

The Don Aqueduct

Walk summary: This gentle waterside trail explores the network of historic canals and waterways that helped shape the industrial landscape of South Yorkshire. It includes crossing the Don Aqueduct, a marvel of engineering where two waterways meet. Along the way, you'll discover locks, working waterways, historic churches and peaceful landscapes.

Distance: 2.7 miles / 4.3 kilometres

Duration: Approximately 1 hour

Terrain: Rural walking along relatively flat, unpaved footpaths along the canal. The walk includes a short section of country road without a pavement. Please note crossing over the Don Aqueduct can be uncomfortable if you suffer from vertigo. This walk is not passable after sunset due to a locked gate by the canal.

Nearest Car Park: Free parking can be found off Top Lane at the back of St Mary's Church, Doncaster, DN7 5SW



1. Kirk Bramwith and St Mary's Church

Walk through the churchyard.

Likely to be on the site of an earlier place of worship, St Mary's is a Norman church built in the 12th century. The main doorway is of the Norman era, with many other parts of the church being added later, including a Saxon font and a tower constructed between during the 13th to 15th centuries. The tower holds a notably ancient bell, made in York and dating from 1350.

The 1940s church door and the wooden furniture inside the church were made by the carpenter, Robert Thompson – famous for his 'mouseman' oak furniture. Mouseman furniture includes a small carved mouse hidden within the woodwork, and there are 26 mice to find carved into the pews, hymn boards and other woodwork throughout the church. St Mary's may have one of the largest collections of church furniture handmade by Robert Thompson.

St Mary's is known for a beautiful display of snowdrops in early spring, which are celebrated with an annual festival.



Leave through the gate on the other side of the churchyard and take a left along the road, passing over a little waterway. Continue along to reach Bramwith Bridge.

2. Bramwith Bridge

Between the river and the canal here, you'll see a paved track on your right. Take this path.

Britain's canal age began in the late 1750s when the pioneering Sankey Canal and Bridgewater canal were constructed to transport coal from mines to industrial cities. The Bridgewater canal was such a success that upon opening, the price of coal in Manchester was said to have halved overnight. Canals were huge construction projects, built by hand and at great cost. Even so, floating goods across Britain proved cheaper and faster than using horse and carts. Canal building continued in Britain for the next 150 years, transforming our landscape.

3. The Don Navigation

Pass through the pedestrian gate and walk along the path towards the lock.

Today, houseboats can be seen along this stretch, but historically the navigation would have been used for industry, with boats transporting goods and raw materials up and down the bustling canal.

In the early days of the Don Navigation, wooden sailboats called Keels and Sloops, built in local dockyards such as the one in Stainforth, would have sailed. Before engines, boats were also pulled along the towpath by horses. When the canal passed through tunnels, workers called 'leggers' were hired to lie on the top of the boat and push it through the tunnel, sometimes for many miles.

When you reach the lock, cross over it and onto the other side. Continue on this path, with the canal now on your right. You'll pass through a gap near a locked gate as you walk along.

4. Meeting the New Junction Canal

You'll soon reach a track road. Turn right and go over the bridge. Walk along the track a short distance and take the first right back onto the towpath. Finding yourself on the opposite side of the canal, follow the towpath back up it.



The invention of steam-powered engines in the 1800s revolutionised transport. Steamboats were powerful and could pull much heavier loads of cargo. It was decided to transform the waterway here, creating a new stretch of canal that was wider and suitable for the new, steam-powered vessels. The new canal would allow reliable access to nearby cities, such as Leeds, and the port at Goole.

At huge cost, the New Junction Canal was completed in 1905. It was the last commercial canal to be built in Britain.

The new canal could accommodate large cargo chains called tom-puddings (known for their likeness to strings of black pudding) which hauled huge volumes of coal from local collieries to nearby factories and ports.

5. The Don Aqueduct

The Don Aqueduct should be ahead of you. You do not need to cross over the steps, instead continue straight along the metal walkway and see the river below you.

Aqueducts were used across the world for many centuries to carry drinking water, but it was the Georgians who first built these “water bridges” for transport in Britain, during the great canal age. This impressive structure is a marvel of engineering.

The Don Aqueduct, carries the weight of the canal over the river Don, allowing boats to travel across. The guillotine-like gates at either end can be used to shut the aqueduct when the river is in flood, which prevents the canal from flooding nearby land.

During the building of the canal, the river Don was straightened here. Unlike a natural river, which curves and meanders through the landscape, the river Don’s course has been straightened and changed many times.

Follow the tow path all the way along until you reach the gate at the end.

At the end of the towpath, turn right onto Low Lane – take care here as there is no footpath. When you reach a fork in the road take the left turn onto Top Lane to reach St Mary's Church.



References

- A Church Near You [online] Available at: [*Kirk Bramwith St Mary with Fenwick & Moss - A Church Near You*](#), Accessed [2026]
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