

# Bude Canal: Lower Tamar Lake to Burmsdon Section

(Often known as the Bude Aqueduct)



## **1. From Lower Tamar Lake to Virworthy Wharf** **½ mile**

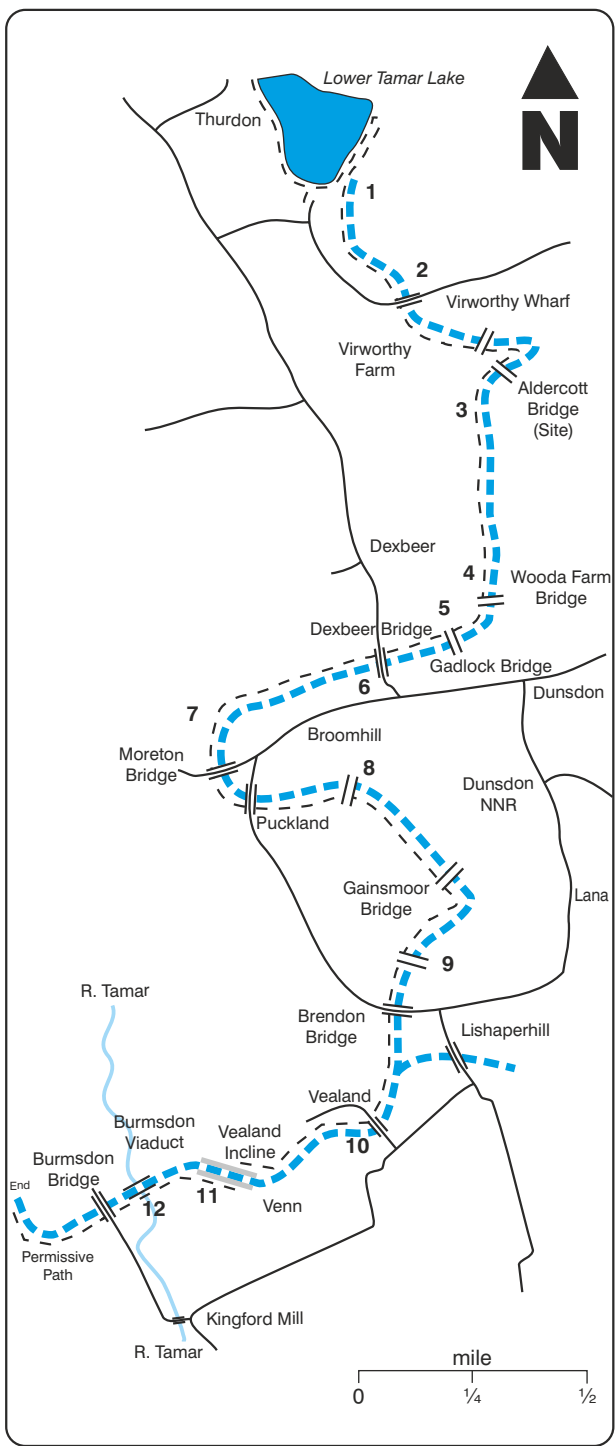
From the car park at Lower Tamar Lake, turn right and follow the lakeside to the footbridge over the Tamar. On the far side is a wooden marker post and cast iron marker indicating the start of the Bude Aqueduct. The small archway on the left marks where the water supply from the lake fed the whole canal system.



A little further on is a sluice gate on the right which controlled the water flow, returning any excess into the Tamar. On the far side note the first of several remaining bound stones marked BHC, indicating the original boundaries of the Bude Harbour Company's land. Note also the more recent marker posts, some with a dragonfly plaque, others with a tub boat cut into the top.

## **2. Virworthy Wharf**

This was the upper limit of the navigable part of the Aqueduct branch. Unloaded tub boats would be moored in a bay, now silted up, on the north side of the road bridge; the bridge itself has been much rebuilt. On the far, south, side of the bridge is a much wider section of the canal and the wharf itself. This was the unloading point for the lime-rich sand from Bude. The wharf building (see picture on front cover) now houses information boards while the unloading area makes a good picnic site. Here, two of the original bridge support arches now make part of a table and bench.



### **3. From Virworthy to Wooda Bridge 1¼ miles**

This next couple of miles passes through a landscape little changed from the days of the canal's heyday. Leaving the green in front of the wharf building there are two cast iron markers, originally spaced every quarter of a mile along the length of the canal.

A little further on, the remains of a maintenance boat were recently discovered, now covered again to preserve it.



Continuing, Virworthy Mill Farm Bridge has a small archway built into it to allow for a flow of water to the filtration system lower down the canal installed when the Aqueduct was adapted to supply the residents of Bude their first piped water in the early 20th century.

So far, it will have been noticed that the canal and towpath, by deviating from a straight line, have remained on a similar level to the surrounding fields. However, in the next length a large bank was built to carry the canal above the field level. Here is a sharp bend, known as Cape Horn, where a stream passes through a stoned culvert.

Beyond Cape Horn the towpath occasionally shows the old stoned surface then passes the site of a now demolished Aldercott Bridge. These accommodation bridges were built to allow farming access from one side of the canal to the other. The canal then continues through typical farming country following the profile of the land.

#### **4. Wooda Farm Bridge**

Another accommodation bridge, this one has been rebuilt with a concrete surface for agricultural traffic. The original stone walls have been retained with the cast iron supports included in the reconstruction.

Originally, the bridges were constructed with a slot through the centre, between the cast iron supports and wooden top planking, to allow the tow rope to pass through the gap without the need to uncouple from the horse.



At Wooda (as with all the modernised bridges) this slot has been lost. Also, vertical cast iron channels were built into the side walls at some bridges to accommodate wooden stop boards. These retained the water when repair work had to be done downstream, and these channels are still to be seen at Wooda.

Further on, concrete sluices and large plastic pipes become visible. These date from when the canal ceased to be used as a working means of transport and the system between Lower Tamar Lake and Bude was taken over to supply Bude with piped water. The fragility of the raised canal bank here required the installation of the additional plastic piping.

#### **5. Gadlock Bridge ¼ mile after Wooda**

Another accommodation bridge, again with a reconstructed concrete surface but without the original support arches. The support walls are still in place, recently rebuilt, although the capping stones are missing.

## **6. Dexbeer Bridge** ¼ mile after Gadlock

This road bridge has been rebuilt to cater for the modern traffic loads. On the far wall of the bridge, one of the bricks bears a < symbol indicating the height above sea level (416 feet/126 metres).

## **7. Moreton Bridge** ½ mile after Dexbeer

This road bridge has also been rebuilt for modern traffic but the original cast iron support arches have been retained and the 'lead-in' walls on both sides of the bridge have been rebuilt but without the original capping stones.



An area beyond the bridge has been used to create a picnic area; shortly afterwards is Puckland Bridge. Here a short section of the footpath deviates from the original towpath, as this has collapsed towards the canal.

## **8. Broomhill Bridge** ½ mile after Moreton

This is another accommodation bridge with the footpath crossing a wooden bridge; beyond is a section of Dunsdon National Nature Reserve (NNR) This diverse wildlife habitat has been designated an NNR because of its marshy 'Culm' grassland which gives rise to a wide range of wild flowers and rare plants, insects and birds. It is maintained by the Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT), who manage it using traditional grazing methods. DWT have helped to create a re-watered section of the canal through the Reserve. On the left Gainsmore Bridge, another accommodation bridge, gives access to the Reserve.

## **9. Dunsdon to Vealand 1¼ miles**

After leaving the NNR the towpath continues past Lana accommodation bridge and then Brendon Bridge, a fully modernised road bridge.



A few hundred yards beyond Brendon Bridge the canal reaches a junction. Here a footbridge crosses the canal.

**PLEASE NOTE  
THIS IS PRIVATE LAND  
THERE IS NO THROUGH ACCESS**

At this point the Holsworthy branch of the canal met the Aqueduct - this branch may be seen on the far side. The canal profile widens out here to create a turning area for tub boats manoeuvring between the two branches.

Note the low stoned wall on the near side edge of the path, built to prevent excessive wear by moored tub boats at the junction.

*(See the information and display board on site.)*

The Holsworthy branch, which met the Aqueduct here, is now in private ownership and there is currently no access along it (except for a length of public footpath at Chilsworthy, a few miles away towards Holsworthy).

## **10. Vealand Bridge and Filter Beds** ¼ mile after junction

Beyond the junction the canal and its path reach Vealand Bridge. This is the only bridge along the Aqueduct which still had the majority of its large capping stones retained. This bridge had also been rebuilt to include a smaller arch. In 2012 further work was undertaken on the main roadside walls. The lead-in side walls were also reconstructed, including replacing the capping stones.



**Please note that this is the last point along the footpath where walkers can gain access to the road network. There are no exit points beyond here.**

After Vealand Bridge the footpath reaches an area of filter beds adjacent to the canal. In 1902, shortly after the canal had ceased use as a means of transport, the Aqueduct branch was purchased by Stratton and Bude Urban District Council as a means of carrying water from the reservoir (Lower Tamar Lake) to Bude for the town's water supply (see information boards nearby). Here a series of sand-filled, concrete-lined filter beds, all now demolished, were constructed to purify the water. The remains of the entrance pipe to the filter beds are still visible. The flat area overlooked by the picnic table and seats here contained these beds. The works required diversion of the footpath and here it is now in the course of the partially filled canal profile. The original towpath remains on the top of the right-hand bank, and has since been cleared as an alternative route.



## **11. Vealand Inclined Plane to Burmsdon Bridge <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> mile**

The path now reaches the top of the Vealand Inclined Plane. The Bude Canal did not use locks in its inland section. Instead it used inclined planes, whereby the tub boats were hauled up and down a slope on rails using a water-powered mechanism. A large stone wheel pit was built into the ground at the head of the Vealand Inclined Plane which contained a waterwheel to drive the mechanism which operated the continuous chain attached to the tub boats. No remains of this construction survive, although a little way down the plane on the left the remains of an overspill gully exist. This carried any surge water created by the tub boats approaching the end of the watered section of canal (see information board nearby). A 3 foot/0.9 metre diameter stone-lined culvert was also constructed to carry away the water used to drive the waterwheel. This is no longer accessible.



The Vealand Inclined Plane had a fall of 58 feet/18 metres over a distance of 500 feet/152 metres. To enable the tub boats to use the system they were fitted with cast iron wheels which located on two sets of rails, made up in short sections and bolted into large stones set into the ground down the length of the inclined plane. About half-way down the slope a single stone sett remains in place.

Continuing down the slope a small red brick building, now disused, was part of the water pumping supply system.

At both the top and bottom of the slope there would have been bays constructed to line up the boats with the rails on the inclined plane as they approached from the watered sections. There are no obvious remains here but, again, examples may be seen at the lower end of Hobbacott Inclined Plane (see above).

## 12. Burmsdon

Beyond the bottom of the inclined plane the towpath switches to the left bank of the canal and in 500 yards/450 metres it reaches the Aqueduct Bridge over the River Tamar.

**NB:** The Aqueduct Bridge marks the end of the public footpath. The Bude Canal Trust owns a further 700 yards/640 metres beyond here, but currently this is not a fully maintained section and access is limited to guided walks and for previously arranged visits. Please contact the Trust at [enquiries@bude-canal-trust.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@bude-canal-trust.co.uk) for details.

The Aqueduct Bridge crosses the River Tamar, the border between Devon and Cornwall. A Grade II Listed Building, in 2009 it was subject to a major refurbishment as part of a Bude Canal regeneration scheme, the only structure on this inland section to be improved under this scheme.



### **For information only:-**

Over the Tamar the last of the historic structures on the Aqueduct branch is Burmsdon Bridge. The towpath along which the horses would have hauled the tub boats goes under the bridge here, unusually for this canal.

## **HISTORY OF THE BUDE CANAL AQUEDUCT BRANCH**

The Bude Canal system had a total length of 35 miles/56 km. over three branches. The system opened in 1823 to Holsworthy and 1825 to Druyton near Launceston and included what is now Lower Tamar Lake, built as a reservoir to supply water to the entire system.

The canal accessed the sea at Bude, via a sea lock, and after going inland split into three branches. One branch went nearly to Launceston, one to near Holsworthy and the third, the Aqueduct branch, linked to the reservoir at the now Lower Tamar Lake. However, soon after operation started the Aqueduct branch also became used for transport for most of its length, as far as Virworthy Wharf using water powered mechanisms.

The main cargo carried was lime rich sea sand, used to improve the poor soils. Most of the canal length, including the Aqueduct branch, was a narrow canal using tub boats. In addition, the inland section did not use locks to gain or lose height but a series of inclined planes and had boat bays at both ends where rails carried the wheeled tub boats.

The inland lengths of the canal were formally abandoned as transport modes in 1891 but soon afterwards the Aqueduct branch received a new lease of life. It was acquired by Stratton and Bude Urban District Council and used to carry water from Lower Tamar Lake for Bude's new piped water supply. This included a set of filtration beds part-way along and, here and there, pipes to carry the water. In the 1960s the supply system was taken over by the local Water Board. When it was no longer required to supply water in the 1980s it became owned by North Cornwall District Council and then, in 1996, it was acquired by the Bude Canal Trust. The Trust was established to ensure the retention of the canal length and continues to own and maintain it until the present day.

(A brief chronological record of the Canal is also available from the Bude Canal Trust by visiting their website: [www.bude-canal-trust.co.uk](http://www.bude-canal-trust.co.uk)).

---

### **PLEASE NOTE**

The Bude Aqueduct footpath is a public right of way as far as the River Tamar at Burmsdon. There is parking available at Lower Tamar Lake.

### **Bude Canal Trust Ltd**

(a registered charity – owners of the Aqueduct branch)

Contact: Mr Robin Edmonds

29a Manor Park, Woolfardisworthy

Bideford, Devon EX39 5RH

Tel: 01237 431136

e-mail: [enquiries@bude-canal-trust.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@bude-canal-trust.co.uk)

[www.bude-canal-trust.co.uk](http://www.bude-canal-trust.co.uk)

### **Other Local Canal Group**

Bude Canal & Harbour Society

Contact: Mr Chris Jewell

4a The Crescent, Bude, Cornwall EX23 8LE

Tel: 01288 352298

e-mail: [info@bude-canal.co.uk](mailto:info@bude-canal.co.uk)

[www.bude-canal.co.uk](http://www.bude-canal.co.uk)

### **Information**

The Castle Heritage Centre,

The Castle, Bude, Cornwall EX23 8LG

Tel: 01288 357300 Free admission

E-mail: [thecastle@bude-stratton.gov.uk](mailto:thecastle@bude-stratton.gov.uk)

[www.thecastlebude.org.uk](http://www.thecastlebude.org.uk)

### **Other Useful Leaflets**

Bude Canal - Barge Section

(IWA West Country Waterway Guide no.2)

The Planekeepers Path

Canal to Coast Path

The Aqueduct Trail

---

**Published by the**

**INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION © 2020**

This leaflet is one of a series published by the West Country Branch of the Inland Waterways Association to encourage greater use and appreciation of the West Country's canals and rivers.

The IWA is a membership charity that works to protect and restore the country's 6,500 miles of canals and rivers. The Association also provides practical and technical support to restoration projects through its expert Waterways Recovery Group.

To find out more visit the IWA website: [www.waterways.org.uk](http://www.waterways.org.uk) or e-mail [iwa@waterways.org.uk](mailto:iwa@waterways.org.uk)



Although great care has been taken in preparing this leaflet, no responsibility can be accepted for any errors or their consequences.