Out on the water

Remember, canals contain deep water and are relatively confined spaces which can make manoeuvring difficult. For safety reasons, always give way to motorised craft.

Canal locks and lifts are regarded as structures and so access rights do not apply. However, access across some lock gates might be possible where specific provision has been requested and approved beforehand.

Access rights extend to non-motorised water-based activities, such as canoeing, rafting, rowing and stand-up paddleboarding (SUPs). Make sure that the canal is an appropriate location for your activity and the number of people involved. Take care not to interfere unreasonably with other interests and avoid going close to water intakes, abstraction points or spillways.

Each location attracts different users and zoning may apply which gives certain users priority over others. It is your responsibility to find out in advance and follow the guidance of local agreements.

Respect the needs of anglers by avoiding nets or other fishing tackle whenever it’s reasonably practicable to do so. We appreciate there are circumstances when it won’t be feasible to delay your journey on the canals for anglers but we ask that when you are close to anglers, you keep noise and other disturbance to a minimum. Boaters or paddlers out on the canal should ideally await a signal from the angler to proceed if they have a line in the water and follow any suggested route if safe and practicable to do so. For this approach to be successful users must be alert and make others aware of their presence. By communicating with each other and applying a degree of patience, it’s possible for all user groups to enjoy the canals with the minimum disruption to each other’s activities.

Access rights do not extend to fishing.

On the towpath

Towpaths are there for everyone to enjoy responsibly, including ramblers, dog walkers, cyclists, runners. It is our aim to make the canals accessible to all, and we are successfully encouraging more people with disabilities to come and enjoy the canal experience. This mix of users and their different needs means that everybody using the towpaths has to be aware of others and respect their right to be on the canal too.

When entering a towpath, please give way to existing users. Use lights where appropriate and take all your litter home.

Unauthorised vehicles, motorcycles, quad bikes and scramblers are strictly prohibited.

Please view our Towpath Code of Conduct for more information.

Other advice:

You can find further advice on Scotland’s Outdoor Access Code via www.outdooraccess-scotland.com, find out more on the Towpath Code of Conduct here bit.ly/TowpathConduct or download the paddlers’ advice leaflet for further information on what the Code means for you via bit.ly/PaddlersAccessCode

Fishing

Anglers need to be careful when casting lines; be aware that there may be people on the water and/or the land. You may not notice people approaching on the towpath, particularly if they are running or cycling, so we advise making a quick check immediately prior to casting.

If a canoeist or anyone else on the water is close by, wait until they have passed you before casting. If you have a line in the water, allow people on the water to pass at the earliest opportunity.

Indicating where you would prefer canoeists or others to pass can help but be aware that it might not always be possible for them to follow the route you suggest.

Boaters may use certain sound signals to alert anglers and other users to their presence.

Access rights do not extend to fishing.

Boats, bikes, boots and beyond

A guide to using Scotland’s canals responsibly

Find out more at scottishcanals.co.uk
Scotland’s canals are vibrant and, increasingly, bustling spaces. Visit us and you could see boaters, walkers, cyclists, anglers, kayakers, rowers and even horses and riders enjoying the diverse environment provided by our inland waterways. We’re proud to offer so many different opportunities for people to enjoy themselves on and along our canals, and pleased to see more and more people doing so.

However, with so many different activities taking place, it does mean that people need to share the space responsibly and considerately. Doing so helps to ensure our canals are a much more integrated multi-use space to be enjoyed by all. To make sure everyone gets the most out of their time by and on the water, we asked you to help us develop a users’ code and this is the result. It provides easy to understand and follow guidelines for sharing the land and water along Scotland’s canal network and what to expect of other users.

**Share the space** – canals and towpaths are popular places to be enjoyed by everyone. Please be mindful of others, everyone has a responsibility to be aware of and respect other users when they are out on the water or towpath.

**Drop your pace** – motorised vessels have priority on the water and pedestrians have priority on the towpaths so be ready to slow down. If you’re in a hurry, consider using an alternative route for your journey. Be aware that not everyone you encounter on the canal may have the same level of experience so please be patient and willing to share your knowledge with others.

**It’s a special place** – our waterways are living history with boats, working locks and low bridges so please give way to waterway users and be extra careful where visibility is limited.

**Your rights**

Scotland’s Outdoor Access rights extend to canals, canal towpaths and embankments, therefore you have the right to be on most land and inland water - providing you act responsibly. As Scotland’s canals become increasingly popular destinations for recreational and commercial activity, everyone has a duty to conduct themselves safely and accordingly. The key things to remember are:

- take responsibility for your own actions
- respect the interests of other users
- care for the environment and the structure itself
- have appropriate insurance, if it is required for the activity you are undertaking