

## **Cloth, coal and canals**

A self-guided walk along the Cotswold Canals near Stroud



Find out how a waterway transformed the Stroud Valley  
See evidence of the woollen industry that once thrived there  
Learn about the ambitious project to reopen the canal  
Discover how heritage buildings have been restored

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Cover image: St Cyr's Church alongside the Stroudwater Navigation © Sara Chardin

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# Cloth, coal and canals

## Discover how the Cotswold Canals transformed the Stroud Valley

Do you know why two creatures – the ‘Cotswolds Lion’ and the cochineal beetle – made Stroud’s name centuries ago?

This was where some of the best-quality coloured woollen cloth in Europe was produced.

The rolling hills and deep secluded valleys of the Cotswolds may be a picturesque landscape but it became a problem for the woollen industry, limiting the transportation of raw materials and finished goods.



Ebley Woollen Mills  
© Howard Beard Collection

The construction of two connected canals in the late 1700s transformed everything. In came tons of coal and new steam-driven machinery; up went productivity and profits.

This walk along the canal towpath from Stroud to Stonehouse tells the story of the Stroud Valley.



Ryeford Double Lock  
© Jenny Lunn

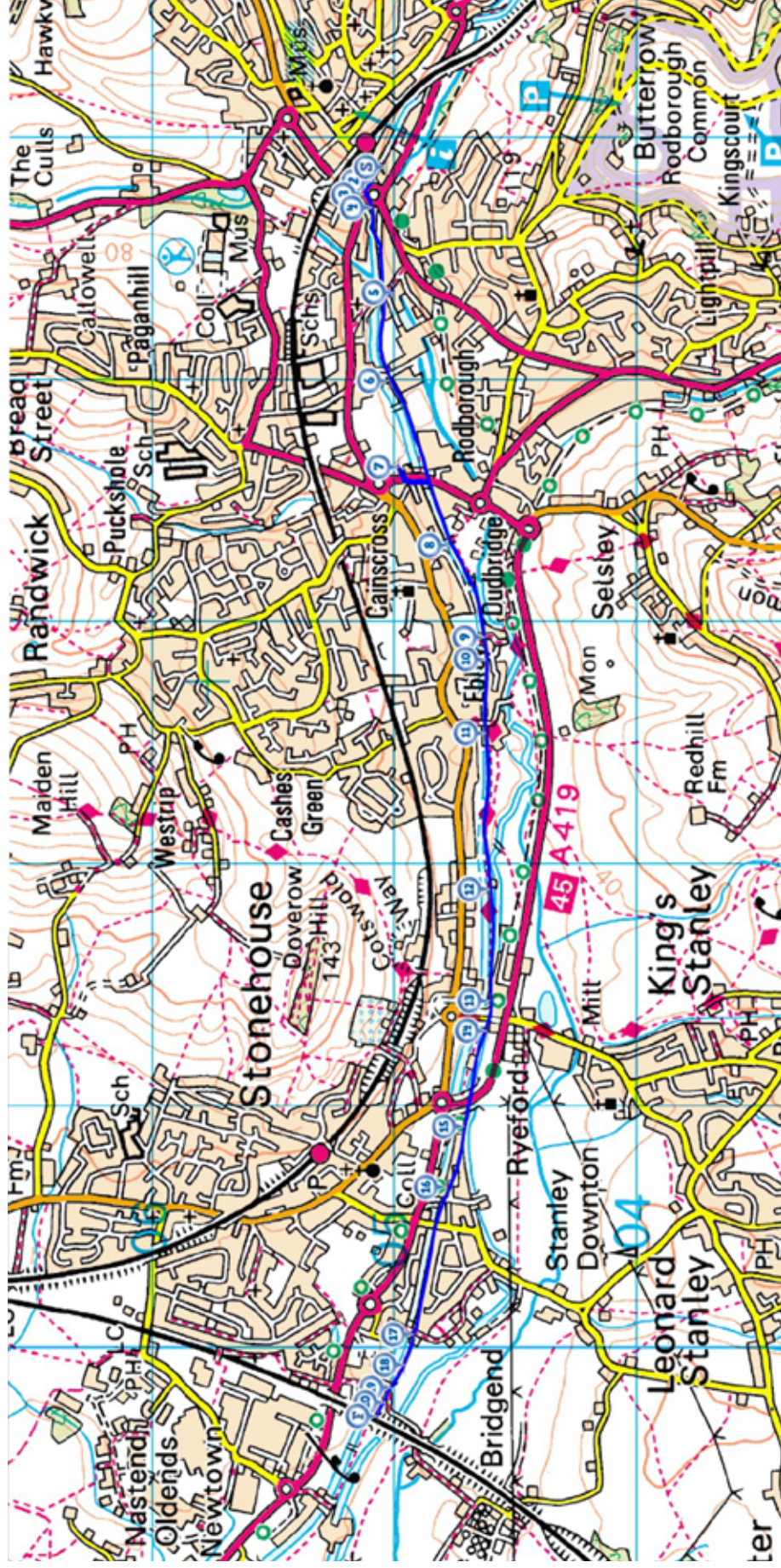
Along the way there is plenty of evidence of the industries that once thrived here in the mills and wharves, basins and locks, bridges and warehouses.

After years of disuse and dereliction, the canal is now being restored and you can now enjoy a walk along a stretch that is almost complete.

Find out how this project is regenerating the area and reinvigorating the local economy once more.



## Route overview



### Note

The canal restoration is a work in progress. Sections of the towpath are closed from time to time for works. Check at the Visitor Centre before departing and follow diversions where necessary.

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## Practical information

<b>Location</b>	Stroud, Gloucestershire
<b>Start point</b>	Cotswold Canals Visitor Centre, Bell House, Wallbridge Lock, Stroud, GL5 3JS
<b>Finish point</b>	The Ocean, off Bristol Road, Stonehouse, GL10 3RA
<b>Getting there</b>	<p><b>Car</b> – Stroud is about 10 miles south of Gloucester and 13 miles west of Cirencester. It is easily accessible from the M5 (Junction 13) and M4 (Junction 18). There are car parks at Cheapside and Brunel Mall (charges apply); limited street parking is available.</p> <p><b>Train</b> – The nearest station is Stroud (200 metres). It is served by long distance trains running between London Paddington and Gloucester and Cheltenham via Swindon.</p> <p><b>Bus</b> – Stroud is well served by regional and local buses</p> <p><b>Bicycle</b> – National Cycle Route 45 (Chester to Salisbury) passes through Stroud and Stonehouse</p>
<b>Directions from railway station to start</b>	Leave the station on the Gloucester-bound side (not the main exit). Go out of the car park and turn right down Cheapside. At the bottom take the second left (the first left is a road that is used as a car park; the third road is marked 'All Through Traffic'). At the end of the red brick building turn left round the corner to the canal lock. There is a cafe straight ahead and the Visitor Centre is up the stairs on the left.
<b>Walk distance</b>	3 ½ miles
<b>Level</b>	Gentle – A level route along the canal towpath
<b>Terrain</b>	Most of the canal towpath is surfaced but it can be muddy in places after rain; work is ongoing to make the path smoother.
<b>Suitable for</b>	<p><b>Families</b> – Take care by the side of the canal and especially around locks</p> <p><b>Prams and pushchairs</b> – Most of the path is surfaced and any steps can be bypassed</p> <p><b>Dogs</b> – Should be kept under control along the towpath</p>



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**Opening times** **Cotswold Canals Trust Visitor Centre at Wallbridge Lock** – Open Monday to Friday from 10am to 1pm, Saturday from 10am to 4pm and on other occasions when the green flag is flying

**Cotswold Canals Trust Visitor Centre at Saul Junction** – Open on Saturdays and Sundays throughout the year

**Refreshments** - **Lockkeeper's Cafe Bar** at Wallbridge Lock beside the Visitor Centre (start of walk route) is open 7 days a week; enjoy drinks, sandwiches and cakes at tables at the lock side

- Several cafes and convenience stores at **Cainscross roundabout** (near Stop 7)

- **Stonehouse Court Hotel** (end of the walk route) is open 7 days a week; enjoy a light lunch or afternoon tea on the terrace

- The **Museum in the Park** at Stratford Park in Stroud (not on walk route) has a self-service café offering drinks and snacks

**Toilets**

- Stroud railway station
- Wallbridge Visitor Centre (start of walk route)
- Ebley Mill (Stop 9)
- Car park off High Street, Stonehouse

**Places to visit** Visit **Dunkirk Mill Centre** and **Gigg Mill** to see the cloth making process in action – Check **Stroudwater Textile Trust** website for opening times and admission prices [www.stroud-textile.org.uk](http://www.stroud-textile.org.uk)

**The Museum in the Park**, Stratford Park, Stroud has displays on the history and heritage of the town – Open throughout the year from Tuesday to Sunday (closed Mondays except Bank Holidays and during August) [www.museuminthepark.org.uk](http://www.museuminthepark.org.uk)

**Gloucester Waterways Museum**, Gloucester Docks – Tells the story of Britain's 2,000 miles of waterways and life on a working dock; open all year, 7 days a week [www.gloucesterwaterwaysmuseum.org.uk](http://www.gloucesterwaterwaysmuseum.org.uk)

**Tourist**

**information**

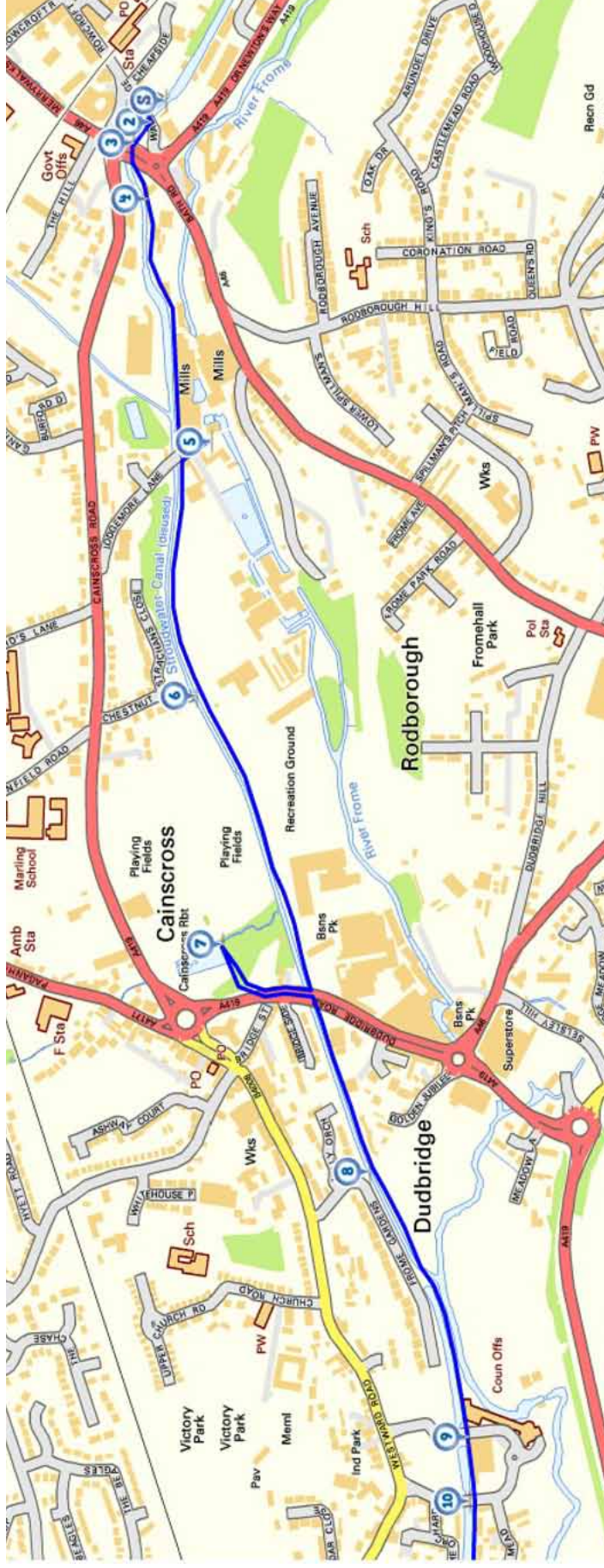
**Stroud Tourist Information Centre**

Subscription Rooms, George Street, Stroud, GL5 1AE

Phone: 01453 760960

Email: [TIC@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:TIC@stroud.gov.uk)

## Detail of first part of route

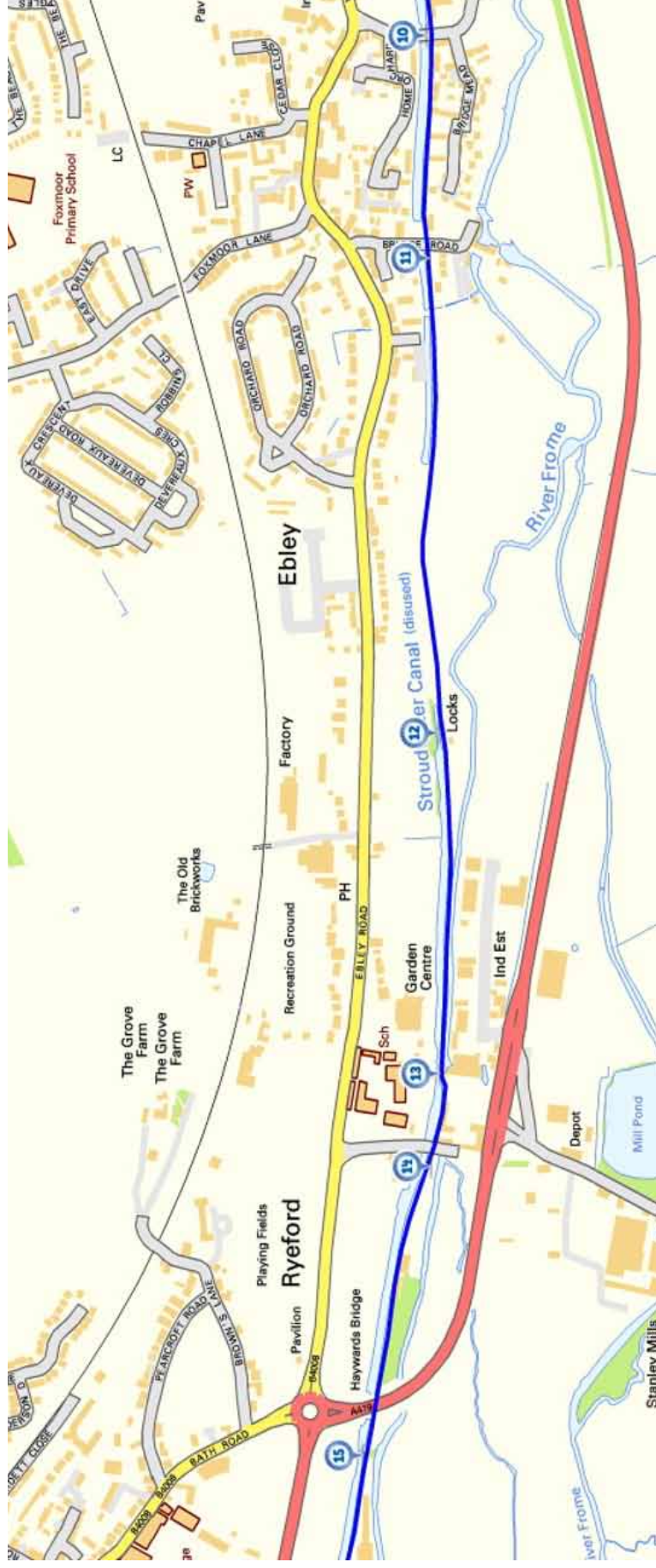


### Stopping points

- 1.** Cotswold Canals Visitor Centre, Wallbridge Lock
- 2.** Wallbridge Upper Lock
- 3.** Wallbridge
- 4.** Company of Proprietors of the Stroudwater Navigation building
- 5.** Lodgemore Mill
- 6.** Chestnut Lane Bridge (formerly Gasworks Bridge)
- 7.** The Lawn
- 8.** Hilly Orchard Bridge
- 9.** Ebley Mill
- 10.** Cloth Mills Bridge



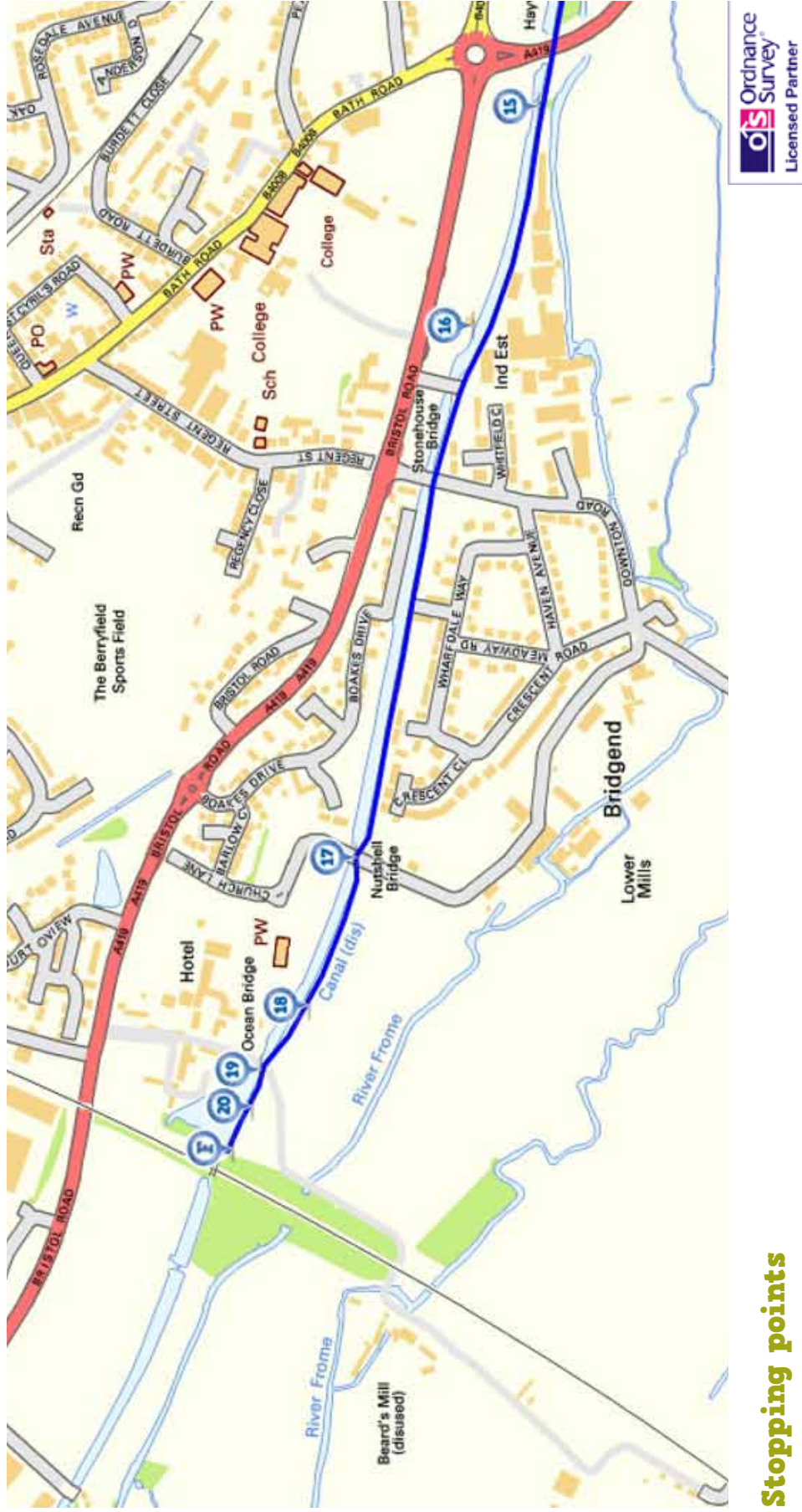
## Detail of middle part of route



### Stopping points

- 11.** Oil Mills Bridge (also known as Snow Mills Bridge)
- 12.** Ryeford Double Lock
- 13.** Ryeford Swing Bridge
- 14.** Ryeford Wharf
- 15.** Skew Bridge

## Detail of last part of route



### Stopping points

- 16.** Wycliffe College boathouse
- 17.** Nutshell Bridge
- 18.** Opposite Stonehouse Court and St Cyr's Church
- 19.** Ocean Bridge
- 20.** The Ocean
- F** The Ocean

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## Directions

Listen to each track then read the directions in the boxes below to reach the next stop.

### 1. Welcome to Stroud

#### Cotswold Canals Visitor Centre, Wallbridge Lock

##### Directions 1

When you are ready to start go down the steps to the lock below the Visitor Centre and listen to Track 2.

### 2. An engineering masterpiece

#### Wallbridge Upper Lock

##### Directions 2

Cross to the other side of the lock using the road bridge. Go down the steps beside the lock gate and under the bridge. To avoid the steps, cross the road and descend the sloping footpath on the right. Stop by the information board on the bend in the canal between the two bridges and listen to Track 3.

**Note:** The rest of the walk follows the canal towpath in a westwards direction. The canal will always be on your right. In parts, the River Frome will also be visible on your left.

### 3. A problem...

#### Wallbridge

##### Directions 3

Walk along the towpath away from Wallbridge Lock and under the new Stroud Brewery Bridge. Pass a building on the left. Part way along the fence on the left is a gate. Stop by the gate and listen to Track 4. If the gate is open you may like to go through for a better view of the front of the building.



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## 4. ...and a solution

### Company of Proprietors building

#### Directions 4

Continue along the towpath past Wallbridge Lower Lock. At the time of creating this walk (Summer 2013) this was yet to be restored. This area was once Wallbridge Basin, the terminus of the Stroudwater Navigation. Follow the towpath through a stone arch and look for evidence of a strong gate that was attached to prevent unlawful access to the basin. Also look for the grooves in the stonework left by the towing ropes.

Pass alongside a mill buildings. You may hear machinery and notice a distinctive smell which is a clue as to what happens inside this mill. There are also a few peep holes in the windows on the left. Look through and see what you can spot. When you reach a bridge over the canal on the right, turn left into the grounds of Lodgemore Mill. Go between the red brick building on the left and the yellow stone building on the right. Stop in the mill car park and listen to Track 5.

## 5. Anyone for tennis?

### Lodgemore Mill

#### Directions 5

From the mill yard, return to the canal and turn left along the towpath. Stop at the next bridge (formerly known as Gasworks Bridge and now known as Chestnut Lane Bridge) and listen to Track 6.

## 6. Power and light

### Chestnut Lane Bridge (formerly Gasworks Bridge)

#### Directions 6

Continue along the towpath past Dudbridge Upper and Lower Locks which at the time of creating this walk (Summer 2013) were in the process of being restored. At the next bridge, we leave the towpath. Go up the steps and turn right across the bridge (Dudbridge Road). Take care as this is a busy road. Go past the end of a row of houses called Canal Side. Bear right off the pavement up some steps into a wooded area. This is signposted as a public footpath. Follow the gravel track through the trees. Stop when you reach a small bridge over cascading water at the end of a lake and listen to Track 7.

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## 7. Decline and rebirth

### The Lawn

#### Directions 7

Retrace your steps through the trees and back down to the road. Go over the bridge and down the steps back on to the towpath. Go under the road bridge and continue along the towpath. The next section of canal passes the former Dudbridge Wharf. Look out for an old crane on the left hand side which was used for loading and unloading goods. Stop when you reach a metal footbridge over the canal and listen to Track 8.

## 8. Fancy a swim?

### Hilly Orchard Bridge

#### Directions 8

Continue along the towpath past a recreation area. You should be able to see the chimney of Ebley Mill straight ahead. After crossing a bridge, the towpath follows a narrow strip of land between the canal on the right and the river on the left.

At the first and second bridge note the spillways which allow overflow water to be released from the canal into the river at times of high water. A fish pass has also been incorporated into the design to enable their transit between the two waterways.

The towpath brings you alongside the imposing stone walls of Ebley Mill. Stop when you reach a single lock gate and swing bridge over the canal. On the left is an opening into Ebley Mill and a mosaic designed by pupils from nearby St Matthew's Primary School. It incorporates images of the mill, a water wheel and teasels which were used to raise the nap of the cloth. Stop here and listen to Track 9.

## 9. The Cathedral of the Cotswolds

### Ebley Mill

#### Directions 9

Do take time to explore the site of Ebley Mill. When you are ready, return to the canal towpath and walk towards the red brick road bridge (Cloth Mills Bridge). Stop just before the bridge looking back to Ebley Mill and listen to Track 10.

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## 10. New life

### Cloth Mills Bridge

#### Directions 10

Go under Cloth Mills Bridge and continue along the towpath to the next bridge (Oil Mills Bridge, now often referred to as Snow Mills Bridge). Go under the bridge and just the other side is a wall where you can sit down. Stop here and listen to Track 11.

## 11. Oil, wool, corn and snow

### Oil Mills Bridge (also known as Snow Mills Bridge)

#### Directions 11

Continue along the towpath. Stop at reach Ryeford Double Lock and listen to Track 12.

## 12. Up and down

### Ryeford Double Lock

#### Directions 12

Continue along the towpath until you reach Ryeford Swing Bridge, a small pedestrian bridge that leads across the canal to some houses. Stop here and listen to Track 13.

## 13. Overflow

### Ryeford Swing Bridge

#### Directions 13

Continue along the towpath towards the brick arch of Ryeford Bridge. Go under the bridge and stop immediately the other side (where there is a bench that you can take advantage of) and listen to Track 14.



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## **14. Beer for breakfast**

### **Ryeford Wharf**

#### **Directions 14**

Continue along the towpath. Pass under the modern road bridge that carries Stroud's bypass. Immediately afterwards is a metal bridge which crosses the canal at an angle. Stop underneath this bridge and listen to Track 15.

## **15. A new lease of life**

### **Skew Bridge**

#### **Directions 15**

Continue along the towpath. Shortly before the next modern bridge stop opposite an old, derelict building made from corrugated iron and listen to Track 16.

## **16. Splashing oars**

### **Wycliffe College boathouse**

#### **Directions 16**

Continue along the towpath past the first bridge (Upper Mills Bridge) and underneath the second bridge (Stonehouse Bridge). Stop when you reach the third bridge (Nutshell Bridge) which is brick built and listen to Track 17.

## **17. In a nutshell**

### **Nutshell Bridge**

#### **Directions 17**

Go under Nutshell Bridge and continue along the towpath. Just after passing St Cyr's Church look on the opposite side of the canal for a stone wall with a stone house beyond. Stop here and listen to Track 18.

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## 18. Compensation

### Opposite Stonehouse Court and St Cyr's Church

#### Directions 18

Continue a short way along the towpath. Stop at the next bridge (Ocean Bridge) and listen to Track 19.

## 19. Crossing over

### Ocean Bridge

#### Directions 19

Just beyond the bridge is a bench overlooking The Ocean basin. Stop here and listen to Track 19.

## 20. A vision for the future

### The Ocean

#### Directions 20

Remain at the bench overlooking The Ocean and listen to Track 21.

## 21. A glorious past and a promising future

### The Ocean

#### Directions 21

This is the end of the walk. If you would like refreshments we recommend the lunches and afternoon teas on offer at **Stonehouse Court**. To get there, cross Ocean Bridge and turn immediately right onto the other side of the canal and walk towards the church. An archway in the stone wall on the left leads through to the garden of Stonehouse Court.

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## Onward journey

From The Ocean you can return to Stroud along the towpath or catch a bus or train from Stonehouse back to Stroud or on to Gloucester and other destinations.

If you wish to catch a bus or train, retrace your steps back along the towpath under Nutshell Bridge and back to Stonehouse Bridge. Leave the towpath to the right and then turn left over the bridge. At the traffic lights use the pedestrian crossing to go over the main road. Continue straight on into Regent Street. Continue for about 400 metres until you reach a T junction with the High Street/Bath Road. This walk should take 15 to 20 minutes.

**For buses towards Gloucester** turn left along High Street and the stop is immediately on the left.

**For buses towards Stroud** turn right along Bath Road and the stop is across the road on the left.

**To reach the railway station** turn left into High Street and then immediately right at the Town Hall into Queen's Road. For trains towards Gloucester and Cheltenham access to the platform is just before the bridge; for trains towards Stroud and London access to the platform is just after the bridge. Trains run approximately once an hour.

## Along the Cotswold Canals - audio trail

An audio trail produced by local volunteers can complement this walk.

Between Bourne Mill and The Ocean look out for black posts with a panel like the one on the right.

Scan the QR code on your mobile phone to link to podcasts which include interviews with people remembering the canal in days gone by.

[www.alongthecotswoldcanals.co.uk](http://www.alongthecotswoldcanals.co.uk)





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## Credits

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