

The Union Canal Towpath - Fountainbridge to Ratho- National Cycle Route 75

Background

The Union Canal opened in 1822 and was originally built as an industrial transport system transporting coal and other minerals directly into central Edinburgh from the West. Horses would tow huge heavily laden barges in from Lanarkshire for the citizens of Edinburgh and for a time it was the most significant form of goods delivery for Edinburgh.

Unfortunately for the canal and the community it supported, the rapid and significant growth of rail transport from 1842 eventually led to the abandonment of the Union Canal in the 1930's.

Heritage and History

The Union Canal was reopened thanks to a determination to preserve our historic canals, through the '[Millennium Link](#)' project . The £84.5m Millennium Link was launched in the 1990's to rejoin the Union Canal with the Forth and Clyde Canal at Falkirk completed in 2002. This included the design of the unique [Falkirk Wheel](#) to solve the problem that the two canals differed in height by 35 metres! The Falkirk Wheel is now the World's only rotating boat lift and a technological marvel worth a visit.

The canal itself is now used recreationally by residents, local rowing clubs and a number of community ventures while the path alongside is part of [National Route 75](#) and is enjoyed by cyclists and pedestrians alike.

Many people have also made their home on the canal and you'll be able to see plenty of colourful house boats at Fountainbridge and along the route.

The Route

This route gives you the opportunity to pass over two purpose built aqueducts although it is recommended that you walk rather than cycle across the aqueducts for safety as they have narrow paths. These navigable aqueducts originally allowed the canal transport boats to travel without the disruption of canal locks and now provide a wonderful path with stunning views.

The first you'll find along the route is the [Slateford Aqueduct](#) around 0.75 miles/1.2km into the route which takes you over the Water of Leith – a beautiful hidden gem of a route also worth a cycle or walk.

At around 5 miles/8.5km, you will reach the second aqueduct, the [Scott Russell Aqueduct](#) (named in honour of a naval engineer), where you will now be completely immersed in the countryside. Trees overhang the path and there are no buildings in sight during the last section of this cycle route providing a peaceful escape from the hustle and bustle of the city centre.

The path is flat but does narrow at certain points under bridges. It is also a shared space so please be courteous. Scottish Canals have published a [Towpath Code of Conduct](#) which is useful.

Why don't you?

See if you can find the Edinburgh and Glasgow coats of arms on Bridge 2, (the second bridge along from Fountainbridge.)

Find the wooden sculptures carved into the nature of the route.

Visit the [Calders Community Garden](#) right next to the canal at Calders Crescent.

Spot the commemorative display at Ratho showing a metal horse pulling a barge as a reminder of the original functions of the canal.

Cycle on to Falkirk in West Lothian and see the great Falkirk Wheel in action! This option is 32 miles and should take between 3-4 hours if cycling at a moderate pace.

Visitor Information

This route is just over 8 miles/13.5km long in total and will take approximately 60-90 minutes to cycle assuming a leisurely pace. Walking will take between 3-4 hours.

Both Ratho and Fountainbridge boast a variety of food and drink businesses. And for a mid-route break and a unique experience, you can stop at [Zazou](#) - the Narrowboat Cafe just after Harrison Park.

Convenient accommodation can be found at [Fountain Court Apartments](#). For a truly special stay, book the [Four Sisters Boatel](#) – a fixed canal barge completely converted into luxury accommodation.

If you decide to stay in Ratho, [The Bridge Inn](#), which is situated right on the canal and offers award winning bed and breakfast. If you book ahead, you can also enjoy lunch, tea or dinner on their very own barge with sailings to the [Almond Aqueduct](#) at weekends.

If returning to Edinburgh via public transport, travel on to Broxburn to catch a train.

Facilities

Cycle Route

Bike Racks

Seating

Cafe

Photo Opportunities