

The Caledonian Canal – a man-made marvel

In the days of the sailing ship, navigating a passage between the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean involved a lengthy and dangerous trip through the Pentland Firth, so, in 1803, work commenced on the Caledonian Canal.

The route cleverly exploited the existing waterways of the Great Glen, requiring 22 miles (35.4 km) of manmade canal to connect Loch Dochfour, Loch Ness, Loch Oich and Loch Lochy to form the full 60 miles (96.6 km) of the canal. Canal Engineer Thomas Telford took on the task and in 1822 the canal was opened – 17 years late and well over budget at £912,000, a colossal sum for the time. Boats are raised and lowered using the canal's 29 locks, including the remarkable Neptune's Staircase, a ladder of 8 locks near Fort William that climbs an impressive 64 feet (19.5m).

The most famous tourist to sail the canal was Queen Victoria in 1873, who commented on 'how rude' the local people were for watching her as she took tea on the Gondolier!

Although the canal was conceived for use in the age of sail, it is still active today and forms part of many of Jacobite's cruises and tours – a stunning way to see Loch Ness for the first time.

