



This walk will take about 45-60 minutes and is wheel-chair accessible. The path is steep though!

Start from the car park next to the Kennet & Avon Canal (SN10 1QS). The car park is signposted from Marsh Lane and Melksham Road. Lock the car, then take the path across to the canal past the information board and weeping willow on your left. Once on the main path by the canal turn left up the hill towards Devizes and the Caen Hill Lock Café where you can pay your £1 parking fee and pick up a drink or snack (opening hours usually 10:30-15:30). Ready? Let's go...

1. Retrace your steps over the lock bridge and turn right to head downhill – looking to your right towards the side 'pound', see if you can spot any wildlife. There's one particular bird that has made this stretch his home – do you know what it is?
2. Considered the 'motorway' of its time, the Caen Hill flight of locks was the last part of the 87-mile route of the Kennet & Avon canal to be completed, opening in 1810. Designed by John Rennie the Elder to enable freight to arrive faster than by road, the canal took the most direct but steepest route. Do you know how many locks there are in total and the height they cover?

3. Between 1829 and 1843, the flight was even lit. What would they have used for this?
4. See if you can spot the remains of the brickyard used to bake bricks for the locks' construction and also the Bruce Tunnel near Marlborough, and the old tramway (*Clue*: look at the towpath arches).
5. Once the London to Bristol railway opened in 1841 the canals started to fall into disrepair, mostly due to the railways buying up the canal companies and running down the canals. Any idea when the last barge travelled up Caen Hill?
6. Restoration work started in the 1960s, thanks to the dedication of keen volunteers. The restored flight was opened by someone very well-known in 1990. Do you know who (*Clue*: who is Lock 43 named after?)?
7. As you go down the hill you will see that many of the locks have dedication plaques commemorating individuals or trusts: Monument Lock, Sir Hugh Stockwell Lock, Cave Lock, A. P. Herbert Lock, Manifold Lock, Trust Lock, Maton Lock and Kennet Lock. It's thanks to this support that the restoration has been possible. Do you by any chance know why Sir Hugh Stockwell and A. P. Herbert had locks named after them?
8. Due to the short distance between locks side 'pounds' had to be excavated to contain the amount of water needed to enable the locks to be drained and refilled as the barges passed through. In 1996, a pump was installed at the bottom of the flight, at Foxhangers, that is capable of transporting millions of gallons of water a day. Can you guess how much water is pumped to the top?

9. At the bottom of the flight, take a close look around for wildlife. Can you guess what you might see?
10. Can you spot the route of the Devizes branch train line, which ran from Patney & Chirton to Holt, much of the track lying alongside the canal? When was the railway open to passengers?
11. Cross over the bridge, looking out for a small plaque on the woodwork. Then turn right onto the road and follow it for 300 metres to the gate into Diamond Jubilee Wood. One of 60 new woods planted in 2012 to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the site covers 186 hectares (460 acres) and is planted with a mix of deciduous and coniferous native plants. How many trees can you identify?
12. From here you can choose to follow either the gravel path next to the road which will take you back up to the car park, or follow one of the many paths between the trees. Whichever route you take there is plenty of wildlife around you so take a while to watch and wait!

**Congratulations - you've reached the end of this CPRE walk! If you enjoyed it – do check out more walks at:**

<https://www.cprewiltshire.org.uk/category/days-out/>

*Many thanks to the members and volunteers of CPRE Wiltshire who kindly contributed their expertise to this local walk.*



~ ANSWERS ~

1. The bird is a heron. If he's not on duty on this upper stretch, you'll have to look out for him further down the hill.
2. Caen Hill has 29 locks in all, extending more than 2 miles with a rise of 237 feet – that's an amazing 1 in 44 gradient! It takes barges around 5 hours to navigate.
3. From 1829-1843 the flight of locks was lit by gas lights.
4. The brickworks were just down from Lock 36. A dip in the ground shows where a seam of gault clay was excavated in 1810.
5. The last barge carried grain and travelled up Caen Hill in October 1948. After that the canal fell into disrepair until restoration work started.
6. The Caen Hill Flight was opened by HM the Queen on 8 August 1990.
7. Sir Hugh Stockwell had a distinguished military career, retiring as General. In his retirement he became the chairman of the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust, who led the restoration works. A. P. Herbert was an early 20th century writer and satirist who was a keen waterman. His book *The Water Gypsies* is set in the bargeman community.
8. The pump takes 7 million gallons of water a day to the top of the flight, enough to fill one of those locks every 10 minutes.

9. Walkers have spotted otters and kingfishers to name but two!
10. The branch was opened by the Great Western Railway in 1857, and from 1862 when the Reading-Hungerford line reached Devizes it became part of the shortest route from London to the West Country. Services were re-routed in 1900, and the line closed in 1966.
11. The Canal & River Trust tells us you should be able to find oak, hazel, sweet chestnut, cherry, crab apple, silver birch and hornbeam. As the wood matures, the trees will provide an excellent habitat for wildlife such as badger, fox and deer as well as smaller mammals like wood mice, vole, shrew and hedgehog. In the long grasses, you might be lucky enough to spot harvest mice or reptiles such as grass snake and slow worm. A maturing pond attracts dragonfly, frog, toad, and newts. You may also spot the endangered chaser dragonfly winging across from the locks as well.



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## COUNTRY WALK: *CAEN HILL LOCKS*

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