

16 July 2022: The Stroudwater Navigation - Stonehouse to Eastington

On Saturday 16 July 2022, I was joined by nine other Ramblers, two of whom had not walked with us previously, as we walked west along the Stroudwater Navigation from Stonehouse to Eastington. It was a fascinating walk, with many points of interest along the way and a canal that was teeming with wildlife, including, to our surprise, what we were sure was a terrapin (a freshwater turtle) basking in the sunshine. Fish, some of which were quite large, were plentiful. The Cotswold Canals Trust, with a number of partner organisations, continues to undertake much needed work in restoring the canal to become, once again, a living, navigable waterway.

The weather was warm, with scattered cloud, a gentle breeze, and excellent visibility. It was an ideal day for walking.

Nine of us caught the 09.45 service bus from the Gloucester Transport Hub; we met up with Hilary on arrival in Stonehouse. We started walking at about 10.30, joining the canal at about 10.40. The Stroudwater Navigation was opened in 1779, linking Stroud with the River Severn. Our first stop was St Cyr's Church, close to Stonehouse Court. After leaving St Cyr's, we soon arrived at the feature called 'The Ocean' which is a large expanse of water, albeit with an abundance of reeds. Shortly afterwards, we came to the new canal bridge carrying the main Gloucester - Bristol railway line over the canal. The new Ocean Bridge was opened formally on 22 May this year to replace an embankment built in the 1960s, which in turn, had replaced the much earlier railway bridge thereby effectively cutting the canal, leaving only a small pedestrian tunnel.

A little later, we reached Bond's Mill, with its distinctive wartime lookout tower, now owned by the Cotswold Canals Trust and used as a Visitor Centre. From Bond's Mill, the canal starts descending through a series of locks - Newtown Lock, Blunder Lock and Pike Lock - the last of which was currently being restored. A little further on, we reached Chipman's Platt where the canal has been filled in, together with a stretch of about a mile to the west.

From Chipman's Platt, we headed south-east to the Church of St Michael and All Angels in Churchend, on the outskirts of Eastington, where we were able to admire, amongst other things, the Thomas Denny memorial windows. It was then only a short walk to The Old Badger Inn, where we slaked our thirst and enjoyed our lunches before crossing the road to catch the service bus back to Gloucester, arriving at about 14.40.

Peter Barrett