

Blackwater Meadow- Ellesmere, on the Llangollen Canal.

The trainer will take you out of the Marina, and once you are confident with the steering, you are off on your own.

Most people cruise westwards towards Llangollen, on the first day you probably will not get very far, as by the time you've checked in and stashed all your belongings and provisions, watched the training video and had your training, time will be passing.

Just time to get used to the feel of your boat, and enjoy the beautiful countryside, before you moor up after a few miles and make yourself a cup of tea and relax after the stress and strain of the days car journey.

Alternatively turn right out of the Marina & where the canal forks take the right fork & moor up on the Canal arm that leads to the town of Ellesmere- the Ellesmere Branch, and sample one of Ellesmere's delightful pubs or restaurants for the evening.

This area is known as the mini Lake District, so it may be worth taking a look at Ellesmere's Meres (lakes).

The next day head towards Chirk. The beautiful countryside continues, this part of the Canal is very rural, and all you will see is fields full of cows and sheep.

You will presently pass the junction with the Montgomery Canal on your left, 7 miles of this is navigable, up to Maesbury, and if you want to cruise along here you have to book with the Lock keeper the day before. (Ask at Blackwater reception before you leave).

From this junction onwards towards Llangollen, the Bridges start being numbered from No 1, so you can easily count your progress, and how successful you have been in navigating under the bridges without touching the sides!!

If you want to stop off for lunch there is a pub coming up after a tricky bridge (No 4)- the Narrow Boat Inn, just before the Maestermyn Marina at Whittington.

Alternatively there is another pub at bridge 11, the Jack Mytton Inn, Hindford, both serve good food & beer.

Shortly after Bridge 11, you will come to your only locks on this part of the Canal. There are 2 locks quite close to each other.

If a boat has just come through, past you, you are in luck, as the lock is with you, and you can open the gates and go straight in.

Get your crew out just before the lock, and make sure they have the windlass to operate the lock gates, as you were shown in the training.

If the Lock is against you, check to see if any boats are waiting to use the Lock on the other side, as they have the right to use it first (if the Lock is against you a boat has last gone through going the same way as you, so has left the water not at your level).

If no boats are waiting you will have to bring the water to the same level as you, by opening the gates nearest to you very slowly, to let the water out(make sure the far gates are shut)

After the 2nd lock on the right hand side, you can moor up and fill up with water if needed (you will need the British waterways key that is on your bunch of keys). Water points are marked on your map along the canal.

A bit further on, after Bridge 15, there are some very posh moorings outside the LionKeys Pub & restaurant, just before you go under the A5 road. There are 20 moorings for customers.

You will start to see less cows & sheep & see more houses now, as you are approaching the town of Chirk.

At Bridge 21 you can moor up and walk to the Bridge Inn, the last pub in England, before you cross the Aqueduct into Wales.

The Aqueduct is 70 feet high and was built between 1796 and 1801 by Thomas Telford & William

Jessop, it is a practise run before you get to the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, but it is very beautiful in itself, and crosses over the River Ceiriog.

It is not as frightening as you would think, with spectacular views of the River cascading down the valley below, and the Chirk Viaduct above you.

You cannot go very fast across the Aqueduct, so just enjoy the view, as very soon you come to the end, and the beginning of the Chirk Tunnel, which at over 400 metres is one of the longest tunnels on the waterways system to have a towpath running through it.

After you have emerged from the tunnel you might want to moor up & take a look at Chirk, or get some supplies.

The areas main visitor attraction is Chirk castle (NT), a magnificent 700 year old fortress built by Edward the 1.

Do not be tempted to stay the night here, as Cadburys have a site near here hidden by the trees, as does a large sawmill, so you might not get any sleep as they seem to work all night!!

You can moor up at Chirk Marina, which is a bit further on, there is a Golf Club there, with a bar & restaurant which are open to the public, they charge about £5 for an overnight stay.

Once the canal turns away from the railway you will find the Offas Dyke path following the Canal. There is a very quaint lift bridge to negotiate at Froncysyllte, you will have to lift it up using your windlass key.

If you want to build up your nerve before crossing the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, you can stop at Froncysyllte for the night, there are 2 pubs, the Britannia Inn and the Aqueduct Inn.

You might have to queue for the Aqueduct, you will need a runner to go ahead & see if any boats are coming over towards you, if not you can go for it.

They sometimes have British waterways staff here who will try & organise who can go first!!

The views are breathtaking, but so is the fact that you have nothing but fresh air for 130 feet below you on your left. There is a walkway on your right.

The River Dee thunders away far beneath you.

You immediately come into Trevor Wharf, which might be a bit congested if boats are queueing to go over the aqueduct, but you ignore them & turn a sharp left towards Llangollen, unless you want to use some of the facilities at Trevor Wharf, water, pump out, chandlery shop etc.

You will encounter shallow water & narrow sections of canal between here & Llangollen, in some cases down to single file.

Be careful all along the Canal about going too close to the sides, as in some cases it is shallow & you may get stuck, in which case you will need to reverse & use your pole to push yourself away from the bank, or jump out and push off.

It takes about 3 hours to navigate to Llangollen, and requires a bit of concentration & some reversing, but it is well worth it.

It is very pretty hilly countryside, but have your first mate & other shipmates handy, in case they need to jump off & hold the boat steady by the ropes whilst you pull in & let other boats pass, its all part of the adventure.

You pass by another pub at bridge 41, the Sun Trevor, in case you are in need of some refreshment.

When the sun is shining, you can think to yourself that there is no better place to be than amongst the Welsh hills & valleys.

As you plod on towards Llangollen, you will see the mysterious ruins of Dinas Bran castle on top of a very steep hill, and you know that you are not far away now.

However you have the narrowest bit to negotiate now, all single file traffic with just a few passing places.

You will need to send a runner ahead to see if it is OK to proceed.

You eventually emerge into Llangollen and if the ticket office is open you can purchase a ticket for

about £5 to moor overnight in the Canal basin, or there are some moorings on the left where you can tie up for a few hours.

If the ticket office is closed, just purchase a ticket when it reopens.

The Canal basin has electric hook up & water, so you can connect yourself to the mains & do some sightseeing for a day or so.

Llangollen is very pretty, with the River Dee cascading through the town, with lots of white water crashing through the rocky river bed.

If you are lucky you will see the steam engines as you walk into the town, at the Llangollen Steam railway, and it is well worth having a ride on one. It will take you to Carrog & back, some 8 miles of some of the most stunning scenery in Britain.

There are many craft & souvenir shops & even some selling gorgeous chocolate & fudge, plus cafes, bars, tearooms & restaurants.

If you tire of Llangollen & want some exercise after being on a boat for a few days, take a walk to the beautiful Horseshoe falls, just a couple of miles along the towpath to the end of the canal.

On the way back stop off for a pub lunch at the Chainbridge Hotel, where you can enjoy spectacular views of the River Dee beside you.

You can take a detour near here as just off the A542 is the ruins of the beautiful Valle Crucis Abbey, one of the most complete Cistercian abbeys in Wales.

Then getting back on the towpath again, you pass a very quaint Canal & motor Museum, which is worth a look.

Back in Llangollen there is more to see & do, including Plas Newydd, an 18th century house open to the public.

Of course every July the International Eisteddfod is held here.

Soon it will be time to wend your way back along the Canal towards Ellesmere.

If you are staying for a week, and you want to do as much cruising as possible, then only get supplies in Llangollen & turn around and head back towards Ellesmere & explore the other end of the Llangollen Canal towards Nantwich.

You may get up as far as Whitchurch & if you feel up to it , just beyond is the Grindley Brook Locks. The top 3 of the 6 locks form the only staircase flight on the Llangollen.

USEFUL APPROXIMATE CRUISING TIMES IN SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Blackwater Meadow Marina to Maestermyn Marina	2 hours
Maestermyn Marina to Chirk	4 & half hours
Chirk marina to Pontcysyllte Aqueduct	1 hour
Pontcysyllte Aqueduct to Llangollen	3 hours

The times are only approximate & depend on weather conditions & amount of river traffic.

The thing to remember is that you are not sitting in a car in a traffic jam on the M25, you are aboard your very peaceful, chilled out, narrowboat, you do not have to rush anywhere, and you can do as much or as little as you want, just remember to leave enough time to get back to Ellesmere, & enjoy yourselves!!!