

Going with the gongoozlers



Keith Carter takes a stroll amongst the boatmen of Marple Locks



Route of the walk Ordnance Survey mapping © Crown copyright 2005

INFORMATION

Start and finish: Ridge Quarry View Point, map reference SJ965867

Time to allow: Three hours

Distance: 4½ miles

Map: OS Explorer OL1 The Dark Peak

Useful book: Pearson's Canal Companion 'Cheshire Ring'.

Tourist Information: Town Hall, Macclesfield, tel 0871 716 2640

Refreshments: Pubs and café at Marple Bridge.

Public transport: Train station at Marple, services to and from Manchester.

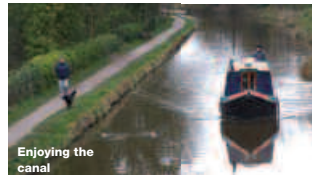
Buses: frequent services to and from Stockport, tel 0161 228 7811.



Town Street, Marple Bridge



This is the hard part



Enjoying the canal



Oldknow's Warehouse

YOU may be surprised to learn that there is a word for those who stand idly by whilst others work their socks off trying to get their boat through lock gates without making a mess of it: the word is gongoozler. I don't know who first coined it but he was obviously a genius.

You will see plenty of them at Marple Locks, a regular Mecca for us, since yes, I am one. Not for me the energetic scurrying about and the winding of winches, a job often reserved for the skipper's family while he stands regally aft at the tiller in his silly hat.

This is the Peak Forest Canal which on reaching Marple has to drop 208ft via a flight of 16 locks in a quarter of a

mile, a major challenge for narrow boat enthusiasts and the highlight of the famous Cheshire Ring. Opened in 1800 to connect the limestone quarries in North Derbyshire with Ashton-under-Lyne, the canal saw a hundred years of constant activity as an industrial lifeline until other quicker and more cost-effective forms of transport saw its decline. Thanks to the efforts of enthusiasts the canal was restored and re-opened in 1974 and now provides leisure and recreation for thousands.

Marple is where the Peak Forest Canal and the Macclesfield Canal meet so there is plenty of towpath walking and any amount of gongoozling to be done here.

1. OUR walk starts just south of Marple town at the village of Ridge End where there is a convenient car park, Ridge Quarry View Point, although there is neither toilet block nor any other information provided. The view from here is fine, looking out across the Goyt Valley towards the High Peak. You can see the canal below you but to reach it you must turn left out of the car park and walk 150 yards along the road to where it bends sharp right. Leave the road here by taking the lane on the left, Hollinshead Lane, which passes a few houses then follows a descending diagonal path that leads to Bridge 21 on the Peak Forest Canal.

2. CROSS the bridge and go left on the towpath through

pleasant open country as far as Bridge 19 where we change sides, crossing the canal to continue on the opposite towpath as far as a basin where narrow boats are moored. Across the canal is the Marple Social and Forces Club. Ahead we come to the junction with the Macclesfield Canal which branches off left and the Peak Forest Canal enters the celebrated flight of locks. The solid stone house across the basin was once owned by James Jinks but the cellar flooded every time a boat entered the basin.

3. DESCEND from lock 16 to 13 where the canal goes under the road, the towpath being channelled down a



Marple Locks



Aqueduct over the Goyt

Take the left towards the Roman Lakes, a group of fishing lakes created by flooding old quarries not by the Romans but in Victorian times when crowds would flock here on Sundays,

and pass under the high railway viaduct that towers overhead. Beyond the viaduct look out for a footpath that branches off to the right. A sign indicates that we are on the Goyt Way, a brief acquaintance that is immediately terminated by our taking the path down to the river which we cross by the Roman Bridge, again no more Roman than I am. Cross the former packhorse bridge and go left along the river, ignoring the steps on the right.

6. AT THE house, go right on a footpath that climbs up to the road, the B6102. Cross the road directly opposite and take Plucksbridge Road up the hill on what is the steepest climb of the day. Where the road bends right, branch off on a path that climbs up the bank to emerge on the canal towpath. We're back at bridge 21 on the Peak Forest Canal again. Cross the canal bridge and go left past a cottage, our path the one we came down on at the start of our walk. At the road, if you go left for a few paces you'll find a tidy pub, The Romper, where perhaps a pint is just the ticket before returning to the car and getting out of the boots. ■

tunnel at Posset Bridge close by the Navigation Inn. It is said that when the canal was being built its principal owner Samuel Oldknow encouraged his men to meet their daily targets by offering them a 'posset', a drink of hot milk mixed with ale or wine, an early and effective incentive scheme. Four more locks follow and we then come to where the main road, the A626, crosses it. This is where we leave the canal but there are more locks to be seen if you have not had enough of them. They can be seen by continuing on the canal through Brabyns Park as far as the aqueduct before retracing your steps to the bridge again.

4. TURN right and walk down the hill on the pavement, passing first Marple Station then the parish church on your left. At the bottom of the hill we enter Marple Bridge, a bustling, tidy community with pubs, shops and a Post Office.

Turn right to the far side of the road bridge over the River Goyt onto Town Street, nicely restored with Victorian street-lamps that give it a general air of a film set. At the next junction, strike off right onto Lower Lea Road through a group of well-preserved cottages, the road giving way to a track that soon leaves the town behind. Our track enters woodland and we come to a point where we have a

choice of going either right or left. Take the left towards the Roman Lakes, a group of fishing lakes created by flooding old quarries not by the Romans but in Victorian times when crowds would flock here on Sundays, a quick train journey from Stockport.

5. FORK right at the next junction by Bottoms Hall where the young apprentices used to be housed by the industrialist Samuel Oldknow. We come to the main lake, popular with fishermen who make walking along the track slightly hazardous as they come roaring along it in their 4X4s. Continue past the lake and along beside the river



Floodgates cottage