



photo: Ross Hoddinott

Bude Canal Regeneration Project

Article by **Charlie David**, Public Space Manager

The Bude Canal is one of the country's most significant canals, belieing its rather innocuous appearance. Only 2 miles of it is still in water. Much of the remaining 33 miles is inaccessible and, through neglect and assimilation into farm land, not discernable. It is though recognised by Government advisors on inland waterways as being in the top half dozen canals in the country for reasons of its engineering heritage and environmental qualities.

above: **Bude's lock gates** were replaced in 2001 after a service of over 180 years. Built as part of the Bude Canal in 1819, it is a rare example of a canal connecting directly with the sea.

What has made it special is the innovative approaches to overcome geographical difficulties adopted during its construction in the 1820s. It remains one of only two canals that lock out in to the sea. The other, the Crinin Canal in Scotland, locks into the placid waters of a sea loch rather than into the stormy waters of the north Atlantic.

Most canals utilise locks to enable boats to overcome unavoidable changes in levels. The Bude Canal, apart from two sets of locks that exist in the first two miles, uses incline planes to negotiate significant changes in levels. These worked by the boats having wheels which located on rails laid on the grassy slopes. The boats were attached to a chain at the bottom of the slope and using water wheel technology were then dragged up the slope on the rails until they reached the next level of the canal. The longest incline plane (Hobbacott) on the Bude Canal was 900ft and raised the barges 225ft.

Built primarily to transport lime rich sea sand to inland farms its heyday was during the mid to late 1800s. By the beginning of the 20th century the use of the canal had all but finished. Bude harbour however, which was part of the canal system relying on the sea locks for access, continued to operate as a commercial port until the 1950s.

The length of canal between Bude and Helebridge fell into the ownership of the local council after the canal's closure in 1901 and since then has been used for recreation, walking and boating. The two sets of locks were removed in the mid 1950s and concrete dams put in their place.

Time hadn't dealt kindly with the canal and over the years it began to silt up, half of it becoming un-navigable and the other half's water levels becoming shallower. The popular towpath started to subside together with the canal banks. The lock structures began to decay with shrubs growing through the walls, hastening their eventual likely collapse.



The Castle Bude

Heritage Centre • Galley
Book & Gift Shop • Restaurant

level access and lift
overlooking the canal and beach
2 mins walk from the car parks
within sight of the Bude TIC

Open all year from 10.00am
☎ 01288 357300
www.bude-stratton.gov.uk

visit Cornwall's dinkiest castle



cornish genius

local heroes

cornish talent

meet a Cornish giant



enjoy fine local food