

Canal & River Trust Audio Tours: Liverpool Link

Hello, and welcome to this audio tour of the Liverpool Link. Together we'll walk from Albert Dock to Stanley Dock, a wonderful, historical route that takes in the legendary Pier Head and the world's largest brick building, the Bonded Tobacco Warehouse.

Our canals and rivers are the perfect places to help you feel calmer, happier and healthier. Even in busy towns and cities, they provide special spaces where you can relax, recharge, or get your body moving.

Whether you're on the canal following this tour or listening along indoors, we hope you enjoy spending time by water today, and that you feel the benefits that this can bring.

Today, our urban journey around this section of the Liverpool Link will take us back in time to the industrial revolution, an important era in the history of our 2,000-mile canal network. It will bring us back to more modern times so we can uncover what makes this stretch of canal such a special place today.

The walk will take in the Liverpool Link, a new stretch of canal that lets boats cruise right into the heart of the city and moor in Salthouse Dock. The new section, from Stanley Dock to Pier Head, opened in 2009.

The new link is 1.4 miles long, includes two new locks, and cost 22 million pounds to build. This is the only section of Britain's waterways to be built in the 21st Century.

The perfect place to start our walk is by the three museums on the north side of the cosmopolitan Albert Dock. Here, you can see the Border Force National Museum, the International Slavery Museum and the Merseyside Maritime Museum, and this starting point lets us absorb the atmosphere of this large, redeveloped dock complex. Designed by engineer and architect Jesse Hartley, Albert Dock first opened in 1846 as the centerpiece of a huge, visionary network of working waterways around this part of Liverpool.

The warehouse here has small windows and few entrances and looks almost like a prison. Merchants used the warehouse at the dock to store imported goods before any tax was paid on them. As you can imagine, there was a lot of import tax evasion and smuggling taking place in the dock in the 19th century.

Regenerated in the mid to late 1980s, Albert Dock boasts the Tate North art gallery in addition to a fantastic variety of restaurants, shops, cafes and hotels. For music fans there is a permanent Beatles' exhibition on the southern side and the Liverpool Wheel can be seen a little further south.

Stroll along the walkways running around the rectangular perimeter of the water and stand among the dock's distinctive red columns. Let's pause and take a few deep breaths as you look out onto the deep, calm water.

Take a moment to appreciate the serenity while we reflect on the controversial history of the dock. It is heavily linked to the exploitation of people through slavery – both from the money that came from Liverpool’s prominent role in the transatlantic slave trade, and through the goods produced by enslaved people. The canals were built to carry these goods, which included sugar, cotton, and tobacco.

In 1792 Liverpool had 131 slave ships, more than twice as many as Bristol and London combined. In fact, 1 in 5 slaves who crossed the Atlantic were carried on a Liverpool ship.

You can learn more about how the profits of slavery were invested in the building of canals in Britain by visiting the Canal & River Trust’s website.

But for now, let’s return to our tour. This part of the canal and dock complex has been used for many world-renowned boating events, including the Tall Ships race and the start and finish of the Clipper Round the World Race. Thousands of people gathered here in 2018 to see the sensational Giant Puppets show with huge crowds stretching as far as the eye could see.

Continuing our walk towards the Mersey, with the famous Albert Dock receding behind us, we look towards Hartley Bridge. A former swingbridge, now fixed, it is one of only a few of its kind and crosses the link from Albert Dock to Canning Half Tide Dock. Canal boats intending to reach a final mooring point at Salthouse Dock will pass under the Hartley Bridge before travelling through Albert Dock.

Pause for a moment while you’re standing on the bridge. Look back at the city and take notice of the contrasting architecture as industrial age warehouses and chimneys rub up against modern glass office buildings. Take time to connect with the flow of the water running underneath you and the unmistakable sounds of the ever-present seagulls overhead. There’s a unique energy to the docks, and a sense of space and adventure as you imagine setting sail into the great unknown.

Once over the bridge you will enter a courtyard type space bordered by the Tate and other refurbished brick buildings. Here you will be struck a 10-metre high stack of brightly coloured boulders looming ahead of you. Seemingly out of place in these redeveloped, industrial surroundings, this fun modern sculpture was installed here in 2018 by the Tate. It was designed by Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone, and its official name is Liverpool Mountain but it more closely resembles a strange, rainbow-like totem pole.

Turn right and cross the footbridge into the serene, mirror-like Canning Dock from the River Mersey. On the right there are two graving docks, which are dry docks used for ship repairs. Next to them is the exit point from Canning Dock to the beginning of the canal; a boater-operated lock is followed immediately by a short tunnel. There is plenty of opportunity around this area to see some locks in action, to watch boats rise and fall, and to marvel at the ingenuity of the 19th Century engineering. It’s fascinating and exhilarating to see and hear the roar of tons of water rush into the locks to lift a boat. Take a minute to consider their importance to the industrial revolution. can you imagine the huge forces that the gates in the lock have to control and withstand?

On the left-hand side, the white and grey paneled Museum of Liverpool resembles something out of a science fiction film with its super-modern sloping, angular design. The museum offers a rich and interactive collection of the city's history and culture with a special section for kids. One of the graving docks contains the stunning, colourful 'Dazzle Ship', a ship beautifully painted by the Venezuelan artist, Carlos Cruz-Diez. This painting builds on the idea of Dazzle Camouflage, used by ships in WW1 with the intention of confusing and distorting rather than disguising the appearance of ships at sea. Many of these ships would have been painted right here in these docks and the effect is indeed dazzling!

In keeping with the angular architectural theme, you will notice the imposing black structure that juts out over the water like the bow of a huge ship. Sitting next to the canal and graving docks, this shiny building is home to restaurants, coffee shops and a very stylish photo gallery, the Open Eye. The gallery has had a presence in Liverpool since 1977. Behind these modern buildings towers the iconic Royal Liver Building, which completes the scene and combines and contrasts the old and the new.

There are several statues scattered around this area, notably a family scene intended to represent those who emigrated through Liverpool across the Atlantic to America in the 19th Century. This statue begs the question - how did parents keep their children safe and entertained on a 19th Century transatlantic crossing? Imagine the excitement and nervousness of travelling to a distant land to start a new life.

The city's rich musical heritage is recognised here too, with legendary Liverpoolian rock and roll star Billy Fury having been immortalised as a statue, as has a little known local band called The Beatles...

But really, it's the carthorses that serviced the docks here for around 300 years that are the unsung heroes of this time. They're rightly represented here as statues, along with King Edward the Eighth who gazes thoughtfully across the water.

As the canal disappears through a tunnel and runs beneath you, take a minute to appreciate the vastness of the nearby river and the sea, feel the freshness of the breeze or the warmth of the sun. Maybe a narrowboat is gliding quietly beneath you at just this moment. Allow yourself to breath in for five seconds and slowly breathe out for ten. Repeat this process twice more and then we will continue with our audio tour.

The canal re-emerges from the tunnel for a short stretch in front of the iconic Three Graces of Pier Head, the trio of historic buildings, the Royal Liver, the Cunard and the Port of Liverpool.

This part of the walk is very atmospheric and a great testament to the work involved in the redevelopment of the area. The design around the canal feels brilliantly modern and clean with plenty of space to sit or stand while waiting for a narrowboat to emerge briefly from one tunnel before disappearing again into the next.

At this point the canal submerges into the next tunnel stretch. Walkers go straight along, past the ferry terminal for cross-Mersey ferries and the landing stage for the Isle of Man ferries. Past the Royal Liver Building, if you look to your right you'll see the church known as the Liverpool Parish Church, said to have been a site of worship since 1250.

If you love walking, we suggest crossing in front of the Crowne Plaza hotel and then following the left-hand riverside path alongside the lock that brings boats into the next mooring point, Princes Dock. The canal emerges here and walkers can follow the same route, past the super-sleek Princes Dock Footbridge to the northern end of the dock. Built in 2001 and designed by 23-year-old Eduard Ross, the Princes Dock Footbridge has an almost whale-like appearance, with distinct ribs forming a delicate white tunnel suspended above the water. The northern end of the dock is marked by a modern, eggshell coloured apartment building called Alexandra Tower. All the buildings around Princes Dock are modern – part of the ongoing Liverpool Waters development by Peel & Co. which is reinvigorating the land along this stretch of the waterfront. In the far distance you can see the modern red container cranes of the Port of Liverpool standing to attention guarding the entrance to the city.

From here the canal runs under a road bridge before gushing into Princes Half-Tide dock. However, this dock is not open to the public – a mixture of new apartment buildings and a warehouse conversion make this area inaccessible to non-residents. Instead, the walk has to turn right and then left at the roundabout, following Waterloo Road until the bridge. The bridge then takes the road over the Collingwood and Stanley dock link. The canal channel continues to run through the old docks – Victoria, Clarence and Trafalgar. However, these are long closed and mostly filled in, awaiting redevelopment.

You get a real sense of history here and can imagine how bustling this area must have been in the 19th and early 20th Century. This stretch of canal will have been incredibly busy at the time with heavily laden narrowboats jostling for position while moving goods to and from the cargo ships. Imagine the shouting, the clanging and the banging as heavy loads were moved to and fro by hydraulic cranes. Think of the dockworkers, ebullient as they finish their shifts, heading towards the local pubs for a few pints and some hearty food.

As we carry on with our walk now up Waterloo Road we enter an area known as the Ten Streets development area. There are ambitious plans to regenerate this area with music, food and arts developments but these are still works in progress. Continuing towards the mighty Stanley Dock we pass a more modern feat of engineering - a ventilation shaft for the Kingsway Wallasey tunnel. These shafts were designed to recycle the air in the tunnel and remove the toxic fumes generated by the traffic passing through. They were completed in 1971 and are said to be Brutalist in their architectural style. The ventilation shafts are huge and would be at home sitting alongside the Museum of Liverpool in a sci - fi film!

Over to our left, at the side of the river, we see the eerie, grey, gothic Victoria Clock Tower. This tower has stood guard at the entrance to Salisbury Dock since 1848, with crew members of departing ships setting their watches by it as they headed out to the Irish Sea. Imagine the unwelcoming sound of the huge bell on

dark winter nights as it rang to warn of fog or other poor weather conditions. Imagine a beautifully crisp, clear spring morning as the sun rises over the Mersey, while the tower casts an early morning shadow onto the dock. Breathe in deeply so that you can taste and smell the sea air blowing in down the river.

You can definitely nail your daily steps by walking to this point, and there's a real romance to this bit of the walk, too. Away from the hustle and bustle you can really appreciate the flow of the water here.

To the right of Waterloo Road, with our walk almost coming to an end, we prepare for the inspiring sight of the Bonded Tobacco building, the largest brick built warehouse in the world. Built in 1901, it totally dominates the dock. More recently, the warehouse has been used in the first two series of the BBC's *The Peaky Blinders* where the Shelby family tavern "The Garrison" and all of the foundry lane scenes were part of a set built inside the warehouse courtyard. There are ambitious plans to turn it into apartments although its sheer size must make this a daunting task. On the other side of Stanley Dock, a smaller warehouse has been converted into the stunning, luxury Titanic Hotel.

You may also be interested to know that Marvel's first Captain America film used the Bascule road bridge at the bottom of Stanley Dock for a scene that doubled as New York City where Captain America rips the door of a New York taxi. He then follows a spy to what is now the Titanic Hotel Wharf and dives into the Dock to stop a submarine.

Stanley Dock is an exciting finale for this walk, not just for its huge buildings but also for the Stanley Flight. To reach this marvel of Victorian engineering, walk through the Titanic hotel carpark, cross the road and turn right. A footpath takes you down to the four locks of Stanley flight, from where the canal travels 126 miles to Leeds. Designed by Jesse Hartley, this magnificent series of locks drops or raises the boats by 3.35 meters, beautifully connecting the dock system to the Leeds & Liverpool canal.

Our volunteers have been hard at work clearing the area around the Stanley Flight. In addition to tidying the area they've also planted shrubs, herbs and bulbs making it a really attractive space that everyone can enjoy whether walking to work or just out for a stroll in the fresh air. It feels good to volunteer. It can boost your confidence and help you make new friends. If you'd like to volunteer with us, just search 'canal volunteers'.

Our walk draws to a close here. Thanks for listening. We hope you've enjoyed it and that we've helped you discover why life is better by water.

To find other exciting ways to enjoy our canals and rivers, visit canalrivertrust.org.uk