

AINA CASE STUDY

HEALTH, WELL-BEING, RECREATION AND SPORT

Kennet and Avon Canal: a newly restored towpath



The towpath now forms an increasingly popular route for a safe range of outdoor activities

The Kennet and Avon Canal runs for 140 kilometres from Bath to Reading. Closed to navigation in 1955, it has been restored through partnership effort and major fundraising work. Attractions along its route include the World Heritage City of Bath, the North Wessex Downs and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the famous Dundas and Avoncliff aqueducts and a range of visitor and heritage sites. Cycle, canoe and boat hire is available and the towpath, restored as part of the restoration programme, is now extremely popular leisure destination.

Sections of towpath have been rebuilt to cycleway standard with much of the canal forming part of the National Cycle Network. Surfacing work has also facilitated access for the less mobile and a traffic free extension is provided by the 25 kilometre Bristol to Bath Railway Path.

A Kennet and Avon public transport map has been prepared to identify those parts of the wider canal corridor route on traffic free roads and lanes, and this also identifies links to bus and train services (including distance from the canal to stations). 'Wigglywalks' have been promoted as circular walking routes centred on the canal, and for a couple of summers a flexible minibus service operated at weekends to enable people to plan linear walks with the guarantee of a safe return to their start.

Literature promoting the canal specifically addresses potential user conflicts through the provision of guidance to cyclists, but horse riding is not permitted on the towpath. The British Waterways Code of Conduct states: "While all waterway users are welcome, it's important that cyclists exercise caution around the canals. Please ensure your bike has a bell and that you use it to warn others of your approach. Remember, ring twice, pass slowly, be nice!"

The success of the Kennet and Avon's towpath is clearly demonstrated by its popularity as one of the most popular cycling routes in Britain. The canal cycle route is now Britain's most popular long-distance waterside cycle journey. Other activities, spread along the route, include jogging, bird watching, angling and leisure activities such as painting and sketching.