

WALK 2

CANAL BASIN AND OLD RAILWAY WALK

OS MAP REFERENCE - Explorer 114
- Pathfinder Series
SS 81/91 1:25000

APPROXIMATE DISTANCE – 2½ miles

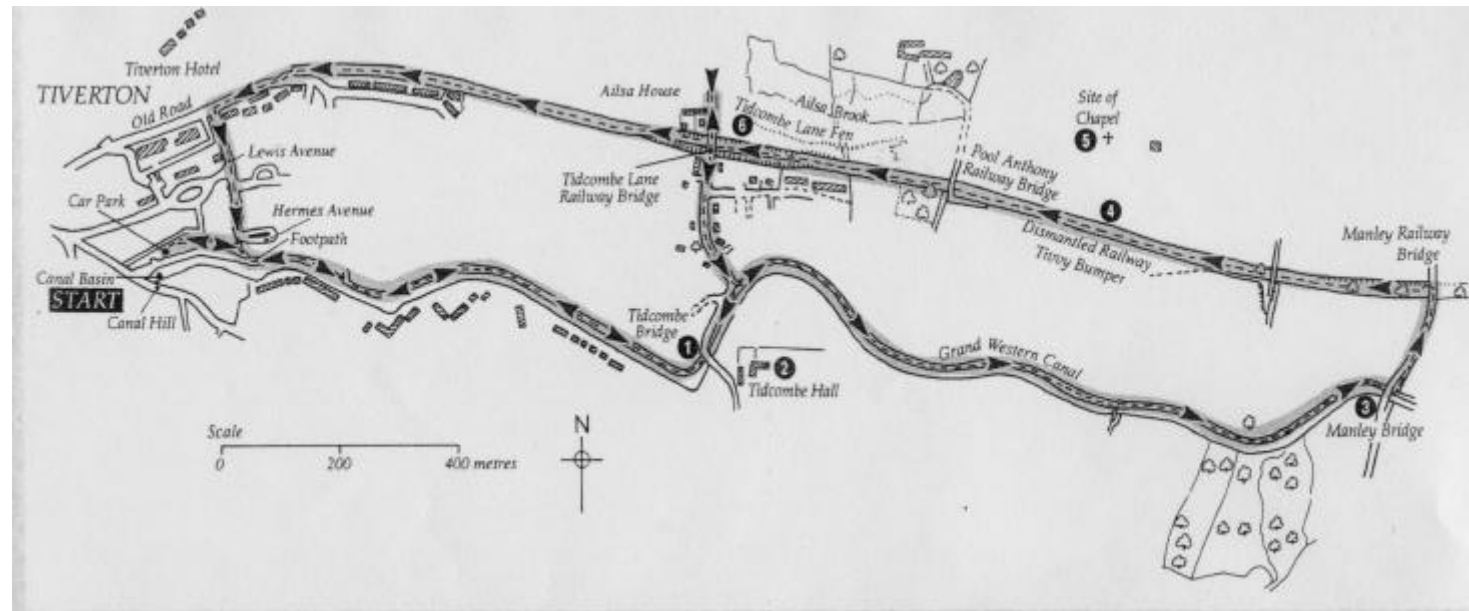
APPROXIMATE TIME - 1½ miles

STARTING POINT - Canal Basin car park, Tiverton

TYPE OF WALK - Easy

Walk 2 is a straight forward level walk along the Grand Western Canal towpath, through both the town and pleasant farmland, returning via a footpath along the course of the former Tiverton railway line.

Walk 2 starts at the Canal Basin Car Park. The Canal basin is where the great dream of a Grand Western Canal linking Bristol and Topsham near Exeter via Taunton, thus avoiding a long and dangerous sea journey around Lands End, began and ended. The section between Tiverton and Lowdells was opened in 1814, with the only other section constructed, linking Lowdells to Taunton, opening in 1834. Barges carrying coal and limestone arrived at the Canal basin where some 14 kilns burnt their caroes into quick lime to be used on the heavy Devon soils. The barges were unoladed on the busy quay and loads shot down into the kilns below. The Canal prospered for a few years, however traffic on the waterway declined with the coming of the railways in the 1840's. Today the Canal is a Country Park.



Take the towpath eastwards past pleasant new houses, their gardens fringing the Canal banks. Wildlife abounds, including water-lilies which were once picked commercially. On the left, nestling in distant woods, can be seen Knightshayes Court, now a National Trust property. The fine house was designed by the architect William Burges and built for John Heathcoat-Amory, grandson of the renowned local inventor/industrialist John Heathcoat.

After about half a mile, the Canal makes a wide sweep to enable barges to pass under the round-arched Tidcombe Bridge ❶. Beyond the bridge, on your right hand side is the large white Georgian house, Tidcombe Hall ❷. On this ancient site, possibly one of the oldest monastic sites in the area stood Tidcombe Rectory. It was here that the Countess of Devon was given licence to have mass said in the private chapel in 1424, and where Richard Newte was cruelly persecuted by Cromwell's men. In some of the worst scenes of violence known to Tiverton, he and his family were driven out and the Rectory burnt down. Rebuilt after the Restoration it was home for the next century and a half to the great Newte family of rectors who gave their name to the steep hill to Cullompton which rises behind the Hall.

The path runs through quiet farmland. A variety of birds can be seen including swans, moorhens, coots and an occasional kingfisher, as well as dragonflies and damselflies. Note also one of the remaining milestones alongside the towpath. The towpath passes under Warnicombe Bridge – a farm bridge – and winds past Snakes Wood until it reaches the second round arched stone bridge – Manley Bridge ❸.

In 1961, an RAF Canberra bomber on a routine navigation exercise from it's base in Geilenkirchen, Germany caught fire and crashed in the canal between Snakes Wood and Manley Bridge. Both of the crew members were killed. Although most of the wreckage was removed at the time, dredging works in 2003 unearthed hundreds of metal fragments including an ejector seat.

Immediately after passing under the Bridge, leave the Canal and turn right into Manley Lane. After approximately 200 yards, turn left by the old railway bridge and join the old railway track. The much loved 'Tivvy Bumper' ❹ (Great Western Railway engine No. 1442) once ran along here. The line, opened in 1848,

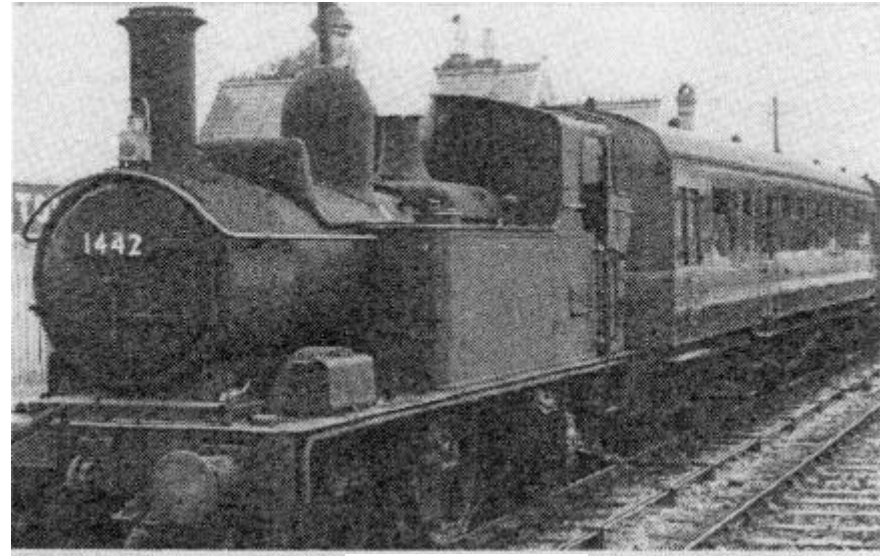
ran from Tiverton Junction on the main line through steep cuttings and apple tree lined verges to Tiverton on the Exe Valley line. The coming of the railway however put the Canal out of business. The railway was then also made redundant during the Beeching cuts. The 'Tivvy Bumper' now rests in its last stopping place, Tiverton Museum in St. Andrew Street.

Walk along the Old Railway Walk which runs roughly parallel to the Canal. Another ancient religious site is soon reached – a chapel to St. Anthony⁵ once stood in fields near Pool Anthony Farm, to your right.

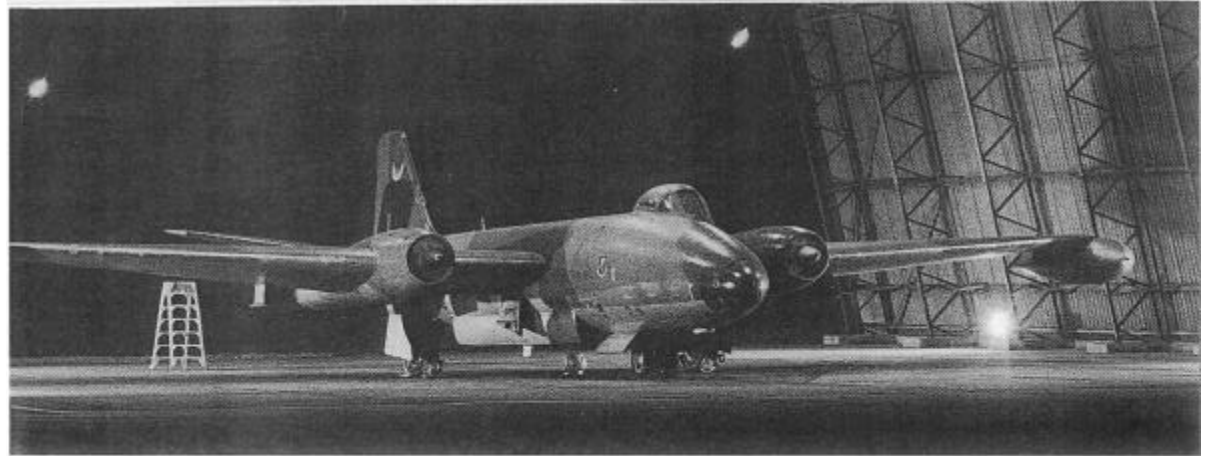
Soon afterwards the houses of Glebelands estate begin to appear on the left, and Pool Anthony Railway Bridge spans the walk. After a quarter of a mile at Tidcombe Lane Railway bridge, take the steps up to Tidcombe Lane where if you walk down hill, you will see on your right ancient Tidcombe Lane Fen⁶, a site of special scientific interest, bisected by Ailsa Brook.

Retrace your steps back to Tidcombe Lane Railway bridge. You now have a choice of routes back to the Canal basin. Either return to the Railway Walk and continue along it until it runs into Old Road, opposite Tiverton Hotel. After approximately 100 yards turn left into Lewis Avenue. Keep straight ahead into Hermes Avenue and then return to the Canal basin by way of a narrow footpath on the right hand side.

Alternatively, to return to the Canal basin via the Canal towpath, continue up Tidcombe Lane for approximately quarter of a mile until you reach Tidcombe Lane Bridge where there is an entrance to the Canal. Turn right onto the towpath and return to the Canal basin.



The 'Tivvy' Bumper



A Canberra Bomber