

NAVVIES

VOLUNTEERS RESTORING WATERWAYS

**Book now for the WRG Reunion:
22-23 November on the Wilts & Berks Canal**

**Canal Camp reports:
Wales, Weymoor and Wildest Lincolnshire**



**WATERWAY
RECOVERY
GROUP**

**ISSUE 333
OCTOBER – NOVEMBER
2025**

INTRO

more bollards...



You may recall that issue 327 last year carried a page of pictures of our London WRG regional group's working weekend at the Leighton Buzzard basin on the navigable Grand Union Canal, putting in service ducting and a service bollard to supply water and electricity to the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust's electric trip-boat *Electra*. Well there was another similar working party recently at Wolverton, once again combining WRG and Buckingham Canal Society volunteers.

These pictures taken by the editor show (clockwise from top left) the volunteers digging a trench through the hard surfaced towpath mostly by hand (to avoid disturbing buried fibre optic cables) putting in the ducting, filling in the trench, and installing and connecting up the bollard.



IN THIS ISSUE Contents

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

See Facebook group: WRG

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Contents

Intro bollards at Wolverton	3
Editor's Welcome and worries	4-5
Chairman's Comment	6-7
Reunion dig Book now for Wilts & Berks	8-10
Coming soon Christmas digging	11
Diary Camps and working weekends	12-13
Camp Reports Weymoor, Swansea, Neath and Louth	14-29
Sue Burchett An appreciation	30-31
Progress updates from around the waterways network	32-36
Guildford festival Looking back 55 years	37
Saafety Excavator safety levers	38
Navvies News the return of WRGWear?	39

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

Production

Editor: Martin Ludgate, 35 Silvester Road, East Dulwich London SE22 9PB.
020-8693 3266 martin.ludgate@wrg.org.uk

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Distribution: John Hawkins,
4 Links Way, Croxley Green WD3 3RQ
01923 448559 john.hawkins@wrg.org.uk

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Cover picture: Volunteers celebrate the completion of a successful week's Canal Camp on the Neath Canal with this group photo taken on one of the two bridges they built. See camp report on pages 21-25 (picture by the editor) **Back cover:** Aerial view of the new Rooks Hill Bridge on the Wey & Arun Canal showing the continued progress on the wing walls that has been achieved since the end of the two successful weeks of canal Camps that we reported in the last *Navvies*. (picture by Gordon Powell, Wey & Arun Canal Trust)

NAVVIES welcome from the editor

The editor encourages you to book a winter work party and sign up for the forthcoming Reunion. And worries just a little about concrete...

Editor's welcome

A warm welcome from the editor to another issue of our magazine *Navvies*, especially to any new volunteers who joined us on one of our summer Canal Camps.

You'll be able to look back on what you and all the rest of the volunteers got up to this summer, with four more camp reports in this issue reporting back from the Cotswold Canals, Louth Navigation, Neath Canal and Swansea Canal. But it's not just about looking back, because there's plenty more to look forward to, starting with something called the Reunion.

The Reunion? Yes, as you'll see on the front cover, it's coming up on 22-23 November, and there's lots more about it on pages 8-10. So I'll just mention here that it's usually the biggest event in the WRG calendar, a major working party attracting 80-plus people and doing a great deal of work (at the same time as having a lot of fun). It's been in abeyance for the last six years as a result of the pandemic followed by a struggle to find a suitable site with enough work and large enough overnight accommodation - but now it's back.

Originally conceived many years ago as a way for new volunteers to get back together with their new friends from the summer Camps, it also attracts returning volunteers from previous years' Camps, new recruits, and seasoned navvies from the regional mobile groups.

Regional mobile groups? Yes, the work doesn't stop when the summer Canal Camps programme ends. Look at our diary on pages 12-13 and you'll find groups with odd names like NWPG or BITM or KESCRG - as well as some with slightly more 'normal' names like London WRG - are out most weekends on canals all over the country. Between them, in the next few months they're supporting the Wey & Arun, Maidenhead, Chelmer & Blackwater, Basingstoke, Wilts & Berks, Shrewsbury & Newport and Cotswold canals. You'll find more experienced 'old hands' in these groups, but they welcome new volunteers too on all their work parties.

And meanwhile, our Canal Camps sites group are already looking forward to next year's summer Camps programme...

What? Summer 2026 already? Yes, we've been writing to canal restoration societies and trusts all over the country (and some of them have been writing to us) about possible week-long camps for summer 2026. Altogether over 20 different waterways were mentioned at the most recent WRG committee meeting. Not all of them will actually end up on the 2026 programme - inevitably the time taken up by planning and securing the necessary permissions for the work will mean that some won't be ready to host a Canal Camp until the following year or later, or they will decide that it makes sense to do the work in other ways that don't involve week-long camps.

But hopefully by the time of the Reunion weekend (see above) we'll have the beginnings of a plan for '26, and something more concrete in time for at least a 'pre-preview' article in the next *Navvies*.

Hang on, 'something more concrete', is that some kind of punning reference to the kind of work we'll be doing? Well, yes, possibly it is. And this is where I get into the 'serious' bit of the editorial column...

On the back cover of this magazine (and in detail in issue 332) you'll see where volunteers have made a great deal of progress in building the concrete abutments and wing walls for the new Rooks Hill Bridge on the Wey & Arun Canal. On pages 14-16 this time you'll see that our teams at Weymoor Bridge on the Cotswold Canals have completed the concrete channel base and walls over the top of the new concrete culvert. In issue 332 you will have seen the reports of weeks of progress on constructing a new length of concrete



Traditional rebuilt bridge meets modern concrete channel at Weymoor on a London WRG / Kescrg dig

sided canal channel as part of a project to lower the canal to enable it to pass under a road that currently blocks it. And finally on the Swansea Canal, you can read about a team working all week to put an attractive stone facing on an overflow channel wall which was made of... you guessed it... concrete!

You could get the impression that only the wooden footbridges on the Neath Canal and brickwork repairs on the Louth Navigation, also reported in this issue, keep the flag flying for traditional methods and materials. Should we be concerned at that?

On the one hand, maybe we shouldn't. On the Wey & Arun, thanks to (a) the loss of so many original structures during the 100 years that the canal was abandoned before restoration began and (b) the excellent progress by the Wey & Arun Canal Trust since then, the canal has long since reached the stage where there are hardly any original locks or bridges left to restore. Almost everything now is new build - and Rooks Hill Bridge is being built for a purpose that didn't exist in 1816 when the canal opened: to carry the Greensand Way walking trail (which currently crosses the infilled canal) across the reinstated channel. And it's the same story at Weymoor, where all the work was necessitated by the requirement to cross a land drain which was cut through the canal bed while the canal was abandoned. And at Lichfield, as mentioned, the new construction work is necessary to cross a road, where the original hump-backed bridge has long gone, and couldn't be replaced like-for-like because of today's requirements regarding traffic sight lines for new road bridges. There are good engineering and planning reasons for these choices.

On the other hand, some would say that concrete isn't a very environmentally friendly material - either when it comes to the natural environment and the sheer amount of carbon emissions involved in its production, or in terms of the built environment if the end result isn't in keeping with the historic fabric of the canal.

Then again, if the restoration movement did choose to do everything the old-fashioned way, with masonry bridges, brick culverts, clay-lined channels and the like, it would almost certainly cost a lot more. And trying to find some middle way - we've helped build or restore a fair few brick-faced locks and bridges with a fairly traditional appearance but with a considerable amount of concrete hidden away out of sight - might be seen as an acceptable compromise, or dismissed as a pastiche of heritage. "After all", as someone said in *Navvies* a long while ago, "If [original canal engineers] Brindley and Telford had been around today, they would have used steel and concrete". "Yes," I replied, "but they wouldn't have been restoring heritage waterways, they'd have been working on modern engineering jobs like HS2 and Crossrail".

With funding increasingly tight, but with greater concerns for the environment, it seems CRT and the restoration movement are being pulled in both directions. And I don't think there's a simple answer - I guess it's a case of treating each challenge on its individual merits. Is that fair? Or an editorial cop-out? Feel free to send in your views.

Finally, to lighten up, I'd like to mention the forthcoming revival of a range of WRG logo clothing. See *Navvies News* on page 39, and look out for more information in the future on how to get kitted out properly for those winter work parties coming up!

Martin Ludgate

CHAIRMAN'S Comment

...on healthy scepticism, why you shouldn't fill the new insulated water containers with squash, and the tricky question of restoration materials

Chairman's Comment

Hello there, and welcome to an edition of *Navvies* that I consider to be both "bumper" and "upbeat"!

Now, regular readers of *Navvies* will not be surprised by the fact it is "bumper". It's the edition that follows on from a summer of Canal Camps & Festivals so has page upon page of reports that are full of the sort of rewarding fun that has been enjoyed by those of us lucky enough to get our boots on the ground recently.

But perhaps my suggestion of "upbeat" needs a little explaining from me. Because, as you may have noticed, there is a tradition in the Restoration movement of what diplomatic people might describe as "healthy scepticism" (but less diplomatic folk might call cynicism):

- No matter how perfect that brick you have just laid is, the next one probably won't go in level
- Yes, the pump has worked well all day, but it's probably about to block
- The people on this week have been brilliant, but my next Camp will probably be full of southerners / morris dancers / snorers / vegetarians (delete as applicable)

Now I'm not stupid enough to believe that (even if I wanted to) I could generate a convincing argument that this was a bad / negative attitude – there is a reason it is called "healthy scepticism".

No – I think my job here is to supply the raw materials for that attitude to feed on. Fortunately, as well as lots of reports of fun and frolics on restoration sites all over the country, this summer has generated quite a few messages for me to fill my Chairman's bit with. But, as you read through them, I couldn't resist reminding you all that I too can fall prey to that "healthy scepticism".

We have introduced an **IGLOO insulated water container** to the Canal Camp kits.

Important message

1: Don't ever think "Hey, let's fill it with squash" – they are difficult to clean / flush out. So clean water only, please.

Important message

2: Four or so of the plastic beakers in the kit will happily freeze overnight in the freezer and provide the "ice cubes" for a day's worth of chilled water.

Sceptic's version:

"Oh good, some chilled water – that will come in handy on the winter Camps".

STOP PRESS: want some road stone (free)?

Contractors have some stone available, it's free, and canal restoration groups (especially in the South East) might be interested...

- Over 20,000 tonnes of MOT Type 1 stone, only used once as crane pads for piling.
- It's located near Tring in Hertfordshire - you will have to arrange the haulage but the contractors can load it.
- Buckingham Canal Society are anticipating having 1,000 tonnes - think of 10 dumpy bags by 10 dumpy bags by 10 dumpy bags high - but that still leaves another 19,000 tonnes for everyone else

Please contact Terry Cavender of Buckingham Canal Society on **terry.cavender@buckinghamcanal.org.uk** for more details if interested, and help avoid this going to waste or landfill.

Gas Burcos – the manufacturers have stopped making them.

Important message:

Therefore, because they are going to get very difficult to source, please look after them.

Sceptic's version: "Oh great – that cup of the tea was the best thing about the dig!"

The tricky question of **Restoration materials.**

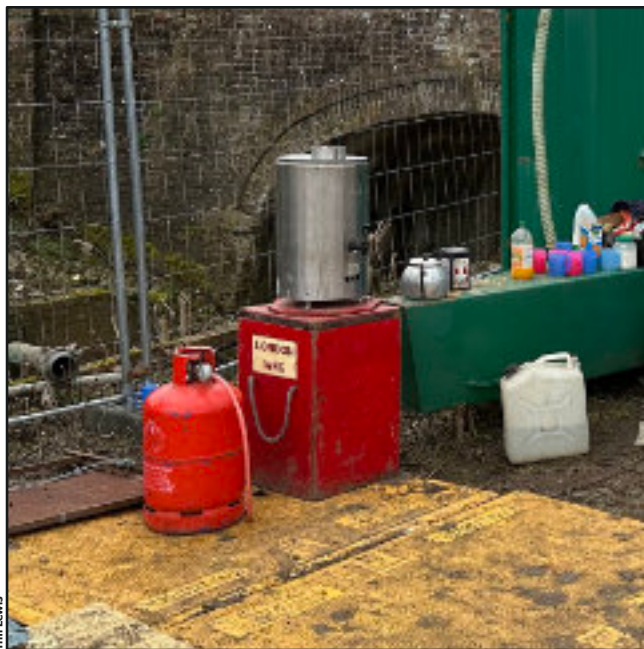
Important message:

Why is Mike covering this when Martin has already raised it on the previous page? Well actually it does look like the necessary "critical mass" is forming to investigate this subject and create some advice and guidance for all restoration schemes.

Sceptic's version:

"Another committee and some handouts? Hardly gonna have any impact, is it?"

Important message 2: Yes – committees / discussions / advice / guidance are a vital part of what we have always done.



The gas Burco: look after it - there won't be any more!

Safety reporting cards

Important message: We put a bit of effort in making sure these were easily available on our sites and have been rewarded with a decent return of useful info. Our thanks as we process them and look for trends, etc.

Sceptic's version: Actually, I don't think there is a sceptic / cynic version here. The concept of Safety Reporting is well accepted throughout WRG. In fact I'll give two reports from the summer that don't need any further processing:

Heras fencing: Don't forget that adding banners to a Heras panel will vastly increase its susceptibility to wind. Always think carefully about adding banners to temporary structures – they may not be able to take it.

Tidy sites: Now I'm fairly sure that this concept is well held by all of us BUT just a reminder that it should also apply to our vans and our trailers. There were a couple of reports from this summer relating to trips (one in a trailer and one in the back of a van) that could have ended up with a nasty injury.

WRG merchandise

Important message: We are lucky enough to have some volunteers who are willing to take on this role (see Page 39), so let's wear our name with pride.

Sceptic's version: Hang on – he's nicking stuff from Martin's pages again. Anyway, unless it results in new underpants for the people on my Camp, I'm not interested...

A splendid summer, my thanks to all.

Mike Palmer

WRG REUNION 22-23 NOV

What used to be the biggest event on the WRG calendar is back at last...

The WRG Reunion: WHAT is it?

It's a major weekend working party that used to happen every year until 2019, where a large number of WRG volunteers get together to support a canal restoration project and really make a difference. And we all get to meet up with WRG friends that we haven't seen for ages and have a good time in the accommodation on the Saturday night. It's being led this year by Becky Parr, and we've got Harri Barnes in charge in the kitchen. And during the weekend we might even be able to announce where some of next year's Canal Camps will be held. In the past the event was sometimes also called the Bonfire Bash, which gives a clue that the work is likely to involve clearing trees and vegetation from the canal bed and burning it on big bonfires - but there's likely to be other work too.

WHO goes on it?

Everyone is welcome to come - whether you're a new Canal Camps volunteer from one of this summer's Camps, an old hand who's been doing this for ages, a regular with one of the WRG regional groups or other mobile groups, or somebody who's never been on a working party before and fancies giving it a go.

WHERE is it happening?

This year's site is on the Wilts & Berks Canal, clearing vegetation around Grove Locks in the Wantage area. For more information about the canal restoration project that we're supporting and how it fits into the rest of the waterways system, see the panel on the next page. And information on where the accommodation is - in an outdoor activity centre WITH BEDS! - and how to get there will be sent out to everyone who books on. Pickups can be arranged for those coming by public transport.

WHEN is it happening?

It's taking place over the weekend of 22-23 November. Volunteers will arrive on the evening of Friday 21, and depart on late afternoon on Sunday 23.



Pictures by Martin Ludgate

Just some of the volunteers at the WRG Reunion dig on the Chesterfield Canal in 2016

Wilts & Berks Canal: BE THERE!

...so book your place now on a great weekend, to avoid disappointment



The Chesterfield Canal emerges from the undergrowth during one of two WRG Reunions held there

HOW do I book?

Book online via the WRG website wrg.org.uk, follow the links to 'Canal Camps & Weekend Digs and then scroll down to 'Waterway Recovery Group Reunion 2025' and click 'Book now'. It costs £20 for the weekend, which includes three meals on Saturday, plus breakfast and lunch on Sunday. Don't delay - we do have room for 80 people, but bookings were coming in steadily as we went to press.

For more information contact enquiries@wrg.org.uk or 01494 783453



It isn't just about the work: socialising at the 2018 Uttoxter Reunion

WHY is it happening?

It's happening because (following several years when we haven't been able to find a site with enough of the right kind of work and accommodation to make it work) we're finally in a position where the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust's restoration scheme has suitable work for us, and we can use it to give their project a big boost. And because it's a great opportunity to get together, have a fun weekend, at the same time as doing loads of useful work.

FACT FILE Wilts & Berks Canal

Length (originally): 52 miles (main line) 8 miles (North Wilts branch) **Locks:** 42 (main line) 11 (N Wilts)
Date closed: 1914 (an aqueduct failure had already closed the canal to through trade)

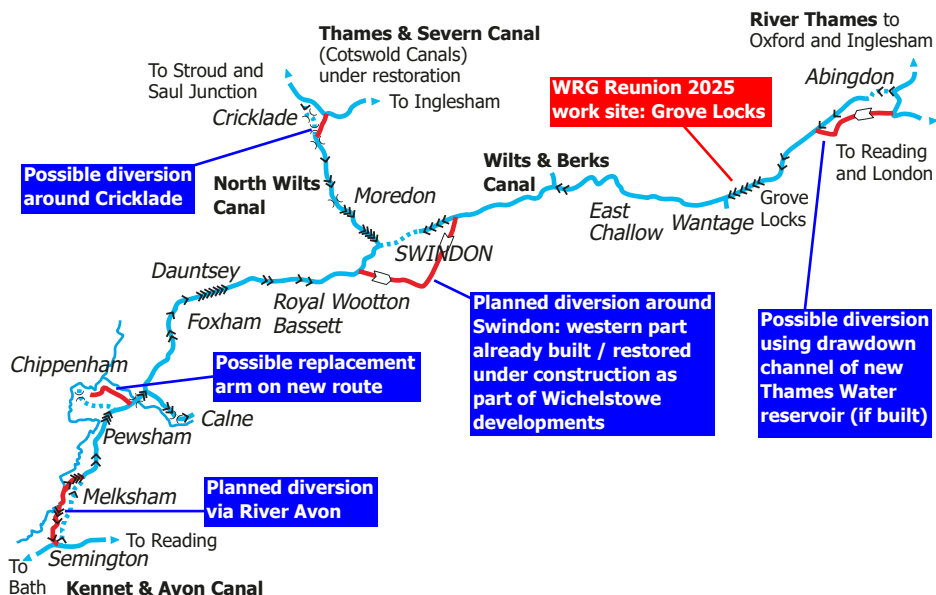
The work for the Reunion: Vegetation clearance around (and for 50 metres above and below) four of the six Grove Locks near Wantage, and around the remains of three bridges on the same length of canal.

Why? The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust plans to begin restoration work on these structures in the not-too-distant future. Our clearance work will allow investigation and planning, enabling restoration to start.

The wider picture: The canal is divided into three sections by Swindon (where a major diversion is needed to bypass parts of the original canal which have disappeared under the town centre - and where some parts of this new route and the original line are already being (re)opened as part of the Wichelstowe series of residential developments on Swindon's south side).

The western section of the canal leads from Swindon to the Kennet & Avon Canal at Semington, and has seen most of the restoration work carried out so far, at sites including Royal Wootton Bassett, Dauntsey, Foxham and currently Pewsham. On the northern arm, the North Wilts Canal branch which runs from Swindon to the Cotswold Canals (Thames & Severn Canal) at Cricklade, there has been a certain amount of restoration work including at Moredon and on the River Key Aqueduct.

But the eastern section from Swindon to the River Thames at Abingdon, the longest of the three sections, has seen relatively little work to date. The planned work to restore Grove Locks will help to redress the balance, and our Reunion weekend will help to give it a good kick-start.



COMING SOON Christmas?

Book now for the Reunion, join the regional groups for their Christmas dig, think about a Christmas Camp, and get the BCN Cleanup in your 2026 diary

The London WRG / KESCRG / WRG Forestry Christmas dig Wey & Arun Canal, 6-7 December

As usual the curtain-raiser for the Navvies festive season is a joint weekend working party on the first weekend in December by three of our mobile groups - WRG's London and Forestry teams and the KESCRG independent group. They will be getting together on 6-7 December for a weekend of scrub-bashing and whatever else the Wey & Arun Canal Trust has for them to do.

The event is open to anyone, wherever you're from, and whether or not you're a regular volunteer with any or none of these groups. On the Saturday evening we'll be having a Christmas dinner with themed fancy dress and the editor's quiz and games, and this year's theme is... **Countries of the World**. See the groups' contact details on the diary pages 12-13 or any of the groups' Facebook pages for details and to book your place.

The Christmas / New Year Canal Camp, 26 December - 1 January

To occupy those 'cold turkey days' between Christmas and New Year we hope to be running another festive Canal Camp. Once again it looks like the leader will be Dave 'Moose' Hearnden, the site and accommodation aren't quite confirmed yet but there's a good chance that we will be back doing more scrub-bashing on the Buckingham Canal again. Keep an eye on the WRG website or contact enquiries@wrg.org.uk or 01494 783453.

The BCN Cleanup, 14-15 March 2026

It might not seem that long since we were last throwing our grappling hooks in the murky waters of the underused reaches of the Birmingham Canal Navigations on this year's BCN Cleanup, but we're already planning the next one. We'll have more information in the next

issue but it's looking like we're heading north to go fishing for shopping trolleys, bikes, prams, old tyres and who knows what else in the Wyrley & Essington Canal - and that probably means moving away to new accommodation too. In the meantime note the date 14-15 March in your diary.



Martin Ludgate

What will we find next year in the Wyrley & Essington Canal?

NAVVIES DIARY

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

Oct 17-19	NWPG	Wey & Arun Canal, Rooks Hill
Oct 18-19	wrgBITM	Basingstoke Canal: Offside rhododendron clearance
Oct 18-19	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Oct 25-26	London WRG	Wey & Arun Canal at Rooks Hill Bridge
Nov 15-16	wrgBITM	Maidenhead Waterways: Bray Cut
Nov 15-16	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Nov 22-23	WRG	WRG Reunion on the Wilts & Berks Canal: vegetation clearance at Grove Locks - see
Nov 22-23	London WRG	Supporting the WRG Reunion - see above
Nov 22 Sat	WRG	WRG Committee/Board Meeting: at WRG Reunion
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
Dec 26-Jan 1	WRG Canal Camp	Christmas / New Year Canal Camp, details to be announced
Jan 10-11	London WRG	Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation (to be confirmed)
Feb 7-8	KESCRG	Wilts & Berks Canal. Joint dig with WRG Forestry
Feb 7-8	London WRG	To be arranged, possible joint dig with KESCRG
Feb 28-Mar 1	London WRG	Shrewsbury & Newport Canals
Mar 7-8	KESCRG	Wilts & Berks Canal. Bank protection at Rushey Platt
Mar 14-15	IWA/BCNS/WRG	BCN Cleanup: likely to be on northern part of BCN, possibly Wyrley & Essington.
Mar 14-15	London WRG	Supporting the BCN Cleanup
Mar 22	NCA	Northern Canals Association: Meeting on Chesterfield Canal
Apr 11-12	KESCRG	Cotswold Canals (Thames & Severn Canal), Weymoor bridge, hopefully finishing
Apr 18-19	London WRG	To be arranged, possibly Cotswold Canals
May 9-10	KESCRG	Cotswold Canals (Stroudwater Navigation), John Robinson lock area, progressing
Jun 6-7	KESCRG	Wey & Arun Canal, Rooks Hill Bridge, hopefully starting excavation / towpath creation

WRG and mobile groups

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

	Bill Nicholson	01844-343369	bill.nicholson@weyarun.org
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk
	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	samklancs@yahoo.com
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	london@wrg.org.uk
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk
	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	samklancs@yahoo.com
pages 8-10		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	london@wrg.org.uk
		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
	Bill Nicholson	01844-343369	bill.nicholson@weyarun.org
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	london@wrg.org.uk
	Ed Walker	07887-568029	ed@edwalker.org.uk
	Ed Walker	07887-568029	ed@edwalker.org.uk
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk
	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	samklancs@yahoo.com
		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	london@wrg.org.uk
	Ed Walker	07887-568029	ed@edwalker.org.uk
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	london@wrg.org.uk
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	london@wrg.org.uk
	Ed Walker	07887-568029	ed@edwalker.org.uk
More info next time		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	london@wrg.org.uk
	Ivan Cane		northern.canals2021@btinternet.com
up the landscaping	Ed Walker	07887-568029	ed@edwalker.org.uk
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	london@wrg.org.uk
the work on the lock	Ed Walker	07887-568029	ed@edwalker.org.uk
north of bridge	Ed Walker	07887-568029	ed@edwalker.org.uk

CAMP REPORT Cotswold Canals

Ricey reports from the final week of the project to install a stream culvert at Waymoor Bridge and rebuild the canal channel above it

Weymoor bridge, Cotswold Canals Week 2: 16-23 August

Guten Tag.

**Das ist richtig, es ist der zweite
Lagebericht in deutscher Sprache für
2025!**

Only joking, Duolingo only got me as far as being able to confidently order a beer and chocolate cake, but what more do I really need? But, as for week two at Weymoor Bridge, our aims were simple: construction of two reinforced concrete walls to form the next section of the sides of the reinstated canal channel where it crosses over a buried stream culvert, continue a blockwork wall forming the edge of the towpath, lay a coping stone or two and ensure we left something fun for KESCRG and London WRG to do on their upcoming weekend.

Week 1 had done a cracking job getting us into a position where the giant Meccano set that we call rebar (or reinforcing bar in full) was ready to be tied with our handy twiddlers.

On **Sunday** Camp commenced with the twiddling ties on the south wing wall whilst backfilling around the north wing wall and various other cavities rumbled on in the background.

The walls were to be shuttered using system formwork, so with seventy panels to be loaded and unloaded and carried onto

site, along with various clips, clamps and struts, and half of the panels being over 45kg each, this took a real team effort.

Rebar work progressed quickly, shuttering started to be installed. The first couple of panels were headscratchers and



Pictures by Ricey

Assembling the rebar and (below) shuttering and bracing ready for the concrete pour



required a little percussive persuasion to get in place, but once that was done, the rest followed quickly.

Monday evening's entertainment occurred organically with a camp member playing a jaunty tune with the trailer on the village hall railings, followed by a 'team building exercise' to workshop multisyllable words to put together a near miss report.

Tuesday was the turn of the north wall, rebar, twiddling and shuttering like a well-oiled machine. Well almost, there was still plenty of head scratching, a few leaders leaning on things, and only a slight delay due to being one panel short, but it is a WRG camp after all!

Wednesday, our big deadline, two vehicles full of concrete were heading for site from 8am with a pump and 35m boom to fill our walls. After an early start for some, our intrepid campers split into two teams. One stayed at Weymoor to double-check the formwork and ensure the concrete pour went well, whilst another headed north to help the locals progress a towpath, behind



The concrete is pumped in

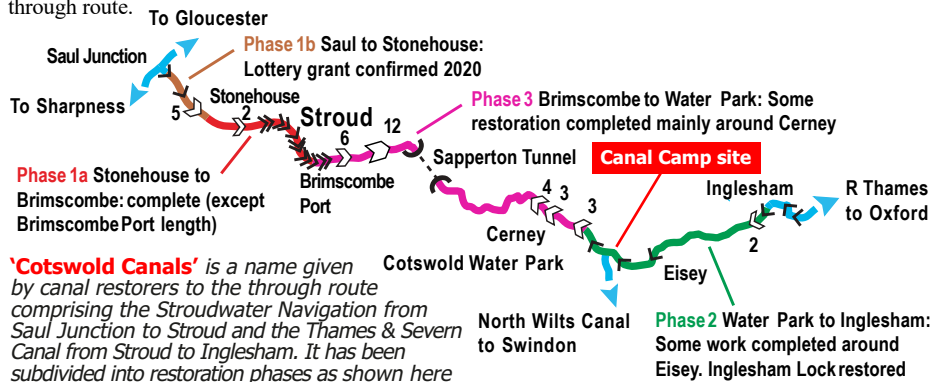
FACT FILE Cotswold Canals

Length: 36 miles **Locks:** 56 **Date closed:** 1927-1946

The Canal Camp project: Reinstating the canal channel in reinforced concrete alongside Weymoor Bridge

Why? A new culvert was installed under the canal last year, to replace an open ditch cut through the canal bed which had been carrying a small stream. The channel then needed to be rebuilt above the culvert.

The wider picture: Although most of the restoration effort on the canal in recent years has been concentrated on getting the western Phase 1a and 1b sections (both supported by major Lottery grants) open and connected to the network, the Cotswold Canals Trust will work on other sites when the opportunity arises. One such site is Weymoor Bridge, which was reinstated several years ago thanks to a legacy specifically for this purpose. Other work carried out nearby over the years has included lock restorations and a new bridge in the Cerney area, meaning that a significant length of restored canal could be put together here in the medium term. Ultimately the aim is for it to form part of the restored through route.



the Cotswold Outdoors Centre. During an after-work celebration trip to the Daneway Portal (and Daneway Inn) at Sapperton, Harry was considered as a sacrifice to the canal gods to give thanks for a successful concrete pour, but fortunately for our Duke of Edinburgh's Award volunteers it was collectively decided a walk back to the pub would be just as an appropriate way to celebrate.

On **Thursday** the removal, transporting back to the yard, and cleaning of shuttering was completed alongside numerous digger experiences, blockwork unloading, and plenty of concrete being mixed for more of those cavities that needed filling around the site. We were an ambitious group, we had managed two walls, but could we build a third, albeit blockwork wall before the end of the week? The answer was no, we didn't finish it, but we gave it a pretty good go over the last two days. We had to leave something for the next camp after all.

To end the week, we had a Ricey/
Sandra traditional **Friday** night boat trip with a chippy tea, to give a well-deserved evening

off for our cook Lou. Thankfully, after an in-depth discussion held in the local pub earlier in the week, we had the perfect ratio of ingredients to ensure the structural integrity and success of her "imagined in a dream" Rice Krispies cheesecake.

Stephen 'Ricey' Rice



The other job: towpath surfacing by the Cotswold Outdoors Centre



With the completed concrete wall visible behind, construction of the blockwork towpath wall begins

CAMP REPORT Swansea Canal

Down in South Wales, our team spent a week putting a stone cladding on the new bywash for the recently uncovered 'buried lock'...

Swansea Canal Camp – 30 Aug to 06 Sep 2025

Ten years ago, the first volunteer to arrive on my first camp as leader introduced me to Haikus when she wrote one on the whiteboard as a greeting to the other arriving volunteers. When thinking about the form of this report – and I don't like being too conventional – I remembered that first Haiku from all those years ago.

I had to remind myself that a Haiku is a traditional Japanese short form of unrhymed poetry, typically consisting of three lines with a 5, 7, 5 syllable format. Haikus often have a focus on nature and the seasons but ours below tell the story of our week. Now knowing what I had to do, off I rambled. Ideas and contributions, serious and not so, were gratefully received from everyone on the camp.

Saturday

**Last camp of season
Clydach Buried Lock, Swansea
Summer, '25**

**Arrived Saturday
Set up our beds, had a brew
Visited the site**

**We had some dinner
Saw you-know-what video
Went off to the pub**



Sunday

*All morning it rained
But after lunch on Sunday
The sun showed its face*

*Cladding of slag stone
Was laid against the ugly
Concrete bywash walls*

*Right tool for right job
When bywash flow is too much
WRG boards save the day*

*Super cook Ian
Prepared a fab roast dinner
Followed by crumble*

*We're a WhatsApp group
Dinner in fifteen minutes
Hope phone signal good*



Monday

On Monday 1st Sep
White Rabbit greetings were shared
To bring us good luck

No luck with weather
The rain did fall heavily
We ran for cover

Finally working
Cladding laid, dry mix bags filled
Tangible progress

Banner put up for
Harry's birthday on this day
Two whole months early

Times are a-changing
Youngsters reading paperbacks
Old-uns reading phones



Tuesday

Tuesday, we sorted
Slag stones in piles for cladding
Blue stone dust mortar

A fine lunch with hosts
Swansea Canal Society
Sarnies and great cakes

Pete, 'Arry, Harry
Mixed mortar, too wet, too dry
Six grumpy cladders

Had to work all day
No forecasted thunderstorms
Everyone tired

Emma offered help
Out came her Swiss army knife
Not a near miss!

We chose the items
From the coffin of food stuff
For Ian to use



Wednesday

More mortar mixing
Lots more cladding in bywash
Plenty of tea drunk

Disc-cutter training
Dust suppression not working
Very short lesson!

Canoes on canal
From Clydach to Trebanos
Both have been WRGied.

Five kayaked up to
Trebanos locks, one fell in
Footwear lost in cut!



Thursday

Amy out in wellies
Bywash water filled them up
Soggy socks and feet

More dodging the rain
Avoiding inundation
More brew and cake breaks

'Arry still mixing
Now getting the hang of it
Old dog has new trick!

Dinner in the pub
Courtesy of our great hosts
Many, many thanks

Antidisestab-
lishmentarianism is
a very long word!

Friday

*BOB sent to Bungle
For unplanned titivation
Nice new paint coming!*

*Temp bridge now removed
West wall cladding completed
Bywash prettier*

*Trailer and kit count
Lots of dirty tools made clean
Top WRGies were we*



Saturday

**Time to give my thanks
To Ian for tasty meals
'Arry assisting**

**And not forgetting
Pete, Emma, Andrew, Paul, Sam
Amy and Harry**

**Lastly but not least
Swansea Canal Society
Gordon and Alan**

**Clydach Buried Lock
Soon be back in use again
WRG pleased to have helped**

Compiled by David (Evvo) Evans



The Swansea Bay Inland Waterway scheme

It's a long term aim of some involved in canal restoration in South Wales to eventually link together the existing projects to create a 35 mile regional waterways network. It would involve the following:

- Restore the surviving Swansea Canal from Clydach to Godre'r Graig
- Get the Neath restoration back on track and open past the obstructions down to Aberdulais and Neath
- Restore the Tennant Canal from Aberdulais to Swansea Docks
- Bypass the lost lower Swansea Canal using the River Tawe
- Link them together via a new route through Swansea Docks

FACT FILE Swansea Canal

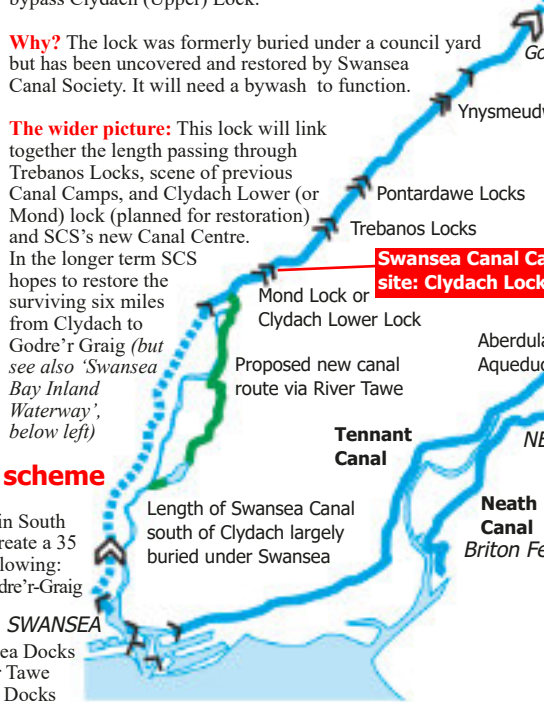
Length: 16 miles (originally) **Locks:** 36 (originally)
Date closed: 1928-1960

The Canal Camp project: Putting stone cladding on the concrete bywash (overflow) channel that has been built to bypass Clydach (Upper) Lock.

Why? The lock was formerly buried under a council yard but has been uncovered and restored by Swansea Canal Society. It will need a bywash to function.

The wider picture: This lock will link together the length passing through Trebanos Locks, scene of previous Canal Camps, and Clydach Lower (or Mond) lock (planned for restoration) and SCS's new Canal Centre.

In the longer term SCS hopes to restore the surviving six miles from Clydach to Godre'r Graig (but see also 'Swansea Bay Inland Waterway', below left)



CAMP REPORT Neath Canal

Still in South Wales, Paul Rodgers reports from a week building footbridges and creating an overflow culvert on the Neath Canal

Neath Canal Camp with Tŷ Banc Canal Group 23rd – 30th August 2025

What a Team!

The last week in August saw a group of familiar faces from previous WRG Canal Camps at Swansea in 2022 and the Cotswold Canals in 2023 heading back to Ystradgynlais

Scout Hall in South Wales for what was originally going to be the final Camp of summer 2025. Getting back to a full-sized Camp with the addition of other long-term WRGies and three Duke of Edinburgh's Award volunteers on their Gold Award residential, gave us a strong team of experienced volunteers, bringing brains and brawn to what was a complex and novel set of tasks not normally encountered on WRG Camps.

It was great for me to be able to hand over the leadership reins and take up the role of assistant camp leader. It was a leadership team that had worked well in 2023 and it was time to shuffle the roles, with Will Horne taking the lead. It was

anal

Length of Swansea Canal north of Godre'r-Graig largely buried by road improvements

Swansea Canal

Godre'r Graig

Swansea Locks

Neath Canal Camp site: near Resolven

Resolven Lock 8

5-6

Ynysbwllog Aqueduct

Clyne Locks 3-4

Tyn-yr-Heol Lock 2

Machin Lock 1

NEATH

erry

FACT FILE Neath Canal

Length: 13 miles **Locks:** 19

Date closed: 1930s

The Canal Camp project: Building and installing wooden lock tail footbridges at locks 12 and 13, and creating an overflow culvert under the canal towpath near Resolven.

Why? The footbridges will allow access to the offside (non towpath side) of the canals, and facilitate future restoration work on the locks themselves. And the new culvert will prevent excess water after heavy rain from overflowing and damaging the canal bank

The wider picture: A great deal of restoration work was carried out on the Neath Canal back in the 1980s to 2000s, led by the Neath & Tennant Canal Preservation Society and supported by visiting mobile volunteer groups including WRG, as well as significant external funding. This enabled a series of seven locks (numbers 8 to 14) from Resolven to Ysgwrfa to be restored and a trip boat to operate. A major new aqueduct was built across the River Neath at Ynysbwllog to replace one washed away by floods in the 1970s, and further lock restorations were carried out at Clyne, Machin and Tyn-yr-Heol locks (numbers 1 to 4).

There were still serious obstacles to further restoration including blockages from road crossings in Neath and at the south west end of the main restored length at Resolven, but there appeared good prospects for reopening through from Neath to Ysgwrfa but also along the connected Tennant Canal from the junction at Aberdulais towards Swansea. However the restoration's progress faltered, major funding proved hard to find, and ultimately the lack of sufficient money and support to maintain the existing restored lengths meant they began to deteriorate and become unnavigable again.

However recently a new organisation, the Tŷ Banc Canal Group, has been formed to try to get the restoration back on track again. It has a long list of priority works, and the Canal Camp jobs formed part of this work to begin to reverse the decline.

certainly a baptism of fire – a new site, a new local group (the Tŷ Banc Canal Group), new projects – as well as an assistant not skilled in assisting!

Months of preparation, supported by George Rogers and Pete Fleming of the WRG Sites Group, meant that we went into the camp armed with our technical drawings, method statements and risk assessments for two wooden lock-tail footbridges and a culvert/weir to alleviate towpath flooding.

We were blessed to have Bev Williams join us as camp cook. Her indulgence and flexibility in coping with the new leadership team's changing requirements for breakfast times and the late - and split - dinner times after the extended hours on site must have tested her cheerful demeanour to breaking point – but it didn't show!

Her hearty breakfasts were enough to get even the most exhausted of us out of bed on time, the choice of sandwich fillings was the most adventurous I've seen, and the evening menus gave us something to look forward to as our weary bodies left site. A polypin of the local 9 Lives Brewing's best beer kept the beer drinkers happy for the week!

Tŷ Banc Group

Given that this is the first time a WRG camp has worked with the Tŷ Banc team, it would be remiss of me not to introduce the wider *Navvies* readership to this wonderful group that has energy, determination, and a clear vision of how to bring the Neath Canal to their local community. Yun Yun and Kevin Herbert, Rob and Simon Hughes, and the wider volunteer team are fearless! I encourage every *Navvies* reader to follow them on Facebook and Instagram. We felt very welcome and the WRG gazebo became part of the Canal Festival when we arrived properly on site on the Sunday.

As well as bringing the local community together for a Canal Festival on the first Saturday and Sunday of our camp, we also enjoyed the most generous hospitality with local caterer, The Soup Dragon, providing a wide choice of food at an evening on site to bring the local group's volunteers together with the WRG team.

Their support in the run-up to the

camp and during the week was invaluable especially with Rob and Simon joining us all week and providing much needed extra energy and experience as well as vital insights and local knowledge.

Location

The Neath Canal follows the Neath River (Afon Nedd) for most of its length and, above Resolven Basin, is sandwiched between the river and the B4242.

Our work focused on the canal northeast of Resolven Basin – if you can call it 'focused', with the 'site' encompassing a 2½ mile-long stretch between the access at the Basin and the locks where the bridges would be installed. We got on top of the challenging logistics by establishing a 'base camp' compound near the Basin access track and the South Wales Adventure Company's kayaking and paddle boarding centre. The culvert site was 'just' 500m up the canal from base camp.

It's always nice to be introduced to the site – especially a new one – on the first afternoon/evening so, in our wisdom, we marched the team from base camp to the closest lock that was to have a bridge installed. In hindsight, that two-mile walk (each way) was a bit too challenging and I think we were lucky that we still had a full complement of volunteers for the Sunday!



Pictures by Paul Rodgers

Thanks to local caterer Soup Dragon for hospitality

Key Tasks

The week was characterised by highs and lows – all good, even the lows!

The Bridge Builders:

Spending most of the week firmly on the ground (very wet, flooded, Somme-like by the end of the week), the Bridge Builders team was focused on measuring, checking, measuring, checking then sawing and drilling test pieces of the timber for the bridges, and then doing a little bit more measuring and checking before tackling the main build. The design templates were straightforward and with a few final checks on the span and parapet widths of the two locks, the final dimensions were agreed. Fortunately, we had skilled woodworkers with their tools at the ready and the base-camp compound became a hive of activity. Working slowly and meticulously over the first three days on one bridge, and having mastered all the necessary skills, the second bridge was completed in less than two days!

The real high of the week came when the spider crane crew arrived in site at 08:30 on the Friday morning. We all headed up to the top lock to witness this marvel in materials handling. Such was the spectacle that *Navvies* Editor-in-Chief, Martin Ludgate, graced us with his presence - and his camera - with our DoE volunteers in awe that our work would

receive such esteemed attention. To see a bridge soaring through the air and being deftly lowered into place after having been skilfully transported down a narrow towpath on a mini tracked crawler was a unique and memorable moment for each and every one of us.



The bridges are assembled and (below) delivered for installation





Excavation under way for the culvert under the towpath

The Culvert Crew: If the Bridge Builders were flying high, the Culvert Crew's focus was all about going low. Nothing we would do in the week would ever get above ground! On day one, having agreed the ideal water level, the Culvert Crew set about excavating the canal side to 1400mm below towpath level; 900 mm below the water level. Making sure that canal didn't end up in the river was the core of our risk assessment. Digging through a towpath is not to be taken lightly but by securing 500mm of the existing canal bank, we created a 'bund' that was to keep our workings dry all week.

Equally, keeping a towpath open through a Canal Festival weekend and a bank holiday presents its challenges. Pouring the deep canalside concrete toe on day two and completing the base slab excavation, reinforcing bar and mesh, and concrete pour on day three kept us on track for the brick and blockwork on the Wednesday. The lintel spans went in on the Thursday to allow the Culvert Crew to join the Bridge Builders in their moment of glory on the Friday morning before heading back to work on the reprofiling of the towpath, putting in the stop-planks and breaking through the bund.

Final Thoughts

Across each of the core tasks, both teams picked up some new skills – even basic sawing and drilling took on a whole new level of precision. Much to the delight of our DoE volunteers, the reworking of the clay recovered from the canal bank excavation into carefully quality-controlled 'turds' to be used in the relining of the canal edge face of the culvert, provided a window into the experiences of the early canal engineers when puddling their canals.

The Tŷ Banc quad-bike was an essential addition to the camp's equipment.

We would not have completed the work without it. Will had taken the driver authorisation training before the camp and we added two more quad-bikers early in the camp. Perhaps the WRG and IWA Boards should anticipate a request for quad-bikes in the not-too-distant future! Equally useful was a bike – remember, it's always worth just throwing those 'might-use' useful things in at the last minute before you head off on a camp!

The hard work and need for resourcefulness helped build a new team that Will and I hope will go on to have more adventures with us and across the wider WRG family in future.

Weather

The weather forecast for the week was pretty good until the remnants of hurricane Erin started veering across the Atlantic which meant that the Summer of Sun was coming to an end! The first three days of the camp were mainly dry but that all changed for the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. It felt rather insulting when the weather cleared as the last van was packed on the Saturday morning.

A social-lite camp

Will worked the Bridge Builders hard and I kept the Culvert Crew on site for a couple of late shifts so the scope for evening social activities was somewhat curtailed. We still managed to get a couple of semi-social activities across the week. For the Sunday evening, as a way to really get to know each other better, we have invented an ice-breaker game that we hope will become a feature of the opening night of all future camps...

With an extra camp added to the 2025 schedule to follow ours, the last task was to take the vans a few miles down the road to the Swansea Canal Society's wonderful new canal centre in Clydach. What great scheduling - it couldn't have made for an easier wrap up and everyone was soon on their way home, exhausted, but with a real sense of achievement and a determination to book early for a canal camp in 2026.

I hope WRG will be back in South Wales again soon. There is a lot that we can assist the local groups with - and we can learn a lot too when we push the boundaries, encounter new sites, take on projects that we don't usually do, and have to think afresh about how we might deliver the full value of WRG to a canal restoration group for the first time.

Paul Rodgers



The culvert: preparing to cast a section of the concrete base...



...before bricking / blocking the walls and (below) adding the lintels



CAMP REPORT Louth Navigation

Mick Lilliman reports from another week at Ticklepenny Lock repairing and patching lock walls, and casting new coping 'stones'

Camp Report: Louth Navigation 9-16 August

...or should this be Louth 2025 Navigation Camp report, as we were working on the Louth Navigation, not the Louth Canal?

For a third year in a row WRG and Louth Navigation Trust (LNT) held a camp in Louth to continue the refurbishment of Ticklepenny Lock. Previous camps had started rebuilding the buttress wall, carried out repairs to the lock wall brickwork and rebuilt an arch, as well as repointing a lot of the lock walls.

The lock is unusual in having scalloped sides, some of the other remaining locks on the Navigation have a similar construction. The lock was designed this way to give stability in poor ground conditions.

So, what can 13 WRG volunteers and a dinosaur called Stanley, together with very keen locals from LNT achieve in a week? Please read on!

The accommodation is a bit quirky, a

Community Centre with blinds on a few windows, so first job was to fit tarps to the windows to block out some of the light. Gaffer tape to the rescue.

Locals joined us for the safety brief, followed by an excellent meal of pasta and Bolognese sauce, followed by chocolate fudge cake with strawberries and cream/yogurt. One of the many achievements was eating nearly all the amazing food prepared by Anne. More about food later.

One of the smaller jobs was to repair some cracks in the lock wall, digging out the mortar, inserting Helifix reinforcing and re-mortaring. Susan donned waders and lifejacket, along with local Malcolm, stitch drilling and raking out mortar either side of the cracks, to a depth of 35mm. Mick's recent purchase of a rotary mortar rake fitted to a battery drill was very useful (almost as though it was planned ahead!).

Another small-ish job was the re-building of the upstream offside arch support wall, the arch itself being structurally sound.

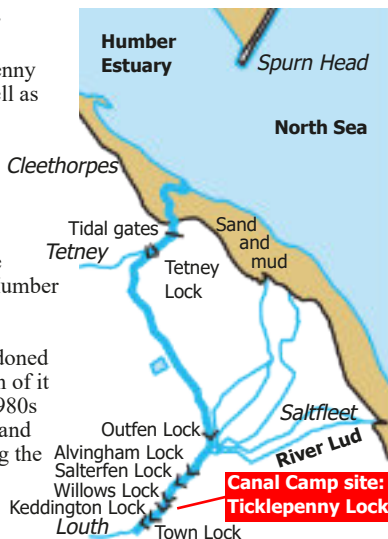
FACT FILE Louth Navigation

Length: 11 miles **Locks:** 8 **Date closed:** 1924

The Canal Camp project: Continuing repairs to Ticklepenny Lock including chamber wall and wing wall repairs, as well as casting 'fake' concrete coping stones.

Why? The lock is a historic structure which has suffered from decay and damage from water running through the chamber and would deteriorate further if left unrepaid.

The wider picture: The Louth Navigation was an 11-mile waterway which connected Louth with the mouth of the Humber Estuary at Tetney Haven. Although mostly built as an artificial canal, it made some use of the River Lud in its upper reaches near Louth. It fell into disuse and was abandoned in the 1920s but survived as a water channel because much of it formed part of the local land drainage system. Since the 1980s the Louth Navigation Trust has been working to conserve and restore what survives of its structures, as well as promoting the towpath as a walking route, and restoring the Navigation Warehouse at Canal Head in Louth as a community centre, and generally raising awareness of the Navigation.



Mick donned waders and lifejacket (common theme here) and carefully removed brickwork until sound brickwork was encountered. Fortunately, sound brickwork was found above water level. Brickwork was rebuilt, and local Pete completed the brickwork wearing waders and lifejacket.

On the offside downstream side the lock tail wall had collapsed. Our ace bricklayer Rob B and his gang worked in the shade to first clear the wall down to sound brickwork and then start the rebuild. Assisting at various times were Peter, James, Robert and Hannah (owner of dinosaur).

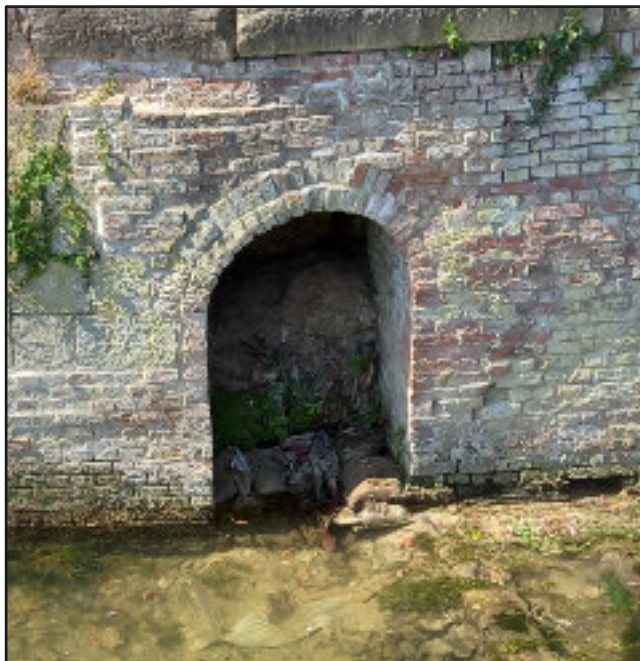
On the other side of the lock the buttress wall had reached the level of requiring an access platform to do sloping brickwork at one end and coping stones at the wharf wall end. We noted a coping stone in the lock (River Lud flows through the lock so it's always in water) so with the help of local man Phil, Nigel and John managed to get the stone into position. This "real" stone was used to demark the transition to sloping brickwork. Nigel and John, assisted by Peter and local Roger started the sloping wall. This required bricks and blocks cut at an angle, provided by Mick once he managed to start the bricksaw.

"Fake" coping stones were required to fill in the remaining part of the flat wall. It was originally going to be cast in situ, but difficulties with heritage approval meant



Pictures by Mick Lilliman

The 'crack' repair team



Offside culvert arch repaired

that we cast them separately and placed them in position without mortaring them in. So, we needed a production team to make "stones". Tony provided the expertise and the tools to make the formwork ably assisted by apprentice chippy Hannah and old hand Steve (not by any means the oldest hand). Once the formwork was unpeeled the stones were "distressed" to make them look more like the real thing. Susan and Hannah distressed the stones. Stones were manhandled, sack-barrowed, rolled and grunted into position. Local reclamation yard man Lee helped a great deal by bringing his

telehandler to lower the stones into position. He also donated most of the bricks.

The job nobody likes got tackled by Robert, brick cleaning. At least he was in the shade of the second gazebo.

We needed a lot of lime mortar for the various brick repairs plus cement mortar and concrete for the coping stones so our mixing champion Paul was kept busy, especially on days when we needed stones making and lime mortar. The electric mixer was washed out regularly between mix changes and to keep the brickies happy we mixed lime mortar in a barrow. Paul was helped by



Expertly cast new coping 'stone', and (below) the old and new stones in place, but with the new ones not mortared in pending heritage approval





The offside wall gang

Robert, James and Mick, with Steve helping when mortar needed delivery.

None of this work could have happened without the amazing cook Anne. Meals were fabulous, with even Rob B having enough to eat. Meals as follows:

- Bolognese sauce with pasta, choc fudge cake and strawberries/cream/yogurt.
- Slow cooked brisket, assorted roast vegetables, chickpea tagine, cherry plum and apple crumble with custard.
- Chicken, leek and ham pie, veggie pie, jacket potatoes, assorted veg and chocolate cheesecake.
- Cottage pie, veggie pie, assorted veg, blueberry and strawberry cinnamon pudding.
- Chicken with peppers, veggie with peppers, Biscoff ice cream (yummy).
- Beef and mushroom stew, veg stuffed squash, cheese and biscuits.
- Leftover Spanish omelette, veg squash omelette, strawberry tart with cream/yogurt.

All were absolutely delicious.

It was hot all week so the "igloo" water container which is now part of the camp kit was very useful. No-one overheated.

Finally, we had the LOSCAR's (Louth Special Camp Awards); in accordance with modern practice, everyone got an award (see below).

Mick Lilliman

The LOSCAR'S (Louth Special Camp Awards)

Most Illustrious Leader	Nigel
Veteran Bricklayer	John and Rob B (joint)
Carpenter of the Week	Tony
Apprentice Carpenter	Hannah
Apprentice Bricklayer	James
Most Improved Bricklayer	Peter
Labourer / Dogsbody/	
Lender of Hands	Steve
Brick Cleaner	Robert
Distresser of Stones	Susan
Bricksaw Artist	Mick
Most Important Person	Anne (the cook)
Favourite Local Society	Louth Navigation Trust

SUE BURCHETT An appreciation

RIP Sue Burchett 1942-2025

“It’s a sad end to Josie and Sue’s Hard Hat Café. At least we had the T shirt.”

As we mentioned briefly in the last issue of *Navvies* Sue Burchett, longstanding former WRG and KESCRG volunteer, boater (with her husband Roger), one time Chair of the National Association of Boat Owners, and legendary cook and caterer for volunteers, sadly died on 25 August after a short illness.

Her funeral in Bristol was led by Edwina Wallace who many of you will remember from IWA festivals in the past, and was well-attended by many old WRGies and other waterways folk, and is probably the only occasion when the ‘Navvies Jerusalem’ has ever been performed as part of a religious service. We’ve collected individual volunteers’ memories of Sue and quotes from Edwina’s piece to create this appreciation...

Born in Luton, Sue held many jobs over the years, often two or three at once, and while working at a petrol station she met police officer Roger – marrying him four months later and remaining with him for the remaining 59 years of her life. Their involvement in volunteer waterway restoration began with the KESCRG group, then continued later with WRG’s BITM regional group (where Sue and Roger’s legendary German Shepherd Dog ‘Blue’ was memorably elected as Chair of the group. Well, WRG rules were that it had to have a chair – but didn’t say anywhere that they had to be human). Very soon Sue was getting a name for herself on account of her catering on working parties and increasingly at festivals, often in partnership with the late Josie Fisher in earlier days (hence the Josie & Sue’s Hard Hat Café T-shirt mentioned at the start)...



Roger and Sue at a surprise party for Roger’s 70th birthday at Saul Canal Festival



Sue abseils down the Anderton Lift to raise funds for restoration

“Sue’s sandwiches were legendary. I remember cold fried egg and curry, cold sausage and beans, and am told opal fruit sandwich was also made on request. Sue taught my seven year old to make sandwiches with a proper sharp knife... not the blunt one I would let her use.”

“Breakfast and supper leftovers became the sandwiches for lunch, no food was ever wasted. The standing joke about the soup was not to stir it: the top was the vegetables for the vegetarians and the meat was at the bottom...”

When Roger retired from the police, they took to the canals as liveaboard boaters in narrowboat *Fruitcake* followed by their second boat *Nacked Navvy*, which they kept for 24 years. Their boats were pressed into service in support of various events...

“The time when we pedalled the boat to the National Festival”

– the unique pedal-powered narrowboat *Escargot*, which a team of WRG and other volunteers laboriously pedalled all the way from Dudley to Henley, with *Nacked Navvy* as support boat.

“The illuminated boats entry ‘Christmas at Canalway Cavalcade’ (in May – with a notice saying ‘Christmas delayed due to British Waterways stoppage’) featuring Roger as Santa and a couple sitting down to a Christmas dinner at a table set up on the roof of the boat. There was rather a danger of the whole shebang going in the water, either due to slippery roof or low headroom on the bridge.”

This is a reminder of Sue’s rebellious streak, and of her involvement as the Chairman of the National Association of Boat Owners, where she trod (not always terribly cautiously) the path between ‘critical friend’ and ‘pain in the backside’ to the waterways authorities. Under her leadership the Association kindly donated a building site mixer to WRG’s Right Tool for the Right Job appeal at the 2003 IWA Festival at Beale Park:

“...but only after they had mixed a cake in it first”

This was a warm-up act (either by WRG Boat Club or WRG BITM if memory serves) for a WRG Pantomime – unfortunately the mixer didn’t get cleaned until the following day:



David Worthington

“Ab and I had to clean the mixer out the next morning as it was due back on the WRG ‘Have a go at Bricklaying’ stand. Removing a slurry of flour, water and eggs (including shells and mashed egg box...) with a significant hangover... not recommended!”

Then there was the WRG Boat Club ‘Three Witches’ act featuring Sue as one of the three in the WRG TV (aka ‘The Recovery Channel’) sketch show at the IWA Worcester festival –

“The volume might have been a little low for the audience to hear some of the words, but it got turned right up just as they denounced BW as “Bureaucratic Wasters”, if I remember rightly”

When they sold *Nacked Navvy* and moved back onto the land, Sue didn’t show any sign of slowing down. She took up ballet classes, tried a zip wire in Wales, took a trip in a hot air balloon and a flying lesson, and joined a WRG team abseiling down the Anderton Boat Lift to raise funds towards its restoration.

Those are just a few of the memories. Farewell Sue, and our condolences to Roger, to their daughters Lynn and Helen, and to all their other relatives and friends.

PROGRESS Montgomery canal

Shropshire Union Canal Society's volunteers move to a new home, and carry on channel clearance from Crickheath towards the border

Montgomery Canal: Shropshire Union Canal Society

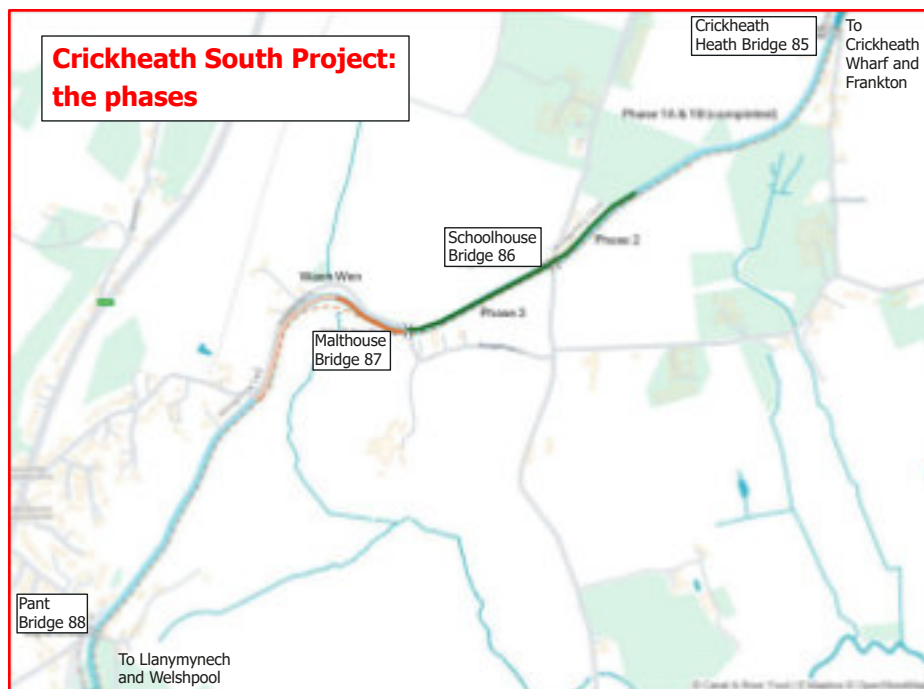
August work party: We've moved! Over a work party extended to four days, the two main events were starting work in the Phase 2 section of the Montgomery Canal's Crickheath South project and relocating the compound.

The Crickheath South project consists of rebuilding / restoring the canal channel from the existing limit of navigation on the restored English length of the canal at Crickheath Wharf southwards towards the Welsh border, and it's been split into phases - see map below. Phase 2 of the project is the remaining 270 metres beyond the end of the completed Phase 1A and Phase 1B lengths until we reach the recently built Schoolhouse Bridge (Bridge 86). In order to work in this area and also the Phase 3 site

between Schoolhouse Bridge and Malthouse Bridge (Bridge 87, the next bridge beyond at Penygarrag Lane), we have occupied the compound previously used to build Schoolhouse Bridge.

The Phase 2 site is quite constrained, much of it is in a shallow cut. There is no haul road, all access will be made along the channel so once again we start at the far end and work back to the access point, in this case the new compound by the bridge. Whilst there had been brush cutting in this area last month, there still remained a good number of saplings and small trees to remove from the banks. Excellent progress was made in bone dry conditions and by Sunday afternoon, 90 metres had been cleared.

Elsewhere, there were a host of different activities at both compounds to prepare for the move on Monday. At the



Crickheath end, materials were tidily assembled, accessible for Monday's crane lorry. The welfare shelter was dismantled and the framework substantially (and lovingly) rejuvenated. The containers were packed ready for lifting. At the Schoolhouse end, final preparations were made including filling two skips with rubbish and setting out pads for the containers to rest on.

Pictures by SUCS



Removing small trees from the banks of the Phase 2 section in August

On Monday, two trucks with driver/operators plus four volunteers spent the day moving the goods and getting organised in the new compound. This was the day of Storm Floris with yellow weather warnings in North Wales, but we escaped with a few light showers and finished moving the containers before the weather became really gusty. There will still be some sorting out to do next time, not least erection of a gleaming welfare shelter, but we now have a new home.

Thanks to all who helped out, also with the plethora of other activities going on over the work party including thistle bashing and refresher training for dumper operators.

September work party: New compound, new era. As mentioned above, we are now working on Phase 2 and Phase 3 sections (see map) but during this work party we also worked in the wooded Waen Wen area beyond – which stretches from Bridge 87 to where Penygarrag Lane turns away from the canal towards Pant. Where we worked this time is shown in dark orange on the map.

Bridge 85 to Bridge 86 is 1/2 mile, Bridge 86 to Bridge 87 is 1/5 mile and the Waen Wen area is 1/4 mile. All of these sections are part of the "Shropshire Gap", the last two miles of unrestored canal in Shropshire from Crickheath south to the previously-restored section spanning the Welsh border at Llanymynech.

On Thursday, a wide variety of housekeeping jobs were undertaken to unpack and organise items from the move after the last work party. Most notable amongst these was assembly of the "new" welfare shelter. What had originally started as a few repairs of the previous shelter turned into a virtually complete rebuild with increased dimensions. Work continued through Friday but by the Saturday morning break, the job was complete and marked by guest of honour Thelma cutting a ribbon. Over the weekend, a water supply to the compound was established from



The site compound containers depart for their new home

Schoolhouse Bridge Cottage (thank you Chris and Julie) and a few remaining items were moved from the old compound to the new in Tim's trailer (thank you Tim).

On site, Friday started with an early morning visit from the ecologist to confirm that all the badger licence conditions had been met – there had been no activity – and we could proceed with removing the remaining setts in the Phase 2 channel. This was completed by Friday lunchtime. During the rest of the work party, tremendous progress was achieved in Phase 2 removing vegetation and small trees which, along with that generated last time, could now be burned thanks to recent rainfall reducing the wildfire risk.

By Sunday afternoon, all the material generated had been disposed of, together with some large stumps left over from previous work, and site strip completed in 240 metres of the 270 metre Phase 2 area. It has now been confirmed Phase 2 will need to be lined with a waterproof liner covered with concrete blocks. Profiling the channel ready for this was due to start in October.

Although still well into the future, work must be done to develop the design for the Waen Wen area, in particular the basin where there will be a winding hole and moorings. This section of the channel is heavily wooded and in places almost impenetrable with undergrowth. To do the surveys and investigations required to inform the design, some clearance is required and 130 metres of channel was cleared of undergrowth and small trees. Despite the recent wet weather, Friday and Saturday were sunny with a breeze and the neighbouring farmer requested we did not have a bonfire due to a remaining risk of wildfire. Instead, we continued with clearance and accumulated a large quantity of material by the bonfire site. It's not often that we are grateful for wet weather but on Sunday, steady light rain developed in the morning allowing us to create a substantial bonfire and dispose of everything by the end of the day.

As ever, huge thanks are due to all those who helped out.



The 'new' welfare shelter is officially opened



Before and (below) after views of Phase 2 clearance



PROGRESS Sankey Canal

Next we head up to the north west for the latest from the Sankey Canal Society, who are working at Spike Island, Blackbrook and elsewhere

Sankey Canal

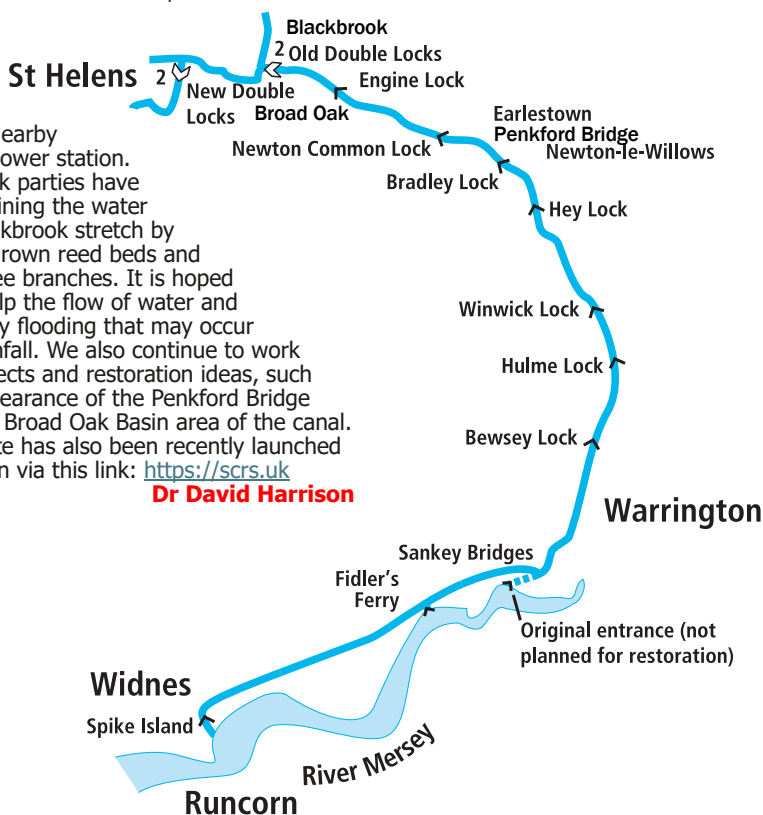
The Sankey Canal Restoration Society has been busy conducting work parties along various stretches of the Sankey Canal; we have recently been cleaning the coping stones along the Spike Island section in Widnes, which has had a new dam constructed to allow the Mersey high tide brine water to fill up the marina section, the dam keeping the water contained.

This will allow us to assist in managing the water levels there, especially

after the loss of water due to the closure of the nearby Fiddlers Ferry power station.

Other work parties have seen us maintaining the water flow at the Blackbrook stretch by removing overgrown reed beds and overhanging tree branches. It is hoped that this will help the flow of water and help to ease any flooding that may occur during high rainfall. We also continue to work on various projects and restoration ideas, such as our recent clearance of the Penkford Bridge stretch and the Broad Oak Basin area of the canal. Our new website has also been recently launched and can be seen via this link: <https://scrs.uk>

Dr David Harrison



Sankey Canal

Length: 16 miles **Locks:** 16 (including later additions and branches)
Date closed: 1931-1963

PROGRESS Stafford Riverway Link

The project to reconnect the Staffs & Worcs Canal to Stafford continues, with the new basin nearly complete and plans in hand for a new bridge

Stafford Riverway Link.

The dedicated group of Stafford Riverway Link volunteers have continued to make progress on their aim to reconnect the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal at Baswich to the town of Stafford. The holding basin where it will begin at Baswich, with room for ten permanent moorings, is almost complete. The next phase, starting later this autumn, is to build the towpath bridge over what will be the entrance to the basin. This will be achieved thanks in part to the very generous donation of cement and ready mixed concrete from Breedon and an equally generous donation of bricks from Ibstock.

In addition to the hardy band of volunteers, groups of Construction Industry students from Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group will be gaining practical on-site brick laying experience, under the guidance of their tutors.

Despite the very generous donations from our supporters the project still needs to raise cash. Before the final connection to the canal the Sky cable will need to be redirected over the new bridge. The volunteers will not be permitted to make the connection to the canal. This will be carried out by Canal & River Trust approved contractors, at a substantial cost.

One opportunity to donate is the "Buy a Brick" appeal on the project's website www.Stafford-Riverway-Link.co.uk.

Moving forward, the project is in the process of changing from a Community Interest company to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

Up to date information on progress and opportunities to volunteer and details of regular work parties and social events can be found on the website and Facebook page.

Paul Bryan
Chair Stafford Riverway Link



Aerial view of the new basin built by Stafford River Link volunteers where the Link will meet the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal at Baswich. The Staffs & Worcs runs from the top centre of the picture to just below the top left corner. The rough unlined section of basin wall is the site for the new connection under a new towpath bridge. The channel heading off the right hand side of the picture led to the now demolished aqueduct over the River Penk and lock connecting to the River Sow, which will not be rebuilt. The channel heading off the bottom leads to where a new lock will lead into the River Penk, and boats will one day continue on to the Sow and Stafford.

GUILDFORD 55 years on...

Yet another anniversary has come and gone, almost without celebration - but our publicity display was in the right place at the right time...

WRG at 55

OK, I know 55 years old isn't exactly a landmark anniversary compared to a century or half-century, but in the case of WRG's 55th birthday it's worth noting on account of where exactly Waterway Recovery Group came into existence.

Navvies magazine had been around for four years already, providing information about volunteer work parties all over the country for the benefit of the increasing number of 'new navvies', the mobile volunteers who travelled around the country, working on whichever waterway restoration projects would benefit from their support. But in 1970, original editor Graham Palmer and the other people behind the magazine decided that the way forward was to launch an organisation to back up the magazine, coordinating mobile labour and building up a resource of equipment and expertise - and Waterway Recovery Group was the result. It was launched on an unsuspecting public at the National Rally of Boats held by the Inland Waterways Association (now WRG's parent body) in early August 1970. The event (which moved around to different sites each year) was at Guildford.

And 55 years on (give or take a few

weeks), our WRG publicity team took our display to the National Trust's Wey River Festival, also in Guildford.

We hope you can tell which is which...



Moose



Harry Arnold

SAFETY Excavator safety levers

Attention all excavator operators: Bungle has an important message about when and why you should use the excavator safety lever...

Excavator safety update

There was an incident on a canal restoration site earlier this year which resulted in a serious injury to a volunteer. The exact circumstances are still under investigation but one thing that has come to light is that the operator of an excavator left the cab while the bucket was still in the air and if it had been lowered to the ground it is unlikely the injury would have occurred.

Co-incidentally HSE have recently sent out a safety notice on a related subject, you can read it in detail at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/safetybulletins/excavators-safety-control-lever-isolation-devices.htm> but the short version is, you should ALWAYS reduce the throttle to idle and isolate the controls of an excavator before leaving the cab or when someone is working in the arc of the machine, normally by lifting the arm or a lever attached to it.

We will be updating our instructor guidance notes as well as the assessment sheets for excavators to make it clear that "testing the controls" also includes checking the safety lever is working (i.e. it stops the controls working when lifted). Also to ensure that when leaving the machine, not only is the bucket lowered to the ground but that the throttle is set to idle, remember that if you have a machine with automatic throttle you will need to move the throttle to idle even though the engine is idling. That way if for some reason a control is operated (I personally had an experience some years ago where my hi vis jacket caught the arm pulling it down as I exited the machine before moving the joystick causing the machine to start slewing) with the bucket on the ground and the machine at idle nothing should move, and if it does it will happen very slowly.

Of course there are exceptions when lowering the bucket isn't practical (for example changing a bucket, slinging a load) and in this case you should take extra care to check you have definitely isolated the controls with the safety lever and do not catch any of the controls when entering or exiting the machine.



The safety lever: use it!

An extra note to instructors, please make sure you are using the latest copy of the instructors guidance notes and DA application forms, printed versions that are in various folders are rarely the latest! The latest versions are available from DA section of the website, so if you think you may be training someone at a camp or dig, print some out and take them with you and please, only put one person on each assessment form, even if that means taking notes on some scrap paper and filling the proper form in later.

Lastly, if you are unfortunate enough to have an incident while operating on a site or driving a vehicle using the wrg DA scheme, remember that your driver authorisation is suspended until re-approved by the wrg board. This means you (or the site leader) need to fill in an incident report which is available from the Driver Authorisation section of the wrg website and either post it to head office or email it to da@wrg.org.uk. You cannot operate or drive any plant/vehicle until re-approved (depending on the situation this can be done quickly by phone/email for minor incidents). For the avoidance of doubt this applies to ALL sites using the wrg DA scheme including those operated by local societies. Some local societies have their own incident report forms that they will also want you to complete and if they cover all the details of the IWA/WRG report form we are happy to accept them instead to save you filling out two lots of paperwork though note it is your responsibility to ensure a copy is sent to us, not just to the local society.

NAVVIES News

Coming soon: the successor to the old 'WRG' logo clothing range. And which of WRG's behind-the-scenes activities would you like to hear about?

Remember WRG'Wear?

Longstanding WRG volunteers will recall that for many years, in addition to the annual Canal Camps T-shirts we used to also sell a wider range of WRG logo clothing.

Under the banner of 'WRG'Wear', this came in an assortment of colours rather than just WRG red, and ranged from Rugby shirts to baseball caps. The latest new lines were regularly advertised in *Navvies*, and the editor even took part in a WRG'Wear fashion photo shoot on a dig in Woking once!

Well, it's looking like it's going to be making a comeback, updated to the new (current) WRG logo, and there should be something about it in the next issue of *Navvies*, and we hope to have some sample items on sale at the Reunion dig.

"What Reunion dig?" I hear you ask. Well, the one that's happening on the Wits & Berks Canal on 22-23 November: see page 8

And thanks to Ian Johnson and Maria Hearnden for volunteering to get the WRG clothing range going again.



Just some of the old WRG'Wear range

Behind the scenes...

Back in the spring, we ran a couple of articles about 'behind the scenes' aspects of WRG - one on the Logistics team's regular volunteer days spent maintaining and sorting out the tool and catering kit for the Canal Camps, and another about the Sites Group's work liaising with local canal societies regarding suitable work sites for our Camps.

We'd like to continue this series - we've got plans to run one on Canal Camp leader recruitment, and maybe another on being a WRG cook.

But are there any other aspects of WRG that you'd like to read about? If so, contact the editor with your suggestions.

IWA seeks H&S volunteer...

WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association has an Honorary Health & Safety Advisor, and is now seeking to complement this role with the appointment of a volunteer officer. This new role will help ensure good Health & Safety practice across the IWA's activities.

The officer will work closely with the Honorary Health and Safety Advisor to review Health & Safety arrangements and make recommendations to Trustees and to the Waterway Recovery Group board as to where improvements could be made.

IWA says "This is an unpaid but important role, and we welcome expressions of interest from anyone who would like to contribute in this way. Please contact charlie.norman@waterways.org.uk"

Thank you...

...as ever to Chris Griffiths for his continued assistance with *Navvies* magazine printing.

Welcome...

...to new members of IWA / WRG head office staff Vicki Eeles and Jenny Davison, taken on to strengthen IWA's digital voice and publications.

