

Caledonian Canal: innovative education work



Children listen to an educational interpreter next to the Caledonian Canal

Waterway pilot project links to a new Curriculum for Excellence programme

Schoolchildren from primary schools at the northern end of the Caledonian Canal have been encouraged to appreciate their local waterway. Muirtown Basin in Inverness hosted the first event in the 'Discover the Caledonian Canal' pilot led by British Waterways Scotland and The Waterways Trust. Three volunteers trained by the Trust were also able to assist.

The programme encourages schools within walking distance of the canal to use the Scheduled Ancient Monument both as a resource for learning and as an attractive open 'classroom' space. The work also helps schoolchildren engage with the wider outdoor landscape.

The pilot project is targeted at upper classes in the participating primary schools and the first schoolchildren (aged between nine and eleven) met a storyteller in period costume and took part in a variety of activities to help bring the canal to life. Topics included water safety, historic timelines and four challenges linked to the external John Muir Discovery Award: discover a wild place; explore wildness; conserve wildness and share your experiences.

The programme complements targets in the Curriculum for Excellence programme linked to health and well-being, technologies and sciences. It also supports Eco-schools projects, and the partners hope that their work will encourage teachers to include the canal towpaths in their important Active School Travel Plans. Schools will be encouraged to take advantage of their local stretch of canal as a space to explore and use as an outdoor classroom and have been given access to 'the Great Caledonian Canal Brainstorm Kit' for in-school learning. Future activities might include mini-beast hunts, planting flower boxes, towpath tidy work and wildlife surveys.

British Waterways Scotland describe the schemes as: "an exciting educational resource which will strengthen links between local schools and the Caledonian Canal on their doorstep. We believe that, by bringing the canal to life through education in innovative and curriculum-linked ways like this, we can also help encourage a life-long sense of 'ownership', interest and enjoyment of the waterway which is such a fantastic local amenity."