

NABO CRUISING NOTES

GLOUCESTER & SHARPNESS CANAL

Introduction

The Gloucester & Sharpness Canal forms the navigable link between the River Severn at Gloucester and the tidal Severn estuary at Sharpness – a distance of approximately 16 miles.

Originally an important commercial waterway serving Gloucester Docks (Britain's most inland port), it is now used extensively for pleasure cruising. The docks have been restored to create a popular tourist attraction. The National Waterways Museum is housed in Llanthony Warehouse. The canal is a Conservation Area – look out for the distinctive mile posts; and 8 of the original 15 bridges have splendid houses of the 1840 era beside them in the shape of a Greek cross each with 2 fluted Doric columns flanking the entrance porch.

Towing path exists along the full length of canal except Hempsted to Gloucester Docks. Some sections are designated public footpaths. The Severn Way long distance path extends along the full length of the river Severn and is accessible from the canal.

Navigation Authority

British Waterways, South West

Waterway Office: Harbour House, West Quay, The Docks, Gloucester GL1 2LG

Tel 01452 318000 or 318008

Fax 01452 318076

BW website www.britishwaterways.co.uk

Emergency Telephone: Outside normal working hours and at weekends **0800 4799947**. [Or from a mobile phone dial 01384 215785]

All craft must have a British Waterways Pleasure Craft Licence to navigate on the waterway. Short term licences are available at the Waterway Office, at Gloucester Lock and at Sharpness Lock. Craft with River Only registration are permitted to enter Gloucester Docks from the River Severn for a period of up to 14 days and can moor free of charge for the first 48 hours. Thereafter, there is a charge for mooring. River craft are not permitted beyond Llanthony Bridge unless they purchase a separate licence for the canal.

Craft with short-term licences (river only or canal and river) must pay an additional charge to use Sharpness Sea lock. The charge is £20 per craft single passage, £40 return passage. Holders of all types of long-term licences (3, 6 or 12 months) will not have to pay to use the sea lock.

Passage through Gloucester Lock (and locks on the river Severn) and bridges along the canal will be charged for operation out of hours at the rate of £20/hour + VAT (15 minutes = £5 + VAT).

History

In 1793 an Act of Parliament was passed authorising a canal to be constructed from Gloucester to Berkeley Pill and work began in 1794. A little over 5 miles had been built by 1799 when the funding ran out and work stopped until 1817 when Thomas Telford recommended that the terminus should be at Sharpness. The Gloucester and Berkeley Ship Canal (its original name) was fully opened on 26 April 1827 and was the broadest and deepest canal in the world at that time with a width of 86 feet (26m) and a depth of 18 ft (5.5m).

The canal intersects the Stroudwater Canal at Saul Junction; and the River Cam feeder was once navigable as far as Cambridge.

In 1874 new, enlarged docks were opened at Sharpness followed shortly thereafter by the building of the Severn Railway bridge giving access to the Forest of Dean coalfields.

Commercial carrying and extensive grain barge and tanker traffic had dwindled by the 1970's and the oil depot at Quedgeley finally closed in 1985. Sharpness Docks is now privatised and is still a busy port. The main use of the canal is as a water supply channel feeding the Bristol waterworks at Purton.

Dimensions

Maximum dimensions of craft using the waterway are as follows:-

Gloucester & Sharpness Canal:

240 ft (73m) long x 30 ft (9.1m) beam x 11 ft 6 in (3.5m) draught. Maximum headroom is 105 ft (32m) but passage is restricted by the manned swing or lift bridges. Four of the bridges are high level minimum 11 ft 6 in (3.51m) headroom and narrowboats can normally pass beneath them when closed (but always wait for a GREEN light before proceeding).

Sharpness Sea Lock:

270 ft (82.3m) long x 55 ft (16.7m) beam x 21 ft 6 in (6.55m) draught.

Moorings

British Waterways provides short stay and long-term moorings along the canal. Ask BW at Gloucester for precise details.

Turning points / winding points

Long vessels can turn at the following places:

Gloucester Docks
Two Mile Bend
Quedgeley Wharf
Pegthorne (Packthorne) Bridge
Splatt Bridge
Saul Junction
Sharpness Old Arm

Opening Times

The opening hours for the canal and Gloucester Lock are harmonised with the River Severn lock times as follows:

Period	Week Nos	Dates	Opening Time	Closing Time
		2004		
1	1 – 13	2 January - 25 March	0800	1600
2	13 – 21	26 March – 20 May	0800	1800
3	21 – 40	21 May – 30 September	0800	1900
2	40 – 43	1 October – 21 October	0800	1800
1	43 – 53	22 October – 31 December	0800	1600
N.B. All Weeks start on a Friday and end on a Thursday				

The entire waterway is closed on 1 January, 25 December and 26 December. Bridge opening outside the published hours is possible if booked the previous day.

All bridges are manned and controlled by RED and GREEN traffic signals. A flashing red light signifies that the lock or bridge keeper is aware of your

presence. Please wait. Do not pass the light until it indicates GREEN. Bridge keepers maintain contact with one another and monitor a vessel's progress. If necessary, sound ONE prolonged blast to summon the keeper.

Note that bridges may be closed in adverse wind conditions at the discretion of the bridge keepers.

Gloucester Lock is similarly manned.

Sharpness Sea Lock operates to suit tide times and traffic requirements.

By-laws

A speed limit of 6 MPH applies on the canal. Sailing craft are not permitted.

Weed

Heavy weeding can be a problem in some locations during the summer months. Engine cooling water inlets need to be cleaned out regularly.

Navigation notes

Distance from Gloucester	Location	Navigation notes / facilities	Additional information
	Gloucester Lock	Lock size 150' x 22' x 9'6" (45m x 6.7m x 2.9m)	Swing bridge across lock chamber cannot be opened Mon – Fri 0800-0900 & 1630-1730 Tel 01452 310832 or VHF Ch 74 Call sign "Gloucester Lock"
	Gloucester Docks		Gloucester – the Roman city of Glevum. Victoria Basin marina long-term moorings only. Swing bridge operates at set times by prior appointment with bridge keeper. Gloucester Yacht Club T Nielsen & Co boatyard Tel 01452 301117
0 miles	North Quay	Visitor moorings 30m length	3m depth Rubbish disposal Water Paid car parking
	West Quay	Visitor moorings 125m length	3m depth Rubbish disposal Water Electricity Paid car parking
	Merchant's Quay	Visitor moorings 85m length	3m depth Rubbish disposal Paid car parking
	Reynold's Quay	Visitor moorings 95m length	3m depth Paid car parking
	Alexandra Quay	Visitor moorings	3m depth Water Electricity Free car parking
	Llanthony Bridge		The only bascule (lifting) bridge on the canal. Bridge cannot be opened Mon-Fri 0800-0900 & 1630-1730 Tel 01452 312143 or VHF Ch 74 Call sign "Llanthony Bridge"
			The adjacent river was crossed by a railway swing bridge upstream of (the removed)

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			Llanthony Lock (90' x 17' x 7' deep) Llanthony Priory is well worth a visit
		Llanthony Quay pontoon visitor moorings 70m length	3m depth Sanitary station and pump-out Rubbish disposal Water Vehicular access to end of pontoons Free parking Store and newsagents nearby opens at 0630 weekdays
1 mile	Canada Wharf		
	Hempsted Bridge		Bridge cannot be opened Mon – Fri 0800-0900 & 1630-1730 Tel 01452 521880 or VHF Ch 74 Call sign "Hempsted Bridge" Beware of boats from Gloucester Rowing Club
		Visitor moorings on greenbank north 125m length	1m – 2m depth Boatyard A&D Marine Chandlery & covered dry dock Tel 01452 415430
2 miles	Two Mile Bend		
	Sims Bridge	Air draught 9'4" (2.9m)	Tel 01452 501994
	Rea Bridge	Air draught 8'2" (2.5m)	Tel 01452 723638
3 miles	The Bung		
4 miles	<i>Former Oil Depot, Quedgeley</i>		Tesco store 1 mile away with free bus service serving local villages 2 surgeries and dental practice
	Sellars Bridge	Air draught 9'4" (2.9m)	Tel 01452 720251 VHF Ch 74 Call sign "Sellars Bridge"
			Pilot Inn
		Visitor moorings on towpath north 180m length from	2m depth near turning bay 1m depth elsewhere Water

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		bridge	Rubbish disposal at bridge Road access 300m from turning bay
	<i>Former Hardwicke Bridge</i>		Removed
5 miles	Hardwicke		
6 miles	The Castle		
	Parkend Bridge		Tel 01452 720016 Café with private moorings
7 miles	Pegthorne		
	<i>Former Pegthorne (or Packthorne) Bridge</i>		Removed following damage by a barge
	Junction Bridge		Tel 01452 740444 VHF Ch 74 Call sign "Junction Bridge"
8 miles	Saul Junction	No visitor moorings	Car parking Water & sanitary station
			The Stroudwater Canal crosses the G&S Canal at this point. Opened in 1779 and joined the Severn at Framilode (basin still exists). Short section in water between locks (70' x 15') used as moorings. Saul Junction Boat Owners Club Tel 01594 845257
			Boatyard RW Davis & Son Tel 01452 740233 Dry dock in old lock chamber
	Sandfield Bridge		Tel 01452 740565 Remotely operated from Saul Junction
	Fretherne Bridge	Visitor moorings on towpath north 60m length starting 112m from bridge	Tel 01452 740582 Bridge cannot be opened Mon-Fri mornings only 0820-0900 1m depth Limited parking No water
			The bridge was rebuilt in 2001 and carries the only classified road (B.4071) over the canal.

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			<p>Diesel fuel from Adlac Limited on former Cadbury factory site alongside canal. Calor gas, Camping Gaz Water 0800-1700 weekdays 0800-1300 Saturday 1000-1600 Sunday</p>
			<p>Nearby Frampton-on-Severn has the longest village green in England. The Bell Inn and Three Horseshoes St Mary's church 3 ponds (SSSI's – sites of special scientific interest). Lord of the Manor (Mr Rollo Clifford) lives at Frampton Manor Frampton Court – home to Lord of the Manor's mother.</p>
9 miles	Saul Lodge		
	Splatt Bridge		Tel 01452 740578
			<p>20 minute walk to Frampton-on-Severn Public telephone Butcher – sells milk, bread, preserves Post Office – licensed Restaurant – opens to order</p>
10 miles	The Splatt		
11 miles	Entrance to River Cam	The Cambridge Arm is no longer navigable	The River Cam feeds the canal. Commercial traffic to Cambridge ceased in the 1930's.
	Cambridge Arm Bridge		Tel 01453 890272
	Patch Bridge		<p>Tel 01453 890324 VHF Ch 74 Call sign "Patch Bridge"</p>
		<p>Visitor moorings on greenbank north 145m lengthy from bridge</p>	<p>2m depth at wharf reducing to 1m after 40m Tudor Arms Youth hostel at Shepherd's Patch</p>
		<p>Visitor mooring on greenbank south 230m starts 20m from bridge</p>	<p>20m berth adjacent to bridge greenbank south for water and rubbish disposal 1m rising to 1.5m depth</p>

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12 miles	Slimbridge		Wildfowl & Wetland Trust access from lane at Patch Bridge Tel 01453 890065
13 miles	The Warth		
14 miles	Purton Water Treatment Works		50% of Bristol's drinking water supply comes from the G&S Canal. Two pumps at Gloucester feed river water into the canal.
	Purton Bridge Upper		Tel 01453 811384 VHF Ch 74 Call sign "Purton Bridge"
	Purton Bridge Lower	Visitor moorings on greenbank south 159m length starts 32m from bridge	Car parking Rubbish disposal Electricity 1m depth Berkeley Arms Berkeley Hunt (closed)
15 miles	Purton Timber Ponds		
	<i>Former Severn Rail Bridge</i>		Removed. The old swing bridge had a headroom of 37' and carried the railway line over the Severn Railway Bridge (removed in the late 1960's following damage when a petrol tanker barge collided with it in thick fog on the night of 25 October 1960).
	Old Arm		The original terminus of the canal. At the end of the arm is a gated tidal basin with 2 disused sea locks – the larger one 163' x 38' x 18' deep; the smaller one 81'6" x 19'6" x 18' deep
		Visitor moorings 100m length on towpath north	Water 1m depth
			Floating sanitary station between Sharpness bridges Dockers Club
		Sharpness Marine	Sharpness Marine established 1971 Tel 01453 811476 Moorings Calor gas & Camping Gaz

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			No fuel Westward Motor Yacht Club
	Sharpness New Docks		Sharpness – limited shopping Shops at Newtown – store with “Cash Back”, master butcher, ships chandler
	High Level Swing Bridge	Headroom 16’9” (5.1m)	
	Low Level Swing Bridge		Pleasure vessels not permitted into dock area unless pre- booked to use sea lock. Sharpness Pierhead Tel 01453 511968
16 miles	Sharpness Sea Lock	Lock size 320’ x 55’ x 22’ (97m x 16m x 6.7m)	Tidal outer basin with pair of gates makes lock longer Lock access HW –2 to +_ hr BW Dock Office (Harbour Master) Tel 01453 811862 Holding pontoon in outer basin – no access ashore
			Sharpness Pierhead Tel 01453 511968 VHF Ch 13, 16, 09, 74 Working Ch 13 Call sign “Sharpness Radio”
	Lydney Harbour		On opposite side of estuary downstream from Sharpness Max craft size 100 ft x 24 ft x 12 ft draft (30m x 7.3m x 3.6m) Lock access HW +/- 1 hr
			4 th century Romano-British settlement and temple dedicated to the god Nodens in grounds of nearby deer park the ancestral home of Viscount Bledisloe Lydney Yacht Club Tel 0594 842573

Severn Bore

The Severn Bore occurs as a result of the incoming tide flowing up a converging river channel with a rising river bed, resulting in a tidal wave being produced. The Severn Estuary experiences the second highest tides in the world and bores occur on as many as 260 days of the year. The most spectacular bores occur at or near high spring tides near the equinoxes.

The Environment Agency produces an information leaflet giving viewing times at various locations.

Viewing points near the canal are as follows, with times related to High Water at Sharpness:

The Hock near Fretherne	-1 hr 25 min	The incoming tide is spectacular but not a true bore
Framilode	-25 min	
Epney	-20 min	
Longney	-18 min	
Waterend	-10 min	
Elmore Back	+/- 0 min	
Stone Bench	+15 min	The best viewpoint close to the canal
Upper Rea } Hempsted }	+ 20 min	
Over Bridge (West Channel of River Severn)	+ 35 min	

Passage from Sharpness to Bristol via Severn Estuary

Refer to separate NABO pilotage notes.

Sources of information

British Waterways Board "Gloucester & Sharpness and River Severn Navigation Bye-laws 1962"

British Waterways "The waterways code for boaters on the G&S Canal and the River Severn".

British Waterways "A boater's guide to the waterways".

"Gloucester Docks: An illustrated history" – Hugh Conway Jones

"Gloucester Docks: Living in History" – Catherine Alexander & Julie Martin

“Exploring the Gloucester & River Severn Navigations” published by Burrows Communications Limited 1998.

Nicholson’s Guide “Guide to the Waterways – Severn, Avon and Birmingham”

“Inland Waterways of Great Britain” – Jane Cumberlidge – Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson

Pearson’s Canal Companion “Severn and Avon”

“The Severn Bore” – FW Rowbotham – David & Charles (out of print)

GeoProjects waterways map “Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal with River Severn and Gloucester and Sharpness Canal”

Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Landranger series map No 162 Gloucester & Forest of Dean

Further information

Further information and guidance is available from the River Users’ Co-ordinator exclusively to NABO members.

Legal Note

Although the greatest care and diligence has been taken in the compilation of these pilotage notes the National Association of Boat Owners accepts no responsibility for any errors, omissions, or alterations in this publication, or for any consequences ensuing upon the use of, or reliance upon, any information given. It must be emphasised that these pilotage notes give only general advice and that the master of the vessel is at all times responsible for the safety of his craft and all aboard.

NABO welcomes any corrections or new information from users of these notes.
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