

# Tapescript

**John:** The extensive network which makes up the Grand Union Canal is, without doubt, a truly extraordinary piece of engineering. Begun in the late 18th century, the majority of the canal system was built without the benefits of modern technology or public finance [7]. It is a truly grand canal. But why is it known as the Grand Union Canal? From 1790 to 1929 a large number of competing, independently owned canals were constructed [8], their waterways not uniform in size and often unable to carry the larger vessels from other sections. Through a series of takeovers, the various companies eventually amalgamated and created a 'union' of canals which could form a continuous link between Birmingham, London and other important industrial areas [9]. Along every stretch of canal, you will find this heritage retained. Traditionally-painted narrow boats are still guided by original mile posts, while working examples of mills, pump houses, ancient locks and keepers' cottages are a common sight on any journey.

The Grand Union Canal boasts an extraordinary variety of wildlife, from feeding herons and hunting owls to rare water voles. Natural habitats are numerous as a result of cleaner waters and the declining industrial traffic [10]. The hedgerows and canal banks have proved an ideal location for a number of diverse species to thrive in this tranquil and often unique environment.

A car-free and carefree way to appreciate the beauty of the canal – and at your own pace – is by walking. Whether you are looking for organised or independent towpath walks, we can help you with your planning. Each waterway office can supply information on circular walks, waterside pubs plus suggested routes and specific points of interest [11]. There are many stations within easy reach of the Grand Union Canal. Why not try a one-way walk, returning to your starting point by train?

We're keen to encourage both experienced and inexperienced anglers onto the well-stocked canal network and reservoirs [12]. We lease certain sections to established clubs who welcome non-members for a small daily fee. Before you fish, check with your local British Waterways office for information on access and availability. Rod licenses are obligatory, and can be obtained from your local post office. [13]

Last but not least, the towpaths are wonderful for cycling. Free of traffic, free of fumes and free of hills. Miles of accessible towpaths through some of England's finest countryside. We can all share the delights of the canal system so please be considerate to other users. [14] Surfaces vary from stony pathways to smooth asphalt – but that's all part of the enjoyment!