

Wendover Canal - an Introduction



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Restoration

Biodiversity

Well-being



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Doggedness and determination are the hallmarks of the restoration of the Wendover canal, conducted over the last quarter of a century by teams of hard-working volunteers - with the vision of creating an environmentally friendly leisure area close to rapidly expanding urban developments.



*It's not always sunshine and flowers!
Bridge 4, Whitehouses*

The story of the canal goes back nearly 230 years to a time when inland waterways formed vital links between communities and industries with boats towed by horses carrying raw materials, goods to suppliers, as well as luggage and post.

The UK was the first country to develop a nationwide canal network which at one



*Getting away from it all –
near the winding hole*

point was nearly 4,000 miles in length. One of the most important of those canals is the Grand Union Canal, linking London to the Midlands. It was this canal that prompted the construction of the Wendover Canal to provide spring water to the Tring summit to keep the locks supplied.

The canal, which starts in Wendover, is in fact a rare chalk stream. It runs for nearly seven miles (11km) through the villages of Halton, Weston Turville, Buckland, Drayton Beauchamp and Little Tring, joining the Grand Union Canal at Bulbourne Junction near Tring.

It opened first in 1797 and was successful for more than 100 hundred years but finally closed for navigation in 1904 because of constant problems with leakage

- although water continues to be supplied to the Grand Union Canal's summit level via an underground 100-year-old pipe.



*Restoring – slowly but surely...
between Bridge 4 and Little Tring*

Interest in restoring the canal did not ignite until the 1980's when the Wendover Arm Trust (WAT) was established. The canal was overgrown with hawthorn scrub and by 1990 work was under way to clear it,

which increases biodiversity as well as allowing restoration.



Modern methods to rebuild a traditional canal –Wilstone Reservoir in the distance

Construction started in 1997, and more than 200 volunteers became engaged in restoring the canal, contributing more than 100,000 hours to-date.

The canal borders Wendover Woods – a major leisure destination – skirts the Chiltern Hills, and is in the Chilterns Area

of Outstanding Natural Beauty. So when the Wendover Canal Trust (WCT) became the operating arm of WAT, as well as the fundamental goal of restoring the canal to a fully functioning waterway, there were two other aims. The first of these was to create a major area for leisure, relaxation, health & well-being for all; and the second to improve the environment and increase biodiversity.



A haven for wildlife - through the reeds

The canal is ideal for walkers, joggers, bike riders, birdwatchers, butterfly spotters, anglers, foragers and picnickers. It is near Tring Natural History Museum and its towpath is on the route of both the Aylesbury Ring and Aylesbury Outer Ring paths. It also overlooks the nearby Wilstone reservoir.

The biodiversity of the Wendover Canal continues to be significantly improved by the WCT's restoration. There's a great variety of wildlife and a 'green corridor' leads from Wendover all the way to Bulbourne. Our volunteers have also undertaken much landscaping and planting to provide a 'pocket park' for general community benefit, including the planting of 1,500 trees and 1,000 daffodil bulbs and the sowing of wildflowers.



Applying learned skills – building the bank wall near Bridge 4

In total the canal is close to four canal reservoirs near Tring which have a variety of wildlife, and hundreds of trees have been planted by WCT in the vicinity of the canal with the assistance of the Woodland Trust. The hedgerows have been improved and steps are continually taken to improve the wildlife habitat.

Heritage is also a key element of this long-

term project. Britain's industrial past figures prominently with examples including the water flow gauge at Wendover, which has been recording water flows since 1844, the longest period of continuous use in the country; Whitehouse's pumping station built in 1802; Little Tring Bridge, rebuilt in 2001; Tringford Pumping Station, a grade II listed building dating from 1817; the Flour Mill at Gannel Bridge; and the site of Bushell Brothers' Boatyard.

The hard graft undertaken by dedicated volunteers to bring the canal to life and eventually open it up to all has been divided into three phases: in the first phase the Grand Union Canal in Bulbourne to Little Tring now has full navigation for narrowboats following restoration work and the complete rebuilding of the bridge



*The beautiful, fully restored
Little Tring Bridge*

at Little Tring - using WCT's funds alone at a cost of £240,000.

The second phase, from Little Tring to Buckland Wharf, is currently underway. The stretch used to be almost impassable and is now being transformed into a watertight navigable canal with extensive biodiversity. Significantly, the entire seven



Whitehouses - mid reconstruction

mile (11km) length of the canal's towpath will be made continuous in this phase for the first time in over 100 years. The water level will also be raised between Buckland and Wendover, enabling use by smaller craft such as rowing boats, canoes, kayaks, paddleboards and trail boats.

In the year to mid-2022, an average of 720 volunteer hours per month were

worked by 58 volunteers. Around 71,000 concrete blocks were laid in such a way that they will be below the water level, and roughly 35,000 cubic metres of soil have been taken from the canal bed from Drayton Beauchamp to where the canal currently ends.

The upgrade of the towpath, which in many places is often muddy and



*Upgraded
towpath on
the
Aylesbury
Canal*

dangerous, is meanwhile progressing through the improvement of the entire stretch within Wendover Parish to the high standard now enjoyed by many on the Aylesbury Canal. The towpaths of both canals make up 80% of Buckinghamshire Council's visionary Grand Union Canal Triangle, which will benefit from further upgrades on the Aylesbury Canal. The initial aim on the Wendover Canal is to have a continuous upgraded towpath between Wendover and Halton, which will enable year-round use for walkers, runners, cyclists and those whose mobility is impaired.

With the help of donations, grants, and legacies, along with the sterling efforts of the restoration volunteers a further step in the canal's restoration will be completed



*A well-earned rest! –
One of several benches at Whitehouses*

by 2030. In the third phase, when the canal is restored via dredging to sufficient navigable depth and three bridges have been raised, narrowboats will be able to reach Wendover. So, there's much to be done but once this marathon project is completed, the rewards for all will be rich.

Look for 'memorial seat' under 'support us' on wendovercanal.org.uk to learn how to sponsor your own bench.



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Further information on WCT's website
at:

<https://wendovercanal.org.uk>

[/about-us/history-of-our-canal/](https://wendovercanal.org.uk/about-us/history-of-our-canal/)

[/about-us/our-restoration-so-far/](https://wendovercanal.org.uk/about-us/our-restoration-so-far/)

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