



PRESS RELEASE

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Montgomery Canal restoration dream becomes reality with launch of £4 million project

A dream to restore the Montgomery Canal, one of Britain's most picturesque canals, took a giant leap forward today (3 July) with the start of a new £4 million project. A new nature reserve is to be created next to the canal near Oswestry which, together with work along the canal itself, means boaters could soon be returning to the area for the first time in 80 years.

The work is being carried out by the Canal & River Trust, the charity that cares for the Montgomery Canal and 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales. It is being funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and supported by the Montgomery Canal Partnership.

The canal on the Shropshire/Welsh border is currently only partly navigable and is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Rare aquatic plants, including Floating Water Plantain *Luronium natans*, will soon be given a secure environment by the creation of a new three-hectare wildlife habitat within Aston Locks Nature Reserve. The site, which is expected to be complete by winter 2018, will also be home for a range of wildlife including damselflies, dragonflies, otters and water voles and attract a range of bird species.

Alongside the creation of the reserve, a further 1¼ miles of the canal, from Welshampton to Crickheath in Shropshire, will be restored to navigation. A dedicated turning point for narrowboats, known as a 'winding hole', will be created, enabling boats to return to the area for the first time since 1936 when the canal was closed. Around half of the canal is currently navigable and, with the help of Shropshire Union Canal Society volunteers, this latest major phase should be completed by 2020. The project includes access improvements to the canal and nearly five miles of towpath upgraded. A comprehensive programme of community events and activities is also underway.

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Patron: H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. Canal & River Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 7807276 and registered charity number 1146792, registered office address: First Floor North, Station House, 500 Elder Gate, Milton Keynes MK9 1BB

Known for its outstanding natural beauty, wildlife and heritage, the Montgomery Canal runs for 35 miles between England and Wales. The canal has an abundance of rare aquatic plants and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest on both sides of the border. The whole length in Wales is also recognised as a Special Area of Conservation, showing that it is one of the most important sites for wildlife in Europe.

The project is also supported with funding from Powys County Council, Shropshire Union Canal Society, Inland Waterways Association, Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust and the Friends of the Montgomery Canal.

Wendy Capelle, waterway manager at the Canal & River Trust said: “The work starting today at Aston Nature Reserves is a huge step forward in restoring this beautiful canal. It is a testament to the dedication of so many people over several years who have kept the dream alive and we’re hugely excited to see the diggers on site. The Canal & River Trust want to continue the hard work of local volunteers in bringing the canal back to life and as a charity, the support of HLF is invaluable in enabling us to do so.”

John Dodwell, chair of the Montgomery Canal Partnership comments: “I would like to thank the Heritage Lottery Fund and all the others who have contributed to making possible this stage of the restoration. This is a new step forward in the 10-year strategy to restore the Canal back to Welshpool – and then on to Newtown. The Heritage Lottery Funding award has re-invigorated the local community’s efforts to ensure further restoration of this magnificent canal.”

Vanessa Harbar, Head of HLF West Midlands said: “Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, the restoration of the Montgomery Canal will see a real boost to Shropshire’s biodiversity, its nature reserves and waterways, and the strong community partnerships that have made this scheme possible.”

The Trust will be working with the 15 partner organisations which make up the Montgomery Canal Partnership. The Partnership aims to restore the canal fully within the next decade as a haven for people and nature. This work will bring canal boats back to Crickheath for the first time in over 80 years.

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Notes to editors:

The Montgomery Canal Partnership members include; Canal and River Trust, Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust, Powys County Council, Shropshire Council, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England, Historic England, Cadw, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales, Environment Agency England, Shropshire Union Canal Society, Inland Waterways Association, Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Severn Rivers Trust.

The Partnership is working to restore the canal under the terms of the 2005 Conservation Management Strategy.

The Montgomery Canal has already been restored in England from Lower Frankton to Gronwen Bridge, near Maesbury (7 miles). In Wales, about 12 miles have been restored in the Welshpool area. So 19 of the canal's 35 miles are already fully usable. The areas to be restored are the 7.5 miles from Gronwen to Arddleean (the northern end of the navigable Welshpool section) and the 8.5 miles from Refail (the southern end of the Welshpool section) to Newtown, Powys. Unlike many other canal restoration projects, with the Montgomery canal, it is all in single ownership; water supply is secure; and all the locks have already been restored (in all cases, except for the two miles at the Newtown end)

Works covered by the £4.2m scheme will include creating extensive new nature reserves in recognition of the SSSI status of part of the canal in England; relining the canal bed to Crickheath. In Wales, the work will include restoring 12 historic structures; four areas of dredging to improve the flow of the water; towpath works and community involvement.

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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About the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

From the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife, we use National Lottery players' money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about.

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