

SUTTON WEAVER – ANDERTON BOAT LIFT VIA MARSH LOCK – DURATION APPROX 5 HOURS

Our transport will collect you from the car park at Anderton Boat Lift and take you to the start of our cruise at Sutton Weaver Swing Bridge, a slightly smaller version of Acton Bridge dating from 1926, carrying cars to and from the Cheshire market town of Frodsham about one mile away.

We initially head off down to Marsh Lock, which offers us the chance to turn the vessel around and head back up the river toward Anderton Boat Lift.

While on passage to Marsh Lock, we pass under the impressive M56 viaduct and also the small dock that once belonged to a soap manufacturer and is now home to a Weaver Motorboat Club. Shortly afterwards we pass the recently upgraded facilities of Runcorn Rowing Club, whose members can often be seen out and about on the river.

The last mile or so can be described on one side as heavy industrial, with the site of the impressive and sprawling chemical manufacturing plant at Rock Savage belonging to INEOS, while on the other side the River Weaver old line can be seen winding its way towards the Manchester Ship Canal, and beyond we see Frodsham Marshes, which is a haven for bird life and wild life, and beyond that the impressive hills of Frodsham and Helsby and onwards to North Wales.

While turning at Marsh Lock you will notice the MSC beyond. Marsh Lock will drop you down approximately one metre onto the Manchester Ship Canal, and eventually at Eastham out into The River Mersey and beyond. We will now make our way back past our berth at Sutton Weaver and approaching Frodsham Cut we pass the site of the former Sutton Level Lock. This twin chamber lock only had a small rise and fall, and was eventually taken out of use in the 1950's when a new deep cutting bypassed them altogether, and the locks and their approach waterways became a boat graveyard, the last resting place for dozens of redundant carrying craft as canal and river traffic dwindled.

Probably the most famous vessel to be sunk here was the Weaver flat Daresbury dating back to 1772.

The next 45 mins is spent gently meandering through the Cheshire countryside and passing locally given place names on the river such as Goulding Point and Devil's Gardens.

A small caravan park exists at Pickerings along with a dozen houses, one of which is the former pub simply named The Boat Inn. We pass between some sandstone works and this was the site of the later Pickerings Lock at the time when the River Weaver had 13 locks along its length. While we sail between Pickerings and Dutton Viaduct look out for the winding course of the old river which can still be seen today.

You will not fail to notice the impressive Dutton Viaduct which takes the West Coast Mainline over the river. The viaduct dates from 1836 and costs £54,000 to build and the engineers were Joseph Locke and George Stephenson. Built in red sandstone with 20 arches and around 700,000 cubic feet of sandstone was used in its construction

A quarter of a mile upstream from Dutton Viaduct we pass the hamlet of Pickering's O' the Boat. This small village is approximately one mile from Kingsley near Frodsham, and was the site of the first lock on the River Weaver, which dated back to 1759, and was the first attempt to tame the river from the

vagaries of the tides, which made the river tidal over its full length and navigation to Northwich nearly impossible.

On our approach to the idyllic setting of Dutton Locks with its pretty cottages, you will notice Dutton Horse Bridge with its unique twin span timber foot bridge, dating from 1919 and is a Grade 2 listed structure and is described as 'an elegant structure in the functional waterways tradition' and is believed to be the sole remaining laminated greenheart timber bridge in the country.

Dutton Locks were extensively modernised and enlarged around 1874 and the original locks were over a quarter of a mile away from the current position. Worthy of note is the large flood control sluices at Dutton where up to eight sluice gates can be lifted over two metres to deal with any flood water coming down from Northwich.

We then pass through the magnificent Acton Swing Bridge which dates from 1933 and swings on a pontoon on the island. Built at a cost of £52,000, when the bridge swings most of the weight is borne on a floating pontoon on the island and a motor of only four horsepower is required to swing the bridge.

At this point on the river, The Trent & Mersey Canal is only 300 metres away passing through the hamlet of Bartington, while Acton Bridge village is around one mile up on Acton Hill.

The river forks off around the back of Acton Bridge island which is the home of the Acton Bridge Cruising Club, and the original stone bridge which carried the A49 over the Weaver.

Shortly we will pass the Woodbine Caravan Park and the Riverside Inn, for many years known as the Rheingold Restaurant and then riverside cottages and holiday homes will come into view and then we eventually arrive at Saltersford Locks. The current locks date from around 1874 and the original lock chamber can still be seen and is now used as a sluice way for flood control.

We head into the idyllic tree lined Weaver Valley countryside heading towards Barnton. Shortly after that we leave the industrial landscape behind and pass Barnton Sluice and Weir.

We then pass the berths at the site of the former soda ash plant which has recently been demolished to make way for housing. If you look carefully on the berth you will see the names of some of the old ships that used the berth years ago, painted on by their crews.

With approximately 10 minutes to go to the lift we will pass through Winnington Swing Bridge which is the smallest of the river's five swing bridges, and just before we pass through the bridge look out in the undergrowth for what looks like an old dry dock, but is actually an ice weir built to remove large floating chunks of ice from the river to keep it clear for traffic in the days when the river used to regularly freeze over.

Anderton Basin is a reminder of the Weaver's industrial past when barges and ocean-going ships lined the berths loading and unloading cargo, predominantly for the chemical industry. Although the Tatter Chemical Plant is still operational, the last commercial cargo ship to use the river was The Saint Keiran back in 1998.

Our cruise finishes at our berth below the Anderton Boat Lift, also known as 'The Cathedral of the Canals'. This magnificent structure was built in 1875 to elevate narrow boats, laden with cargo, 50ft between the River Weaver and The Trent & Mersey Canal.

The lift was designed by the River Weaver trustees chief engineer Edward Leader Williams with Edwin Clark as the principal designer.

The structure is designated as a scheduled monument and is included in the National Heritage list for England. Today it is an award-winning visitor destination offering leisure boaters a link between the two waterways and an informative visitor centre, café and children's play area.