

PRESS RELEASE

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MAJOR LEAP FORWARD FOR MONTGOMERY CANAL RESTORATION Unique project protects rare wildlife as canal restored for boats

Waterways and well-being charity, the Canal & River Trust has taken a major leap forwards this spring in the mammoth task to restore the beautiful Montgomery Canal on the Shropshire Welsh border.

Thanks to a four-year, £4 million project, boats should soon be returning to a section of the canal near Oswestry for the first time since the canal was closed due to a breach in 1936.

The Trust, which cares for the Montgomery and 2,000 miles of canals, has been working with volunteers from the Shropshire Union Canal Society and contractors to upgrade nearly five miles (8km) of towpath, restore 1¼ miles (2km) of the canal to navigation from Maesbury to Crickheath and create a dedicated turning point for narrowboats, known as a ‘winding hole’. Construction of the winding hole has just been completed and the basin is currently being filled with water, which will take about three weeks.

For the first time in a canal restoration, two nature reserve lakes have been constructed parallel to the canal channel at Aston Locks, near Queens Head, to provide a protective home for rare aquatic flora and fauna removed from the canal. Wildlife such as damselflies, dragonflies, otters, water voles, and rare aquatic plants like Floating Water Plantain *Luronium natans* are now successfully colonising their new home.

Known for its outstanding natural beauty, wildlife and heritage, the Montgomery Canal runs for 35 miles between England and Wales, but only around half of the canal is currently navigable. The Montgomery is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest on both sides of the border. The entire 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.

This latest major phase is being funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), supported by the Montgomery Canal Partnership, delivered by the Canal & River Trust and should be completed by 2020.

Canal & River Trust project manager David Hennessey explained: “The Montgomery is a very special canal and its restoration has required a unique solution. The absence of boat movements over the last 80 years has allowed the man-made channel to become colonised by a wide range of

rare flora and fauna. By creating a new three hectare wildlife habitat, we will be able to protect and conserve these species for generations to come, while enabling boats to return by excavating the main channel into a navigation again.

“Completion of the winding hole is a particular milestone as this will eventually allow boats to travel another 1¼ miles along the beautiful canal. Slowly but surely, we are achieving the major goal of connecting the mainline Montgomery down to Welshpool.”

Canal & River Trust ecologist Sara Hill added: “The reserves are a fundamental part of the restoration. Since construction finished in 2018, wildlife has moved in. We have seen an array of fish, dragonflies and rare water plants making this their home. It’s important we continue to monitor the ecology of the reserves. With help from go pro and underwater drone technology, we are starting to build a picture of how well some of the key plants are establishing.”

The Canal & River Trust works with 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.

Montgomery Canal Partnership chair John Dodwell said: "This is a great step forward and will mean 60% of this historic, lovely canal has been restored. We look forward to more support from the public - both by volunteers and by donations - to enable us to make further progress. Details can be found by visiting www.restorethemontgomerycanal.uk."

For more information about visiting your local canal, the Montgomery Canal restoration or becoming a Friend of the Canal & River Trust, please go to www.canalrivertrust.org.uk.
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Notes to Editors:

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people’s lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

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 Arddleen (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). A restoration fund has been established and is currently focussed on raising £300k to rebuild Schoolhouse Bridge, the last lowered bridge in England. Donations can be made by visiting www.restorethemontgomerycanal.uk.

Works covered by the £4m scheme 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.