

NAVVIES

VOLUNTEERS RESTORING WATERWAYS

Kescrg:

A year in the life of a mobile volunteer group

Cotswold Canals:

The next three years on the Missing Mile...



**WATERWAY
RECOVERY
GROUP**

**ISSUE 337
JUNE – JULY
2026**

INTRO

Training Weekend



A selection of pictures taken by Ali Bottomley on the WRG Training weekend hosted by the Lichfield Canal. See report on pages 14-15



IN THIS ISSUE Contents

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

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Contents

Intro Training Weekend pictures	2
Editor's Welcome and plastic lock gates?	4-5
Chairman's Comment	6-7
Kescrg a year in the life of a mobile group	8-11
Leadership Teams Day report	12-13
Training Weekend report	14-15
Festivals Sites sought for waterways events - plus some that we've attended recently	16-18
WRG Wear WRG logo clothing returns	19
Diary Camps and working weekends	20-21
London WRG reporting weekend working parties at John Robinson Lock	22-24
Progress a bumper-size roundup of restoration from around the network	25-39

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

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Cover picture: The Kescrg mobile group's volunteers at work on gabion channel banks on the Wey & Arun Canal at Rooks Hill. See pages 8-11 for a roundup of Kescrg's activities over the last 12 months. Picture by Stephen Davis

Back cover (top): The lock tail bridge at Pewsham Top Lock on the Wilts & Berks Canal, before the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust began restoration work a couple of years ago (picture by WBCT)

Back cover (bottom) The same site today as WBCT volunteers celebrate its completion (WBCT)

NAVVIES welcome from the editor

The relevance of our Progress pages, the usual appeal for summer Canal Camp reports, and a rather more unusual set of lock gates...

Welcome

A warm welcome from the editor to another issue of *Navvies*, the magazine named after the original navvies who built the canals 200-plus years ago, and written by and for the 21st century volunteer navvies who are restoring these historic waterways from dereliction for everyone to enjoy - and published by Waterway Recovery Group, whose mobile volunteers work around the country on whichever canals need their labour. And welcome especially to any new readers, including those who've received a free copy as a result of signing-up for one of WRG's programme of summer Canal Camps which starts in just a few weeks' time.

We should have plenty of camp reports in the next couple of issues, keeping the readers informed of what our volunteers have got up to during the summer of '26. Well, we *should* have - but only if some of you volunteers write them and send them to the editor. So here's a reminder to all of you that it's a lot easier to write a good / entertaining / accurate / stimulating / downright stropky [delete as appropriate] camp report if you do it straight away, rather than waiting until the editor is pestering you in October to write a piece about something you did three months earlier and are struggling to remember.

Seriously, we do appreciate all the reports we receive for publication - my thanks in advance to everyone who sends one in. And pictures are greatly appreciated too.

In the meantime...

...as we don't have any week-long summer Canal Camps to report on in this issue (although we do have plenty of reports of work by the regional mobile groups whose weekend digs carry on all year), I'd instead like to highlight the 'Progress' pages which take up a large part of this issue.

These pages include a lot of information about what's going on in the wider world of waterway restoration, mostly submitted by the local canal restoration societies and trusts - and although it's all good and (to me, and I hope to you too) interesting information I think it's fair to say that at times there can seem to be a little bit of a 'disconnect' between these reports and the volunteer work that the typical *Navvies* reader gets involved in. For example the Chesterfield Canal report covers a £5m Government funded project involving professional engineering contractors building a new lock and new bridges - it's a far cry from most of the volunteer work parties that I've been on.

But actually if you look at some of the other reports on the Progress pages in this particular issue, there are several that are very much relevant (sometimes indirectly, I'll admit) to what WRG and other mobile volunteers are working on.

One of our summer Canal Camp sites is the Lichfield Canal, working on new channel construction. And in the Progress pages you can see that on a nearby site on the same canal, a longstanding obstruction to restoration - the 'Big Pipe' - is finally being done away with.

On the Wilts & Berks Canal we're all set for a week's Canal Camp at Pewsham Locks. And meanwhile our Wilts & Berks Progress report covers the threat (or opportunity) for the canal restoration as a result of plans for a new reservoir, as well as the progress of a housing development in Swindon that's providing a vital new section of canal at the developers' expense. No, they aren't on the same section of canal as the WRG Camp site - but between them they cover three of the W&B Canal Trust's strategic priorities for the forthcoming years (as covered in full in our Restoration Feature in *Navvies* issue 334): developing Pewsham as a canal centre and community hub; opening navigation from the Thames to Wantage; and linking Swindon to Royal Wootton Bassett.

On the Wey & Arun, we're looking forward to a fortnight of channel construction on a

currently filled-in length of canal, which will link up our last year's project at Rook's Hill Bridge and our earlier one at Birtley Bridges to create a longer length of restored canal. And in our Progress report, you can see how the Wey & Arun Canal Trust have (quite literally) built on our success at Rook's Hill Bridge, adding the bridge deck to the abutments our Canal Camp volunteers built last year.

And finally on the Cotswold Canals, as you'll see from the Progress piece showing the task list for the remaining three years or so of the restoration of the Phase 1b (Saul to Stonehouse) section of the canal, and our report of a couple of London WRG weekends there recently, our work is right at the heart of what's happening in the wider scheme to get ten miles of the canal open and connected up to the national network.

But going back to the Chesterfield...

...and there's another point to be made that's nothing to do with how directly relevant to WRG's volunteer work the progress reports are. Because this particular one is extremely relevant to another discussion that has been happening in the world of canal restoration, and in particular in the pages of *Navvies*. Specifically, my editorial welcome in issue 333 and Steve Morley's reply in issue 334 on the subject of whether we should allow cost and maintenance issues to justify modern materials such as concrete locks with steel gates, whether our role as custodians of heritage mean we should stick with traditional masonry and timber, or whether some compromise is possible.

What might not be obvious from the Progress piece is that the gates for the new Keith Ayling Lock are made neither of metal nor of wood, but from plastic! Well, OK, fibre-reinforced polymer (FRP)' to be precise. Made in the Netherlands (where they know a thing or two about canals!) they are reckoned to last much longer than traditional wooden ones. A great idea, or a step too far? What do you think? Email the editor with your views.

And finally, here's to a successful summer Canal Camps programme. I hope to meet some of you on a worksite somewhere.

Martin Ludgate



New Chesterfield Canal gate - but what's it made of?

CHAIRMAN'S Comment

"If we believe all the suggested benefits of the waterways network are true, then the logical approach is to increase that network..."

Chairman's Comment

Here I am at the end of a blisteringly hot day, when I can clearly remember that only a couple of months ago that it was rain, not sun, that filled the day. Now you may be thinking that - in an attempt to fill the pages of *Navvies* - I've descended to that great old English conversation staple: the weather. Actually, it's a not too subtle excuse to talk about the most important waterways report – WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association's publication ***Waterways for Today***.

"Why is it important?" you ask. Well, for those not conversant with the report (and you really should be – it's available to download on the IWA website), it puts forward 12 benefits of the UK's waterways network. I'll pick up on some of those benefits in a moment but first a couple of important points need to be made:

- These benefits are not just benefits for a few lucky people who live or play on the network – they are benefits for the whole of the UK.
- These benefits are not just idle speculation, each of them is backed up by facts, statistics, research, case studies, etc.

So let's get back to the 12 benefits, shall we? As Martin has already filled this edition of *Navvies* with some excellent progress reports I'll just pick three:

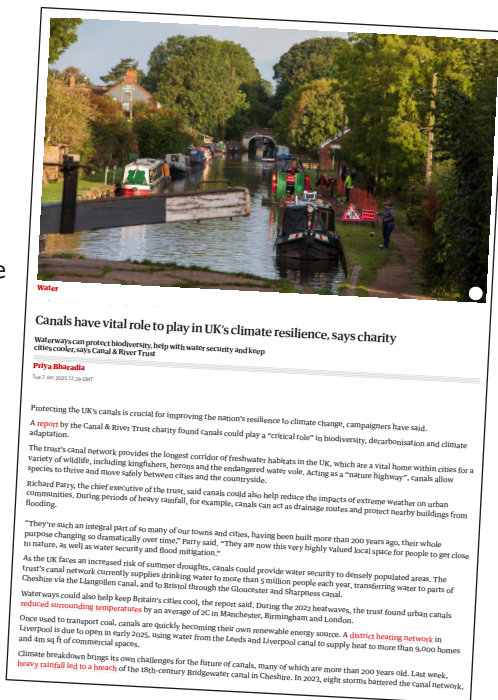
Benefit 6: Sustainability - Planning for resilience and climate change

Benefit 8: Education and Young People

Benefit 9: Jobs, training and apprenticeships

Benefit 6 is why I started this Comment with chat about the weather. Whatever your thoughts about the politics of climate change, it is clear that the UK waterways network has great potential to help with addressing the effects of it. Whether it's making things cooler on hot days or providing extra capacity on the wet days the UK waterways network is a tremendous asset to the whole of the UK. That's not just our opinion – for example *The Guardian* recently ran an article entitled "Canals have vital role to play in UK's climate resilience".

Moving onto Benefit 9 is easy for me – this *Navvies* has pages of reports of great events such as the Leadership Teams Day and the Training Weekend. Yes, marvel at the skills, dedication and determination, but most of all appreciate the fact that all of it was enjoyable fun. Waterways are a great place for learning.

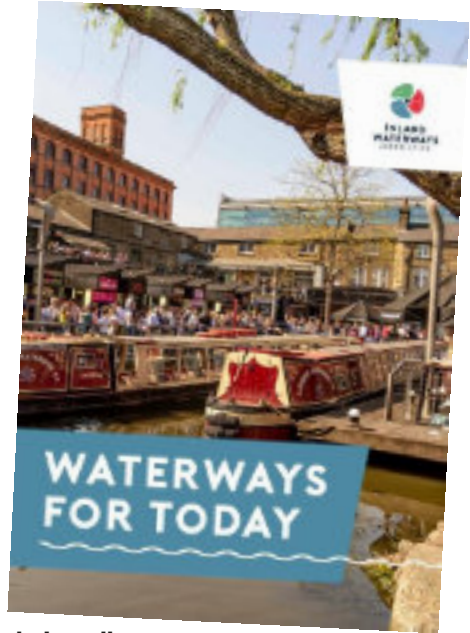


The Guardian article referred to in Mike's piece

Which leads on to Benefit 8 – Education and Young People. Picture a waterway: it doesn't actually matter if it's navigable or derelict, because what it will be is full of structures that represent excellent engineering. More importantly than just abstract engineering, they all represent how you successfully engineer with nature. As society worries about a lack of general engineering awareness, the waterways network represents an enormous classroom full of brilliant examples – mitre gates, stop-planks, culverts, arched bridges, embankments, channels, etc.

So that's enough of a rant from me about the value of waterways, what message have I got to conclude this? I guess it's simple...

If we believe all the suggested benefits of the waterways network are true, then the logical approach is to increase that network and therefore increase the benefits. What is needed is a Group that Recovers these Waterways. We are that group. Our job (working with the canal societies and trusts) is to do it well.



It is inevitable at this time of year that the Chairman's Comment finishes off with a few Health and Safety messages:

Please remember the two biggest messages from our **Health & Safety Audit 2026**:

- A tidy (well laid out) site is a safe site.
- Never worry about asking for a banksman – if the manoeuvre (or you) requires it.

We are trialling an online **Safety Reporting Tool** over the summer BUT if you don't want to use the Tool then it's still fine to use the usual paperwork/forms/postcards/etc.

Mike Palmer "The waterways represent an enormous classroom full of brilliant examples"



GROUPS A year in the life of Kescrg

Looking back on a year of working parties held by Kescrg, an independent mobile volunteer canal restoration group active in the south of England

Kescrg 2025-26: A year in the life of a mobile volunteer canal restoration group

Well, it must be that last *Navvies* before the summer – the last edition before Martin gets inundated by a tidal wave of Summer Camp Reports; a magazine searching for some good volunteer updates with a smattering of in-jokes and references to mud and lost wellies and that kind of thing to get us in the mood for the camps...

But never fear – outside of the summer camp season and in addition to all the amazing work the canal societies' working parties do themselves, there are several 'visiting groups' that run weekend working parties once a month or so, moving round the country to help out different canal societies on projects requiring additional skills or just hours of labour to keep them moving forward. Kescrg is one such group – though independent of WRG we hold very much the same ethos and draw on the same wider group of volunteers.

Our digs are advertised in *Navvies*, on our Facebook page and website and via our email list. New volunteers are always welcome, so if you are ever missing a cold hard village hall floor, a tasty pint in an unfamiliar pub or a bit of muddy action out of camp season, just keep an eye out and give us or one of the other groups a go!

So, in no particular order, apart from that boring and much overused 'calendar', Ed Walker and I have pulled together a summary of a year digging with Kescrg:

July 2025 - Wey & Arun, Canal Camp:

Stephen, Ian and Anne ran an excellent camp on the Wey and Arun where the main work was doing a major concrete pour on Rooks Hill bridge abutments along with block work on a culvert head wall and excavating and concreting the foundations for the new canal bank. A great bunch of volunteers including 4 fab DofEers (Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme participants, using the Canal Camp for the residential part of the gold



Pictures by Stephen Davis

Progress at Weymoor Bridge on the Cotswold Canals: work under way last September on concrete and blockwork walls to create the new canal and towpath over the new culvert...

award), who all particularly enjoyed the trip to the Dunsfold Land Rover collection. They just fitted right in.

September – Cotswold Canals:

September, and we were at Weymoor bridge on the eastern end of the Thames & Severn canal, a site we and many others have worked on in recent years, this time with London WRG. A busy weekend with loads of odd jobs done; block laying, brick laying, back filling and concrete pours to make the site ready for winter.

October – Wilts & Berks Canal: October came and we were on the Wilts and Berks, this time working on Double Bridge a mile or so below Pewsham locks. This bridge was restored some years ago, but the parapets had developed some significant cracks allowing rain to penetrate and damage the original arch structure – we spent a good weekend raking out joints and repointing as much as we could, and eating cake supplied by the amazing Fiona.

November - Wilts & Berks, WRG

Reunion: November saw the welcome return of the WRG Reunion on the Wilts and Berks near Wantage. Kescrg supported this event mostly by fencing off lock chambers that had become exposed by the scrub clearance process.

December – Wey & Arun, Christmas

dig: Beginning of December saw London WRG, Kescrg and WRG Forestry joining forces for the annual Christmas dig – this year on the Wey & Arun back at Rooks Hill. It was great to see the progress the Trust work parties had made on the bridge since the summer – we were able to lay the last couple of brick courses facing up the concrete abutments we poured in the summer, with the Trust well on the way to setting up shuttering to cast the arch. However, the main task for the weekend was tree felling and clearing to expose the site of the lock a little south of the bridge – this will eventually be Phase 3 of the overall project on this site [see our Progress pages ...the Editor], and hopefully a lock we will be able to come back and help build in years to come.

February 2026 - Wilts & Berks: Another joint dig with London and Forestry; possibly the wettest and muddiest I (Ed W... we all know Steve has been way muddier) have got on a weekend for a long time. A large group of volunteers helped over a 3-day weekend with the scrub management on the North Wilts section on the outskirts of Swindon – many trees were felled and chipped, with the chippings reused to improve the path surface. This was a section of canal long overdue some TLC and provides a popular



...and the site at Weymoor Bridge on Kescrg's return to this project in April 2026, with brick facing and other finishing work in progress

walking route with locals, so the combined forces of the 3 groups hopefully helped to raise the profile of the canal in the north part of Swindon, as great progress is being made on other projects to the south. This weekend also saw the welcome return of cakes courtesy of Fiona...

March - Wilts & Berks: Bit of a theme developing here as we were back on the Wilts and Berks again, the planned work changed quite late on but we were able to give the local group a significant hand with clearing the towpath to the West of Shrivenham – some of the worst brambles I have ever seen had taken over the path but we managed to clear a good few hundred metres. We were not allowed bonfires due to the proximity of the main road, but brash was neatly piled up alongside the towpath to make a thicket. Once again we had a plentiful supply of cakes...



Everything stops for tea... and cake, of course!

April – Cotswolds: Back to Weymoor again for some finishing up work – lots of brick and block laying, earth moving, more backfilling of the towpath, landscaping and a cheeky concrete pour left the site looking much better, we even replanted the gate post! Strangely enough, we had more cake.

May – Cotswolds: Off to the western end this time and back to John Robinson lock for the first time in two years, the site has significantly changed! We ran a three-day weekend to help get the site ready for the Canal Camps program this summer and had a good variety of work – the main task was laying a roadway into the bed of the canal below the lock to give access for the wall rebuild. While the plant drivers got on with that, everyone else completed the more exacting work of laying coping stones, brick laying, pointing and stone repairs. Dave brought chocolate brownies for Friday, and Fiona and Eli both made cakes for the weekend. So much cake in fact that almost no biscuits got eaten – the

Why Kescrg?

Originally it stood for 'Kent & East Sussex Canal Restoration Group', being a 1970s offshoot of the Kent &



East Sussex branch of the Inland Waterways Association. It's now an independent group, and few of its volunteers actually live in either Kent or East Sussex. But the group still carries on its original function of providing volunteer support for waterway restoration projects mainly in the South of England, and it welcomes volunteers from all over the South - and from further afield

Kescrg food boxes are overflowing with spare packets of biscuits. We need help!

June – Wey & Arun: Back to Rooks Hill (which now looks much more like a bridge!) where a select crowd braved the mud and rain on Saturday and spent the weekend installing gabion mattresses as bank protection on the newly created section to the South of the new bridge. You know that lost welly mentioned earlier? Just ask RAF Martin next time you see him... but I think it is fair to say that this section will happily hold water once the project is complete!

The future: About the time you read this we will have held another joint weekend with London WRG at Pewsham on the Wilts and Berks; work at the moment looks to be

further bricklaying on the bottom lock of the three-lock flight, which will lead on well to the Kescrg summer camp in August where we will be continuing the work on that site.

September (12-13th) we should be working on the Dauntsey section of the Wilts and Berks, exact details still to be determined.

Depending on how the work on the summer camps goes, we hope to be going back to JR lock on the Cotswolds again in October (3-4th).

We will be holding a weekend in November but this is as yet not completely nailed down (Reunion anyone?) but one



Laying coping stones at John Robinson Lock on the Cotswold Canals, and (below) the finished job



thing that is set is the usual KESCRG/LWRG/ Forestry Christmas dig in December (12-13th), this year on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation in Essex. So, if you have a spare weekend this Autumn to fill with fresh air, rewarding work, spending time with some reasonably nice people and have space for some cake in your life, why not join our Facebook group (just search Kescrg), contact us via our website, or join our email list via IWA head office and keep up-to-date with all our activities.

Happy digging and have a great summer one and all!

Ed Walker & Stephen Davis

LEADERSHIP TEAMS DAY Report

...in which WRG's leaders find out about planning excavations, learn the art of instruction, and Lowsonford Village Hall gains a dry dock...

Leadership Teams Day report

Lowsonford Village Hall now has a dry dock! Well, not in reality – but planning how it would be constructed was just one of the activities at this year's Leadership Teams Day.

The programme for the day, which is aimed at leaders and those considering leadership of summer Canal Camps and mobile weekend working party groups, always tries to incorporate a mixture of lessons learned from previous Canal Camps; key messages from the WRG Board; a chance for experienced and new leadership teams alike to share their experiences with each other; and feedback.

As such, the day started with a presentation all about the planning of excavations, expertly delivered by Adam 'Digger' Morris, following some challenges at Weymoor Bridge in particular with a lack of forethought in this area.

Stodious use of Microsoft Excel avoided the need for calculators – but still participants were introduced to the angle of repose, bulking factors and the need to carefully think about the beginning-to-end

sequence of excavation activities on a site. The key messages also included the need to record in the Project Plan which stockpiles of material are which, because in three years' time it will all look the same with weeds growing from it.

Next, the room split into four groups to undertake a site planning activity. Each group went for a site visit into the grounds of the village hall, reviewing the access routes and any hazards or challenges that might not be evident from the plan provided. Several trees, overhead cables, manholes and a septic tank all added challenges to the site (along with a deliberately obstructive 'landowner' - actually one of us!).

Once familiar with the site, each group then set about planning how to construct a dry dock on the site, laying out where materials would be delivered, where excavation arisings would be stockpiled, the position of welfare, parking, brick-cutting, dewatering pumps etc... Some groups even offered alternatives to the landowner to make construction simpler – though not all suggestions were welcomed.

Groups then returned outside to lay out the key site elements (as well as being



'Digger' explains about planning an excavation

shown key changes to the trailer packing arrangements - hint: no kebs, and the gazebo now stands up.)

Several participants remarked on how big the excavation was going to be – already demonstrating the lessons learned from the first part of the day.

Inside, groups also rotated through a session on 'the art of instruction'. Pairs first had to try and replicate each other's drawings without looking at them and then discussed different learning styles and how different instruction methods can develop volunteer skills and confidence in different ways.

Finally, the day finished with the regular 'parish notices', all those miscellaneous bits that don't quite fit elsewhere into the programme. Updates on accommodation kit, a trial of the HSE reporting tool and updates on volunteer booking information were all provided.

A big thanks to Jude for her excellent catering, to Digger for his presentation and to everyone else involved in delivering a very informative and enjoyable day. Of course, a huge thanks also to Stephen 'Ricey' Rice for his role in planning and delivering the day alongside me.

Ricey and I have some ideas for future years, but we'd really like to hear from you what you thought (if you were there) and/or what you would like to get out of future Leadership Teams Days.

Contact us on

george.rogers@waterways.org.uk or stephen.rice@waterways.org.uk.

Finally – we are looking to deliver a similar event specifically for very new leaders and for volunteers who might be interested in leading in the future. This will run shortly after the summer camp programme in September or October – please let us know if you are interested and please keep a lookout for anyone you think has leadership potential and highlight the event to them. We promise that attending is no commitment to leading in the future!

George Rogers



"Site visit" to the village hall grounds for the site planning activity



"The art of instruction" - trying to copy a drawing without seeing it

TRAINING WEEKEND Report

Waterway Recovery Group's annual training weekend once again succeeded in improving volunteers' skills ready for the summer Camps

WRG Training Weekend 2026 Lichfield, 16-17 May

The annual WRG Training Weekend was held at Fosseway Heath on the Lichfield Canal this year. Many thanks to Adrian and our friends at the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust (LHCRT) who hosted us once again. We are very grateful for the use of their site, which has the perfect amount of space needed to train volunteers in a number of different areas.

I am also incredibly grateful to our instructors. Every year, they kindly volunteer their time, ensuring that the foundations are laid for the safe operation of plant and equipment on our sites. The weekend is impossible to run without them, their infinite patience and their enthusiasm for passing on their wealth of experience. You are all amazing and much appreciated. This year, bookings were plentiful, with the timetable offering sessions on

dumpers, excavators, ride-on rollers, surveying and brick saws, as well as an opportunity to learn to drive the minibus and manoeuvre the kit trailer. The half-day course in bricklaying was incredibly popular, with many thanks to Martin S and his professional guidance.

As always, the trainees were fabulous. There were lots of new faces, all of whom we sincerely hope to see again on WRG camps, weekends or other restoration activities, as well as some familiar folk



Pictures by Ali Bottomley



who had come to refresh their skill set. It was great to see how quickly everyone mingled and helped to make the weekend a whole lot of fun, as well as a learning opportunity. Many have since emailed to express their thanks to the team of instructors, who were so patient and skilled at passing on their experience to others.

A special thank you to Jude, whose incredible cooking kept everyone satisfied throughout the weekend. We even ate our salad at lunch this year so hopefully she will agree to feed us more tasty delights next year... (pretty please?)

My genuine thanks to everyone who made the weekend happen: to all the incredible instructors for working so hard and always being so generous with their time; to the lovely Adrian for not minding giving up his time from Friday through to Monday to ensure that the materials and plant were delivered and then removed from site; to Jude, for keeping us so well-fed and looked after; to Mike Palmer, Harry and Spence for making sure vans and trailers arrived full of kit and for ensuring we had some bricks to lay on Saturday; to Bex and Spence for sorting out the station pick-ups; to Head Office for their support behind the scenes; and finally to all of the trainees who were such fantastic company, and made everything worthwhile. THANK YOU!

Ali Bottomley



FESTIVALS Sites wanted!

The Inland Waterways Association's Festival of Water can help publicise the canals and campaign for them. But not without finding a site for it...

Do you know of a suitable Festival of Water venue?

Almost every year from 2014 to 2023, WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association has held an annual Festival of Water at various locations around the waterways system. It provides an enjoyable day out for local people, a get-together for boaters from all over the country, a chance for IWA and the canal groups who are there with their stalls to raise money, interest and support for the canals, to hopefully recruit new supporters, and maybe even some new WRG volunteers. IWA has also run National Campaign Rallies in the past, bringing national publicity to particular issues.

And WRG volunteers have often provided support in helping to set up, run, and clear up after these events... and the Navvies editor has even been known to run the occasional boaters' quiz in the entertainments tent on the Friday evening.

But it hasn't happened since 2023...

The main reason that there has not been a Festival of Water for the last few years is a lack of suitable venue. So this is an appeal to IWA members and Navvies subscribers to see if there is a location within your local area that could host the event. You can help in the search for a new venue that could hold the Festival of Water.

Any suggestion will be looked at: firstly virtually; and then if it looks like it has the main ingredients for a possible site, then a physical visit will be made to confirm all the necessary requirements for a venue would be met; before then asking the land owner for permission to hold the event on their land.

There are several key main elements that are necessary, in order for us to consider a site as a possible venue.

Firstly, land size available. This ideally has to be about the same as 3 full size football pitches (approx. 5 acres / 2 hectares). This is for the site for exhibitors and traders, the campsite (for many exhibitors and visitors) and car park. Ideally the campsite will need to be adjacent, or very near by the trade site, and the same for the car park. The land should be as flat as possible and be alongside a waterway. The trade site area needs to be all together, and not broken up into small pockets.



Pictures by Martin Ludgate unless credited

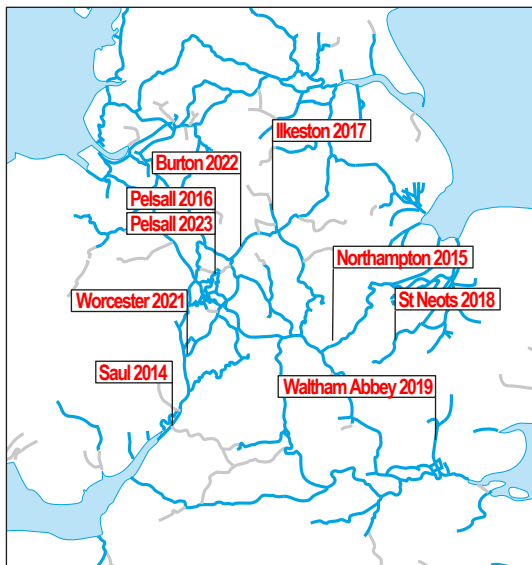
The IWA Festival of Water at Pelsall brings some colour to the northern Birmingham Canal Navigations

The waterway alongside needs to be able to accommodate up to 100 visiting boats, preferably double moored, so as not to spread the boats out too far along the waterway. Ideally the towpath would be on the same side as the trade / exhibitor site; if not, there should be nearby access to a bridge to cross over to the trade site easily. If there is a section of good flat bank that can accommodate floating traders, that will be an advantage. The waterway must be connected to the main national waterways network, but needn't be on a canal: we have had events on rivers as well as canals.

Access onto the land must be good enough for caravans, trailers and suppliers' vehicles. Vehicles can be up to 7.5 tonnes for suppliers.

There needs to be a water supply nearby. A fire hydrant is acceptable, as we obtain permissions to use this type of supply.

The nearer to a town or centre of population the event is, the larger the possible attendance. Past events have been close to St Neots High Street, Northampton town centre and Ilkeston town centre. All of these had a large attendance.



IWA Festival of Water sites 2014-2023. Where next?



It needn't necessarily be on a canal: the 2018 festival had a fine riverside site on the Great Ouse at St Neots

In addition to being a national campaigning event raising awareness of the issues facing the waterways in general (such as the current Fund Britain's Waterways campaign), the Festival of Water also aims to identify any local campaigning issues to help address. So if the local waterway is underused (like Pelsall on the Birmingham Canal Navigations), has navigational problems (such as the various long-term closures on Environment Agency waterways) or has a waterway restoration project nearby which can be promoted (like Ilkeston, with the Derby Canal and Cromford Canal projects both within a few miles), all the better.

If you know of anywhere that might be able to hold an event, be that a Festival of Water or a National Campaign Rally, please do get in touch either via the IWA head Office or directly to the Event Logistics Chair maria.hearnden@waterways.org.uk.



On the subject of waterways festivals and events, here are a couple of recent ones that WRG volunteers have been involved in. **Above**, site services volunteers transport kit and people around the IWA Canalway Cavalcade festival at London's Little Venice, while **Below** our publicity team had the WRG display all set up and ready to go at the start of Crick Boat Show



Maria Hearnden

WRG WEAR logo clothing is back!

Remember WRG Wear?

Quite possibly you don't remember it if you've joined us in the last ten years or so, but those with longer memories will recall when we ran a range of 'WRG Wear' logo clothing including everything from rugby shirts to baseball caps. Well the good news is that WRG Wear is back just in time for the summer Canal Camps season, initially with a small selection of clothing besides the usual short-sleeved Camps T-shirt (which - unlike all the new items - is also available to buy at the summer Camps).

This year there are long-sleeved T shirts, sweatshirts, hoodies and polo shirts, featuring the WRG logo as well as the 'Navy man' - see illustration below. They are available in **red** and **black** only, and in sizes small / medium / large / extra large / XX large.

Please order directly with Julian at Jancraft via email to mail@jancraft.com, and make payment via BACS to account number **34033368**, sort code **30 98 21**. Please give **your surname** as reference on the payment.

Alternatively mark the item(s) you want (and what size and colour) on the form below and send it with a cheque made payable to **Jancraft** at **Balaclava, High Park Avenue, Wollaston, Stourbridge DY8 3NJ**.

Remember to add postage of **£5** for up to two items, **£10** for more, to your payment. Please give your **name, email address and phone number** on every order.

For enquires only call on **07977 491629**, but all orders by email or post please.

ITEM	WRG logo on front	Navy only on front	WRG logo front / navy Logo back	Camps 2026 WRG logo front / Camps logo back
T-shirt short sleeve	£7.50	£7.50	£10.50	£8.50
T-shirt long sleeve	£9.50	£9.50	£12.50	£10.50
Sweatshirt	£14.00	£14.00	£17.00	
Hoodie	£17.00	£17.00	£20.00	
Polo shirt	small chest logo £11.50	Navy back print only £11.50	Small WRG front Navy back £14.50	



Left: the 'navyman' logo

Right: the WRG logo (modelled by the editor)



NAVVIES DIARY

Week-long Canal Camps cost £90 or as stated. Booking for events labelled 'WRG' at The Canal Centre, 100 The Canal Road, Berkhamsted, HP4 1EF. Tel: 01494 783453, enquiries@wrg.org.uk. Diary

Jul 4 Sat	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: event at Middlewood Locks
Jul 4-5	KESCRG	Wilts & Berks Canal: Camp preparation at Pewsham Locks. Joint dig with London WRG
Jul 4-5	London WRG	Wilts & Berks Canal: Camp preparation at Pewsham Locks. Joint dig with KESCRG
Jul 5 Sun	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: event at Nob End Locks
Jul 11-18	WRG Canal Camp	Wey & Arun Canal Camp: Channel construction at Rooks Hill. Led by the NWPG region
Jul 18-19	wrgBITM	To be arranged
Jul 18-25	WRG Canal Camp	Wey & Arun Canal Camp: Channel construction at Rooks Hill.
Jul 18-25	WRG Canal Camp	Lichfield Canal Camp: Channel construction in Lichfield. Leaders Colin Hobbs and Wilts & Berks Canal
Jul 25-Aug 1	WRG Canal Camp	Lichfield Canal Camp: Channel construction in Lichfield. Leaders Colin Hobbs and Wilts & Berks Canal
Jul 25-Aug 1	WRG Canal Camp	Grand Union Canal: Hanwell Locks sidepond restoration Rescheduled from April. Led by the NWPG region
Aug 1-8	WRG Canal Camp	Grand Union Canal: Hanwell Locks sidepond restoration Rescheduled from April. Led by the NWPG region
Aug 1-8	WRG Canal Camp	Wilts & Berks Canal Camp: Pewsham Locks Led by the KESCRG regional mobile group
Aug 8-15	WRG Canal Camp	Cotswold Canal Camp: John Robinson Lock. Rebuilding wing walls. Leaders: Mike Paine & Wilts & Berks Canal
Aug 15-22	WRG Canal Camp	Cotswold Canal Camp: John Robinson Lock. Rebuilding wing walls. Leaders: Stephen & Wilts & Berks Canal
Aug 22-29	WRG Canal Camp	Cotswold Canal Camp: John Robinson Lock. Rebuilding wing walls.
Sep 12-13	KESCRG	Wilts & Berks Canal: Channel profiling at Dauntsey
Sep 19-20	London WRG	Cotswold Canals: John Robinson Lock
Sep 19-20	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Sep 20 Sun	WRG	WRG Committee/Board Meeting: Rowington Village Hall
Sep 25-27	wrg Forestry Team	Wilts & Berks Canal: Swindon Branch, accommodation at Watchfield
Sep 26-27	wrgBITM	Maidenhead Waterways: Bray Cut
Oct 10-11	London WRG	Shrewsbury & Newport Canals
Oct 17-18	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Oct 17-18	wrgBITM	Basingstoke Canal: To be confirmed
Oct 24-31	wrg Forestry Team	Wilts & Berks Canal: East Vale & Abingdon branch. Return to Grove Locks. Accommodation at Kempsey
Nov 21 Sat	WRG	WRG Committee/Board Meeting: Location & date TBC
Nov 21-22	wrgBITM	To be arranged
Nov 21-22	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Dec 12-13	London WRG	Joint Christmas dig with KESCRG and WRG Forestry on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation
Dec 12-13	KESCRG	Joint Christmas dig with WRG Forestry and London WRG on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation
Dec 12-13	wrg Forestry Team	Joint Christmas dig with London WRG and KESCRG on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation
Dec 12-13	wrgBITM	Maidenhead Waterways: Bray Cut
Dec 19-20	MBBCS	Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal: Nob End Locks
Dec 26-Jan 1	WRG Canal Camp	Christmas / New Year camp: venue to be confirmed in future issues of <i>Navvies</i>

WRG and mobile groups

**WRG Canal Camp' should go to: WRG Canal Camps, Hardy House, Northbridge
y contributions to Dave Wedd, Tel 07816 175454, dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk**

	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	samklancs@yahoo.com
RG	Ed Walker	07887-568029	ed@edwalker.org.uk
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	london@wrg.org.uk
	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	samklancs@yahoo.com
onal mobile group		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk
		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
Il Mathew		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
Il Mathew		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
leader Dave 'Evvo' Evans		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
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almer & Becky Parr		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
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		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
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	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	london@wrg.org.uk
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sford	Clive Alderman		
	Mike Palmer	01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk
	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	samklancs@yahoo.com
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er Navigation	Ed Walker	07887-568029	ed@edwalker.org.uk
avigation	Clive Alderman		
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk
	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	samklancs@yahoo.com
		01494 783453	enquiries@wrg.org.uk

DIG REPORT LWRG on the Cotswold

London WRG turn up mob-handed at the Cotswold Canals project at John Robinson Lock. Fortunately there's lots of work for them to do...

Cotswold Canals dig report: London WRG at John Robinson Lock

It's not all that long ago I remember only four of us turning up for a London WRG weekend dig so it was quite a shock to have 27 volunteers on our April dig on the Cotswold Canals.

I was part pleased with the turnout and part kicking myself for not having the sense to limit the numbers. Luckily everyone was very good-natured about having to squeeze past each other to get ready in the mornings. The queues for toilets weren't too

bad, and we got used to rearranging kit boxes every time we needed to eat.

We tore through the mortar materials and kept the local Jon very busy trying to keep us supplied with work. We benefited from having several pro or regular bricklayers on site and that meant we made a very good start on several bits of brickwork. Andy and newcomer Danny laid a lot of very precise courses for the towpath under the lock tail bridge. Rob and Phil also got well underway with a tricky bit of brickwork on the other side of the lock tail between the lower gate recess and the tail

bridge. We had a lot of people cleaning out for re-pointing and a smaller number doing the actual pointing.

Meanwhile David and some assistants managed to Tirfor winch out the rotten wood of the old sill. We also managed to complete an excavation job on the old brick built overflow bywash culvert which had caved in.

Our two brand new volunteers on site were introduced to the mixer and started the weekend by laying a bed of mortar. They smoothed this out beautifully and covered it with a tarpaulin but when we came onsite the next



Pictures by Martin Ludgate

The pointing team at work



Bricklaying lessons on the towpath wall under the tail bridge

morning we found a large set of pawprints stamped into the surface through the tarpaulin. We hadn't thought to barricade it off!

Although it was hard work to get enough materials for all the brickwork we wanted to do, we had enough numbers to get the bricks on site so we set the place up for the next few months of activity. There were due to be weekend digs here every weekend in May, plus the locals' own work mid-week, followed by three weeks of summer Canal Camps. I expect the place to be unrecognisable by the autumn.

The site at John Robinson is very popular with walkers, runners, and cyclists so we had a lot of public curiosity about what we were up to. We spent a good amount of time explaining the next phase of work to people, and trying to direct them through the maze of barriers to the footpath route.

Cooking for 27 people in the tiny kitchen at Saul was a challenge. I was really grateful to Martin Danks and Lynda for making breakfast and helping with the catering. We also had a few bits of administrative running around to do which everyone pitched in on.

I'm not sure that I would cap the numbers so long as we could provide work for this number of people again. The difficulty with such a large dig tends to come from the number of moving parts you have to manage. People needing station lifts and various other requirements. It just so happens that our next dig is at the same



Dealing with the collapsed section of the bywash culvert



Rebuilding begins on the towpath side wing wall beyond the tail bridge

Cotswolds site and accommodation so I will be interested to see if we get similar numbers again in five weeks time [see over ...**Ed**]. I might encourage camping if the numbers get much about 20 again but it doesn't really help at mealtimes when it's the oven space that really matters.

London WRG has got very used to being highly active in the Cotswolds so this seems like a return to form for us. We were also pleased to have new volunteers with us and I hope we see them again.

Top tips for huge weekend digs:

- Warn the local canal society beforehand that there will be lots of you so they can prepare the work.



Rebuilding the offside wall between lock and tail bridge...



...and the same wall on the May dig, with much progress made



Demolishing the offside wing wall ready for rebuilding this summer

- Find out ahead of time what the kitchen facilities are. Oven capacity is particularly important.
- Plan your menu carefully as you probably can't fit everything in the oven.
- Everything cooks slower if there are large volumes of food.
- Delegate tasks and responsibilities both onsite and at the accommodation.
- Your job is to lead, not to do the work.

Sophie Smith

Postscript: London WRG returned to the same site five weeks later in late May.

It was another well-supported weekend, and once again the work centred around the bottom end of John Robinson Lock, which visiting teams from KESCRG and NWPg had visited in the meantime.

We continued cleaning out and re-pointing the otherwise sound brickwork on the main chamber walls, completing most of this work. Phil and Rob continued their bricklaying on the offside tail wall between the lock and the tail bridge, which advanced to the point where coping stones would be ready to go on.

Meanwhile on the towpath side, where the tail wall slopes down alongside the towpath, Jon was busy putting together something of a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle of coping stones of different shapes and sizes. And on the other side of the tailbridge, the two wing walls were given rather different treatment...

On the towpath side, the existing wall was carefully built up with bricks, then a course of stones, and then some more brickwork. While on the offside, where the old wall is damaged and is to be completely rebuilt, the machinery operators did their best to reduce it to rubble and take it away.

We also continued the repair to the collapsed section of the bywash culvert, and throughout the weekend we fetched large quantities of bricks and mixed

copious quantities of mortar.

By the time you read this, the start of three consecutive week-long Canal Camps on this site (concentrating on rebuilding the wing walls on the far side of the tail bridge) will be just weeks away, we'll have reports from them in the forthcoming issues of *Navvies* (please!) and London WRG will be back there in September to finish off whatever's left to do. You'll be welcome to join us.

Martin Ludgate

PROGRESS Wey & Arun Canal

Our roundup of progress on restoration projects around the country begins in the deep south with WACT continuing from last year's work at Rooks Hill

Wey & Arun Canal

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust's current major restoration project is at Rooks Hill, south of Bramley. Phase 1 is on schedule to complete this summer, and Phase 2 will also kick-off this summer with two WRG Canal Camps booked.

Phase 1 – Nearing completion

- Rooks Hill Bridge
- Banks and canal cut to the south of the bridge, alongside Fanesbridge Cottage
- Repairs and extension to stream culvert under the canal

Phase 2 – Starting this summer

- New canal cut and banking work replacing infilled length between Rooks Hill and Birtley
- Construction of towpath linking Greensand Way long distance walking trail at Rook's Hill to Birtley section



Pictures by WACT

Rooks Hill Bridge: aerial view of the concrete pour for the bridge deck...

Phase 3 – 2027+

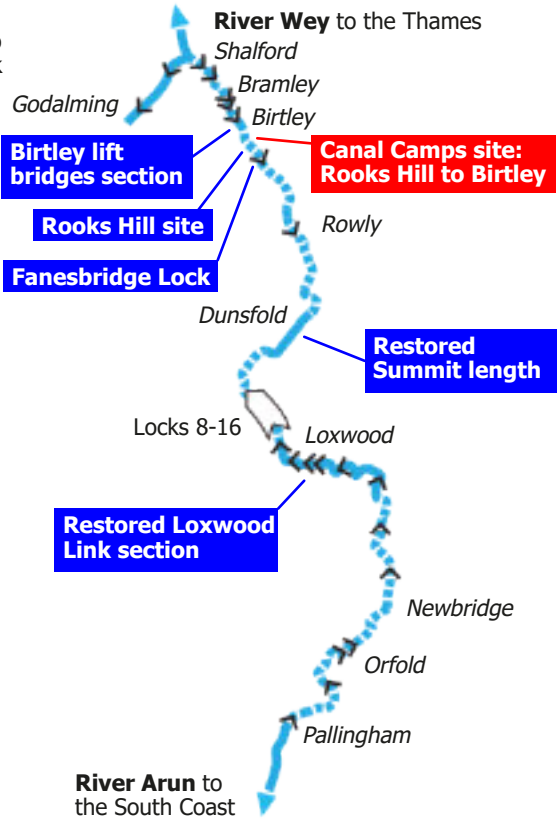
- A new lock to be constructed to replace the original Fanesbridge Lock

Members open morning and bricklaying ceremony: Saturday 18th April was a special day at Rooks Hill, where we were able to say thank you to our members and supporters who have made this restoration project possible and to our volunteers who have carried out all the design and construction work.

We also welcomed Sir Jeremy Hunt MP and Bramley Councillor Jane Austin, who kindly joined us to lay special bricks to recognise the contribution of two individuals who made this project possible: John Compton who kindly sold the Trust the land, and Martin Foster who left us a generous legacy.

Our members were able to follow the route the canal will take from the restored canal in Birtley southward to the site of the new Rooks Hill bridge and have an escorted tour to see the progress on the bridge and canal channel.

Our Appeal total has now passed £233,000 leaving us just under £20,000 to fully fund phase 1 of this project which we expect to complete this summer.



...and a close-up of the brick arch of the bridge

PROGRESS Lichfield Canal

Meanwhile on the Lichfield Canal, the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust are dealing with a longstanding obstruction to restoration

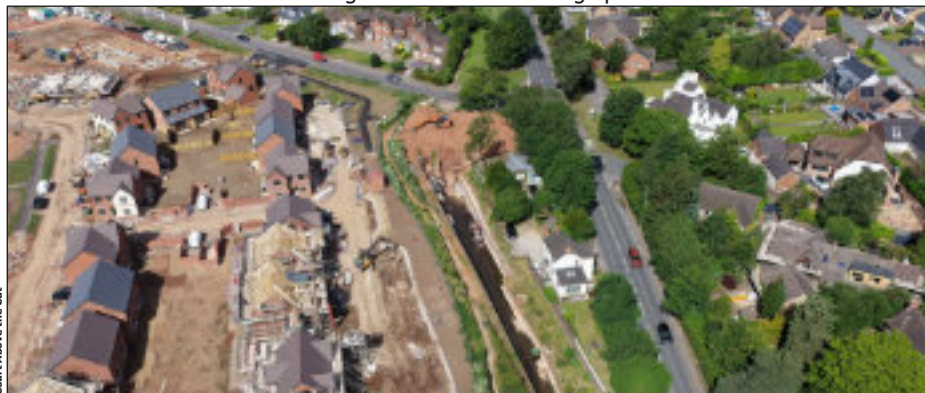
Lichfield Canal

Our first picture shows Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust removing sections of "The Big Pipe". This is a concrete stormwater drain pipe that was laid along a length of the canal bed running through the outskirts of Lichfield after the canal closed, cutting through the canal lining and damaging the invert and cills forming the base of the locks. It's been an obstruction to restoration, made more awkward by the need to maintain its function of carrying away rainwater runoff until such time as the restored canal can take over this role. But as pictured, a section at Gallows Wharf is finally being removed - good riddance!



LHCRT

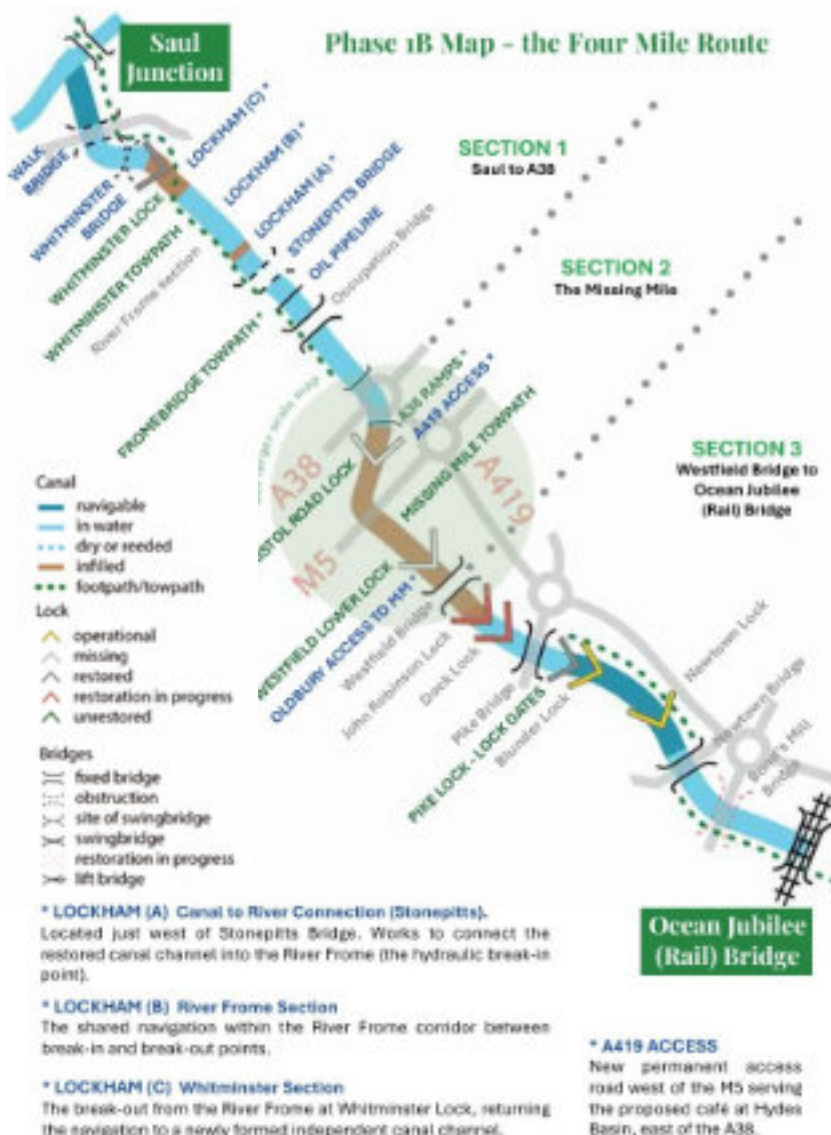
Our second picture is a drone shot of the canal channel above the restored locks 25 and 26 at Borrowcop Locks Canal Park, by Tamworth Road in Lichfield. The channel has been reinstated at several feet below the original level, so that there will be enough headroom to get under Cricket Lane (the road crossing in the distance) without needing a lift bridge or a humpback bridge. To cater for the changes of level the original Lock 24 (behind the camera) has been abolished, and a new one will be built on the far side of Cricket Lane. This section will then be linked to the Gallows Wharf length via the new lift bridge pictured in our last issue.



Court Above the Cut

PROGRESS Cotswold Canals

Looking forward to three years' progress on the Saul to Stonehouse length as the Cotswold Canals Trust lists the work to complete the Phase 1b length



To read more about the Missing Mile and Phase 1b restoration see our feature in *Navvies* 335

Cotswold Canals: the Phase 1b restoration and the Missing Mile

As covered elsewhere in this issue volunteers are currently completing John Robinson Lock and rebuilding the tail walls. These will lead into a new length of canal being built to replace the 'Missing Mile' destroyed when the M5 motorway was built. This in turn forms an important part of the Lottery-supported four mile Phase 1b restoration (the Cotswold Canals Connected project), aiming to complete the Saul to Stonehouse section in 2029, connecting to the already-restored length from Stonehouse through Stroud and almost to Brimscombe.

The maps and task list on these pages were created by Jon Pontefract of Cotswold Canals Connected for *The Trow* magazine and are reproduced courtesy of Cotswold Canals Trust.

Phase 1b Task List 2026 - 2029				
	2026	2027	2028	2029
Contractors	• M5 Crossing • Oil Pipeline • Stonepitts Bridge • Oldbury Access to MM • Lock Gate Fabrication	• M5 Crossing • Missing Mile Utilities • Walk Bridge • Whitminster Bridge • Stonepitts Bridge • Lockham (A) • Lockham (B)	• Walk Bridge • Lockham (C) • A419 Access	
Volunteers	• Westfield Lower Lock • Fromebridge Towpath • Lock Gates (Pike Lock)	• Earthworks and Channel east of M5 • Bristol Road Lock • Whitminster Lock • Lock Gates (TBC) • Whitminster Towpath	• Earthworks and Channel west of M5 • A38 Ramps • Complete Section 1 Towpath • Lock Gates (TBC)	• Missing Mile Towpath Underpass (Cattle Creep) • M5 Pedestrian Underpass

* FROMEBRIDGE TOWPATH Wetlands & Access Improvements:

- Towpath reconstruction and surfacing at Fromebridge.
- Creation of the Fromebridge Wetlands habitat area.
- Construction of a new bird hide.
- Provision of safe pedestrian access from Fromebridge Lane into the site.

Missing Mile Section 2 Larger scale



* A38 RAMPS

New pedestrian ramps rising from the new Bristol Road Lock up to the footpath on the A38 at Whitminster Roundabout, providing level access between canal and highway.

* OLDBURY ACCESS TO MM

New permanent causeway over Oldbury Brook at Eastington Trading Estate providing access to the Missing Mile for construction and ongoing maintenance works.

PROGRESS Montgomery Canal

Shropshire Union Canal Society volunteers make excellent progress on lining the next length of the Montgomery Canal to Schoolhouse Bridge

Montgomery Canal: April work party

An eventful Shropshire Union Canal Society work party - and records tumbled...

This party was always going to be a busy one for several reasons. Nine volunteers attended on Thursday for a variety of preparatory tasks, thereby extending the April work party to four days. On arrival, we were greeted by a tree which had fallen onto the welfare container courtesy of Storm Dave, a few days earlier. Thankfully, no damage and by Saturday, this had been consigned to the bonfire.

Large numbers were expected for the main work party with a group from OutdoorLads attending Friday to Sunday, an event that had been in planning for several months. With high numbers, there was a prospect of making great progress with lining (installing a waterproof liner in the notoriously leaky canal bed) and blocking (covering the liner with a protective layer of concrete blocks) in the Phase 2 section (from the end of the rewatered length south of the limit of navigation at Crickheath Wharf to the new Schoolhouse Bridge 86) of the 'Crickheath South' project to restore and rewater the canal towards Llanymynech.

Delivery of blocks in Phase 2 is only possible along the channel bed, so profiling the channel ready for lining and blocking (which requires diggers to operate in the channel) cannot be undertaken at the same time. So Thursday was spent profiling as much of the channel as

possible ready for the following day. Also on Thursday, work to extend the welfare facilities with extra benching and a gazebo was completed along with a number of other preparatory jobs. We had a very productive site meeting with Canal & River Trust senior engineer Ian Draycott to discuss detailing for the wash wall (canal bank wall) that will be constructed through Schoolhouse Bridge later this year. A start was made clearing spoil in the channel through this area.

On Friday, we were visited by CRT chief executive Campbell Robb making his first tour of the Montgomery Canal since his recent appointment. With the work party in full swing, he appeared very impressed by what he saw. In addition to the Society's restoration work, Campbell also visited Llanymynech Wharf Visitor Centre and the Carreghofa Bridge construction site nearby, before moving on to Welshpool.

And so to the main restoration works themselves. As anticipated, numbers were high – in fact an all-time record of 37 on Saturday and a Sunday record of 28. A somewhat less welcome feature was the



Pictures by SUCS

Lining and blocking in progress on the Phase 2 section of canal

weather with some sharp, but thankfully short-lived, showers and gusty winds. These are never the best when laying large sections of liner which at times billowed like sails which would not look out of place in Cowes Week!

Nevertheless, by Sunday afternoon, 60 metres of channel had been lined and blocked – another record. This required an incredible 5,000 blocks to have been individually handled and each lovingly placed.

With so many volunteers available, many other tasks were also undertaken. Over four days, substantial progress was made removing spoil from the side of and through Schoolhouse Bridge. Environmental works stretched from winter into spring – whereas in February, a major snowdrop salvage operation had been undertaken

relocating barrow-loads of snowdrops from the future work site at Waen Wen (some distance beyond Schoolhouse Bridge), this time it was the turn of daffodils which were replanted out of harm's way along the hedgerow in the Phase 2 section. Given the mild and wet winter, weeding was also necessary around newly planted hedging whips.

To have guest volunteers for three whole days was a new experience. The group of nine from OutdoorLads came

from as far afield as Kent, Southampton and Kosovo and hugely enjoyed supporting the Society's restoration efforts as well as the friendly environment on site. Their leader, Rob, said "Our members found the weekend very rewarding and were really happy to see the impact on the restoration that their hard work had". Once again, a big thank you is due to all those who helped out over the work party.



Schoolhouse Bridge with spoil to be cleared from underneath and each side of the bridge, and (below) with the channel completely cleared



Montgomery Canal: May work party

The Phase 2 section is taking shape. Over 5 days a great deal was achieved

The normal work party pattern is three days over Friday to Sunday, but on this occasion, both Wednesday and Thursday were included to provide two days of preparation. The primary activities were to finish profiling a sufficient length of channel for lining and blocking during the main work party and to prepare sufficient liners cut to length for a prompt start on Friday. In glorious sunshine, both objectives were achieved.

The weather during the main work

party was cooler, but with little wind. A few spots of dampness at times, but we dodged the worst which was overnight. So, near ideal conditions for laying large lengths of liner. By close of play on Saturday, another 60 metres of channel had been lined. An excellent turn out of volunteers on Sunday enabled the blocking to catch up with the liner. Placing 'riprap' stone aggregate on the off side bank above the blocks was completed. As previously explained, there is no plant access to the offside bank so all material must be barrowed along the newly blocked channel and placed by hand. The riprap is covered with soil. Most of that was also completed and then reseeded. A really



Pictures taken on the Thursday afternoon and Sunday afternoon show how much progress was made with lining and blocking during the May working party



tidy result. The towpath side is much more accessible and will be completed next month using power barrows.

Over the coming months, another big task will be to build the towpath wash wall through Schoolhouse Bridge and much preparation work was undertaken this time including a very productive site meeting on method and sequencing with CRT senior engineer Ian Draycott.

The first job was to divert the towpath and make the site secure. The remains of a redundant, concrete-encased drain and inspection chamber were then removed using a pecker attached to the 8-tonne excavator. Then, through to Sunday

afternoon, countless dumper-loads of spoil were removed from the channel. One more very productive and tidy output from this month's work party.

Montgomery Canal: June work party

A very busy work party. 5 days, record volunteer numbers (again), multiple different activities.

June was the second successive work party with two days of preparation before the main work party started on Friday. And once again, two full days of profiling the channel was required to keep one step ahead of the rapid progress by the lining and



On the towpath side of the canal, the riprap stone can be delivered by tracked power barrow (above), but on the offside (below) it has to be done with buckets and wheelbarrows



blocking team, enabled by such healthy volunteer numbers.

On Thursday, the opportunity was also taken to add riprap and soil over the liners above the level where the blocks finish (blocks finish below water level). This continued through the rest of the work party and is a fairly lengthy and laborious job, not least due to the distance travelled to deliver materials. On the offside bank, buckets of riprap must be barrowed over the laid blocks and this work had progressed more or less in sync with the channel being lined and blocked. At least on the towpath bank, materials can be delivered by power barrow along the towpath, though none of this had been done so far this year. By Sunday afternoon, 150 metres of towpath bank had been completed and reseeded. With deliveries of these materials completed, it was finally possible to apply the wear course (very fine chippings/quarry dust) to the surface of the towpath.

The main work party started on Friday. A new attendance record was set with 42(!) attending that day – that's an awful lot of tea and cake, and a lot of progress too.

Over Friday to Sunday lining and blocking continued with a further 45 metres completed. The seemingly endless task of excavating material though Schoolhouse Bridge progressed so well that the end does actually seem to be in sight, despite the 7.5 tonne excavator breaking down at lunchtime on Friday. Thanks to those who fixed it and returned it to operation 24 hours later.



"Monty's Mountain" continues to grow

However, we lost count of the number of dumper loads removed. For the time being, this is being removed to the spoil heap in the compound, now affectionately referred to as "Monty's Mountain", which continues to grow. Although nothing is yet confirmed, potential "homes" for this material have been identified which do not involve waste disposal costs.

With a substantial quantity of material removed, it was possible to start setting out the position of the wash wall that will be constructed through the bridge. This will be a significant task occupying many of the forthcoming work parties.

With warmer weather following the mild but very damp winter and early spring, vegetation is now growing rampant. A further task for the work party was

strimming and weed bashing at both the Schoolhouse and Crickheath compounds as well as around newly planted and laid hedging.

As channel restoration on Phase 2 (north of Schoolhouse Bridge) is progressing rapidly and coming towards a conclusion, attention is now turning towards the channel in Phase 3 (Bridge 86 Schoolhouse Bridge to Bridge 87 Malthouse Bridge). Some initial clearance took place there last autumn and, now that the channel is just about dry after the wet winter, will resume in earnest over forthcoming work parties. A start was made on the Friday.



Keeping the rampant vegetation under control

PROGRESS Chesterfield Canal

On the Staveley Town Deal project, the newly built Keith Ayling Lock gets its gates installed, while the rebuilt Bellhouse Basin takes shape

Chesterfield Canal

Work continues on the £5m Staveley Town Deal funded project to extend the existing isolated restored six-mile Chesterfield to Staveley length. Although short, the new section includes some significant structures. The Trans-Pennine Trail bridge was completed first; the new Keith Ayling Lock is now complete and has had its gates, balance

beams and paddle gear added; the Bellhouse Basin is taking shape, the narrow channel making provision for the future reinstatement of Bellhouse Bridge has been built; and work is under way on building a new concrete channel wall on the section below the lock where a former railway bridge crossed the canal.

Meanwhile the Chesterfield Canal Trust is very grateful for two grants recently



Pictures by CCT

Keith Ayling Lock gets gates, while (below) Bellhouse Lane Bridge narrows and Bellhouse Basin take shape



received to help with its activities elsewhere on the canal.

Cllr Bert Bingham, Nottinghamshire County Council councillor for Worksope West, made a major donation from his Councillor's Divisional Fund. It will go towards the maintenance of trip-boat *Hugh Henshall* and also *Dawn Rose*, which is the Trust's replica 'Cuckoo Boat' (the Chesterfield Canal's

distinctive style of historic working narrow boat, none of which survive), built entirely by hand by Trust volunteers.

Both of these boats are moored in Shireoaks Marina which lies within Cllr Bingham's division.

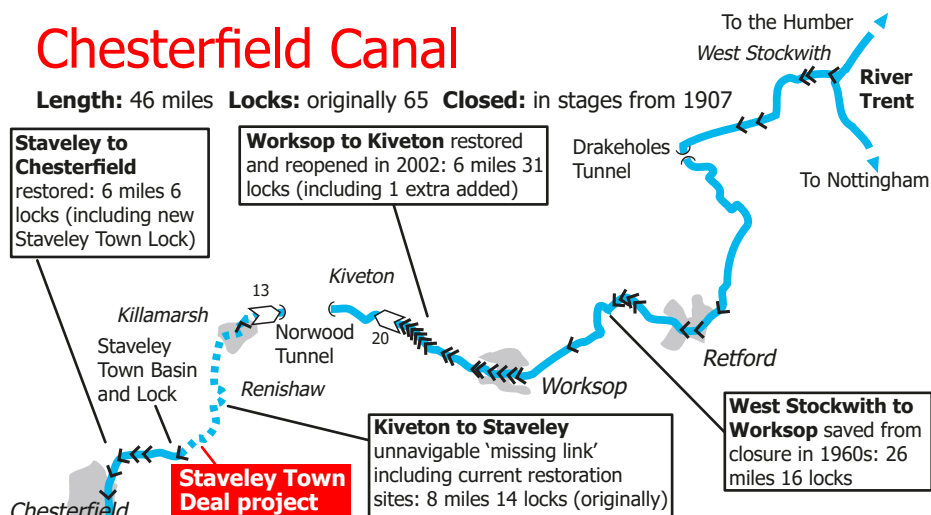
Cllr Bingham said "I have long admired the work of the Chesterfield Canal Trust. On behalf of Nottinghamshire County Council, I



Constructing the new concrete channel walls at the old railway bridge site below the new Keith Ayling Lock

Chesterfield Canal

Length: 46 miles **Locks:** originally 65 **Closed:** in stages from 1907



The Staveley Town Deal project, supported by £5m from the Towns Fund, is rebuilding the length northeast of Staveley Town Lock (which was added in 2012 to get the canal under a railway) including the new Keith Ayling Lock (to return the canal to its original level) and Trans Pennine Trail Bridge

wanted to demonstrate this by supporting the maintenance of these two boats which bring people from near and far to Shireoaks to enjoy the waterway. Long may this continue."

Peter Hardy, Chair of the Trust, is pictured (right) receiving a ceremonial cheque from Cllr Bingham at the Stret Lock Open Day. He said "We are very grateful to Cllr Bingham for this grant. *Hugh Henshall* carries hundreds of passengers every year and *Dawn Rose* demonstrates horse boating during the summer months to sizeable crowds. It costs a surprising amount of money to maintain boats, so this donation is very welcome."

The Mansfield

Building Society has also given the Trust a grant. This was from its Community Support Scheme and is to purchase a new bench at the Hollingwood Hub, the canal visitor centre and coffee shop developed as an extension of the Hollingwood Lock keeper's cottage.



Next job: the concrete canal bed under the Trans Pennine Trail bridge. The initial blinding layer has been laid

PROGRESS Wilts & Berks Canal

A new reservoir scheme could represent a major boost for the prospects for canal restoration - or it could be a lost opportunity...

Wilts & Berks Canal

The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust has launched a campaign to secure restoration of the canal through the site of a planned major drinking water supply reservoir - where the Trust believes that a once-in-a-generation opportunity could otherwise be lost.

The South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO), otherwise known as the White Horse Reservoir, is being planned by Thames Water. It will be the second largest reservoir in the country, and will store water in winter which can then be released into the Thames to supply South East England at drier times. Its situation just southwest of Abingdon puts it directly on the line of the Wilts & Berks Canal's Swindon to Abingdon line - not far from where the WRG 2025 Reunion working party took place.

This might sound like a disaster for the canal's complete restoration and reopening, which is WBCT's long term aim. But alternatively it could be very helpful for the canal. An alternative route has been reserved for the canal, skirting the reservoir on the north and west sides, but the Trust believes it would make more sense to extend this to include complete reinstatement of the canal on this new route, and continuing eastward to reach the River Thames (this part would double-up as the channel carrying water from the reservoir to the river - rather than constructing the channel as an underground culvert, as currently proposed). All this could be incorporated into the reservoir construction works - where it would form just a small fraction of the multi billion pound total cost of the project.

So campaigners and supporters of the Wilts & Berks Canal

Trust are calling for urgent public backing to ensure that the reservoir does include the full navigable reinstatement of the historic Wilts & Berks Canal around the reservoir and to the River Thames. The Trust says: "A once-in-a-generation opportunity could be lost unless canal restoration is fully incorporated into the reservoir's final Development Consent Order (DCO) plans."

WBCT has been working with Thames Water and SESRO representatives to demonstrate the substantial environmental, social and economic benefits that full canal restoration could deliver alongside the reservoir project.

These benefits include:

- New wildlife habitats and biodiversity gains
- Walking, cycling and recreation routes
- Improved health and wellbeing outcomes
- Economic growth and tourism
- Protection of more than 200 years of heritage

Figures presented by the Trust indicate the restored canal corridor could contribute the following real benefits each year to the local communities and residents:



The reservoir plans: canal diversion shown by thick blue line around top and left

- £7.7 million annually in economic activity
- £5.4 million annual NHS savings through increased physical activity
- £14.4 million annual wellbeing benefits
- Thousands of acres of enhanced habitats and biodiversity improvements
- Tens of thousands of volunteer hours every year

The Trust believes the reservoir project presents a unique opportunity to create a connected green and blue infrastructure corridor that would benefit communities across Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and beyond for generations.

However, campaigners say time is running out.

The current SESRO (White Horse Reservoir) planning programme means key design and consultation decisions will soon be finalised before submission of the Development Consent Order application.

A spokesperson for the campaign said: "This is about making sure the biggest infrastructure project in the region also delivers the biggest possible public benefit.

"If the reservoir proceeds without full canal reinstatement being secured now, the opportunity may never come again.

"We are asking local residents, businesses, councillors, environmental groups and supporters of active travel and heritage to stand with the Trust and help ensure the full Wilts & Berks Canal restoration is included within the final plans."

The campaign will now focus on raising public awareness, engaging decision-makers and encouraging community support ahead of forthcoming

consultation stages.

Supporters are being encouraged to:

- Follow and share campaign updates on social media
- Respond to public consultations
- Contact local councillors and MPs
- Join or support the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust
- Help spread awareness of the issue locally

For further information, interviews or campaign involvement, contact:

Email: Info@WBCT.ORG.UK

Check WWW.WBCT.ORG.UK

Become a member from just £1.50 a month and pledge your support: WWW.WBCT.ORG.UK/JOIN-PAGE/

See Facebook group: Wilts & Berks Canal Trust



Henry Sullivan, WBCT

Meanwhile elsewhere on the Wilts & Berks, here's an example of a major development helping the canal restoration, as the new reservoir could do. The Wichelstowe major residential southern extension of Swindon has already resulted in the restoration of one length of canal and the construction of part of a canal diversion around lengths that have been lost under the town. Here. These two lengths are being connected together by the new Badgers Bridge as part of the latest phase of Wichelstowe



From this...



...to this