

PRESS RELEASE

Issued: 21 April 2020

CALLING ALL ARMCHAIR ADVENTURERS – BIN THE BOX SETS AND PLAN THE NEXT ‘MUST DO’ CHALLENGE – ENGLAND’S FIRST COAST TO COAST CANOE TRAIL

Coronavirus confinement at home may be frustrating, particularly for active people who are used to racing around outdoors and don't have patience for streaming endless TV box sets.

Canals and towpaths are largely off limits at the moment but bin the boredom, the Canal & River Trust charity invites you to plan your escape for when the lockdown is lifted. Close your eyes and imagine paddling through Lancashire and Yorkshire's wild upland waterway landscape, smelling the fresh Pennine country air and listening to skylarks.

Become an armchair traveller and prepare for your next big adventure along England's first Coast to Coast Canoe Trail – a fantastic, varied 162-mile waterway route across northern England which offers a new challenge to kayakers and paddleboarders – as well as canoeists.

This spring marks the end of a five year youth engagement project, funded by a £1.3 million grant from the Desmond Foundation and run by the Canal & River Trust, which cares for 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales. Over the last few years, new canoe access points have been created, signage installed and trail maps printed – all that is needed now is an adventurous spirit.

The trail stretches from Liverpool in the West to Goole on the Humber estuary. In partnership with British Canoeing, two new detailed trail leaflets have been produced for would-be canoeists, kayakers and paddleboarders, giving top tips on how to negotiate the route, which follows the 127-mile Leeds & Liverpool Canal, Britain's longest single canal, and 35 miles along the Aire & Calder Navigation through Yorkshire. The first covers the western side - Liverpool's Eldonian Village to Reedley Marina near Burnley, and the second maps out the eastern side from Burnley to Goole, dividing the route into a series of shorter day trips.

This new grand waterway adventure is not for the faint-hearted. It involves carrying canoes around 91 locks, including the 21-lock Wigan flight and Bingley's famous Five Rise Staircase, and paddling under the summit of the Pennine hills through a mile-long tunnel at Foulridge.

TV presenter Andy Torbet, 43, a professional diver, adventurer and former Army paratrooper, was the first person to complete the entire route for a three part series on the BBC One Show in July 2016. The trail took him five and half long days of paddling but he loved the experience.

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“This journey is special because you get to see a vast array of the country hidden to most. From the ‘secret’ route through the heart of Liverpool, behind the buildings and business of the city centre, to the open hills fields of Northern England,” he said.

“You pass by historical sites of the industrial revolution as well as kingfishers and herons. It also gives you an appreciation for the friendliness and community that exists along our canal networks. And of course there is the great satisfaction of crossing England using a path less travelled and only yourself for power.”

Last summer Jo Moseley, 55, followed in his footsteps and became the first woman paddleboarder to complete the challenge, raising £1,000 for charity in the process. She used the journey to highlight the problem of damaging plastics on our waterways, collecting rubbish trapped in locks and reed beds as she paddled along.

She said: “I will always cherish the 11 days I spent stand up paddleboarding 162 miles coast to coast last summer. The beauty of the birdlife, history and community of people I met along the canal were a joy and lifted my soul. Being immersed in nature, I felt physically, mentally and emotionally nourished - if a little tired by the end! A magical discovery on our doorstep I’m so grateful for and very keen to share with other people.

“Part of my challenge was to pick up plastic and raise awareness of the single use plastic pollution in our canals and what we can all do to make a difference. I saw some heart-breaking sights, especially the impact on the bird life. Some areas were worse than others and I have been back to pick up litter since. I am a huge supporter of the Canal & River Trust’s Plastics Challenge. The coast to coast trail is so beautiful and rich with wildlife & history, making a very positive contribution to our mental & physical wellbeing - it is important to care for it.”

A significant part of the Desmond Foundation project involved hundreds of young people finding new ways to engage with their local communities, growing in confidence as they acquired environmental and waterway skills, and working on their neighbourhood canal.

Richard Parry, Canal & River Trust CEO, added: “The amazing legacy from this brilliant project is the Coast to Coast Canoe Trail, every bit as challenging and engaging as Alfred Wainwright’s famous Coast to Coast Walking Trail. Of course, paddlers can do just as little or as much as they wish along the 162-mile route, but we are certain this new cross-country waterway trail is set to capture the imagination of every canoeist, kayaker and paddleboarder with a taste for adventure.

“Navigation along our canals is currently off limits but hopefully we can all resume our enjoyment of them soon – and while most of us are supporting the national effort to fight the pandemic by staying at home, it’s a perfect time to plan the next ‘big adventure’ along this unique, inspirational trail.”

Pick up the Desmond Family Canoe Trail leaflets at venues across the route or to download maps go to <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/the-desmond-family-canoe-trail>

During the coronavirus lockdown, the Canal & River Trust is urging people to follow government guidance to stay at home. If people have to venture out for essential journeys, please remember that use of local canal towpaths should be strictly limited, and people should keep their distance from others and moored boats. Canals play an important role in urban areas – providing vital green space

– however towpaths should be strictly for local use only during the coronavirus pandemic. People must follow social distancing measures at all times.

ENDS

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.

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