

Your cruise starts from the bottom of the famous FOXTON LOCKS, which rise 75ft up the hillside, and are a fascinating sight. This is also the site of the INCLINED PLANE boat lift, a Victorian steam-powered marvel of engineering built to short-cut the locks. The FOXTON CANAL MUSEUM tells the story. It is a busy canal junction, with a choice of routes: north towards Leicester, as far as Fleckney (approx. two hours) or east down the Market Harborough Arm (approx. two hours).

If you decide to go north, you pass under Bridge 62, a horse-width bridge which carries the towpath over from the locks side, and the small village of GUMLEY can be seen on the hill to the left. The fancy clock-tower rising above the trees is all that is left of Gumley Hall, whose horticulturist owner planted the woods. Pat's Spinney leading up to Pat's Bridge also has a remarkable variety of species. GUMLEY has a pub 'The Bell' (0116 2790126) open 11am -3pm with food available 12.00 to 2.00pm every day. Children over 10 years old welcome but no dogs. Gumley is accessible (10 mins approx.) from footbridge no. 63.

DEBDALE WHARF was the terminus of the canal for 12 years, and goods were distributed further on by horse and cart. The white Wharf House now has an idyllic setting. There is a turning place here, and on the left a boatyard and marina in what were known locally as the "treacle mines" (from the days when clay was extracted for brick-making). The canal then winds through some of the beautiful rolling Leicestershire countryside; on the right is the village of SMEETON WESTERBY, on the left SADDINGTON. Some of the bends here are tight, so go slow and watch for other boats.

Just past Bridge 71, the feeder from Saddington Reservoir enters from the left, and the canal crosses a stream and footpath on an AQUEDUCT. This section was recently re-built in concrete to combat leakage. A footpath follows the feeder, and then branches to the right, up into Saddington village, where the 'Queens Head' pub overlooks the reservoir. To follow this, moor up on the aqueduct and go over the stile in the hedge just beyond; fork right, down and under the aqueduct and then follow the yellow footpath markers up to the village. It is about a 15 minute walk and the ground may be rough and muddy, particularly after bad weather. Round the bend, past brick 'narrows' is a turning place, and beyond can be seen SADDINGTON TUNNEL. Road Bridge 72 (moorings just this side) will give easier walking, to the left, up the road to Saddington. The 'Queens Head' (0116 2402536) is open every day from 12 noon onwards; food available between 12.00 and 2.00pm. Accompanied children are welcome in the premises; dogs in the garden only (there is a large very pleasant garden)

SMEETON WESTERBY, also about 10 minutes walk from the canal (to the right) has the 'Kings Head' pub (0116 2792676) which offers food 12.00 to 2.00pm Tuesday to Saturday (closed Mondays) and 12.30 to 2.30pm on Sunday. Children and dogs are welcome.

SADDINGTON TUNNEL is 880yds long, and crosses the watershed between the valleys of the River Welland (South) and the River Soar (North). You may go through the tunnel if you wish, but use the headlight, go slow, keep to the RIGHT, and for safety keep all persons (except steerer!) and dogs inside the cabin. You may be lucky and see the bats that live in the tunnel. The towpath goes over the top, and since construction there have been many problems with land-slips in the unstable ground.

From Fleckney Bridge 73 (moorings just beyond bridge) there is a footpath across the fields into FLECKNEY. Turn right up the High Street for the 'Old Crown' pub (0116 2402223) – about 15 minutes walk – which is open for food 12 till 2pm Tuesday to Sunday. (Closed Mondays) Children and dogs (on a lead) are welcome. Almost opposite is the Fleckney Fish Bar (0116 2402602) which is open Wednesday to Saturday 11.30am to 2.00pm. About half a mile further on, the Kibworth Locks start to lower the canal towards Leicester. You must turn (carefully) above the top lock and retrace your journey to Foxton.

At Foxton junction there are two pubs, the 'Foxton Locks Inn' which is open for food from 11am every day, and the 'Bridge 61' (0116 2792285) which serves drinks and snacks all day. From the junction, the Market Harborough arm continues through a swing-bridge which will need opening (there is a key on the boat) a mile to Foxton village where there are pubs north and south of the canal. 'The Black Horse' (01858 545250) serves food Tuesday - Sunday between 12.00 noon and 3.00pm – children and dogs are welcome in the public bar and large garden. 'The Shoulder of Mutton' is a 'Texas Steak House' (01858 545964) is open for food between 12 noon and 9pm daily serving quality Chinese food. Children welcome, dogs only in the garden.

When leaving the village, it is useful to put someone ashore at Bridge 3 to operate the swing-bridge. They will need the key to unlock the bridge barriers, swing them across the road and then pull the red lever and push open the bridge. Make sure the key is retrieved afterwards. The bridge can be quite heavy to push, so an adult should always be present. The canal now winds its way past the site of a wartime airfield, now the location of Gartree Prison. This high ground was originally 'Foxton Moor' hunted by John O'Gaunt. Round the corner, by the old A6 road bridge number 8 is the "Glue Factory". This used to emit unpleasant smells over some distance, but modern processes have substantially reduced this. Just through the bridge can be seen the abutments of the old bridge from when the turnpike road took a steeper climb up Gallow Hill. Extra horses used to be kept at the old Bowden Inn below, to help the carts and coaches make the climb. The canal is now elevated and passes through some ancient ridge and furrow fields which run down to the Harborough bypass below. The next landmark is at GREAT BOWDEN road bridge number 10, where the imposing Victorian Great Bowden Hall built alongside the canal has undergone renovation and conversion to apartments. There was also a wharf here, and before the bridge there is a winding hole for turning. The road to the left leads down to Great Bowden village (about 10 minutes walk) which is home to two public houses. 'The Red Lion' (01858 469805) is open for food from 12.00 noon till 2.30pm every day and allows children and dogs. On the village green 'The Shoulder of Mutton' (01858 465142) is open 12.00 till 2.30pm Monday to Saturday – food by prior booking only, and has a carvery at 1pm and 2.15pm on Sundays. Children are welcome, and dogs in the bar. There is an unrestricted outside area.

Through Great Bowden cutting, the tree-lined canal approaches the old A6 again at Bridge 12. Through it was the site of 'Uncle Toms Cabin', a popular café where rowing boats could be hired. At the next bridge, number 13, the towpath changes sides and the canal runs parallel to the road for a stretch. 'Wooden Bridge', number 14, carries a footpath and it is only a short walk by road from this mooring into the town of Market Harborough. There is also a turning point there, but be careful of moored boats on the offside. The canal now winds round what was the De Trafford estate, now a prestige housing estate, to enter Market Harborough Basin (Union Wharf), the terminus of this arm. When the canal was first started from Leicester in 1793, it was planned to continue to Northampton, hence its old name 'The Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Union Canal', but funds ran out when it reached Debdale Wharf, and the connection to Market Harborough was not built until 1809. After that a new canal company took a different route, starting with the flight of locks at Foxton, to join the Grand Junction (now Grand Union), near Daventry, so leaving the six miles to MARKET HARBOROUGH a dead end.

The basin was originally a busy wharf, receiving mainly timber and coal, and loading agricultural produce; a timber yard remained until recent redevelopment. From the 1960s it was home to one of the first major hire fleets, Anglo Welsh, and boats were built there, and is now one of the bases for the Canalclub holiday boats. The 'Union Inn' was built to serve the canal trade, and has an imposing frontage to the Leicester Road, but is currently closed. One of the original canal warehouses has been converted into the Waterfront Restaurant (01858 434702). There are many other pubs and all the usual amenities in the centre of Market Harborough; approx 5 mins walk. The town's most distinctive features are the fine Church of St. Dionysius, and the Old Grammar School, a black and white building on stilts, bequeathed by benefactor Robert Smyth in 1614.

(Information regarding pubs is liable to change. We suggest you check, using the phone numbers supplied).

Enjoy your cruise!

SOME BASIC RULES

DO NOT SPEED – THE BOAT SHOULD NOT MAKE A BREAKING WASH. FULL REVS SHOULD ONLY BE USED IN AN EMERGENCY.

SLOW DOWN WHEN PASSING OTHER BOATS, AND GO DEAD SLOW PAST MOORED CRAFT.

ALWAYS KEEP TO THE RIGHT WHEN PASSING OTHER BOATS, UNLESS INSTRUCTED OTHERWISE. (FOR INSTANCE MEETING THE HORSE-DRAWN TRIP BOAT).

IF SOMEONE FALLS IN, THEY SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO GET BACK ON THE BOAT WHEN IT IS MOVING. TAKE THE BOAT OUT OF GEAR UNTIL THEY HAVE GOT SAFELY TO THE BANK, (THE CANAL IS QUITE SHALLOW) THEN MANOEUVRE TO PICK THEM UP.

NO PERSONS TO BE ON THE ROOF OF THE BOAT AT ANY TIME.

IF YOU BRING A BARBEQUE WITH YOU PLEASE DO NOT OPERATE IT ON THE BOAT AND ENSURE THAT YOU DO NOT OBSTRUCT THE TOWPATH.

YOU MAY MOOR ANYWHERE ON THE TOWPATH SIDE, BUT NOT VERY CLOSE TO BRIDGES, OR ON BLIND BENDS. DO NOT OBSTRUCT THE TOWPATH, AND BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHER CANAL USERS.

NOTE THE TIME TAKEN ON YOUR OUTWARD JOURNEY, AND MAKE SURE THAT YOU ALLOW ENOUGH TIME TO RETURN TO BASE AT THE TIME YOU ARE DUE.

IN THE EVENT OF ANY PROBLEM CONTACT FOXTON BOAT SERVICES 0116 2792285

HANDY NUMBERS

Gumley	"The Bell"	0116 2792476
Saddington	"The Queens Head"	0116 2402536
Smeeton Westerby	"The Kings Head"	0116 2792676
Fleckney	"The Old Crown"	0116 2402223
Fleckney	"The Fleckney Fish Bar"	0116 2402602
Foxton Locks	"Bridge 61"	0116 2792285
Foxton Locks	"Foxton Locks Inn"	0116 2791515
Foxton	"The Black Horse"	01858545250
Foxton	"The Shoulder of Mutton"	01858 545964
Great Bowden	"The Red Lion"	01858 469805
Great Bowden	"The Shoulder of Mutton"	01858 465142
Market Harborough	"The Waterfront"	01858 434702