



# DISCOVERING DERBY'S LOST CANAL

Although infilled in the 1960s, work to reinstate the Derby Canal is rapidly gathering momentum – as **Bobby Cowling** discovers on a fabulous walk of its easternmost section

## Planning your walk



### ESSENTIALS

**Distance:** 6 miles

**Terrain:** Varying from treated surfaces to extremely muddy fields. Walking boots are essential.

**Starting point:** Sandiacre Bottom Lock, NG10 5LA

**Ending:** B&M Home Store, DE21 7BR

**By car:** Sandiacre Lock is at the end of Lock Lane, a very narrow road running alongside the Erewash Canal with little space to leave your car. However, unrestricted street parking is available nearby.

**Public transport:** From Spondon, take the regular Nottingham-bound i4 bus directly to Sandiacre.



### FOOD & DRINK

#### The Navigation, Breaston

Very much a landmark feature of the Derby Canal walk, this former boatman's pub retains a strong link with its waterways past, particularly in the form of its colourful narrowboat-themed flowerbed. What's more, it is a convenient refreshment point for walkers, serving excellent grub and well-kept real ales.



### MORE INFORMATION

#### Derby & Sandiacre

**Canal Trust:** [derbycanal.org.uk](http://derbycanal.org.uk), email [info@derbycanal.org.uk](mailto:info@derbycanal.org.uk).

## Historical context

Conceived in 1793, the Derby Canal was completed three years later by engineer Benjamin Outram. As well as bringing boats to Derby from the Trent & Mersey at Swarkestone and the Erewash Canal at Sandiacre, a short arm also ran north of the (then) town to a large wharf at Little Eaton, which was served by a horse-drawn tramway.

While the canal was relatively successful for a number of decades, the advent of the railways inevitably brought about its decline. Traffic suffered still further when Butterley Tunnel closed on the neighbouring Cromford Canal at the turn of the 20th century, and in 1937 the Little Eaton Arm was abandoned.

The rest of the canal went the same way a few years later and the last attempt to navigate it was made by loaded coal boats coming from the Erewash Canal in 1946. They got no further than Sandiacre Bottom Lock, which had been chained and padlocked shut by the Derby Canal Company.

Unfortunately, the Derby was not nationalised, and such obstinacy on the part of its owners was demonstrated over the following years. In 1961, the Derby Canal Restoration Committee was formed by the Midlands branch of the Inland Waterways Association. Some 40 boats sought passage from the Erewash Canal but found their way deliberately blocked by a tree that had been felled across the entrance.

The canal was formally abandoned and gifted to Derby Council in 1964 and it was infilled a few years later, forming a pathway along much of its length.

In 1993 the Derby & Sandiacre Canal Trust was established with the aim of restoring the route and in 2011 it secured outline planning permission for the restoration of the whole canal line.

## THE WALK

### 1: Sandiacre Bottom Lock

We begin our walk at Lock Lane Bridge, which sits between the Derby Canal's junction with the navigable Erewash Canal and Sandiacre Bottom Lock. The latter, which like all others on the canal was 14ft wide, has particular significance: historically, as the scene of thwarted attempts to navigate the route by those battling to save it and, very recently, for a good deal of on-the-ground restoration activity by the Derby & Sandiacre Canal Trust.

In February 2019, the lock was excavated and, as it had been used as a landfill site when infilled, a specialist firm was



Lock Lane Bridge at Sandiacre.



The partly excavated Sandiacre Bottom Lock.



*“A stolen vehicle was torched under the bridge, rendering it structurally unsafe”*

employed to safely dispose of its contaminated spoil. DSCT was aware that a sewer had been laid through the western end of the lock, so care was taken to avoid disturbing this area. But the trust was not expecting to uncover another sewage pipe that wasn't in the plans it was working from.

The next stages of the project are clearly laid out in the lock's accompanying information board – an excellent feature throughout our walk. The currently exposed lock chamber will be repaired by volunteers and an access ramp built so that the public can inspect the work being undertaken as part of guided tours. Funds will need to be raised to relocate the sewer pipes before the full excavation and rebuilding of the lock can be completed.

Heading west from the lock along the canal-width path, around 100 yards on an obvious change in ground level indicates the subterranean presence of Sandiacre Top Lock. Between the two locks once stood the Boat Inn, which was accessible only by water or towpath. Sadly, this building was destroyed by fire during World War II, though the remains of the stone wall, door frame and boot scraper can be seen behind the hedgerow on the right-hand side.

This section of path down to Bostocks Lane is owned and well maintained by DSCT and it makes for a very pleasant green space for the residents of the nearby houses. One imagines that reinstating the canal channel here wouldn't be especially complicated.

## 2. Cockayne Bridge

The next major landmark you'll come to, around 500 yards from your starting point, is Cockayne Bridge. The arch of this structure is now bricked up, forcing walkers to take the steps up to cross Longmoor Lane and rejoin the path. In June 2019 a stolen vehicle was torched under the bridge, rendering it structurally unsafe. Keen to avoid huge traffic problems that would result from the hurried construction of a replacement, Derby County Council Highways Department



**TOP LEFT:** The pathway beyond Lock Lane Bridge where a change in ground level indicates the subterranean presence of Sandiacre Top Lock.

**ABOVE:** The infilled Cockayne Bridge.

asked DSCT to agree to a temporary infilling of the bridge. As such, the trust now has a good working relationship with DCC Highways, which signed a legal agreement to rebuild the structure to a design that suits the canal restoration.

Now facing a park on the far side of the bridge, follow the path as it heads left and after 200 yards or so you'll come to the first road crossing of the route on the level at Springfield Avenue; a little further on, there is the rather more significant intersection with the busy Bostocks Lane. It is hoped that the trust will benefit from a number of DCC Highways' road scheme proposals that could simplify the reinstatement of the canal at these points.

## 3. Bostocks Lane and M1

On the opposite side of Bostocks Lane you'll see a narrow bridleway, enclosed by trees, that will lead you the short distance to the culvert under the M1. This section is owned by Derby City Council and it has a very different atmosphere from the stretch covered so far. The unsurfaced path is narrow



**LEFT:** The Navigation Inn at Breaston is a prominent feature of the Derby Canal walk.



and (during our visit in early January) extremely muddy.

With regard to the significant obstacle of the motorway, two options are being explored: the creation of a new culvert or using the existing Longmoor Lane bridge that you will pass through.

After the culvert, almost immediately on the right-hand side of Longmoor Lane you'll see a stile and footpath heading off to the right. *Don't* take this route – but it's worth noting that DSCT has agreed terms to buy the pathway, which rejoins the original line of the canal, from current owner Sustrans.

Continuing along Longmoor Lane, the pavement on the right-hand side comes to an end, forcing you to cross the road. Keep a look out for a clearing in the trees on the right and a small wooden gate. Cross the road again to head through the gate, where the path is initially contained within a chicken wire fence, before it becomes hedge-lined on one side, with a wooden fence on the other. Stay on this pathway as it runs parallel with Longmoor Lane through a succession of gates pinned with notices warning of the dangers of leaving them open and letting horses out onto the road.

#### 4. The Navigation Inn and cycleway

After coming to a tarmac stretch of land at the back of several derelict-looking industrial units in Breaston, you'll arrive at another road crossing in the form of Risley Lane,



with the Navigation Inn on the opposite side of the road. A vertical lift-bridge is planned to allow the canal to pass here.

The Navigation is an original feature of the Derby Canal, being built in the 1790s. And at around 2 miles from Sandiacre, it is ideally placed to provide refreshment and sustenance for walkers. But even if you don't drop in, its narrowboat-fronted flowerbed will put a spring in your step.

The pub marks the start of a wide, well-surfaced multi-use path that forms part of a National Cycleway route. The wide views out over the surrounding Derbyshire countryside are superb, with the green-capped ornamental clock tower of Draycott's Victoria Mill closer by. After passing under an old aqueduct and becoming tree-lined, the pathway is intersected again, this time by the narrow Hopwell Road, where another lift-bridge is planned.

#### 5. Coop Cottages and Golden Mile

On the far side of Hopwell Road, immediately to the left, you'll see DSCT's flagship project: the Coop Cottages. Built at the end of the 18th century, soon after the completion of the canal, the properties were originally part of a mill complex before being converted to accommodate families working on nearby farms. In 2017 the trust purchased the buildings and work on their redevelopment is now well underway. Indeed, during the Sunday morning of our walk, a group of trust members were busily engaged in the rebuilding work. Among them was trust director Chris Madge, who kindly gave us a tour of the premises. The plan is to create three residential properties, along with a café, a small museum and an office area that will serve as the headquarters of DSCT. Having purchased the plot for £200,000 and spent an estimated £400,000 on its development, DSCT is hoping to make a significant profit from the enterprise.

The completed cottages will become the focal point of a section of canal called the Golden Mile (named after the nearby Golden Brook). In 1999 Railtrack determined that the flooding of its main line to London was due to the canal no longer draining land to the north of Draycott. Working with the trust, the company dug out a drainage ditch along the canal line, and when the work was completed, hawthorn hedges were planted on one side. Work to reinstate the full channel, which will include a slipway and

**TOP LEFT:** The narrowboat-themed flowerbed at the Navigation Inn.  
**ABOVE:** The drainage ditch running along the canal line on the Golden Mile stretch.

**ABOVE LEFT:** The rebuilding of the DSCT-owned Coop Cottages at Draycott is rapidly progressing.  
**FAR LEFT:** The culvert under Derby Road at Draycott.  
**LEFT:** The cross-country section of pathway between Draycott and Borrowash.



mooring points, will cost £400,000 and DSCT is working towards obtaining match funding by raising a quarter of this figure itself. And it is well on its way to reaching its £100,000 target, being just £5,000 short of the mark.

Following the pathway alongside the drainage ditch for 1km (the 'mile' in its name is a nice bit of poetic licence), we came across another work party, busy clearing the route of brambles and undergrowth. If you are looking for a stretch of canal that encapsulates the hard work, ambitions and achievements of DSCT, the Golden Mile is it.

## 6. Cross country to Borrowwash

Shortly after a right-hand turn, the cycleway heads up onto Derby Road, but don't go this way. Instead, follow the grassy path straight on and into the culvert underneath the road. Beyond here, the route becomes little more than a narrow, grassy path, but it is clearly marked as it passes through a succession of fields and farmland, crossing a stream by way of a footbridge. You are still following the original line of the canal but there's little evidence of it now.

As the pathway runs ever closer to the railway, you pass the site of the former Ockbrook Aqueduct and come to Borrowwash Lock. This was excavated as long ago as 1998 with the help of a local builder. An accompanying information board shows a 1901 map with an arm heading north from the lock to a flour and corn mill. Continuing along the path, the very clear canal line above the lock to Station Road was dug out by trust members with the help of the Waterway Recovery Group. DSCT is looking to establish a temporary water supply (longer-term arrangements exist to abstract from the River Derwent in Derby) to enable the full completion of this stretch.

There's another road crossing over Station Road, before the unsurfaced footpath continues to run parallel with the railway, which is in a cutting several feet below. It's a pleasant stretch at the back of houses and, once again, it's fairly easy to imagine the reinstated channel here. This is especially the case when the rebuilt Ullickers Bridge comes into view, straddling grass where there once was water.

## 7. Activity at Spondon

The path becomes surfaced again as it passes through Spondon, where, at the time of writing, a large property

development is going up on its northern side. Wheeldon Brothers acquired the land in 2018 and, as part of its planning application for 73 houses, it agreed to restore 300m of canal for DSCT, which owns the pathway from here to Angler's Lane. Both the new homes and the rewatered channel are expected to be completed this year, and this will be the first section of the Derby Canal to be reinstated.

To extend the canal beyond the 300m stretch will require the relocation of water pipes and the building of a suitable bridge over Angler's Lane. On the far side of this road, a narrowboat-decorated safety barrier welcomes you to the final stretch of path, which represents a pleasant green corridor through rather industrial surrounds. Approaching Spondon railway station on the right, the pathway heads below Station Road via the brightly painted Rainbow Bridge. Beyond the structure, there is an original winding hole, dug out by trust members some time ago.

Just a short way further on, a large B&M home store appears on your right and with the footpath coming to an end just a short distance ahead at Megaloughton Lane, this is a good place to end the walk if you're phoning for a taxi back to Sandiacre. If, however, you plan on taking a bus back to Sandiacre, or even into central Derby, you'll need to take the second left at the large roundabout up ahead onto Derby Road, where you'll see an Asda store.



**TOP LEFT:** Borrowwash Lock was excavated over 20 years ago.  
**ABOVE:** The rebuilt Ullickers Bridge at Borrowwash.

**LEFT:** The restored canal line above Borrowwash Lock.  
**BELOW:** Rainbow Bridge at Spondon.

## Further exploration

At around 12 miles, it's perfectly possible to follow the line of the canal from Sandiacre through to Swarkestone, by skipping the lost sections of central Derby.

From Megaloughton Lane in Spondon, follow the footpath beside the Raynesway ring road towards Alvaston, where you'll pick up the pathway running alongside the River Derwent into central Derby. By crossing Alvaston Park on the approach to Wilmorton and

Pride Park, you'll rejoin the original canal line, which is now a footpath running from the Navigation Inn all the way through to the Trent & Mersey at Swarkestone.

Space prohibits the publication of a map here, but for more details, email: [robert.cowling@wwonline.co.uk](mailto:robert.cowling@wwonline.co.uk).

Also, at the time of writing, DSCT is preparing to launch a trip-boat from Exeter Bridge in central Derby, which will take passengers 1½ miles along the Derwent to Darley Mills.

