



PRESS RELEASE

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'FROM COAL TO GOLD'

CHARITY SETS SAIL ON REGIONS CANALS

A project enabling young people to experience life on the West Midlands' famous waterways, learning traditional skills and improving sections of canal is due to set sail this spring.

The charity, Canal & River Trust, is supporting the work of the Coombeswood Canal Trust which runs the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award scheme on the regions canals.

As part of the five day course young people from across the country will have the opportunity to experience life on board two heritage narrowboats, *Atlas* and *Malus*. The two boats, which are jointly owned by the Birmingham Canal Navigation Society, are kitted out for each expedition and whilst on board, the students will take part in a range of activities to help improve canals across Birmingham and the Black Country. The students will also learn a range of traditional boat skills such as steering, locking, bow hauling, rope work and sheeting the boats.

Through a collaboration with The Black Country Living Museum the students will also perform some voluntary work in exchange for a chance to explore the museum. They also have the opportunity to have a go at 'legging' through the limestone caverns at Dudley Canal Trust.

Peter Matthews CMG, chair of West Midlands Waterways Partnership said the Canal & River Trust was keen to support the project: "The residential course is a fantastic way of getting young people to experience what our historic waterways have to offer and what better fun is there than being out on the canal, exploring the waterways, learning new skills and making lifelong friends."

Mick Cowles, Youth Project Co-ordinator at Coombeswood Canal Trust, said "One of the most important skills the young people will learn will be working together as a team. Working together and living aboard at such close quarters means that students soon get to know one another. The course helps to ensure that traditional boat skills are passed on to the next generation. The grant from Canal & River Trust will help to support the courses for the next 12 months."

Richard Woodward, Chairman of Coombeswood Canal Trust went on to say: "To our knowledge there is no other course like it in the country. However, there are ongoing costs to running the

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project. The historic narrow boats need constant maintenance and there are always materials to buy. We are in the process of applying for ongoing funding, perhaps sponsorship from local businesses, to ensure that we can keep the project running.”

The courses are one of the cheapest DofE Gold Residential courses making it accessible to more young people. In cases of particular hardship the cost of the course can be fully covered by a bursary from Coombeswood Canal Trust.

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For further media requests please contact: Sarah Rudy, National Press Officer on 01908 302 584 / 07788 691 219 or email sarah.rudy@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Notes to editors:

To achieve the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award, candidates need to complete a 5 days and 4 nights away from home on a shared activity with people they've never met before.

The Canal & River Trust is the guardian of 2,000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales, caring for the nation's third largest collection of listed structures, as well as museums, archives, and hundreds of important wildlife sites.

We believe that *living waterways transform places and enrich lives* and our role is to make sure there is always a place on your doorstep where you can escape the pressures of everyday life, stretch your legs and simply feel closer to nature.

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