
Favourite Nature Rambles Around Chichester

by David & Lynda Thornley

The Canal Walk



This is one of the all time favourite walks as there's no need for us to drive anywhere, the walk

starts at the canal basin and ends in the city centre. At just over eight miles it's a bit further than some but it's easy going and there's plenty of places to stop off for a spot of refreshment.

The canal basin has been tidied up as part of a redevelopment and the canal trust have opened a new centre making it an attractive place for people to go to escape the more enclosed feel of the city. A new canal boat now welcomes visitors who want to take a leisurely trip along the canal but can't work up the enthusiasm to walk; there's also canoes for hire for the (slightly) more active.

The canal was a waterway built to connect the city to the sea but never quite made it as an economic



proposition. With two roads now running over it and a crumbling sea lock at Birdham it's far from being a link to the sea now but the canal trust are trying to drum up enough support to do just that. Whether they succeed or not the path it provides to the harbour is a walk well worth taking, especially in spring when there's so much to see.

The first stretch from the basin passes an old swing bridge then ducks under the A27 before opening out into fields as you leave the houses of Chichester behind you. It's here that you can see the impact the Canal Trust are having on the canal with extensive conservation work and path

improvement. It's not long before you reach Huntston where you cross over the canal to the other side and see the view made famous by Turner; unfortunately it's now marred by power lines. All along this bank and further on the margins are filled with flowers which add a welcome splash of colour, especially in spring.



This is a pleasant place to stop for a few moments or, if you have the time or inclination you can visit the Spotted Cow, just down the road. The path then leads on to where there used to be a bridge for the Selsey Tram to cross over on it's way south; there's not much left now of the bridge or the line either for that matter.

The canal is navigable all along this stretch up to Donnington where the canal boats have to turn around as the road makes a very effective barrier to progress. The character of the canal changes once you cross this road, the relatively clear water becomes wilder with extensive stretches of reed and weeds. Not so neat maybe but a much better habitat for swans, coots, moorhens and the odd water vole if your lucky. In May there's always plenty of cygnets and baby coots with attentive and quite forceful mothers!



Once across the next road leading to Birdham you're walking through the marina which is interesting enough if you're out for that sort of thing but is hardly natural although it does have an excellent place to stop off for refreshments by the Lock. Over to the east on the right hand side is an extensive area of reeds, which is much more attractive if your interest is in birdlife. There is a rather fine hide there but I must admit that I've not seen that much about whilst walking past.



Togo north from the marina you can take the Salterns Way which goes inland but a much more attractive option is the coastal path that leads to Dell Quay. The start is made by going through a pretty little copse that's maintained as a nature reserve and has many woodland birds; the views through the trees across Chichester Lake to Old Park Wood are especially attractive. It's easy to get on the foreshore once you're out of the woods at Copperas Point but only if the tide is reasonably low; the mud flats are home to many wildfowl during the winter although most have gone by spring. In the cold winter months it's a delight to see so many Wigeon whistling as well as mallards and huge numbers of Brent Geese that settle on the farmland alongside, despite all the bird scarers, much to the farmers disgust.



This stretch to Dell Quay is not to be rushed, it's particularly pleasant and as you get nearer the quay has a timeless boaty feel to it as you pass the many moorings that dry out at spring tide on the way to the Crown and Anchor. There's a choice of walking the final half mile along the foreshore or staying on the path that leads along a line of very old oak trees mostly lopsided as a result of the prevailing winds. After nearly seven miles the pub makes a welcome pause with excellent beers and a sheltered terrace, unfortunately too many other people like it too so it can get crowded.



Dell Quay is a busy spot with the dingy sailing club and boatyard, it's an ideal spot to launch a small craft. The final stretch passes by the hardstanding with boats ashore, then on through a traditional meadow full of buttercups in spring. The sewage works may not be the most attractive sight but you're soon past it and able to go out into the harbour on a small promontory, even in spring without wildfowl there are plenty of swans to be seen here.

The north side of the promontory is a creek and once past that the path leads through farmland to the delightful little church of St Peter and St Mary. Unfortunately that's the end of the rural part of the walk but it's not far back to the centre of the city under the A27, over the railway and along Westgate.
