

April



TAKE AN INDUSTRIAL PILGRIMAGE ALONG THE GREAT WEST WAY

2019 marks the 50th anniversary of Concorde's first British flight, making it the perfect time to celebrate the region's contribution to England's industrial heritage

On 9 April (coincidentally, the birthday of engineering genius, Brunel) 1969, Concorde's British Prototype took to the skies for the first time from Bristol's Filton Airfield, one of a long line of phenomenal engineering feats to have taken place in the region.

Concorde's 50th anniversary is the perfect opportunity to celebrate all the industrial endeavours that can be found along the Great West Way: From Brunel, one of the greatest engineering minds in history, to the Kennet & Avon Canal, home to the formidable Caen Hill Lock Flight, and of course, Concorde, the last of which is on display at Aerospace Bristol, it's impossible to travel along the Great West Way without learning about the route's integral part in England's industrial revolution.

Here are just some of the places along the route that celebrate its phenomenal contributions to England's Industrial heritage:

Aerospace Bristol

The city of Bristol has played a leading role in aviation development and was once home to the largest aircraft factory in the world. Visit this fascinating museum and you'll learn the story of how the city became an aviation superstar, including its role in the two World Wars and in building the most famous – and most loved – aeroplane in the world has ever seen – Concorde, now the museum's crown jewel

Brunel's SS Great Britain

Brunel also designed this passenger steamship hailed as, "the greatest experiment since the creation". The SS Great Britain carried emigrants to Australia for many years and was later used for cargo; today she sits in the city she was built in and is open to visitors who can roam her decks and even climb her rigging.

Box Tunnel

Built by candlelight at considerable human cost - 100 workers died forging their way through the unforgiving Bath limestone, Brunel's railway tunnel was the longest in the world. It's long been said that Brunel aligned the tunnel so that if viewed from the eastern end, the sun would rise through the tunnel on his birthday, April 9. In 2017, a chance to test the theory arose - and found the sun nestled perfectly in the centre on that date due to a seemingly deliberate design feature.

Caen Hill Lock Flight

This is the most enticing sight on the Kennet & Avon Canal - a series of 29 locks rising 237 feet over 2 miles uphill into the market town of Devizes. Take a stroll up the eponymous hill or, even better, hire a narrowboat and travel as so many have done before by pulling open the gates and letting the water carry you up the hill.

Clifton Suspension Bridge

Continue your industrial heritage tour with a spin across Isambard Kingdom Brunel's world-famous bridge. Cars can cross this nineteenth-century suspension bridge for the princely sum of £1, while pedestrians will love peering over the sides to check out the plunging views of the Avon Gorge far below.

Crofton Beam Engine

This engine house turned museum, set in unspoiled countryside near the old market town of Marlborough, houses the oldest working steam engines in the world still performing the job they were built to do! The two beam engines are both fed by a hand-stoked, coal-fired boiler and are magnificent pieces of industrial archaeology.

STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway

The town of Swindon was once home to the Swindon Works, the main maintenance centre for the railway in the west of England. Today one of the Grade II listed railway buildings has been restored as a museum, where you can have a go in the interactive signal box and drive a steam train simulator.

Maidenhead Bridge

Another extraordinary design by Brunel, but onlookers were so sceptical that its flat arches would collapse under the weight of the trains crossing it that he had to leave the wooden formwork in place for years after it opened to assuage people's fears. Needless to say, it's survived the test of time and today it still carries the Great Western Railway from London Paddington on its way west towards Bristol.

Find out more about the Great West Way at GreatWestWay.co.uk.

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Note to editors:

About the Great West Way

The Great West Way is one of a number of successful projects to receive funding from the UK Government's £40 million Discover England Fund, administered by VisitEngland. VisitWiltshire are the Destination Organisation leading the project. For further information go to www.discoverenglandfund.org or www.GreatWestWay.co.uk/StoryoftheGreatWestWay

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