

Rickmansworth Waterways Trust

Strolls from the Lock Number 1 – To Springwell

Time: approximately 1hr 30min

Distance: approximately 3 miles

From the Lock Centre turn right onto the towpath and under Bridge Number 173. You are sandwiched between the River Chess and the canal until arriving at the iron bridge. At this point, the River Colne flows across the canal, from left to right, under the bridge, on its way to the Thames. Tesco's, on the opposite side of the canal, is built on the site of Frogmore Wharf. W.H.Walker & Bros had a timber business here, between 1905 and 1988, which included the making and repairing of boats. Although boat repair work continued up to the early 1960's, the last boats ('Bangor' and 'Aberystwyth') were built in 1952. The style of boat, known as the 'Ricky', was typical of this yard. Wander Ltd (Ovaltine) bought boats from here which carried their products from their factory at Kings Langley.

The next bridge, number 174, used to be a swing bridge and gives access to the Aquadrome car park. *Continue along the tow path*, where, about 50 yards from the bridge, there is an iron canal distance post by the hedge, marked 'Braunston 75 miles' and 'GJCC^o' (Grand Junction Canal Company). Braunston, Northamptonshire, is a major hub on the canal system, being the place where the original Grand Junction Canal met the Oxford Canal. One of the many pill boxes erected during 2nd WW to stop invasion via the canal system is a little further on past a bend in the canal, on the opposite side. The next bridge, number 175, is called 'Stockers'. This name comes from Stockers Farm, the collection of timber panelled buildings on the left of the canal, some of which date from the 16th century. The lock cottage here has an interesting collection of canal memorabilia at the front. The large house is Stockers House, which originally housed the person who collected the coal tax. You can see the toll post, bearing the arms of the City of London and dating from about 1845, on the right immediately after passing under the bridge. There are many of these all around London, on roads as well as canals, at a distance of 20 miles from the Post Office in Trafalgar Square. The amount of tax was calculated at the lock by the depth of the boat in the water. It was abolished in 1889. The iron pillars at the edge of the bridge have deep cuts, caused by the friction of the rope between boat and horse.

The canal passes through some attractive scenery from this bridge onwards. Less attractive, however, is the remains of a factory which has loading facilities for the canal boats underneath. Above it are chalk quarry workings. Is the monkey still suspended from the hoist? Shortly afterwards is the next lock- Springwell- with bridge number 176. A new community has sprung up here on the right, with houses replacing the original industrial buildings. Before the bridge, cross onto the road running parallel to the tow path, and walk back in the direction in which you have come. Follow the road which bends sharply to the left, over a stream, but turn right before the next small bridge, along a metalled track by the side of the river (Colne) and through the gate. This leads into the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust-managed nature reserve of Stockers Lake.

At a weir across the river, follow a sign directing to Rickmansworth Aquadrome via a path running to the left of the lake. You will now be walking along three separate lakes on your way back to the canal centre, formed from pits dug for sand and gravel in the first half of the 20th century, and now used for recreation. On your walk alongside Stockers Lake, a large area of reed marsh can be seen on the other side of the river. About ¹/₂ mile further on is a sign pointing to a heronry, the largest in Hertfordshire and interesting to visit in the breeding season (February/March).

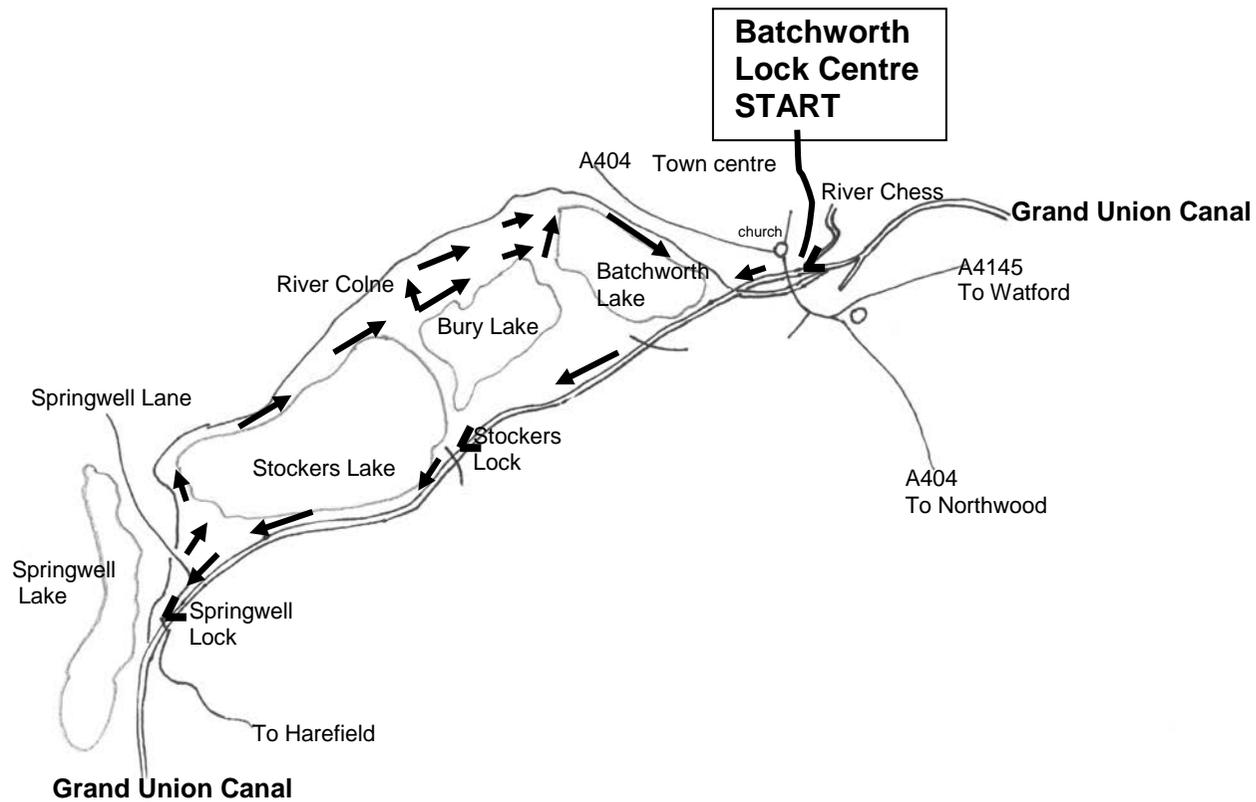
Go right along a track after exiting the reserve through a gate, then along a path running down the left of the next lake, Bury Lake. This can be followed as far as the next lake, Batchworth Lake. Alternatively, turn left about 100 yards from the board, to follow the river bank. In either case, when Batchworth Lake is reached, keep to the left of the lake, past the water-ski centre (toilets available) to an iron gate in the hedge at the end of the lake, to rejoin the tow path. Turn left to return to the lock centre.

These walks are written by Jillian Christensen and are provided free by The Rickmansworth Waterways Trust but a minimum donation of 20p is suggested to help support our education programme. Thank you!

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