



The Basingstoke Canal is declared by many to be Britain's most beautiful waterway. From the rolling North Hampshire Hills to the dramatic flights of locks in Surrey, the tree-lined canal offers a variety of delights. A surprise can be found around every corner, ranging from 200 year old bridges and locks to traditionally painted narrow boats, providing a unique attraction for all.

The Canal today is an attractive leisure amenity and has 32 miles of towpath available for walking, fishing and cycling while boaters and canoeists can enjoy the timeless pleasures of this still largely rural waterway.

The canal is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), teeming with wildlife. It has a huge variety of damselflies and dragonflies and has more types of aquatic plant than any other water body in Britain! The Greywell Tunnel, West of Odiham, is Britain's largest bat hibernation site.

Originally completed in 1794, the canal was never a great commercial success for its owners. However it brought significant improvements for local people, industry and agriculture. The cheap transportation of manure from London and chalk from Basingstoke opened up the local area for agriculture. The price of coal in Alton reduced by 50% after the canal opened. There were some "boom periods" for the owners, particularly during the construction of the army camp at Aldershot in the 1860's.

The collapse of the Greywell Tunnel in 1934 effectively closed the link to Basingstoke although continued problems with water shortages had meant it was not really a viable journey since the start of the 20th century. Nevertheless, limited trade continued on the canal right through the second world war, especially to bring coal and timber to Woking from the Thames.

The Canal had fallen into dereliction by the 1960's and was inaccessible in many places. The determined efforts of local volunteers from the Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society led to the eventual purchase of the canal by Hampshire and Surrey County Councils in 1974. Restoration work then started in earnest.

The Canal was restored over the next 17 years. Following thousands of days of work from local volunteers, County Council canal staff and contractors, it was formally reopened in May 1991 by HRH the Duke of Kent.

The Basingstoke Canal Authority (BCA) now manages the canal on behalf of Hampshire and Surrey County Councils. The BCA answers to a Joint Management Committee made up of the two County Councils, six canal side Borough and District Councils, the Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society and English Nature.

The BCA's brief is to manage and develop the canal as a recreational and leisure amenity whilst recognising its position as a waterway of outstanding nature conservation importance. Continued maintenance is crucial to this and tasks such as dredging, lock gate replacement and repair, towpath improvements, weed cutting, tree control and conservation measures are carried out by Canal Rangers.

The Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society organises regular volunteer work parties on the canal. Many other voluntary groups operate to create opportunities for canoeing, boating, fishing, rambling etc. along the canal. Boat trips are available from several locations—you can even book a holiday afloat!

If you want to find out more about the canal, or discover it for yourself, the best place to start is at the Basingstoke Canal Visitor Centre at Mytchett, which is on the Surrey and Hampshire border. Here you will find out about boat trips, fishing, places of interest, canal history and contacts for the many local recreation clubs and organisations involved in making this magnificent facility accessible and enjoyable for everyone.

For more information call Basingstoke Canal Authority at the Canal Centre on 01252 370073