
SEND NATURE TRAILS

WEY NAVIGATION

WHAT IS IT?

A 15 mile stretch of navigable water, part river and part canal.

WHERE IS IT?

The Wey navigation runs from Guildford in the south to Weybridge in the north, where it joins up with the river Thames. It meets the Godalming navigation in the centre of Guildford and then extends to Godalming wharf. There are six lengthsmen along the waterway, looking after sections of up to 5 miles, ensuring stable water levels and controlling vegetation along the towpath. The lengthsmen who lives at Triggs Lock looks after the stretch which runs between Bowers and Papercourt Locks. Most of this section runs along the western edge of Send parish.

WHAT'S ITS HISTORY?

Sir Richard Weston (1591 –1652) of Sutton Place spent most of his life experimenting with crop husbandry, applying rotation methods and irrigation techniques that he had seen applied in the Netherlands in his youth. He began to construct his 'flowing river' around his Sutton Place estate with the aim of flooding fields during the winter which kept the land warmer and allowed the production of an earlier crop. He also realized that 'straightening' the river would make it easier to navigate, but this required the creation of pounds, or locks and weirs, to maintain sufficient flow in the river to get boats up and down. An act of parliament to make the Wey navigable was obtained in 1651. By the time Sir Richard died in 1652, ten miles of the planned 14 miles of navigation had been completed. The remaining four miles were completed by 1653, linking Guildford with Weybridge and the Thames, so creating the A3 of its day! The navigation was successful in business terms, with grain and other cargoes being carried up and down its length until the mid-1960s.

HOW CAN I ACCESS IT?

From the following points in and around Send, starting in the north: Tanyard iron bridge near the industrial site in Tannery Lane - Wey barges transported bark here for tanning; Highbridge at the end of Wharf Lane - there was once a carpenter's shop at "Sendheath Wharf" here; Cartridge by the New Inn pub - rebuilt in 1999; down the footpath half way up Potters Lane alongside Crickets Hill Farm; at Triggs Lock, across the fields from Send Church or from the Sutton Green direction.

WHAT MIGHT I SEE THERE?

Due to the rural setting at Triggs length we are fortunate enough to boast the most bio-diverse stretches along the navigation and it is not uncommon to see buzzards, barn owls, a visiting osprey and resident Egyptian geese. Green and greater spotted woodpeckers are abundant along the length. Bats to be found are Daubenton's, pipistrelle and noctule. The flood meadows in and around Sutton Place offer a host of wild flowers and insects. From late May onwards, you cannot miss seeing large numbers of banded and beautiful demoiselles and azure damselflies. A bit later in the year you will see the dragonflies – ruddy darters, southern hawkers and

occasionally a migrant emperor. Butterflies you can see will include Orange Tip, Brimstone, Holly and Common Blue, Comma, Gatekeeper as well as Peacock and Red Admiral. The sandy substrate is ideal for reptiles and some heath land plants, and the chalk is perfect for vetches. Plants growing along the towpath at various times of the year include cuckoo flower, meadowsweet, enchanter's nightshade, hemp agrimony, comfrey, and in late summer, the orange balsam that is said to have arrived in the area as a result of seeds falling out of gunpowder barrels from the American Civil War returning to the Gunpowder Mills at Chilworth.

On the water, swans nest by Sanger Drive, and there are many mallards and other water birds.

Evidence of invasive species is present, Himalayan balsam being the main concern. Mink are predators along the navigation and will no doubt have an adverse effect on the fish and wildfowl population. There is evidence of signal crayfish burrows – which is worrying because they weaken the perched embankment of the towpath, but as yet there seems to be less activity than is the norm upstream.