

Telephone : 01395 443545

UK Canal Boating

Email : bookings@ukcanalboating.com

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Booking Office : PO Box 57, Budleigh
Salterton. Devon. EX9 7ZN. England.

South Pennine Ring from Bollington through the longest tunnel in the UK

Cruise this route from : Bollington

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Cruising Days : 15.00 to 0.00

Cruising Time : 87.00

Total Distance : 106.00

Number of Locks : 229

Number of Tunnels : 11

Number of Aqueducts : 0

The South Pennine is a circular canal route in Northern England.

The South Pennine takes in the whole of the Huddersfield Broad Canal, Huddersfield Narrow Canal and Ashton Canal, most of the Rochdale Canal and part of the Calder and Hebble Navigation.

It provides a varied range of canal scenery, including probably the most dramatic upland scenery anywhere on the canal system as the route passes through the Pennines.

It has a variety of canal features including broad and narrow locks, aqueducts and sections of river navigation. The route includes the famous Standedge Tunnel - the longest canal tunnel in Britain and one of the Seven Wonders of the Waterways

Cruising Notes

NAVIGATIONAL NOTES

You need to be at the Diggle portal by 11.30am on the day of your passage, passage must be booked at least 3 working days in advance but book much earlier as they get very booked up, Passage is only available on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between March and November . So if starting your holiday on a Tuesday you will be at the tunnel by Friday Day 4, If starting on Friday Day 4 will be Monday. Passage is between 1pm

to 2.30pm and one of the Canal & River Trust Tunnel 'Chaperones' is aboard your boat for the passage as the tunnel is extremely narrow in some places so your boat will be measured to make sure it will fit, check the dimensions before you book.

You can book your passage through the tunnel online <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/places-to-visit/standedge-tunnel-and-visitor-centre/boating-through-standedge-tunnel>

or call: 03030 404040 and ask for Standedge Tunnel passage bookings.

Allow about 3 hours for the passage.

Check lock opening hours on the Canals & Rivers Trust website as water saving measures have been taking place over the last year or so with restricted opening times.

Day 1

There is open countryside around Bollington, and there is a good view of this stone built town from the huge canal embankment that cuts across it.

From the Wharf turn north.

From here it is only 1 mile to the boundary of the Peak District national park. West of bridge 27 is a sociable village pub.

As the canal leaves Bollington it enters an isolated stretch through quiet countryside, there are pubs:- Windmill Inn 250yds west of bridge 25, Miners Arms near bridge 18- there are good moorings here. Also a picnic area of Hag Footbridge 16.

Higher Poynton is a pretty place to moor up and its only 2 hours cruising to here, and the canal is wider here too. There are ducks and swans, and nearby is a recreation ground, also a pub just near Bridge 15 (Brownhills Bridge), called the Boar's Head. Children are welcome, and there is a garden with play area for the children.

Nelson Pit Visitor Centre is one of Poynton's hidden gems and is perfectly situated near to Poynton Marina for a relaxing afternoon.

Built on the site of a former colliery, this bijoux centre features displays about Poynton's mining history, the origins of the Middlewood Way and the local canal network.

Anson Engine Museum is also just a short walk from the Marina- it houses a unique collection of over 250 gas and oil engines, also a fantastic display showing the development of the internal combustion engine. The museum has a collection which tells the story of the engine from the cannon to the sophisticated, electronically controlled engine of the future.

The museum also has a steam section with two Robey engines; an A frame and a beam engine. Pride of place goes to the Stott engine that used to drive a cotton wadding mill in Hazel Grove.

Day 2

The Macclesfield Canal wends its way through largely unspoilt countryside, with little villages and occasional pubs along the way. You will very soon encounter a tall aqueduct over a railway. Looking to the west, you may glimpse the suburbs of Stockport and Manchester. Close to Eccles Bridge 3 at Goyt Mill, there is a fish and chip shop.

The village of High lane is soon reached and a useful stop for supplies if there is anything you have forgotten!

There are moorings between the High Lane Arm (branch of the canal) and bridge 11, with shops close by.

Marple is a busy boating centre, and there are some excellent walks in this area where the stunning scenery combines with often unexpected remains of early industry.

Soon you have to turn left to ascend the Marple flight of locks.

By the bridge is the Ring O' Bells Pub. It has a canalside patio and garden, and children are welcome.

On the Peak Forest Canal after turning left at Marple Junction the 1st lock is just after you turn so get your crew ready. The first four are quite close together, the rest spaced further apart, making the total distance around a mile long. At this point, the canal is 500ft above sea level.

Not far from the canal, to the left, is the town of Marple. Ludworth Moor is quite nearby, where there are ruins of an old Celtic Druid's temple, known as 'Robin Hood's Picking Rods'.

Once through the locks, it's not far to Marple Aqueduct, a three-arched ancient monument, over the River Goyt. It stands at almost 100ft above the River. Then you will go through Hyde Bank Tunnel, which is 308yds long, continuing northwards, then over a couple of minor aqueducts, and cruising through Romily, Bredbury and Woodley, where you will cruise through the narrow Woodley Tunnel, 176yds long.

There are a couple of pubs in Romily -the Duke of York, east of Bridge 14; children welcome and outside seating, and the Friendship Inn, also east of Bridge 14; children welcome, but only until early evening.

Continuing northwards, as you make your way to Dukinfield Junction, the canal becomes more suburban, and to the right, beyond the M67 Bridge, you can see the industrial town of Hyde, which is in Greater Manchester. There is a pub at Dunkinfield called the Globe Hotel, near Bridge No. 2, with an outdoor patio and children welcome.

Ashton under Lyne is at the junction, and if you have time you might like to moor up and have a look around.

At the junction, bear right onto the Huddersfield Canal, towards Stalybridge. The canal is the focus of this bustling town, and there are many colourful boats moored along the canal. There is plenty of mooring space between locks 4W and 8W. In the distance, above the rooftops, you can make out the Pennines.

Pubs are plentiful in Stalybridge – Station Buffet Bar; Q Inn; Old Fleece Hotel; White House; Bridge Inn, and Bull's Head. The town is around 8 miles from Manchester city centre, and has its own football club.

For more information about Stalybridge, visit their website. (useful links below)

The town of Stalybridge was the creation of the Industrial Revolution. In 1776 came the event that was to lead to the development of Stalybridge as a town - COTTON!

Cotton manufacture in the village was growing rapidly, and more water-powered mills were being built along the local streams as well as along the river.

You can moor here for the night as you will have cruised for nearly 8 and a half hours.

Day 3

The Parish of Saddleworth, which lies east of the large town of Oldham is broadly rural, historically in the West Riding of Yorkshire, for centuries Saddleworth was a centre of woollen cloth production in the domestic system. Following the Industrial Revolution, in the 18th and 19th centuries, Saddleworth became a centre for cotton spinning and weaving. By the end of Queen Victoria's reign, mechanised textile production had become a vital part of the local economy. The boom in industry called for greater transport links, including the Huddersfield Narrow Canal and several railways.

Following the Great Depression Saddleworth's textile sector declined. Much of Saddleworth's architecture and infrastructure dates from its textile processing days however, notably the Saddleworth Viaduct and several cottages and terraces, many built by the local mill owners.

The Pennines beckon from over the rooftops of Stalybridge as you continue your climb towards the short Scout Tunnel.

The canal passes through leafy glades with occasional views of past industry, the coal mining in this area. There are attractively sited picnic areas along the route.

Impressive mills although sadly now derelict, line the canal, reminding us of its past history as this was the centre of the cotton and weaving industry in the 18th century.

Mossley was a prosperous cotton town in the 19th century and Mossley Industrial heritage Centre brings the old industry back to life in this old cotton spinning Mill. The centre is very small but has a collection of old photographs for visitors to browse through as well as some artefacts from the town's history of cotton spinning. The centre is usually open from 2.00 to 4.00 pm from Wednesday to Saturday. please phone first to check opening times.

There are 2 pubs- Roaches Lock which is a real canal oriented Pub and canalside patio, and Tollemarche Arms with outside seating overlooking the Canal.

The scale of the textile industry is subdued by the imposing Saddleworth Moor, along with scattered attractive villages along lovely views over the high ground. The canal continues its steep rise across the heathered Moorland deep beneath the Pennines.

Uppermill is a traditional Pennine Village just after Wade Lock 21, tourism has long replaced the Cotton and Weaving industry . Saddleworth Museum and Art Gallery are by Wade Lock , telling the story of Saddleworth's past with many intriguing objects. The Granby Arms in the High street is a traditional village pub.

Dobcross is soon reached , another delightful traditional Pennine village with its winding streets and traditional cottages and again with its past very much in the Cotton and Weaving Industry. There are a couple of Pubs- The Swan Inn and Navigation Inn.

Brownhill Countryside Centre is by Brownhill Bridge and is surrounded by the dramatic Pennines scenery.

It is 7 hours to here and a Dobcross is a lovely place to stop for the night

Day 4

After a climb of 9 locks you reach Diggle, at the heart of the local hand weaving industry in the late 18th century. The village is situated on the moorlands of the Pennine hills.

It is 2.5 hours from Dobcross to Diggle so get up early to get here in plenty of time for your passage through the Tunnel.

The dark entrance to the Standedge Tunnel lies a short distance away. Standedge Tunnel is Britain's longest,

deepest, highest canal tunnel, deep below the Pennines. It's one of the seven wonders of the waterways.

Four parallel tunnels make up the Standedge Tunnels in northern England. These four tunnels are comprised of three railway tunnels, and one canal tunnel. All of the tunnels are linked by cross tunnels to provide access and escape routes for the people who use them. Perhaps most importantly is the historic significance of the tunnels. The canal tunnel was built in 1811, and the railway tunnels, particularly the central tunnel, was completed in 1848 by the London and Northwestern Railway. All of the tunnels provided important transportation routes.

The canal tunnel is known as the highest, deepest, and longest tunnel in the area. Amazingly, it lies 636 feet underground. Once the tunnel was completed after 17 years of man hours, it provided a through route. The canal tunnel is wide enough for a narrow boat to pass. Interestingly, engineers created wider areas throughout the tunnel to provide passing lanes for people. This contributed to a safer route for people to use. Today, a lock chain is used to prevent two-way traffic from becoming a problem. The last boat to use it was a commercial boat in 1921. This tunnel was officially closed in 1944, and it deteriorated as a result. Restoration efforts have enabled people to use it once again.

Three railway tunnels run parallel to the canal tunnel, and to each other. The 1848 tunnel is the most well-known of them all. It became notorious for its intense traffic during peak travel hours. It has a length of 3 miles, and it is level throughout its length. This is important because water troughs were built along the sides to provide steam locomotives with water supplies without having to stop for any length of time. The busy nature of the tunnel required the construction of the parallel tunnel in 1871. Both of these tunnels became important business routes.

Although all 3 railway tunnels are still maintained, the 1894 tunnel is the only one that remains in use. Perhaps most importantly, this tunnel serves as an escape route for emergency situations. It provides an emergency escape for important rescue personnel such as police, ambulance drivers, and fire fighters. Consider this importance during the height of traffic in northern England. The ability to quickly get from one area of England to the other, could mean the difference between life and death. Connector tunnels make this feat possible.

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Allow about 3 hours for the passage.

Once through the tunnel, you can moor above lock 42E for up to 24 hours. Further mooring space is available below lock 32E, between Marsden and Slaithwaite villages.

Marsden has always been a focus for the waevign industry and is associated with the Luddite riots, there is a set of socks in the village which is now a popular TV location.

Marsden Moor Estate is owned by the National trust and over 5000 acres of morrland are accessible through a series of walks and trails.

The Standedge interpretation offers all the facts and figures concerning the Tunnel.

Day 5

You leave behind the hussle and bussle of the tunnel and start the long descent into Huddersfield through the many locks, so be prepared for some work today! Trees line the waterway and from time to time you see the remains of a splendid old mill as the trees back away.

The railway accompanies you into Slaithwaite and you are soon amongst the shops and streets of this settlement.

It is 5.5 hours to here and a pretty place to stop for the night as there are a few pubs in the village for your refreshment.

Day 6

Linthwaite is soon reached and is home to several very striking derelict mills, although some are being converted into attractive apartments.

The steady descent of the canal is with much contrast- pretty stone bridges as well as an imposing railway viaduct all in attractive settings.

2 short tunnels and a few more locks and there are moorings by Firth Street Bridge if you wish to visit the Victorian industrial town of Huddersfield. There is a museum depicting the Weavers life at Colne Valley, Tolson Museum houses local history and archaeology, and easily accessible by bus is Holmfirth for devotees of the TV programme 'Last of the Summer Wine'. Kirklees Light railway is a narrow-gauge railway offering a scenic ride.

It is 6 hours to here from last night mooring and there are moorings by Firth Street Bridge

Day 7

For the remarkable Turnbridge Loco liftbridge you will need your Watermate key.

9 locks take you away from Huddersfield and you reach Cooper Bridge lock which marks the entry to the river section of the Cadler & Hebble Navigation, but before leaving the lock you should be quite sure of the layout of the junction and your intended passage as it is confusing.

You are taking the left turn towards Brighouse.

Brighouse is a woollen textile village transformed in the 19th century into an important canal port, silk and cotton were also spun here. The canal cuts through the centre of the town, close to the market place the scene is very pleasant with gardens seats and willow trees.

There are good moorings between the 2 locks.

The canal follows the River Calder and the railway is never far behind.

Flooded gravel pits nearby are used for water skiing.

Elland basin is a pleasant place to stop for the night with tastefully restored buildings and gardens and a few pubs nearby, it is 7 hours to here.

Elland is on the steep south side of the Calder valley and its narrow streets discourage traffic.

Day 8

The locks continue at intervals until you reach Salterhebble where there are 3 locks very close to each other. This picturesque locks are superbly kept, and the bottom lock here has an electrically operated guillotine gate operated with a Watermate Key.

The Salterhebble branch is away to the right, you continue left to Sowerby Bridge.

The narrow canal clings to the side of a wooded hill. Wainhouse tower to the north is a 253 foot chimney which has been converted into a viewing tower and is open on bank holidays.

Sowerby bridge is soon reached where the Rochdale canal branches off to cross the Pennines.

The basin at Sowerby bridge has been restored and its a great canal centre. The scale and grandeur of the landscape dominate the town.

Tuel Lane lock is operated by a lock keeper and passage is normally 7 days a week 8am to 4pm from mid March to end October ,outside of these months you have to book more than 48 hours in advance . Do not enter Tuel Lane Tunnel that follows the locks whilst boats are in the lock or when the lock is emptying because of turbulence.

Two rivers and two canals form the heart of this fascinating mill town at Sowerby Bridge. From the Middle Ages and possibly as far back as the Roman occupation, Sowerby Bridge was an important crossing over the Ryburn and Calder rivers.

Industrial growth meant the development of transport here was rapid. In 1735 one of the oldest turnpike roads in Britain was completed, whilst in 1757 John Smeaton, the Eddystone Lighthouse designer, surveyed the development of an early "navigation" (part river, part canal), the Calder and Hebble, which was eventually built in 1770.

Add to this the most successful trans-Pennine canal, the Rochdale (built in 1804 and restored in 2002) which is home to Tuel Lock, the deepest in the country.

Today Sowerby Bridge is shaped in a new style. Its flower-decked canal wharf is a great eating and drinking location, updating one of Britain's most authentic early millscapes. Explore the town's foodie reputation there are many bars, restaurants and cafes here.

The countryside beyond Sowerby Bridge is a tranquil rural scene, with stone walled fields reaching up the steep hillsides and small stone homesteads with rich pasture grazed by sheep and horses, as you climb towards Hebden Bridge.

Surrounded by breathtaking countryside, Hebden Bridge has been voted as the "fourth funkiest town in the world" best small market town in the UK and "the greatest town in Europe". Unique double decker "over and under dwellings" hang on the leafy green hillsides above the town. Houses were built in terraces with 4 to 5 storeys because space was limited by the steep valleys and lack of flat land. The upper storeys face uphill while the lower ones face downhill, with their back wall against the hillside, each with separate entrances.

Hebden Bridge's 18th century core and Victorian streets spread from the 16th century packhorse bridge over the Hebden Water that gives the town its name.

Moor for the night here as you deserve to take some refreshments in the many pubs that surround this area !!

Set atop the hillside, hundreds of feet above Hebden Bridge, Heptonstall is one of the most historic villages in the Pennines. Don't miss the Heptonstall Museum, housed in the Old Grammar School building, telling the story of the infamous Cragg Vale Coiners and Heptonstalls' part in the English Civil War. Nearby 'Weaver's Square' is a fine example of different types of Yorkshire paving, from cobbles to flagstones

Day 9

From Hebden Bridge the Canal hugs the narrow valley bottom surrounded by steep hillsides, interspersed with textile mills and dyeworks on its way to Todmorden. As you approach Todmorden there's a distinct change in the air as the scenery bursts with Yorkshire charisma. The snarling old boundary between Yorkshire and Lancashire once stabbed through Todmorden, and though many folk still muse over where 'Toddy' belongs today, it's now firmly declared a Yorkshire town. The bloody Wars of the Roses, with seething battles over who should be king, and the great lurch into the Tudor dynasty, have been silenced by the years and soothed by the region's uplifting vistas.

Nestled deep in the Calder Valley, the characterful market town of Todmorden is a little bit Yorkshire, a little bit Lancashire, and wholly unique. Todmorden used to stand with one half in Lancashire - the old Yorkshire/Lancashire border ran through the magnificent Grade I listed Town Hall. The name means "Valley of the Marsh Fox" and the town is situated at the point where three valleys meet. Todmorden town centre's high street and traditional cobbled highways are populated by an array of independent shops and cafes.

There are many pubs in Todmorden if you wish to take refreshment, however the nights mooring will be in the small village of Walsden after Travis Mill Lock 28 where there is a water point and refuse disposal and nearby pub.

It is 6.25 hours to here.

Day 10

The canal continues to steadily climb through a series of locks to the summit. The landscape is of open moorland.

The Summit Inn is a welcome break from the exhausting work of the locks! The village of Summit was once a bustling woollen weaving community. Underneath this community the railway burrows through a tunnel 2869 yards long - the longest in the world when built in 1839. From March to October the Summit Locks are locked to preserve water at night.

The canal now descends from the summit to the bustling town of Littleborough, good for supplies. Continue onto Smithy Bridge 54 where the Smithy Bridge Pub awaits you. There is also a takeaway in the village.

It is 6.5 hours to here.

Hollingworth Lake lies to the left of the village, Hollingworth Lake is a man-made lake which spans 118 acres. It was originally built as the main water source for the Rochdale Canal during the 19th century. The lake soon became an attraction for those living nearby and in Victorian times it was known as "The Weighvers' Seaport".

You can have a go at a variety of activities at Hollingworth Lake Activity Centre, including:

Watersports: sailing, kayaking, canoeing, powerboating, windsurfing, rowing and more.

Outdoor activities: rock climbing, mountain biking, archery and more.

You need a permit to fish at Hollingworth Lake. These are available from Hollingworth Lake Visitor Centre.

The lake is stocked with coarse fish, including bream, carp, tench, roach and perch. There's no close season but there are restrictions on where you can fish. A small hide at the south west corner overlooks a natural area where boats and watersports are excluded to help you fish.

As well as walking around the lake itself, the wider country park has plenty of walking routes. These range from easy strolls to sturdier treks in the surrounding hills. The visitor centre has leaflets and guide books for these walks.

Day 11

At Clegg Hall there is some early 19th century weavers cottages and an old mill from the same era. The open moorland finishes as the canal approaches Rochdale, but the canal skirts the town. The motorway disturbs the peace beyond Castleton, but is soon gone. There is a compact flight of 6 locks at Slattocks but the Ship Inn is canalside by lock 55 to provide refreshment. This stretch is a mix of industry and housing, but you can moor near bridge 72/73 in Chadderton for the night, The Rose of Lancaster pub overlooks the canal, the River Irk and open countryside.

It is 6.5 hours to here.

Day 12

There is only one lock in the 3 mile stretch from the River Irk aqueduct to Failsworth so your crew can have a rest!

The Rochdale canal now makes its way into Manchester and from Failsworth Top lock you now have 17 locks to negotiate. Canal & River Trust has a number of volunteer lock keepers working on the Rochdale Canal flight of 17, between Lock 65 at Failsworth and Lock 81 at Miles Platting. Although booking is no longer required on the flight, it can be hard work and a number of boaters have requested assistance. The volunteers are happy to help when they can. Their help is given voluntarily so assistance is not guaranteed, but if you would like help call 0303 040 4040 at least 24 hours before your planned passage (longer if possible) and they will try to arrange this with the volunteers.

As you are now travelling through the heart of Manchester, along the Rochdale & Ashton canals, and you need to take the usual precautions as with any built up area- lock any front hatches or doors, and put valuables out of sight. Don't be afraid to venture into urban areas where the industrial archaeology can be very interesting.

Failsworth has a collection of fine Mill buildings and Newton Heath a canalside market and handy shops. Attractively painted cast iron bridges, reflecting the livery of past railway companies, regularly span the navigation as the canal weaves its way past a series of abandoned but impressive Cotton Mills.

At Dulcie Street Junction turn left onto the Ashton Canal.

The Ashton canal takes you past steaming factories, tall chimneys, away from Manchester. The canal is a welcome escape from the city life, and it continues its tranquil path through the city.

Your crew will be busy though as the 1st of 18 locks soon approaches as you climb the canal to the Dukinfield Junction.

Large scale redevelopment has been completed at Paradise Wharf and Piccadilly Village with smart flats, basins and a crane.

The well cared for Beswick locks stand next to the new stadium where you can see the wonderful 'B of the Bang' sculpture- an explosion of spikes designed to commemorate the Commonwealth Games held here in 2002.

Moor for the night near here it is nearly 7 hours to here.

Day 13

At Fairfield Junction the last of the 18 locks is reached! It is a picturesque Canal scene here with traditional buildings.

At Dukinfield Junction turn right onto the Peak Forest Canal towards Hyde & Marple. This is where you started the Ring!!

Moor for the night around Romiley as there are a couple of pubs to choose from- it is 6.5 hours to here

Day 14

From Romiley you reach Hyde Bank Tunnel, which is 308yds long,

Now your crew will need to be at hand as the Marple flight of 16 locks is reached. Turn right at the Marple Junction down the Macclesfield canal.

Marple is a busy boating centre, and there are some excellent walks in this area where the stunning scenery combines with often unexpected remains of early industry.

By the bridge is the Ring O' Bells Pub. It has a canalside patio and garden, and children are welcome.

The Macclesfield Canal wends its way through largely unspoilt countryside, with little villages and occasional pubs along the way. You will very soon encounter a tall aqueduct over a railway.

Higher Poynton is a pretty place to moor up.

As the canal weaves towards Bollington it enters an isolated stretch through quiet countryside, there are pubs:- Windmill Inn 250yds west of bridge 25, Miners Arms near bridge 18- there are good moorings here. Also a picnic area of Hag Footbridge 16.

There is open countryside around Bollington, and there is a good view of this stone built town from the huge canal embankment that cuts across it.

It is 7 hours to here

Useful Links

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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