

Leaf boat making on the Llangollen canal



DENBIGHSHIRE DIGITAL ADVENTURES

Download tomorrow's adventure

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This family activity challenges you to gather up as many natural materials as you can, and then use them to build a 'boat', ready to sail on the Llangollen canal.
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Before you start



How to get there

This adventure takes place at the Horseshoe Falls and on the wonderful Llangollen canal.

To get to the starting point, take the A542 from Llangollen towards Ruthin, and after about 1 ¼ miles, turn onto the B5103 following the sign for the Corwen, Llantysilio and Rhewl). You will come to a junction with three road signs – for Corwen (B5103), Ruthin and Horseshow Falls (the way you've come) and Llantysilio and Rhewl. Make sure you keep going straight on, following the signs for Llantysilio and Rhewl. After about 200m, you'll come to parking on your left (there is a brown sign for a picnic area, and there are also toilets available here). You may want to check out the map of the area in the car park too.

Then on foot, turn left out of the car park, and start walking towards the lovely church of Llantysilio. Take care, as there are no pavements on this stretch of road. The church is on your left – go down the small path, and then through the small gate to the left of the church's main entrance (don't go into the church yard). Then follow the track down to the River Dee (again, please take care, this track is often extremely muddy and not ideal for buggies or those with mobility issues).

Postcode:

LL20 8BT

Public transport:

For public transport options, call Traveline Cymru on 0871 200 2233 or National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50.

Let's get started

On your walk down the track to the river, you should start to collect the bits and bobs you need to make your boat. Look out for big leaves that have fallen off trees. Green ones are best, as brown ones may be too brittle and start to fall apart as you work with them.

You'll need twigs too, to make masts or to fix together to create a raft. And if you find a big piece of bark that's peeled off a tree, then you're really in luck!

The fantastic Horseshoe Falls in front of you were built by a famous engineer called Thomas Telford in 1806. They helped to take water from the River Dee into the Llangollen Canal, which then took goods like slate and wool, loaded on barges, all over the UK.

Telford built the canal, too, with the help of hundreds of men, who cut it out of the rock. But Telford always wanted to make sure that his work fitted in with the landscape rather than ruining it. Do you think he succeeded? **(1)**



Activity starting point

Start this activity once you've passed through the gate by the side of the church's main entrance.

How long will this activity take?

This activity can be completed in half an hour, but you may choose to stay much longer to take in more of the canal and river, or even take a picnic!



What you need

Comfortable walking shoes.

Bags of common sense – playing by water is fun but it can be dangerous too.

Even bigger bags full of imagination.

Top tips:

Why not take a photo of your leaf boats and share them with us on the Discover Denbighshire Facebook page (search Discover Denbighshire).

Are you coming with a pram or buggy? If so, you may find it easier to pick an alternative starting point; turn off the B5103 when you see signs for the Chainbridge Hotel, park up at the hotel (please note, parking is only for people using the hotel facilities too) and then take a stroll by the water right behind the hotel. You should be able to find enough materials to have a go at a leaf boat from here too!



Getting back to the start

Walk back along the path, retracing your steps to the car.



What did you think?

Tell us what you thought about this activity on the Discover Denbighshire Facebook page.

There are two different types of boat designs you can go for. Probably the simplest one to build is what we've called a rowing boat.

All you need to do is to poke a thin twig through one end of a leaf, and then thread it through the other end, too. If you have a leaf with a long stem, you can use the stem itself instead of a stick. Just bend the stem over and thread it through the end of the leaf. This will create a simple rowing boat.

If the leaf is big enough, try turning your rowing boat into a pirate ship by adding more masts and sails. All you need to do is push the stems of smaller leaves through the bigger leaf so they stick up and form sails. **(2)**



Or you could decorate your boat with flowers, seeds and different coloured leaves– but remember to only use natural objects, never use plastic or other man-made stuff that could clog up the canal. **(3)**



Now for a raft. Well done if you have found that piece of bark. It's naturally buoyant, which means it should float brilliantly. Try jamming a twig into the bark to act as a mast and then adding a leaf as a sail. If the wind catches the leaf it should shoot across the water.

If you're feeling really ambitious, you could build a raft by tying twigs and sticks together using long pieces of grass. It's a bit fiddly but with a mast and sail, they look superb.

To test Telford's engineering genius, now's the time to race your boats.

You could put them in the river before the Horseshoe Falls and see which one is the first to sail over the edge!

Or, if you follow the path over the small bridge and past the brick building (it's a sluice house, which controls the flow of the water into the canal), you can race your boats further up the canal. We suggest that you walk past the sluice house and then past the Chainbridge Hotel (on your right) for about five minutes – you'll come to a safe place where you can gently put the boats into the water.

Telford was an expert engineer and designed the canal so that all the way along its 11 mile length, it runs ever so slightly downhill. This meant he didn't have to build any locks to help the barges get down it. That saved money and helped give the waterway a much more natural look.

This is a great spot for a race. The water won't be flowing quite as fast in other parts of the canal, so it should be the best-designed boats – or the one with most sails – that wins.

Happy sailing!

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Don't miss

Whilst you're in the area, there's lots of other great places that you could visit...

Llangollen steam train

The canal was just one factor that turned Llangollen into such an important transport hub in Victorian Britain.

The railway first arrived in the town in 1848 and was a sensation for day trippers, who arrived in their thousands to take in the air and the fantastic views.

The line and station closed in 1965 and were left to decay until enthusiasts re-opened them in the 1970s as a popular tourist attraction. The station has now been beautifully restored, with its own tea room and a regular timetable of trips of old steam locos.

The station is on the opposite side of the River Dee to the main High Street in Llangollen.

The Station, Abbey Road, Llangollen, Denbighshire, LL20 8SN

For more information visit www.llangollen-railway.co.uk or call 01978 860979

A trip on a horse drawn barge

A trip on a horse drawn barge from Llangollen is a great way to take in what has been described as one of the most beautiful stretches of canal in the world. There's a choice of 'cruises' starting from Llangollen Wharf, with the two-hour trip taking you up the Horseshoe Falls and back.

It's the chance to take part in a real slice of history, as these pleasure trips have been running for well over 100 years.

For more information, visit www.horsedrawnboats.co.uk or call 01978 860 702

Plas Newydd

For nearly 50 years, this unique black and white cottage was the home to Sarah Ponsonby and Lady Eleanor Butler, otherwise known as the Ladies of Llangollen.

The couple spent their 'sweet and delicious retirement' at Plas Newydd, reading, writing and painting. They became celebrities of the age, with romantic poets such as Lord Byron and Wordsworth, as well as the Duke of Wellington, among their visitors.

The house was given its Gothic exterior by later owners but the oak carvings that fill the interior were all collected by the Ladies. The gardens are also worth a stroll, and there's a café and bowling green, too.

Plas Newydd, Hill Street, Llangollen, Denbighshire, LL20 8AW.

For general enquiries, bookings or special occasions please call: 01978 862834 (April – Sept), or 01824 708274 (October – March).

For more information, visit www.denbighshire.gov.uk/heritage