
CONNECTED WITH THE CLYDE:

A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY CANOE JOURNEY

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This AHRC-funded Connected Communities festival event took participants on a multi-disciplinary, heritage learning journey, by canoe, down a stretch of the River Clyde, Scotland. At the arrival point they explored the heritage of Wolfclyde and met up with many more participants. On land, through multi-disciplinary approaches from archaeology to story-telling and creative artistic interventions, they explored some of the multiple heritages of Wolfclyde.

Participation

Eleven heritage adventurers spent two days canoe training with the Scottish Outdoor Education Centre at Broomlee, near West Linton in South Lanarkshire. The training up-skilled the participants and got them prepared for the canoe journey, down the River Clyde from Hardington Mains to Wolfclyde Bridge. On the day of the festival journey there were 15 canoeists. We travelled downstream for around 6km and stopped at various points on the way. At the stopping points we explored various aspects of river heritage: from story-telling of miller's daughter who drowned, to huge gravel quarries that were used to build the M74 motorway in the 1980s. When we arrived at Wolfclyde we were met by over 40 people, some local and some who had travelled from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Fife and the Borders to take part in the afternoon activities. These activities were collaborative and practice-based, and enabled participants to engage with the range of heritages at Wolfclyde. They ranged from a photographic exercise to 'capture' the heritage, to a 'sights, sounds and smells' activity on the medieval Coulter Motte, to imagine the place when it was occupied in the 12th century. Overall a total of 56 people took part during the festival.

Outcomes of evaluation

To evaluate the outcomes of the Festival event we undertook a number of surveys. The canoeists were surveyed twice: firstly before they had undergone the training and then again after the festival journey. The third evaluation was for participants who came by land and took part in the afternoon activities, they were surveyed at the end of the day. Results from the surveys of the canoeists indicated that the training had a positive impact on them, especially in terms of their improved or newly gained skills to become proficient flowing- and calm-water paddlers. This up-skilling also increased confidence levels in team working, paddling and developing methods that apply to journeys, canoes and heritage. In addition, the training and the festival event broadened participants' understanding of how other disciplines consider rivers and the multiple heritages of a river.

The responses of the afternoon participants to the survey indicated that they have an enthusiasm for river heritage, combined with an outcome that some of them are now thinking about how their discipline can develop this model of engagement with people, rivers, canoes and heritages.

Learning/reflections

As part of the festival all canoeists were asked three questions with regard to their learning and reflections. The results are incorporated into, and indicate a range of learning points from all participants. In terms of my own reflections and learning points, I shall mention three:

- This ambitious festival event illustrated that with practice-based engagement and working across multi-disciplines, riverine heritages can be explored in diverse ways and have multiple impacts.
- Five of the participants on the canoe journey were local, including two high school pupils and their teacher. It is hoped that a re-iteration of the journey will be repeated next year, in which case I would wish to increase the number of local participants, in order to develop and broaden the public co-design, and co-production aspects of a participative project.
- As a committed Connected Communities researcher, working on a physical feature such as a river, but applying multi-disciplinary lenses to investigating it can help people to develop new ways of thinking about rivers and our entanglements with them.

Summary of feedback

Feedback is still coming in for the event, but it focuses on three areas: primarily people enjoyed the day, and they want to repeat it annually. People are discussing how we can work collaboratively to enable it to be up-scaled and take place each year, for the duration of the Discovering the Clyde programme (2015-2020). Second, the feedback is that people are keen to use some of the data that was gathered during the event (video, photography, sketches) in order to further explore their relationships with the river and its heritages. Finally, people have already collaborated to explore future projects, such as with the Clyde and Avon Landscape Partnership scheme and the Clydesdale Mills Society.

Follow-up activities

We are now developing three routes for follow up activities. Firstly, a facilitated workshop with the participants will gather reflections and consider ways forward. Secondly, some of the participants are planning to meet up to review the digital materials that were gathered during the days, with the aim of creating a story-line and video/still photography video diary of the event. A short video trailer has now been created by Doug Rocks-Macqueen, one of the canoeists, from footage gathered by the participants. The video can be accessed here: [\[Link\]](#) Finally, it is hoped that some of the participants will gather to co-design a research project that combines the disciplines represented on the canoe journey, plus a number of additional

disciplines (geology/art/cartography), in order to submit a grant application to research the interdisciplinary nature of river interactions, through participatory, practice-based, heritage engagement.