

AINA CASE STUDY

HEALTH, WELL BEING, RECREATION AND SPORT

Great Glen Canoe Trail



A £600,000 project welcomes canoes and kayaks onto the Caledonian Canal

The Caledonian Canal brought life and trade to the Great Glen and today it continues to offer a range of opportunities for both locals and visitors. Outdoor enthusiasts can cross Scotland - coast to coast – by following the canal through 60 miles of dramatic scenery on foot, by boat, by bike and now by canoe.

The Great Glen Canoe Trail was formally launched in March 2012 and was planned from 2009 after it had been recognised that the numbers of canoe and kayak paddlers were increasing year on year. Approximately 4,000 people had taken to the water in 2010 and it was known that numbers would continue to rise.

Following a successful Caledonian Canal interpretation project in 2007, a number of public bodies turned its attention to developing recreational routes through the Great Glen, and Forestry Commission Scotland had already commissioned a small report looking at the increase of recreational paddling. In 2008, the Great Glen Ways Partnership commissioned a second report to be completed to identify the suitability and demand for a canoe trail and in 2009 the Scottish Canoe Association were invited to join the project.

The four main funding partners were able to raise £331,800 (British Waterways Scotland £150,000, Highland Council £100,000, Scottish Natural Heritage £71,800 and Forestry Commission Scotland £10,000) with £270,000 being match funded by the European Regional Development Fund. This created a working budget of £600,000, which aimed to improve information and facilities along the route, provide appropriate low-level landings to protect canal banks from erosion, establish initial provision for camping and overnight stays and offer essential safety advice.

Facilities for paddlers now include a website and DVD, a guidebook, a trail map, orientation panels, low-level pontoons and a network of informal campsites. Further improvements and investment are now planned over the coming years.

The Great Glen Canoe Trail was one of only three finalists in the Best Nature Experience category at the 2012 Highland and Island Tourism Awards and shows how a canal can be a catalyst for outdoor recreation that attracts new visitors and supports local economies. Its immediate success led to it becoming the first water route within a nationally-promoted brand known as Scotland's Great Trails.