

The Crab & Winkle Way



The Crab & Winkle Line was only the third railway line ever built, and the first to convey passengers on a regular basis. It had connections with the 19th century's most celebrated engineers: the plans were

drawn up by William James; George and Robert Stephenson built the engine *Invicta* for it; Thomas Telford built the harbour at its Whitstable terminus; and Brunel inspected its tunnel, the first in the world for passenger trains. The gradient of the route proved too much for the underpowered *Invicta*, which had to be restricted to a flat section of route out of Whitstable.

The line was closed in 1953, and the route lay overgrown until 1997 when the Crab and Winkle Line Trust was set up to bring it back into public use. In 2000 the Crab & Winkle Way opened, using one-third of the original line. Although much remains to be done to improve the route, it quickly became popular with commuters and with leisure riders, as well as with walkers.

The ride begins in Canterbury, the first English city reached by St Augustine, who converted King Ethelbert to Christianity and was given the land on which the present Cathedral stands. The infamous

murder in 1170 of Thomas a Becket in the Cathedral by the henchmen of King Henry II made the city a place of pilgrimage until 1538, when Henry VIII ordered the destruction of Becket's shrine. Although the city was badly damaged by the Baedeker bombings of the Second World War, much of its Roman and medieval heritage is still visible.

The route is signed on road from Canterbury West station, joining National Route 1 through the town near the river at Pound Lane. From Harbledown the route is mostly traffic-free, following the railway line from the Winding Pond (a great place to picnic) to the outskirts of Whitstable. On the way you travel through Blean Woods, one of the largest areas of ancient broadleaved woodland in southern Britain, where you can find the rare heath fritillary butterfly.

The route ends at Whitstable station, but is signed right through to the harbour of this lovely seaside town which is still a commercial port. Enjoy its weatherboard cottages, stroll down Squeeze Gut Alley and sample the local seafood for which the railway was nicknamed. If you don't feel up to the ride back, you can get the train from Whitstable to Canterbury East station, but you will have to change at Faversham.

The Route

Where: Canterbury to Whitstable

National Route: 1

Distance: 7 miles each way

Terrain: mostly traffic-free, but a bit hillier than you would expect of a railway path.

Public transport: two railway stations in Canterbury and one in Whitstable

Bike hire: Downland Cycles at Canterbury West Station - 01227 479 643

Maps: National Cycle Network Garden of England map NN1X. A free Crab & Winkle Way leaflet is available from local libraries and Tourist Information and can be downloaded from www.kent.gov.uk/cycling

OS maps: Explorer 150, Landranger 179

Tourist information: Canterbury TIC - 01227 378100

Places to search for on Sustrans website mapping: Canterbury, Blean, Whitstable



A tree-lined section of the Crab & Winkle Way