

## Ashby Canal and Coventry from Springwood Haven June 2022

This route promises a leisurely week on the water combining peaceful countryside, a historical battlefield and a trip to the city!

We are very excited to be going from one of ABC Boat Hire's newest hiring locations, Springwood Haven Marina on the Coventry Canal near Nuneaton.

It's just my husband David and me, and we are quite lazy boaters, so I'm always trying to find routes we can cruise in a week without too many locks. We like being able to drift along a quiet canal with lovely scenery and the occasional pub or place to visit. Our previous trips have included Whitchurch to Llangollen (2 locks each way), Anderton to Leigh (1 lock each way) and Gailey to Market Drayton (2 locks each way). This time I've surpassed myself and worked out a trip with no locks at all! We are planning to cruise the entire navigable length of the Ashby Canal, before returning to the Coventry Canal and visiting the city of Coventry itself.

Day 1 – Royal Jubilee!

Springwood Haven Marina is in a scenic location, nestling at the bottom of a gently sloping hillside and hidden away from the bustling town of Nuneaton.



Springwood  
Haven  
Marina

On arrival, we complete our paperwork and handover and are shown to our boat, the Great Dusky Swift. The 'Swift' class of boat has the kitchen or 'galley' at the back of the boat, making it perfect if there are just two of you; you can still talk to each other when you're making drinks or getting food ready.

Our boat



We cast off and make our way out of the marina just before 3pm. The weather is a bit grey and dull, but it's not cold so we don't mind. We've got a small Union Jack flag flying as today is the day of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee party. It seemed unimaginable then that in just 3 months' time her long reign would finally end, especially when we saw the footage on tv of her enjoying afternoon tea with Paddington Bear and tapping her teacup to 'We Will Rock You'.

An hour later, the sun comes out, hooray! We cruise past the backs of housing estates before reaching Marston Junction, where we turn left onto the Ashby Canal.

It's sunny!



We are instantly surrounded by pretty countryside and a much more rural 'feel' than the Coventry Canal.

Shortly after joining the Ashby Canal we moor up near to Bulking Road Bridge. We are planning to walk into the town of Bulkington for some provisions and then I've taken the precaution of booking a table at the Corner House pub for dinner.

We head through a small housing estate towards a convenience store and find ourselves walking straight through a proper Jubilee Street Party! It's great – they've officially closed the road to traffic, and there are tables laden with food in the middle of the street, with a mobile DJ playing music.



Street party!

After getting some supplies (who forgot to bring any tea or coffee?), we head to the pub where we indulge in some classic pub fayre of Steak Pie and Gammon & Egg with chips. Yum!

The Corner House pub



It's a fine evening, and after our meal we amble back to the boat to watch the Platinum Jubilee Party at Buckingham Palace on the tv.

Total cruising time Day 1 = 2.5 hours.

## Day 2 – To Market Bosworth

Our ambition today is to get to Market Bosworth, an historic town very much associated with Richard III and his demise at the Battle of Bosworth. We cast off just before 9am in some drizzly rain, but the weather gradually improves as we go along and in any case we have our complimentary ABC weatherproofs to keep us dry. One size fits all – not stylish but extremely effective!



It's a bit damp –  
but very pretty

The Ashby Canal (or Ashby-de-la-Zouch Canal to use its full name) was completed in 1804 and its main use was to transport coal from the mines at Moira and Measham to Coventry and beyond. Unfortunately, mining subsidence eventually led to the canal being closed near the mines, and presently you can only get as far as Snarestone before having to turn round. Work is underway to restore the damaged section, so in another few years' time we may be able to cruise all the way to Ashby. For now though, the next target on our horizon is to top up our water tank, and we pull over at a handy (and luckily unoccupied) water point just before Bridge 15 at Hinckley. Hinckley's main claim to fame is for having installed the first hosiery stocking machine in Leicestershire in 1640, and at one point in the 19<sup>th</sup> century approximately 6000 local people were employed in the underwear factories.

Anyway, back to the water point. The water tanks on narrowboats can hold several hundred litres, but it's sometimes surprising how much you use in a single day when you include washing up, making drinks, cooking, taking showers and of course flushing the toilet. We've tried to get into the habit of refilling the tank every day, as then we find it only takes 10 to 15 minutes instead of half an hour or longer. All ABC hire boats are supplied with a hose and a key to open the water points along the canal, so you just connect your hose to the tap, put the other end in the water filling point and turn on the tap.

The water hose goes here!



On our way again, before reaching Market Bosworth we pass the welcoming looking Sutton Wharf, with a café and floating ice cream van! We make a mental note to pay a visit on our way back.



Floating ice cream parlour

After some more relaxed meandering through the countryside, we reach our destination and moor up a little way along the towpath

from Bosworth Wharf Bridge, close enough to walk into the town but far

enough away to avoid any traffic noise at night! It's still early afternoon so we settle down to watch the Platinum Jubilee Pageant on tv. It's a real journey back through the 7 decades of the Queen's reign – some of the highlights for me were the cars (Morris Minor, Austin Mini, Rolls Royce, Aston Martin. Have you owned any of these cars? I once had an old Mini.)

Later we decide to go into Market Bosworth for a look around and something to eat. There's a bit of a hill to walk up from the canal to the town centre, perfect to help work up an appetite for dinner. On the way we pass a few quirky points of interest, including:

The local fish and chip shop  
– the 'Batter of Bosworth'



Two Gruffalos lurking in a garden



Platinum Jubilee train "Lilibet"

Having reached the town centre, we spot a welcoming looking pub called the Dixie Arms. It's Sunday, so we treat ourselves to a Roast Beef dinner and a glass or two of the local ale before strolling back down the hill to the boat.



The Dixie Arms

Total cruising time Day 2 = 5.5 hours.

Day 3 – The end of the line....

There's a handy water point just before the bridge where we moored, so we fill up before setting off. Our goal for today is to reach the end of the navigable canal at Snarestone, where we can turn the boat and then head back for a second night in Market Bosworth. After passing the village of Congerstone, we arrive at Shackerstone, where railway enthusiasts can take a trip on the Battlefield Line: <https://www.battlefieldline.co.uk/special-events>.

There is a railway museum, Victorian tea room, and the opportunity to board a steam train and take a 9 mile round trip to Market Bosworth and Shenton.



About an hour from Shackerstone and we have reached the Snarestone Tunnel. Whilst not very long (250 yards), the roof gets lower towards the end of the tunnel so it's quite a strange experience!



Snarestone tunnel



Will we make it out?

We make it safely through, and just a few minutes later we arrive at Snarestone Wharf.

There's a gate across the canal to stop us going any further so we turn the boat here, but in fact the canal does carry on a bit further and a few months after our trip, a further section of about 600 yards was reopened. At Snarestone Wharf there is a sign for the Ashby Canal Association who are the organisation trying to restore the 7 miles of canal between Snarestone and Donisthorpe. The Association was formed in 1966 and so far a mile has been restored, but it's a huge task involving lots of people, lots of money, and various plans and permissions being granted. Maybe one day.....



Snarestone Wharf



Having turned, we make our way back through peaceful countryside to Market Bosworth, where we have booked a table at the Black Horse for their weekly Pie and Wine evening. We feast on Beef, Ale and Carrot Pie, followed by a delicious Tiramisu with Salted Caramel Ice Cream. Then it's back to the boat for a nightcap before turning in. It's lovely and quiet sleeping on a boat (so long as nobody is snoring!)

Total cruising time Day 3 = 5.5 hours

#### Day 4 – Ready for Battle!

The sun is shining and today we are hoping to visit the Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre. This is the site of a famous battle in 1485 between King Richard III (Plantaganet) and Henry Tudor. Richard was killed and his earthly remains lay undiscovered until 2013 when his skeleton was discovered beneath a car park in Leicester. He now lies in Leicester Cathedral and Henry Tudor became King Henry VII, father of the infamous Henry VIII who got through 6 wives before his death in 1547. The Tudors continued to rule in Britain until 1603.

In order to visit the Heritage Centre we need to find the Battlefield Moorings, which are proving almost as elusive as Richard III himself! Our Nicholson's Guide shows them on the left hand side of the canal, but they don't seem to be there now (we later found out that the Canal & River Trust closed them in 2018. Time to buy a new edition Nicholson's Guide). Opposite where the moorings used to be, there's plenty of space to moor on the towpath side of canal, so we stop there. There aren't any mooring rings or plates for piling hooks, so we resort to using the mooring pins supplied on the boat and



hammering them into the grass. All ABC hire boats come equipped with pins, hooks, windlasses, ropes, hammers and various other tools and equipment.

[Moored up at Battlefield.](#)

We tie up our boat, and some steps lead away from the canal and down to the road, where we can walk underneath the canal to get ourselves on the right side of the canal for the Battlefield.

Walking towards the Heritage Centre, I'm alarmed to see a sign warning of alligators – what! In England? I'd never seen such a sign before, but apparently it refers to spikes in the road to prevent unauthorised access.



Having successfully avoided the alligators' teeth we find ourselves at the entrance to the Centre itself. Tickets are priced at £8.95 for adults (2022 price) and there is an interactive walk-through exhibition, opportunities to dress up as a knight, a café, a shop, and various events going on all through the year. If you are interested in history, there's a very comprehensive explanation of the York and Lancaster Royal Houses and their fight for the throne of England.



Memorial plaque (on a tree trunk)

Having gorged ourselves on history, we decide to take a walk through Ambion Woods to the café at Sutton Wharf which we spotted when we were on the canal a couple of days ago. The woods are really pretty with dappled sunlight coming through the treetops, and in no time at all we reach the canal and the café. What an idyllic spot for lunch – we take our time watching the boats go by, only interrupted by an inquisitive swan on the hunt for titbits.

## Sutton Wharf Cafe



Got any food?

We notice there are water points at the Wharf, so after walking back to collect our boat we drop by to top up our tank, before carrying on south to Stoke Golding, our destination for tonight's stopover. Our Nicholson's guide suggests mooring between Bridges 28 and 27, but there's no room. Not to worry, we find a good spot just after Bridge 27. Walking into the village, we discover a handful of traditional pubs (White Swan, George & the Dragon), but none serving food, so we return to our welcoming boat where I put a buffet meal together and we dine 'Al Fresco' at our bow deck table. There is apparently an Indian Restaurant in Stoke Golding, but if you don't fancy that then you'll need to cater for yourselves if you moor up here.

Time to crack open the Baileys. With all the exercise and fresh air we've had today, we are soon yawning and heading down the wooden hill (aka the bow steps!) to bed.

Total cruising time Day 4 = 2.5 hours.

## Day 5 – Farewell to the Ashby

Today we will be leaving the Ashby Canal behind and heading towards Coventry. Casting off just after 9am, we cruise through uninterrupted countryside for a couple of hours before passing the village of Burton Hastings.

The canal is so pretty here – we aren't very good at identifying plants but we see giant daisies, buttercups, some big yellow flowers (orchids?) and lots of

delicate pink flowering dog roses, all framed by gently rolling meadows and farmland.



And a family of swans!

After another hour or so we reach Marston Junction where the Ashby Canal joins the Coventry Canal. Springwood Haven is off to the right, but we are heading into Coventry City Centre, so we turn left. We want to find somewhere to stop for the night before we get to any built up areas, so we moor up in a lovely quiet spot near the town of Bedworth. The locals tell us it's not Bedworth it's 'Bedduff'.

Moored at 'Bedduff'



We've read that Bedworth is a calming buffer-zone between Nuneaton and Coventry, and so it proves. On first glance, there's not much to see here, but in fact there is a fascinating Town Trail which only takes an hour and includes several historic buildings and an eye catching sculpture of a miner made from reclaimed iron and iron chains. You can read about the trail here:

<https://www.bedworth-society.co.uk/bedworth/town-trail>

Exploring the options for refreshments in the evening, the shadow of Covid19 is still in evidence, but in some cases with a welcome touch of humour!



Bedworth pub sign 2022

We dine at the local 'Spoons' (The Bear & Ragged Staff pub), and then amble back to the boat. Tomorrow we hit the city!

Total cruising time Day 5 = 4.5 hours.

#### Day 6 – A Musical Museum

We are up early this morning and casting off at 8.30am for the 3 hour cruise into the heart of Coventry. Almost immediately, we reach Hawkesbury Junction, colloquially known to canal users as 'Sutton Stop' after Richard Sutton who was appointed lock keeper and toll clerk in 1807. Hawkesbury is the junction between the Coventry and the Oxford canals, and involves a complicated 'U' turn manoeuvre, immediately followed by the Hawkesbury lock. When the canals were frequented by working boats the toll fees to enter the Oxford canal would have been collected here. A handy pub for the thirsty boat workers was sorely needed, and the original Greyhound Inn still

welcomes visitors. It's a picturesque spot, but we are quite relieved to be keeping straight on into Coventry and not attempting the 'U turn'!



Hawkesbury Junction and Greyhound pub

The approach to the city centre is surprisingly interesting due to the addition of an imaginative and unusual 'Art Trail' which is dotted around the canal all the way into the city. The trail includes fish sculptures, giant lock gates, a colourful 'snake in the grass', various artwork featuring canal boats, a large stone settee, and some really quite odd structures that we can't identify at all. The artwork was all created in the late 1990's, and some of it is suffering from the effects of the weather and graffiti, but it's still great fun as you travel into the city to see how many pieces you can spot! Full details and explanations of the artwork can be found on the Coventry

Canal Society's website:

<http://covcanalsoc.org.uk/>



We arrive at Coventry Canal Basin late morning – it’s not really a basin as such, more like a two pronged fork, and the only free space we can see is at the far end of one of the forks behind two other boats. Ooo err! We manage (that means David manages!) to turn the boat and reverse it back to the space, meaning we are facing the right way for setting off tomorrow. When we first started boating many years ago this ‘reverse parking’ would have taken us a LOT longer, but we’ve learned that taking your time and not worrying about who’s watching you makes the whole thing a lot easier!



We've  
made it!

I didn't know what to expect from a city centre mooring, but Coventry Basin is lovely and quiet, with a statue of the noted canal engineer James Brindley in the middle.

James Brindley



Time to explore! A walkway from the canal takes us over the dual carriageway into the city centre. There's lots to do in Coventry, including the Coventry Transport Museum, Coventry Cathedral, the Belgrade Theatre, Showcase

Cinemas, shopping centre, and our destination for today, the Coventry '2 Tone' Music Museum. It's about a 30 minute walk from the boat to the museum, which celebrates the history of popular music from the area, particularly the 'Ska' movement of the late 1970's and early 1980's. Do you remember (or know the music of) The Specials, The Beat, the Selector and Madness? This place is set out as a miniature village, with a little street, shops, a café, and the museum itself. You can play the musical instruments in the mini studio, have your picture taken dressed in a 2 Tone outfit, and sit in the original car that featured in the 'Ghost Town' music video. It's brilliant!



'Ghost town' car

2 Tone village and cafe



We have lunch at the museum and then walk back towards our boat. A few minutes after leaving the museum we happen upon a place called 'FarGo'. FarGo is a retail space created specifically for creative, independent businesses. There are over 40 individual businesses and it's the sort of place you can easily lose yourself in for hours. There's artwork, books, clothing, cafes, exhibitions, and regular shows. It was definitely worth coming to Coventry!



While we were at the museum we asked some of the staff for any ideas about where we could go to get an evening meal. One of the recommendations they made was for an historic early 19<sup>th</sup> century pub called the Town Wall Tavern. If you're looking for old fashioned British comfort food, this is the place to go! It's like stepping back in time – they even have a 6ft square snug known as the 'Donkey Box'! David has Faggots and Peas, followed by Bread & Butter pudding with custard, washed down with a couple of pints of Theakstons Old Peculiar. I have Beef & Ale pie and a couple of glasses of chardonnay.



Town Wall tavern and the 'Donkey Box'

A short walk back to our boat for a good night's sleep.....

Total cruising time Day 6 = 3 hours.

Day 7 – New places and old friends

Earlier in the week I posted a picture on Facebook of our boat moored up in the sunshine. An old friend of ours messages us to ask if we are anywhere near Hartshill, where he now lives. After looking at the map, I realise that Hartshill is only about 20 minutes' cruise from Springwood Haven, so we can meet up for a drink, spend the night there and then just tootle back to the marina tomorrow morning to return our boat.

After a leisurely breakfast we make our way out of Coventry, back past the Art Trail, Hawkesbury Junction, the Ashby Canal turn and the outskirts of Nuneaton. Past the marina and on to Hartshill, where there are mooring

spaces next to the Anchor Inn where we've agreed to meet up with our friend. The weather has been getting better and better and we arrive in beautiful sunshine and warm temperatures. We can see there's a signposted walk through the woods here so we go and stretch our legs before returning to the boat before dinner.



Into the woods.....

And this is when we see the oddest thing.....

Moored up near us is a very small boat. It looks like a rowing boat with a tiller on the back. Suddenly, 5 men appear, slowly shoehorn themselves into the boat, and row off up the canal, passing our boat as they go. There's a piece of string trailing from the back into the water – it appears to be attached to something, but what? There are also English and French flags painted on the side of the boat. Perhaps it's an Anglo-French eccentric boating club.



Five men in a boat..

After dining on board, we walk to the pub and meet up with our friend and his wife. We all used to work together but haven't seen each other for 8 years so it was quite a catch up 😊 We invite them onto our boat for a nightcap and they are most impressed with our temporary floating home!



The Anchor Inn at Hartshill

And so to bed for our final night aboard the good ship Great Dusky Swift.

Total cruising time Day 7 = 5.5 hours.

Day 8 – Homeward bound

Today we return to the marina and say farewell to the canal and our lovely boat. We will be back soon for another adventure!

Total cruising time Day 8 = 20 minutes.



Blue  
skies  
ahoy!



