

Central Birmingham Trail

Birmingham Canal Navigations



The Trail

The [Central Birmingham Trail](#) starts at the entrance to the Sea Life Centre in Brindleyplace. The northern section of the trail (Stops 1-6 to and from Cambrian Wharf) takes 45 - 60 minutes including stops. The optional southern section (Stops 7 - 10 to and from Gas Street Basin) takes an additional 30 minutes including stops.

Answers

Sheet 2 Answers

Stop 1: The original 1769 canal is over 235 years old. Sherborne Wharf is signed at the entrance to the Oozells Street Loop. James Brindley's canal was a contour canal which looped around the contours to avoid gradients. The apartments alongside the loop were built in the 1990s. The NIA (National Indoor Arena) was completed in 1991.

Stop 2: The newer canal forms a "short cut" because it follows a much straighter route. A "cut" is another name for a canal! B.C.N. stands for Birmingham Canal Navigations. The signpost reads "Gas Street 350m". (The numbered "Canal Walk" signs enable British Waterways people to locate and maintain the lighting bollards.) The bridge is made of cast iron. The inscription on the bridge (above the towpath on the opposite bank) reads "Horseley Iron Works, Staffordshire, 1827". The new "cut" was opened in 1829.

Sheet 3 Answers

Stop 3: The towpath was used originally by horses that towed the boats. Today the towpath is used by walkers, joggers and cyclists. The milepost is one of a thousand erected to mark the creation of the National Cycle Network. It indicates 5 miles to West Bromwich.

Stop 4: Cambrian House was probably built at the same time as the canal as the vaulting in the cellar is built into the sides of the canal retaining wall. It is a rare survivor of eighteenth century canalside buildings and the rear house still contains a basement scullery with range. There were offices, together with two living rooms at ground floor level and three bedrooms at first floor level. The canted windows gave an excellent view down both canals. Cambrian House is now a British Waterways shop and information centre where a range of free information leaflets is available together with ice creams, drinks, snacks and gifts.

Cambrian Wharf (originally called Farmers Wharf) was developed in 1789 as a lime wharf. Limestone was brought along the Birmingham Canal from Dudley and burnt in lime kilns here to make lime for mortar – an important material for the building industry. There were also timber yards and coal merchants. Ind Coope brought beer in barrels along the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal from their brewery at Burton-on-Trent.

Sheet 4 Answers

Stop 5: The Birmingham and Fazeley Canal Toll House (originally 1787, but recently rebuilt) has 3 windows to enable the toll keeper to look out for boats approaching from both directions.

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Answers (continued)

From Farmers Bridge Locks, retrace your steps back along the towpath past Cambrian House to Old Turn Junction.

Stop 6: The Horseley Iron Works roving bridge was cast in 1827. The “Malt House” is on the site of the Birmingham Brewery Company. Barley for malting was brought by canal. The small brick bridge on the towpath beyond the “Malt House” crosses the entrance to a basin built c.1815 to serve the brewery.

Sheet 5 Answers

Stop 7: Turn left up the small curved staircase to reach the Brewmaster’s House. The plaque near the entrance reads “Erected c.1805”. The Georgian-style neo-Classical doorway and sash windows are typical of this date. The Brewmaster’s House is high above the level of the canal because the canal lies in a deep cutting. Indeed, Old Turn Junction used to be called Deep Cutting Junction. The original idea was to build the canal in a tunnel at this point. Modern leisure facilities built alongside the canal include “The Pit Stop”, the “Pitcher and Piano” and numerous restaurants in Brindleyplace and along The Water’s Edge. Other facilities include the National Sealife Centre, the ICC (International Conference Centre, including Symphony Hall) and a floating coffee shop and restaurant.

Stop 8: Modern restaurants on the site of Regency Wharf include “Blue Mango” and “Zinc”. A small brick bridge carries the towpath across the former entrance to Regency Wharf. On the opposite side of Gas Street Basin, boats on the Birmingham Canal tied up alongside the Worcester Bar. Goods were unloaded and carried across the bar to boats moored at the terminus of the Worcester and Birmingham Canal. pontoons on both sides of the Worcester Bar are now used for residential moorings.

Sheet 6 Answers

Stop 9: The plaque reads “Old Wharf (1772-1931). Beyond Bridge Street lay the Old Wharf Terminus of the Birmingham Canal (infilled 1931) and the Paradise Street Offices of the BCN (demolished 1913)”. The pub is called the “James Brindley”. The water bus operates every 45 minutes from 1 May to 30 September from the Mailbox to Sherborne Wharf.

Stop 10: Two plaques beside the Worcester Bar stop lock mark the point where the Birmingham Canal Main Line ends and the Worcester and Birmingham Canal starts. Both toll houses were built with bay windows so staff could see boats approaching in both directions. The Worcester and Birmingham Canal was opened from here to Selly Oak in 1795, to Kings Norton in 1796 and was completed to Worcester in 1815. The stop lock through the bar was also opened in 1815. A toll of 4d per ton (c.2p per tonne) was levied on all coal and other goods leaving the Birmingham Canal. There was also a meter on the lock so the W&B company could be charged for the water they took from the Birmingham Canal.

The trail finishes at the Worcester Bar. It is about 10 minutes walk back along the towpath to the start of the trail at the Sea Life Centre in Brindleyplace.

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