

Standedge Tunnel Fact File



Did you know?
Standedge Tunnel is
the highest, longest and
deepest canal tunnel
in Britain.

These narrowboats are about to be towed through the tunnel.



Canal &
River Trust

© Canal & River Trust is a charity registered with the Charity Commission no. 1146792

canalriverexplorers.org.uk

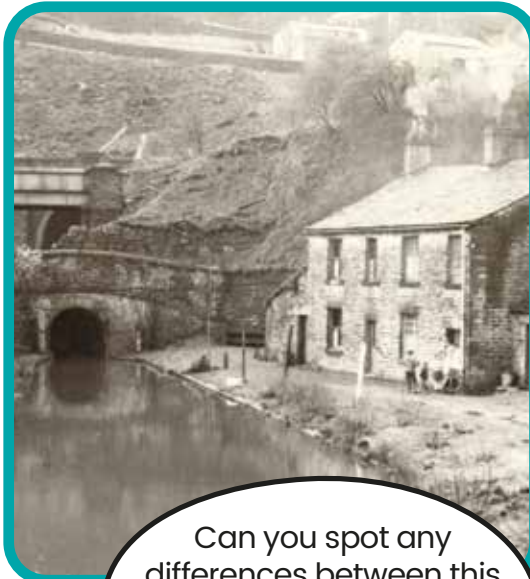
So why did they bother?!

Some people thought a canal crossing the Pennines (which are the mountains running north to south, separating the east and west of the country) joining Huddersfield in Yorkshire with Ashton-under-Lyne in Lancashire was a good plan. Many people got excited about it when they heard, as it would provide a quicker more direct route to transport cargo; but they probably didn't have to build a tunnel over 3 miles long underneath the bleak Standedge Moor!



Imagine how eerie the fumes coming out of the airshaft must have looked on the bleak moor.

Tunnel End Cottage



Can you spot any differences between this historic photo and the modern photograph on the front cover?



How did they build it?

It wasn't an easy job and took a lot longer than the engineers thought it would (in fact it took 17 years!), but the canal was no use without it. Work on the tunnel started in 1794. They marked out where the tunnel had to go on the moor above, and then built shafts (holes) down into the ground.

The tunnel was dug by miners using pickaxes, shovels and gunpowder. Once down the shafts and in the tunnel they made a hole in the ground in front of them, then the hole was then packed with gunpowder. When the fuse was lit, the miners got out of the way quickly, to what they hoped was a safe distance!

Unfortunately they weren't always very good at working out what a safe distance was and sometimes the men were injured or killed. Once back in the tunnel, now full of smoke and dust, they had the unpleasant task of lifting all the loose rock to the surface out of the way.

It wasn't much better when you got home; tunnel workers and their families lived in wooden shanty towns and crowded work camps near the tunnel. Only supervisors and skilled craftsmen were provided with stone houses to live in.

What was it like going through the tunnel?



This man is checking that the tunnel is in working order; not easy in the fog!

The boats travelling on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal were pulled by horses. As it was difficult and expensive to build wide tunnels, the tunnel was built without a towpath. This meant the horses had to be walked over the hill, above the tunnel.

Empty boats could be punted through the tunnel with poles (like the boats in Venice) but fully laden boats had to be 'legged' through, usually by two men lying on their backs who pushed with their legs against the tunnel walls.

As the tunnel was narrow it was not the best place to meet a boat coming in the opposite direction; the 3 passing places were a long way apart.

What happened next?

Railways meant cargoes could be carried much quicker than on canal. Canal customers started using the railways to send their goods. This meant canal companies lost money and were often bought up the railways.

More and more cargo was carried by rail and in 1921 the last working boat went through Standedge Tunnel. Over time without repairs being done, the tunnel fell into disrepair and in 1944 the canal and its tunnel were closed.

Why not visit Standedge and experience the tunnel for yourself?



And now?

In 1974 the Huddersfield Canal Society was formed with the hope of returning the canal to working order. Restoring the tunnel was a huge engineering feat. Some of the tunnel was in very good repair but other areas were very unstable. Finally on 25th May 2001 after 20 years of restoration Standedge Tunnel was once again open.

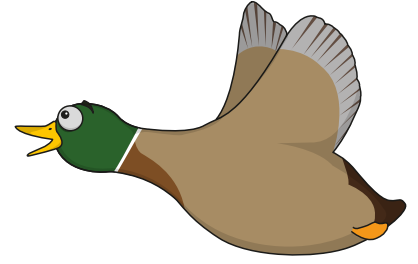


You can go on a boat trip into the tunnel today.

The tunnel is not straight it has an S shape in the middle!

At its deepest point below the top of Standedge Moor the tunnel has over **190 metres of rock above it.**

The average time to leg a loaded boat through the tunnel was 4 hours.



In 1914 David Whitehead and his wife legged a narrow boat through the tunnel in the fastest recorded time of 1 hour and 25 minutes.

Fascinating Facts



Legging a boat through a canal tunnel.

While the railway was being built, the **explosions** needed to break through into the tunnel caused rock to fall in other places and **sunk a boat!**

Strange but True

The original length was about 3 miles 133 yards (4,950 metres) It was later extended as part of the restoration to approximately 3 miles 190 yards (5,000 metres).

Thomas Bourne started working at the tunnel when he was a boy. His job was to ensure the boats went into the tunnel safely then walk over the top of the moors and make sure they came out of the other end. He did this job for almost **37 years** and walked 215,582 miles (347,306 km). That's over **8½ times around the world!**

Mobile phones and radios don't work that deep underground and so other systems have to be in place should there be an emergency.

It is said that **mysterious furry creatures** named Diggles live in the tunnel!

Always remember to stay **SAFE** near water – **Stay Away From the Edge.**