

MACCLESFIELD CANAL

Whilst for much of its length the Macclesfield Canal travels along a roughly North-South axis, above Congleton it runs briefly East-West, as it is forced to steer a course between the foot of The Cloud and the valley of the Dane. If you have energy to spare from tackling Bosley Locks, then an ascent of The Cloud is worth considering. This is best achieved from Bridge 61, taking the byroad past Crossley Hall, over the railway, and then on for the best part of a mile, until you reach a crossroads from which a footpath sign beckons (fairly vertically, it must be said) to the summit. When you get there, you'll be 1,126ft above sea level and over 700ft higher than the canal which snakes across the landscape to reach the foot of Bosley Locks. Behind you, Rudyard Reservoir (which feeds the Caldon Canal) gleams in the distance. To the right lies Bosley Reservoir, the feeder from which enters the Macclesfield Canal above the top Bosley lock. On days of crystal clarity you can see as far as Wales. Once upon a time they quarried the 'Chatsworth' gritstone of The Cloud; the stone chambers of Bosley Locks were built of it.

Locks at Bosley remind you of that old joke about waiting for a bus: you don't get one for ages and then they all come at once. The locks all come at Bosley. Twelve of them in a mile. And it is one of the most superbly engineered and magnificently located flights in the country; notable, for a narrow canal, in that both sets of gates to each stone chamber are mitred in pairs. Once each chamber had a side pond, a water saving device that acted as a mini reservoir. When the lock was emptied, half the water would run into the side pond to be retained for half filling the chamber when it was next used.

At the foot of Bosley Locks, the canal crosses the River Dane on an imposing stone aqueduct, best appreciated from the footpath, which descends to the valley floor from Bridge 57. Contrast this supreme example of late architecture with the twenty arches of the distant railway viaduct carrying the old 'Knotty' main line across the river to the west. Sleek electric locomotives whisk London – Manchester Expresses along this route now, but the branch line to Leek, which crossed the canal above the bottom lock, lost its passenger trains in 1960 and was closed down altogether four years later. The line continued beyond Leek to Uttoxeter along what had been the bed of the short-lived Uttoxeter extension of the Caldon Canal. By all accounts it was an awfully pretty railway ride past Rudyard Lake and on down the Churnet Valley. Blissfully peaceful and remote casual moorings are to be had at the foot of the flight. North of Bosley the canal, at its summit level of 518ft, traverses the foothills of the Peak District.

Bridge 49 is an electrically operated swing bridge, for which boaters will need their BW sanitary key to gain access to the control manual. Oakgrove is no more than a spattering of houses on the Leek – Macclesfield grand prix race track. Nearby is Sutton Reservoir (Turk's Head), which has only a quarter of the capacity of Bosley.