

NAVVIES

VOLUNTEERS RESTORING WATERWAYS

**Canal Camps update:
Six sites confirmed**

...plus the return of WRG North West



**WATERWAY
RECOVERY
GROUP**

**ISSUE 329
FEBRUARY - MARCH
2025**

INTRO Chelmer weekend



Two of our mobile groups, London WRG and WRG Forestry Team were out early in 2025 with a very frosty weekend dig on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation, thinning-out self-seeded willow trees on the towpath bank to give the remaining ones a chance to grow properly. These are actually planted, grown and harvested to make cricket bats as a source of income for the waterway, which is managed by an offshoot of the Inland Waterways Association and receives no regular public funding. See also our report from the WRG North West regional group's Uttroter Canal dig on pages 26-27



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**PLEASE NOTE: subscriptions renewal cheques should be made out to The Inland Waterways Association.
Note new address (right)**

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Cover picture: Our WRG North West regional group had suspended its work parties but was revived in early February for a weekend on the Utttoxeter Canal. Here they are seen carrying out maintenance on the restored Bridge 70 at Crumpwood. See report, pages 26-27 (picture by Alison Smedley) **Back cover:** Shropshire Union Canal Society volunteers have been braving the elements on the Montgomery Canal, where heavy rain at least filled up these newly restored lengths, before hard frost iced it over. See progress report, pages 30-32 (pictures by SUCS)

NAVVIES welcome from the editor

Is our work threatened by increasingly frequent storms and floods? Or might canal restoration actually be able to help reduce their impact?

What are we doing? And where? And when?

Hello and welcome to another issue of *Navvies* – and following on from our Camps Preview article in issue 228, this time you'll no doubt be hoping for the full programme of work for this summer's week-long Waterway Recovery Group Canal Camps at sites all around the waterways system. And the good news is that we do indeed have plenty more information including a sizeable proportion of the Canal Camp sites and dates. Unfortunately as we went to press there were still a few sites where we hadn't confirmed the work or the dates, but rather than make you wait until next time we've given you all the information we possibly can so far in a second preview article on pages 14-15. And there's more happening besides the main Canal Camps programme: see pages 10-13 for our 'Coming Soon' section with the latest on the BCN Cleanup (you'll need to book soon for this), Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice, and a couple of training opportunities. And don't forget that the mobile groups have a full programme of weekend working parties too: see the Diary on pages 20-21 for the complete list.

But why are we doing it?

Well, we can answer that question on various different levels. Firstly there's the generally up-beat, positive question about what it is that makes us give up our weekends and holidays for the good of canal restoration. In which case, there are various answers, from a desire to help turn derelict abandoned ruins into working historic waterways that folks can boat on, walk beside or enjoy in other ways, to a wish to get out and about in our spare time and do something more productive, enjoy the camaraderie of volunteer work... or even just to sample the local pubs in the evenings after work!

Or you can take a rather more negative approach to the question...

As I write this, the Bridgewater Canal, part of the Cheshire Ring circuit of waterways whose restoration our predecessors fought so hard for in the early days of the volunteer movement, suffered a major breach near Bollington following very heavy rainfall which has washed out a large chunk of canal bank and closed the waterway indefinitely. And around the same time, the Huddersfield Narrow Canal (the "impossible" restoration which was started by a bunch of extreme optimists in the face of a lot of scepticism as a follow-on restoration when the Cheshire Ring was nearing completion – and which gloriously proved the doubters wrong when it reopened in 2001) came close to suffering a similar fate. The waters of the River Tame, abnormally swollen by recent storms, washed away a large section of riverbank where the canal runs along the steep valley side above the river. It didn't actually breach the canal channel, but it left a lock chamber wall in a precariously exposed state, and canal and towpath closed until further notice.

And while the Bridgewater is owned by the wealthy conglomerate Peel Holdings who have plenty of financial resources (albeit that's no reason to assume they'll be in too much of a hurry to spend them on such a minor part of their estate – after all, you don't get to be a multi-billion pound concern by splashing the cash around!) the Huddersfield is part of the Canal & River Trust's network, and dependent on already-stretched finances which will get even tighter given that the new Government has so far shown no more inclination than the old one to improve on an entirely inadequate future funding package.

Meanwhile, as you can read elsewhere in this issue, restoration of Devon's Stover Canal has suffered a major setback with another breach following a storm in late autumn, and it's not clear where funds will come from to reinstate it.

I'm not saying that it's necessarily the case that "the entire system is falling apart" (although plenty of people are). These could be seen as three isolated occurrences. The

vast majority of the canal network isn't closed long-term due to breaches (although as I write, quite a few parts are closed in the short term due to wind-blown trees from yet another winter storm). But whatever your views on global warming / climate change and its causes and what we might or might not be able to do about it, it's hard to deny that the kind of extreme weather conditions which are more likely to cause these kind of problems for our waterways have been getting more common.

So the question I'm hearing asked is "Why are we bothering to restore canals, when it seems the ones we've already got are doomed as a result of our increasingly extreme weather conditions?" Well, the question (and to my mind, at least part of the answer) is similar to the one I already covered a few issues back of "Why are we spending money on restoring canals, when Government funding cuts are making it harder and harder to keep the existing ones open?" And my answer in each case is along the lines of (a) because it's not like the money saved by not restoring canals would be transferred to keeping the navigable ones open – they're funded in completely different ways and (b) because if we abandon them now, then if and when we do manage to find some way of getting the navigable network on an even keel and start to think about getting back into restoring disused waterways, they'll have been allowed to get into a so much worse state by then.

But that's not really where I'm coming from this time. How about turning the whole idea around and looking at whether canal restoration can actually help with mitigation of climate change. Please note once again that I'm not for one minute suggesting that restoring the Nitts & Stuffs Canal is going to reverse global warming and take us back to the glorious (and possibly non-existent) cool but dry summers of the past. No, I'm talking about mitigation – helping to enable the country to cope a little better with the worsening episodes of extreme rain (and subsequent flooding) that we're getting.

CRT has just put out its first Climate Adaptation Report, highlighting how the canals aren't just impacted by abnormal weather; they can actually contribute to reducing its impact: by transferring water (providing supplies for agriculture in droughts; or moving domestic supplies from areas where it's plentiful to places that are in danger of running short); using canal water to cool buildings; or most importantly, providing flood alleviation.

Sure, I can hear some of you thinking "Yes but that's really just more of CRT's campaign to try to justify getting money from the Government" – and yes it is, but that doesn't mean they aren't valid plans. And they aren't just fanciful ideas for the future: there's already a flood control scheme using the Rochdale Canal as part of an overflow channel; there are properties heated and cooled by canal water; there are water transfer schemes (and another big one being developed using the Coventry, North Oxford and Grand Union canals).

And it isn't just CRT. And this is where canal restoration comes in. Get Terry Cavender of the Buckingham Canal Society to talk (try stopping him!) about how his canal's



David Miller

Restored and rewatered length of the Buckingham Canal at Cosgrove: could it help flood relief?

restoration could tie in with climate change mitigation measures. In a nutshell, the canal runs parallel to and not far from the upper River Great Ouse for its entire length. For much of the route, the strip of land between them is undeveloped farmland / flood plain and could be used as the site for a series of flood water storage ponds, with excess water fed into them from the river (and out of them once the floods have subsided) via the canal. The result is a way of reducing the impact of flooding on the towns and villages on the route – and justifying restoring the canal as part of the scheme. And that might just get the canal restoration funded.

And how do we do it?

Dealing with abnormal weather isn't the only thing that could be seen as either a bad or a good thing for canals and canal restoration. The same might be said about working with nature conservation / biodiversity / environmentalism / call it what you like. In the past we've had a few conflicts between canal restorers (wanting to reopen canals to boating) and nature conservationists opposing this on the grounds that boats will damage precious nature habitats. The arguments have raged (I know, I took part in a few of them!) between the view that "We rescued this historic waterway from the threat of obliteration while wildlife interests did nothing to save it – why should they now be allowed to stop us using it?" and the counterargument that "This is a rare and precious nature habitat that we must save – why should we let a bunch of motor boaters destroy it".

I would have hoped that the conservation management plans that have become a necessary part of

waterway projects in recent years would at least have meant that these debates could take place before the restoration, rather than retrospectively (although the odd story coming from the Montgomery Canal indicates that that isn't necessarily so). Whatever the case, nature



Martin Ludgate

conservation and protection against loss of biodiversity is something that needs to be considered by today's canal restorers - otherwise they will struggle to get permission to work. But like climate mitigation, it's something that needn't be seen as a barrier to restoration. It might go hand-in-hand with restoration to navigation – depending on how you do it.

Now I'm sure lots of you are thinking that nature-friendly canal restoration isn't exactly a new idea - so why am I telling you about it all of a sudden? Well, what's new is that on pages 22-25 we have the first article in a series written for *Navvies* by Alex Melson on wildlife and canal restoration. In this one he describes the wildlife value of the canal system – in the subsequent ones he will go into how restoration can be done in a way that can benefit nature.

But what do you think? Do these thoughts on climate change and biodiversity represent the right way forward for canal restoration? Or should we be wary of getting into bed with environmentalists and the like? If you have a view on the subject, then the *Navvies* letters page is all yours.

Martin Ludgate

CHAIRMAN'S Comment

If our position is that waterways provide environmental benefits, shouldn't we be trying to make our restoration efforts as environmentally friendly as possible?

Chairman's Comment

As is often the case, the Chairman's comment for this edition of *Navvies* is mainly going to be a recommendation to read all the other pages! I would defend such duplication by hopefully using my pages to put the other pages into context* and show how and where they fit in the wider world of Restoration.

So first I will commend the Editor's comment on pages 4-6 to you. Martin does indeed raise some important points and it's equally important we do not get sidetracked or distracted by what might be described as peripheral arguments. Having discussed it with Martin I know he was concerned about just the mention of Climate Change might lead to lots of opinions about "what were the causes" and "what were the solutions" and "blah blah".

But I don't think that is the issue we need to be concerned with. Irrespective of the wider Climate Change discussions there does seem to be agreement** that the climate has got more extreme and our waterways network:

(a) is therefore under more stress than it was originally designed for, but (possibly more importantly)

(b) could play a key part in helping to mitigate those extremes.

So the arguments seem to be good for securing waterways funding and recognition of the place of the waterways in the nation's infrastructure. But hang on... remember the phrase "originally designed for" in the paragraph above?

Because, while all of the above is, at the very least, interesting to the readers of *Navvies*, I think there are two conversations that we should be focusing on. I'll state them here together with:

Q1: A quick example of the sort of question that should be at the forefront of our discussions, and

Q2: A quick example of the sort of question that has, in the past, hindered those discussions.

The first conversation: If there is, through new technology, new thinking, new funding, new whatever, a chance to make our waterways more useful to the whole nation then shouldn't we seize on that opportunity?

...to which the questions are:

Q1: If WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association, through its Sustainable Boating Group, is recommending / campaigning for electric charging points at regular intervals along all navigable waterways, then shouldn't we be making sure all restoration proposals take this into account?

Q2: Hang on – aren't we a heritage organisation? What, every historic bridge now comes with a 13 Amp socket, does it?

And the second conversation: If our campaigning position is that waterways provide really good environmental benefits, then shouldn't we be trying to make our restoration efforts as environmentally friendly as possible?

...to which the questions are:

Q1: Should we really be burning all those trees we have just chopped down?

Q2: Hang on – surely we are not back to reusing (and cleaning!) all those knackered bricks we have just knocked out of that wall?

Obviously that's a rather hasty (and clumsy) summary of what I feel is the current situation, and I freely admit I've taken liberties because I know the audience. But I can see that the need to have these conversations is becoming vital.

So how will that occur? You won't be surprised to hear that, as far as WRG is concerned, these very pages of *Navvies* are going to be key to this. Alex Melson has started the ball rolling on pages 22-25 with the first of a series of four articles that put over the importance of waterways from the environmental viewpoint and these should start the conversation. I commend those pages to you as well as Martin's.

As to the wider restoration sector I have been asked to give a presentation at the joint IWA / Canal & River Trust annual Restoration Conference. This presentation currently has a working title of *Waterways of the Future* which is clearly rather vague but, if you have read this far down the page, you will have gathered the main thrust. The fact that I will be co-presenting with Hugh Pearman from the IWA's Heritage Advisory Panel also suggests that it's not going to shy away from the big questions that have previously hindered discussions.

Which does lead to my third recommendation: on page 10 is a piece about the Restoration Conference. Please look at the subjects to be discussed and, if you have an association with a particular restoration scheme, please campaign to ensure they send the right people to it. Yes it's a good opportunity to network and talk shop every year, but this year's subjects are significant and it's important they 'hit home'.

Oh, and my fourth recommendation? Read all the other pages of this *Navvies*, as always it's brilliant.

Cheers

Mike Palmer

** I was going to deploy the much overused cliché that "restoration as a big jigsaw where you don't actually work out the importance of each fiddly little bit until you complete the whole puzzle and stand back, unless you have a big picture on the box to cheat with". But that would just be too corny!*

*** By agreement I mean both CRT with its Climate Adaption Report, and IWA with its Waterways For Today report. Honestly – when those two are in agreement...*



The impact of one of the recent storms on the Oxford Canal in Banbury

LETTER to the editor

"It all needs bodies to help with the physical work as well as all the other elements from strategy to planning work parties with everything between"

"When will it be completed?"

Over the Christmas period we were again able to have the amazing WRG team join us on the Buckingham Canal at Cosgrove for Christmas Camp. The team of 18 plus others on some of the days made huge progress on three key project sites. This included the WRG forestry team removing some eight diseased trees for us.

Buckingham Canal Society want to thank the whole team. Those on the ground doing the physical bits, those organising, those supporting everything WRG does, including all the backroom "stuff."

I look back on the mere 17 years I have been involved with restoration and what has been achieved across the country by those of us "keeping the restoration faith". These are often intergenerational projects. Every week one door closes and another opens. Some are hugely game-changing opportunities that enable progress. But it all needs bodies to help with the physical work as well as all the other elements from strategy to planning work parties with everything in between.

So, get involved if you are not already. It is not a New Year Resolution; it is a tangible way to resolve to protect and restore our waterways. We all know that WRG and local societies need new blood, regardless of how vintage or nouveau it is!. If it is a few hours a month or several weekends, go for it.

But more than that become a self-appointed ambassador and talk to three or four random people each week about canals. If you spark interest in a handful you will have done so much for the legacy we are all trying to achieve.

My favourite reply to the often-asked question on the towpath of "When will it be completed?" is often "even sooner if you support us or even come and help!"

Looking forward to seeing this year's progress across all the restorations

Terry Cavender
Executive Officer and Trustee of Buckingham Canal Society



Making "huge progress" - the WRG Christmas camp on the Buckingham Canal

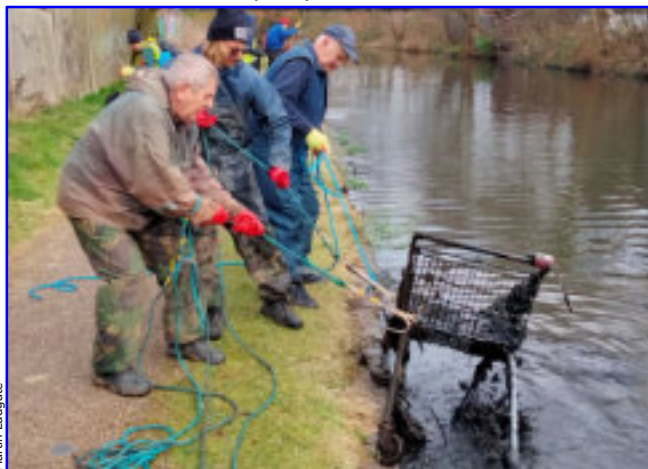
COMING SOON BCN and more

Last call to book for the BCN Cleanup; Canalway Cavalcade needs volunteers; and do you want some training before the summer Camp?

BCN Cleanup 15-16 March: final call

As we went to press, online bookings were already coming in for this annual event on the waterways of the West Midlands, but there was still plenty of room for more.

The BCN is a network of over 100 miles of fascinating ex-industrial waterways which criss-cross the Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Black Country area. They're still mostly open to boating, but many of them are underused. Let's face it, Walsall isn't your typical boating holiday destination, is it? But the less use they see, the more they tend to attract rubbish, which in turn makes it more difficult to navigate them, and that puts off all but the most intrepid boaters... So to break this



Martin Ludgate

Another trolley emerges from the murky depths of the BCN

vicious circle, each year since the late 1990s we (WRG, the BCN Society, the local branches of WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association, and other local groups) have organised the Cleanup. Lots of volunteers spend the weekend throwing grappling hooks into the canal and hauling out old bikes, shopping trolleys, car tyres, prams and whatever else we can find, and the Canal & River Trust and BCNS organise taking it away for recycling or disposing of.

We target a different area each year, and this time it's the canals around Tipton which will benefit from our efforts. And by way of a change, we'll also be working (from boats) on clearing vegetation that's growing from the canal banks, threatening to block the channel.

As usual there will be WRG accommodation and food at the Malthouse Stables centre in Tipton - conveniently very close to the work site. To book online, see wrg.org.uk and go to 'events'; alternatively contact 01494 783453 or enquiries@wrg.org.uk

IWA / CRT Waterway Restoration Conference 26 April

Find out more about the behind-the-scenes work that goes into restoring canals at annual conference, jointly organised by The Inland Waterways Association and Canal & River Trust, on Saturday 26th April 2025 at the National Waterways Museum. Ellesmere Port, Cheshire.

This year it will focus on the challenges of delivering sustainable restorations from different viewpoints featuring a line up of experienced speakers. Presentations and seminars will include the Grand Union Canal water transfer project and its wider implications for restoration; Youth Engagement in restoration and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. A strong focus will be given to the Restoration for the Future, and what sustainable plans will need to consider while also ensuring a commitment to heritage preservation.

The conference is a valuable chance for those involved in waterway restoration to

experience new insights into the important topics facing restorations today. It is aimed particularly at waterway restoration societies and trusts, but representatives of any groups including WRG groups are welcome. Delegates will have the opportunity to network, and attend in-depth sessions and workshops led by experts.

The fee for the day is just £10.00. More information including the programme will be published on waterways.org.uk. Spaces are limited: to book, see waterways.org.uk/support/ways-to-get-involved/events/waterway-restoration-conference-2025

Any questions, email verena.leonardini@waterways.org.uk.

Canalway Cavalcade: support volunteers wanted 30 April - 6 May



Help make this event happen again this year

Volunteer Bookings are open for helping to support Canalway Cavalcade, WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association's annual festival at London's Little Venice, and one of the most colourful events of the Inland Waterways calendar. We are delighted to launch the booking form for volunteers to register your place at IWA Canalway Cavalcade 2025.

This year the event is to be held over 3th - 6th May 2025 and as always we need plenty of volunteers to make sure we can run the event smoothly and safely. We need volunteers both during the event, and

setting up beforehand and taking down afterwards.

During the event: Please could you spare some time to help with roles including...

- Running the information stands
- Collecting donations
- Distributing programmes
- Assisting the teams of commercial and children's Activities

Whatever time you can offer will be greatly appreciated, even if it's just a couple of hours. *Navvies* readers would be ideal for helping out on the Information Stands. Questions can be things like "what time is the puppet show?" or "where can I get a boat trip" or "what's all this in aid of?" so it's beneficial to know a little bit about either IWA, WRG, canals, boating, or just the festival in general - which can all be found in the event brochure so experience is not essential. To complete your booking please scan the QR code (right). Or if you would prefer to fill in a paper form, go to the IWA webpage and look under the Volunteer section <https://waterways.org.uk/support/ways-to-get-involved/events/iwa-canalway-cavalcade-2025>



Scan to book on as a Canalway Cavalcade volunteer

Before and after the event: If you can spare some time before or after the festival, the IWA/WRG Work Camp volunteers are always happy to welcome an extra pair of hands to help build the event on the Thursday and Friday and especially to dismantle the festival on the Monday evening and Tuesday morning. If you fancy building market stalls, gazebos and putting up banners please email pete.fleming@waterways.org.uk to register your interest.

Committee roles: the jobs described above take place on site around the event weekend, however there are several opportunities for volunteers to help on our Organising Committee, such as Publicity, Marketing, Commercial, Volunteer Coordination, and Social Media. If you have skills or interest in these areas please get in touch! We require all volunteers to complete a Booking Form prior to arrival so that we have essential medical and emergency contact information and can thoroughly plan for the event, even if you have discussed attending with any of the team leaders.

Thank you for your continued support.

Emma Greenall

WRG Training Weekend 17-18 May: get trained for your Canal Camp

The annual Training Weekend returns to the same central site at Lichfield for 2025 and we are very grateful to our friends at the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust who have made this possible for us once again. All training sessions will take place on Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th May, with accommodation available from Friday evening for those wishing to stay over.

Fosseway Heath is a fantastic site, providing us with the perfect place to give volunteers some experience of the wide range of skills that will be useful on working weekends and camps. Our aim is to provide initial or refresher training in those areas which have been identified as priority for projects in the coming year, as well as instructor training for those with years of regular operator experience. Training will be available in the following areas:

- 360-degree excavators (WRG categories 30 & 31)
- Articulated dumpers
- Ride-on rollers
- Minibuses
- Trailers
- Site tools
- Bricksaws
- Bricklaying

...as well as any other useful sessions identified over the next few months.

For those of you who have never attended a WRG Training Weekend, it is ideal for anyone attending a Canal Camp this year where specific skills have been identified as useful by your leaders, or perhaps you volunteer regularly and need certain skills for a particular local project to progress. Equally, returning volunteers may feel they need refresher sessions before the camp season starts. Perhaps you are considering becoming an instructor? Or, if you are already an instructor and able to volunteer and share your knowledge over the two days, please do get in touch.

If you would like to book on, discuss opportunities or volunteer as an instructor, please do contact me via email: wrgtraining@wrg.org.uk

I look forward to hearing from you.



The Training Weekend will feature 360° excavators and bricklaying



Ali Bottomley

Leadership Teams Day 31 May: preparing for summer 2025

This year's Leadership Teams Day (LTD) is on Saturday, 31 May at its traditional location of Rowington Village Hall, Rowington Green, CV35 7DB near Warwick and starting formally at 10:00.

Existing and aspiring WRG Canal Camp leaders, assistant leaders and cooks are invited to attend, as are those involved in leading the regional and other mobile groups. Those making up the WRG leadership teams for this year's Canal Camps are very strongly encouraged to attend. Those who lead work parties for canal trusts are also very welcome to attend to share and compare their experiences against WRG's.

Breakfast rolls will be available from 09:30 and lunch and a dinner will be provided on the day. The hall is available on the Friday evening for those not wishing to travel on the Saturday morning and also for Saturday night sleepovers so WRGies can attend the WRG Committee Meeting on the Sunday morning to learn more about the administration and operation of WRG.

There will not be a meal provided on the Friday evening but the hall kitchen will be available and there is always the Tom o' The Wood pub a short walk down the road where decent food can be had. Best to book if you want to eat.

The day's programme will be concentrating on updating Leadership Teams with all sorts of matters relevant to running safe, happy and successful camps in 2025.

The draft programme currently has these sessions in mind:

- WRG Standards for Leadership Teams and Key Messages from the WRG Board
- Assistant Leaders
- Environmental Considerations for Restoration Work and Canal Camps
- Reporting of Incidents, Accidents and Near-Misses
- Developing Risk Assessments
- 2025's Camps

If leaders have anything on their minds that would be useful to discuss and investigate further, then please let me know via Verena in WRG HQ – verena.leonardini@waterways.org.uk

It will be a very useful, even essential, day for this year's Leadership Teams to increase their awareness of useful and mandatory matters. The day will go a long way to making sure the Leadership Teams are fully prepared and able to justify their actions should the need arise.

Please book on via the WRG website where places on the canal camps can also soon be booked. There is no charge!

David ('Evvo') Evans



Last year's Leadership Teams Day under way

...and then...

...turn the page for the latest on what's happening on the summer Canal Camps programme

CANAL CAMPS 2025 Update

We've got (some of) the news that lots of you have been waiting for: sites and dates for (some of) our programme of week-long WRG Canal Camps...

WRG Canal Camps 2025: latest news of sites and dates

In the 'Camps pre-preview' that we included in the last issue of *Navvies*, we gave provisional information about seven of the sites that we anticipated would be hosting week-long WRG Canal Camps this coming summer - and we said we hoped to be well on the way to finalising the programme by the time that issue hit your doorsteps... and that a Camps Booklet (paper or electronic) with full details would be with you before long...

Well, OK, let's have the bad news first: we're afraid we still haven't quite got to that stage, as it's been taking time to get all the details confirmed. Oh, and unfortunately one of the seven sites we told you about last time has dropped off the list. Through no fault of their own, the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust aren't quite ready to host us this year - and we're thankful that they've been able to tell us early on, before we've opened the bookings.

And now on to the good news: We can confirm that the other six of those sites have been confirmed, the Camps scheduled, we can give you the dates, and you will be able to book online as this appears in print or very soon afterwards. So here they are...

Lichfield Canal: channel rebuilding in Lichfield

What are we doing?

We'll be rebuilding a length of canal channel in Lichfield, with the work likely to include excavation, piling, concrete lining and towpath laying, as part of a plan to link together two already restored lengths of canal.

When are we doing it?

We have two weeks of Camps on 26 July - 2 August and 2-9 August

Louth Canal: Rebuilding Ticklepenny Lock

What are we doing?

Continuing the good work of the last two years' camps which have been carefully rebuilding the chamber of a historic scallop-sided brick-built lock chamber from a state of imminent collapse to fully restored condition, for possible future reopening to boats.

When are we doing it?

The Camp is on 9-16 August

Wey & Arun Canal: Rooks Hill Bridge

What are we doing?

Building a new traditional style brick arch bridleway bridge (it may include formwork, reinforcing, pouring concrete, bricklaying and machinery work), as part of a plan to extend the restored Birtley Bridges section southward.

When are we doing it?

We have two weeks of Camps on 5-12 July (led by our friends in mobile group NWPG) and 12-19 July (led by our friends in mobile group KESCRG)

River Parrett: laying paths at Langport

What are we doing?

Our volunteers will be rebuilding and improving the paths on Cocklemoor, the riverside land in Langport owned by Langport Town Council, as part of work to regenerate the town's riverside as a local amenity, and in support of restoration work on the river

When are we doing it?

We have two weeks of Camps, provisionally on 12-19 April and 19-26 April (this is around the Easter holiday; the exact dates are still to be confirmed)

Cotswold Canals: Weymoor Bridge culvert

What are we doing?

We're carrying on from last year's work, when we diverted a stream into a new culvert running under the canal bed, and built a section of the new canal channel above it. This year we're returning to build the final section of concrete channel (including formwork, reinforcement, and casting the concrete), to link it up with the existing canal banks.

When are we doing it?

We have two weeks of Camps on 9-16 August and 16-23 August

Cromford Canal: creating a new canal channel at Beggarlee

What are we doing?

We're building a 45-metre length of new canal channel (with steel piling on one side and an earth bank on the other - so plenty of machinery work) leading on from the Langley Mill terminus of the Erewash Canal. It's part of a diversion that will take the restored canal around a blockage resulting from when a new road was built.

When are we doing it?

The Camp is on 19-26 July

But that's not all...

Although these ten weeks on six sites are the ones that we have definitely got confirmed sites and scheduled dates for, that doesn't mean these will be the only week-long Canal Camps this year.

We are still working out the final details for three or four more sites that are very likely to make into the schedule. We plan to bring you full details of these in the next *Navvies* if they are available.

We will also add any further information including the names of the camp leaders to our *Navvies* diary pages as it becomes available.

See the WRG website wrg.org.uk and follow the link to 'Working holidays' for the latest information

CAMP REPORT Buckingham

It was back to Buckinghamshire for the Christmas Canal Camp at Cosgrove on the Buckingham Canal. Dave 'Moose' Hearnden reports...

Buckingham Canal Christmas Camp 26 December - 1st January

The WRG Christmas Canal Camp this year was again on the Buckingham Canal, a branch of the Grand Union Canal, as it was last year.

The work for the week was the usual winter work of 'scrub bashing', but at different locations along the arm. Last year we had worked from Bridge Two towards the A5 road; this year, we were asked by Buckingham Canal Society to clear a piece of land by the toilet block alongside the Grand Union at the junction with the Buckingham Arm, it was referred as the triangle. Then there was further work back at Bridge Two.

The WRG Forestry Team were with us and had several trees to remove in the area we had to clean, and also two clumps of trees that were diseased, up the arm.

Slowly everyone appeared at the start

of the Camp: three caravans, plus the WRG Van and Trailer driven by Pete, who had collected the kit from our store.

The first evening we had the normal health and safety talk, including info about the bunk beds having been made stronger since the previous year's camp (which did cheer up some of the camp!) and food cooked by Maria with help from Mo. A lot of social catching up with everyone then proceeded.

Jigsaws? They were breeding! We must have had 24 jigsaw puzzles in the hall that first night. Maria, and a couple others do swaps when they catch up with each other, and it was that time again to swap.

Next morning was the first day on site. This is always slightly slow, with sorting out vehicles and spaces, but we were still on site a decent time, the leaders explained to the workers what was happening, and what was needed, and away they went.

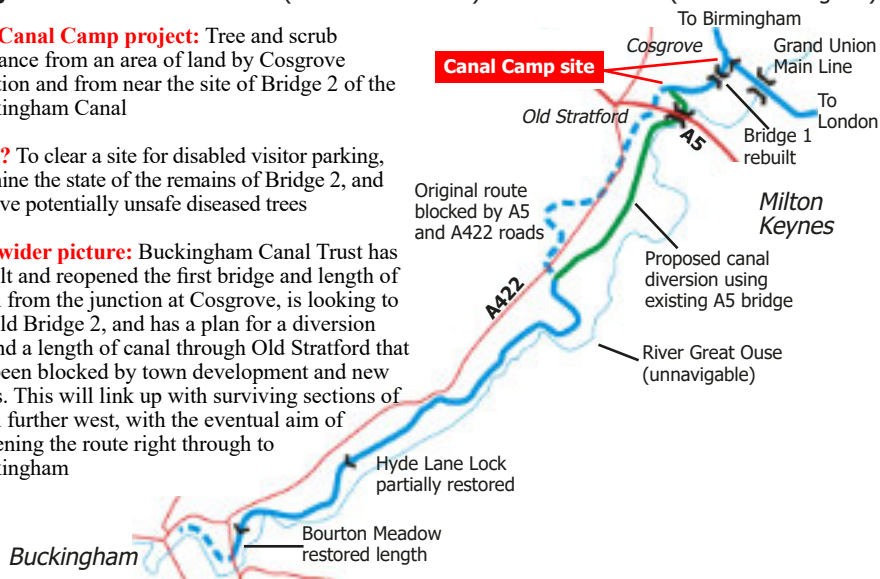
FACT FILE Buckingham Canal

Length: 10 miles **Locks:** 2 as built (more will be needed) **Date closed:** 1944 (dammed at Cosgrove)

The Canal Camp project: Tree and scrub clearance from an area of land by Cosgrove Junction and from near the site of Bridge 2 of the Buckingham Canal

Why? To clear a site for disabled visitor parking, examine the state of the remains of Bridge 2, and remove potentially unsafe diseased trees

The wider picture: Buckingham Canal Trust has rebuilt and reopened the first bridge and length of canal from the junction at Cosgrove, is looking to rebuild Bridge 2, and has a plan for a diversion around a length of canal through Old Stratford that has been blocked by town development and new roads. This will link up with surviving sections of canal further west, with the eventual aim of reopening the route right through to Buckingham



This was the triangle of land mentioned earlier, which belonged to CRT. It was a mess – it just looked overgrown; but as the workers started to get to grips, and the fire was started, we found there were a lot of items including tractor tyres that had been dumped, including a fibreglass side of a boat's wheelhouse - or my thought was perhaps the roof of a wheelhouse.

Martin Ludgate



Clearing the 'triangle', the site for the disabled access visitor car park

Before going off to start on taking the diseased trees down along the arm, the Forestry Team had a look at a couple of the trees in our triangle. It was agreed we would do all the clearance work to be able to get to the trees and then Forestry would then come in and take about three trees down, most likely the next day.

So the day went on slashing and burning, and at the end of the day we jumped into the van and cars and went back to the hall.

The accommodation was a Scout Camp, so it had 5 rooms with bunk beds, plus a hall for eating and socialising, a decent kitchen, plus a toilet (always handy), but just outside were male and female showers and toilets in a separate block.

The reason it was mentioned earlier about the bunks having been made stronger was they had been bought for children, and they soon realised that the slats were not the strongest! After the camp previous year, I had to admit that one or two bodies had gone through the slats and in one case more than once... luckily they already knew this and even though they had change some (although obviously not all of them), we just gave them a valid reason to replace the remainder. (Obviously no volunteers were injured during this critical experiment, but some very loud laughing was heard around the building!)

Back at the hall Maria, ably assisted by Mo, produced a lovely evening meal

In the evening once we'd been fed, everyone was chatting with certain people making jigsaws, I think that of every Xmas camp I have been on, nearly all have a jigsaw or two on the go, once completed, that is packed up and another one is started.

Next day after breakfast (cooked by RAF Martin and John Hawkins), it was off to site, the workers continued working at the triangle. Forestry planned and then took down the trees in the triangle but what started as just three turned into six or seven. Obviously whilst trees were coming down everyone kept a safe distance, but once a tree was down then it was fair game when the workers would then just attack the trees; once logged, logs were put into a stack, to be collected later. We decided at lunch time that there were plenty of logs, so after lunch I went back with Maria and bought back my little trailer and loaded the logs.

About lunch time our editor Martin Ludgate arrived to deliver the van from London, he had originally been planning on attending the camp but having had slight accident he felt he could not be on site, but had volunteered to bring the van to us and travel back home via public transport; big huge thank you Martin. This made travelling to site easier. *[I've recovered now! ...Ed]*



Buckingham Canal Society

Using WRG Forestry's new powered winch to drag felled trees out of the canal by the rebuilt Bridge 1

The logs were split giving the Scout Camp a pile, obviously some were going to go home with me.

By the end of the second day the triangle had been cleared, and all the rubbish that we could deal with had been put into a pile to be collected by CRT.

The plan for the triangle, and the reason we were asked to clear it, was that it's planned to turn it into disabled parking.

The other part to the triangle was a cthouse, for a feral cat or two in a 3ft by 2ft wooden box. The number of local people who wanted to know if the cats were OK, were they being moved etc... The answer was no: it had been planned to remodel the cat house several plans were put forward, extra floors with patio doors opening, in front of a large pond, but sadly never happened! But seriously so many people asked about the cats, we never saw any!

Day three now with the triangle completed and it did look good, the camp went off to where Forestry had been working, and we were going to tidy up and make access easier for Forestry to do what they do best, i.e. take down trees, of course we had a fire going fairly quickly, which we kept adding stuff to.

Trees that had been cut down were logged and dumped in the lighter, this was so they could be moved to a place with easy

access, it saves having to carry the logs down to the end of the arm. Work continued all day.

Day four, Forestry stayed at the same site and everyone else went off to Bridge Two, this is a farmers accommodation bridge – or rather, it was a farmers accommodation bridge before it was demolished. The trouble is, no one knows what is left of the original structure. We had been asked if we could clean the foliage off the sides of what is remaining, so the trusty volunteers got going. After a day of clearing and a bit of trowel work, the wing walls were found and in most cases were cleared and cleaned so they could be seen, ready for a further inspection involving an excavator in the New Year.

Back to the hall, evening meal, chatting and jigsaws again.

The Forestry Team all the while had been removing some trees, after helping at the triangle they continued taking down some decent sized trees: from the outside they looked nice, but once down could see they were diseased, with large brown areas marking softish wood. It was a shame, but it would only take a storm and they could have come down, so it's much safer that they were removed in a controlled way.

The plan for the last day on site was that the workers were going to tidy up the

mess the Forestry Team had made, this was going to be putting the logs from the dropped trees into a lighter.

That was the plan, but Charlotte had obviously not realised that and read the plan as she got carried away and kept tidying up as the trees were bought down, doing our work for us! Oh how dare she! But there was still some tidying up to do, plus another couple of trees were taken down, so we did get to tidy up but not as much as we had planned but it kept us occupied cleaning up etc.

After lunch Forestry had a look at some trees that need to be removed, several are leaning over fairly badly, this will be a fairly large job that will require some boaters to be moved, the work is being planned for the New Year.

So the last day on site was moving logs and putting them in the lighter, plus keeping a fire stocked. By the end of the last day, several small manageable sized logs were left in piles along the towpath for the locals, all the rest were either burnt or put in the lighter.

Final evening meal which was New Year's Eve, was three courses, starting with choice of starters, main course, choice of meats (plus obviously veggies catered for), and several puds. All prepared by Maria and Mo.

Then later a WRG cheese board! Happy welcoming of the New Year was had by all.

On the last morning it was time for the clear up: the trailer had been packed the night before, I had put the net over my trailer for the journey home, which just left cleaning up the accommodation and packing the catering kit into the van.

People were dispersing as the morning went on, the van left with Pete driving, the catering kit and trailer going back to base.

A person from the Scouts came and checked over the property for handover, and then Maria and I were on our way home, Maria driving the 2nd van, and myself driving our Land Rover Disco and towing my little trailer.

I believe it had been a very successful camp, with a lot achieved over the week. CRT had appeared on site several times and seemed very happy, the locals seemed



David Miller

Taking logs away in the Canal Society's lighter

pleased with the transformation. I think the volunteers did an amazing amount of work, of scrub bashing and clearing, Forestry managed to drop a good number of trees.

I would like to thank, Pete for collecting the van and trailer and for just being Pete; Maria and Mo for all the good food for the week that they produced, no one went hungry; RAF Martin and John for all the breakfasts; Nigel for organising the Forestry Team; but also all the volunteers that make the Christmas Camp so special.

Back at home, we ended the camp with an Indian meal in our village.

There is one final point I would like to make: I ended up bringing at least 13-14 jigsaws home!!

Dave 'Moose' Hearnden

NAVVIES DIARY

Week-long Canal Camps cost £80 or as stated. Booking for events labelled 'WRG Canal Asheridge Road, Chesham HP5 2PX. Tel: 01494 783453, enquiries@wrg.org.uk. Diary

Feb 22-23	London WRG	Shrewsbury & Newport Canals
Mar 1-2	KESCRG	To be arranged
Mar 15-16	London WRG	Supporting the BCN Cleanup
Mar 15-16	WRG/IWA/BCNS	BCN Cleanup - see pages 8-9
Mar 15-16,	wrgBITM	To be arranged
Mar 23 Sun	WRG	WRG Committee/Board Meeting. Note date changed from Sat 22 March
Mar 29-30	NWPG	To be arranged
Apr 5-6	KESCRG	Lichfield Canal, joint dig with London WRG
Apr 5-6	London WRG	Lichfield Canal, joint dig with KESCRG,
Apr 12-19	WRG Canal Camp	River Parrett Canal Camp
Apr 19-26	WRG Canal Camp	River Parrett Canal Camp
Apr 30-May 6	IWA/WRG	Support camp for iWA Canalway Cavalcade festival at Little Venice, London - see pag
May 10-11	KESCRG	Wilts & Berks Canal, Pewsham Locks
May 16-18,	NWPG	To be arranged
May 17-18,	wrgBITM	To be arranged
May 17-18	TW2024	WRG Training Weekend
May 17-18	London WRG	Cotswold Canals
May 31 Sat	LTD	Leadership Teams Day: Rowington Village Hall
Jun 1 Sun	WRG	WRG Committee/Board Meeting: to be confirmed. Rowington Village Hall
Jun 7-8	KESCRG	To be arranged
Jun 14-15	London WRG	Uttoxeter Canal: balsam bashing weekend
Jun 21-22	wrgBITM	Suffolk Stour: to be confirmed
Jul 5-12	WRG Canal Camp	Wey & Arun Canal Camp led by mobile group NWPG
Jul 12-19	WRG Canal Camp	Wey & Arun Canal Camp led by mobile group KESCRG
Jul 19-20	wrgBITM	Suffolk Stour: to be confirmed
Jul 19-26	WRG Canal Camp	Cromford Canal Camp at Beggarlee
Jul 26-Aug 2	WRG Canal Camp	Lichfield Canal Camp at Tamworth Road, Lichfield
Aug 2-9	WRG Canal Camp	Lichfield Canal Camp at Tamworth Road, Lichfield
Aug 9-16	WRG Canal Camp	Louth Canal Camp at Ticklepenny Lock
Aug 9-16	WRG Canal Camp	Coswold Canal Camp at Weymoor Bridge
Aug 16-23	WRG Canal Camp	Coswold Canal Camp at Weymoor Bridge
Sep 6-7	London WRG	To be arranged
Sep 20-21	wrgBITM	Maidenhead Waterways
Sep 28 Sun	WRG	WRG Committee/Board Meeting: Rowington Village Hall. Not date changed from Sat
Oct 4-5	London WRG	Shrewsbury & Newport Canals
Oct 17-19	NWPG	To be arranged
Oct 18-19	wrgBITM	To be arranged
Nov 15-16	wrgBITM	Maidenhead Waterways
Nov 22-23	NWPG	To be arranged
Dec 13-14	wrgBITM	To be arranged

WRG and mobile groups

**'Camp' should go to: WRG Canal Camps, Unit 16B, First Floor, Chiltern Court,
contributions to Dave Wedd, Tel 07816 175454m dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk**

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es 8-9

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27 September

WILDLIFE and canal restoration

How can canal restoration coexist with environmentalism and nature conservation? In the first of a series, Alex Melson sets the scene...

Wildlife and canal restoration

Waterway restoration hasn't always had the easiest of relationships with nature conservation. As covered in the editorial column on pages 4-5, sometimes as canal restorers wanting to reopen waterways for boating (and other compatible uses), we have found ourselves at loggerheads with wildlife interests who may see reopening to navigation (particularly by powered craft) as a threat to an important ecological asset. But that needn't be the case. Restoration can actually benefit biodiversity at the same time as extending the navigable waterways network.

Alex Melson (who many of you may recall from his time as one of the IWA Head Office staff with responsibility for WRG matters among other things - before moving on to pursue a career in ecology, nature and the environment) has returned to us as a volunteer contributor of a series of articles about wildlife and inland waterways. In the first one, he explains why wildlife interests regard the waterways network as so important to biodiversity and nature conservation. Subsequent articles will follow this up by showing how he believes canal restoration can contribute to the wildlife value of canals, and giving a list of practical ways that restoration methods can be chosen which improve biodiversity.

Wildlife and Canal Restoration part 1: The Wildlife Value of the Canal Network

The canal network, once a system primarily developed for transportation and trade, has evolved into an invaluable ecological asset. Spanning across many counties, canals often serve as critical corridors for wildlife, providing both habitat and migration routes for a variety of species. Their environmental value has garnered increasing recognition, particularly in urbanised areas where natural habitats have been lost. The intricate and diverse ecosystems along canal banks and within the waterways themselves offer significant contributions to biodiversity, flood control, and carbon storage.

The Canal Network as a Wildlife Habitat

One of the most striking features of the canal network is its capacity to support a wide range of wildlife. Despite being human-made, canals have become naturalised over time, allowing them to provide critical habitats for numerous species of plants, animals, and microorganisms. The still waters of canals create ideal environments for many aquatic species, including fish, amphibians, and invertebrates. Species such as perch, roach, and pike thrive in the slow-moving waters, while the shallows are home to species like frogs and newts. Insects, including dragonflies and water beetles, are often found in abundance along canal edges, feeding off aquatic plants and contributing to the food web.

On land, the riparian zone—the area of land bordering the canal—is often rich in vegetation, from grasses to reeds, shrubs, and trees. These plants not only stabilise the soil and reduce erosion but also provide crucial nesting sites for birds and shelter for mammals. Canal banks often host populations of small mammals like voles, water shrews, and hedgehogs, which rely on the dense vegetation and proximity to water for survival. Birds such as ducks, kingfishers, and herons are commonly observed along canal routes, taking advantage of the water as a hunting ground.

The variety of habitats created by canals — ranging from the open water to reed beds, woodlands, and wetlands — supports a remarkable diversity of species. For example, the shallow, silty waters of many canals provide ideal conditions for plants like water lilies and submerged vegetation, which in turn offer shelter and food for fish and invertebrates. The

overhanging branches of trees lining the banks also offer shelter and breeding sites for numerous species, including birds and bats.

Canals as Migration Corridors

One of the lesser-known but highly significant aspects of canal networks is their role as migration corridors for both aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. Many species of birds, such as migratory waterfowl, use the canal network as a stopover or resting place during their long journeys. Canals offer a relatively undisturbed environment compared to other, more developed areas, making them valuable refuges for birds to rest and replenish before continuing on their migration routes.

Similarly, canals can also serve as highways for the movement of amphibians and reptiles, such as frogs, newts, and turtles, which may use the water to travel between different areas for breeding or foraging. Some species, like the European eel, rely on a mix of freshwater and saltwater habitats, often travelling along waterways such as canals as part of their migratory routes.

In terms of plant life, canals support the spread of aquatic and semi-aquatic plants across broader areas, helping plants migrate from one water source to another. The slow-flowing nature of many canals allows seeds to be carried downhill, facilitating the spread of plants that may have otherwise been restricted to isolated environments.

Biodiversity and Ecological Services

The wildlife value of the canal network extends beyond individual species to the broader ecological services these waterways provide. Canals, especially those in rural or semi-urban areas, contribute to biodiversity conservation by maintaining pockets of nature amidst



Pictures by Martin Ludgate

Heron take advantage of waterways as hunting grounds. This one was on the Shropshire Union Canal

increasingly fragmented landscapes. These waterways are often among the few remaining natural corridors that allow species to move between isolated habitats. In urbanised environments, where green spaces and natural habitats are in short supply, canals provide a rare opportunity for wildlife to flourish.

In addition to their role in supporting biodiversity, canals play an important role in flood management. The vegetation that lines the canal banks helps absorb and slow the flow of water, reducing the risk of flooding in surrounding areas. Aquatic plants, such as reeds, help to stabilise the water flow, while also filtering out pollutants, improving water quality, and providing clean water for local wildlife.

Furthermore, canals contribute to carbon sequestration. Vegetation along the canal, including trees and aquatic plants, captures and stores carbon, helping to mitigate the effects of climate change. These green spaces help absorb CO₂ (carbon dioxide) from the atmosphere, making canals a vital component in broader strategies for climate change adaptation.

Challenges and Conservation Efforts

While the canal network offers immense ecological value, it faces a range of environmental challenges. Pollution, invasive species, and habitat degradation due to human activities threaten the delicate balance of the canal ecosystems. The introduction of non-native species can out-compete local flora and fauna, disrupting the natural processes that have evolved in these habitats.

To preserve and enhance the wildlife value of canals, various conservation efforts are being undertaken. For example, many canal authorities and environmental groups are working to restore native habitats, remove invasive species, and improve water quality. In



The Montgomery Canal, restored with a hard towpath bank, but a vegetation fringe on the opposite side

some areas, volunteers help with riverbank planting to support biodiversity, while also engaging local communities in maintaining and appreciating these valuable ecosystems.

Public awareness is also a key aspect of canal conservation. By educating people about the wildlife value of canals and promoting responsible use, such as minimising littering and reducing chemical runoff, we can help safeguard these vital waterways for future generations. Collaborative efforts between government bodies, conservationists, and local communities are essential for ensuring the long-term health and sustainability of the canal network.

Conclusion

The canal network, once viewed primarily as a means of transportation, has emerged as a critical ecological resource. These artificial waterways support a wide variety of wildlife, from aquatic species to terrestrial animals, and provide crucial migration corridors for birds, amphibians, and insects. Beyond the direct benefits to wildlife, canals offer essential ecosystem services such as flood management, water purification, and carbon sequestration. As urbanisation and habitat loss continue to threaten natural ecosystems, the canal network plays a vital role in maintaining biodiversity and ensuring the resilience of ecosystems in increasingly developed landscapes. With continued conservation efforts, the canal network can continue to support a rich diversity of life for generations to come.

Alex Melson



Waterways 'maintaining pockets of nature' - cormorants on the River Weaver

Next time: enhancing biodiversity during canal restoration

WRG NW on the Uttoxeter Canal

Our North West regional group has been in abeyance for a year or two, but they're back with a successful weekend on the Uttoxeter Canal

WRG North West on the Uttoxeter Canal

Last summer, the Caldon and Uttoxeter Canal Trust asked if regional group WRG North West (who since a year or two ago are sort of retired from digs... sort of...) could muster a group to do some scrub-bashing on the Uttoxeter Canal, and it turns out we could.

A November storm caused the first date to be cancelled (and a good thing we did, what with the site being flooded...)

A bit of an accommodation booking email black hole mishap meant our motley group rocked up to Rupert and Alison Smedley's holiday cottage. Friday evening was spent educating our Duke of Edinburgh's Award volunteer Charlie with a pub visit followed by a toast frenzy, before popping the dishes into the dishwasher (yay!) and lots of people having proper beds (double yay!). In daylight we made sure we showed

Charlie "one we made earlier" (the Caldon Canal) so he knew what he was aiming for.

On site we all headed to mile post 23. Paul Shaw and his chainsaw gang sorted out trees that had come down in a storm recently and were blocking walking routes.

Meanwhile everyone else weeded the path and cut back new growth between MP23 and Bridge 70, the last surviving bridge on the Uttoxeter Canal, restored some years back [see also front cover picture] including the steps of the bridge. Mark ('Mk2') on his first ever North West dig removed more ivy from Bridge 70 (a repeat task from several years ago) and Sam got busy with the brushcutter.

Lunch revealed pork pies, cuppa soup and (whole) biscuits amongst the offerings. The afternoon was more of the same except a group headed towards Carringtons Lock to clear the balance beam bench.

Back at the accommodation, Barbara had been hard at work making lasagne with

FACT FILE Uttoxeter Canal

Length: 13 miles

Locks: 17 as built

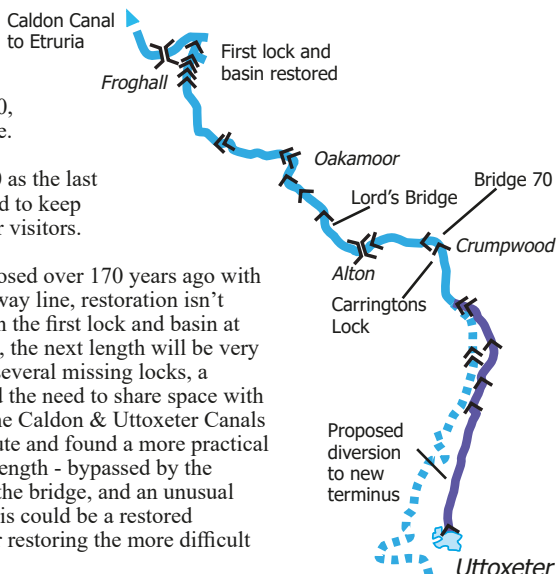
Date closed: 1849

The work for the weekend:

Clearing fallen trees, scrub and encroaching vegetation around Bridge 70, Carringtons Lock and near Lord's Bridge.

Why? To preserve the restored Bridge 70 as the last surviving such structure on the canal, and to keep the paths and views of the canal clear for visitors.

The wider picture: The canal having closed over 170 years ago with parts of its route used for building a railway line, restoration isn't going to be a quick or easy job. Although the first lock and basin at Froghall has been restored and reopened, the next length will be very tricky and expensive to open, thanks to several missing locks, a blockage where a main road crosses, and the need to share space with the Churnet Valley Steam Railway. So the Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust has looked elsewhere along the route and found a more practical place to start: the Alton to Crumpwood length - bypassed by the (disused) railway, with surviving locks, the bridge, and an unusual 'level crossing' of the River Churnet. This could be a restored 'showpiece' length, and raise support for restoring the more difficult lengths of the canal in the future.



mountains of garlic bread followed by cheesecake. The cottage is designed for ten and we were 14, so there was rearranging of a bit of furniture - the four youngest (i.e. those aged under 50) squeezed into a corner and tried not to eat too much....

We had a change of site on Sunday and

headed to Lord's Bridge (near the Ramblers Retreat tearoom). It was a brand new site for us and the landowners came down to see how it was all going and appeared to be pleased. The idea was to clear the view seen from the footpath that crosses over the canal so that interpretation boards can be put up. We were able to have a fire (thanks John Foley for the Foley Firekit) and Malcolm was very complementary about my fire laying skills. A late tea break (with cups donated by the tea room - there may have been a mug-forgetting

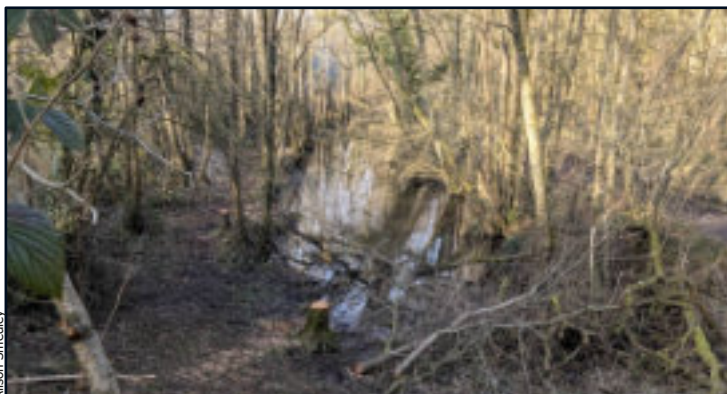
incident) and then a late lunch back at the cottage.

Thanks to everyone for turning up, Barbara for shopping and cooking, Rupert and Alison for their hospitality and Mike for fetching the van and kit.

Helen 'Bushbaby' Gardner



Volunteers clearing the restored Bridge 70



"There's a canal in there somewhere!" Below: remains of Carringtons Lock



PROGRESS Shrewsbury & Newport

At Wappenshall Junction, SNCT's volunteers make progress on their 'dwarf wall', and redefine the concept of a temporary toilet...

Shrewsbury & Newport Canals

Work at Wappenshall Wharf (the junction of the Shrewsbury Canal and the Newport Arm, where the Shrewsbury & Newport is converting the historic transhipment warehouses into a canal centre and community centre) has continued through some really wet weather in the last couple of months of 2024. Too many storms to remember all their names too!

The stable block has now been completely built and has its roof on. All internal walls have been put in and we have power and light installed. The flashing to the large transhipment warehouse wall has been added so we are now able to work in the dry when necessary. The sewage plant system has been electrically connected and the new toilet block, complete with hot & cold water and hand drier, is now in use. This has enabled the 'temporary' toilet block (that's been there since 2009!) to be donated to the Stafford Riverway Link project, and has opened up a large section of the car park once again. The café kitchen has arrived and will be fitted in early January.

The dwarf wall, which will define the limit of the car park, has grown quite a lot and is about half built. The remaining big job to do before we can open the café is to rip up all the reinforced concrete in the car park and replace it with permeable block paving. This will have to be done at the worst time of the year, weather-wise, to meet the target of opening the café in the spring.

Pictures by Bernie Jones



Bernie Jones

'Temporary' toilet block on its way to the SRL project



Above: The dwarf wall is coming on nicely.

Below: The first 66 packs of permeable pavers were delivered before Christmas.



PROGRESS Montgomery Canal

Meanwhile Shropshire Union Canal Society have been braving the rain and ice to carry on their work southwards from Crickheath

Montgomery Canal

Shropshire Union Canal Society Crickheath South work party report - December 6-8, 2024: Defined by Darragh. Whilst spared the very worst of Storm Darragh endured

by other parts of the country, we still suffered a washout on Saturday. One hour of hedge planting was sufficient to convince us we'd be better off at home.

The last SUCS work party of the year is characterised by the volunteers' Christmas party (thoroughly enjoyable, as ever), a large proportion of environmental work and, sometimes, better weather. It turned out that Friday was the lull before the storm and good progress was made on various environmental activities. Hedge-laying continued towards the recently rebuilt Schoolhouse Bridge, and another team planted hedging whips north of Crickheath Bridge. A further team undertook scrub clearance on the off-side bank on the next section of canal beyond Schoolhouse Bridge which enabled surveying to take place and levels established – a vital input to the design of this section to be restored in the future.

By Saturday, the storm was at its peak. Those volunteers who made it to site and huddled in the welfare container made the rather optimistic decision to continue hedge planting. But an hour in the gale and rain convinced us this was over-optimistic. After a refreshing brew-up, most went home. A couple of jobs persisted till lunchtime – removal of



Pictures by SUCS

'Good progress with the hedge-laying and (below) hedge-planting in Storm Darragh's rain on the Saturday (why is he smiling?)'



the haul road by the now-completed section in the Phase 1B section of the Crickheath South project (to restore the channel from Crickheath south to Schoolhouse Bridge) and a reorganisation of the storage container. For both these jobs, volunteers were mainly inside (cab or container) but nevertheless, everyone was off site by 12.30.

Sunday was still extremely windy but at least dry and even with some sunshine. Further hedge planting took place in a variety of locations and more work was done on the haul road and in the storage container.

The rain at least was filling the restored sections nicely and they were looking more and more like a canal as each day passed. 2024 saw substantial progress and achievement thanks to volunteers contributing over 5,500 hours of their time.



Completed channel section filling up after December's rain

Montgomery Canal: Crickheath South work party report - January 10-12, 2025:

With temperatures down to -7°C overnight, 'bonfire management' was a popular activity.

Severe cold weather in the days before and during this work party resulted in frozen ground, frozen channel and plenty of black ice. Some planned activities such as hedge planting and hedge laying were therefore postponed but, with extensive vegetation clearance also planned, the perfect opportunity for volunteers to keep warm was achieved.

Clearance is the first step in restoration and, looking to the (not too distant) future, scrub and over 2,000 sizeable saplings were cleared from 170 metres of channel west of Schoolhouse Bridge.

Aided by the desire to keep warm, the felling rate was relentless. There were heroic efforts by relays of volunteers to haul the material along the towpath to the bonfire site and for others to keep up with feeding the material onto the fire. No one felt the cold!

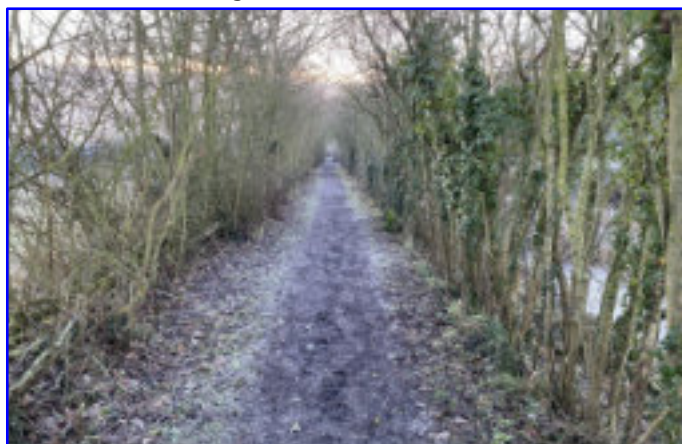


Keeping toasty during the cold January working party

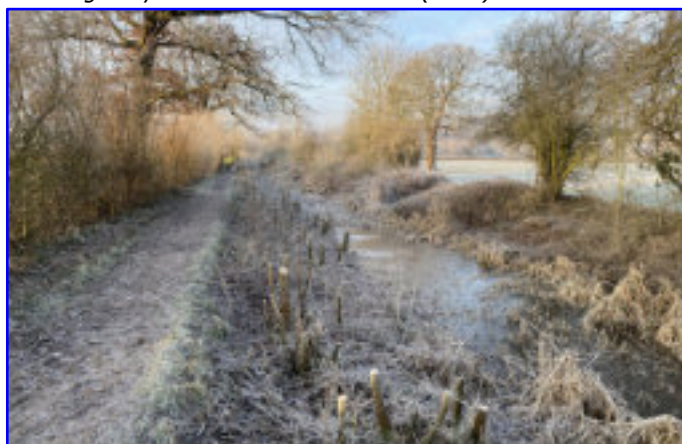
Work is progressing rapidly and we expect to relocate from the Crickheath compound to a compound site by Schoolhouse Bridge later this year. Apart from channel clearance, further preparation activity took place in the form of improving access to this compound for



Profiling the lined section of channel



Next length beyond Schoolhouse before and (below) after initial clearance



larger delivery vehicles. The ramp from the road was substantially improved by widening and reducing the gradient.

Back towards the Crickheath end of the site, work to profile the channel continued. Due to the prevailing ground conditions and topography, the channel for this project is lined in some areas and unlined in others. A further 80 metres of channel, continuing on from the areas completed last year, requires lining and profiling the channel in this area was started. Once the thick crust of frozen ground was broken through this proved relatively straightforward.

Just before Christmas, the stop planks damming the channel at the limit of navigation at Crickheath Bridge were cracked open allowing the water level in the Phase 1A section by Crickheath Wharf to equalise with the navigable waterway at Crickheath Basin. Thick ice covering the channel provided some attractive photo opportunities [See back cover pictures] but prevented making the pipe connection between between Phase 1A and the isolated 1B (which has already been largely filled with rainwater). This job will now have to wait to a future date.

PROGRESS ...or the opposite...

It isn't always positive news from the world of canal restoration. The Stover Canal has fallen victim to Storm Bert and will need major repair

Storm Bert Causes Major Damage to Stover Canal

The lower towpath of the Stover Canal was washed out in November following extensive rainfall from Storm Bert.

The canal is situated in the floodplain of the River Teign, alongside a now disused railway line which used to connect Newton Abbot with Exeter. It serves as a flood relief channel for neighbouring properties in Teigngrace village. Normal flood flows overwhelm adjacent fields, and this causes the canal to fill with water.

The rainfall from Storm Bert at the end of November, coupled with snowmelt from Dartmoor on already saturated ground, produced volumes of water not seen for many years.

Over previous flooding events the railway embankment has retained water to the west of the canal. It has been suffering incremental damage with ballast being washed out over recent floods. However, on this occasion a huge volume of water caused a failure in the embankment allowing water to enter the canal, flowing over the towpath and into a disused clay pit on the other side.

The Templer Way trail and some 60 metres of embankment and towpath have been lost and 1.3 million cubic metres of water will have to be pumped from the clay pit before remedial works can begin. It is estimated that pumping will take at least nine months assuming the Environment Agency allow the 'potentially contaminated' water to enter the Teign. The railway has been non-operational for some years and there is now concern as to whether Network Rail will try to use the occasion to close it permanently. The canal towpath has been closed to the public and will probably remain so for 2025.

The upper section of the canal suffered damage to paths and footbridges and is strewn with debris from fallen trees but this is already being addressed by Stover Canal Trust's volunteers.



Stover Canal Trust

View from what's left of the towpath

Rob Harris



David Abel

Aerial view of the breach site: for scale, the fence-like object towards the left is the railway track

PROGRESS Sankey Canal

Sankey Canal Restoration Society have been active recently dealing with problems of stagnant water and weed near Newton-le-Willows

Recent Restoration Work on the Sankey Canal Roundup

After a year of problems at the Hey Lock stretch of the Sankey Canal at Newton-le-Willows, which witnessed the water becoming stagnant, fish stocks dying and a growing duck weed problem, it was decided that Sankey Canal Restoration Society should team up with Newton-le-Willows Anglers Association to solve the issue. Neil Viggers led the SCRS volunteers for this intensive work.

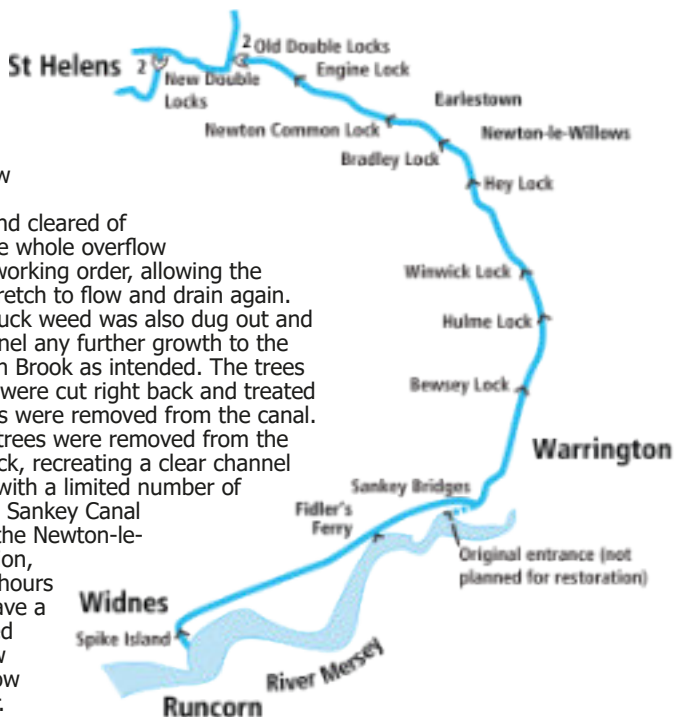


Pictures by SCRS

The Hey Lock section of the Sankey Canal

The drainage channel from the canal to the lower pound was cleared out, the inlet channel dug out, and the overflow and weir into the nearby Newton Brook dug out and cleared of sediment and weeds. The whole overflow system was restored to working order, allowing the water of the Hey Lock stretch to flow and drain again.

Several tonnes of duck weed was also dug out and a boom installed to channel any further growth to the overflow and into Newton Brook as intended. The trees growing out of the walls were cut right back and treated and the dead, fallen trees were removed from the canal. Finally, the overhanging trees were removed from the canal and boughs cut back, recreating a clear channel of water. This was done with a limited number of volunteers from both the Sankey Canal Restoration Society and the Newton-le-Willows Anglers Association, accumulating over 1000 hours of volunteer work. We have a plan to check the restored system at least every few weeks to make sure it now remains in working order.



We have also been excavating Newton Common Lock Keeper's cottage, publishing the findings, and we have been conducting work parties at the Spike Island area of the Sankey Canal in Widnes, clearing the coping stones and at Bradley Lock, clearing the overgrowth from the original line of the infilled section of canal.

Dr David Harrison



Getting the overflow system going again, allowing the water to flow and drain



CATERING packing a Camps kit

It's end of a WRG Canal Camp and you're wondering how on earth you fit all the catering gear back in the crates. Maria can help...

Packing a WRG Canal Camps catering kit

Canal Camps Catering Kit Boxes 3 to 7. At the last Leadership Teams Day [see page 11] during the cooks' section, it was suggested that a first time Canal Camp cook's guide to packing away the WRG Camps catering kit would be useful, as five of the boxes are just labelled 'catering kit', which is not helpful to many, especially if you are on a follow-on camp in the same accommodation, and the kit might still be unpacked in the kitchen when you arrive, so you have no idea how it was packed when it arrived at the camp.

This is not a definitive way to pack these boxes, but this is how I pack the kit on logistics days when we prepare the kits prior to the Canal Camps season. Pack it in any box, then add the box label to it. Keep items within the height of the top of the box as they need to be stacked in the van.

Boxes 3 to 7

Square trays

Baking trays
Square Grundy tins and lids,
big and small
Stainless trays, big and small
Bun trays



Round items

Round Grundy tins
Colander
Sieves
Green mixing bowls and lids
Stainless mixing bowls
1 jug
1 middle sized saucepan
All chopping boards

Cutlery and Toaster

Cutlery tray on the bottom
Toaster
Knife roll
Frying pan
1 jug



Saucepans

5 saucepans and lids.
2 big pans with smaller lids
inside, 3 pans on side (a bit
tight, but drop in together).
Big lid upside-down on top

What's left

Cake box
Sink strainer
Tea pots
Box with cooks folder and scales
Big saucepan lid upside-down on top



There are nine boxes in total for the catering kit. Besides the above five, there are two with labels saying plates, bowls, mugs and either tumblers or tea/coffee/sugar containers, one labelled for accommodation kit and one labelled for tea towels / oven cloths / oven gloves. All these boxes must be packed so a lid or other box can be put on top without damaging what is below it. Please avoid sending a box to site with the brew kit or lunch with its label still on it, just in case it gets lost in transit.

If you feel you need something to help you with the catering on your camp, please do bring your favourite utensil from home, extra plastic boxes or your knife block, as I do, then do take them home with you afterwards, and do not add them to the kit, or any of the hall's equipment or cutlery. All WRG equipment, be it site tools in the trailer or catering kit, is marked in red somewhere or etched in the metal or plastic. All the cutlery has holes in the handles, so please check when you have that end-of-camp count-up.

Happy cooking!

Maria Hearnden

DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S Award

Young volunteers joining Canal Camps for their Duke of Edinburgh's Award have long been a part of WRG. But what do they make of us?

Canal Camps and the DofE Award

You'll periodically come across references in Canal Camp reports in this magazine to something called "DofEers" (there are various spellings of this). It's a reference to young volunteers attending the Camp as the Residential section of their Gold Award in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

Canal Camp reports in *Navvies* being what they are, you'll see occasional jokey and mickey-taking references to them (as you will to all volunteers!) but seriously, WRG values these volunteers greatly, and many of them go on to become WRG regulars. Plenty of our 'old hands' who are now in their 50s began as DofEers on camps in the late 1980s. And for over a decade now, WRG has been a DofE Certified Provider.

But what do the DofE volunteers themselves make of it. Our parent body the Inland Waterways Association interviewed two for its magazine *Waterways*. This is the result...

Kiera – Montgomery Canal Camp 2024

The main thing the Camp gave me was the confidence to try new things. I came to the Camp not really knowing what to expect and not knowing anyone, but the people there were really kind and helpful, always willing to show me new things and help me learn. They gave me the opportunity to learn how to drive the excavators, even really big ones! which meant I got my excavator ticket, which is something I didn't expect I would get, and such a cool thing to say I have.

The Camp also showed me how much work goes into restoring canals and how passionate the people involved are. That passion for what they did was infectious and really made the whole experience friendly, welcoming and informative. The food was also amazing every day.

I left the camp with many new skills and stories to tell and I'm really thankful for the opportunity to do something different for my DofE residential. I would 100% recommend others to do it if they want to learn something new and do something different!

How did you hear about the Waterway Recovery Group?

I came across the Waterway Recovery Group by accident, really. I was searching for a unique experience that was for over 18s as a lot of the ones the DofE website suggested were for younger people, and due to COVID-19, I left my residential quite late. I found the group through searching on Google for residential camps, and this came up.

Why did you choose to join a WRG Canal Camp to complete your Gold Residential/what attracted you to this particular experience?

I chose the WRG camp for my residential mainly because of the price. It was the cheapest I had seen and what was included for that price I thought was really good, three meals a day and accommodation for less than £100. You couldn't get that anywhere else! It also enabled me to learn new skills and meet a range of people I wouldn't otherwise have met. I wanted to gain something from my experience, so this was the best option. I chose the Montgomery Canal trip in particular because it was close to where I lived and at the right time of year for me (Easter holidays). It was in a nice place, so I got to travel and see somewhere new.

Did you have any doubts that may have prevented you from joining the Camp?

Overall, my doubts weren't going to prevent me from joining the camp, but I did have a few worries before joining. The main thing was that I didn't know what was going to happen on the camp apart from helping restore it, so I feel like I was a little underprepared as I only found out what we were going to be doing for the week once I got there. I was worried if I was going to enjoy it as I really had no idea what was going to happen until I got there, but I did, so that was OK. Thus, I don't think I really had doubts, more just general anxiety about the week.

Did you encounter any barriers over the week you spent on site:

Not really other than being cold. Not to the fault of anyone, but that easter week was quite cold, so I could do with some more layers, but I made it work.

Do you think the experience has changed your attitude toward our waterways or helped you develop a more mindful approach to our canals and rivers?

I think the experience has shown me there is a lot of effort that goes into restoring and maintaining canals and rivers and that it is a long-term project. From this experience, I'm definitely more mindful of the upkeep involved in rivers and canals.

Jon - Weymoor Bridge Canal Camp 2024

I had the pleasure of attending a Canal Camp at Weymoor Bridge with the Waterway Recovery Group in August, which I attended to fulfil my Residential section for my DofE Gold Award. The experience was fantastic, with the camp staff and the volunteers all coming together to make it an incredibly enjoyable week. Our task was to build a culvert to divert a stream under what will eventually become the canal, which we just about managed to do despite some drainage issues.

What a typical day on a WRG Canal

Camp looks like: *Each day started in much the same way, with George (the camp chef) serving up a great breakfast to get us all out of bed and ready to head to the work site. The workdays were long and there was plenty of hard work to go around but despite most of the group having never done anything like this, we all chipped in and made a lot of progress over the week, learning new skills that we can carry forward into the future. Some drainage issues on site made progress slow at times, and certainly caused some frustration as we watched the pit we had prepared fill with water before our eyes every time the water pumps went down (which they did often, and keeping the pumps running ultimately became a full time role for at least two volunteers). Despite the setbacks we faced, the group morale remained high throughout the week and we had a laugh while dealing with whatever the*

project or site threw at us. Throughout the week, the volunteers had the opportunity to learn a variety of new skills, be that mixing concrete, digging a really good hole, or operating an excavator.

Evening social: *At the end of the workday, after clearing the site, we would all load up into the WRG vans and head back to the hall for showers; about mid-way through the week, the other DofE volunteers and I decided we would help solve the free-for-all to get to the only shower in the hall by playing cards in the evenings for the next day's shower order ('Chase the Ace' being our go-to choice for this), which made things much more efficient and raised the stakes of our games. The evening entertainments were usually quite simple, often consisting of the whole group sitting around the tables in the hall and talking, playing cards, and telling stories of our previous adventures (and misadventures) which was fantastic and exactly what the group wanted. During the week, we also took a walk through the local town and had the opportunity to take a boat ride along the canal which was graciously provided by the Cotswold Canals Trust. Finally, we'd all sit down to another delicious meal made by George and there was always a rush when the call for seconds came.*

Takeaway from the experience: *My experience with the WRG has confirmed for me that there is something very rewarding about working hard with your hands towards a goal and seeing the stark difference between when you arrive and when you leave; we live in an increasingly digital world, where many people go their whole lives without experiencing that feeling, and I firmly believe that everyone should take part in a practical project like this at least once. With regards to British canals, despite being something I have previously not thought much about, I now recognise that they form a critical part of this country's history and unique character, and the efforts of the WRG, the Cotswold Canals Trust, and other organisations to preserve and restore this historical infrastructure is such a valuable endeavour that we should all support. I will definitely consider attending more Canal Camps in the future!*

Our thanks to IWA Waterways for letting us reproduce this article

