



Would you like to find out
why one of Britain's first
canals was built?
Read on...



Toll house at Bratch Locks on the Staffs and Worcs Canal.

The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal is 74 km (46 miles) long. It runs from Great Haywood on the [Trent and Mersey Canal](#) in Staffordshire to Stourport on the [River Severn](#) in Worcestershire.

Why was it built?

The Staffs & Worcs Canal was one of the trunk routes in the national canal network. It provided an important link in [James Brindley's](#) plan to join England's four main navigable rivers - the Mersey, Severn, Trent and Thames - with a "Grand Cross" of canals. By linking up with the River Mersey (via the [Trent and Mersey Canal](#)) and the [River Severn](#), it gave growing industrial towns such as Kidderminster and Wolverhampton a cheap waterway route to the ports of Liverpool and Bristol.

When was it built?

The Staffs & Worcs was one of Britain's first canals, completed by [James Brindley](#) in 1772. It is an early 'contour' canal built to avoid expensive tunnels through high land or bridges across deep valleys by following land at the same height (shown by contour lines on maps) in broad loops.



Narrowboats cruising on the Staffs & Worcs Canal.

The rise and fall of canal freight traffic.

In addition to supplying raw materials for the carpet factories of Kidderminster, the Staffs & Worcs Canal moved a wide variety of local cargoes. Casting sand was carried from quarries at Wombourne to forges in the Black Country, while pig iron from the Forest of Dean supplied ironworks alongside the canal at Swindon, Cookley and Greensforge.

After 1850, several transshipment basins were built to transfer goods from the railways to the canal. Steel from South Wales and coal from Highley Mine near Bewdley, for example, were unloaded from the Severn Valley Railway for the short journey by boat to the Wilden Ironworks. While most freight switched to road transport during the 20th century, Cannock coal from Littleton Colliery near Penkridge was carried regularly by canal to the electricity power station at Stourport between 1926 and 1949.

A premier tourist route.

Today, most of the old industrial sites have been cleared and the Staffs & Worcs has become one of the most picturesque canals in the country. It is busy with narrowboats cruising the 'Stourport Ring', while walkers, cyclists and anglers make extensive use of the attractive towpath.