

Restoring the Wey & Arun Canal



Some questions and answers



www.weyandarun.co.uk

An inland route by water exists between the Thames and the South Coast - sometimes called “London’s Lost Route to the Sea”.

The aim of the Wey & Arun Canal Trust is to restore that route, which would rate among the most scenic waterways in England. Today the southernmost point of the canal system is at Godalming, but we plan to take it south to Pallingham, near Pulborough, West Sussex. The canal will then join the River Arun and give access to the English Channel at Littlehampton.

Below are some questions and answers on the restoration of the Wey & Arun Canal

Q1. What work has been done so far?

A. Over half the 23-mile length has been worked on. Over a third has been cleared. 10 locks rebuilt and one added, and 23 bridges restored or constructed. Two aqueducts have been completely rebuilt, while many culverts have been replaced and breaches repaired.

Q2. Is any of the canal open for use?

A. The Trust’s trip boats operate regularly on the Loxwood section. Some restored sections are still isolated from each other but the benefits of restoration are appreciated by both visitors and wildlife.

Q3. Will the canal ever be finished?

A. Certainly. Much effort by volunteers has contributed to the progress so far. Contractors are employed for some of the major projects.

Q4. What is the point of restoring an old canal?

A. For various reasons: landscape beauty and a haven for wildlife, an area where people can enjoy tranquillity whether by boating, walking, riding, fishing or just standing and watching.



Brewhurst Lock, Loxwood, before restoration



The Trust's trip boat, Zachariah Keppel, in the restored Brewhurst Lock in 2007.

Q5. What is the history of the canal?

A. The canal was built in two stages. The Arun Navigation (4½ miles) was completed in 1787 from the River Arun at Pallingham, near Pulborough, to Newbridge, between Billingshurst and Wisborough Green. The Wey & Arun Junction Canal (18½ miles) was built in 1813-16 to link Newbridge to Shalford on the River Wey just south of Guildford. The capital was put up by local landowners seeking access to London markets for their produce. The canal's heyday was in the late 1830s but railway competition started in the 1860s and by 1871 the Junction Canal had been abandoned, being followed by the Arun Navigation in 1896.

Q6. Who owns the canal now?

A. After the canal was abandoned its ownership largely passed to the adjoining landowners. Today over fifty owners have a holding between Pallingham and Birtley (just south of Bramley, Surrey). Some own a mile or so of the waterway while others have as little as 100 yards. The Canal Trust owns some parts and leases many others from the landowners.

Q7. Why did you start in the middle, rather than at one end?

A. We work only in areas where we have the consent and support of the landowner(s). We take opportunities where and when they arise in order to show a Trust presence over the whole line of the canal. This demonstrates the benefits of restoration to the greatest number of people. The pieces of the jigsaw gradually fit together.



Loxwood New Lock under construction in 2006. The new lock is part of the ambitious project to restore the canal crossing under the main road in Loxwood.

Q8. Can the whole length of the canal be restored?

A. Yes. The generally remote rural land of low agricultural value has ensured that the canal line has remained largely intact. The Trust aims to reopen all 23 miles.

Q9. How do you know that restoration is possible?

A. An engineering and environment survey was commissioned in 1992 from Halcrow who are leading consultants in this field. In 2006, the consultants Atkins produced a Completion Strategy Report. These professional reports show clearly that full restoration is feasible and affordable and that a restored canal will deliver huge benefits over a wide region.

Q10. What about houses that have been built on the old line of the canal?

A. Most of the canal runs through open countryside but in the Bramley area the line of the canal runs through the gardens of houses. The Halcrow study looked at this problem and proposed alternative routes for the canal. These will form the subject of negotiations before a definite proposal is put forward.

Q11. Will wildlife suffer from the restoration work?

A. Some restoration can be disruptive, but only temporarily, and within a short time the benefits to wildlife are to be seen. More species come in as improved habitats are made and as the water space increases. The Trust surveys sites in advance of restoration.

Q12. What are the major problems facing complete restoration?

A. Landowner consent, water supply and, inevitably, money.

Q13. What about road bridges?

A. We have built one and we hope that the Loxwood bridge/tunnel will be finished in 2007. Each one presents different problems in providing clearance for canal boats.

Ultimately, bridges are the responsibility of the local highway authorities. The Hal-crow study shows detailed plans for all of them.

Q14. Is the route protected from development?



The road bridge at Drungewick Lane, built by the Canal Trust in 2002

A. West Sussex and Surrey County Councils have established a voluntary landowner register which requests that no action be taken or planned that would create further obstacles to restoration.

Q15. How many members do you have?

A. Over 2,300 and rising!

Q16. What about water supply for the canal?

A. The canal originally had a main reservoir in Vachery Pond (south-west of Cranleigh). Another was planned, but never built. We are installing back-pumps to return water from below each lock to the pound above it every time a boat has passed through, although in the nineteenth century only two locks enjoyed this advantage thanks to windmills.

Q17. Are all your people volunteers?

A. Almost all: the Trust has three paid employees - the part-time Office Managers who share the job. A number of retired and semi-retired members are able to give a lot of their time to the Trust's work. Nonetheless, many of our members have full-time work and this limits what they can do as canal volunteers. We are always on the lookout for more volunteers to help with the canal restoration project - from office work to practical construction work.

Q18. Why don't you use more contractors?

A. Mainly, money. We do use contractors for the larger construction tasks, such as the Drungewick Lane Canal Bridge and Aqueduct, where the work of volunteers,

necessarily spread over many months, would not be appropriate. We assess each job to see whether it should be done by volunteers or by contractors. The even larger and more difficult engineering operation to take the canal under the main B2133 road is currently in progress and will cost an estimated £1.2million – this has involved lowering almost ¼ mile of the canal's bed by some six feet.

Q19. What are your priorities?

A. The Trust is undertaking increasingly ambitious restoration projects and the independent consultants, Atkins, have produced a Canal Completion Strategy which is being considered by the Trust for implementation as and when possible. The Completion Strategy identifies a restored link to the national waterways system as a priority for the next few years. In parallel, the Trust will build on its achievements so far, for example by extending the navigable section at Loxwood.

Q20. How will you pay for this work?

A. Mainly generous donations from our members. We also seek grants from national and local sources. We run a public trip boat during the summer on Saturday and Sunday afternoons and also organise a number of fundraising events during the year.



Canal Trust volunteers laying a new hedge in the Loxwood area. The materials come from woodland leased by the Trust

Q21. What is your policy on nature conservation?

A. The Trust is a member of both the Sussex and Surrey Wildlife Trusts. With these links, the Trust, through its Conservation Officer, receives advice and guidance.

Q22. Is it possible to walk beside the canal for the whole length?

A. Not all of it but there are long sections where there is a public right-of-way along the towpath. The Wey-South Path, which follows the canal as closely as public rights of way permit, is shown on Ordnance Survey Explorer maps, Nos. 121, 134 and 145.

However, much of the canal is on private land which is not open to the public and we urge people not to jeopardise the Trust's relations with the landowners concerned by trespassing.

Q23. Do you have a trip boat?

A. The Trust has a 30 seat narrowboat, the "ZACHARIAH KEPPEL" and a 12 seat boat "JOHN SMALLPEICE", which are regularly used to give people an experience of cruising on the restored section near Loxwood. Both can be booked for private trips and parties. A new longer boat to take 45 passengers will be available shortly.



*The Trust's
12-seater trip
boat, the John
Smallpeice*

Q24. How do you keep your members informed?

A. Our quarterly magazine "Wey-South" is sent to all members and there is the opportunity to receive an electronic mailing from the secretary every month. This gives up-to-date information and news about the Trust. Active working party members also receive a monthly newsletter to keep them up-to-date.

Q25. How can I help?

A. By joining as a member. Gift Aid your subscription to increase its value to us by 25% without any additional cost to yourself. Please pick up a membership form or download one from our website www.weyandarun.co.uk.

Q26. How can I find out more?

If you would like to find out more, we recommend "London's Lost Route to the Sea" by P.A.L. Vine which gives the history of the Wey & Arun Canal and is available by mail order for just £11. The latest edition of our walk guide "Wey-South Path", link-

ing the North Downs Way and the South Downs Way, gives the opportunity of walking some 11 miles of the former canal towpath and is also available from the address below for £3.50 inclusive.



The flood gates at Lordings, south of Billingshurst, accessible via the Wey-South Path

All the Trust's publications and other goods can be ordered by post from:

W & A Enterprises Limited
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Please make cheques payable to "W&A Enterprises".

Q27. What if I still have questions?

The Trust's office is happy to answer general enquiries about the work of the Trust - their contact details are below.

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