



Did you know that this canal passes through both England and Wales?



Limekilns at Belan

Lime was so important to farmers that, by 1842, there were 92 limekilns along the Montgomery Canal at places such as Pant, Buttington (Tal y Bont) and Belan.



Limekilns at Pant

The Montgomery Canal originally ran for 56km (35 miles) from the Llangollen Canal at Frankton Junction, through Llanymynech and Welshpool (Y Trallwng) to Newtown (Y Drenewydd).

Why was it built?

Over 200 years ago, goods were transported from place to place by horse and cart on uneven, muddy and often expensive toll roads. By the 1790s, canals were being built across England and Wales as horse-drawn boats could carry bigger loads and the journey was quicker and cheaper.

Much of the land that lies in the [River Severn](#) valley was used for growing crops. Therefore, the Montgomery Canal was built to allow cheaper and easier transport of heavy cargoes for the local landowners and farmers. Lime, produced by burning limestone with coal, was an important crop fertiliser. Limestone could be found locally at the quarries of Llanymynech, and became one of the main cargoes to be transported along the canal in the 18th and 19th centuries. Horse-drawn wagons pulled the stone along tramrails from the quarries to the canal. It was then transported to the lime kilns along the sides of the Montgomery. The lime then went by boat directly to the local farms.



Vrynwy aqueduct

The building of the canal

The Montgomery Canal that we know today is actually made up of three canals built in separate stages by three different canal companies and a number of engineers. Between 1794 and 1796, the first stage from Frankton to Llanymynech was completed. A year later the narrow canal was extended to Garthmyl, south of Welshpool.

The building of some of the aqueducts caused many problems and became expensive. In particular, the Vrynwy aqueduct nearly collapsed soon after it was built in 1796. This was due to the enormous weight of puddled clay used as a waterproof lining to hold the water. After many emergency repairs the aqueduct was eventually strengthened with iron in 1892.

Once more money had been raised, the final section from Garthmyl to Newtown was started in 1816. It took six years to complete. The last 3.2km (2 miles) of the canal from Freestone Lock are now infilled, although the original route to Newtown is still clear.



The Duchess Countess packet-boat in 1910. It would have been towed by a horse.

This packet-boat was later used as a houseboat on the Montgomery Canal. It is now being restored.

(Photo courtesy of the Duchess Countess Trust)

The Industrial Revolution

As the Industrial Revolution progressed, trade developed between towns, cities and coalfields. The Montgomery Canal provided better links between places and was used for bringing coal, dairy products and grain into the area.

Other local industries used the canal to transport their products including the woollen mills and factories in Newtown, the flannel factories in Welshpool and the brick and tile factory near Buttington. Both the Montgomery Canal and the River Severn exported timber from Montgomeryshire into other parts of Wales and England.

There were probably eight water mills on the canal, using the water power at locks to grind corn (e.g. Town Lock Corn Mill in Welshpool) or bone, and power saws for cutting timber (e.g. Powis Estate Sawmill).

Even with the arrival of the railways, the canal was used for carrying passengers on 'packet-boats'. These boats were faster than the cargo boats and ran a regular service along the canal between Newtown and Rednal, where passengers changed onto the Shrewsbury to Chester train.



Welshpool Lock



The towpath wall is being built along the canal at Newhouse.

The decline of the canal

With the arrival of the railway in the 19th century the canal became less important to local factories and mills. Transport by train was faster and cheaper, and the canal was used less and less.

In 1936 the canal bank collapsed near Welsh Frankton and was never repaired. In 1944 the canal was eventually closed and became filled in or overgrown in many places.

Restoration begins

In 1969, plans to build the Welshpool bypass along the derelict canal bed led to fierce local opposition and the plans were abandoned. Renewed local interest in the canal led a group of volunteers from the Inland Waterways Association and the Shropshire Union Canal Society to begin restoration by clearing part of the canal around Welshpool. In 1974, Welshpool Lock (Loc y Trallwng) was re-opened.

Since then restoration has continued and, to date, almost half of the canal has been restored with future plans to open the whole length of the canal. As the canal is being restored, it is becoming popular with boaters, canoeists, anglers and walkers.



Brithdir Nature Reserve with its Floating Water Plantain.

The restoration of the canal and nature conservation

The aquatic wildlife in and around the Montgomery Canal has flourished since its closure in 1944, in particular aquatic plants such as Floating Water Plantain and Grasswrack Pondweed. It is also home to dragonflies, otters and mute swans. In fact, the Montgomery Canal has become one of the most important waterways for wildlife in Britain.

Careful restoration of the canal is important to help maintain this wildlife. If the canal was left untouched it would revert back to swamp and eventually woodland. This would lead to the loss of many rare aquatic plants and animals. However any restoration plans for the canal must include protecting the future of the existing wildlife and habitats.

During restoration, seven specially designed nature reserves have already been created off the main line of the canal, and there are plans to develop more of these in the near future. The conditions of the reserves match the canal so that aquatic plants can be easily transferred to help maintain their future and other wildlife habitats. These reserves can be found at Weston Arm (Cangen Weston), Rednal Basin (Basn Rednal), Aston Locks (Lociau Aston), Wern Claypits (Pyllau Clai Wern), Guilsfield Arm (Cangen Cegidfa), Whitehouse Bridge (Pont Whitehouse) and Brithdir.