

## **FORTH, CLYDE AND UNION CANALS**

### **Notes on multi-use access – commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage**

The Forth and Clyde Canal stretches 35 miles between Bowling, on the Clyde west of Glasgow, and the Forth estuary east of Falkirk, linking directly via the Union Canal to Edinburgh. Walkers and cyclists may now be a more common sight than the horses for whom the towpaths were originally created, and riding a horse alongside the canal may not be everyone's cup of tea, but under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, horse-riders enjoy equal access rights to other non-motorised access takers. Most of the former barriers along the towpath have been removed or modified to allow multi-use access, although there are a few places where the passable width is very narrow, or where steps have been installed to divert around obstructions in the line of the towpath may not be passable with a horse.

These notes have been produced by British Horse Society Scotland to help identify location and brief details of features which may influence multi-use of the Forth and Clyde and Union Canals. An interactive digitised map of the route identifying sections which are accessible with a horse should be available from spring 2015 at [bhsaccess.org.uk/ridemaps](http://bhsaccess.org.uk/ridemaps). Both the notes and maps are intended to supplement information already available from other sources, including detailed route guides, [www.scottishcanals.co.uk/our-canals/forth--clyde-canal](http://www.scottishcanals.co.uk/our-canals/forth--clyde-canal) and other relevant websites.

The background information for these notes has been provided by volunteers who surveyed the route in 2014 as part of a multi-use long distance route audit funded by Scottish Natural Heritage. BHS will endeavour to update notes as and when notification of subsequent changes is received, but cannot guarantee accessibility or the accuracy of information provided. Inclusion of sections of route does not constitute a recommendation. All route users are responsible for deciding for themselves whether this route, or any section thereof, is suitable for their intended use, taking account of their own abilities, skills, fitness and experience (and in the case of horse riders, the disposition, fitness and experience of their horse).

Horse-riders should be aware that the promoted long distance route along the Forth and Clyde and Union Canals includes some sections along and across very busy main roads. In places the path runs parallel to the main railway line or motorway, and in several places there are pubs alongside the canal with tables either side of the path which in good weather attract a lot of people. The canal towpaths also include numerous bridges, tunnels and underpasses of varying width, length and height, many carrying noisy traffic.



Only gates which are usually locked, particularly narrow barriers without alternative or other features which may present a particular issue for experienced riders are noted below. Photos have been included where appropriate to help you assess whether a feature such as steps or a narrow aqueduct may present an obstruction to you. Riders will need to decide for themselves whether they consider it safer to dismount and lead. Bear in mind that as well as other people using the canal towpath, which may well include people pushing prams or fishermen, as well as those on foot, cycle or in a wheelchair, you may well meet barges, canoes and other boats using the canal, particularly around marinas.



Remember that whether on foot, cycle or horseback, rights of access in Scotland depend on access takers and land managers accepting individual responsibility for their actions. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code [www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com) offers guidance on what this means on the ground. Additional guidance for horse riders can be downloaded from [www.bhsscotland.org.uk/responsible-riding](http://www.bhsscotland.org.uk/responsible-riding). Specific guidance on walking, cycling and riding along canal towpaths is summarised in the “Towpath code of conduct” found at [www.scottishcanals.co.uk](http://www.scottishcanals.co.uk).

Courtesy, consideration of others’ needs and good communication are the key to sharing paths. Always give way to more vulnerable users, and limit your pace to ground conditions and visibility. Horse riders should pass other route users at a walk, and either move their horse off the path to dung, or dismount and clear dung off the path. Event organisers, groups or commercial operators considering using the Forth and Clyde or Union Canal towpaths are urged to contact the route managers.

### **Bowling to Cadder**

This section is virtually all accessible for multi-use with sufficient space for horse-riders to pass alongside locked vehicle barriers but the route goes through Clydebank town centre, which can be very busy on shopping days. The most significant issue for horse-riders is likely to be five flights of narrow steps climbing back up after the tunnel under the canal at OSGR NS570689. There is limited space alongside several flights (see picture below right), but otherwise the only alternative option is to divert along the main road.



Parking may be possible at Clydebank Sports Centre, but is otherwise very limited (no trailer parking at Lochburn Road). Public parking at Bowling is very limited, with narrow access.

### **Cadder to Kilsyth**

Fully multi-use accessible, albeit with several busy road crossings, notably at Hillhead Basin (OSGR NS658742).

### **Kilsyth to Bonnybridge**

This section of route includes numerous metal barriers, most with adequate space to pass alongside but a few which are narrow to get a horse through.



At Auchinstarry Canal Basin a tunnel under the B802 allows access along the towpath but access alongside the gates between the towpath and the public road is restricted to 1m wide.

Where the road between Kilsyth and Dullatur crosses the canal at Craigmarloch drawbridge (OSGR NS737774) there is a metal horse stile across the path (pictured below) relatively close to the canal. Approach has been made to Scottish Canals to remove this stile, but meanwhile horse riders should take particular care to avoid their horse backing up, rushing or tripping over the stile into the canal.



There are three barriers at Wyndford, west of Banknock (OSGR NS766787) varying in width between 0.83m and 1.2m. Heading east, these can be bypassed by turning off the canal towpath before the road bridge, heading north to the car park, right along Wyndford Road for a short way and then rejoin the towpath at OSGR NS779787 over a small bridge (reverse directions if heading west).

The narrowest of the three barriers just north of Castlecary, either side of the M80 underpass (OSGR NS789785) is 0.66m wide, and the widest 0.94m.

### **Bonnybridge to Falkirk**

The underpass where the A803 crosses the towpath at OSGR NS875803 is multi-use accessible, but at OSGR NS878804 the waymarked path diverts up off the canal via two flights of 40 steps to get around the railway. There is no facility for horses to climb up the bank alongside the steps. The only alternative is to leave the canal at Rosebank roundabout and then ride along the busy A9 for 800m, rejoining the canal towpath at Merchiston Road (OSGR NS880806).

At the B902 Graham's Road junction there are steps either side of the road underpass. The alternative is to cross at the road junction, following the pavement to rejoin the towpath on the north side of the canal (path on south side of canal is a dead end).

At Abbots Road (OSGR NS897815, east of Bankside) keep to the path along the north of the canal.

### **Falkirk to Linlithgow**

At the time of survey (summer 2014) the canal towpath between the Falkirk Wheel and Tamfourhill was temporarily closed, and the gate leading back onto the canal at OSGR NS858796 was locked. Minor roads and tracks could potentially be used as an alternative, crossing south over the canal, east along the south side of Tamfourhill Wood, rejoining the canal over the vehicular bridge at OSGR NS877792 (but see further restrictions below). The locked gate and adjacent kissing gate across the towpath at NS880791 is impassable with a horse. Scottish Canals have been asked to address this issue but in the meantime, the alternative is to continue east from Tamfourhill Wood, through Glen Village, rejoining the canal towpath east of the tunnel.

The tunnel east of Falkirk is over 620m long, with water spouting overhead, strange echoes. In places the entry and exit to the tunnel, and towpath through tunnel, is surfaced with stone cobbles which may be slippery when wet. The tunnel can be avoided by using the B803 (linking to the towpath via Falkirk High Station) and B8028.

West of Polmont, immediately north of the Young Offenders Institute at OSGR NS910781, there are two 1.2 m gates across the towpath.

The 250m long Avon Aqueduct at OSGR NS966758 passes high above a narrow river gorge. The stone cobbled narrow towpath has high metal railings alongside and is passable with a horse with care. Cyclists and horse riders are recommended to dismount and walk, and to wait for any boats to pass before crossing the aqueduct.



### **Linlithgow to Edinburgh**

There are a succession of fairly low bridges along this section of towpath, under which the towpath is usually 4-5' wide but the space passable by a horse is much narrower hence riders will need to be prepared to dismount and lead.

There is potential parking and good access onto the canal at The Park Bistro, east of Linlithgow, OSGR NT029770.

Just west of the River Almond at OSGR NT103707 there is a shallow weir over stone cobbles across the path which is easily passable with care but beware of increased risk of slipping.



The stone cobbled Lin's Mill Aqueduct over the River Almond at NT104706 is similar to the Avon Aqueduct but much shorter, approx. 75m long, with metal railings alongside.



There is a very short aqueduct over B7030 Cliftonhall Road at OSGR NT117710, which can be avoided by dropping down a grass track to cross the road, although there is a metal vehicle barrier where the track meets the road with 1m max. width to pass alongside.

East of Ratho at OSGR NT139709 there is a new wooden planked bridge approx. 10m long x 2m wide in the line of the towpath across the entrance to the mini-marina.