

UK Canal Boating

Escape with a canal boating holiday!

Black County Ring from Alvechurch in 7 days

Cruise this route from : Alvechurch

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Black County Ring from Alvechurch in 7 days

Cruising Days : 7.00 to 8.00

Cruising Time : 52.00

Total Distance : 79.00

Number of Locks : 79

Number of Tunnels : 9

Number of Aqueducts : 0

The Black County Ring encompasses the Cannock Chase woodland, a medieval royal hunting forest, with wild deer still roaming this SSSI.

It takes you through the City of Birmingham, but also includes a lot of countryside .

The route is a varied mix of urban and countryside and offers family activities along the way.

Birmingham has its shopping, restaurants and art galleries, plus the Sea Life Centre and museums for the children and lovely waterfront scenes at Gas Street Basin and Cambrian Wharf

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Cruising Notes

Day 1

The small town of Alvechurch is set below the canal in a hollow, it has some fine half timbered houses and has local stores and takeaways. There is a pub Canalside in the Marina- The Weighbridge Inn.

Turn north towards Birmingham and the ridge of hills is in the distance. You pass a couple of Reservoirs to your left popular with bird watchers and walkers , the scenery is very pleasant and rural. At Hopwood the Hopwood House Inn is Canalside at bridge 67 .

Soon the very long West Hills Tunnel beckons, and you will leave rural Worcestershire and pass into Warwickshire and the Black Country.

The Tunnel is 2726 yards long, so don your waterproofs as you will get dripped on, its one of the longest tunnels in the country!

The tunnel emerges in Kings Norton , bridge 71 is the best access point for shops, and after a mile you turn right at Kings Norton Junction, note the old canal house just before the junction.

Continue northwards towards Birmingham, and you soon past Bournville. The Bournville Estate was started in the late 1800's , and now Cadburys World is open to visitors and is a chocoholics dream! Booking is required. There is mooring for visitors.

You can also walk through the Works to Selly Manor and Minworth Greaves- 2 half timbered Birmingham houses of the 13th and 14th Centuries. At Bournville Station walk west to the Cadbury's entrance, take Birdcage walk through the Works , bear right at the fork then turn right at the village green.

You pass through Selly Oak and past Birmingham University, and Edgbaston which is home to Warwickshire's County Cricket Ground- an England Test Venue. After the short Edgbaston Tunnel abot 1/2 mile to your left is the Birmingham Botanical Gardens & Glasshouses which are open to the public.

About 1/4 mile west of Bridge 86 not too far from the Plough and Harrow Hotel is Perrott's Folly, a 7 storey tower built in 1758 and claimed to be Birmingham's most eccentric building. It is thought that Tolkien based his Two Towers of Gondor from Lord of the Rings on this tower, and he lived opposite the Hotel for a time. The canal makes a sharp left turn into Gas Street Basin , and you can moor where-ever you find moorings, either here or continue on as there are many moorings around.

Gas Street basin which is in the heart of Birmingham's canal network, has been has been redeveloped into a unique experience where traditional narrow boats moor up next to cosmopolitan cafes and bars. The surrounding area is a vibrant arts and entertainment area and there are many shopping options within a short walk.

You can also moor at the Cambrian Wharf by the Sea life Centre which might be slightly quieter. Go past the Gas Street Basin and turn right at Deep Cuttings Junction, the Cambrian Wharf is by the Sea Life Centre.

Amongst some of the attractions are the National Sea Life Centre and the Jewellery Quarter Discovery centre, also many fine Art galleries and over 500 restaurants offering every choice of food!

For shopping a visit to the new Bullring is a must, which covers an area the size of 26 football pitches and a has a huge range of shops.

Close by is the National Indoor Arena, one of the busiest large scale indoor sporting and entertainment venues in Europe.

It is 4 hours to here (or slightly less as lock free).

Day 2

If you haven't done so already turn right at Deep Cuttings Junction past Cambrian Wharf and you will meet the Farmers Bridge flight of locks, you will need a BW anti vandal key..

From this point the locks fall steeply away from the heart of Birmingham.

At Aston Junction continue left and northwards where you encounter the Aston flight of locks which takes the canal down 11 locks to Salford Junction. Aston Villa Football Club is about a mile to your left at Holborn Hill Bridge, and they offer Stadium tours, which is a chance to see behind one of the oldest Football clubs in the World. Aston Hall is close to the Football Club, built in the 1600's this is one of the last great houses to be built in the Jacobean style.

At Salford Junction turn right onto the Birmingham & Fazeley Junction.

You soon pass Star City on your right, Star City is one of the UK's largest leisure destinations - a unique family entertainment destination with 12 restaurants and 11 leisure attractions including a 25 screen VUE cinema. Funfairs, fireworks displays and other exciting family orientated events regularly take place at StarCity, including high-profile attractions such as the Moscow State Circus and Cirque De Soleil. It is also home to England's largest Indoor Adventure Golf Complex, a 22 lane ten pin bowling alley, a purpose built all-weather 5-a-side football center, a Laser Station and a Twin Peaks Family Climbing Centre.

All shops are readily available alongside the canal beyond Salford, a good access point is where the A452 crosses the canal at Tyburn bridge.

The Minworth Locks are soon reached and begin the descent towards Fazeley & there is a handy transport cafe near Hansons bridge. There are also pubs – the Hare & Hounds by Minworth Green bridge, and The Boat by Caters bridge.

It is 9 hours cruising from the Gas street basin so a useful place to stop for the night.

Day 3

As the canal descends towards Fazeley it loses the industry that has accompanied it since Birmingham. At the village of Curdworth there is a pub to the south of Curdworth bridge, and another in the village. Beyond Curdworth Tunnel and the M6 motorway, the canal continues to Fazeley in complete isolation through empty fields, only the 11 locks falling to Fazeley junction breaking the journey.

At Bodymoor Heath is a lovely pub- the Dog & Doublet by Cheatles Farm bridge. To the right is Kingsbury Water Park, a 600 acre landscaped park containing 30 lakes from old gravel pits. There are walks, nature trails, fishing, horse riding, sailing and wind surfing and power boating. There is also a childrens farm at broomey Croft near Kingsbury Swivel bridge.

The Gothic style footbridge at Drayton Bassett is worth a photo, it has twin battlemented towers which look quite ridiculous on such a small construction, but it is wonderfully eccentric. Just beyond that is Drayton Manor Theme park to the left of the road. It has 15 acres of serious rides so a definite day out for the children, also for the smaller children there is Thomas Land, and for all there is a Zoo to look around.

In the evening it might be worth getting a Taxi into nearby Tamworth and visit the Snowdome, where you can ski, snowboard or toboggan on real snow, see website.

At Fazeley Junction the Coventry Canal meets the Birmingham & Fazeley, turn a sharp left and you will pass Peels Wharf.

This all gives way to lightly wooded open fields towards Hopwas Hill as the Canal follows the course of the River Tame very closely, passing below Hopwas village.

Hopwas is a pretty & tidy village with a green, built on the side of a hill. It has a PO, and a convenience store. On the Canal is the Tame Otter Pub, where real ale & food are served all day, there are moorings available, also here is the Red Lion, food at lunch and in the evenings, steaks are a speciality.

Just beyond here there is a delightful wooded stretch that covers the side of the hill.

Landing is forbidden because these are the Whittington Firing Ranges.

After the wood the canal continues in a side cut embankment with a view of Tamworth to the east.

The next village you will reach is Whittington. There is a PO stores, garage, chemist, Chinese takeaway & off licence. The village centre is to the west of Whittington bridge, the shops are best approached from bridge 78. There are 3 pubs here, The Swan Inn on the Canalside, and the Bell Inn & Dog Inn in the main street. From here you can catch a bus into Lichfield, which is well worth the detour.

The three spires of the 13th century Cathedral in Lichfield, the 'Ladies of the Vale' are a visible landmark for miles around. The modern shopping centre contrasts sharply with the graceful Georgian buildings of the city centre. There are excellent pubs & restaurants and night clubs, with a Farmers market on Sundays. You can also catch a train into the centre of Birmingham from Litchfield.

Between Whittington & bridge 78, the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal changes to the Coventry Canal.

At Huddlesford is the junction with the Wyrley & Essington Canal, now only used for private moorings. There is an award winning friendly canalside pub here, - The Plough serving real ale & good food. You can walk the 1-2 miles to Lichfield.

It is worth mooring here for the night as it is 9 hours cruising from Minworth.

Day 4

The Canal runs northward through flat open country and a swing bridge announces your arrival at Fradley Junction, where you meet the Trent & Mersey canal.

There is a boatyard here, a british Waterways information centre and cafe, and a very popular pub, The Swan – reputedly one of the most photographed pubs in the country. It is in a 200 yr old listed building, with cosy fires, real ales, and good bar meals with a carvery on Sundays.

You arrive on the Trent & Mersey in the middle of a 5-lock flight.

Also nearby & good for kids to unwind is the Fradley pool Nature reserve, with lots of walks quite close to the Canal.

The canal soon enters quiet countryside until it gets to the village of Handsacre. There is useful store 500 yards south of bridge 59, and a fish and chip shop and a cafe near bridge 58. The net village is Armitage and there is a very popular restaurant called Tom Cobleighs Spode Cottage, also the Plum Pudding Pub is canalside, and the Ash tree at bridge 62.

You pass on your left Spode House, a former home of the pottery family.

The huge chimneys of Rugeley Power station come into view, there are pleasant moorings by bridge 66 with the town centre and shops just a short walk away.

Cannock chase to the south covers an area of 26 miles and has been designated an area of outstanding natural

beauty. Near the Sherlock valley are German war graves from the 1st and 2nd World wars. The museum of Cannock Chase illustrate the life of the Chase, from medieval times to a 19th century colliery.

To the south of Wolseley bridge is a pub, indian restaurant, and antique, craft & garden centre.

The village of Little Haywood is off to the right, but a good place to moor up for the night is before Haywood Lock, with lovely views of Shugborough Hall. Shugborough Hall dates from 1693 and belonged to the Earl of Lichfields family. The estate is now managed by Staffordshire County Council and is open during the season. You can look around the Mansion, servants quarters, walled garden and beautiful terraces and stone monuments with extravagant names scattered around the stunning 19th century Grade One listed gardens. Also on hand is Park Farm which contains an agricultural museum a working mill and a rare breeds centre. There are stores in Great haywood.

It is 8 hours cruising to here

Day 5

After the lock turn left at Great Haywood Junction onto the Staffordshire & Worcestershire canal. You soon come into Tixall Wide, which resembles a lake rather than a canal. To the north is the extraordinary Tixall Gatehouse , this massive 4 storey Elizabethan building dates from 1598 and is all that is left of Tixall hall. To the south is Shugborough Hall and the park surrounding it.

At Milford there is good farm shop south of bridge 105. Your crew should always be at the ready on this canal, as the locks come at regular intervals!

Radford bridge is the closest point to Stafford, about 1.5 miles if you fancy the walk, although there is frequent bus service. (Stafford is to the North, or right of the canal.)

Stafford is well worth visiting as there is a lot of fine old buildings including the City Hall complex of Italianate buildings dating from 1880. There is also a robust looking gaol and there are some very pretty back alleys.

The canal continues along the Canal until it reaches the relatively old village of Penkridge, and you can moor up above the lock. There is a Pub canalside by the lock, and a few pubs and stores and a bank in the village.

At Filance bridge 84 there is a useful Spar shop 100 yards north on the estate.

Gailey Lock is approached directly as you go under the A51, look out for the large round toll keepers watch tower , there is now a canal shop selling gifts on the bottom floor.

½ mile east of Gailey Wharf is the Gailey & Calf Heath reservoirs which are now nature reserves, and ½ west is the Spread Eagle- a large road house serving real ale & food.

It is a good place to moor up for the night.

It is 8 hours cruising to here.

Day 6

The canal is very twisting which shows its considerable age, you soon pass Calf Heath Marina near Hatherton branch Junction. There is a restaurant serving reasonable priced food in the marina.

You soon reach the outskirts of Wolverhampton, and the junction of the Shopshire Union Canal with the Stafforshire and Worcester at Autherley. Continue on down the Sattf & Worcs as you will soon reach the

Aldersley Junction where you turn left onto the Birmingham navigations.

21 Locks now carry you up into the heart of Wolverhampton so your crew are going to keep fit today! Dunstall Park racecourse is passed on the right.

After the last lock you can moor up in the Broad Street basin, as there are useful water and refuse points. It is also not far into the centre of Wolverhampton.

It is 9 hours cruising to here.

Day 7

Continue down the main line of the Birmingham canal, ignoring the left turn up the Wyrley & Essington Canal, and later on the Wednesbury oak Loop also on your left. At Tipton Green keep straight on, ignore the turning down to the Black Country Museum .

Keep on the Birmingham main line towards the Gas Street basin which is where you will join the Worcester & Birmingham Canal again on your way back to Alvechurch.

The Birmingham Level main Line past Tipton Green is very uninteresting until you again reach Deep Cuttings Junction where you turned at the start of your journey!

Retrace your steps and perhaps moor for the night at Hopwood House pub which is 9.5 hours cruising today, and leaves you just an hour to do tomorrow.

Day 8

Get up early and cruise back to the Marina from Hopwood

Useful Links

Description : Cadbury World

Website : <http://www.cadburyworld.co.uk/>

Telephone : 0844 880 7667

Description : National Sea Life Centre

Website : <http://www.visitsealife.com/birmingham/>

Telephone : 0871 423 2110

Description : Visit Birmingham

Website : <http://visitbirmingham.com/>

Telephone : n/a

Description : Gas Street Basin, Birmingham

Website : <http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/directory/65/gas-street-basin>

Telephone : n/a

Description : Selly Manor and Minworth Greaves

Website : <http://www.sellymanormuseum.org.uk>

Telephone : n/a

Description : Birmingham Botanical Gardens

Website : <http://www.birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk>

Telephone : n/a

Description : Aston Villa Football Club

Website : <http://www.avfc.co.uk>

Telephone : n/a

Description : Aston Hall

Website : <http://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/aston>

Telephone : n/a

The information above is provided in good faith to assist you with planning your canal boat holiday.

Information accuracy cannot be guaranteed, however, if you do see something that needs updating, please don't hesitate to [contact us](#).

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