are one way, but the Barnton tunnel is quite straight and you can look to see if the entrance is clear before you proceed! Having got through that with no hitch, we very quickly came to the entrance of the Saltersford tunnel. This is slightly shorter than the Barnton tunnel, but is quite crooked, so entrance is timed either side. Going west we were allowed to enter between the hour and 20 minutes past the hour. We arrived at 3.55pm, so moored up for a few minutes (there are handy mooring bollards that you can use to tie up to).

Tunnel signs



We're going in!



After exiting the tunnel, we cruised along for a little way before mooring up at a peaceful stretch of the towpath near Bridge 209.

When we'd picked our boat up, the marina staff had been lamenting the fact that there had been no rain for 61 days and the water levels were dropping. By the time we moored up for the night it was raining a little, which turned into a heavy downpour just as we set off for the nearest hostelry. Not so good for us, but good for the canals!

Ten minutes later we arrived at the warm and dry sanctuary of the Leigh Arms which is a large pub and restaurant next to the River Weaver. We had a very generous helping of freshly cooked meat pie with homemade chips and veg - yum!

Day 1 total cruising time = 2 hours.

Day 2

The next day (Tuesday), we decided to top our boat up with water. It's amazing how much water you can use on a narrowboat with washing up, showers, toilet use etc., so it's a good idea to top up regularly, otherwise it can take a very long time! Just past bridge 209 is a marina owned by Black Prince holidays and they were kind enough to let us moor up there for a few minutes to get some water in our boat. We then carried on cruising, accompanied by a heron, until we came to the Dutton Stop Lock which is just before the Preston Brook tunnel.

Heron in flight



A 'stop lock' is a lock which only provides a small drop in the water levels and is ideal for beginners as you don't sink (or go up) very far in the lock at all. The Dutton Stop Lock was designed to prevent the slightly higher Bridgewater canal from losing water to the Trent & Mersey, and is in fact a Grade II listed building.

Dutton Stop Lock



Almost immediately after the lock you arrive at the Preston Brook tunnel, which marks the end of the Trent & Mersey canal. The tunnel itself is 1133 metres long, only wide enough for one narrowboat, has a slight kink in it, and takes about 20 minutes to travel through. Because of this the timings are quite strict; you can only enter between the hour and 10 minutes past going north, and between the half hour and 20 minutes to the hour going south. There is no towpath inside, so before boats had engines, horses were led over the hill to the other end of the tunnel and the boat's crew had to 'leg' the boat through the tunnel with their feet against the tunnel walls. We were glad we didn't have to do that....

We arrived at the entrance to the tunnel at 12.30pm, so we moored up and had lunch while we waited to go in. At 1pm on the dot we were first in the queue and I managed to steer the boat through without touching the walls once and did it in exactly 20 minutes so I was chuffed 😊



**Moored up for lunch
before entering the
Preston Brook tunnel**

Upon exiting the tunnel, there is a sign welcoming you to the historic Bridgewater canal. The Bridgewater was opened in 1761 and was the first canal to be built that didn't follow the original path of a river or tributary. The first thing that struck us about it was it is so wide!

Lovely wide canal



It was really easy cruising on such a spacious canal and after passing through a pleasant rural stretch of countryside, we found ourselves going past the back gardens of houses in the towns of Higher Walton and Stockton Heath. It was interesting to see how people had landscaped their gardens leading down to the canal with patios, seating areas, barbeques etc.

We decided to finish our second day's cruising at the small village of Grappenhall. Please stop here if you do this route, even just to have a look around. We moored our boat on the towpath just beyond the town bridge and we had our moorings all to ourselves. I think a lot of people carry on to Lymm which is the next town after Grappenhall, but if so they don't know what they are missing.

Walking from the towpath and over the town bridge you find yourself on a cobbled street leading past the 12th century church (with stocks outside!), to where the 2 pubs are situated. We visited them both for a drink before deciding where to eat and they were both very welcoming and relaxing.



Grappenhall's cobbled street

Shall I put him in the stocks?





One lovely pub....

.....and another



After dinner (we went to the Parr Arms), a relaxed amble along the cobbled street and we were back at our boat. We had a good tv reception in our mooring spot so we watched a bit of telly!

Day 2 total cruising time = 5 hours.

Our boat put to bed just past Grappenhall bridge



Day 3

Our guidebook showed there was a water point just after Lymm, so we cruised through Lymm (very pretty, we decided to stop there on the way back). We found the water point shortly after bridge 26, and moored up to wait to use it as there was a boat already there. The people on board were using their own hose instead of the one supplied by the marina – unfortunately it wasn't very wide

and they hadn't filled up for a while so we ended up spending a whole hour there by the time we had filled our own boat up. It didn't matter though, we had a chat to the other crew while we waited, and as we didn't really have a fixed agenda anyway, we weren't bothered by stopping for a while. David decided to use the chance to clean our boat with the mop!



Isn't he good?

On our way again, the next part of the Bridgewater canal takes you through Sale and Stretford before passing the outskirts of Manchester. I'd been warned by a colleague before the trip that this area could be 'a bit grim', but in fact a lot of work has been done to make the area around the canal more attractive. Sale itself has a waterside plaza with a theatre and modern bars and restaurants. Old warehouses and factories have been converted into smart apartment blocks – it was fascinating! Here's some photos from that area.....

Sale Bridge





Converted warehouse on the left

Industrial heritage – or potential luxury flats?



King's Ransom pub & restaurant at Sale

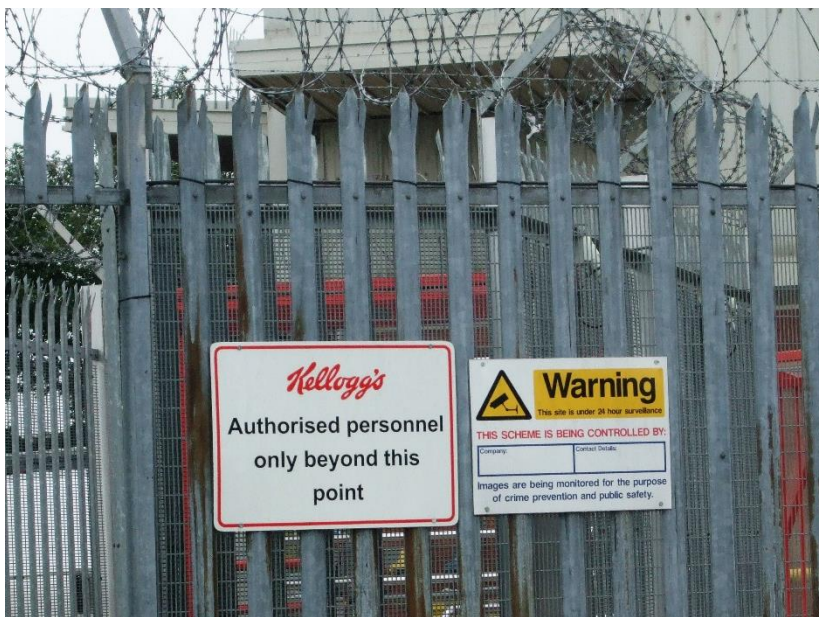
Shortly after leaving Stretford, we came to a junction in the canal called 'Waters Meeting'. This is where if you turn right, you cruise right into the heart of Manchester, very close to the Manchester Utd football ground and Old Trafford

for any sports enthusiasts! We were going towards Wigan though, so carried straight on. The junction itself is rather bare-looking with some startling graffiti on the left hand side.

Colourful graffiti in Manchester



We then passed the Kellogg's factory.



Get your cornflakes here.....

Nothing particularly interesting happened for the next few minutes until we rounded a slight kink in the canal and..... ooh, look at this!



Entrance to the Barton Swing Aqueduct

We had reached the Barton Swing Aqueduct which passes over the Manchester Ship Canal. The aqueduct was finished in 1894 and was built to carry the Bridgewater canal over the ship canal. When it swings, it actually pivots on the centre of the aqueduct, carrying 800 tons of water with it. There is then space on either side for large ships to pass through. It is the first and only swinging aqueduct in the world, and we were about to cross it! The view from the

aqueduct was stunning and we took our time slowly cruising across.



Manchester Ship Canal seen from the Barton Swing Aqueduct

And on the other side....



A bit more cruising, and we arrived at our final destination for the day, the village of Worsley. The whole journey from Grappenhall had only taken us 7 hours, including our unexpected hour at the water point!

Worsley is the ‘jewel in the crown’ of the Bridgewater canal, because it is the whole reason the canal was originally built. Back in the 18th century, the 3rd Earl of Bridgewater owned the coal mines at Worsley and needed to find an efficient way of transporting the coal to Manchester. He presented a bill at parliament proposing the canal and then spent enormous sums on its implementation. Eventually, in 1795, he managed to have an extension of the canal built from Worsley to Leigh near Wigan, which linked the canal to the existing Leeds & Liverpool canal and created a direct route from Lancashire to Cheshire.

The first thing we noticed as we cruised into the town was the colour of the canal water. It was quite a bright shade of orange! We found a good place to moor – the moorings are next to a little park so your boat is some distance from the road and you aren’t disturbed by noise at night.



Moored up on the orange canal

Looking in our guide book, we read that the water has its distinctive hue because of the coal mines. Iron oxide from the Worsley mines dissolves into the water to give it a 'rusty' colouration, and this extends for some distance along the canal in both directions.

The next things to catch our attention were some of the splendid buildings surrounding the canal. The Earl of Bridgewater had a large Packet House built in 1760 which still stands near to the mine entrance today...



The Packet House, Worsley (entrance to the mines or 'Delph' is on the right)

The next building of note, and also on the canal, is the Boat House which was built for the visit of Queen Victoria to the town (she arrived in a barge) in 1851. She wrote about her visit in this excerpt from her diary:

"The barge glided along in a most noiseless and fairylike manner, amidst the cheers of the people who lined the banks of the canal (the Bridgewater Canal) and passed under 2 beautifully decorated bridges, belonging to the villages,

connected with the east collieries belonging to Lady Ellesmere. Two other barges conveyed the suite and some of the servants."

**The Boat House,
Worsley**



Immediately over the road from our moorings was the Bridgewater Hotel, the oldest pub in Worsley and named after the Earl. So we had our dinner there!



The Bridgewater Hotel

Day 3 total cruising time = 6 hours.

Day 4

We knew we would need to turn our boat at some point on our 4th day, in order to start cruising back towards Anderton. But we wanted to at least get to the end of the Bridgewater canal so that we could say we'd done all of it. First,

though, we needed to top up our water tank again. Our Nicholson's guide said there was a water point in Worsley itself, but I couldn't see it anywhere. We asked the people at the next boat along to ours who pointed out that the water point was actually inside the public toilets! The toilets were locked and padlocked, but our British Waterways key opened the lock and we trailed our hose across the grass to the boat – it only just reached!

**Can you spot the
hosepipe? (Clue: it's
red)**



And there is a sign for water if you look hard enough!

Turning left under a road bridge, we started our day's journey continuing west in the direction of Wigan. A wide straight stretch of easy cruising brought us to Boothstown, where Eric Cantona used to live when he played for Manchester United FC. There was a marina and nice looking pub called 'The Moorings' with space to moor up alongside, so we thought we might finish our day there after we'd turned back. Soon afterwards we came to Leigh, where the Bridgewater canal ends and becomes the Leeds & Liverpool.

We made it!



Leigh looked like it might be nice place to stop, with plenty of places to eat, some right by the canal. But we carried on through, soon passing Pennington Flash Country park and some rather scorched earth which looked to have fallen victim to some of the fires that took hold in that long dry summer.



Waterside pub at Leigh

Pennington Flash Country Park



Scorched earth

Now came decision time. We could make it all the way to Wigan in about 2 and a half hours, but that would add 5 hours onto the cruising time we'd already done, so we decided to turn our boat at the winding hole just before Plank Lane Swing Bridge and then return to moor up back at Boothstown.

We found the winding hole right next to an estate of new houses, complete with built-in solar panels sunk into the roofs – impressive!

When I first started canal boating, I struggled to get my head round which way the tiller had to go when you turn your boat. It reminded me of when I first learnt to drive and had to learn to reverse round a corner (a long time ago....). But this time I tried to remember you put your bow into the winding hole and the boat pivots on its centre with the front going the opposite way to the tiller. One easy three point turn later and I succeeded – yippee!

We reached Boothstown mid-afternoon and moored next to the pub in glorious sunshine. Time to explore the town and maybe find somewhere different for our evening meal than the usual pub fare.



Moored at Boothstown

It's only about a 10 minute walk to the town centre through a modern housing estate. The centre itself has a small shopping arcade including a Sainsbury's local where we stocked up on a few items for our on-board catering. We are both creatures of habit when it comes to our canal boating diet; sausage butties for breakfast, and then at lunchtimes I prepare a salad for us including a selection of cooked meats, quiche, scotch eggs, coleslaw. We like to 'carry on cruising' at lunchtime (probably because we are too lazy to be bothered to moor up anywhere), so we take it in turns to eat while the other person mans the tiller. (Or should that be 'persons' the tiller in this age of political correctness)?

We noticed an Italian Restaurant and decided to book ourselves a table for that evening as I had a hankering for a proper Italian pizza. I thought that, as it was Thursday, we probably didn't need to book, but it's a good job we did as when we returned in the evening the place was full to the brim with customers

waiting! There was a great celebratory atmosphere inside with the diners ranging from couples like us to whole families. And the food was delicious 😊



Ristorante Vesuvio, Boothstown

Day 4 total cruising time = 4 and a half hours.

Day 5

Our aim for today was to end up at Lymm, which would leave us with less than 7 hours' cruising to do to get back to Anderton the following day. So off we went, back through Worsley with the orange canal water, back over the swing aqueduct and through Sale and Stretford, and eventually we arrived back at the water points near Lymm. Another boater told us there was a weather warning for heavy rain in about 20 minutes' time, so we topped up our water as fast as we could and headed for Lymm. Too late! We arrived in Lymm with torrential rain lashing down on us and feeling rather soggy. Luckily there was plenty of space to moor up near the town bridge – Lymm has visitor moorings on both sides of the canal. Having tied ourselves up (the boat, not us personally), we were surprised and amused to see another narrowboat cruising past us towing a plastic duck on a string behind it!

Moorings at Lymm



Even though it was cloudy, we could see that Lymm is a really pretty town – here's a few of our photos:-



Lymm bridge



Canalside cottage



Lymm High Street

There were some gift shops in Lymm so we bought a couple of presents for family. As the weather was still a bit 'iffy' we decided to eat at the Golden Fleece as it was closest to our boat if it started raining again.

Safely back on board our boat, we discovered we had all the BBC channels on our tv so we watched 'Would I lie to you?' on BBC 1 accompanied by a glass or two of wine from our fridge.

Day 5 total cruising time = 5 hours 45 minutes.

Day 6

After a very lazy breakfast, we cast off and started making our way back towards the Preston Brook tunnel. After a while, I checked our canal guide and reckoned we had a chance of getting to the tunnel entrance between 1.30 and 1.40pm, when we would be able to go straight in. As we got closer and closer to the tunnel it got nearer and nearer to 1.40pm and we finally got there at.....1.42pm! Oh well, at least we could moor up and have a leisurely lunch together. We were second in the queue of boats to enter the tunnel, behind another narrowboat from which emerged a man, a woman, and attached to the woman's hand by a harness and lead, a rabbit! They all sat next to some lovely green grass which the rabbit had a good munch on. As 2.30pm approached it was like Grand Prix racing cars at the starting grid – ready, cast off, and GO!

**In the Preston Brook tunnel
with another boat following
us**



Emerging from the tunnel, back through the Dutton Stop Lock, we then had good luck with the timed Saltersford tunnel, arriving at 4.35pm and going straight in. Shortly after that, it was through the Barnton tunnel, and we

moored up for our final night just after bridge 200. There are moorings available there both on the towpath side just before the Anderton Boat Lift basin, and on the other side of the canal next to the Stanley Arms pub. We moored on the towpath side and took advantage of the handy footbridge to make our way over to the pub for our supper.

It was Saturday night, and we didn't have to get our boat back to the marina until Monday morning. But we were both due back at work on Monday so we decided to have a look round the Anderton Boat Lift visitor centre on Sunday morning before taking our boat back. If you are taking your boat back early in the morning, mooring by the Stanley Arms is an ideal spot as you are only 10 minutes' cruising from Anderton Marina.

Day 6 total cruising time = 6 hours 45 minutes.

Day 6

A sad day.....nearly time to say goodbye to our trusty little boat. But first we visited the Anderton Boat Lift to see if we could witness a boat being lifted. There were quite a few visitors stood around the basin as a pleasure craft made its way up and out of the lift, while another boat went down on the other side. It is a fascinating sight!

Boat coming up (you can see the top of the boat in the left hand channel)....





.....and exiting the lift

Day 7 total cruising time = 15 minutes!

As you can see from our cruising times, we had a very relaxed week on the canals and you could easily go all the way to Wigan in a 7 night hire doing about 5 hours a day of cruising. If you are fairly new to boating this is a fantastic route with so much to see and lots of easy cruising. And if you are more experienced, the route we travelled as far as Manchester follows the Cheshire Ring so you might want to try that!

PS just in case you think there might not be much nature or wildlife on this route, here's a few of the things we saw....



Mass of lilies at the end of the Bridgewater canal

Black Necked Geese



Two swans looking for each other



Gorgeous butterfly perched on the boat



What's he trying to catch



**..... it's a tiger, a rare breed
indigenous to the Bridgewater
canal!**

