

# CELEBRATING OUR CANALS & RIVERS 1948-2011

BRITISH WATERWAYS' TRANSITION TO CHARITABLE STATUS



British  
Waterways

Looking after your canals & rivers

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FROM NATIONALISATION  
TO NEW MILLENNIUM –  
A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

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A NEW WATERWAYS  
CHARITY

# THE FACTS

Volunteers already give over

## 24,000 days

a year to British Waterways

## 91%

of people think the waterways are an important part of the nation's heritage

## More boats

on the network than even at the height of the Industrial Revolution

## Third largest

The waterways are home to the third largest estate of listed structures (only the Church of England and National Trust look after more)

## 200 miles

of new or restored canals have opened in the last decade – the first time the network has grown since the mid-19th Century

British Waterways' canals, rivers, reservoirs and docks generate

## £500m

worth of annual public benefit

## 13 million people

regularly visit their local waterway – that's a quarter of all UK adults

The waterways support

## 23,000 jobs

## 100's

A haven for flora and fauna, canals are home to hundreds of wildlife conservation sites and dozens of Sites of Special Scientific Interest



# THE WATERWAYS RENAISSANCE

The Georgian canals and rivers that connect our towns and cities were the transport arteries that made Britain a pioneering great industrial nation.

From their well-documented dereliction and decline, the story of the last sixty years since nationalisation shows what can be achieved when a community values and invests in its waterways.

All those with an interest in the waterways – those who look after them, those whose livelihoods depend on them, those who enjoy them and especially those who have supported them through thick and thin – should be rightly proud of what they have achieved.

Building on this waterways renaissance, in 2012 a new charity in England and Wales will take up the waterways' cause with community involvement at the heart of its founding principles.

The people who use and enjoy the network will be integral to helping ensure that this wonderful national treasure is looked after and, in turn, it's potential is unlocked as a haven for people and wildlife, as a catalyst for regeneration and commerce and to help mitigate against climate change.

This fundamental change to the way our waterways will be cared for in the future was conceived by British Waterways and has won widespread stakeholder and cross-party political support. 250-years since the waterway network was first built, we are looking ahead to join with all waterway enthusiasts to create a new charity with shared goals and a common sense of purpose to safeguard our precious canals and rivers for the next 250 years.



**Tony Hales**  
British Waterways Chairman &  
New waterways charity Chair of Trustees



# FROM NATIONALISATION TO NEW MILLENNIUM

## – A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY



### 1940s

#### NATIONALISATION

- > The canals see a resurgence of freight traffic as their creaking infrastructure is pressed into service for the war effort. But with the return of peace comes the threat of decline and irrelevance
- > In 1948 the waterways, somewhat an afterthought, are moved into public ownership as part of the new British Transport Commission, with one official remarking: "Oh, do we get the canals too?"
- > Canals still have their supporters though. Formed in 1946, the fledgling Inland Waterways Association lobbies government for the disappearing canal network to be saved – highlighting their leisure potential

### 1950s

#### FREIGHT SURVIVAL

- > Many canals are abandoned as there is little prospect of alternative use – illustrated by a government survey which concludes there is no market for property next to the decaying and out-of-favour waterways
- > Although pioneering pleasure boaters are evident, a waterways' staff magazine of 1958 says that this 'will not mean greatly increased earning in the kitty and our main efforts must always be directed towards getting commercial traffic'
- > Already impacted by the growth of the railways and road transport, waterborne freight becomes further pressured by the opening of the first motorways

### 1960s

#### FROM BIG FREEZE TO LEISURE REVOLUTION

- > Derelict canals have become standing jokes in comics like the Beano. Local authorities including Glasgow and Manchester start to fill in canals which they see as public safety hazards
- > British Waterways is created under the '62 Transport Act to operate much of the nation's inland waterways but a particularly harsh winter sees boats unable to move between Christmas and March, virtually finishing off commercial freight carrying on the narrow canal network
- > A 1967 Daily Mirror article entitled 'The Wasted Heritage' draws attention to the plight of derelict canals heralding...
- > Barbara Castle's 1968 Transport Act which gives the first official recognition for the recreation value of waterways and a remit to develop their leisure potential

The 20th century story of the waterways is one of rediscovery. Canals and rivers declined as a freight-carrying network but found a new purpose in leisure and recreation. It is a captivating story of enthusiasts, communities and government rediscovering the value of the waterways.



# 1970s

## THE GREAT STAGNATION

> Long term underfunding is still a way of life for the waterways, however enlightened enthusiasts remove old bedsteads, point brickwork and mix concrete. Although a far from fashionable pastime, their passion is central in saving and restoring many miles of canal in a recessionary and largely heritage-blind decade

# 1980s

## THE REGENERATION POTENTIAL

- > The early 1980s sees leisure boat numbers top 20,000 for the first time
- > By the mid-1980s, the successful redevelopment of Brindleyplace in Birmingham and London's Docklands helps to further shift attitudes towards waterways
- > In 1989, English Heritage identify a skills gap in waterway conservation, saying: "Poor craftsmanship and inappropriate materials ruined the appearance of many historic structures... British Waterways' officers do not have adequate training or access to professional advice on the conservation of historic structures"

# 1990s

## LOTTERY BOOST

- > The value of the waterways is increasingly realised. Research shows that properties next to well-maintained waterways are worth up to 20% more
- > The case is successfully made for increased investment to overcome major arrears in canal maintenance and in 1999 the Deputy Prime Minister announces new support and funding
- > By the late 1990s waterway restoration schemes pick up pace as community support and grants from the newly created National Lottery enable the biggest expansion in the network in 150 years...



# NEW MILLENNIUM

## – A SECOND GOLDEN AGE

The last decade has seen the culmination of a real success story.

Waterways that were sometimes toxic, lifeless channels are now precious habitats for some of our rarest animals and plants. Where canals were once locked and hidden away behind high walls, they are now open for everyone. Heritage that was once 'at risk' is now cherished, and a once creaking infrastructure is now safeguarded by major engineering works. Today carefully planned routine maintenance ensures the waterways can be enjoyed by millions of people each year.

### INVESTING IN THE 'TRACK'

- > Over £1 billion invested by British Waterways during the decade on targeted maintenance
- > Replacement of over 2,000 individual lock gate leaves
- > Major upgrades to the waterways' 90 reservoirs
- > Repairs to many of the 700 major embankments to address leakage and improve stability
- > £66m spent on dredging
- > Nearly 2,000 culverts and 125 miles of controlled feeders monitored and maintained
- > Major failures, such as breaches on the Monmouthshire & Brecon, Stourbridge and Caldon canals, are fixed
- > The number of waterway structures in the poorest condition reduce from 31% to 19%

### LOOKING AFTER THE WATERWAYS HERITAGE

- > Heritage structures at risk are reduced from 125 at the start of the decade to 44
- > Pontcysyllte Aqueduct joins the Taj Mahal and the Acropolis as a World Heritage Site
- > British Waterways is now regularly praised by English Heritage for its conservation skills
- > Typically more than 300 works are undertaken each year to legally designated heritage structures with a conservation compliance record running at 99%

### COUNTING THE PENNIES

- > As government funding declines in real terms by 42%, self-generated revenues (through property rents, wayleaves and leisure income) increases from £62m to £101m to fund essential waterway repairs
- > The capital value of British Waterways' property estate consistently outperforms the sector, increasing by £200m. It now provides an important financial dowry for the network's future
- > Creative and popular bids see £300m of Lottery, Local Authority and European money successfully secured for the waterways
- > The waterways attract many £millions of work carried out by others such as local authorities to resurface towpaths, upgrade visitor facilities and protect wildlife



## ON THE DOORSTEP

- > 13 million people visit the waterways and their towpaths each year
- > Licensed boats increase from 25,000 to 35,000 - there are now more than at the height of the Industrial Revolution

## AN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSET

- > Water quality continues to improve with water voles, otters and kingfishers all increasing in number
- > British Waterways drive forward the potential of the waterways for wind power, microgeneration and as a more sustainable alternative to traditional heating and cooling

## AN EXPANDING NETWORK

200 miles of new and restored waterways have been added to the British Waterways' network, which now stands at 2,200 miles. At one point the network is expanding at a faster rate than at the peak of the Industrial Revolution.

### 2001

- > Edinburgh to Glasgow – Millennium Link (opened in 2002 by Her Majesty The Queen)
- > Huddersfield Narrow Canal

### 2002

- > Rochdale Canal
- > Millennium Ribble Link
- > Anderton Boat Lift

### 2007

- > Montgomery Canal extended to Gowan

### 2008

- > Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal Phase One

### 2009

- > Bow Back Rivers
- > Liverpool Canal Link

### 2010/11

- > Droitwich Barge Canal and Droitwich Junction Canal

## THE NEXT 200 YEARS

Although enjoying a second golden age, unimaginable even twenty years ago, the nation's ageing and increasingly expensive waterway network requires a plan for a sustainable future. In 2009, British Waterways revives and energises a debate which began almost half a century before about taking its canals and rivers out of state control to become a 'national trust' for the waterways.







There is widespread enthusiasm for waterway volunteering, it has always been there, largely untapped, since the dedicated volunteers kick-started the canal renaissance early in the 20th century. The new waterways charity will have a fantastic range and breadth of exciting volunteering opportunities – from positions of governance to day-to-day maintenance, iconic lock keeping duties, education and even engineering and other professional support.



# THE FUTURE

## – A NEW WATERWAYS CHARITY

In 2012, a new exciting charity will take over the guardianship of British Waterways' canals, rivers, reservoirs and docks in England and Wales. Scottish waterways will remain in public ownership.

The move to charitable status will be the next chapter in the renaissance of the waterways and a change that will help safeguard the network for future generations to use and enjoy.

By becoming a charity, the nation's historic canals and rivers will be able to broaden and strengthen their funding. The change will also give a greater role to the many people and communities who want to support and get involved with their local waterway.

Come 2015, it is the government's intention, subject to funding, that an additional 600 miles of navigation currently managed by the Environment Agency, including the River Thames and Medway, will join this exciting new charity.

### ON YOUR DOORSTEP

A 'national trust' for the waterways is good news for the many millions of people who live next to a canal or river, regularly walk or run on a towpath or who visit to simply take time out to feed the ducks or enjoy the wildlife. There is widespread enthusiasm for the idea among key stakeholders such as boater owners, anglers, and those passionate about waterways heritage. Stretching from London to Lancaster and from Wales to the Wash, a more sustainable waterway network is essential for the hundreds of waterway businesses and many civic organisations that rely on it.

### A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The new charity will receive critical financial support from government by the transfer of British Waterways' property assets and, despite the current difficulty in public spending, a long term funding contract with government will be given in return for the excellent everyday work that benefits the public. The charity will also enjoy new opportunities to help close the current gap in required funding for an ageing and increasingly visited waterway network. It will grow income from voluntary giving, have greater commercial freedom, increase volunteering and ensure all future efficiencies translate into improvements on the canal bank.

**Within ten years there could be around 100,000 regular supporters, contributing around £6m in donations, appeals and legacies.**

## THE BELIEF

Along with the name of the new charity, the ultimate legal purpose of the charity is subject to a government public consultation. However, it will embrace the fact that the waterways belong to us all and that they should be enjoyed today and protected for tomorrow. It will stress that waterways are part of our local community, history and cultural identity, that they refresh the spirit and provide a haven for wildlife and people amid an otherwise fast-paced and pressured world.

## WHY NOW?

Nationalisation was right at a time when society had largely turned its back on an out-of-date and mostly redundant transport network. Under British Waterways' stewardship, the condition of the waterways has dramatically improved but the money available from the public purse has declined – accelerated more recently with cuts in all public spending. Much has been achieved for which many people should be very proud.

British Waterways' vision is to get the waterways out of this short term cycle and on a more secure footing with a long term plan. The network is in a position where this can happen and, by seizing the political will, a move to charitable status will realise an ambition held by many waterway supporters for over half a century. The change represents the start of the next 200 years of exciting waterways history and will illustrate what more can be achieved when a community is given further rein to value and invest in its waterways.

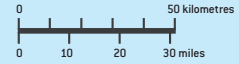




# WATERWAY MAP

## Key

## SCALE

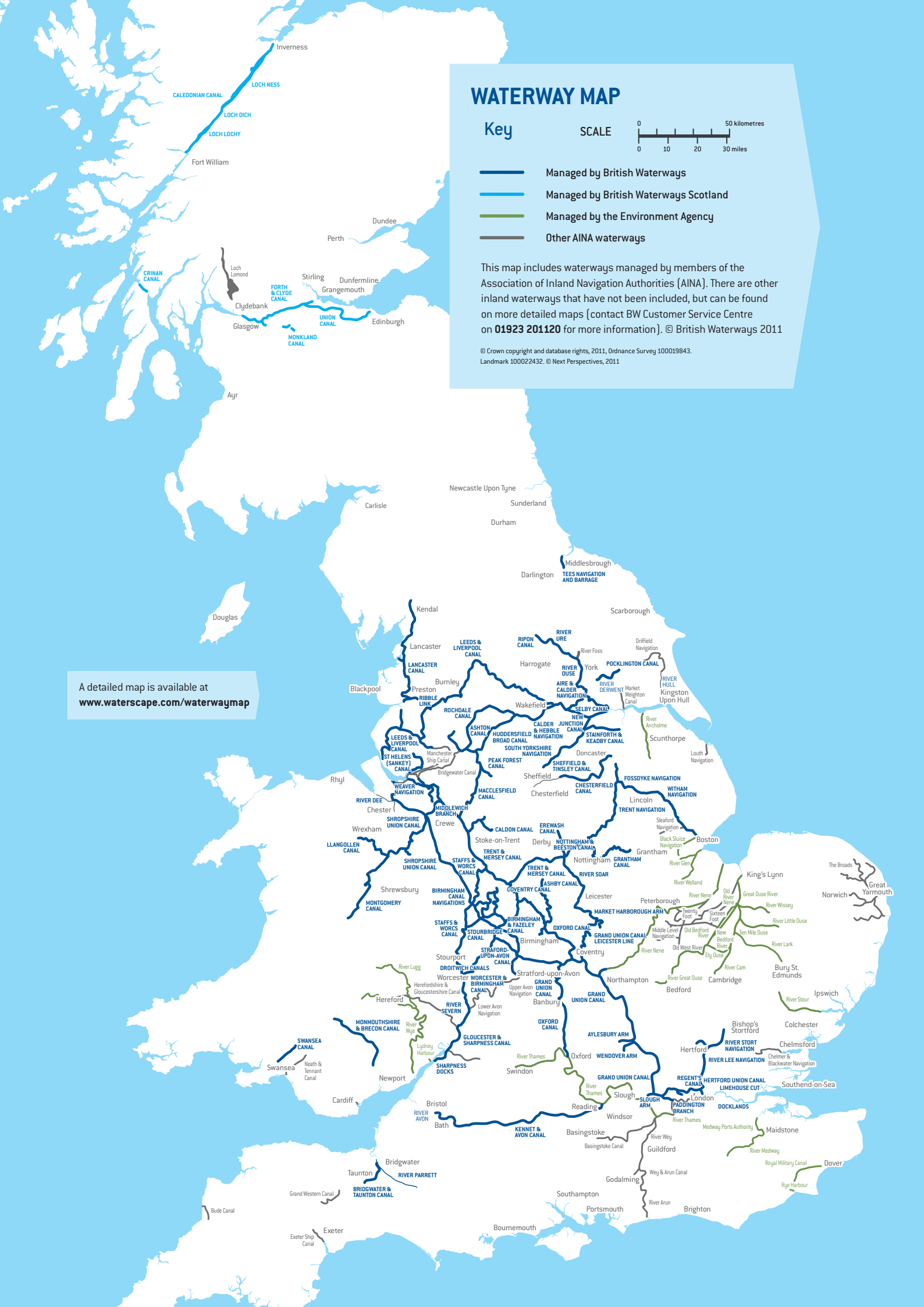


- Managed by British Waterways
- Managed by British Waterways Scotland
- Managed by the Environment Agency
- Other AINA waterways

This map includes waterways managed by members of the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA). There are other inland waterways that have not been included, but can be found on more detailed maps (contact BW Customer Service Centre on **01923 201120** for more information). © British Waterways 2011

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A detailed map is available at  
[www.waterscape.com/waterwaymap](http://www.waterscape.com/waterwaymap)





“I am convinced by the compelling vision of a national trust for the waterways.”

**Richard Benyon**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Natural Environment and Fisheries

“When the government announced on 14 October 2010 its intention to transfer the waterways in England and Wales into a new charitable body, it was the culmination of 18 months of hard work and persuasion by a lot of people. It was a fantastic seal of approval for this strategy and for a vision first put forward over 50 years ago and we should all collectively be very proud.”

**Robin Evans**, Chief Executive







“ [British Waterways] plans to rise like a phoenix, a third sector, charitable equivalent of the National Trust for 2,200 miles of canals and navigable rivers.”

**The Guardian**, October 2010

“It is for their therapeutic value, however, that canals should chiefly be promoted. Anyone who walks or boats along them knows that they possess a mysterious, balm-like power. Stealthily, even secretly, they carry the peace of rural England into the heart of frenetic cities. Millions are aware of this secret world, but millions aren't. If it takes the creation of national waterways trust to spread the word, I'm all for it.”

**The Times**, chief culture writer, May 2009



## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Register for updates about  
Britain's new waterway charity at  
**[www.waterscape.com/findoutmore](http://www.waterscape.com/findoutmore)**

# NEW WATERWAYS CHARITY COMING SOON...

In 2012, the 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales will move from a public body to a new charity.

# 13th

largest charity in the UK by income\*

Within ten years the number of regular supporters is predicted to be around

# 100,000

# 24th

largest charity in the UK based on assets\*

# £6m

in voluntary donations by year ten

\*Charities Direct website July 2009

**GET INVOLVED** – want to know about volunteering opportunities on your local canal or river?

Visit [www.waterscape.com/volunteer](http://www.waterscape.com/volunteer) to read about the experience of other volunteers and to find an opportunity near to you. You can search by postcode or the type of task you're interested in, or just browse through the full list. If you have a general enquiry email [volunteer@britishwaterways.co.uk](mailto:volunteer@britishwaterways.co.uk).



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