

# THE RIVER ALT



*fact file*



**NRA**

*National Rivers Authority  
North West Region*

## THE RIVER ALT

The Alt rises in Huyton then flows in a North Westerly direction through the outskirts of Liverpool and Aintree to Formby where it turns South to join the outer Mersey Estuary and the Irish Sea at Hightown.

The Alt is Merseyside's second largest river after the Mersey, draining much of the surface water from the north Liverpool conurbation.

There are over 75 kilometres of rivers, streams and brooks within the overall catchment of the river.

The Alt can be divided into two main sections:

Upstream of Maghull, the river drains urban and industrial areas. Pollution in this stretch comes mainly from industry and sewage.

Downstream of Maghull, the Alt drains agricultural land. Pollution here is diffuse, coming mainly from farms.

Much of the length of the river lies below high tide level, particularly in the lower reaches near Formby and Hightown.

Consequently, the Alt is pumped from source to estuary. This is achieved by pumping stations situated at Altmouth and on the tributaries.

The Altmouth Pumping Station can pump over 80 cubic metres of water per second from the river into the Irish Sea.

## WATER QUALITY

The quality of water in most of the Alt's catchment is poor with pollution depriving the water of oxygen and its ability to support fish life.

The National Rivers Authority has a system of classifying rivers according to their quality, as follows:

- Class 1 rivers are of good quality. The water can be used for drinking and they are clean enough for fish like salmon and trout to live in. (Highly oxygenated).



- Class 2 rivers are of fair quality. The water can be used for drinking but needs treatment. Coarse fish like perch, roach, bream and chub can live in them. (Sufficient oxygen present at all times).



- Class 3 rivers are of poor quality. They are too polluted to have any large fish populations but plenty of small animals can live in them. The water can be used for industry but not for drinking. (Intermittent oxygen depletion).



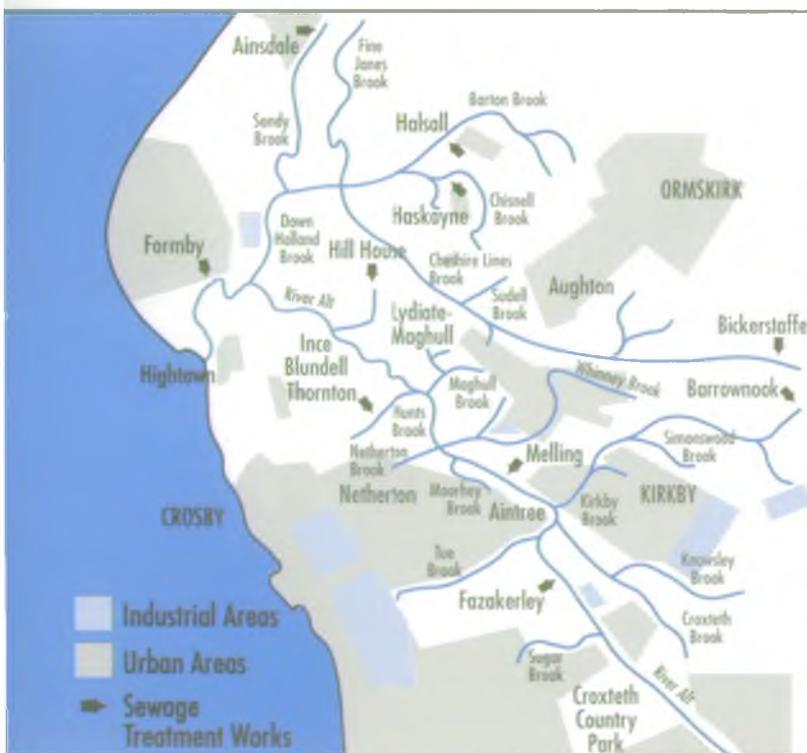
- Class 4 rivers are badly polluted. Some small animals like bloodworm can live in them, but no fish. (Little or no oxygen present).



Most of the Alt is Class 3 or 4, but some stretches - mainly those which pass through the more rural areas - can reach Class 2.

Improvements are planned to bring the entire length of the Alt up to Class 2 by the year 2000.

To do this, the NRA must tackle pollution from a wide range of sources.



## WHERE THE POLLUTION COMES FROM

Ten sewage treatment works discharge treated effluent into the Alt and its tributaries.

In the summer months, when there is little rainfall, much of the river's flow is treated sewage effluent.

The largest of the ten works on the Alt catchment is Fazakerley Sewage Treatment Works, the discharge from which makes up 85% of the dry weather flow of the river in its lower reaches.

Whilst there are no direct industrial discharges into the Alt system, pollution from trade premises often occurs through accidents which result in spillages.

The NRA's Pollution Control Officers visit these premises to advise on the storage and disposal of potentially polluting materials.

Wrongly connected drains contribute to the problems of the Alt. In many areas, sewer pipes carrying domestic waste have been wrongly connected with surface water drains which lead directly into the watercourse.

The NRA is working with North West Water Ltd. and the Local Authorities to investigate and rectify these problems.

Much of the land to the North and the East of the catchment is given over to market gardening and farming and these practices can also cause pollution.

In addition to animal slurry and silage liquor, which can find their way into the river as a result of spills or through faulty farm drainage systems, pollution can also occur through the use of fertilizers and pesticides.

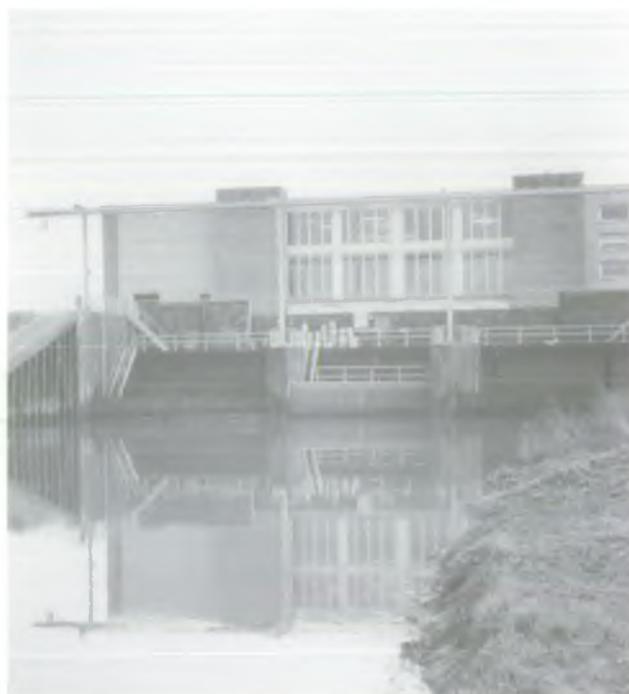
## PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Much work remains to be done if the target of bringing the water quality of the Alt up to a Class 2 by the year 2000 is to be achieved.

The National Rivers Authority has been involved in discussions with North West Water Ltd and has highlighted a number of pollution problems to be tackled on the Alt.

In addition, the Water Company has also given an undertaking to carry out improvements at a number of sewage treatment works on the Alt and these should lead to a significant improvement in water quality.

Farms and market gardens in the area have been visited by NRA inspectors who have given owners advice on farm drainage and the storage of waste, chemicals and pesticides.



Altmouth Pumping Station

The NRA has also carried out a conservation study to assess the Alt's potential as a habitat for wildlife. With some improvements, the area could attract a much wider range of flora and fauna.

With the planned improvements in water quality, fish could also eventually be returned to the river.

A special scheme, The Alt 2000 Initiative, has been launched to bring together a variety of organisations to help tackle the problems of the river.

In addition to the NRA, North West Water, the Mersey Basin Campaign, Friends of the Earth, Liverpool City Council, Sefton and Knowsley Councils and the North West Environmental Trust are among the bodies involved on the Alt 2000 Initiative.



## HOW YOU CAN HELP IMPROVE THE RIVER ALT



Typical urban pollution on the Alt

- **Don't** put oil, petrol or garden chemicals down drains or into gutters.
- **Don't** throw rubbish into rivers or streams.
- **Don't** allow any potentially polluting matter to escape into rivers or streams or the drainage system.
- **Don't** put rubbish into brooks or on the banks. **Remember** that rubbish blocks river channels and culverts causing flooding.
- **Do** ask for advice if you are not sure how to dispose of a potential pollutant.
- **Do** report any suspected pollution to the NRA.
- **Do** tell the NRA if you have a spillage of a potential pollutant.
- **Do** consult the NRA before undertaking any work on, under or over a watercourse or on the banks of a river or stream.



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