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Walk 1: Burscough bridge to Appley bridge - 6 miles

Burscough

Parking: on road parking can be found next to the canal at Burscough Bridge.

Rail: Burscough has two stations, Burscough Bridge is on the Southport to Wigan line and is a short walk from the canal, Burscough Junction is on the Ormskirk to Preston line about 10 minutes walk away.

Food and Drink: there are a number of pubs here and shops including a large Tescos

You can access the towpath easily at Burscough Bridge. The Waterfront pub on the opposite bank used to be the Packet Inn where travellers would stay before taking the packet boat along the canal. Go underneath the bridge. On the left is the old canal depot. There is a house, a warehouse and in the yard at the back stables. Look out for the milepost showing we are 24 miles from Liverpool and 103½ from Leeds.



Carry on along the towpath. Ainscough's mill is on the other side of the canal. Now empty, it used to process corn into biscuits. Boats used to bring corn from Birkenhead up the canal to the mill. If you are lucky you might see one of the boats, Ambush, which still sails around here. The bridge next to the mill is a railway bridge built in 1848 by a Leeds iron works; look for the makers name.

Just the other side of the bridge is a cricket pitch and after that small fields with horses and chickens and waterfowl. We then come to the junction with the Rufford Branch. There is a bridge which takes the towpath over the junction. From the bridge you can see the houses which used to belong to Burscough's boatmen. On the left is a dry dock where barges were once

repaired. Looking down the Rufford Branch you can see the locks which take the canal down to the tidal River Douglas and the River Ribble. To the right of the top lock is the Ship Inn or "Blood Tub". This canalside pub does food and has a large car park opposite.

Continue from the junction bridge along the towpath. There are towpath moorings here and some interesting boats can be found among the narrowboats. We come to our first swing bridge Grovers Bridge #33. It is now electric and needs a key to be operated. At the end of the trees on our left is the next milepost showing we have walked one mile.



On the other side of the canal there used to be a boatyard. After some fields of black sheep with curly horns we come to the Ring O'Bells Bridge #34. The Ring O'Bells pub is on the left here. The canal passes by market gardens and rows of trees. Look out for the World War Two pill boxes. They were built as part of a defensive line to protect against invasion from the Irish Sea or from paratroops dropping in the flat fields. After Moss Bridge #35 is Spencer's Swing Bridge #36 and the next milepost.



The canal sweeps around and passes over a couple of roads. Giants Hall is on our left just before the next milepost which is hidden in the brambles. Over the fields Parbold comes into sight. Past the site of Brick Bridge (now just a narrowing of the channel) and over a culvert we come to Parbold and the famous view of its windmill.

Parbold used to have a mill by the bridge but this burnt down and has been replaced by canalside housing. The



windmill no longer has its sails but still acts as a landmark. Parbold Bridge #37 (or Windmill Bridge as it was once known) is a changeline bridge. Changeline or roving bridges allow the towpath to swap sides, the original bridge would have been designed in such a way as to let the horse pulling the boat cross over without unhitching the towrope.

The canal takes a sharp turn to the east. It was planned that the canal would continue north from here but the plan was abandoned leaving a dry dock where the junction would have been. This is now the mooring for the trip boat Rose of Parbold.



Before Chapel House Bridge #39 is the 28th milepost and it is on this stretch that we can find some of the original stone mile markers. Keep an eye out on this section for kingfishers. These small bright blue birds are very fast so you might just see them as a blue streak as they fly away from you.

The canal is joined by the Southport to Wigan railway line over the next mile and at Hand Lane Bridge #41 we can see a nice stone arch over which the line passes. Also by this bridge is milepost 29 which oddly looks organic rather than metal.



We soon find ourselves approaching Appley Locks. Boaters are given the choice of going left or right. Left are two locks, right is one deep lock. Only the deep lock is used these days. If you are lucky a boat will be using the locks and you can watch their progress.

Past the lock you can see signs of industry through the trees to your right. Appley bridge was once quite industrious, now the factories have been replaced with houses and the air is fresher. There are some more canal houses before Appley Bridge #42. Appley bridge has a waterside pub, the Waters Edge, on the opposite side to the towpath; it can be accessed by crossing Appley Bridge or the next bridge along.

Leave the towpath at Appley bridge and turn left and walk up hill to the station to catch the train back to Burscough Bridge.