

Loxwood – London's Lost Route to the Sea

*Cross pastures to discover how a
forgotten canal is being brought to life.*

DISTANCE 4.5 miles (7.2km) **MINIMUM TIME** 2hrs

ASCENT/GRADIENT 82ft (25m) ▲▲▲ **LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY** + + +

PATHS Field paths, tracks and tow path, 4 stiles

LANDSCAPE Gentle farmland bisected by Wey and Arun Junction Canal

SUGGESTED MAP OS Explorer 134 Crawley & Horsham

START / FINISH Grid reference: TQ 041311

DOG FRIENDLINESS On lead on road and stretches of farmland

PARKING Free car park by Wey and Arun Junction Canal, next to Onslow Arms, Loxwood, beyond pub car park

PUBLIC TOILETS None on route

The Wey and Arun Junction Canal was completed in 1816 to connect the Wey and Arun rivers and form part of a continuous inland waterway route, linking London with the south coast. Glancing at derelict stretches of the 23-mile (37km) canal today, in places either completely dried up or engulfed by weeds and a sea of mud, you could be forgiven for thinking that 'derelict' is perhaps an understatement.

Canal Make-over

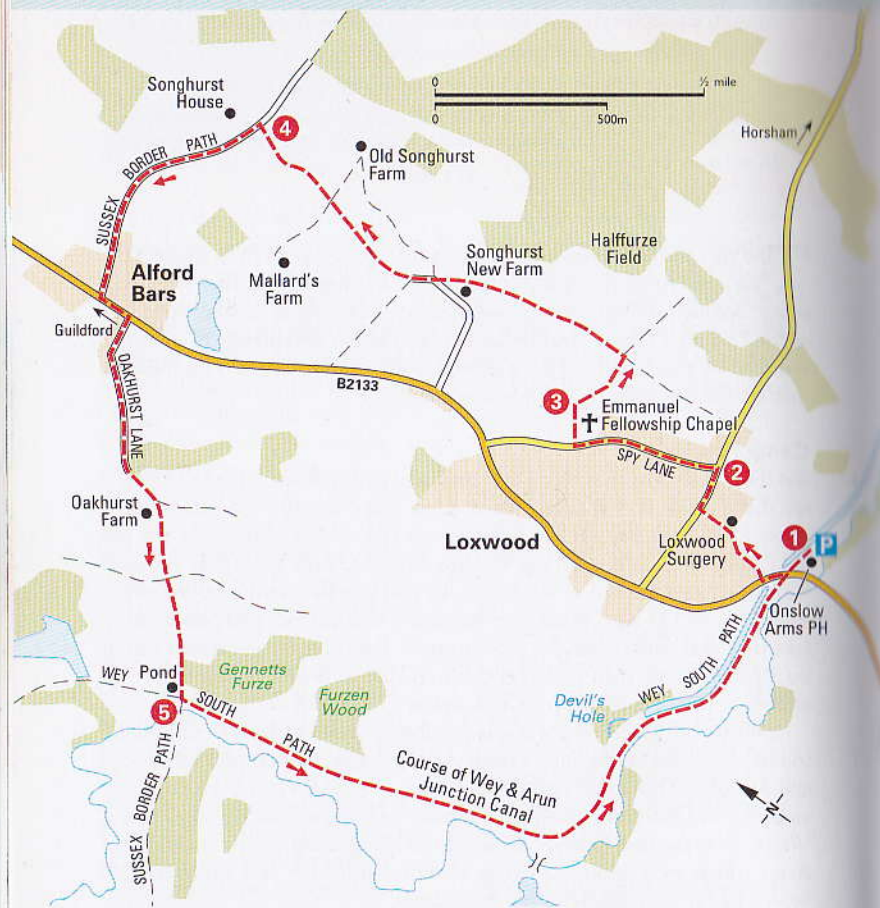
But look closer, journey along the canal tow path a little further, and you'll see that a make-over is taking place. After years of neglect, a great deal of restoration work has already been completed along the route of the old canal and a stretch beyond the Onslow Arms has now been fully restored with boat trips offered at weekends. To join together two sections either side of the B2133 here, it has been necessary to construct two new locks to take the canal underneath the modern road. But there is a great deal still to do if the Wey and Arun Canal Trust is to realise its dream of reopening this stretch of what became known as 'London's lost route to the sea'.

During the 19th century it was possible to travel by boat from London to Littlehampton on the Sussex coast via Weybridge, Guildford, Pulborough and Arundel. This route represented a tiny but important part of a once complex and extensive network of inland waterways covering England and Wales. To make that journey involved travelling along the rivers Wey and Arun which were linked between Shalford in Surrey and Pallingham in Sussex by the Wey and Arun Junction Canal.

Though the canal was initially successful, it was the arrival of the railway which spelled its demise. It finally closed in 1871, and as the years passed the waterway clogged up and was reduced to a stagnant depression in the ground, remaining in that state for the best part of a century, abandoned and largely forgotten. The lock by Devil's Hole, an abandoned oxbow of canal that was an earlier attempt to bypass a slope, was used by Canadians in the Second World War for target practice!

In the early 1970s a group of dedicated volunteers and canal enthusiasts formed the Wey and Arun Canal Trust, with the aim of restoring the canal as a public amenity, including its diverse range of wildlife habitats. Many of the original bridges and locks have been reconstructed or restored, but construction work of this kind is very expensive and every penny is needed. The conservation project depends on the Trust's fundraising efforts and the goodwill of local councils, businesses and landowners.

This pretty walk begins in Loxwood and gives an insight into the rebirth of the Wey and Arun Junction Canal, highlighting the various renovation works in progress. Heading north across lush farmland, the route eventually joins the tow path, and you'll see how the conservation programme is transforming the canal from an overgrown ditch into a vibrant waterway.



WALK 32 DIRECTIONS

1 From the car park by the Onslow Arms turn right at the B2133, cross over the canal, walk along the road for 50yds

(41m) and then turn right on to a signposted path which leads between hedges. Continue walking ahead by Loxwood Surgery on the right. Turn right at the T-junction.

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK
The Onslow Arms is characterised by its horseshoe-shaped bar. Choose from pizza, ploughmans' or sandwiches from on the main menu. There is also a beer garden and children's play area. Tanglefoot and Badger Best feature among the beers and there are usually a couple of guest ales.

2 Pass Burley Close and turn left into Spy Lane. Follow the road as it leads between houses and bungalows and look for the Emmanuel Fellowship Chapel on the right. Bear right immediately beyond the chapel, over a stile and skirt the Emmanuel Fellowship playing field.

3 Follow the path to the next stile and pass through a tongue of woodland. Make for the right-hand boundary of the field, aiming for a stile in the corner. Turn left and immediately left again by a fingerpost and stile. Follow the

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

In Spy Lane is the former chapel of a religious sect formed in the 19th century. The adjoining burial ground is the final resting place of founder John Sirgood and 600 of his followers, though there are no headstones to mark their graves. Sirgood was a puritanical evangelist who came to Loxwood in 1850. He gathered around him the Society of Dependents, whose members became known as Cokelers from the name of a local field. The Cokelers carried out a great deal of charity work in the area, though they refused to solemnise marriage in their chapel, did not approve of music and books, and did not endorse sport or the theatre. The chapel is now home to the Emmanuel Fellowship, which has no connection with the extinct Cokelers.

left-hand edge of three fields, passing Songhurst New Farm. Head for the field corner and look for a stile just to the right of a galvanised gate. Continue along a surfaced single-track lane, passing a brick-built house on the right. Continue for 0.5 mile (800m), passing a right turning to Songhurst Old Farm.

4 Turn left on reaching a T-junction with a lane, following the Sussex Border Path and pass Songhurst House. After 0.5 mile (800m), turn left at a T-junction along the right-hand verge of the B2133. Walk along to Oakhurst Lane and follow the Sussex Border Path to Oakhurst Farm. Pass between timber barns and go straight ahead when the track curves right. Follow the field path ahead into woodland and keep forward at the first T-junction, following the Sussex Border Path. Carry on to reach a pond (on the right) and a crossing of tracks.

5 Turn left here and follow the Wey South Path alongside the disused Wey and Arun Junction Canal, which here appears as an overgrown ditch on the left. Continue on the old tow path, passing through several gates. Disregard any turnings and keep to the route of the canal. Pass a lock and a footbridge and eventually you reach the B2133. Cross over, keeping to the left of the Onslow Arms and return to the car park.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE

Enjoy a summer afternoon cruise on the restored section of the Wey and Arun Junction Canal. The weekend trips begin by the Onslow Arms in Loxwood and last less than an hour. Longer cruises on the canal take place once a month.