

The Lickey Incline and Tardebigge Flight (12¼ miles)

Great Transport Feats

The walk starts at Stoke Works, criss-crosses the railway uphill with an easy stroll back down the canal towpath. In dry weather only sensible footwear is needed. The link-paths can become muddy and overgrown making boots and trousers sensible at other times. Bring a telephoto lens with your camera.

The total walk will take about 4½ - 5½ hours. There are a number of opportunities to shorten the route if you refer to an OS map but don't miss out on the fantastic views along the northern sector of the walk.

Roadside parking available near start point. There are car parks at Aston Fields and Tardebigge Church. Most public houses will allow walkers to park but please check.

Between 1791 and 1815 men toiled to link the Severn at Worcester with Birmingham by canal. In doing so they created the Tardebigge Flight with 30 locks, the longest in the UK followed by a tunnel of 580 yards.

Between 1838 and 1841 navvies linked Gloucester and Birmingham by rail. In doing so they built the Lickey Incline - generally regarded as the steepest main line gradient in Britain - 2½ miles at 1 in 37.

In two places the walk follows the long distance Monarch's Way. The future King Charles II fled north after the Battle of Worcester (1651) to Madeley, Shropshire before coming south through Bromsgrove to Stratford, Charmouth and Shoreham

The towpath is not a public right of way but the Canal and Rivers Trust allows walkers access.

1. Stoke Works - In 1812 salt was discovered during the building of the canal. In 1825 and 1828 two works developed which, following various financial and technical problems, came under the control of John Corbett, the Salt King in 1852 and 1858. He built an industrial village, including the village school, now converted to dwellings. The works had a large boat fleet and internal rail system.

From the Boat and Railway proceed north along Shaw Lane under the Midland and Great Western Bridges, with their associated cottages and houses. There were station platforms on both lines with the GWR part finally closing in 1966.

Turn right at F/P sign and follow track parallel to railway across the Hen Brook to reach Foley Gardens (F/P sign)

2. Stoke Wharf - Turn right and right again into Hanbury Road, pass Navigation Inn to canal, where there is picnic site on the left hand side over the bridge. Turn left along towpath (upstream). There are refreshments at the café on the Metal Ores Ind. Estate, open weekdays and Saturday morning). Continue along towpath to Lock 28.

3. Thompson's Bridge - Cross over the canal, either using the bridge or the lock gate. Note one of the now redundant Ordnance Survey Bench marks mounted into the bridge on the opposite bank. These were used as reference points for elevation above sea level. Go through kissing gate opposite. Follow field round to

gate and into an enclosed path. Cross into the adjacent field through another gate, keeping straight on towards the railway line. Only cross the tracks if you can neither see, hear nor feel a train - many will come round the curve on full power to attack the Bank. Turn right into Fish House Lane (F/P sign).

4. Sugarbrook - Turn right into Sugarbrook Lane and turn left up bank (F/P sign) to tarmac path alongside railway.

5. Formerly Garringtons – (now largely industrial units and housing) Claimed to be the largest automotive forging unit in Europe. Once employing over 1200 people, it closed in 2002 with a pension scandal. About halfway along the path there is the waiting point for the banker.

At the end of tarmac path turn right over railway bridge and through gate onto an enclosed path. Looking towards the new station, the stabling point for the Class 37 bankers was immediately on the left, whilst the Wagon Works and Motive Power Depot (MPD) for bankers, such as Big Bertha, was to the right. Freight from the oil terminal (now the station car park) ceased in 1996.

6. Footpath Junction - (F/P sign) Go left through the gate and continue through another gate into lane. Just past Maidsmere Cottage turn left across stile (F/P sign) and small stream. Keep to left-hand side of sports ground. As the track bears right carry straight on through a gate into the housing estate (Platform Road). Go down the road and straight on through two gates to reach the road.

7. St Godwald's Road - (F/P sign) Turn left along road. The housing estate occupies the site of Wagon Works and the roads are named after railway personnel, some of whom were killed in a locomotive explosion.

[For Bromsgrove Station, Ladybird, shops, buses and car park, continue over railway bridge and turn left]

8. Aston Fields – Just before the bridge turn right on to path along railway embankment to next bridge. This is where the incline commences.

9. Rigby Hall - Cross railway bridge and main road into service road parallel to Rigby Lane, passing Rigby Hall School. Where the road bears left continue straight on down track between another school and playing grounds. Bear slightly right just past playing fields and onto a cycle track/path. Turn right into Penshurst Road and right again when you reach Belvoir Road. At end follow tarmac path which, becomes combined with cycle track, parallel to railway.

10. Oakalls Railway Bridge – Turn right under bridge and through two gates to reach road.

11. Heydon Road, Finstall - Turn left, right and left (almost a cross roads) into Pikes Pool Lane. [For refreshments go straight up main road to Cross Inn]. Go under highway. Just beyond end of pavement turn right over stile, continue parallel to lane and over another stile.

12. Pikes Pool Bridge - Turn right. Follow track with partial hedge initially to the left and then cross to right. Path then keeps to left of hedge/fence until stile is reached in top corner of field. Enjoy the panoramic views as you chug uphill. Continue alongside hedge/fence across two stiles. Turn left along farm track. Leave track on the right across stile in a hedge, just after the first gate across track.

13. High Barn Farm / Vigo – The walk now heads back to the canal. [Alternatively, to continue following incline turn left onto bridleway, then left onto road and right onto path before the railway bridge] [For Tardebigge Cider turn up road and take first right].

For the canal turn right onto the bridleway, back along the other side of the hedge. Go through gate by barn, keep close to right hand side of field to gate in corner with finger post. Excellent views looking ahead towards the radio masts at Wychbold and the Malvern Hills beyond. Head half left downhill to Fininstall Farm. Go through gate into farmyard and left along driveway leading parallel to highway.

14. Tutnall Lane - Go under highway and turn right into Alcester Road.

15. Fininstall - Turn left by bridle way sign by bus stop. (Keep straight on to visit Cross Inn). Some say this was part of a pack horse road for salt from Droitwich. Follow this bridleway through woods and down towards Stoke Cross Farm.

16. Dusthouse Lane - Turn left, keep left at road junction until road turns sharp left by F/P sign. Take the path, keeping left of wire fence. Follow the line of the fence to bridge and cross into copse. Turn right through kissing gate, then left parallel to copse to another kissing gate. Go up the enclosed path to canal bridge (No 56). Looking to your left as you go uphill you will get a glimpse of the old limekilns at Tardebigge Wharf. Cross bridge and down steps onto towpath.

This path apparently closely follows a tramway (closed in 1870) from Dusthouse Quarry to Tardebigge Wharf.

17. Canal / Top Lock - Turn left under bridge and follow towpath back to Stoke Works. The 'Top Lock' is one of the deepest locks on any canal in England and was built on the site of an experimental (and unsuccessful) boat lift.

[17A]. Tardebigge Basin & Church - turn right. At Top Lock (58) there is an information board by Top Lock House and on the other side of the lock a commemorative plaque. Turn right just past the lock and over a stile and through two gates to visit the Baroque St Bartholomew's Church. At one time the church straddled the Worcester/Warwickshire boundary and has also been in Staffordshire. The School House (1845) completes a charming church yard. Cross the car park just the other side of the church and go through a kissing gate. Follow the path back to the canal and turn left heading back toward bridge 56. The towpath continues over the top of the tunnel to Alvechurch and Birmingham]

Just after the London Lane bridge at Tylers Lock is a building which was formerly the Engine House. It once housed a Newcomen-Watt beam engine, used to pump canal water uphill from Tardebigge reservoir.

18. Tardebigge Reservoir - Where a bridleway crosses the canal it is worth going up the bank to admire the wildlife. [At either Bridge 52 or Lock 33, turn right for short cuts back to Aston Fields]

19. Queen's Head - Just beyond the start of the Stoke Flight is this popular inn. [Follow the road to Point 4 and up to Avoncroft Museum. See Walk B]. Continue along the towpath back to starting point. This part of the walk is also common with Walks B, C and D, which contain more detail.

Further Information:

Bookshops and the Tourist Information Centre stock many histories on the railway, canal and salt works.

Black Prince Holidays - Stoke Works 01527 575115 hire canal boats

West Midlands Railway serves Birmingham -Bromsgrove - Worcester – Hereford.

For train times ring 08457 484950 or visit <http://ojp.nationalrail.co.uk/service/planjourney/search>

Bus Routes

Bus No	Route	Points Served
145 145A	Bromsgrove – Stoke Prior - Droitwich (Mon-Sat)	1, 8 and 9.
147	Halesowen - Bromsgrove	8, 9, 10 and 11
318	Stourbridge - Bromsgrove	8
43	Redditch – Finstall – Bromsgrove	8, 15 & 17
42	Redditch - Bromsgrove - Kidderminster	8, 11, 14, 15, 17 & 17a

For times contact Traveline: 0871 200 22 33 www.traveline.info

If you encounter any problems please ring Worcestershire County Council-Public Rights of Way Section 01905 768289 or visit http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20237/public_rights_of_way

For Tourist Information ring:

Droitwich Tourist Information Centre 01905 774312

Redditch Tourist Information Centre 01527 60806

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