

NAVVIES

VOLUNTEERS RESTORING WATERWAYS

**Cromford Canal:
Back to Beggarlee**

KESCRG: a year in the life



**WATERWAY
RECOVERY
GROUP**

**ISSUE 331
JUNE – JULY
2025**

INTRO Training



Our picture shows a busy scene at the WRG Training Weekend which was once again kindly hosted by the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust. You can find a report and more pictures in this issue, as well as news from another regular training event, the Leadership Teams Day. We'll be repeating both of them next year, and in the meantime hopefully there will be opportunities for training during some of the Canal Camps, as there were on the recent ad-hoc Cromford Canal Beggaree dig, also covered in this issue.

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For latest news on our activities visit our website wrg.org.uk

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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: Return to 'JR'. Following resolution of access issues which had been preventing progress on John Robinson Lock and the adjacent stream culvert / aqueduct, a key volunteer element of the Cotswold Canals Phase 2 project to reconnect the canal to the national network, London WRG are seen rebuilding one of the lock's top paddle culverts. (See pages 22-23)

Back cover: Return to Beggarlee. Top picture shows the compensation pond dug to allow a new length of the Cromford Canal to be built on floodplain land; bottom picture shows where the new canal will come in (near right) and turn sharp right to pass under the old rail bridge. (See pages 12-15)

NAVVIES welcome from the editor

"Do remember we're trying to attract new volunteers, not put them off!" - how to make your editor happy with a Canal Camp Report...

Welcome...

...to another issue of *Navvies*, the magazine of Waterway Recovery Group, written by and for those interested in volunteer work on restoring the inland waterways of Britain. And in particular, the volunteers of WRG and other mobile groups who travel the country, helping out on different canal restoration projects wherever their labour is needed. Rather like the original 'navvies', the itinerant labourers who travelled around 200-plus years ago seeking work on building the canals - and who give our magazine its name.

Calling all Camp Report writers!

As this issue appears in print, we'll be just a few weeks away from our main WRG summer Canal Camps programme of week-long working holidays. There isn't actually much about it in this issue - we've covered all of the confirmed sites in our preview articles in the previous three issues, and most of the Camps are now fully booked. And whilst there are still one or two more sites that might just scrape in as late entries, we can't confirm that yet - but any information will appear on our website wrg.org.uk and the Waterway Recovery Group Facebook page.

However by contrast the next couple of issues, all being well, should have a great deal about Canal Camps in them. And that's because the first Camps will have happened by then, and we'll hopefully be able to fill *Navvies* with reports of our success in supporting canal restoration projects. But the reason I say "hopefully" and "all being well" is because it depends on somebody writing the camp reports and sending them to the editor. And that's where you come in...

As I've always said, we welcome camp reports irrespective of what style you choose to write them in - in the past we've had everything from simple daily diaries to ones written in Biblical style, a few in rhyme, pictorial and cartoon reports, and even one in the style of a student science lab report! (But do remember we're trying to attract new volunteers, not put them off!)

They can be long or short, witty or serious, factual or philosophical; so long as they get to the editor they'll get in. And the sooner the better: you'll remember things much better if you write them down straight away, and the readers won't have to wait until late autumn to see them. And do send some pictures too. See page 3 for the editorial contact details.

It's not just camps

I mentioned above that there isn't so much about summer camps in this issue. But it's not just about week-long Canal Camps. There's still plenty of canal restoration going on. We have weekend dig reports from London WRG and from an ad hoc group who worked on the Cromford, as well as a 'year in the life' piece about what our friends in Kescrg have been up to. All the mobile groups welcome new volunteers: see the diary on pages 20-21 for dates and contact details.

Rallying round...

It's not even just about practical canal restoration, though. As well as the usual coverage of derelict waterways under restoration, you might notice a bit in this issue (and the last one too) about boat rallies, gatherings and festivals happening on the working canals. In particular there have been mentions of:

- **Canalway Cavalcade**, the annual waterways festival in London's Little Venice, held over the May Day holiday weekend by the Inland Waterways Association
- **Moira Canal Festival**, an annual event held on 17-18 May on a restored section of the northern reaches of the Ashby Canal
- **Foxton Waterways Festival**, a one-off event held by IWA over the 7-8 June weekend at Foxton in Leicestershire
- **Bridgewater Canal Campaign Rally**, another one-off event to be held by IWA over the August Bank Holiday weekend at Lymm, close to the breach which has closed the canal to through boating since 1 January

There are lots more of this type of event; these are just some that made it into these pages. And while they can be great fun (or not, depending on the weather!) to attend or to volunteer at, they can also serve a serious purpose.

Canalway Cavalcade serves to remind London that it has a canal, but this year it also tied in with the Campaign Cruise to the Houses of Parliament. Almost 30 boats waved their 'Fund Britain's Waterways' banners at the MPs and called for proper public financial backing for the canals, rather than the continuously declining support over the next 12 years that's currently on offer from the Government for the Canal & River Trust's network.

The Moira Festival supports the restoration of the remaining derelict sections of the Ashby Northern Reaches, returning the canal close to its original terminus. And this year (as reported in our news pages 36-38) the Wilderness Boat Owners Club took their small trailable boats there and gave the event some extra publicity - and while they were in that part of the country, they dropped in on the WRG Training Weekend and gave us £500 towards its costs.

The Foxton Festival marked 75 years since the then recently formed IWA held its first Festival and Rally of Boats at nearby Market Harborough in 1950, an event regarded as playing a pivotal role in the revival of the waterways system from its decline towards dereliction. The 2025 event included a flotilla of boats to Market Harborough and back, and parallels were drawn between the threat to the canals back then and today's concerns.

And finally, the Bridgewater event was planned to draw attentions to the concerns about whether and when the breach might be repaired by the canal's owners Peel Ports. Given the assurances received that it will reopen in 2026, the organisers have broadened the aims to highlight the fragility of the waterways, and the impact of the breach on the national network, and to encourage the canal's owners to engage with everyone regarding the repairs.

The Foxton and Little Venice events also gave some unexpected extra publicity to concerns about the state of the canal system, when a series of unplanned emergency closures stopped a number of boats from getting there at all. And there were 'Fund Britain's Waterways' banners being waved wherever there was an opportunity.

But there's another way these events are relevant to us as volunteers, besides their role in raising publicity for the campaign to maintain and restore the canals we work on. And that's the volunteer teams that work on them. WRG volunteers were helping at Little Venice and Foxton, and we'll be at Lymm on the Bridgewater Canal too. And we could do with some more support - see page 38 if you can help.

Martin Ludgate



Historic boats and floating traders at Foxton festival

CHAIRMAN'S Comment

Mike is concerned about "Mistakes that cannot be undone, and to be frank, our waterways are so important that they do not deserve mistakes."

Chairman's Comment

As Martin will tell you I have several (many!) excuses as to why my Chairman's Comment and the *Navvies* deadline rarely meet up. Frequently used is the one that goes "Hang on just a day or two, there is some really important news coming any day now that will clarify all the rumours on (insert controversial subject here)".

But at some point I have to accept that my hopes (that this particular subject was just a case of some details needing tidying up) are not aligning with the reality (that this is actually a symptom of what may turn out to be the biggest blockage to the restoration movement for a long time).

At the Board meeting on 1 June the WRG Board agreed that in the light of information from the Friends of the Cromford Canal, the planned Canal Camp on the Cromford Canal will not be going ahead. Having seen the front cover of this edition and read the articles on Beggarlee progress I suspect you will be asking "**Why?**" There is clearly the work, it is clearly worthy of restoration and there are lots of volunteers who really want to work there.

I have pondered the most positive way to answer the question, but in the end the fact is that Canal & River Trust (CRT) have not provided the permissions to work and, given the hoops placed in the way, there is no belief that these permissions will be granted in time.

Now I have gone into print several times recently about the difficulties waterway restoration projects are having obtaining permissions (and even information) from authorities. But from national navigation authority CRT? This is not somebody in the Council Planning department or nature conservation organisation who has never dealt with a waterway before. This is the body who states on their website The opportunities to help people and nature along our waterways are as varied as the canals themselves. No single organisation can hold all the answers.

Whereas right now it is feeling like CRT

are of the opinion that only they have the answers, and they can be very selective about how (and if) they give those answers out.

Why am I so wound up about this? Well firstly, this is not a local spat between a single project and one CRT region. It's actually a symptom of a national push from CRT. As Chief Executive Richard Parry reminded us recently (as reported in *Navvies* 321) CRT have land ownership in at least 20 restoration schemes. So it is definitely a National issue.

But the real worry I've got is what this could turn into. Yes, I have a long memory here, but for those who have joined our readership recently, try going to our website and reading some back issues of *Navvies*. Either from your memory (or prompted by early issues) try and remember (or read) those early decades of canal restoration: the continual anger and shouting; the "them and us" relationship; the frequent attempts (on both sides) to "get one past" the other side. Oh, it was great fun BUT, and here is the bit where I'm going to be serious, we would be foolish to ignore the fact that, in the midst of all that "to and fro" some mistakes were made. Mistakes that cannot be undone, and to be frank, our waterways are so important that they do not deserve mistakes.

I'm genuinely concerned that:

- both sides think they are in the right, when in reality both sides could accept they could do better in the future, and
- neither side is coming to this debate with the right resources (of which the most important resource would be the right attitude).

Mike Palmer

PS While all of the above is ongoing I'm really proud to see that WRG continues on in its role as "exemplar". Reports in this edition include the Training Weekend, the Leadership Teams Day and a donation from Wilderness Boat Owners Club – my huge thanks to Womble, Evvo and WBOC for continuing to support us.

TRAINING WEEKEND Report

The leader of the WRG Training Weekend reports back from another successful two days of training on machinery, bricklaying and more...

WRG Training Weekend Lichfield Canal, 17-18 May

The annual WRG Training Weekend returned to sunny Lichfield again this year; we are so lucky to have the use of the site at Fossey Heath, and are very grateful to our friends at Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust for hosting us once again. With the timetable fully booked for the two days, it was certainly a busy one, with many volunteers training in a variety of useful skills. Sessions included dumpers, excavators and ride-on rollers; a rather special

'concrete' workshop; brick saws; minibus and trailer; and half-day courses in bricklaying.

The fabulous team of instructors began to arrive on Friday, with the rest joining us early on Saturday morning. I can never truly express how amazing they are, or how wonderful it is to see them carry out their sessions, imparting a wealth of knowledge and experience with such patience and clarity, but they are just that – amazing! So many trainees took time to express their gratitude and to comment on the quality of their sessions.

Our trainees proved themselves to be





excellent students: there were some familiar faces seeking refresher training; others were regular volunteers from our local groups and societies; and a few were experiencing their very first weekend with Waterway Recovery Group. We hope they all went away with some new knowledge, experience or skills that they could put to good use or build upon during future weekends or camps.

Throughout the weekend, we were all spoilt by Jude Palmer's incredible cooking and five-star menu. Chef was a little upset by our



pitiful salad consumption on site, but to be fair, if you're going to send down delicious home-made cakes and other sweet delights, I know what's going to disappear fastest!

On Sunday, we had a rather lovely visit from the Wilderness Boat Owners' Club, who have very kindly donated £500 to support our training event [see News, page 35]. This generous donation will certainly help with the costs of plant hire and acknowledges how important the on-going training programme is in ensuring safer sites for our volunteers. Thank you so much!

Sincere thanks to everyone who made the weekend run smoothly: to all the incredible instructors for working so hard and always being so generous with their time; to Adrian for giving up his Friday and Monday to ensure that the materials and plant were delivered and then removed from site; to Jude, for cooking up a delicious storm as always; to the head office team for their continued support; to MKP, Harry, Bungle, Spence and Bex for making sure vans and trailers arrived full of kit and for helping to prep site; and finally to the trainees who were just lovely, and made everything worthwhile. THANK YOU!

Ali Bottomley



CAMP REPORT River Parrett

You've heard of carrot cake, but what about Parrett cake? Rhiannon reports from a week of towpath-laying and cake-eating in Somerset

Camp Report – River Parrett 17th-26th April

Langport Town Council invited us down to Somerset for a long camp over the Easter weekend and continuing for the following week.

Our aim was to widen and resurface various paths alongside the River Parrett in a very popular park. Langport Town Council, especially Gerard, were truly amazing hosts to us and we cannot thank them enough. We never ran short of materials or cake (thanks to a volunteer rota of locals who turned up with homemade cake at 11am every day)! Due to the location, we didn't have a fully enclosed site and therefore spent a lot of time talking to the locals. They were, without

a doubt, the most friendly and thankful local populace we have ever experienced. People regularly asked about our work and thanked us for what we were doing. One woman brought us two packets of biscuits and another brought us 20 doughnuts!

The work was fairly repetitive and not as interesting as the rest of what we got up to on the camp, so I won't bore you all with a description of widening a towpath. The first two nights of the camp showed a slow change in the alcohol choices of WRGies – rather than the traditional line of beer bottles down the middle of the table, our camp was bestowed with more bottles of red wine than I could count.

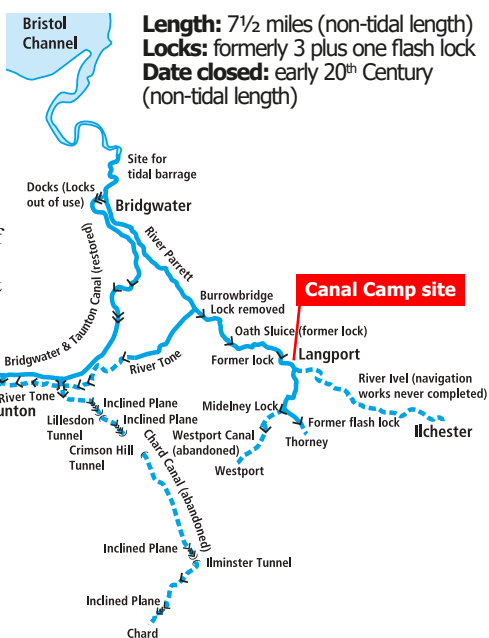
Martin (our first cook for the 10 days) pulled out all the stops on the Saturday with a pudding of raspberry syllabub and a

FACT FILE River Parrett

The Canal Camp project: Rebuilding and improving paths on the Cockle Moor, the riverside land in Langport owned by Langport Town Council

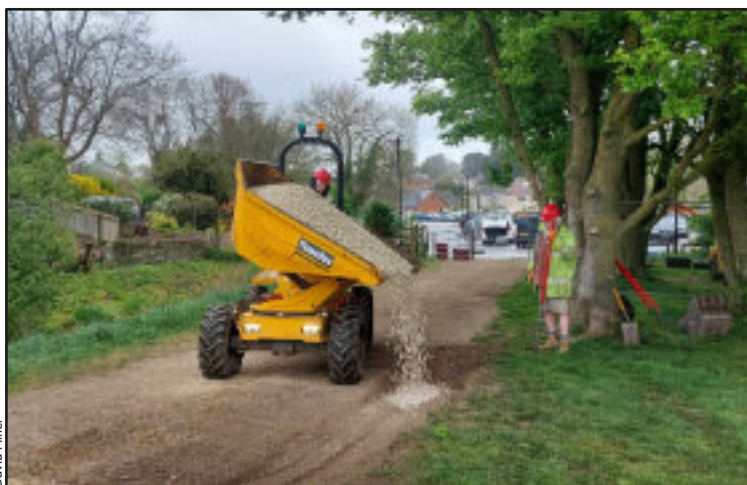
Why? It's part of work to regenerate the town's riverside as a local amenity, and in support of future restoration work on the river

The wider picture: The Parrett was once part of a regional system of almost 100 miles including the rivers Tone and Parrett and the Bridgwater & Taunton, Chard and Grand Western canals. Not all of it is practicable to restore, but a smaller local network could one day be re-created.



cheese board. Then on Sunday, we were treated to a boat trip by an amazing couple, Phil and Jen, who had a small fibreglass cruiser, along with Sean, the head of the local council. The trip up and down the River Parrett could be best described as raucous, with Gerard having dropped

David Miller



The first of many loads of gravel gets unloaded on the towpath

off copious amounts of beer with Phil and Jen in advance. We cruised to see the lock at Oath where the brackish tidal water was separated from the freshwater river. On the return journey, we were treated to Phil pulling out his bugle and playing the Last Post at an unsuspecting passerby, whom Phil had mistaken for Gerard. During the boat trip, Martin relinquished his cooking duty and left Harry and Evvo in charge of preparing our roast for Easter Sunday dinner.

Monday saw our midway cook swap, with Martin heading to site and Ian arriving to cook the second half of camp. Ian started off strong with a hot cross bun bread and butter pudding. On Tuesday, we were joined by Callum and Rob (the Langport Town Council's lengthsman), who helped us make speedy progress, aided by the decrease in the number of general public wandering about with the bank holidays done. On Wednesday night, we were treated to dinner out by Sean, Gerard and the Langport Town Council and on Thursday evening, a local CAMRA pub hosted a pub quiz, which was eagerly attended by most of the volunteers. On our final night, we reciprocated the generosity of our hosts and invited them to dinner with us, which was a lovely send off to the week and half.

Dave Evvo Evans



10 days but we got a long length of towpath built, and were hosted splendidly by Langport Town Council. Our thanks to them, especially Gerard, for their organisation and generosity in hosting us. I'm sure all of us would be very happy to return to Langport again!

Rhiannon Smith

Just a selection of the cakes that arrived on site

Overall, it was a long and tiring

DIG REPORT Cromford Canal

The editor reports back from another one in a series of ad hoc long weekend WRG digs which have been progressing work at Beggarlee

Cromford Canal Beggarlee Dig May 2025

The latest in a series of ad hoc WRG working parties supporting the Friends of the Cromford Canal's Beggarlee Project to extend navigation north along the Cromford Canal from the Langley Mill terminus of the Erewash Canal (see page 16) took place over the late spring bank holiday weekend at the end of May. The Navvies editor was there to report back on progress...

A delayed departure from London and typical pre-bank holiday motorway traffic all the way up the M1 (not to mention a road closure when I was less than 100 yards from the work site!) meant that by the time I arrived on site at Beggarlee on the Nottinghamshire / Derbyshire border just north of Langley Mill it was (rather conveniently) just about time for the afternoon tea break. Meanwhile WRG

irregulars Pete, John (the Hawk), Moose, Dave S, Adrian ('Velcro') and Maria had already been at work for some hours, and together with locals Malcolm and Neil from FCC they had made quite an impression on the job already. Admittedly I hadn't actually seen the site since before the week-long Canal Camp that WRG held there last summer, but the progress since the previous series of ad hoc digs there in 2023 was impressive. It was really starting to look like a canal...

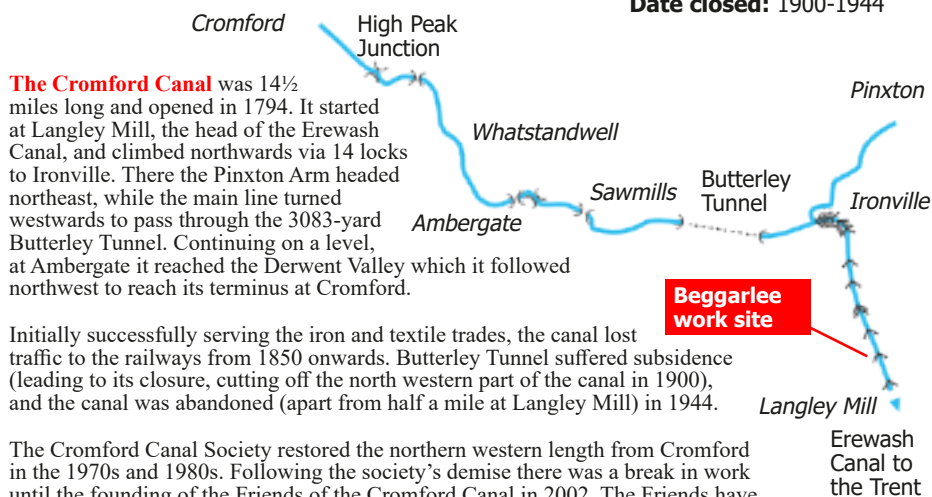
...and that's an odd thing, because "it" wasn't actually a canal at all. The channel that had appeared running north-south through the site and was starting to look convincingly canal-like is in fact a long, narrow flood relief storage pond. No, that's not a euphemism, we haven't been building a canal on the sly and pretending it's something else (would we?) – it genuinely is a pond that just happens to be long and thin

FACT FILE Cromford Canal

Length: 14½ miles

Locks: 14

Date closed: 1900-1944



The Cromford Canal was 14½ miles long and opened in 1794. It started at Langley Mill, the head of the Erewash Canal, and climbed northwards via 14 locks to Ironville. There the Pinxton Arm headed northeast, while the main line turned westwards to pass through the 3083-yard Butterley Tunnel. Continuing on a level, at Ambergate it reached the Derwent Valley which it followed northwest to reach its terminus at Cromford.

Initially successfully serving the iron and textile trades, the canal lost traffic to the railways from 1850 onwards. Butterley Tunnel suffered subsidence (leading to its closure, cutting off the north western part of the canal in 1900), and the canal was abandoned (apart from half a mile at Langley Mill) in 1944.

The Cromford Canal Society restored the northern western length from Cromford in the 1970s and 1980s. Following the society's demise there was a break in work until the founding of the Friends of the Cromford Canal in 2002. The Friends have since worked at sites including Sawmills, Ironville and the Pinxton Arm and aim to eventually reopen the entire route (although delicate negotiation with nature interests will be needed at the Cromford end). The Beggarlee Project (see page 14) will open up the southern length extending north from Langley Mill and put the Cromford back on the national waterways map.

and generally canal-like. And the reason for digging it is that the actual new canal route that's being created (again, see the explanation on page 16) will be on an embankment built on what's now floodplain land alongside the River Erewash, a tame enough little stream when we were there, but one which can burst its banks after heavy rain. And

Pictures by Martin Ludgate



Muck-shift in progress

(not unreasonably) the conditions for us getting permission to build on this floodplain land stipulate that to compensate for the loss of floodwater capacity resulting from us building the embankment, we have to create at least the same amount of new capacity.

So that was exactly what we were doing: two excavators were at work digging out the southern end of the new flood water storage pond, tipping the spoil into three dumpers (two hired-in and one owned by the Friends) which were delivering it to where the ground is being built up ready to create the new canal embankment. A third excavator was spreading it there, and a vibrating 'sheep's foot' roller was compacting it.

At the end of the day Adrian left, Paul had already arrived, and Mark 'Mk2' arrived at the accommodation (Ironville Church Hall, nicely facelifted since we were last there) in the evening, so we were up to eight WRGies for the rest of the bank holiday weekend. A hastily organised shopping expedition provided Maria with the wherewithal to produce a tasty spag bol, and the Anvil Club (built on to the back of the hall) was open for business with one of the Friends having kindly put some money behind the bar for the canal volunteers!

My notes say that we were kept awake by the "ghostly Hound of the Ironvilles" – I think (though I'm not 100 percent sure) that's a reference to Moose & Maria's dog Ben.

Anyway it clearly didn't ruin our night's sleep too badly, as we were up bright and early on Saturday with breakfast on the table before 8am and off to site for some more dumper / digger / roller action. Two new Friends of the Cromford Canal volunteers – Jeff and Jane – had arrived looking for some machinery tuition, and Dave and Paul trained them up on dumpers. Apart from that it was 'more of the same' – having spent the previous afternoon on a 6 tonne dumper, I took a turn on the Friends' 4-tonner, a handy machine but one that currently tends to announce its presence from some distance away, and then a go on the roller, a mighty 16-tonne beast and a bit of a contrast to the sit-on rollers I'm more used to from typical towpath jobs. Not only did it have a cab, it had air conditioning in it!

More good progress was made, with the flood storage pond pretty much fully excavated and the area around it getting close to its finished level. A lot of the spoil contained rather more than the expected soil and rubble (from a demolished lock and bridge on the original alignment of the canal) – not only had the Friends already dug out some lengths of railway line (so old that they were made of wrought iron) but we found everything from coping stones from the old lock to remnants of railway signalling equipment from the many sidings which once occupied much of the site.

Returning to Ironville, Maria soon had a chicken and veg casserole ready for us, followed by what my notes call a “fruit thing” – I’m sure it was very tasty anyway! And the conversation over a couple of beers from the Anvil Club ranged from educational children’s TV of the past (did you prefer *Magpie*, *Blue Peter* or *How?*) to dodgy foodstuffs of the past (Smash versus Angel Delight), e-scooter law, and arguments for and against different methods of washing, sieving and cooking rice (not that we’d had any rice!) And they say the art of conversation is dead.

On Sunday, after an early breakfast (served up at 7am – thanks John) I skived off and went



Old lock uncovered: the chamber was to the right of the wall

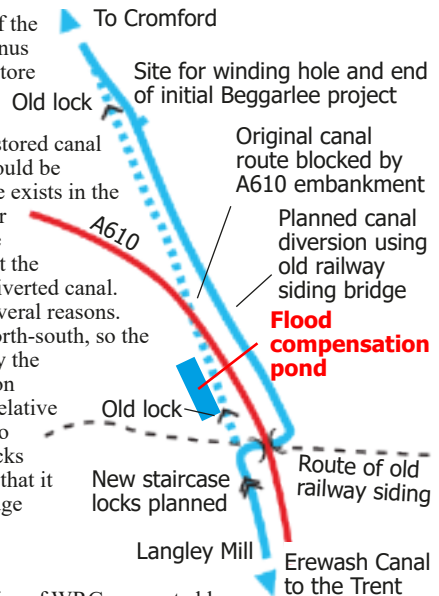
Cromford Canal: the Beggarlee Project

The Beggarlee Project will reopen the first 1.25km of the Cromford Canal northwards from Langley Mill, terminus of the Erewash Canal. This is not an easy length to restore as it was blocked in the 1980s by the construction of the new A610 Langley Mill bypass road.

Creating a new navigable culvert to carry the restored canal through the road embankment on the original route would be prohibitively expensive and difficult, but an alternative exists in the form of a bridge which was built to carry the road over a freight railway siding which served a coal mine. The mine closed not long after the road was completed, but the unused bridge still stands and can be used to carry a diverted canal.

However this is not a straightforward job, for several reasons. Firstly the siding ran east-west while the canal runs north-south, so the new channel will need two very sharp bends. Secondly the bridge wasn't built to carry the weight of a waterway on its foundations, and thirdly it's at an awkward height relative to the canal. The solution to these latter two issues is to build a pair of staircase locks (replacing two single locks on the original route) to raise the canal to a level such that it can then be carried through the old railway siding bridge on an 'aqueduct' structure supported by abutments on either side of the bridge, rather than putting any of its weight on the bridge foundations.

Practical work got under way in 2023 with a series of WRG-supported long weekend work parties which carried out initial drainage works, putting two existing ditches into underground culverts so that the new channel above the planned new staircase locks can be built over them. In 2024 work began on excavating a flood compensation pond close to the line of the original canal, to provide flood water storage capacity to make up for floodplain land which will be lost when the new canal channel is built. The recent working party completed this work, and the next task (pending permissions) will be to excavate the new channel northwards from Langley Mill to the site of the new staircase locks.



to Crick Boat Show while the rest of the team had another productive day on site, including giving Jane some more tuition, this time on one of the excavators. Someone hit on the brilliant idea of different horn codes for use by different diggers, so the dumper drivers could tell which one was telling them their dumper was full and ready to go. (Yes, it took us 3 days to come up with this!) A lot more wood / scrap metal / rubbish / stumps were cleared from the site, and the roadways cleared of mud. And I got back just in time for Maria's full works roast pork / Yorkshire puddings / stuffing etc and trifle for afters. And we discovered the difference between bottled Hobgoblin and King Goblin beers, which was more than the people delivering to the Anvil Club had managed...

Monday dawned dampish but brightening up, for a final half day on site. The last bit of muck-shifting saw the flood storage pond excavation complete, the base for the new canal embankment raised to the point where the manhole (which we installed during the 2023 weekends) was properly buried, and then had a good clear-up all round, leaving a big pile of stone and concrete and an otherwise tidy site. All the plant was cleaned – the soil was caked onto the roller so hard that it



The team, the flood water storage pond behind them, and headwalls of culverts installed in 2023 in the foreground

needed a wrecking bar to shift it!) and we all headed home.

Thank you to Pete for leading it, FCC for providing good work for us (and beer money), Maria for catering, John for breakfast, and the WRG and FCC volunteers for turning up and working hard. See you on another one sometime.

Martin Ludgate



Just some of the machinery: there was also a third excavator and a sheep's foot roller (see back cover)

KESCRG A year in the life

Following on from the 'Year in the life of London WRG' feature in the last issue, this time we catch up on what KESCRG have been up to in the last 12 months

KESCRG: a year in canal restoration 2024-25

KESCRG is an independent mobile canal restoration group that provides experienced volunteers to canal projects in the south of England and occasionally further afield; we've worked as far afield as the Shrewsbury and Newport, Lichfield and Cromford canals over the last few years. Digs are usually held on the first weekend of the month (allowing for bank holidays) with a longer break over Christmas and the summer and we supply a leadership team and a core of volunteers for one of the WRG summer camps.

The last twelve months have seen us working on a few regular sites and returning to an old favourite after many years. But June 2024 saw us working at Weymoor Bridge on the Eastern end of the Cotswold Canals where we started the prep for that summer's Canal Camps which were spent putting in a culvert to carry a stream under the canal bed, and then reinstating the first section of the canal bed and walls above it in reinforced concrete.

A number of the summer camp leaders joined us for the weekend (always the best way to find out about a site: do some work on it!). Work involved site clearance to allow the stream diversion to be put in and demolition of some of the existing walls to give a good edge for the new

concrete walls (cast by the camps) to join to.

July saw our summer camp where we continued towpath laying on the Bonfire Hanger section of the Wey & Arun canal following on from NWPG's week. I've lost count of how many dumper loads of stone were loaded, moved by dumper almost a kilometre along the canal before dumping, raking and rolling into submission.

August saw a bonus long weekend with



Alan Lines

Towpath work at Bonfire Hanger on the Wey & Arun on last summers camp

NWPG and Wey & Arun volunteers to put the finishing touches on the Bonfire Hanger towpath – by all reports the improvements are much appreciated by the walkers and horse riders who use it.

September came and we were back at Weymoor again; this time jointly with London WRG and some of the summer campers to complete the shuttering work to allow the concrete pour to be completed – two days of hard, technical but rewarding work saw everything ready and the pour was completed on the Monday with minimal problems.

In October we headed west for a weekend on Dock Lock on the Stroudwater – bricklaying, pointing and working on the spill weir to get the Pike Lock to Dock Lock pound ready for rewatering.

November saw us meeting up with London WRG and WRG Forestry for a “Not the reunion” weekend on the Wey & Arun. Forestry had just finished their week’s camp felling diseased ash trees on the offside

below Loxwood, and the two extra mobile groups went to help tidy up, burn off the brash and split the resulting logs.

December always sees our traditional Christmas dig with London WRG and Forestry, which this year was back on the Wey & Arun. It was London’s turn to organise and work continued on ash tree clearance followed by the usual Christmas party on Saturday night.

After a short Christmas break, February saw us back at the western end of the Cotswold Canals where we managed to persuade the noisy bunch of Forestry to join us for a Burns Night weekend of off-side tree felling. While Forestry dealt with the big stuff near Pike Lock, the rest of us concentrated above Blunder lock. Eli did us proud with an excellent Burns Night dinner on the Saturday – first time I’ve had haggis on a dig!

March and we were back at the western end again; the original plan had been to start work on the culvert / aqueduct at the top end of John Robinson lock but



Alan Lines

The concrete pour goes in on the final day at Weymoor on the Cotswold Canals in September



Alan Lines

Making up gabions for bank support at Pike Lock on the Cotswold Canals in March

this fell through so we built gabions to support the bank at Pike lock and had some more bonfires.

In April, KESCRG and London WRG joined forces again to work on the Lichfield canal – towpath laying in the Borrowcop Park area was the order of the day.

May arrive and we returned to an old favourite site, Pewsham on the Wilts & Berks. It must be more than twenty years since I last worked there - I remember some truly epic scrub bashes in the early 2000's. The site has changed immensely since those days and the local society volunteers have pushed ahead significantly with the work. As the first mobile group to work on the site for quite a while (we think), this was a chance for both sides to learn about the other. Being offered a boat trip as soon as we got there (with tea and cake!) certainly made a good

impression. Work for the weekend was to repoint a large chunk of the bottom lock of the Pewsham flight; much chiselling and mortar stuffing later and the wall looked much better.

Moving on to the future and as you read this, KESCRG should have just finished a weekend on the Wey & Arun – the current plan is this will be doing prep work for the summer's camps down there where we (along with NWPG and the local society) are building a new farm bridge over the canal at Rooks Hill, just south of the lift bridges that we helped to build a few years ago. This leads nicely on to July where we have a week's camp on the same site following on from NWPG's week; hopefully we will be casting parts of the bridge walls.

After a break in August, on 6-7 September we should be back at Weymoor



Back to an old favourite: chamber repairs at Pewsham Locks on the Wilts & Berks in May

bridge, again with London WRG. The site has two camps over the summer to continue the canal walls so we'll probably be starting the brick and block work to create the tow path.

October (4-5th) and we are back at Pewsham on the Wilts & Berks again: work to be confirmed, but possibly continuing on the bottom lock which needs some demolition and rebuilding.

December (6-7th) is the usual Christmas dig with London WRG, again on the Wey & Arun.

Dates for next year have not been set as yet. We are always on the lookout for new sites – particularly ones where we can commit a number of weekends, so as to push a project forward.

New volunteers

are always welcome, weekend details are in the *Navvies* diary, on our website (www.kescrg.org.uk), and our Facebook group always has lots of details and photos as to what we have been up to.

Ed Walker



The team at Pewsham

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

Jun 21-22	KESCRG	Wey & Arun Canal: Rooks Hill Bridge, prep for summer camps. Leader: Stephen Davis
Jun 21-22	wrgBITM	Suffolk Stour: Piling at Dedham Lock island
Jun 21-22	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Jul 5-12	WRG Canal Camp	Camp 2025-03: Wey & Arun Canal Camp led by mobile group NWPG
Jul 12-19	WRG Canal Camp	Camp 2025-04: Wey & Arun Canal Camp led by mobile group KESCRG
Jul 19-20	wrgBITM	Wessex Waterways: Oriel Bridge at Foxham
Jul 26-Aug 2	WRG Canal Camp	Camp 2025-07: Lichfield Canal Camp at Tamworth Road, Lichfield
Aug 2-9	WRG Canal Camp	Camp 2025-09: Lichfield Canal Camp at Tamworth Road, Lichfield
Aug 9-16	WRG Canal Camp	Camp 2025-11: Louth Canal Camp at Ticklepenny Lock
Aug 9-16	WRG Canal Camp	Camp 2025-12: Cotswold Canal Camp at Weymoor Bridge
Aug 16-23	WRG Canal Camp	Camp 2025-14: Cotswold Canal Camp at Weymoor Bridge
Aug 23-30	WRG Canal Camp	Camp 2025-16: Neath Canal Camp at Resolven
Sep 6-7	Grand Union	CHECK DATE: may be previous weekend. Ad hoc Buckingham Canal Society / WRG installing trip boat power bollard at Wolverton
Sep 6-7	London WRG	Cotwold Canals (eastern): Weymoor Bridge. Joint weekend with KESCRG
Sep 6-7	KESCRG	Cotwold Canals (eastern): Weymoor Bridge. Joint weekend with London WRG
Sep 20-21	wrgBITM	Maidenhead Waterways: Bray Cut
Sep 20-21	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Sep 28 Sun	WRG	WRG Committee/Board Meeting: Rowington Village Hall. Note date changed from Sat
Oct 4-5	London WRG	Shrewsbury & Newport Canals
Oct 4-5	KESCRG	To be arranged: Wilts & Berks at Pewsham?
Oct 5 Sun	NCA	Northern Canals Association: Meeting on Shrewsbury & Newport Canals
Oct 17-19	NWPG	To be arranged
Oct 18-19	wrgBITM	Basingstoke Canal: Offside rhododendron clearance
Oct 18-19	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Nov 1-2	WRG	Possible WRG Reunion: to be confirmed in next issue
Nov 15-16	wrgBITM	Maidenhead Waterways: Bray Cut
Nov 15-16	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Nov 22-23	NWPG	To be arranged
Dec 6-7	London WRG	Wey & Arun Canal. Joint Christmas dig with KESCRG and WRG Forestry
Dec 6-7	KESCRG	Wey & Arun Canal. Joint Christmas dig with London WRG and WRG Forestry
Dec 6-7	WRG Forestry	Wey & Arun Canal. Joint Christmas dig with London WRG and KESCRG
Dec 13-14	wrgBITM	To be arranged: Xmas Work Party
Dec 20-21	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Mar `4-15, 2026	IWA/BCNS/WRG	BCN Cleanup: likely to be on northern part of BCN, possibly Daw End / Rushall
Mar 22, 2026	NCA	Northern Canals Association: Meeting on Chesterfield Canal

WRG and mobile groups

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

dig

27 September

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DIG REPORT LWRG at 'JR' Lock

London WRG's volunteers head for the Cotswold Canals to renew their acquaintance with John Robinson Lock and hone their bricklaying skills

London WRG at John Robinson Lock in May

This May WRG's south eastern regional volunteer group London WRG were very glad to be back at the Cotswold Canals after a long absence. For the first time in ages we were bricklaying on a Cotswold lock – something that had been a big part of our lives in the pre-pandemic years as we worked at Goughs Orchard, Ham Mill and Bowbridge locks.

John Robinson Lock (the bottom lock of a series of five locks on the Stroudwater Navigation near Eastington, and a busy Canal Camps work site in 2023) has finally got permission to go ahead again, it's a vital part of the Lottery-funded Phase 1b section of the restoration (see map below) and there's plenty of work ready for us there. In the lock chamber we focused on wingwall work, adding more courses as well as some repointing and brick cleaning.

As the bricklaying team got on with that in the hot sun, another small team were busy moving colossal coping stones. These had been dumped at the far end of the lock and now needed returning to the right place. There will be plenty of work needed to get these into position, but for now we used a digger and dumper to put them near the edge of the chamber.

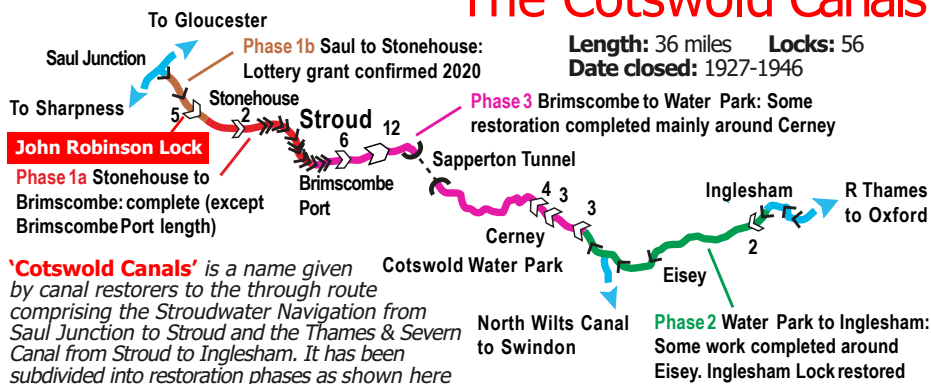


Pictures by Martin Ludgate

Constructing a top ground paddle culvert

It was a hot weekend and there were a few pink volunteers by the end of it. We were pleased to be joined by new face Steve, and also two longstanding WRGies, Andy and Natalie, who don't often come out with London WRG. One thing we've found is that some people who weren't able to book into a camp this year before they got booked

The Cotswold Canals



up solid have instead decided to join us on a weekend, which has been a bit of a bonus.

Another pleasant surprise was that Saul Memorial Hall has improved since we were last there. Clearly they've had a tidy up and both the bathrooms and kitchen were in better shape than when we last stayed there.

Knowing we weren't going to be a large group of volunteers, we experimented with using a slow cooker for the first time on a London weekend. This meant the cook was able to stay longer on site. It worked fairly well and I think this might be a good option for us to try again in future.

We're very keen to get back to 'JR' and crack on with the work to be done there. Unfortunately there aren't likely to be any weeks' camps there this year (as they couldn't be planned before the access permission had been agreed), and for our group at least all the weekends are booked

on other projects for another six months. This means we aren't available in prime mortaring weather. We'll try to get back to the Cotswolds if we have any cancellations on our other planned weekends elsewhere this autumn – and if anyone reading this who is involved with one of the other regional groups finds themselves with a spare weekend, please do consider this site. I think we may well try to focus on this site in particular when we're next planning our London WRG diaries.

Sophie Smith



The Stonehenge team shift some monumentally sized coping stones



Rebuilding and repointing work on the lock's upper wing wall

WILDLIFE and canal restoration

Alex Melson brings us his vision for a restored canal network which is a model of harmony with nature and the community...

Wildlife and canal restoration

Waterway restoration hasn't always had the easiest of relationships with nature conservation. 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. Depending on the methods used, restoration can actually benefit biodiversity at the same time as extending the navigable waterways network - and this can be used to gain wider support for canal reopening.

Alex Melson (who many of you may recall from his time as one of the IWA Head Office staff with responsibility for WRG matters - before moving on to pursue a career in nature and the environment) has returned as a volunteer contributor of a series of articles about wildlife and inland waterways.

In the first one, he explained why wildlife interests regard the waterways network as so important to biodiversity and nature conservation. In part two he went on to show how waterway restoration can be done in ways that contribute to the wildlife value of canals. This time he goes a step further and brings us his vision for a waterway network of the future where boating goes hand-in-hand with nature and communities...

Wildlife and Canal Restoration part 3: The Restored Canal Network of the Future: A Model of Harmony Between Nature and Community

In a future where urbanisation and environmental degradation seem to be ever on the rise, the restoration of our historical canal networks offers a refreshing glimpse into a sustainable, interconnected world. Imagine a future where canals, once vital for transport and industry, are revived not only to support the economy but to create thriving ecosystems that benefit both wildlife and communities alike. This visionary restoration, blending modern design with environmental care, promises to be a game-changer in how we relate to nature in urban spaces.



"The banks are transformed into flourishing ecosystems" - a restored length of the Montgomery Canal

A New Kind of Canal

The canals of the future are not just arteries for trade and commerce as they once were. These waterways have been re-imagined to support diverse ecosystems and create accessible spaces where nature and humans coexist in a seamless, sustainable environment. Stretching through cities, towns, and rural areas, these canals are designed to be both functional and restorative. They are now equipped with integrated green spaces, wildlife corridors, and water purification systems that serve the dual purpose of conserving biodiversity and providing recreational spaces for people.

One of the defining features of the future canal network is its sustainable water management. Smart technology embedded in the waterways ensures that water levels are carefully monitored and regulated. The canals serve as natural flood alleviators, absorbing excess water during heavy rains, thus preventing urban flooding while maintaining their ecological balance. These waterways are also fitted with filtration systems that use natural processes, such as wetland plants and algae, to purify water, ensuring clean habitats for aquatic species while safeguarding the health of local communities.

Habitat Restoration and Wildlife Corridors

The future canal network can be designed with the primary goal of restoring and enhancing wildlife habitats. The once-polluted waters and abandoned banks are transformed into flourishing ecosystems that attract a variety of species, from birds and amphibians to insects and fish. Native plants, carefully selected to thrive in canal environments, line the edges, providing food and shelter for local wildlife.



More canals could be used for flood alleviation, as the Forth & Clyde in Glasgow already is

The canals themselves become natural highways, not just for boats, but for species migration as well. Wildlife corridors are strategically incorporated into the design to allow animals to safely move between fragmented habitats, contributing to the restoration of biodiversity across larger landscapes. Fish ladders and aquatic plant beds help species like eels, salmon, and freshwater mussels thrive, while beavers, otters, and birds are attracted to the lush habitats along the water's edge.



We could see otters and other species attracted to habitats along the water's edge

Moreover, the canals support the cultivation of wetland ecosystems that act as buffers between urban sprawl and natural environments. These wetlands purify water, prevent erosion, and filter out pollutants, thus reducing the urban heat island effect and maintaining cooler, healthier surroundings. Communities can enjoy the spectacle of migrating birds or witness the beauty of beavers working along the canal banks, bringing the wonders of nature closer to home.

Community-Centered Design

While the restored canals are nature-centric, they are equally designed with the community in mind. The canals are no longer secluded stretches of water, but rather dynamic spaces that invite human interaction and foster a deeper connection to the environment. The restoration project includes pedestrian walkways, cycling paths, and water-based transportation options, making the canals a hub of activity for locals. People can enjoy walking, biking, kayaking, or even taking part in sustainable boating activities like solar-powered tours, offering a unique way to experience nature and learn about the ecosystem restoration efforts taking place.

Public parks, educational centres, and community gardens are dotted along the canal banks, encouraging social interaction and environmental stewardship. These spaces are not just for leisure—they also serve as hubs for environmental education and activism, where local communities can engage in conservation efforts. Schools can take part in educational programs that teach students about water conservation, local wildlife, and sustainability, fostering a new generation of eco-conscious individuals.

Local farmers markets, pop-up events, and outdoor activities thrive along these canals, creating vibrant community spaces where people can gather, share ideas, and connect. The canals become places where communities are re-engaged with their surroundings, celebrating their historical significance while embracing their potential as green urban spaces.

Integrating Technology for Sustainability

To ensure that this restored canal network remains efficient, sustainable, and accessible, technology plays a crucial role. Sensors integrated into the water, plants, and surrounding environments collect real-time data that is used to manage water quality, track wildlife populations, and optimise canal maintenance. AI-driven systems are used to predict and manage water flow, monitor ecological health, and alert authorities to any potential environmental threats. This tech-driven approach allows for a more responsive and adaptive canal system that can evolve with the challenges of the future.

For residents and visitors, augmented reality (AR) apps bring the history and ecology of the canals to life, providing interactive experiences that reveal hidden layers of the canal's history, biodiversity, and restoration efforts. The app can guide users on eco-friendly boating routes, suggest walking paths with the highest chance of wildlife sightings, and even offer real-time water quality readings, all enhancing the visitor experience while fostering a culture of environmental responsibility.

A Model for the Future

The restored canal network of the future is a testament to the power of thoughtful, integrated design. It represents a harmonious fusion of human and environmental needs, where nature is not simply preserved, but actively nurtured in an urban context. In revitalising these historical structures, we not only honour the legacy of our industrial past but also create a model of sustainability that can guide future urban planning worldwide.

This canal system is more than just a way to transport goods or people—it is a vibrant ecosystem, a space for community gathering, and a tool for climate resilience. By embracing the lessons of the past and the possibilities of the future, we create a shared space where both wildlife and people thrive, ensuring that the canals of tomorrow are not just pathways of water, but pathways to a more sustainable, connected world.

In this visionary future, the canal network isn't merely restored; it is transformed into a beacon of hope, a model of how we can live in balance with nature while fostering stronger, more resilient communities.

Alex Melson

Next time: Alex gets practical with the Top Ten ways to enhance biodiversity during restoration. But what do you think of his ideas? A dream for the future, or a nightmare scenario for a network built for industry and maintained for navigation? Send the editor your views!



"Public parks are dotted along the banks" - the restored Droitwich Canal in Vines Park, Droitwich

PROGRESS Montgomery Canal

Shropshire Union Canal Society enjoy another productive weekend lining the Montgomery Canal channel south of Crickheath Wharf

Shropshire Union Canal Society - May 2025 work party report



The channel widens considerably on a bend, enough for some soft banking to be installed

"Another highly productive work party", said restoration project manager, Tom Fulda, summing up progress on the Shropshire Union Canal Society volunteers' 'Crickheath South' project to rebuild the Montgomery Canal channel southwards from the limit of navigation (since 2023) at Crickheath Wharf towards the new Schoolhouse Bridge and the Welsh border at Llanymynech. "Helped by the prolonged dry and sunny spell, profiling, lining and blocking continued to be the main event but as usual, a variety of other tasks were undertaken".

Working back towards the previously re-watered section, the channel widens considerably on a bend. When we started lining this current section, lengths of liner approximately 8.5 metres long were sufficient to cover the channel from side to side. This work party finished with 14 metre lengths being used and we haven't yet reached the widest point. Regular adjustments are therefore made to keep the nib at the top of the blocks just below water level.

As the channel widens there is space again to incorporate the soft bank design on the



Pictures by SUCS

Riprap (crushed stone) on the towpath side

offside. Twenty metres of the first course of hollow blocks were installed. A significant volume of soil is required to infill behind the hollow block retaining wall and this has already been positioned above the liner ready for infilling when the retaining wall has been completed.

In total, 102 metres of this section have now been lined and blocked, and the towpath bank has been completed above water level by covering the liners with riprap then soil. Soil covering for the offside bank waits for another occasion.

Next work party, it will be time to remove the temporary dam separating this site from the re-watered section (having first de-watered the re-watered section!) in order to profile the channel in this area and start lining.

A variety of other tasks were undertaken including fixing some leaks around the temporary connecting pipe between the Phase 1A (nearest to Crickheath) and 1B (nearer Schoolhouse) sections of canal, past the farm crossing and knocking down weed growth on the spoil heap in the compound and elsewhere.

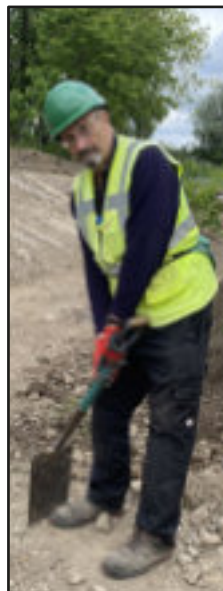
Occasionally on the canal, one encounters such an unusual sight you have to take a second look to check it really happened. One such event happened on Sunday afternoon when the Society Chair was caught with spade in hand (although he appeared unsure what to do with it).



First of two courses of blocks on the soft bank



Covering the riprap with soil



"What do I do with this?"

PROGRESS Roundup

Work starts on a new bridge on the Wey & Arun, a dry dock roof takes shape on the Wilts & Berks, and Wappenshall makes progress

Wey & Arun Canal **Reinstating the canal and opening-up new countryside walks in Surrey**

Following approval of its planning application, the Wey & Arun Canal Trust is starting work on a new restoration project south of Bramley in Surrey.

The site is at Rooks Hill and extends for 800 metres south from a recently restored section at Birtley Green. After completing the restoration of a section on the Wey & Arun canal south of Bramley in 2023 along with two lifting bridges [Navvies readers will recall Canal Camps working on building these in recent years] and the creation of a circular walk connecting the canal and the Downs Link (a walking and cycling trail based on former railway lines), construction on a new section will start this summer. Walkers who enjoy walking along Greensand Way, which crosses the route of the canal, today just see a grassy field as the canal was infilled and therefore not visible.

Phase 1 will see the construction of Rooks Hill Bridge over which the Greensand Way will cross the canal. Along with the bridge construction, the banks and canal channel to the south of bridge alongside Fanesbridge Cottage will be created and a culvert under the canal will be repaired. In **Phase 2**, a new canal cut will be constructed and connected up to the in-water section just south of the Birtley No 1 swing-bridge. A new towpath will be built providing public access from Greensand Way up to the completed Birtley Bridges section and will create new walking routes.

In **Phase 3** a new lock will be constructed on the site of the original Fanesbridge Lock and the rest of the canal channel will be restored. On completion of this section, a 1.6km length of canal will have been restored, and we are working on a new scheme to continue the restoration southwards as far as Run Common Road. The costs of Phase 1 is estimated at £286k. The Trust already has donations of over £86k to start work, but is launching a fundraising appeal to complete Phase 1 with a target to raise a further £200k. Details of our appeal and how to donate can be found on our website <https://weyarun.org.uk/backdrop/rooks-hill-appeal>

Wilts & Berks Canal



Work continues at Pewsham Locks, not just on the locks themselves (see KESCRG report, page 32) but also on the adjacent former dry dock, whose roof is seen taking shape..

Shrewsbury & Newport Canals



A recent aerial photo shows the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust's project at Wappenshall with the completed East Basin, the warehouses which are being turned into a canal and community centre, and the car park just being surfaced.

Sankey Canal

The Sankey Canal Restoration Society has been extremely busy of late with numerous projects being conducted and with the society attending a number of events. St Helens Spring Clean was the largest event organised by SCRS in recent years, and one that was supported by St Helens Borough Council and The World of Glass. It focused on removing rubbish in the canal and litter picking, and witnessed the launch of our new dinghy *The Henry Berry*. SCRS has also maintained its presence at the St Helens Heritage Festival, an event that has become a prominent feature in the town, which celebrates the industrial heritage of the area, the Sankey Canal being a vital ingredient in its development.

SCRS has also been involved in a conservation project at Red Brow Wood, which is a woodland area on the banks of the canal at Newton le Willows. The work involves the restoration of ancient woodland, paths, clearing feeder streams to the Sankey Canal, and the revealing of a sandstone quarry face worked as part of Liverpool & Manchester Railway's 'Nine Arches' viaduct construction. The work is funded by Wargrave Big Local and is being led by Groundwork CLM with additional funding and work by SHBC. SCRS and Newton-le-Willows Anglers' Association have been providing manpower.

There has also been Work party progress, concentrating at Blackbrook Branch, cutting undergrowth to reveal Blackbrook Bridge and improve the channel flow, which will reduce the possibility of future flooding. This was achieved by working with Newton le Willows Anglers Association and Blackbrook Residents Flooding Group. At Bradley Lock, we have started uncovering the canal bank copings, revealing archaeological features. We have been awarded United Utilities funding for the Broad Oak Basin restoration project in Parr, one of the oldest canal basins in the country. We plan to work with SHBC, Groundwork CLM, United Utilities, the Environment Agency and C&RT to restore the basin, to replace a closed footbridge, create a heritage nature trail, repair Old Double Lock and clear the canal channel to improve flood resilience. We are still at the planning stage, though hope to report on this progress next time

Dr David Harrison, Secretary of SCRS

LEADERSHIP TEAMS DAY report

Evvo reports back from his final WRG Leadership Teams Day before he hands over the reins to... whoever wants to take it on for 2026...

WRG Leadership Teams Day 2025

This important annual event in the run-up to WRG's summer Canal Camps programme took place on Saturday, 31 May at its traditional location of Rowington Village Hall near Warwick. During the day, we covered a number of subjects and updates relevant to leaders, assistant leaders and cooks.

Over 30 leaders took part and it was good to see leaders from mobile restoration groups and local canal societies that host WRG Canal Camps mixing and sharing knowledge and experience with WRGie leaders.

H&S Report: We started with a Health and Safety Report on the last year of WRG Canal Camps.

Thankfully, there were no serious incidents or accidents but a point of slight concern was that from fourteen weeks of camps, only twelve reports were submitted – 4 x accidents, 6 x near misses and 2 x incidents.

The WRG Board needs reports to be able to see and understand all unexpected events on site and in camp accommodation, in order to put in place the right protections for volunteers. No unexpected / unwanted event is too minor to report and helps to identify unwanted trends that could become serious if left unconsidered. See the panel on the right for which form to use.

Some recent examples of reports submitted are:

- A ride-on roller's dislike of even very minor almost invisible sideways slopes. (Fortunately, the dog-poo bin was missed by millimetres!)
- How low-hanging tree branches could cause injury to dumper drivers. (The branch knocked off the magnetically-held flashing beacon on the roll bar and which landed on the driver's hard hat.)
- A poorly stapled document caused a minor skin puncture to a cook.
- A minor diesel spill. (The volunteer's outer clothing acted as the spill-kit!)

All the reports showed the actions taken to prevent such events recurring.

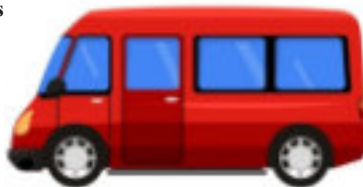
Which form to use?

The IWA Toolbox Talk on Accidents, Incidents and Near Misses has these descriptions:

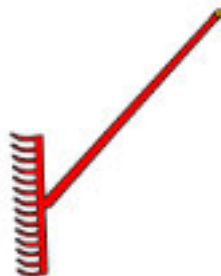
Accident – These are occurrences that result in an injury or ill health. These are easily identifiable by needing to use something within the first aid kit or being taken to A&E.



Incident – An event that does not cause harm to a person but where a piece of equipment (eg: van, excavator, hired kit, etc) has been damaged in any way leading to repairs.



Near Miss – An event that, while not causing harm, has the potential to cause injury or ill health (eg: tools and materials being left unsafe or working unsafely).



What would you do? How would you respond to your cook cutting their finger, a volunteer slipping over in the shower, a diesel spill? In our session on Accidents, Incidents and Near Misses, we used some role-playing to allow groups to discuss the options and learn from each other's experience. No Oscars were won by the role-players, but we are grateful nevertheless!

On a more serious note, please look out for new online incident reporting system currently being developed and to see how the feedback from our lively discussion on risk assessments will inform the Board's consideration of the WRG Canal Camp General Risk Assessment.

The Assistant's role: The first afternoon session focused on the vital role of Assistant Leaders. This session was led by Ricey and Sandra H and described how they work together as leader and assistant and divide different responsibilities according to their different strengths. They provided work sheets for everyone detailing their thoughts / suggestions on the various things that leaders can do to ensure enjoyable and effective camps for volunteers.

Key points: We then moved on to WRG Standards and Key Messages – a session of informing and reminding leaders so that they build and maintain their confidence to lead safe and productive camps. Key points included:

- The need for leaders to maintain their own health and well-being eg by talking difficult issues through with fellow leaders or their Duty Director.
- The importance of pre-camp contact with their volunteers and the Daily Briefing Card, both of which helps leaders keep their volunteers informed of progress and intentions.
- Our responsibility under IWA policies for keeping volunteers' personal and sensitive data secure and destroying it as soon as it is no longer needed.
- IWA's updated policy on the important subject of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Victimisation.
- Alex Melson's very informative series of articles in current editions of Navvies on Environmental Considerations for Restoration Work and Canal Camps
- Bonfire management – we all love a bonfire but there is bureaucracy to consider and the Toolbox Talk – Waste Management and You – tells us all we need to know about applying for the requisite D7 – Exemption Certificate
- The possibility that any camp or camp leader may find themselves subject to interest from local media, as



"I can assure everyone that no-one was asleep" says Evvo

well as the general public. Mike Palmer's article in *Navvies 330*, while not directly on this subject, has pretty well all the information a leader might need on the benefits of waterways to the community, the IWA's Funding Britain's Waterways' campaign, etc. For the killer question "why do you do it?" leaders can refer to the "Waterways for Today" report. There will be a copy in the camp flightcase.

- And that taking down scaffolding is just as dangerous as erecting it! Clear and understood plans must always be in place for both the upping and the downing of scaffolding and at no point must a single person hold two unsupported standards (verticals).

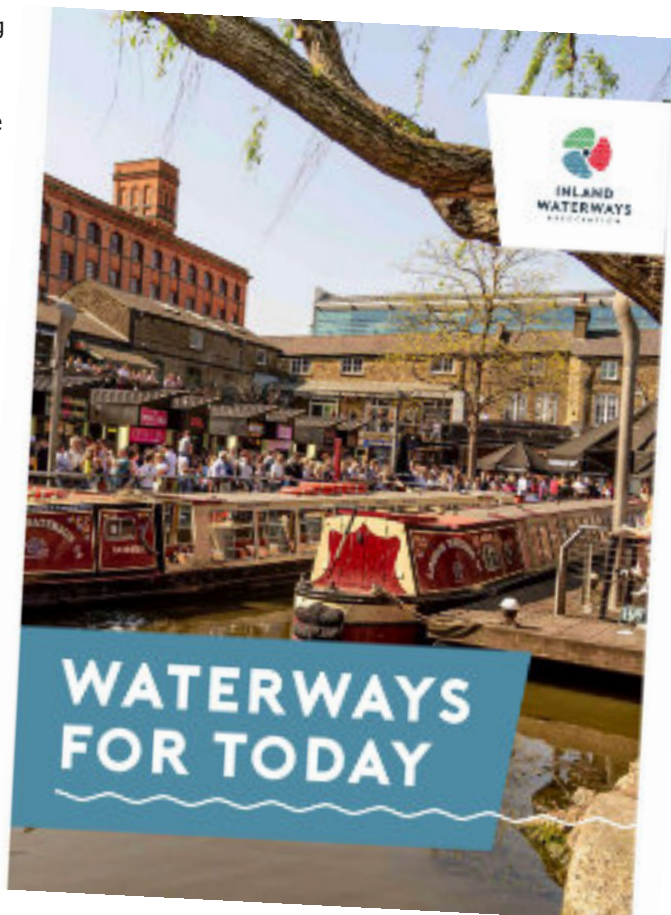
Feedback: In the final session of the afternoon, we had a brief discussion of the feedback from the WRG Canal Camp Survey 2024. There was a reasonable response rate to the survey, and while most of the feedback was very complimentary, the comments that were less so are being carefully considered. It was encouraging to see that 42% of the respondents said they would be interested in finding out more about leading on WRG camps. Please come forward – we would love to hear from you!

That concluded the programme for another successful Leadership Teams Day. We were so busy and concentrating so hard only one photograph was taken. It features a rear view of me (Not a view of my rear!) and most of the attendees. Photographs do lie so I can assure everyone that no-one was asleep during the proceedings despite what you think you see!

And finally: To conclude my report on LTD 2025, many, many thanks to everyone there for their participation. Additional thanks go to Jude and Maria for providing us with such tasty meals and, last but not least, to Verena in WRG HQ for all the background and co-ordination work she did before, during and after the day.

I have led LTD for quite a few years now but have decided to hand over the reins to someone else to put their stamp on it. I have enjoyed it very much and found it very rewarding. Whoever takes it on, I shall be sitting at one of the tables next year to support and respond to them. So, my very last sentence of this report is to thank everyone who has presented at these days and helped me during my time at the helm.

Dave 'Evvo' Evans



In the flight case: the 'why are we doing it' report

BEHIND THE SCENES Sites Group

Last time we looked at how WRG Logistics sorts out kit for our camps. This time we look at how our Sites Group helps to plan the work with local canal societies

WRG Canal Camps Sites Group

So in continuation of the 'Behind the scenes in WRG' series, we have prepared this explanation on the WRG Sites Group...

The Sites Group in its current format was formed in 2023 with the intention of boosting the planning of the Canal Camps programme and providing extra technical support for the preparation and delivery of camps.

The team is made up of seven volunteers who each have experience of planning and running camps as well as technical knowledge for the various different activities, tasks and projects that Camps can undertake on site. This was to help fill the gaps left by head office staff changes and provide support to leadership teams for the projects where works are becoming more complex. We meet online roughly every two weeks throughout the year depending on progress and updates that need to be communicated.

Our 'year' usually starts in September with seeking feedback from leadership teams and local society contacts who have hosted Canal Camps during that summer and collating this to help gain learning for aspects that went well, and how we could improve where necessary on the camps process. This is then followed by a request to local canal societies, trusts and other groups around the country for submissions of an interest in hosting one or more Canal Camps in the following summer programme (there are also usually one or two in the spring and autumn). As part of this expression of interest, we ask for details of the project, the works that WRG would be undertaking, the accommodation, any constraining dates and the status of permissions and consents required for the works to go ahead.

Once these have been returned, they are reviewed and a Sites Group lead person is allocated to each project. This is usually determined by the location and whether there are existing contacts and knowledge of projects within Sites Group. The review establishes whether the work is suitable for a

Camp and identifies if a site visit is required to gain a better appreciation of the proposal.

The team summarises each of the proposals into a presentation to the WRG board at the December or January meetings for either approval or further development prior to approval. From this the Canal Camps programme is drawn up which tries to make the best fit of the constraining dates from local societies and a logical sequence for van logistics moving around the country from one Camp to another through the summer.

As leadership teams are identified and approved by the board, the Camps programme is released for 'publication' and booking. The sites group doesn't generally undertake the 'finding of leaders' activity (although a number of the group do often form parts of the leadership teams on camps), this falls to 'Ricey' (Stephen Rice) in his new 'WRG camp leader finder' role to match camps to potential leaders, assistants and cooks (more on that in potentially the next issue in another of the 'behind the scenes' series).

In previous editions of *Navvies* it has been highlighted that additional Camps may be released at a later date, with others noted as still being subject to agreement. This is for a number of reasons: it's mainly because before a camp is advertised and opened for booking we want to be really certain that it can go ahead. This could be due to permissions not yet being fully in place, or lack of a leadership team.

When leadership teams have been identified for each camp, the sites group contact works with them to develop the paperwork which includes the project plan, method statements and risk assessments. In general it is not the role of the sites group to write the paperwork, however they will assist and other members of the group will review and provide comment to help ensure consistency and detail is provided. The ambition is for paperwork to have been written and reviewed at least 4 weeks before the camp commences however this is subject to the occasional late changes that occur.

Pete Fleming

NAVVIES News

On how the Wilderness Boat Owners' Club has supported waterway restoration in general, and the WRG Training Weekend in particular

A voice crying in the Wilderness...

...is, as I'm sure you well-educated readers will be aware, actually a Biblical quote that refers to John the Baptist. More recently it's also come into use to mean a lone voice putting forward an opinion or idea that's not widely held.

But in this case I'm going to get a little less metaphorical than that: I'm using it to mean, quite literally, the voice of a campaigning boater making their views heard from the helm of a Wilderness Otter or Wilderness Beaver trailable narrowboat. Let me explain...

These light but sturdy little GRP-built boats were produced from the 1970s onward for some decades, were once a common sight on the canals, and plenty are still to be seen even though they are no longer being made. They may have largely lost out in popularity to steel narrowboats on the canals these days, but they do have one great advantage: although they're built to narrowboat style to make them well-suited to the canals, their lightweight materials means they're practicable to tow on a trailer behind a modest-sized vehicle, and to launch down a slipway.

That means they can go boating on lengths of isolated restored canal that haven't been reconnected to the main waterways network yet, and won't be for a while (because Sod's Law always seems to dictate that the trickiest and most expensive bit of any canal restoration seem to be the bits that link it to the main network). Which not only gives the boaters a chance to chalk-off lots of bits of water (probably totalling upwards of 100 miles) that those with steel craft won't be boating on for years, it can be used as a campaigning tool in its own right. Just by being there, they can support restoration projects...

Put a load of slightly curious looking GRP narrowboats on an obscure isolated bit of navigable canal at a trailboat festival, and all of a sudden the local canal society's proposals to reopen the canal to navigation perhaps don't sound quite so outlandish to the sceptics among the local population, the local authorities, and everyone else who needs to be convinced...



Wilderness Boat Owners' Club craft at the south end of the isolated restored Moira length of the Ashby Canal

The Wilderness Boat Owners' Club coordinates such campaigning efforts: here's their report from a recent cruise in support of the Ashby Canal Association's ongoing restoration of the abandoned northern reaches of the Ashby de la Zouch Canal...

On Sunday 18th May 2025 seven boats belonging to members of the Wilderness Boat Owners' Club set off for a Sunday afternoon cruise, with a difference!

Ten Wilderness Boats attended the Moira Canal Festival, held on the detached section of the Ashby Canal at Moira Furnace, near Swadlincote, Leicestershire, over the weekend of the 17th and 18th May 2025, along with two CaraBoats and a Sea Otter. All thirteen boats were towed to the canal by their owners from all over the country and launched either at the Moira Furnace slipway, or at 'Conkers Waterside Centre' in the National Forest, just down the canal.

On the Sunday afternoon seven of the boats set off for the southern end of the detached section, about a mile away, and had a most enjoyable cruise in the bright sunshine. The boats lined up across the end of the canal and toasted the sunshine and restoration progress with a glass of orange juice.

Several of the residents of the nearby houses, which look out across the current end of the canal came out on to their balconies, or on to the canal bank, to photograph the boats and celebrate the restoration with us.

Of course, it will be some years before this section is linked to the rest of the Ashby Canal. In the meantime the Wilderness Boats Owners' Club continues to demonstrate its support for this and other restoration schemes up and down the country, through supporting events such as the very well attended Moira Canal Festival.

But there's more to the story. While they were in that part of the country, the Owners' Club presented took the opportunity to present a cheque to WRG at our Training Weekend...

Two members of the Committee of the Wilderness Boats Owners' Club (WBOC) presented a cheque for £500 to WRG (Waterway Recovery Group) on Sunday 18th May 2025. The donation from WBOC was made to help support this year's WRG Training Weekend, which was held on the Lichfield Canal.

Chris Davey, WBOC Honorary Secretary, handed the cheque to Ali Bottomley, who has organised the WRG Training Weekends for well over a decade. In attendance were John Parker, WBOC Chair (far right) and Mike Palmer, WRG Chair (far left).

The Wilderness Boat Owners' Club actively supports restoration schemes around the country. As part of this, WBOC members take their Wilderness trailboats to detached and restored sections of canal that are cut off from the main network, to help promote their use. By doing this WBOC aims to encourage wider support for restoration projects, so that, where applicable, they can eventually be re-connected to the main parts of the canal network. Of course WBOC members also use their boats regularly on their home waterways and they enjoy cruising the main networks across the UK, whenever they can.

John Parker, WBOC Chairman said "I'm delighted that WBOC can help support the Waterway Recovery Group to train its volunteers, old and new, in new skills that they can use on restoration schemes across the country."



NAVVIES News

How do you fancy working part-time doing digital things for IWA? Or volunteering to help at an important campaign boat rally?

Fancy helping at a boat rally?

The Inland Waterways Association, WRG's parent body, is holding an event over the August Bank Holiday weekend on the Bridgewater Canal near Lymm, Cheshire.

The Bridgewater Canal Rally will be held within walking distance of the major breach which occurred at New Year, closing the canal and cutting off important waterway routes. The canal's owners have said that they are committed to repairing it by the end of 2026; however the rally will not only support getting the canal open again, but also draw attention to the wider threat to other waterway from extreme weather and shortage of maintenance funding.

Volunteers are needed to help run the event, putting up marquees, banners, signs amongst other things, then litter picking, and keeping the event tidy over weekend, and taking it all down again afterwards.

The volunteer work camp will run from Wednesday 20th August to Wednesday 27th August. You will have to bring your own accommodation, such as a tent or caravan (or even a boat!), and catering for volunteers will be done centrally in the mess tent.

Please let me know if you can do all or part of that time, especially if you are willing to lead on cooking for everyone (with help from others).

Maria Hearnden moose_dave@hotmail.com 07773 451888

Jean Halliwell R.I.P.

We are sorry to have to bring you the sad news that Jean Halliwell, a volunteer with our WRG North West regional group, died on 10 June just as this issue was going to press. Our sympathies to everyone who knew her.

IWA is hiring...

WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association is looking for "someone to help us grow our digital voice – whether you're an experienced content creator looking for a flexible, purpose-driven role or a curious, motivated emerging creative keen to learn on the job." The paid part-time role will involve sourcing and creating content for social media, writing copy and designing visuals. See charityjob.co.uk/jobs and search for 'IWA'.



Jan Stewart

Emma Greenall is pictured receiving her IWA Richard Bird Medal from WRG Chairman Mike Palmer at the Little Venice Canalway Cavalcade festival in recognition of her longstanding contribution to the success of the event (see Navvies 327)

INFILL Deirdre's back!

Dear Deirdre How much longer are we going to need to shovel muck to restore these flipping canals? Hasn't someone invented an AI that can do it yet?

- Mike, Burton-on-Avon

Deirdre writes Unfortunately all the AIs are being programmed to do the beer drinking and the bonfire watching. We mortals are still going to be shovelling muck long into the future.

Do you have a question for Deirdre? Send it to the editor.

Grin and bear it!

This, I am reliably informed (by Claire Cavender) is not just a prop for 'Wild over Waterways' (IWA children's activities) that somebody has kindly donated for their use, but also the newest member of our Head Office staff, being stationed at Chesham



between festivals and other engagements.

Whilst he has as you can see been issued with PPE, the bear currently lacks a name, and a job title. Can you help? Or just suggest a caption for the picture?

Blasts from the past...

Having failed to come up with anything new to fill up this page (will try harder next time!), the editor has been reduced to recycling some choice quotes from past issues...

20 years ago, from the recent training weekend:

Saturday night entertainment was provided by Bungle fitting our excavator's new door. Having completed the task, he promptly shut the door before realising he had yet to attach the handle. This provided us with the opportunity to practise our new pointing (and laughing) skills. He then went on to dispel the childhood myth about pegs and holes. A Bungle-shaped peg does indeed fit in a small window-shaped hole if you push hard enough.

15 years ago, on the 'Noticeboard' page:

Apologies to anyone who sent anything to Navvies which hasn't appeared in print. The editor had major computer problems a couple of months ago and may have lost a few bits and pieces. Feel free to send them again, so he can lose them again in different ways...

10 years ago, from a report on a first-time Canal Camps cook's experiences:

I made a statement (at the sponsored walk) to the effect that I had survived the week cooking. The response from certain people was "Yes, but did the volunteers?"

5 years ago, from an optimistic piece (we were in lockdown we had to try to be optimistic!) about the Cotswold Canals:

Fingers crossed, and we could have ten miles of canal open from Saul Junction through Stroud to Brimscombe in five years!

Keep 'em crossed, folks!

This might look quite like a canal...



...but it isn't one.

While this might look nothing like a canal...



...but one day it will be one.