



Glandŵr Cymru
Canal & River Trust in Wales

Our work in Wales





The UNESCO World Heritage Pontcysyllte Aqueduct near Wrexham, is Britain's longest and the world's highest navigable aqueduct. This awe-inspiring structure carries the Llangollen Canal 38 metres high across the River Dee. This 'jewel in the crown' of our network is where we launched the Canal & River Trust charity in July 2012.

Wales in numbers

Our **76 miles** of canals in Wales are home to **215 listed structures** and some of the world's finest examples of **living industrial heritage**.

5 Sites of Special Scientific Interest

4 wildlife conservation sites

2 World Heritage sites

3 scheduled monuments

33 aqueducts (25 listed)

250 bridges (118 listed)

130 culverts

20 listed locks

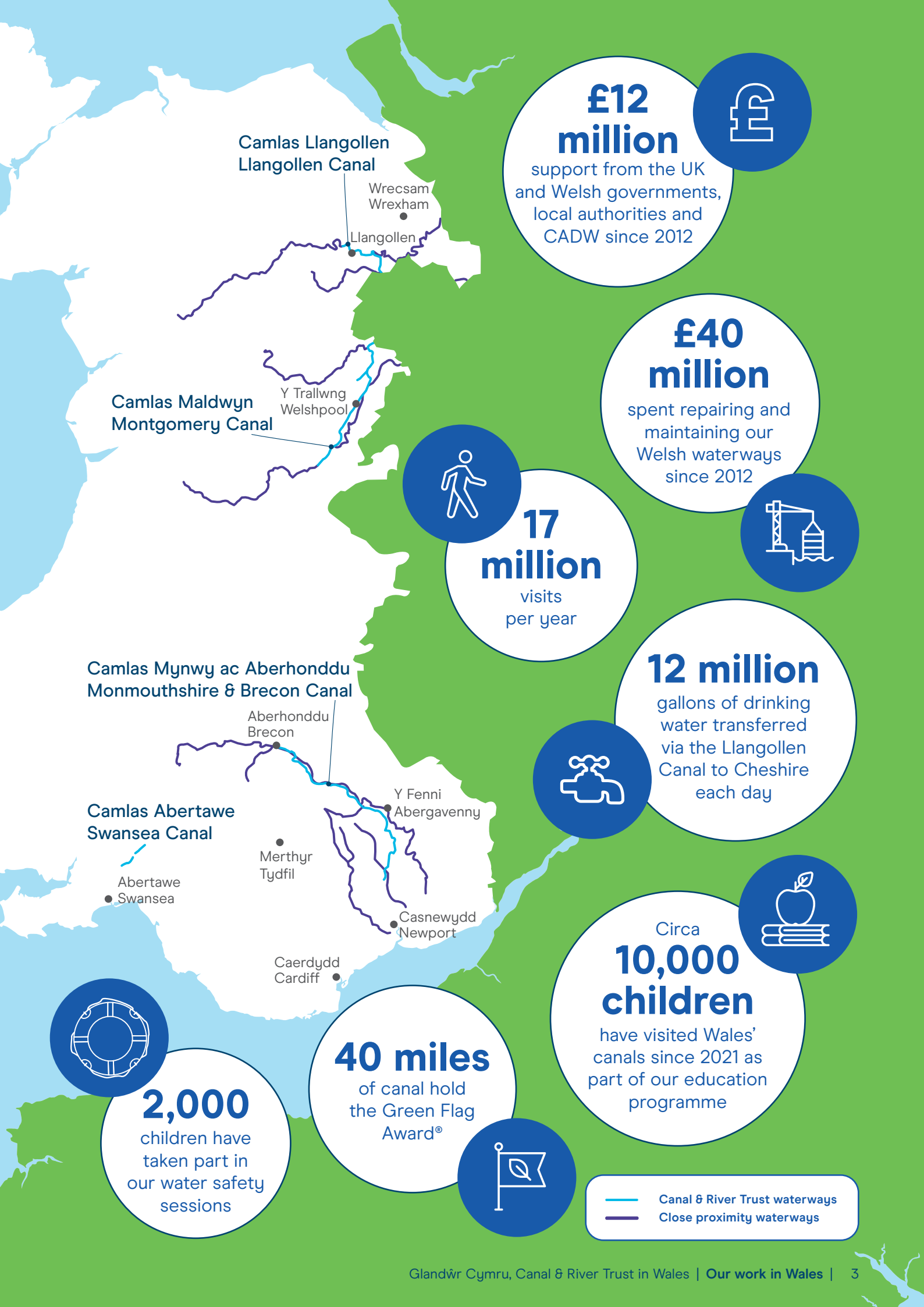
5 fish passes

3 dry docks

15 river weirs (3 listed)

3 listed tunnels

12 listed buildings



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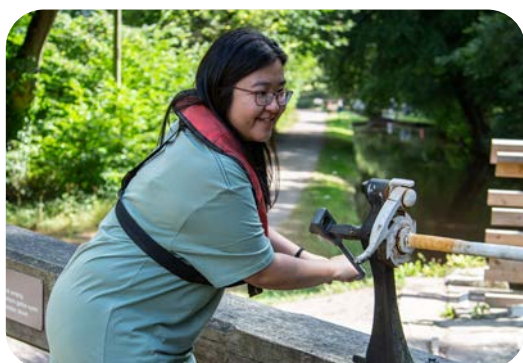
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Transforming places and enriching lives

The Canal & River Trust cares for 2,000 miles of canals and rivers in Wales and England. Glandŵr Cymru, the Canal & River Trust in Wales, cares for 76 miles of these, along with their associated historic structures and wildlife habitats, including five Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Above: The total annual economic activity related to the Mon & Brecon Canal is estimated to exceed £25 million.

These canals offer people a place to escape, the chance to improve their health and wellbeing and a way to connect with nature, heritage and each other.

They play a vital role in the Welsh waterway ecosystem too. Interconnecting with rivers, they extend green corridors, pathways and cycleways, helping nature to thrive and providing more opportunities for active travel and tourism.

Our approach – embracing natural, built and social heritage and delivering environmental, social and economic outcomes – works within Wales' growing legislative framework. It supports the definition of sustainable development within the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the sustainable management of natural resources described within the Environment (Wales) Act, and the ways of working included in both.

Edwina Hart MBE, former Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, said: “The development of our waterways in Wales provides an excellent opportunity to develop successful tourism destinations that can provide a high-quality environment for our visitors. In addition to this, the facilities for visitors will also be used by local communities in which they are located and will help generate local income and jobs.”

Delivering benefits for Wales

On the Llangollen Canal in North Wales, the Montgomery Canal in Mid-Wales and the Monmouthshire & Brecon and Swansea canals in South Wales, we're delivering wide ranging benefits for local residents, tourists and wildlife. Our work is actively supported by national government, regional authorities and local partners.

We are working with Cardiff University's Sustainable Places Institute to understand the full value to Wales and England of the canals we care for. This 10-year research partnership has already produced the 'Waterways & Wellbeing, Building the Evidence Base' report (2017), examining the contribution our waterways make to economic, social and environmental benefits in Wales and England.

In 2014, at the launch of our strategy 'Beyond the Towpath', the Welsh Government recognised the ability of waterways to deliver public policy outcomes, with a Memorandum of Understanding backed by a cross-departmental Task and Finish Group.

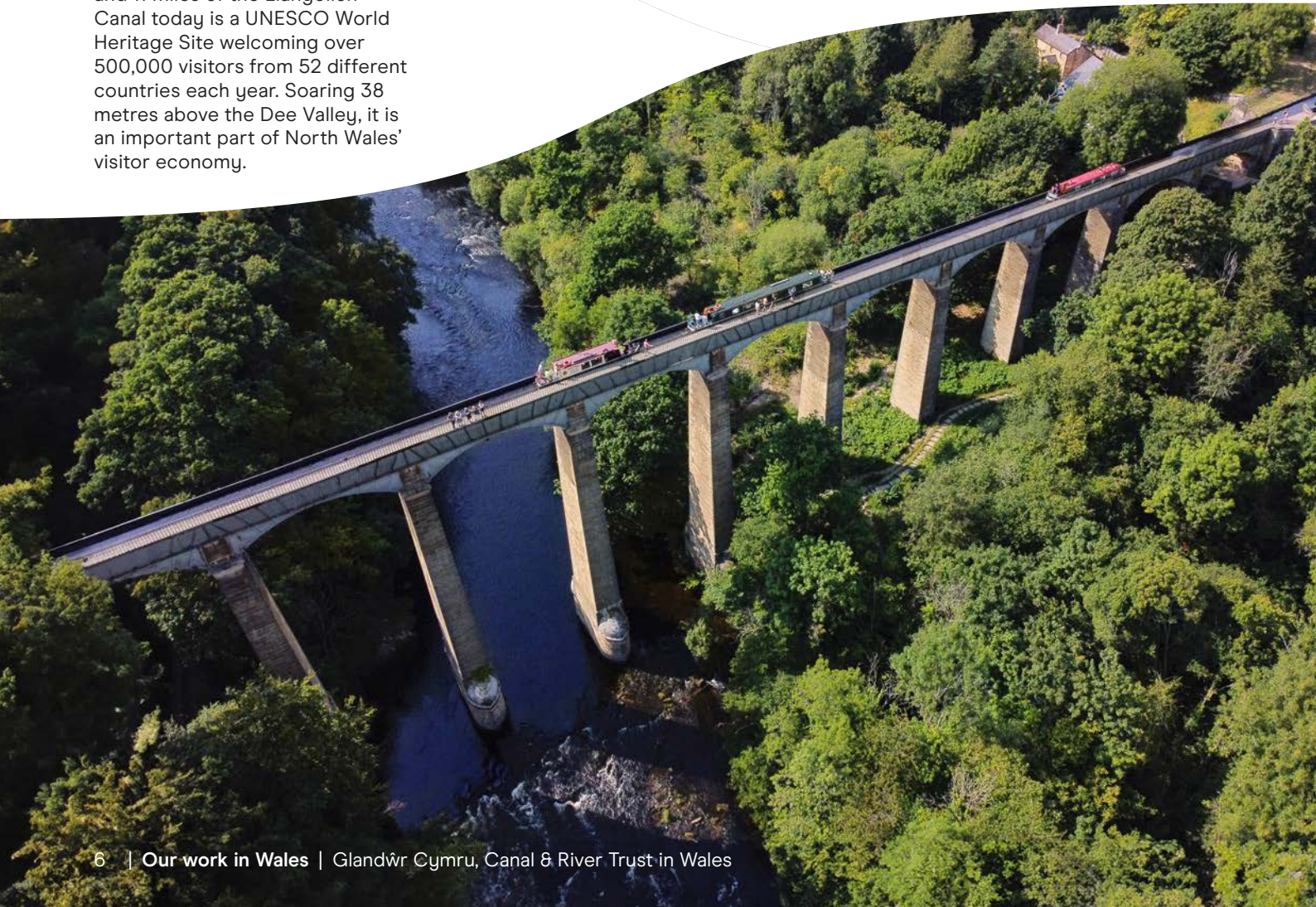
And in 2015, the Welsh Government's Well-Being of Future Generations (WoFG) and Environment (Wales) Acts were passed, seeking to improve the environment, the economy and equality. Our waterways contribute 16 of the 40 indicators consulted upon for the WoFG Act.

Providing vital homes for nature

Biodiversity is in crisis. Over the past 30 years there has been a 20% decline in Welsh wildlife and 18% species are facing extinction.

Our unique interconnected network of hedgerows, waterways and canal banks provides nature with a home like no other, and is critical for the survival and recovery of Wales' threatened wildlife. Herons, dragonflies, water voles and bats are just a few of the precious creatures making their homes on and alongside these manmade waterways. But these habitats wouldn't exist without our intervention. They need constant care to keep them, clean, wild and full of water.

Below: Opened in 1805, the world-famous Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and 11 miles of the Llangollen Canal today is a UNESCO World Heritage Site welcoming over 500,000 visitors from 52 different countries each year. Soaring 38 metres above the Dee Valley, it is an important part of North Wales' visitor economy.



Right: Over the past 12 years we have spent over £750,000 undertaking extensive restoration work on our Welsh aqueducts at Pontardawe, Goytre Wharf, Brynich (Grade II*) and Aberbechan (Grade II listed).



Open to everyone

Our canals are open and freely available, allowing everyone to enjoy the immense benefits of spending time outdoors in green open spaces. Being more active and connecting with each other and with nature helps people live happier and healthier lives.

Whether it's walking, cycling, running, paddleboarding, fishing, spotting wildlife, canoeing or boating, our canals are places where people can exercise, and enjoy the wellbeing benefits of being by the water. They bring communities together, and provide safe, accessible traffic-free routes, for active travel, taking cars off the roads.

Our canals in Wales are already visited by over 17 million people every year, but we want more people in this nation and beyond to experience the physical and mental health benefits of spending time by and on the water, and we're working with a range of partners to help bring more people to our canals.

Keeping history alive

Wales' canals are home to 215 listed structures, including some of the world's finest examples of living industrial heritage.

Our heritage advisors are dedicated to caring for the locks, bridges, tunnels, aqueducts, mileposts and all other historic structures along our waterways. Their efforts are ensuring that generations to come will be able to marvel at our soaring aqueducts, steep lock flights and charming humpback bridges.

The value these canals hold for people – our health and prosperity – and for wildlife is unquestioned and is supported by Welsh Government, UK Levelling Up funding, regional authorities and public and private partners. This investment, over £12 million

since 2012 alongside around £28 million invested by the Trust, is benefitting residents, local economies, the nation's heritage, nature and the thousands of boaters and visitors who come to visit Wales each year.

We work closely with our many partners, including the Welsh Government, the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust, Swansea Canal Society and the Montgomery Canal Partnership, to protect and enhance these fragile and historic waterways.

Every day of the year, our teams and volunteers can be found repairing, restoring and caring for this living, working heritage and looking after the canal environment.

Keeping our canals open and alive

Caring for our ageing canals in Wales is a constant challenge. As the climate changes, more storms and floods are damaging their historic structures, including towpaths, bridges and culverts. Droughts are causing brickwork to crumble and threatening the water supply that our canals depend on. Rising costs and increasing financial obligations, at a time of reduced government support, are making our work harder than ever.

We're committed to doing everything we can to achieve a sustainable future for these canals, keeping them open and alive, making them resilient and safe and maximising their value for people, nature and the economy. Without a thriving canal network, the ecosystems of the rivers that they interconnect with and the countryside they pass through would be less rich and diverse.

With your support we will be able to keep these canals open and ensure they can be visited, used and enjoyed for generations to come.



The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal

Often voted Britain's prettiest canal, the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal (or the 'Mon & Brecon' as it is fondly known) runs for 35 miles from Brecon to Five Locks, Cwmbran, following the line of the Usk Valley through the Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park, and attracting around three million visitors a year.

The Blaenavon area and a section of the canal were granted World Heritage status in 2000 in recognition of its historical significance. The Llangattock escarpment is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is the entrance to an extensive cave network. The northern section forms part of the Taff Trail Long Distance Cycle & Footpath.

Above: New walking routes along the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, including our 'Down to the Sea' partnership with the Brecon Beacons National Park, and our 'Step by Step' bilingual walking trails (funded by Cronfa Dreftadeath and the National Lottery Heritage Fund), encourage people to get out and explore the canal and its heritage.



Spending time by the water and living active lives

Part of the popular Taff Trail, the Mon & Brec is one of the most favoured visitor attractions in the Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park. Working with our partners, for the past twelve years we have been providing opportunities for more people to enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of being active on and along the canal.

Our work to improve towpaths and encourage local communities to spend time by their local canal has been supported by the Welsh Government, Players of People's Postcode Lottery, Visit Wales, Peak Cymru, Arts Council Wales, Arts & Business Cymru, Torfaen Council and Ramblers Cymru.

We have worked together to improve the towpath, enhance nature and create new opportunities for local families to be active and make the most of what this historic waterway has to offer.

Below: In 2017, with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Brecon Beacons Trust, we restored three historic limekilns at Watton, Llangattock and Goytre, helping volunteers develop skills in traditional stone masonry repairs including lime mortar pointing.

Learning in nature

Passing close to where we live and learn, canals are a fantastic resource used by schools and colleges to enhance education programmes and bring learning to life.

Our Fforwyr Glandŵr, Explorers in Wales online learning resources are linked to the Welsh Curriculum and we support school and group visits to Brecon and Goytre Wharf. As well as delivering water safety lessons, we work with schools and colleges the length of the canal on STEM activities, environmental initiatives and arts programmes.



Above: Woodlands Community Primary School visiting the Mon & Brec Canal in Brecon.



Improving wildlife habitats

Working in partnership with the Welsh Government, and with an award of £2.5 million from its Green Infrastructure Investment Fund (in 2016/17), we've been able to invest significantly in the resilience of the canal's structures, water supply and habitats.

The funding created an opportunity to explore the canal's role within the wider landscape for the first time – as a corridor for connecting habitats, a foraging route and an interconnecting and complementary ecosystem with the River Usk.

Our actions on the Mon & Brecon are an exemplar which fed into a 'Waterways and Wildlife: managing our natural environment' handbook for Wales's canals. This includes a management plan for woodland and hedgerows to extend the range of habitats for dormice, and reopen historic views of the Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park, enhancing visitors' experience of the canal. The report was written in collaboration with Ruth Feber from Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit.

Our ecologists and volunteers have created bat caves in the historic lime kilns, attracting lesser horseshoe bats to the area for the first time.

Below: After dark, many stretches of our canals are free from noise and light pollution. With a ready supply of water to drink and an array of insects to eat, they are ideal habitats for bats. In particular, the wooded sections of the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal provide vital homes for a number of bat species, including common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and noctule.



Above: Our volunteer lock keepers and towpath rangers on the Mon & Brecon Canal help to make our waterways better places to visit, by supporting boaters, litter picking, removing obstructions to navigation and re-enforcing embankment walls.

Keeping historic structures and heritage skills alive

Mile markers, stone bridges, locks and aqueducts every step along the 225-year-old Mon & Brecon Canal remind visitors of Wales' industrial past. Our heritage experts, apprentices and volunteers are dedicated to protecting and preserving this history.

Launched in 2014, our Heritage Lottery Fund Heritage Skills for the Future project supports trainees working towards a NVQ Level 2 qualification to learn essential heritage building skills including lime mortar, stone masonry, carpentry skills and how to repair centuries-old brickwork.

Climate change is threatening our historic structures

However, these fragile structures, and the canal itself, are under immense strain from the impact of more intense and extreme weather events – floods, droughts and soaring temperatures. As a 'contour' canal, following the sides of hills, the Mon & Brecon, is at increased risk of structural failure and needs particular care and attention.

Between 2012 and 2023-24 we spent over £9 million on major repairs to the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal in addition to routine resource costs.

Securing a sustainable water supply

Around 80% of the water needed to keep the canal open comes from the River Usk at Brecon. This water is returned to the river once it has travelled along the canal. These two waterways are interconnected, and together their ecosystem is stronger, providing more habitats for wildlife and more opportunities for boating and tourism.

After a change in legislation, the Trust was required to apply to Natural Resources Wales for licences to abstract water from the River Usk and its tributaries to feed the canal. But these licences came with new conditions that impose significant restrictions on the water supply to the canal. We appealed against these restrictions, highlighting the severely negative impact on the natural environment, surrounding communities, boaters and local economy, if this issue isn't resolved for the long term.



Above: Drained section of canal at Brynich Lock on the Mon & Brecon.

Below: Brecon Basin in Powys is a key visitor destination on the Welsh canal network, offering people the chance to enjoy spending time by the water, including boat trips and cycling a two-mile stretch of the Taff Trail along the towpath from Brecon Basin to Brynich Lock and aqueduct.





The Swansea Canal

The Swansea Canal runs 16.5 miles from Swansea to Abercraf, with six miles currently navigable. The canal was built to transport coal, raw materials and finished goods to and from Swansea Harbour. Since 1981, the Swansea Canal Society has worked to restore it, enhancing its environment. The canal continues to deliver a vital water supply to the Vale Nickel Refinery at Clydach.

Above: In 2018, with Swansea Canal Society, we secured £320,000 Rural Community Development Funding from the Rural Development programme teams in Neath Port Talbot and Swansea councils. The funding was the first part of a 10-year vision to establish the canal as a premier heritage, visitor and leisure destination in South Wales.



Left: The efforts of the Swansea Canal Society to restore and enhance the canal environment has earned a 5-mile section of the canal a Green Flag in Keep Britain Tidy's Award Scheme for six consecutive years.



Working with the Swansea Canal Society, we have developed a management plan for the canal, which has helped secure nearly £1 million of investment, allowing us to work towards our joint vision of establishing the waterway as a premier heritage, visitor and leisure destination in South Wales.

This funding has enabled our two charities to dredge a 1.4 kilometre stretch of the canal, enabling trip boats to operate. The buried lock at Clydach has now been restored, stretches of towpath resurfaced, and community events are bringing new people to the waterway.

Channel management

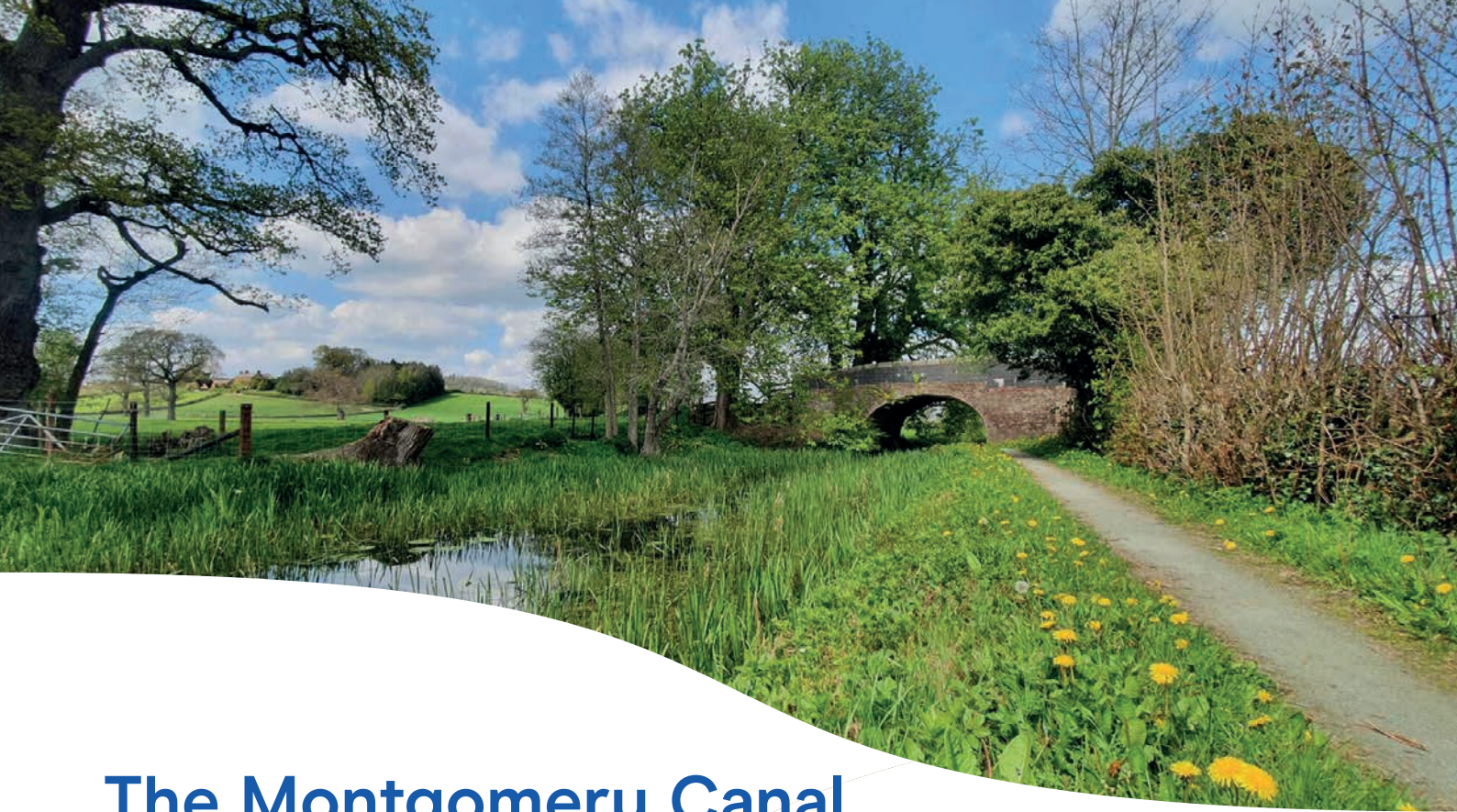
Active management of waterway channels and adjoining vegetation, like trees, is needed not only to keep them navigable and safe for people, but also to maintain their wildlife value. Because of slow flows and controlled water levels, open water would eventually be lost to encroaching vegetation, so regular weed cutting or dredging of channels is carried out.



Above: In 2023, thanks to funding from Heritage Lottery Fund Wales and Powys County Council/Welsh Government Brilliant Basics Fund, in partnership with Swansea Canal Society, we delivered a programme of community engagement events and activities celebrating the 225th anniversary of the Swansea Canal, including a 'Lighting up the Canal' lantern parade at Coed Gwilym Park in Clydach.

Below: Over 40 miles of Welsh canals hold the Green Flag Award®, the internationally recognised standard for managing great outdoor public spaces.





The Montgomery Canal

The Montgomery Canal runs 35 miles from Frankton Junction in Shropshire to Freestone Lock near Newtown, Wales. Built in the early 19th century to transport lime and materials for agriculture, it is now a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in England and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in Wales. Home to rare aquatic plants, it has been undergoing restoration by teams of dedicated volunteers since 1969.

Above: The Montgomery Canal near Arddleen, part of the section of canal that is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation. Many waterside habitats have vanished from the countryside, making waterway banks especially precious for wildlife.

Today, all 35 miles of towpath are accessible and 60% of the canal is open for boating. Restoration continues, with 4.4 miles being reopened using Government Levelling Up funding.

Our work with the Montgomery Canal Partnership to restore this canal has also received significant financial support from Powys County Council, the Welsh Government and National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Right: Dredging on the Montgomery Canal between Bridge 99 and Vyrnwy Aqueduct, near Llanymynech.



Along with upgrading stretches of the towpath, including a well-used section which is part of the Sustrans National Cycle Network, around 1.5 miles of the canal has been dredged, and just over half a mile of canal bank has been stabilised.

Once we are confident all habitats on the newly restored section are in good condition, small numbers of boats will be introduced gradually, monitoring for impacts and adjusting management accordingly.

This careful approach to the restoration allows us to realise the social, economic and ecological possibilities of the canal, informed by the sensitive ecology. Without these major interventions the canal's ecology would continue to decline and eventually risk being lost.

Nature conservation highlights

The Montgomery Canal is internationally recognised as a Special Area of Conservation, particularly for its aquatic plant diversity.

Our ecologists have worked with volunteers to ensure it is a haven for nature and plant life. Thanks to over £750,000 funding from our partners, including the Welsh Government, Nature Networks Fund and Belu Water, over the past decade we have been able to improve the condition and resilience of the canal for protected species such as floating water plantain. We are also working with the Rare British Plants Nursery to understand how we can develop effective conservation strategies for rare aquatic plants.

Keeping history alive

Thanks to a grant from Cadw's Historic Buildings Grant, in 2024 we repaired the Grade-II Listed Aberbechan Aqueduct on the Montgomery Canal near Llandyssil in Powys, removing it from the Buildings at Risk register. Over the years, river flooding and leaks from the canal had taken their toll on the 200-year old structure. Large voids were repaired in the bed of the canal, along with brickwork on both piers and abutments.

Below: Kayaking on the Montgomery Canal near Redwith.





The Llangollen Canal

Built between 1795 and 1808 by Thomas Telford and William Jessop, the Llangollen Canal runs 46 miles from Horseshoe Falls, bridging Wales with England at Chirk, and continuing to its junction with the Shropshire Union Canal at Hurleston. Winding through the Welsh Hills and Dee Valley, it offers stunning scenery and boasts feats of remarkable engineering, attracting visitors from across the world.

Above: Bridging Wales with England, Chirk Aqueduct on the Llangollen Canal, takes boats over the River Ceriog and across the border in mid-air. It's a scheduled monument and part of the Llangollen Canal World Heritage Site.

Improving access to the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct World Heritage Site

In 2009, an 11-mile stretch, including the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, earned UNESCO World Heritage status. This section, from Gledrid to Llangollen, is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

One of the most popular visitor attractions in North Wales, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Trevor Basin were struggling to support growing visitor numbers. Thanks to £4 million UK Levelling Up funding and further support from Wrexham County Borough Council, we are introducing a number of improvements, including a new lift bridge, moorings, hire boat base, education centre, and walking route upgrades.

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TRUST

This builds on previous work to improve access to the World Heritage Site, including access improvements for cyclists, wheelchair users and pushchairs, installing new information signs, publishing the site's first guidebook, refurbishing the Listed dry dock, creating a new car park and canoe access points, upgrading paths and adding access gates.

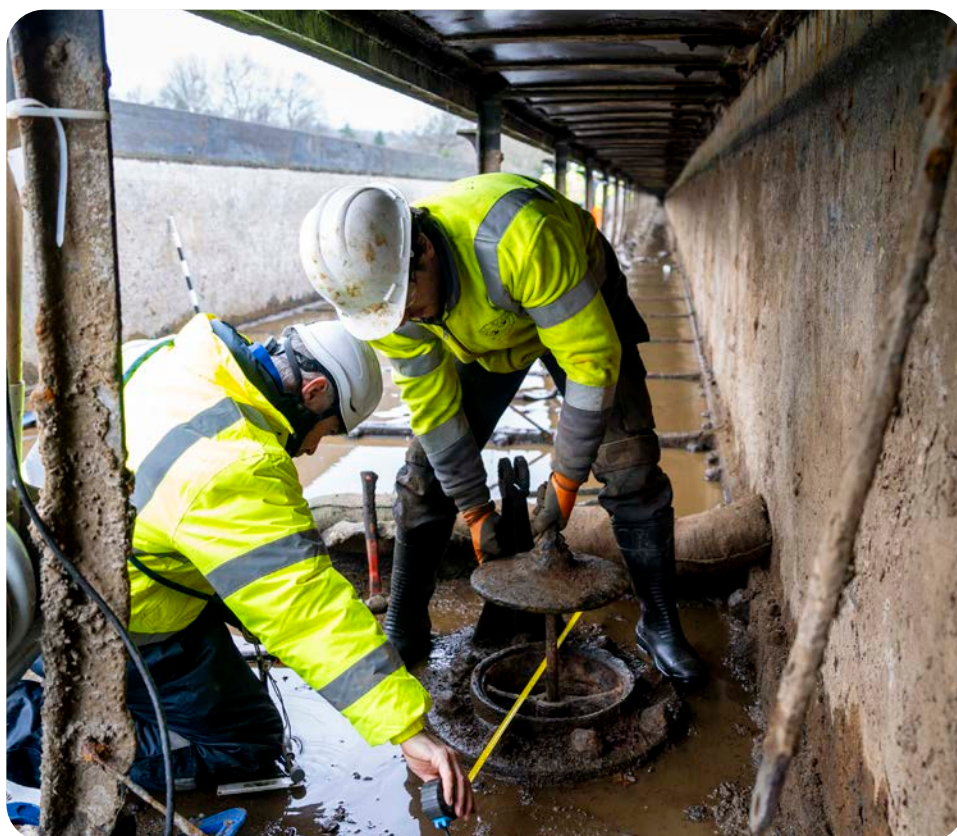
This work has been supported by a range of local and national partners including Cadw, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, Visit Wales, Welsh Government, Players of People's Postcode Lottery, Taith and WREN Community Landfill Tax.

Being safe by water

The awe-inspiring aqueduct is a popular spot for educational visits from schools across the region. Our educational resources are linked with the Welsh curriculum, and our Explorers educational team bring the history of our canals to life for hundreds of children and students each year, either within the classroom or out on the towpath. Our online and in-person water safety programme helps young children understand how to be safe by water.



Above: Learning outdoors with Year 4 from Ysgol Min Y Ddol school in Wrexham County. Children enjoyed an interactive workshop about bridges, explored floating and sinking through a practical activity making boats, learned about water safety, and took a boat trip across the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct.



Left: In 2024 we drained the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, enabling our engineers to carry out a full inspection for the first time in 20 years. And our year-long 'The Bridge that Connects' cultural programme celebrated communities within the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct World Heritage Site by sharing stories of the area. The project was funded by Shared Prosperity Funding through Wrexham County Borough Council.



The challenge facing Wales' canals

As our winters become warmer and wetter, our summers hotter and drier, the future is bleak for canals. Yet they have so much to offer people living in Wales.

Above: Our Trevor Basin visitor centre next to the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct provides information on ways to explore the World Heritage site, visited by half a million people a year.

For hundreds of years, our canals have shaped the towns and villages they pass through, helping communities to thrive and prosper through boating, tourism, jobs and sustainable development.

Whether it's ensuring a sustainable supply of drinking water in water-shortage areas or providing visitor destinations for tourists, our canals and towpaths are a critical and interconnected part of the nation's infrastructure.

Critical national infrastructure

To continue enjoying the contribution that our canals make to the Welsh economy, we must ensure further investment to prevent the very real risk of decline and ruin.

We've shown you a glimpse of the breadth of activities and partnerships that have been possible over the last 12 years in Wales thanks to our amazing volunteers, partners, funders and donors, Friends, supporters and ambassadors.

These canals and precious heritage structures provide vital links between different waterways

and pathways, allowing people and wildlife to move freely and safely between different areas.

If canals in Wales are to continue to help address some of the most significant challenges our nation faces including biodiversity loss and declining mental health, we need you by our side.



Above: Llangynidr Lock Flight on the Mon & Brecon drained for repairs.

5 actions we need for our Welsh canals to flourish

1

View Welsh canals as an integral part of a healthy river system in Wales, maximising opportunities to protect nature and boost biodiversity.

2

Work together to ensure there's a sustainable water supply solution for the Mon & Brec, supporting nature, boating and the local economy.

3

Make sure our historic canals in Wales are adequately funded so that repairs can be carried out to keep these canals alive.

4

Continue to invest in heritage and environmental skills training to empower local people to care for their waterways.

5

Continue to raise awareness of Welsh canals as a free outdoor spaces to visit for active travel and connecting with nature.



Right: Our 2017 cross border duck race on the Llangollen Canal at Chirk Aqueduct was organised jointly with Wrexham County Council.

Below: In 2019/2020, in partnership with Torfaen County Borough Council, we dredged seven kilometres of the Mon & Brec Canal from the current southern terminus at Five Locks (Cwmbran). This maintenance work is essential to ensure boats can continue to travel along the canal, sustaining tourism income generated by the hire boat industry.





Glandŵr Cymru
Canal & River Trust in Wales

Inspired by the impact of our work and the potential of our canal network?



SUPPORT US

Get in touch to discuss
opportunities for support and
help us to keep our canals open
and alive for tomorrow and beyond.

canalrivertrust.org.uk/wales



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Front cover image: The Mon & Brec Canal at Brynich.
Back cover image: The Mon & Brec Canal at Llangattock.