

Introduction

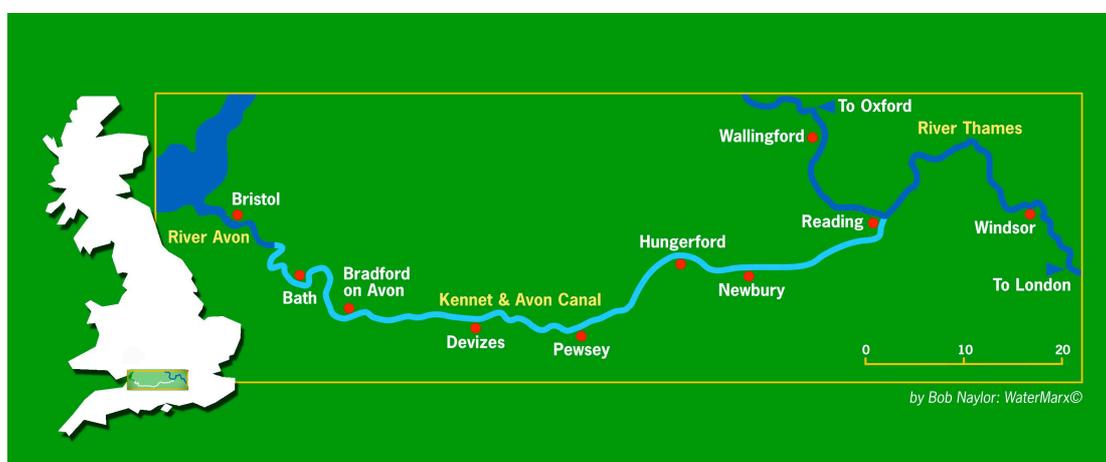
The Kennet & Avon Canal is 87 miles (140 km) long and has 104 locks, four aqueducts and one tunnel. It cuts across the country, running eastwards from Bristol, linking the Bristol Channel to the River Thames at Reading.

Part river, part canalised river and part man-made cutting, the navigation passes through scenery that changes constantly. Peaceful rural landscapes flow into rural market towns and the man-made canal joins the River Avon at the World Heritage city of Bath.

The K&A has the second deepest lock in England, Lock 9 at Bath, which is 19ft 5ins (6 meters) deep. Other attractions on the canal include two restored pumping stations at Crofton and Claverton, the aqueducts at Avoncliff and Dundas, a tunnel on the summit pound and a delightful cutting through Sydney Gardens in the historic city of Bath. A spectacular flight of 29 locks at Devizes raises the canal almost 240 ft in 2 miles with the central 16 locks forming the Caen Hill Flight where the canal climbs 130ft 8 inches (40m) in 0.62 mile (1km) with iconic side pounds storing essential water for the locks.

With only a very few exceptions, commercial traffic is now a dim memory but the canal remains vibrant in many other ways. Heritage and feats of engineering lie side by side with nature to create a leisure opportunity for everyone to enjoy. Activities along the waterway include boating, angling, cycling and walking, discovering the wealth of industrial heritage or simply watching the wildlife along the towpath or in the 14 SSSIs along the canal corridor.

The canal was saved from being abandoned by the efforts of volunteers in the 60s, 70s and 80s. And today, paid navigation authority (The canal and River Trust) staff and contractors work side by side with a new generation of volunteers. Lock keepers are employed on the lock flights, but boaters work through the locks themselves although volunteer lock keepers may be around to help. Other volunteers help maintain the natural environment, greet visitors, raise funds and encourage the engagement of people of all ages.



The Kennet & Avon Canal Trust

In response to the dereliction of the canal a group of enthusiasts formed an association to fight what many thought was the inevitable. After an abortive attempt in 1948, the Kennet and Avon Canal Association was formed in 1951 and in 1956 they successfully petitioned against closure of the canal. The Kennet & Avon Canal Trust was formed in 1962. Volunteers and members of the Trust started the enormous task of clearing and restoring the canal.

In 1963, the newly formed British Waterways Board took over responsibility for the canal and restoration was started with the help of the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust and riparian local authorities. The first phase of this restoration ended in August 1990 when HM the Queen declared the 87-mile canal reopened to navigation. But further improvements, both structurally and to the water supply, were still required.

With water supply a major obstacle to full operation on the canal, the Trust set up an appeal to raise £1 million to fund back-pumping schemes to recycle water at locks. Its successful achievement in only three years culminated on 1 August 1996 with the commissioning of the pumps at the famous flight of 29 locks at Devizes. Capable of lifting 300,000 gallons of water every hour to a height of 235 feet, the Caen Hill back pumps mean that the flight can now remain open to boats every day. But there was still more to be achieved. In 1995, a partnership of local authorities, The Kennet and Avon Trust, The Association of Canal Enterprises and British Waterways made a successful grant application to The Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant of £25 million towards a project of £29.4 million.

In May 2003 the completed restoration was celebrated by a visit from HRH Prince Charles. And in 2011, DEFRA finally designated the Kennet & Avon Canal as a 'cruiseway' waterway, imposing a legal requirement on the navigation authority to maintain the canal in a state necessary for safe navigation along the entire length of the waterway.

Today, the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust manages the iconic steam pumping station at Crofton and promotes understanding of the canal through its museum, archive and education service and trip boats.

Canal and River Trust (CRT)

The Canal & River Trust took over responsibility as the navigation authority for all the canals in the UK on 2 July 2012 replacing British Waterways, which was a government organization financed through DEFRA (the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs). As a charity, CRT continues to receive grant funding from the government but can also attract donations and charitable income to add to money received from boat licences, marinas, property, investment, water sales and income from utility companies who use the towpaths. The total budget for 2015 was £190 million.

Since becoming a charity the navigation authority has taken a broader approach to its responsibilities, not only maintaining and managing the waterways and their structures but recognizing the economic and social environmental contribution that the waterways make, encouraging an increasing number of people to engage with the canals around them. CRT is working with local communities, social enterprises and businesses to revitalize canal-side locations, creating attractive vibrant places where people want to live and work. Last year a growing force of volunteers - individuals and various diverse groups of people - gave almost 500,000 hours of volunteering time to CRT. Local Waterway Partnerships have been set up to allow local people and key stakeholders to work with local CRT staff to influence how the canals and rivers in their area are used and managed.

The K&A Canal – a time line

1712 Bath Corporation's plan to make the River Avon navigable from Bristol to Bath was approved by parliament but the project shelved because of strong opposition.

1715 An Act of Parliament was passed to make the River Kennet navigable from Reading to Newbury.

1723 The River Kennet Navigation Canal was opened.

1724 Work started to make the River Avon navigable between Hanham Mills near Bristol and Bath.

1727 The River Avon Navigation from Hanham Mills, Bristol to Bath was opened. Stone was transported on a wooden railway from local mines to the waterway for transport to Bristol and beyond. Barges were hauled by men.

1794 An Act of Parliament was passed to build a canal to join the River Kennet Navigation at Newbury with the River Avon at Bath.

1795 An Act of Parliament was passed to create a narrow canal (The Wilts and Berks) from Semington on the K&A to the River Thames at Abingdon.

1796 The Kennet and Avon Canal Co gained control of the River Avon Navigation.

1799 The first part of the K&A Canal route was opened from Newbury to Hungerford. All new work on the canal was suspended except for a horse railway at Caen Hill.

1801 A new Act of Parliament allowed work on the K&A to continue.

1802 The Somersetshire Coal Canal made a junction onto the K&A at Dundas. Work started on the floating harbour in Bristol.

1805 The K&A Canal Company was forced to seek yet another Act of Parliament to allow them to raise another £150,000.

1810 The K&A was finally opened on 28 December with the first boat to climb the Caen Hill Flight of locks carrying coal from the Somerset coalfields.

1812 The K&A Canal Company bought the River Kennet Navigation.

1813 K&A Canal Company shareholders were paid their first dividend.

1833 A wrought iron boat from Scotland “The Swallow” was introduced to carry about 40 passengers each way between Bath and Bradford on Avon in less than 90 minutes. Soon it was making two trips a day with 1st and 2nd class accommodation in its long cabin. It was horse drawn.

1840 Traffic and trade reached a peak with toll receipts totaling £51,000/year.

1841 The Great Western Railway (GWR) provided a rail link between Bristol and London – trade was transferred from canal to rail.

1848 The canal began to cut wages so they could afford to cut tolls in an attempt to fight off opposition from the railway, but things only got worse.

1852 GWR bought the canal and imposed a 4mph speed limit, making it even less competitive.

1876 The canal made its last profit after years of declining trade.

1900 The last cargo was carried from London to Bristol but local traffic continued.

1921 Commercial navigation ended when the last canal carrier, William Dickenson retired. The last cargo was timber from Bristol to the wharf at Honeystreet for boat builders Robbins, Lane and Pinnegar.

1924 GWR tried to close the K&A Canal but there was opposition.

1946 The Inland Waterways Association was founded.

1948 The railways were nationalised and ownership of the canals fell into the hands of the Government. Over the next five years the route was left to rot until it fell into complete dereliction.

1950 The Docks and Inland Waterways Executive closed the K&A until further notice.

1951 The K&A Canal Association was formed to try to prevent further deterioration and closure.

1954 Most of the water had drained away, lock gates had fallen off and the British Transport Commission proposed to officially close the canal

1956 The K&A Canal Association collected 20,000 signatures of support for the canal and presented the petition to the Queen.

1958 A new report by the Bowes Committee rescued the canal by saying that although it didn't think its status should be changed, the canal should be considered for redevelopment.

1962 The K&A Canal Association pushed the Inland Waterways Redevelopment Advisory Committee into agreeing that the canal should be restored. The K&A Canal Association became the K&A Canal Trust and began a restoration plan. The British Waterways Board became the navigation authority in the 1962 Transport Act.

1968 The Transport Act formally classified the K&A as a 'Remainder' waterway apart from three 'Cruiseway' sections on the rivers.

1990 The K&A was re-opened by the Queen.

1999 The K&A Canal Partnership was awarded £29 million by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

2011 The K&A finally achieved Cruiseway status on 18 April.

2012 Canal and River Trust became the navigation authority on 2 July when BW ceased to exist in England and Wales.

Cargoes on the K&A

Goods were transported along the K&A Canal in both directions, from the Port of Bristol and from London via the River Thames. The most important cargoes were coal from Wales, Somerset and Gloucestershire, limestone and building stone from Bristol and Bath, slates, tin plate, iron and copper from Wales as well as fruit and other products from the Mediterranean, salt, sugar, timber and pitch from the West Indies, and tea from the East Indies.

Westwards from London via Reading came products from the Baltic, Mediterranean and East Indian as well as locally produced cargoes such as flints from Reading and peat ash from Aldermaston. The wharf at Hungerford was especially busy loading gravel, chalk and chalk products for the westerly route, and timber for the east. Grain and flour were produced locally and a fairly equal volume went in both directions.

In 1818, over 200 boats were using the canal, some seventy of these were barges carrying more than 60 tons. The average time taken to travel the 57 miles journey from Newbury to Bath was 3 days 9 hours. In 1833 the canal started carrying passengers and the Fly Boats could make the journey from Bath to London in 4 days non-stop.

Facts and figures

Length	87 miles (135 km)
Locks	104
Flights	Bath (Widcombe) Flight of six locks (number 7 to number 13 – 8 & 9 are now combined into one lock)
Seend	Flight of five locks (number 17 to number 21) Devizes Flight of 29 locks (number 24 to number 50) including the iconic Caen Hill Flight of 16 locks (number 29 to number 44)
Wootton Rivers	Flight of four locks (number 51 to number 54)
Crofton	Flight of nine locks (number 55 to number 63)
Tunnel Bruce	Tunnel on the summit pound between Wootton Top Lock and Crofton, 502 yards (459m) long.
Pumping stations	Crofton Steam driven beam engines, Claverton Waterwheel
Aqueducts	There are two spectacular aqueducts - at Avoncliff and Dundas – and several others that pass over rivers, roads and railway lines.
River Sections	The western end of the navigation is the River Avon and at the eastern end the River Kennet weaves in and out of the navigation from Copse Lock until Newbury where it takes over from the canal through to Reading.
Links	The Somersetshire Coal Canal at Dundas (now derelict) The Wilts & Berks Canal at Semington (under restoration)
Dimensions:	The maximum craft dimensions when the canal was built were: Length 72ft Breadth 13ft 10” Air draught 7ft 6” Draught 3ft 6”
Cruising:	Throughout the year with maintenance stoppages at any time.

K&A Canal profile



Towns along the route of the K&A Canal

Bristol

The Floating Harbour was created in 1809 and was an important busy commercial port for two centuries until it closed in 1975. It was saved from plans in 1969 to fill it in by local boating enthusiasts who held a festival of pleasure boats in 1971. Since then, the harbourside has been redeveloped as a centre of heritage and culture with bars, restaurants and festivals throughout the year to interest all tastes. The SS Great Britain is a major attraction in the harbour itself but there are many shops, theatres and other attractions within walking distance in the city itself.

Bristol won the EU's European Green Capital Award in 2015 and is very cosmopolitan - twinned with Bordeaux in France, Hannover in Germany, Oporto in Portugal, Tbilisi in Georgia, Puerto Morazan in Nicaragua, Beira in Mozambique and Guangzhou in China.

Bath

The City of Bath combines Georgian history with stylish shops, buzzing bars and trendy restaurants.

Its hot springs, Roman Baths, Pump Rooms, splendid Abbey and Georgian stone crescents have attracted visitors for centuries. Bath International Music Festival is held in June and is one of the most prestigious festivals in Europe – and there are countless other arts activities spread over the year. Other attractions include a Postal Museum, Jane Austen Centre, Costume Museum, Museum of Bath at Work and Sally Lunn's Kitchen Museum.

Bath is twinned with Aix-en-Provence in France, Alkmaar in The Netherlands, Braunschweig in Germany and Kaposvár in Hungary.

The K&A Canal cutting leaves the River Avon just west of a spectacular weir and a flight of six locks carries the navigation up 64 ft 6 inches (19.7m) to pass through Bath's beautiful Sydney Gardens before travelling eastwards through the Bath Valley.

Bathampton

Famous historically as the birthplace of Plasticine in the 1890s when William Harbutt wanted to give his students clean clay for modeling Bathampton is now best known to canal visitors for the George Inn. Reputed to have first been built in the 14th Century it was the site, two centuries ago of crowds who gathered to see the body of the last man in Great Britain to die in a legal duel. The Du Barry room commemorates the luckless aristocrat.

Bradford on Avon

Bradford on Avon is a small, stylish town with several buildings dating to the 17th century, when the town enjoyed a thriving woollen textile industry.

There are plenty of pubs and restaurants as well as some interesting shops.

Bradford on Avon's most famous landmark is the 'Lock up' on the bridge across the River Avon. It has two cells and iron beds. On top of the 'Lock-Up' is a fish-shaped weather vane. Prisoners were said to be "below the fish and over the water". Other historical highlights include The Saxon Church of St Laurence, the Tythe Barn – which has featured in films and TV programmes - and the town's original market – The Shambles.

Bradford on Avon is twinned with Norden in Northern Germany and Sully-sur-Loire in France.

Trowbridge

The Wiltshire Country town of Trowbridge gained its wealth from the woollen mills that were fuelled by coal brought along the K&A from the Somerset coal fields. Although the navigation doesn't pass through the town, Trowbridge is definitely worth a visit for its interesting museum as well as numerous examples of Georgian and industrial architecture.

Work has started on a new town centre development alongside the river Biss which flows through the town and under the K&A at the Biss Aqueduct a few minutes from the town centre.

Devizes

At the top of the Devizes Flight of Locks, the historical market town of Devizes dates back to the 11th century and is bursting with impressive architecture and Norman churches.

Apart from the attractive Market Place, small, specialist shops can be found hidden away in courtyards and alleyways.

Local attractions include the Wiltshire Heritage Museum, the Wadworth Brewery Visitor Centre and Quakers Walk which is a 700-year old tree-lined bridleway leading from near the Canal Wharf to Roundway Hill and on towards the Ridgeway – Britain's oldest road.

Devizes is twinned with Mayenne in France, Oamaru in New Zealand, Tornio in Finland and Waiblingen in Germany.

Pewsey

Pewsey is a large village with the feel of a small town. With a pub and restaurant right next to the canal, the village centre is a short walk away and has several shops, pubs and cafes.

Attractions include an Art Gallery, Pewsey Heritage Centre, and Pewsey White Horse. The Pewsey Carnival – the oldest carnival in Wiltshire – is held in September.

Hungerford

Hungerford is a busy market town, renowned for its many antique shops. There are also plenty of other shops, pubs, cafes and restaurants to keep visitors busy.

Tutti Day, a traditional festival that takes place each year on the Monday and Tuesday after Easter dates back to the 14th century when John of Gaunt gave Hungerford special hunting and fishing rights.

An Arts Festival takes place in July and includes performing arts and much more.

The town is surrounded by open common land (five minutes walk from the town centre) – a perfect place for a relaxed walk amongst an abundance of flora and fauna as well as grazing cattle - and not far from England's highest chalk hill, Walbury Hill, near Inkpen.

Hungerford is twinned with Neckarsulm in Germany and Ligueil in France.

Newbury

Newbury is alive with bustling cafes, canal-side pubs and restaurants. The Corn Exchange Theatre hosts a lively events calendar throughout the year and the

Watermill Theatre, on the outskirts of town, has a reputation for being one of the very best regional theatres in the country.

The West Berkshire Museum and a group of galleries are housed amongst a former cloth factory and granary on the wharf. The Newbury Spring Festival showcases breathtaking musical talent for 2 weeks in May.

Newbury is twinned with Braunfels in Germany, Bagnols-sur-Cèze in France, Eeklo in Belgium and Feltre in Italy.

Reading

The university town of Reading, which sits at the junction of the K&A Canal and the River Thames, is the county town of Royal Berkshire. It is a mixture of Victorian redbrick buildings, medieval churches, historic coaching inns, high-tec office developments and the Oracle shopping centre where shops and cafes line the navigation.

Attractions include the Abbey Ruins, Blake's Lock Museum, Reading Gaol, Museum of English Rural Life and the Museum of Reading, which houses numerous galleries including one telling the story of Reading's world famous biscuit makers, Huntley & Palmers.

Culture vultures can choose from rock, pop, comedy, classical music and dance at the Hexagon Theatre or a diverse range of performing arts at 21 South Street.

Reading is twinned with Clonmel in Ireland, Dusseldorf in Germany, San Francisco Libre in Nicaragua and Speightstown in Barbados.

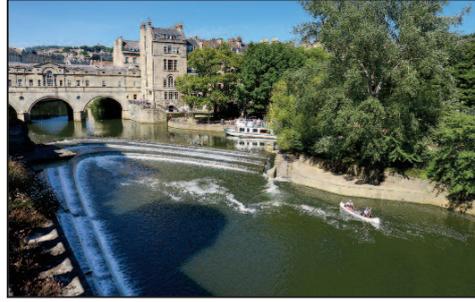
Events enjoyed on the K&A Canal

Several important events are hosted on the K&A during the year: the International Devizes to Westminster Canoe Race (every Easter), Reading Water Fest (every June), Newbury Waterways Festival (end of July), Newbury Crafty Craft Race (early May), the Bristol Harbour Festival (end of July) and Saltford Regatta on the River Avon section of the navigation in May.

In addition to all of these events there are floating markets and various other local activities throughout the year to keep visitors entertained.



Bristol Harbour



Pulteney Weir, Bath



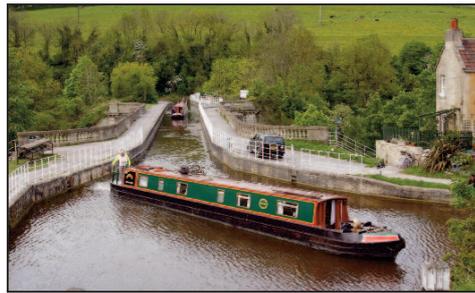
Sydney Gardens, Bath



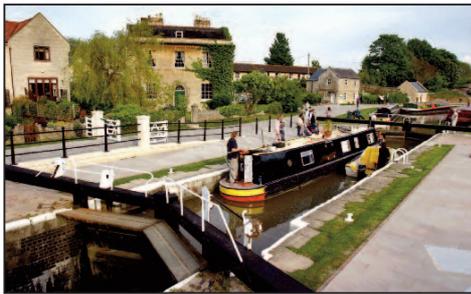
Claverton Pumping Station



Dundas Aqueduct



Avoncliff Aqueduct

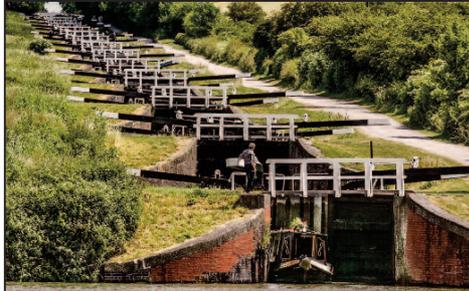


Bradford on Avon Lock



Floating Market at Bradford on Avon

All pictures by Bob Naylor: Watermarx©



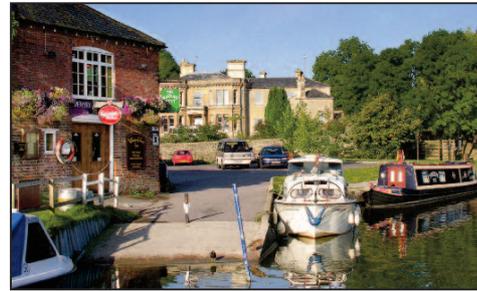
Caen Hill Flight



Canoeing at Devizes Wharf



Lady's Bridge



Pewsey Wharf



Bruce Tunnel



Crofton Pumping Station



Aldermaston Lift Bridge



The Oracle, Reading

All pictures by Bob Naylor: Watermarx©

Vive la difference!

There are many similarities between our two canals, but of course very many differences. This list is in no way exhaustive!

	K&A	Nivernais
Connect two rivers	√	√
16-lock flight	√	√
Geological problems	√	√
Traffic lights	√	√
Water voles	Protected	Culled
Use of volunteers	Established	Embryonic
Lock working	Boater	Lock keeper
Bank holidays	Busy	Locks closed
Maintenance	Short local stoppages	Closed for winter
Sailing	√	
Water skiing		√
Water jousting		√
Towpath	Narrow	Car width
Lift bridge	√	√
Boat toilets	Porta-potties or pump out	Sea toilets
Water supply	Reservoir & back pumps	Reservoir
Navigation Authority	Charity	State

The benefits of twinning

Publicity and media coverage

Every opportunity should be taken to publicise twinning activities in local print and broadcast media to get extensive coverage.

Sharing experience and techniques

Geological problems at Pousseaux put the Canal du Nivernais under serious threat of closure to through navigation. The problems were similar to those overcome by BW in the Bath Valley and through the twinning links, Mike Lee of the K&A Canal Trust shared BW's solution with the VNF who adapted the works and saved the Canal du Nivernais.

An objective set of eyes

Written reports of the experience of visitors can help to improve the offer to tourists both on the water and the towpath.

Encourage tourism and local economic development

Research shows that twinning has a great potential for developing local tourism. The 'welcome guarantee' offered to twinning visits can improve the welcome for all visitors. And the value of local people accompanying visitors to local attractions should not be under-estimated.

Opportunities for professional development

Sharing experience of waterways and tourism professionals.

Opportunities for young people

Collaboration between schools could be encouraged along both canals.

Develop community partners and broker relevant contacts

There are many common interests — boating, canoeing, cycling, tourism and fishing for example. In the past there is an enthusiasm to engage with canoeists. The K&A hosts the annual Devizes to Westminster Canoe Race, with nearly 550 competitors from the UK and abroad.

Friendship, hospitality

Firm and long-lasting friendships have been forged through the twinning.

Last words

“International collaboration on inland waterways allows the promotion and development of economic activity and entrepreneurship based on cultural heritage and tourism”. *Glen Miller, BW, at the World Canals Conference in Liverpool in 2004.*

“Twinning has helped the KACT considerably. It is now a well-known organisation in French waterways circles and this has influenced the choice of those visiting the English canals”. *Mike Lee, Former KACT Hon Engineer, Former HLF Partnership Chair and Former Twinning Co-ordinator.*

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