

ANDERTON BOAT LIFT TO NATIONAL WATERWAYS MUSEUM, ELLESMERE PORT - CRUISE DURATION APPROX 6 HOURS

Our cruise departs from 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.

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.

Within 10 minutes of starting the journey from the lift we will pass through Winnington Swing Bridge which is the smallest of the river's five swing bridges, and as soon as you 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.

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.

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

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.

Once leaving the lock, the old course of the original River Weaver enters the Navigation as we head through the countryside towards Acton Bridge.

Shortly riverside cottages and holiday homes will come into view, and eventually we pass the Woodbine Caravan Park and the Riverside Inn, for many years known as the Rheingold Restaurant, before the river forks off around the back of Acton Bridge island.

Inside the island is the home of the Acton Bridge Cruising Club, and the original stone bridge which carried the A49 over the Weaver.

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.

Our journey continues down the Weaver Valley and after a further mile and a half we reach the idyllic setting of Dutton Locks with its pretty cottages.

Like Saltisford Locks, 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.

As soon as we leave Dutton Locks 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.

When passing Dutton Horse Bridge, 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 downstream 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.

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 Dutton Viaduct and Pickerings look out for the winding course of the old river which can still be seen today.

The next 45 mins is spent gently meandering through the Cheshire countryside and passing locally given place names on the river such as Devil's Gardens and Goulding Point, when eventually Frodsham Hill comes into view and we soon afterwards pass the now silted up Frodsham cut, which at one time led to the now disused Frodsham Lock.

Shortly after passing 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 main channel continues to the left whilst the sluice/weir water runs to the right and we continue our journey and soon reach 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 then pass one of our berths at Sutton Weaver, which we use for departure and embarkation at the bridge, and continue down to Marsh Lock, which offers us our last chance to turn the vessel around and head back up the river.

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 northern end of the Navigation is at Marsh Lock which allows access from the Navigation onto the Manchester Ship Canal which opened in January 1894. The industrial might of this part of the world can be seen to the east in the shape of the Ineos (formerly ICI) Chemical plants at Rocksavage, Weston Point and Runcorn.

Once on the Ship Canal we commence the 10.5 mile trip to Ellesmere Port. The view on both sides is of farmland and grassy salt marshes with great bird life. The impressive brows of Frodsham and Helsby Hills are a short distance away to the south situated at the north eastern end of the Backbone of Cheshire which stretches away 35 miles southwestwards to Whitchurch carrying the famous walking route known as the Sandstone Trail.

The view becomes intensely industrial again after 5 miles when the Canal carries us through Stanlow Refinery. The 1900 acre site now owned by Essar Energy was opened in 1924 and is the UK's second largest refinery supplying one sixth of the UK's petrol needs as well as jet fuel, diesel and a wide range of chemicals. Large ocean going vessels are quite likely to be seen here.

Our berth at Telford's Quay at Ellesmere Port is close to the famous northern half of the National Waterways Museum. The Shropshire Union Canal and Railway and Canal Company, who owned the docks at Ellesmere Port, ordered the Danny to be built in 1903, and it was between Ellesmere Port and Liverpool that she spent the first 19 years of her working life towing barges and providing a basic passenger service. On retirement from active service the Danny spent a number of years as an exhibit at the museum until funding ran out and she was destined for scrapping. She was saved from oblivion in 2004 by a determined group of like-minded people led by DAPS chairman, Dan Cross. With assistance from many sources Danny was brought back into her present active condition replicating what she looked like in 1936.