



# Taking Leamington through the Falkirk Wheel

A canal boat trip through the Falkirk Wheel is one of the most spectacular experiences of the UK canal system and with Linlithgow being 12 miles from the wheel it is possible to do a day return trip through the wheel. This guide provides the information needed for this trip and covers timing, skipper's guidance and items of interest on the route.

It complements the guidance given by the LUCS dispatcher before the start of your trip and includes relevant extracts from the Scottish Canals' Skippers guide to the Forth & Clyde and Union Canals which is available from <https://www.scottishcanals.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Scottish-Canals-Lowlands-Skippers-Guide-WEB-May-16.pdf>

**Please note you must contact the Falkirk Wheel on 01324 676912 to book your trip 24 hours beforehand.**

Also, please note that for operational reasons it might not be possible to do through the wheel. Although this is highly unlikely, for this reason LUCS cannot guarantee a passage through the wheel.

## 1. Timing

A return trip to the wheel is a long day and, if you are unlucky with boat traffic it might take even longer. You should take the following into account when planning your trip:-

Time for trip	Allow at least 10 hours	Linlithgow to Falkirk Wheel locks - 3 hours Through locks and wheel – 1 hour Time at the wheel – 1 hour or more if required Contingency – 1 hour
Latest departure time – see note.	Not after 10 hours before sunset	Earlier if more than an hour is required at the wheel
	Saturdays	Not later than 09:30 to allow for Saturday afternoon hire boat traffic.
Latest return from wheel	Saturdays	Not later than 2:30 pm after this a lot of hire boats go through the wheel
	Other days	Not later than 4:30 pm as wheel & locks stop operating at 5:30 pm

Note: This is actual departure time. Your party should be ready to leave 30 mins before departure to allow for the dispatcher's briefing

## 2. Skipper's guidance

### 2.1 Crew

- Skipper - One of your party must be nominated as skipper. The skipper must ensure this guidance is followed as well as that given by the dispatcher.
- Other drivers – As this is a long trip, it is advisable to nominate other drivers who can assist the skipper. Let the dispatcher know who these drivers are.

- Lock rope handler - someone at the front of the boat will need assist with ropes in the Falkirk Wheel locks. This person should be selected before departure. Also the front rope needs to be in the correct position before departure (see section on locks). The skipper must ensure the rope handler reads this guide to understand what needs to be done in the locks.

## **2.2 Weather**

The boat Driver is fully exposed to the weather and so the Skipper and Drivers should have waterproof clothing and footwear. Check the weather forecast before departure. If it looks particularly bad there is no problem postponing your trip to another date. However please give 24 hours notice to enable LUCS to contact the Dispatcher.

## **2.3 Bridges with restricted visibility**

Bridges 45 and 52A which are respectively 0.5 and 4.2 miles from Linlithgow have restricted visibility and as a result it is not possible to see oncoming boats until you are almost under the bridge. This is because the roads over these bridges are on a slope. When the canal was re-opened this required a dog leg in the canal to provide bridges with sufficient height.

Slow down when approaching these bridges, sound the horn and be prepared for another boat coming towards you.

## **2.4 Avon aqueduct**

The Avon aqueduct is 2.6 miles from Linlithgow and is 250 metre long. On the aqueduct the canal narrows with room for one way traffic only. As you approach the aqueduct lookout for other boats and be prepared to wait for them to pass. If you wish to stop on the aqueduct to admire the view, maintain a watch for other boats and be prepared to move off the aqueduct immediately.

## **2.5 Falkirk Canal Tunnel**

Like the aqueduct, the 633 metre long Falkirk Tunnel has room for one way traffic only. Before entering the tunnel switch on headlights and navigation lights. Also switch on interior lights as necessary. It is wet in the tunnel so the driver should have waterproof clothing.

The tunnel has a Red and Green traffic light system but often displays Red and Green lights flashing which means proceed with caution.

Look carefully for any boats approaching and only enter the tunnel if it is clear, sounding the horn as you do so. If there is another boat coming moor up clear of the entrance.

When going through the tunnel steer by focusing on the towpath handrail and keep to a moderate speed. Move the tiller as little as possible. It is a common illusion to feel that the boat is being pulled to one side.

## **2.6 Contacting the Falkirk Wheel**

When leaving Falkirk Tunnel you are 1.5 miles, or about 30 minutes from the Falkirk Wheel's top locks. At this point you must phone the Falkirk Wheel Basin Controller on 01324 676912 to advise them that you are approaching the locks. Also let the Controller know that you wish to moor in the wheel basin and how long you wish to stay there. You will also be asked how many people are on board.

On arrival at the wheel basin phone the Basin Controller again with your requested departure time to establish when you will be able to return through the wheel.

Note your transit through the Falkirk Wheel also needs to be booked 24 hours in advance.

## 2.7 Falkirk Wheel Locks

The double locks are operated by Scottish Canal's lock keepers whose directions must be followed.

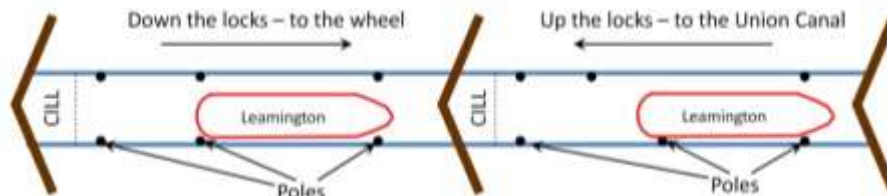
### Before going into the locks

- **The Skipper must wear a lifejacket** when taking Leamington through the locks and from the locks to the wheel basin.
- The forward rope must be positioned so that the Lock Rope Handler can reach it from within the boat on the right hand side
- Appoint someone to pass messages between the Skipper and the Lock Rope Handler.

If the lock gates are open go straight into the locks, otherwise moor at the pontoons just before the locks.

Before the locks can be operated Leamington has to be secured with ropes looped around vertical poles as shown in the photographs. These poles keep the boat in position as the water level changes. As the locks are operated there is a significant flow of water. To hold the boat against this the ropes need to be fairly tight but not so tight as to impede the movement of the boat as it rises and falls within the lock.

The poles that Leamington should be secured to are shown in the sketch below i.e. in both locks use the poles on the Falkirk Wheel end locks on the north side. This keeps the boat well away from the lock cill.



### Going down the locks - pass the ropes round these poles by:-

- Manoeuvring the boat so that the rope handler at the bow can reach the right hand front pole
- The rope handler then passes a rope around the front pole but leaves the rope loose and plays it out if required as the Skipper manoeuvres to secure the stern.
- The Skipper manoeuvres the stern against the middle pole then passes the rope around it and holds it. If necessary use the boat hook to pull the boat to the pole. **Do not reach out to grab the pole.**
- Once the stern is secured the Skipper instructs the Lock Rope Handler to bring in the rope to hold the boat in position but loose enough to slide down the pole as the locks are drained. Secure the rope by wrapping it once around the upright and holding onto the end. .
- The Skipper then advises the lock keeper that the boat is secure



### Going up the locks – the procedure is similar except that:

- The front rope should be on the left hand side of the boat. This should be done before leaving the wheel basin
- The bow is at the middle pole, the stern at the rear pole
- The locks will be empty when you go into them so the lock keepers cannot help you to pass the ropes
- As the locks fill there will be boat movement (usually forward). The skipper should compensate for this with the engine

## 2.8 From the locks to the Falkirk Wheel basin

The lock keeper will let you know when to proceed to the wheel. You may be asked to moor below the locks and follow another boat to the wheel.

On leaving the locks you proceed through the 150 metre long Roughcastle tunnel, over the Falkirk Wheel Aqueduct and into the Gondola.

Instruction for Roughcastle tunnel are as for the Falkirk Tunnel (except that it is not so wet!). If you are following another boat do not enter the tunnel until the other boat has left the tunnel. The Falkirk Wheel's trip boats travel through the tunnel very slowly, it is best not to follow too close behind.

Scottish Canal's operators will then guide you into the Falkirk Wheel's Gondola and instruct you how to secure Leamington's stern and bow ropes.

During the rotation of the wheel no-one must leave the boat and, unlike the locks, the boat's engine must be switched off

The operator will instruct you where to berth Leamington after leaving the Gondola

An extract about the Falkirk Wheel from Scottish Canal's Skipper's Guide is attached to this guidance,

## 3. What to see

Consult the separate guide "By canal betwixt Linlithgow and the Falkirk Wheel" for a detailed guide to the route for which key features are shown below.



Old railways at Causewayend basin



Avon Aqueduct from above and below

Glum side of the Laughin / Greetin Bridge



Falkirk Tunnel



# The Falkirk Wheel – Extract from Scottish Canal's Skipper's Guide

**VOYAGING THROUGH THE FALKIRK WHEEL**

- 1] There is no extra charge for BW licence holders who wish to take their craft through the Wheel.
- 2] You should contact the Basin Controller on 01324 676912 up to 24 hours in advance to book your time. E-mail us notice will speed your transit.
- 3] Shippers approaching on the Union Canal should phone 01324 676912 to re-confirm when exiting the Falkirk tunnel, and indicate if continuing E or W on the Forth Canal. This will enable Locks 1 & 2 to be prepared.
- 4] Shippers approaching from the Forth Canal should phone to re-confirm when leaving Lock 15 (westbound) or Burntjerrybridge (eastbound).
- 5] Pre booked transits of the Falkirk Wheel are available. Please check opening times as these vary throughout the year.

**ROUTE OPTIONS FOR LICENCE HOLDERS**  
These are from one canal to the other either direction.

Basin Control Office  
Toilets & Showers  
New Port Downie  
01324 673217

**Lock 3**  
The Golden Jubilee Lock  
(Fixed 2.74m (9ft) footbridge at N end)

**Visitor Centre**  
(01324 619998)  
Tourist Information Office  
Information Desk  
Exhibition Area  
Shop  
Cafe  
Ticket Office  
Toilets

**Slipway**

**Gondola in upper position**

**Gondola in lower position**

**Gondola entry when ascending**

**Falkirk Wheel Basin**  
overnight moorings subject to availability.

**Finger Jetty**

**Slip Jetty**

**Falkirk Wheel Aqueduct**

**Waiting berths**

**Roughcastie Tunnel (150m) leading to Locks 1 & 2, South Basin**

**North Basin**

**Form & Oyle Canal**

**OPERATIONS AND SAFETY**  
For your own safety you must obey the instructions given by the BW staff who manage the site equipped with CCTV, traffic lights, radio and PA systems to help them. The locks and swing bridge are normally operated by BW staff and will be locked when unattended. Staff will guide users into the Gondolas and during the 15-minute rotation you must not leave the vessel.  
Assistance may be available from BW staff.

**POINTS TO NOTE**

- Each Gondola is controlled by an operator, whose instructions must be followed.
- The operator will select vessels to make optimum use of Gondola capacity.
- Have your stern and bow lines ready to control the vessel in the Gondola.
- Do not allow anyone near the bow or stern when these are adjacent to the north end of the Gondola.
- Do not leave the vessel except if directed, or in an emergency.

**MAXIMUM DIMENSIONS**

UNION CANAL AND FALKIRK WHEEL	WHEEL & ROUGHCASTIE TUNNEL DEPTHS
Length: 21.3m (70ft)	Wheel & Roughcastie Tunnel Depth: 1.5m (5ft)
Width: 3.5m (11ft 6ins)	Water levels fluctuate – allow adequate draft tolerance.
Union Canal Depth: 1.0m (3ft)	

**MAXIMUM DIMENSIONS**

GOLDEN JUBILEE LOCK 3 (From Forth & Oyle Canal to Basin)	HEADROOMS
Length: 22.05m (73ft)	Headrooms: 2.74m (9ft)
Width: 3.8m (12ft 2ins)	Water levels fluctuate – allow adequate draft tolerance.

The Union Canal – Linlithgow to Falkirk Wheel  
 – Extract from Scottish Canal’s Skipper’s Guide

