

TRING BY THE WATER TRAIL

Two routes for a relaxing walk around the Grand Union Canal, reservoirs and a lake in the north section of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. You can expect to see boats, historic canal features, native Black Poplars and a rich variety of birds and wildlife, with several pubs and cafes offering refreshment along the way. The shorter route is 6 miles, the longer route is 8 miles.

The Grand Junction Canal, from Brentford on the Thames to Braunston in Northamptonshire, was opened as far as Tring in 1799. A major engineering achievement, it required a large water supply at the summit level, brought about by building a feeder from springs at Wendover. This was soon opened to boat traffic and another canal arm was built to serve Aylesbury.

1. You can start this walk with an interesting stroll from central Tring down Dundale Road, across the Icknield Way and up to Little Tring. Alternatively, you could join the route at Wilstone village or Marsworth, which have occasional bus services from Tring.
2. At Little Tring, turn left at the canal bridge



along a footpath which follows a restored section of the Wendover Arm Canal.

3. Where canal bears right, take the left path to come to a gate.



4. At the gate turn right and follow the path along the field edge and over a hill.



Cross a wooden footbridge over a dry (but being restored) section of the Arm.

5. Turn left through the gate, downhill towards Wilstone reservoir.



Built in 1802, this is the largest of the reservoirs storing water to operate the locks at the Chiltern summit of the canal. In the Rothschild era this was the scene of duck shoots, attended by royalty. The path turns sharp right at the bottom of the hill.

6. A little further along take a path to the left to follow the reservoir bank.



Part of the way round you may wish to take the steps down to a path which leads to Mead's Farm Shop and café.



Or, carry on round the reservoir to the steps to the car park.



7. From there, turn right and continue for about 100 yards.

8. Look for a footpath to the left, across the road (be very careful crossing as visibility is poor).



It crosses a field diagonally right, crossing a driveway, to emerge at a road.



9. Turn left.



10. After a short distance turn left again into Chapel End Lane, which continues as a footpath.



Bear right at a junction of paths.



11. Soon after turn right though the gate.



into a long field. The path follows the right hand edge of this field alongside a pretty stream.



This is an excellent place to see several fine specimens of Black Poplars (the Aylesbury Vale has the largest remaining population of this rare British species). Continue straight ahead; the path continues as Sandbrook Lane.



This emerges in Wilstone village, opposite the attractive Half Moon pub.

12. Turn left along the road.

13. Turn left again along a footpath by the recreation ground.



This brings you to the Aylesbury Arm of the Grand Union Canal.

14. Turn right along the towpath.



Follow this until it joins the main canal, noting a staircase lock (where the bottom gate of one lock forms the top gate of the next) just before the junction. Turn right along the main canal towpath to Startops End, Marsworth.



Continue along the towpath, with Bluebells Café on your right.

15. Take a right fork in the path alongside Startops reservoir.



16. At the end of the reservoir is a T junction. Here you can choose the longer or shorter route.



The **longer route** continues to the left.



Or there is a right hand turn, which takes you on the **shorter route** between Startops and Marsworth reservoirs.



Shorter route

Turn right between the reservoirs. There is a bird hide (accessible by wheelchair) alongside this path. The path emerges through a kissing gate onto a road. Turn right along the road, crossing with care to the other side to gain the pavement. Take the first path on the left, which follows the edge of Tringford reservoir where there is another bird hide where you may wish to pause. Follow the path until it joins a stony track, where you bear right and soon join the road at Little Tring. Turn left along the road to join your start point by the canal bridge.

Longer route

17. Continue straight ahead rejoining the towpath with a flight of locks rising to the Tring summit. Beside the top lock is a dry dock, used by a builder of wooden narrowboats.

18. Just past the top lock, overlooked by a Toll House, the Wendover Arm goes off to the right (a slightly shorter option is to bear left under the bridge – effectively turning right) and follow it back to Little Tring.



19. Otherwise carry straight on to the road bridge by the Grand Junction Arms pub. Take a moment to look at the fine buildings of the former Bulbourne canal workshops, where lock gates were made until 2004. Turn left along the road (take great care as there is no footway and heavy traffic)

20. After about 200 yards you will come to the entrance to College Lake



This is a wildlife reserve created from a worked-out chalk pit. Enjoy a break here (there is a very pleasant café). See the birds and read the displays. Retrace your steps back to the canal, and along the towpath to the canal junction. (See waypoint 18).

Take the path alongside the Wendover Arm towards New Mill, where there is a large and busy flour mill.



Narrowboats used to be built next to it by Bushell Brothers. A few hundred yards beyond, note the Tringford Pumping station on your right. Although diesel pumps have replaced the original steam ones, all the water levels in the canal and reservoirs are controlled from here. You soon come back to Little Tring, where the humpback road bridge has been rebuilt as part of the canal restoration.