

AINA CASE STUDY

FAIRER, STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Canal College



Canal towpaths provide important links in a new long distance path

Scotland's longest walking route, the 470-mile *Gore-Tex Scottish National Trail*, was officially opened by the First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond MSP, on October 30, 2012. The trail forms Scotland's first ever end-to-end walking route from Kirk Yetholm in the Scottish Borders (the northern terminus of the Pennine Way) to Cape Wrath, the most north-western point on the British mainland. It weaves through beautiful and rugged landscapes but also makes use of canal towpaths in the Central Belt and the Great Glen.

From Edinburgh, where the route makes use of the Water of Leith walk, the trail follows the Union and Forth & Clyde Canals westwards to Milngavie, via the Falkirk Wheel, Ratho, Polmont and Kirkintilloch. This is referred to as the Canals Section and covers 51 miles and a shorter length makes use of the Great Glen Way on the Caledonian Canal towpath, south from Fort Augustus, before heading into the West Highlands.

The route is not formally signposted but a guidebook is available and the towpaths form well maintained routes between the wilder lengths. For the first time many of Scotland's existing footpaths are linked into a longer length-of-the-nation route including a number of local 'core paths' as part of legal access networks around towns and villages. Outdoors writer and promoter of the project Cameron McNeish says "Scotland is now very well served by an astonishing array of good walking routes so it seems the right time to develop a long distance walk that links them together to run the entire length of the country".

The trail shows how canal towpaths can be incorporated into local, regional and national routes, with links to nearby communities and resultant social and economic benefits. Commercial sponsorship has also assisted in the initial promotional work.