



Fund Britain's Waterways Update, July 2025

The Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) 4-month campaign cruise for 2025 is now drawing to an end and it is timely to look back on what has been achieved, before the steering group meets to discuss next steps for the FBW campaign. In addition to the sheer distance covered by the campaigners and their unstinting commitment of time, what has been most striking has been the warmth and support they have received along the route.

STOP PRESS!

We are delighted to announce a campaign cruise on **Sunday 3 August 2025** to **Baits Bite Lock** on the River Cam, one of two locks that have been closed for safety reasons. A cross-section of FBW supporters including boaters, businesses and waterway organisations will be meeting Charlotte Cane, MP for Ely and East Cambridgeshire, to highlight the [financial difficulties facing the Cam Conservancy](#) as a specific example of threat of inadequate funding to the entire waterway network. We hope also to organise a cruise on the Great Ouse shortly. Please email info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk if you are interested in either.



Baits Bite Lock, River Cam, November 2016 (credit Simon Judge)

2025 FBW CAMPAIGN CRUISE: HEADING FOR LONDON

On 29 March 2025 seven boats set off from Strawberry Island Boat Club, Doncaster, waved off by the Mayor of Doncaster Ros Jones CBE and other local dignitaries and led by this year's campaign cruise leader Hazel Owen, Chair of the Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs and a member of the FBW steering group.



Campaign cruise launch event at Strawberry Island Boat Club (credit: Duncan Wright)

More boats turned out to greet the flotilla on the River Trent at Gainsborough on 1 April and Newark on 2 April. Both events attracted coverage on BBC regional television news as well as BBC and independent radio. You can watch the coverage [here](#).



The augmented FBW flotilla in Gainsborough (credit: Stephen Busby)

Six of these boats journeyed for 278 miles and through 172 locks to London, being joined by others and attending events to raise awareness along the way.



Event at the Soar Boating Club, 6 April (credit: Allyson Marr)



The advance guard of the FBW flotilla heading for London (credit: Brian Sharples)

A reception for the boaters was held by St Pancras Cruising Club on 1 May, with a welcome from the Mayor of Camden Councillor Samata Khatoon and the Commodore of the Club Colin Parlett.



The boaters encountered unplanned stoppages on their route including in London, but most managed to participate in IWA Canalway Cavalcade in Little Venice over the Bank Holiday weekend 3-5 May.

TAKING THE MESSAGE TO WESTMINSTER

The complete flotilla of 26 boats gathered at Limehouse, travelled in convoy up the River Thames and stood off the Palace of Westminster at 11.00 a.m. on Wednesday 7 May, where they were viewed by Parliamentarians and FBW members from the terrace and cheered on by supporters on Westminster Bridge.



The FBW flotilla viewed from Westminster Bridge (credit: Liz Rayner)



Uma Kumaran MP and guests on the terrace of the Palace of Westminster (credit: Uma Kumaran MP)

L-R Ros Daniels (Canal & River Trust Regional Director London & South East), Mike Wills (Inland Waterways Association National Chair and Chair of FBW), Uma Kumaran (MP for Stratford & Bow and Waterways APPG Co-Chair), Mel Hide (Royal Yachting Association Director of External Affairs), Sue O'Hare (Inland Waterways Association Deputy Chair and Member of FBW Steering Group), Richard Parry (Canal & River Trust CEO)



Members of the FBW flotilla standing off the Palace of Westminster (credit: Rachel Eglinton, Be Seen Be Green Photography)



FBW supporters on Westminster Bridge (credit: Liz Rayner)

NORTH TO BOSTON

From Westminster the flotilla had an overnight stay in West India Docks and then divided between different routes north, with one group going up the Thames and the Oxford Canal and the other back up the Grand Union Canal. Events were held on each route, including at Tooley's Historic Boatyard on the Oxford Canal in Banbury on 24 May and Lichfield Cruising Club on 24-25 May.



FBW boaters and supporters outside Tooley's Boatyard with Matt Armitage and staff and volunteers from Tooley's



Members of Lichfield Cruising Club with FBW boaters, the Lichfield Mayor Claire Pinder-Smith and other local dignitaries

CROSSING THE WASH

After a two-week delay caused by an unscheduled closure of the Boston Barrier for maintenance by the Environment Agency, a flotilla of 14 narrowboats embarked on a 50-mile, nearly 12-hour journey across the Wash from Boston to Wisbech, including a break on Thief Sands to wait for the incoming tide. The Wash is not natural territory for narrowboats and the convoy made an unusual and impressive sight which was covered by both regional and national BBC television news (see footage [here](#)). Some spectacular video clips, especially drone footage, can also be found on the Facebook group for the 2025 FBW campaign cruises [Fund Britain's Waterways – Cruises for 2025](#).



Waiting for the tide in Boston Lock (credit Hazel Owen)



FBW flotilla crossing the Wash (credit: Shirley Sefton)



FBW flotilla on Thief Sands in the Wash waiting for the tide during the crossing

Since then the flotilla has split up, with some boats returning to base after nearly four months of campaigning. Others have continued onto the Middle Level Navigations and out to the Great Ouse and its tributaries. On 29 June the boaters hosted a visit by Paul Burrows, Chief Executive of the Middle Level Commissioners, and more events and publicity are being planned by local members.



Meeting with Paul Burrows, Chief Executive of the Middle Level Commissioners, in Peterborough

OTHER RECENT EVENTS

FBW was pleased to support campaigners for the future of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, who gathered on 9 July 2025 in a rally outside the Senedd to call on Welsh Government ministers and Natural Resources Wales to find an immediate and sustainable solution to the water supply crisis affecting the canal. The current temporary solution of buying in water from Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water is diverting Canal & River Trust funds from vital maintenance work. After intense lobbying by British Marine Wales and IWA alongside other groups, Deputy First Minister Huw Irranca-Davies MS [announced on 17th July](#) that the Welsh Government will both provide emergency investment and seek a longer-term solution.



Campaigners outside the Senedd debate on the Mon & Brec Canal, 9 July (credit Paul Thomas)

On 12 July 2025 a convoy of narrowboats cruised the Walsall Canal as part of an Explorer Cruise run by the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society (BCNS), flying the flags of the FBW campaign. This was the first time that such a large group of boats had visited the canal since its reopening by the Canal & River Trust after a 10-month cleanup of a 12-mile stretch following a toxic chemical spill in August 2024. Explorer Cruises aim to show people under-used parts and hidden gems of the canals across Birmingham and the wider West Midlands, and what a hugely valuable resource there is on the doorstep, not only for boating but also for walking, jogging, cycling, angling, canoeing and more.



BCNS Explorer Cruise at the site of the chemical spill on the Walsall Canal, 12 July (credit Stephen Busby)

SUMMING UP THE 2025 CAMPAIGN CRUISE

We can do no better than let Ian Marr, one of the boaters from Strawberry Island Boat Club on the campaign cruise, sum up the experience:

“After well over 1000 miles, hundreds of locks, a few IWA Silver Propellers and even taking Purple Emperor on salty sea water, we have arrived back at base.

But what have we achieved?

Well, certainly many more people have been aware of our campaign cruise efforts than last year.

We have raised our profile further with key movers and shakers.

We have experienced firsthand the challenging nature of our fragile and underfunded waterways. Every campaign boat has experienced stoppages in one form or another, tried to make plans that get scuppered, seen and used neglected infrastructure and trudged through canals struggling for water.

Each year the challenges get worse and more frequent. There are plenty of excuses, but it is very clear the nation's special heritage is under the most serious threat since the post-war years. A step change needs to happen to halt the decline and turn things around.

The writing is on the wall. Closing hire boat companies. It's not IF all three Pennine routes will close in any year, but WHEN. People are choosing to sell their boats.

Thanks to every one of you out there who made us welcome, waved as we went by, signed the petition and joined in with our activities."

And the heartfelt thanks of all associated with FBW to the organisers and participants in this year's campaign cruise.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The schedule for the remaining parts of the cruise can be found [here](#) and a photo report on its progress to date [here](#). You can follow the flotilla by joining the Facebook group [Fund Britain's Waterways – Cruises for 2025](#).

Sent on behalf of the Fund Britain's Waterways steering group
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