

Social scene

Out and about in Oldham

life in Oldham



# Modern art meets our industrial heritage



This is the second feature in a series of seasonal articles aimed at encouraging people to get out and about, explore their own borough and get healthy in the process. The walks are suitable for all age groups and are not too taxing. Points of interest, and places to stop for a bite to eat or liquid refreshment are highlighted. With the help of the Oldham Ramblers' Association, Oldham Council and Countryside Rangers we hope to reintroduce you to the beauty on our doorstep.

**Walk:** Huddersfield Narrow Canal Sculpture Trail  
**Distance:** If done in total, around 5.5 miles. There are numerous points at which you can make the choice of shortening the walk.

**Time:** Two and a half hours at leisurely pace

**Calorie burn:** 650+

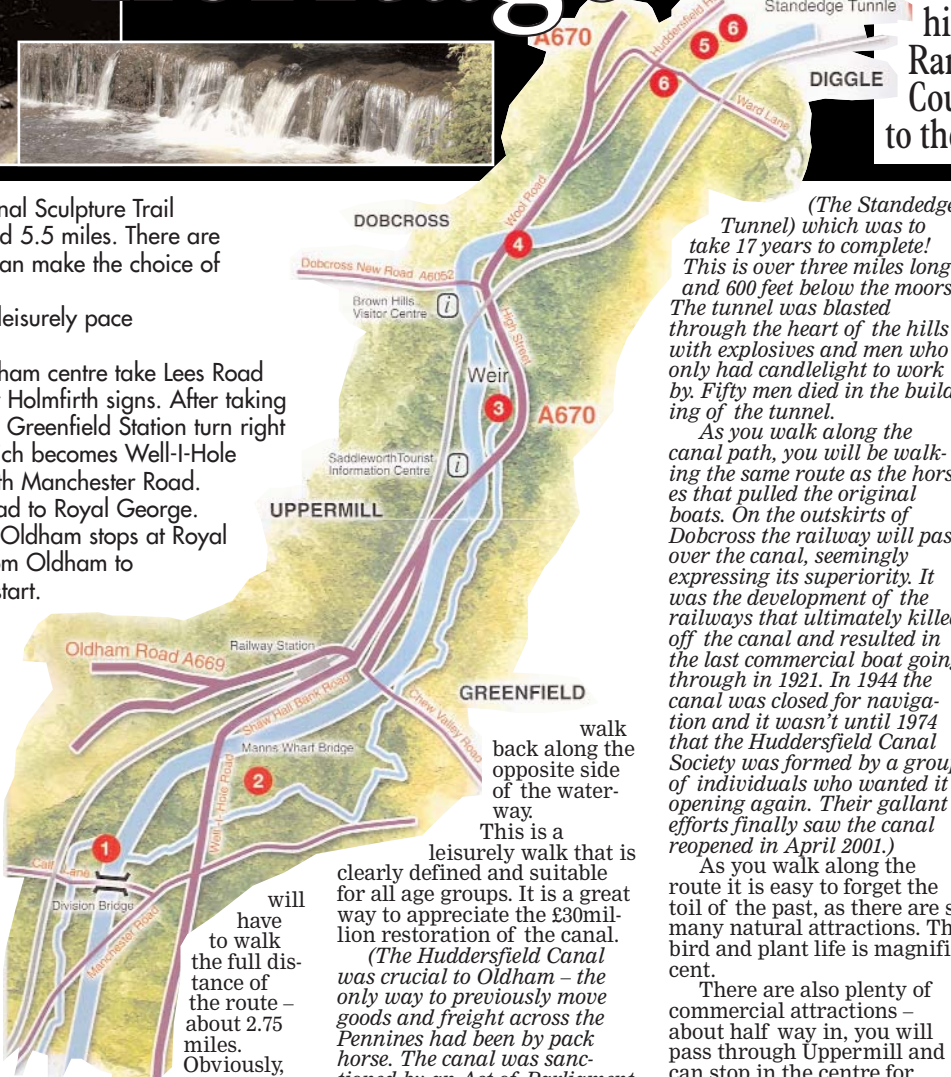
**How do I get there?:** From Oldham centre take Lees Road (A669) from Mumps and follow Holmfirth signs. After taking sharp right and starting drop to Greenfield Station turn right onto Shaw Hall Bank Road (which becomes Well-I-Hole Road) and follow to junction with Manchester Road. Turn right down Manchester Road to Royal George.

**Public transport:** 350 bus from Oldham stops at Royal George pub or catch a train from Oldham to Greenfield station and walk to start.

**Parking:** Free parking area opposite Royal George pub.

**S**TART at the small parking area opposite the Royal George pub on Manchester Road, Friezland. Walk back up the road, in the direction of Greenfield centre, until you meet a road off to the left called Calf Lane. Turn down Calf Lane and cross the Division Bridge where you will be able to get down to the canal towpath. You are now on track for the journey and will be facing back towards Greenfield centre. The good news is that the walk now sticks to the towpath for its duration, unless you choose to divert from it for refreshment or a look around Uppermill village.

There are five modern art sculptures on this walk, and if you want to see them all you



will have to walk the full distance of the route – about 2.75 miles. Obviously, you will then have to turn around and walk the same distance back. If you do this, we advise you to cross the canal at Standedge and

walk back along the opposite side of the waterway. This is a leisurely walk that is clearly defined and suitable for all age groups. It is a great way to appreciate the £30million restoration of the canal.

(The Huddersfield Canal was crucial to Oldham – the only way to previously move goods and freight across the Pennines had been by pack horse. The canal was sanctioned by an Act of Parliament in 1794 and, amazingly, it only took four years to build the 17-miles of waterway and 74 locks on either side of the Pennines – it was the passage underneath

(The Standedge Tunnel) which was to take 17 years to complete!

This is over three miles long and 600 feet below the moors. The tunnel was blasted through the heart of the hills with explosives and men who only had candlelight to work by. Fifty men died in the building of the tunnel.

As you walk along the canal path, you will be walking the same route as the horses that pulled the original boats. On the outskirts of Dobcross the railway will pass over the canal, seemingly expressing its superiority. It was the development of the railways that ultimately killed off the canal and resulted in the last commercial boat going through in 1921. In 1944 the canal was closed for navigation and it wasn't until 1974 that the Huddersfield Canal Society was formed by a group of individuals who wanted it opening again. Their gallant efforts finally saw the canal reopened in April 2001.)

As you walk along the route it is easy to forget the toil of the past, as there are so many natural attractions. The bird and plant life is magnificent.

There are also plenty of commercial attractions – about half way in, you will pass through Uppermill and can stop in the centre for refreshments or a browse. Failing this you can press on and stop at the Navigation pub near Dobcross or continue to completion and rest points at The Hanging Gate,

Diggles, or the Diggles Hotel.

As stated in the general information for the walk, the beauty of it is that there are numerous points at which you can cross the canal and come back on yourself if you do not want to walk the whole distance.

The map we have printed shows you where the modern sculptures are situated. You may find these useful as way-markers for your journey:

**1** You will come across the first sculpture almost straight away. It is called the 'Royal Ferns' and is at the aqueduct on the border of Oldham and Tameside. It is carved from oak and said to represent the flora of the canal side, with the Royal Fern common to the Saddleworth area.

**2** The second sculpture is on the opposite side of the canal near where the road crosses over. You can cross to have a look at Manns Wharf Bridge, Greenfield, and see 'Hill Shelter' – meant to reflect the shape of the hills around it.

**3** Push on and about a mile to Uppermill centre, you will come to the aptly named 'I Love It Here' at Watergate Mill. This sculpture is designed to be sat on and consists of three slabs of stone which represent the stepping stones across the river that runs parallel with the canal.

**4** The fourth feature is a mural underneath the bridge at Wool Road, Dobcross. Entitled 'Past,

Present and Future', it explores the canal's journey through space and time.

**5** Now you are on the last stretch and the final feature is at Ward Lane, Diggles, and called 'Through Heathered Hills'. It is a number of carved heather flowers and metal gateway representing the opening to the Standedge Tunnel.

**6** There are also two themed play areas for the children close by. You have now completed the journey and all that remains is to retrace your steps. As mentioned, you can follow the canal back on the opposite side for a change of scene. Enjoy.



This week's walk is available as a leaflet from any tourist information point in Oldham, including libraries.

**Next week: Don't miss our guide for a scenic walk around a country park**

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