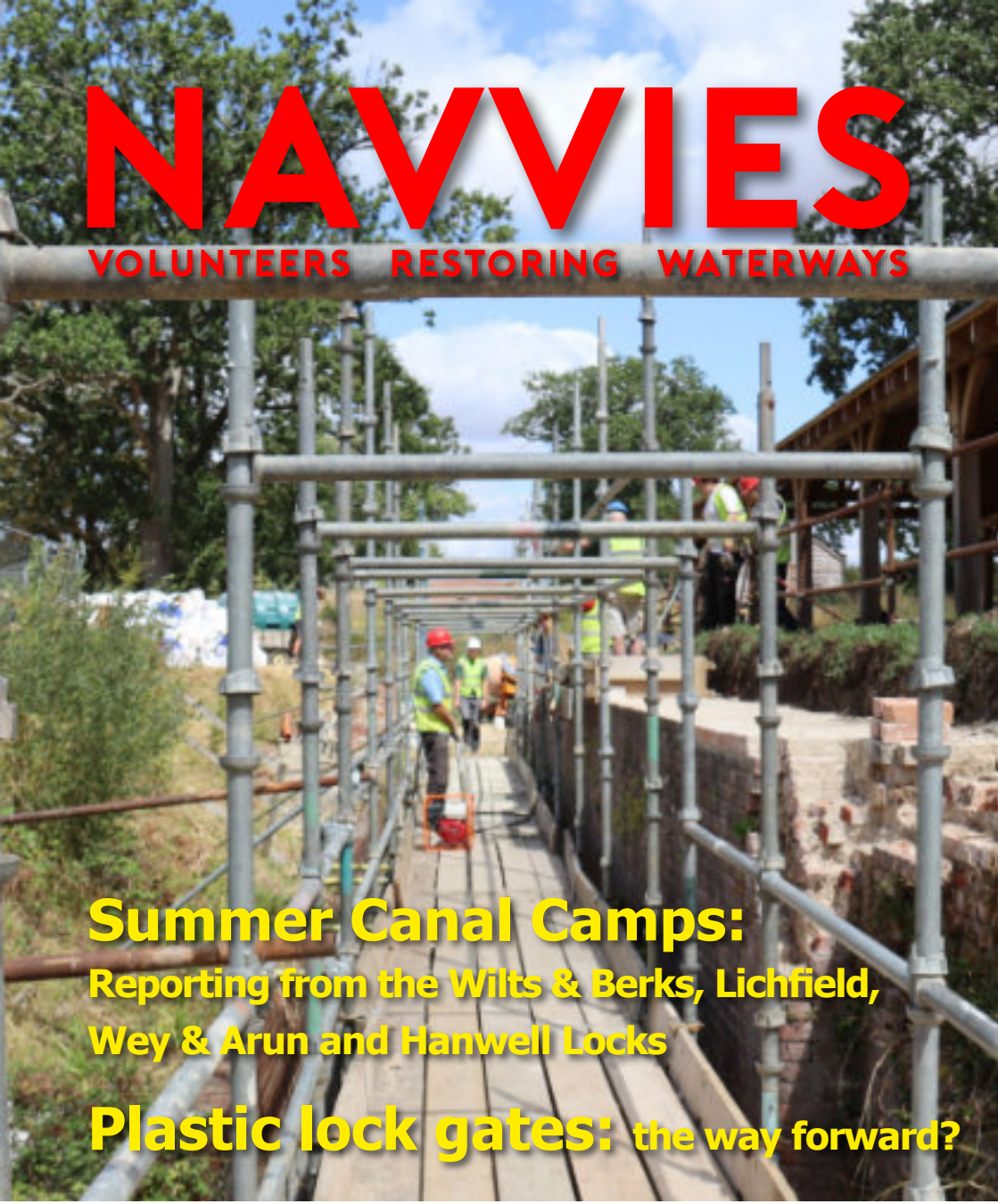
NAVVIES

VOLUNTEERS RESTORING WATERWAYS



Summer Canal Camps:

Reporting from the Wilts & Berks, Lichfield, Wey & Arun and Hanwell Locks

Plastic lock gates: the way forward?

WATERWAY RECOVERY GROUP

ISSUE 338
AUGUST – SEPTEMBER
2026

INTRO Summer Camps





Pictures taken on this summer's Canal Camps on the Wey & Arun Canal (above, by Bill Nicholson) and on the Hanwell Locks side-ponds (Martin Ludgate). See reports in this issue

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For latest news on our activities visit our website wrg.org.uk
See Facebook group: WRG **Follow us on X @wrg_navvies**

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

Production

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Contributions welcome, by email or post, to the address above. If sending a lot of large picture files, please contact the editor first. **Press date** for issue 339: 15 September.

Subscriptions: A year's subscription (6 issues) is a minimum of £5.00 (please add a donation if you can) to **WRG, Hardy House, Northbridge Road, Berkhamsted HP4 1EF.** Cheques must be made out to **The Inland Waterways Association** (although the proceeds will be put to WRG / *Navvies* use).

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

Navvies is published by Waterway Recovery Group and is available to all interested in promoting or supporting the restoration and conservation of inland waterways by voluntary effort in Great Britain. Articles may be reproduced in allied magazines provided that the source is acknowledged.

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Waterway Recovery Group is part of The Inland Waterways Association, (registered office: Hardy House, Northbridge Road, Berkhamsted HP4 1EF), a non-profit distributing company limited by guarantee, registered in England no 612245, and registered as a charity no 212342. VAT registration no 342 0715 89.

Directors of WRG: Rick Barnes, George Eycott, John Hawkins, Dave Hearnden, Nigel Lee, Mike Palmer, George Rogers, Jonathan Smith, Harry Watts, Mike Wills.

ISSN: 0953-6655

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Cover picture: Pewsham Bottom Lock during the Wilts & Berks Canal Camp, with concrete coping 'stones' being cast along the top of the offside chamber wall. Picture by Martin Ludgate
Back cover (top): 'Before' and 'after' pictures on the Lichfield Canal, showing the approach to the site for the new Darnford Lane bridge at the start and end of the Canal Camps (Colin Hobbs)
Back cover (bottom) 'Before' and 'after' pictures of the demolition and excavation for the foundation trench for the offside lower wing wall at Pewsham Bottom Lock at the start and end of the KESCRG-led Canal Camp (Stephen Davis)

WELCOME from the editor

Martin welcomes new readers, some initiatives that might just help with the waterways' funding issues, and the first rain for months…

Welcome…

…to another issue of *Navvies*, the magazine that takes its name from the original navvies who travelled the country 250 years ago, working on building canals wherever they were needed. And which caters for today's 21st century volunteer navvies who tour the country, working on whichever canal restoration projects can benefit from our help.

And in particular, a welcome to those of you who are new volunteers, perhaps who have signed up for a Canal Camp as part of their participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. You'll see in this issue that there are reports from no fewer than seven week-long Camps on four different projects, all of which have made a great deal of progress thanks to your (and everyone else's) support. And as I (rather belatedly) write this column, work is in progress on the fifth and final site in this summer's programme, the Cotswold Canals, with some camp reports expected (please!) from the three weeks' work on that project in the next issue.

It's all going very well. But elsewhere on the canal system, unfortunately things aren't looking quite so rosy. In fact, if anything, things are looking rather brown. I'm talking, of course, about the weather – the second very dry year in a row has once again resulted in significant numbers of temporary closures of canals around the country as their reservoirs and other water sources ran dry.

So much so that in early August the Canal & River Trust (CRT, the authority responsible for maintaining most of the canal network and a fair proportion of the rivers) announced that it was looking at concentrating on keeping a set of 'key routes' open. "We are changing our planned maintenance to give priority to engineering work that addresses movement constraints on key routes where there are higher levels of boats and boating businesses, as well as water transfer obligations. These are difficult calls to make as it means other work will inevitably get delayed."

I have to say that this set a few alarm bells ringing for me: were we heading back for the bad old days when the (then) British Waterways system categorised waterways into 'commercial' (the few large-scale freight carriers); 'cruising' (most of the smaller canals, to be maintained for leisure boating) and 'remainder' – the rest, to be dealt with as cheaply as possible? CRT hasn't made any secret of its view that new current public funding package (which runs 2027-37 and sees the annual grant fall every year – and no indication that there will be any money at all post-2037) is inadequate. And that if more money can't be found it will ultimately be impossible to keep running the entire network, with canals likely to close down.

In response to my query, CRT responded that for the present this was solely an exercise in dealing with the current water emergency (although CRT will look to learn lessons for future droughts): "We're looking at routes where there is more potential of keeping a waterway open, based on where there is water and whether water can be got into that waterway - and targeting work to those areas."

Which is something of a relief for now. But in the longer term and on the wider subject of coping with reducing funding, CRT said it would form part of the organisation's 10-year strategy work and discussions. So no, the threat hasn't gone away.

But continuing on a brighter note… (inasmuch as 'we probably aren't going to close down any canals just yet' is really much brighter), there have been just a few things in the news recently to suggest that there's a chance that some ways could be found to cut the costs of maintenance and/or increase the funding for the canals…

(1) On this page you'll see the response to my question last time about use of cheaper or longer-lasting modern materials – and I saw them 'in the flesh' at a recent event on the Chesterfield (see page 31). Nobody knows for sure how long the 'plastic' (actually fibre-reinforced polymer or FRP) lock gates will last, but there was a suggestion that they might not need

replacing in the lifetime of anyone present (including one 3-year-old child). Are there enough other cash-saving ideas like this to make a difference?

(2) A study by Manchester University has published its results which confirm that simply having canals running through urban areas contributes significantly to keeping the temperature more moderate, particularly in heatwaves. It received widespread press coverage. Could it one day justify some funding?

(3) A call by our friends in the Buckingham Canal Society for Anglian Water to formally integrate canal restoration into the regional Water Resources Management Plan 2029, arguing that "historic waterways are re-emerging as nationally significant climate resilience infrastructure." BCS says restoration of the Buckingham Canal would provide a water transfer corridor moving water to where it's needed, as well as providing a buffer for flood water after extreme rainfall. Would it provide enough benefits to justify the water company paying for restoring and maintaining the canal for navigation?

I'm not suggesting any of these will replace £50m a year of public money. But between them – plus there will need to be a fair few more good ideas – it's just possible that things might not be quite as gloomy. Speaking of which…

On a brighter or duller note, depending on how you look at it, it's currently chucking down rain outside!

See you on a working party somewhere!

Martin Ludgate

LETTERS to the editor

There has been a good response to the editor's questions about use of 'plastic' lock gates and other new materials on restoration projects. More contributions to the debate are welcome

Interesting that the new materials question has again arisen.

When the Huddersfield Canal restoration began around 1974, we realised that the 74 locks would each require three gates i.e. over 220 sets. Not a small order.

We explored amongst other things glass reinforced concrete and various plastics. with timber attached to make a good seal. The fundamental issue is how resilient they would be if someone crashed into them. Or what would happen if the masonry could adapt to minor settlement etc.? How much flexibility would there be? Timber often just bounces back after a collision and says "sorry". A craftsman can often quickly set in a new piece of timber to create a temporary repair.

The other issue is whether the locks are sufficiently identical/similar to allow a mould to be an option.

I'll watch the debate with interest.

Bob Dewey

Interesting item about the reinforced plastic lock gates; as you say the Dutch know a thing or two about canals...

Considering that good quality large timber is somewhat rare these days (and shockingly expensive) this seems like a really good idea. No problem with rot either.

I know non-traditional change is a problem for some, but imagine if Telford had been put off from using cast iron for aqueducts by the "traditionalist" lobby?

Regards

Andrew Harris, Whitby, Ontario

I've just read, cover to cover, your latest offering and how uplifting and spirited a read it is. I respectfully tip my sun hat to all those that toil on our behalf. Great work.

With regard to what materials should be used in recovery work, my take is straightforward. Exactly the same as those pioneers of two centuries ago would have used - if they were working today and subject to the same budgetary constraints. Cost and durability should always be considerations.

Thanks again

Michael Lott

CHAIRMAN'S Comment

Mike Palmer reflects on a successful summer of Great Work, Great Events, Great Laughter - and great plastic watering cans...

Chairman's Comment

This edition of *Navvies* certainly maintains the tradition that the first edition after the summer is full of reports of **G**reat **W**ork, **G**reat **E**vents and **G**reat **L**aughter.

There is just one summer location still to report in and, to be fair, that's because the three weeks of Canal Camps we are running at John Robinson Lock on the Cotswold Canals have yet to finish (the last week has just started as I'm typing this). However, I was lucky enough to run* week 1 of these Camps and I can certainly confirm that that site too was full of GW/GE/GL.

However, while you will have to wait for the reports detailing everything that happened in those three weeks, I'll give you the highlights from my perspective:

- Excellent working partnership (good communication and cooperation) with the on-site contractors (COSLIN – wonderful Mark and Shaun),
- A busy, vibrant site – quite a few volunteer teams working on different parts of the "Missing Mile" project,
- Good support from Cotswold Canals Trust – not just in terms of supplies and similar (thanks Jon and Stuart) but also access to the engineering team meaning issues could be dealt with and agreed to everyone's satisfaction (thanks Clive).



Mike Palmer

Progress on John Robinson Lock's nearside wing wall during the first Camp...

As I say, those are the highlights from my perspective. Yes, there are other (important) issues to consider in making sure the Camps run well and are enjoyable BUT, speaking as a leader, these three points are the sort of thing that make the leaders' life much easier, meaning that we can take more time and effort to address those other issues.

Back to the subject of **all** our Canal Camps – as mentioned in the last edition of *Navvies* we trialled an Online Health and Safety Reporting Tool this summer and it was certainly embraced by many of you. It clearly needs a bit of refining to make it more usable, but we will be keeping it on. However, as stated in the last edition: the paperwork version of our Near Miss / Incident reporting will still be available should you not have a phone or network coverage.

As a final point I'd like to return to John Robinson Lock. Obviously, no matter what your experience, you should always approach a site/day/task with the understanding that you may learn something. I would like to suggest that perhaps the biggest lesson for many of us was just how useful a simple plastic watering can is for mixing and bricklaying teams. Definitely a case of the Right Tool for the Right Job. I wouldn't be surprised if they get added to the Camps kit.

Mike Palmer

** Alongside Bex and Jude of course. Oh and some brilliant volunteers.*



Stephen Rice

…and the offside wall nearing completion on the second Camp. Reports next time (please!)

CAMP REPORT Wilts & Berks Canal

Our friends in the KESCRG mobile group lead a week at Pewsham casting lock coping 'stones', digging big holes, and lots more...

Wilts & Berks Canal Camp, Pewsham Locks Led by the KESCRG mobile group

Nineteen volunteers turned up at Christian Malford village hall near Chippenham on Saturday 1st August looking forward to a week's canal work on Pewsham locks on the Wilts & Berks canal. Four of the volunteers were new and didn't know quite what to expect; everyone else was confident that with Eli cooking at least they would be well fed! The usual kit sorting, organising and safety talk was followed by excellent Spanish chicken for dinner (setting the tone for the week) and a trip to the pub a few doors down (also a theme for the week for some).

The work for the camp had evolved over the previous few months: the original plan had been to start rebuilding the towpath side lock wall of the bottom lock of the flight of three locks, but the final plans for this work had not been developed enough for us to start. Not to be held back, the local society handed us a relatively long list of other, fully planned, tasks that needed to be done around site and with a highly experienced team of volunteers we aimed to complete a lot of them.

Pewsham locks are in a very idyllic position, set in the rolling fields south-east of Chippenham, and have had quite a few WRG weekends and camps over the years but not for quite a while. The local society the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust are very active and have recently completed the restoration of a drydock (parallel with the lower lock of the flight), a very nice brick bridge over the tail of the top lock, and are working on completing the carpenter's workshop to be used as an education centre. The dry dock made an excellent tea break area supplying plenty of shade, places to sit along the low walls and seemed to catch any breeze that was available.

Sunday: first day on site and a slightly slow start as tools were counted and people got used to where everything was. Teams split up to start the various jobs, Natalie headed off to carry on pointing-up the top lock wing walls, William started the excavation for the carpenter's workshop water tanks, Mick led a team to start assembling shuttering for concrete coping 'stones' on bottom lock, John Hawkins and Dan started the repair work on a retaining wall below top lock and Stephen and Nigel started excavating the foundations for the off-side lower wing wall of bottom lock. Work cracked on steadily, two coping stones were cast in the afternoon and William had made a start on the first tank hole after a morning removing the unused pipe and conduit that crossed where he needed to dig. Everyone headed home via Sutton Benger rugby club showers for dinner (lasagne and lemon posset for dessert with extra cake to celebrate Mick's birthday) before a group went on an after dinner walk along the restored canal section that leads from almost Dauntsey to Foxham.



Ed Walker

Laying the initial 'blinding' concrete of the wing wall

Monday: A very hot day but the teams carried on with a will. James (one of our Duke of Edinburgh's Award volunteers) had developed very well as a dumper driver under the expert tutelage of Mk2 and carried on with the task, helping Stephen and Nigel with the wall foundation excavation. William carried on creating a large, rectangular crater in the Wiltshire countryside, ably assisted by Jon Christmas. John Hawkins and Dan, having completed the breaking out work on the wall the previous day, rebuilt the wall. Natalie and team carried on pointing while Mick, ably assisted by the dream floating team of Steve P, Bob and George (another DofE) struck shuttering, cleaned up the concrete copers, reset shuttering and cast two more copers. Dinner was Roast Pork followed by a trip to the cinema to avail ourselves of the air con.

Tuesday: The regular local work party day and a number of extra people arrived to see what we had been up to. Discussions were had to further define what could be done on the wing wall rebuild job as Nigel had pretty much completed the excavation – it was decided that we could carry on the task and pour the initial concrete 'blinding' layer which would allow the locals to start the wall rebuild after we had left. The coping gang were now getting so good at striking shuttering and resetting that we got into a routine of the day's copers would be poured between tea break and lunch which gave the afternoon to pour a stage of the blinding (with concerns over the clay drying out it was decided to only dig to final depth what we could reliably cover with blinding in a day). With the wall repair complete John Hawkins moved on to complete a small patch repair of the lock wall to allow the coping stone run to be completed and Natalie, ably assisted by Alan and Jon Christmas, finished off the pointing on the lower wing walls of top lock. As we had to be out of the hall this evening, dinner was picnic style on the benches in Sutton Benger before resetting the hall. Whereupon James and Stan decided they hadn't done enough exercise that day and headed off to a gym in Chippenham – the rest of us felt that this was way to much hard work and headed for a pint or two at the Rising Sun a few doors down instead.

Wednesday: down to three jobs left now, Alan taught Geoff dumper driving with William on excavator – by this time William was demonstrating a fine ability to dig a round hole with a square excavator bucket, some expert trimming with a spade by Geoff and William meant that this hole was ready for its concrete the next day. Further down the site, the usual schedule of two coping stones in the morning and blinding concrete

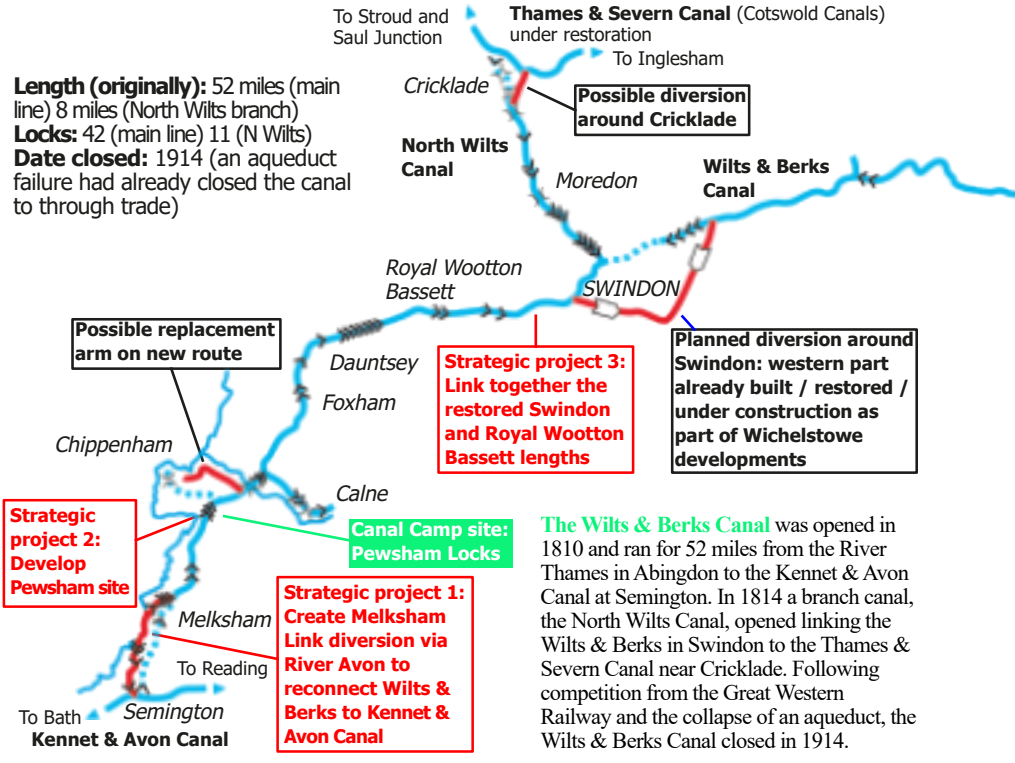


Martin Ludgate

Levelling the top of the concrete coping 'stones'

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 Wilts & Berks Canal was opened in 1810 and ran for 52 miles from the River Thames in Abingdon to the Kennet & Avon Canal at Semington. In 1814 a branch canal, the North Wilts Canal, opened linking the Wilts & Berks in Swindon to the Thames & Severn Canal near Cricklade. Following competition from the Great Western Railway and the collapse of an aqueduct, the Wilts & Berks Canal closed in 1914.

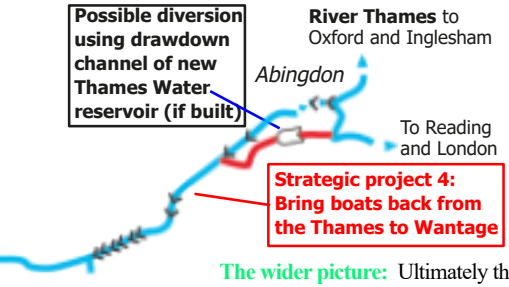
in the afternoon continued. Each blinding pour consisted of 2-4 dumper loads of concrete, each of which was made up of 3 mixes made in a large cement mixer – I don't think I've ever been on a camp that has made this much hand mix concrete in a week before! We had to be out of the hall again for a yoga class so the annual inter-van pub skittles competition was held at the Wellesley Arms pub in Sutton Benger, after six rounds BOB narrowly beat EHP and friends.

Thursday: A Day of many concrete pours; while the shuttering gang were stripping off the previous day's copers, a crack mixing team of George, James and Stan with the assistance of Fiona was assembled to pour the base slab for the first tank. The necessary 0.7m3 was quickly mixed and barrowed to the excavator where Ed placed it in the hole for William to float it off to depth.

With this task complete the next pair of copers were cast before everyone concentrated on that day's blinding pour.

Friday: last day on site; William completed the second hole for the other tank (this one required a rectangular hole so was a bit faster), another two copers were cast by Mick's crack team and Stephen and Nigel (aided by John Hawkins and Stan) excavated the penultimate blinding section – this was duly cast in the afternoon, leaving a final section for the locals to dig out and pour.

Ian Williamson arrived for a day visit and was promptly handed a shovel. We also managed to give each of our new volunteers a 20 minute demo session in an excavator while tools were gathered, cleaned and packed. Back at the accom, Eli had created an amazing curry for dinner and there were the usual awards.



The Canal Camp project: Various restoration joba on Pewsham Locks and associated structures.

Why? This flight of locks appears t have been an important site on the canal historically, with a dry dock, a saw-pit, a lock house and other structures. The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust is restoring / recreating it all as a heritage site, canal centre and community resource, with plans for a trip-boat in the future.

The wider picture: Ultimately the Trust aims to restore the entire historic route - a number of lengths have been restored either by volunteers or by housing developers as part of the Wichelstowe residential expansion on the south side of Swindon. For the medium to long term, WBCT has agreed on a 25 year plan to focus its efforts on four projects where its resources can be used to best effect. Melksham is one of these four; the others are:

Melksham Link: Reconnecting the Wilts & Berks canal to the Kennet & Avon canal at Semington and bringing the canal to Melksham town centre via a new route using the River Avon

Connecting Royal Wootton Bassett to Swindon: With sections of the canal in water in both towns, it should be a relatively easy task to connect the two towns… except that the M4 motorway is in the way!

Bringing Boats Back to Wantage: Reconnecting the Wilts & Berks canal to the River Thames, getting under the A34 main road and Great Western railway line, and bringing the canal back to Wantage and Grove. An important part of this is the proposed Thames Water reservoir known as SESRO (South East Strategic Reservoir Option) being planned near Abingdon.

All in all, a very good camp – loads done; 12 concrete coping stones cast (requiring in total about 8 tonnes of concrete), 10m of wing wall excavated out and blinded, pointing completed, one tank hole ready for its tank and the other just needing a concrete base. The local society were very pleased with what we had done, particularly how much further on a project can be pushed by a week's work of a group of experienced volunteers. Many thanks to Nigel, William, Mick, John Hawkins and Natalie for leading teams on various tasks over the week and particular thanks to Eli for the excellent food all week.

Ed Walker
Stephen Davis


Martin Ludgate

Casting the coping stones

CAMP REPORT Wey & Arun Canal

Reporting from the deep south, where two weeks were spent building a new section of channel to link together two recent restoration projects

Wey & Arun Canal Rooks Hill Project NWPG Camp 2026-08, 11-18 July

This time last year we reported on two very successful and productive WRG summer Camps led respectively by the NWPG and KESCRG independent mobile working party groups at Rooks Hill Farm on the Wey & Arun Canal. In this edition, one year on, are reports on two further camps on the same site where further great progress has been made.

But first, a reminder about what that project is all about.

The Rooks Hill Project: Rooks Hill is towards the northern end of the canal on a section to the south of Bramley village. The area of work forms a southern extension to a 900 metre length at Birtley restored between 2019 and 2023. This includes two new lifting bridges, one of which was built with the support of WRG camps. Having established an attractive, in water, section of canal together with a very popular and well used circular footpath, the Trust has the opportunity to extend it south.

This next length of new waterway has been divided into three phases. Phase 1 includes a new brick-clad arched bridge, a 150m length of new canal and banks and portals for a culvert passing under the canal. Work on this phase began last year and should be substantially complete by the end of September this year.

Phase 2 is the construction of 300m of new canal adjacent to the line of former canal which was infilled and is now a farm track. At its northern end the new canal will join with the existing Birtley section. This is where this year's camps were focussed.

Phase 3 will comprise a further 150m of restored canal and a new Fanesbridge Lock on the southern section of the project. Work may start in 2027 but see below.

Late last year the WRG Board agreed that it could support two 2026 camps on the project. This was great news for the Trust. The first of two consecutive weeks would be led by NWPG with the second by WRG, led by Harry and Hild Watts. This report covers the NWPG week.

The first week's Canal Camp: Looking back at the camp, three words come to mind: Heat, football and staples.

Heat: it was forecast to be hot and it was. Fortunately it managed to just stay below 30 degrees for most of the week. Gazebos were in abundance both on site and at the accommodation – six in total. Fans came a close second. These are perhaps both essential items when running camps -



Pictures by Hild Watts

Gabion canal bank construction

especially in July anywhere south of Birmingham. Should they be provided in the WRG kits to reflect the changing climate? Nevertheless, we managed to keep cool enough to keep the work going and to chill out in the evenings at the hall. By the way, the WRG ice water barrel is brilliant!

Football: our camp included the quarter and semi-finals of the World Cup and so it was inevitable that 50% of the camp would want to watch it. Fortunately, those who didn't were either Scottish or were not likely to support any other social activity that we might have arranged (Jigsaws preferred).

Linking the WRG projector to a laptop and using the hall's wi-fi and the back room, everyone was happy – at least until the end of the semi-final.

Staples: There is always one thing that becomes a persistent problem on a camp. This year it was staples – yes those things that hold bits of paper together. We needed these to attach felt to the waterproof butyl liner that had to go behind the gabion baskets forming the new canal bank. Despite our best efforts and trips to Screwfix, we never managed to get the right size to fit the stapler provided. In the end we gave up and

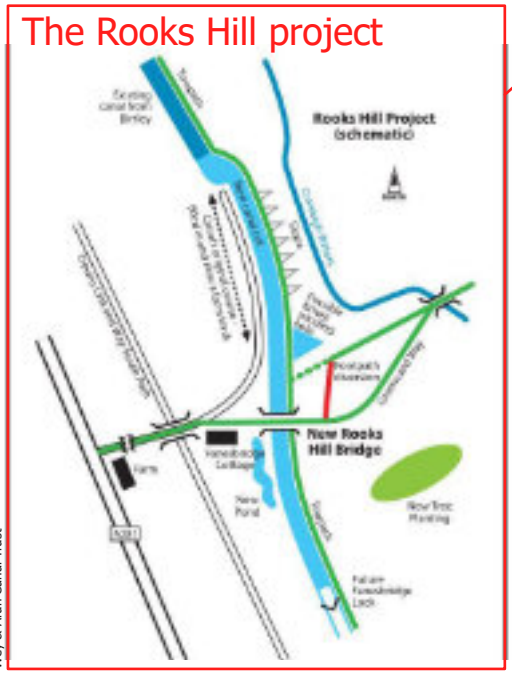
FACT FILE Wey & Arun Canal

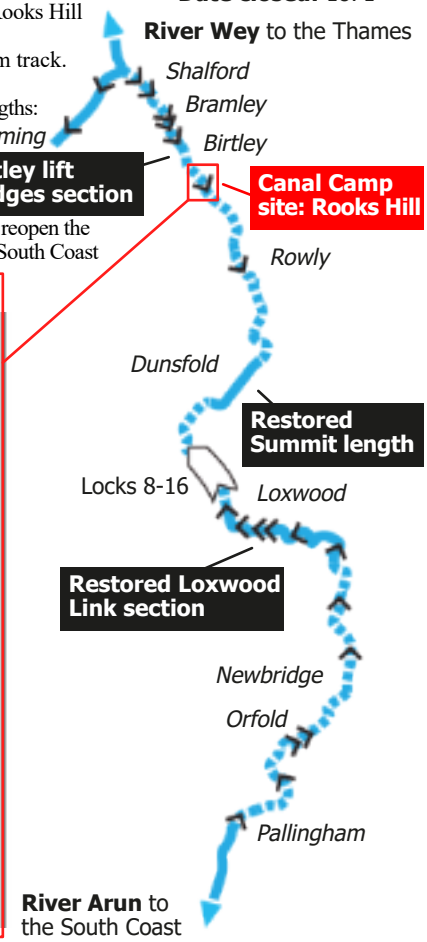
Length: 23 miles
Locks: originally 26
Date closed: 1871

The Canal Camp project: Creating a canal channel at Rooks Hill

Why? To bypass the original canal, buried under a farm track.

The wider picture: This section connects two restored lengths: the Birtley Bridges section and Rooks Hill Bridge. These in turn are part of the Wey & Arun Canal Trust's plan to expand progress northwards from previously restored Summit and Loxwood lengths. Eventually the aim is to link all these sections together and reopen the route from the Thames and London to the River Arun and South Coast





Wey & Arun Canal Trust

left it to Camp 2 to sort out which they did without any trouble or fuss. They bought two new staplers. At least it wasn't the digger.

To the work. The main work area was to progress the so called soft bank of the new canal in phase 2. Not that 'soft' really as the whole process involved:

- Excavating a 2.5m wide level trench that forms the base of the wall
- drilling holes with an auger attached to a 5 tonne digger, inserting plasticwood piles to the correct position & level, concreting them in and then doing a similar back row of shorter piles but without the concrete bit
- Assembling, levelling and filling gabion baskets placed between the front and back piles
- Placing a felt protected butyl liner behind the gabion baskets
- Tying it all together with stainless steel threaded bars
- Laying a cable duct and inspection chambers
- Attaching a back rail and geogrid – the latter to form the base of the new towpath
- Placing and tying a line of coir rolls along the front edge on top of the gabions.

Our camp tackled all but the last three of these stages, with three teams of 2 – 3 people working full time for the 6 working days of the camp. The work demanded skills in digger driving, the use of laser levels and many other tasks and a production line was soon established with some healthy competition between the teams.

As well as starting on phase 2, phase 1 needed more work. For our week this involved completing the brickwork and copings on the east culvert portal started on last years camps. Messrs Brotherston and Cardy had this dealt with by Wednesday lunch and transferred to brick laying on the south parapet of the bridge. This latter task was in support of Graham and Mike F who got to within one course of completing the northern parapet. (which has since been completed and is ready for the copings).

I shouldn't moan about the hot weather as if it had been wet, the site and the work would have been unworkable.

As well as the brickwork on phase 1 we installed a further 37 plastic wood piles, numerous gabions and tie bars and set the job up for the second week who were to make even greater progress on the bank.

Thanks to Adrian, Mike O'D and Dave (pile placing), Ian and Pete Taylor (gabions), Pete Turville and Duncan (Tie rods), Steve and Georgia (support and logistics), Mike F, Graham, Phil and Rob (bricklaying) and of course Sue for providing us with splendid meals.

I mentioned Phase 3 earlier. Whether the Trust goes ahead will depend on a number of factors – progress on phase 2, availability of grant money through the Community Infrastructure levy, and how it fits in with the Trust's restoration priorities. If we do proceed then expect a bid for camps in 2027 to support the building of the lock!

Bill Nicholson

Camp 2026-08 led by the NWPG group was immediately followed by Cammp 2026-10, led by WRG leaders Harry and Hild Watts. So over to Hild to continue the story…



Rob puts the final courses of bricks on Rooks Hill Bridge

Wey & Arun Canal Rooks Hill Project Camp 2026-10, 18-25 July

Work on the Wey & Arun Canal between the new bridge and the existing canal (with actual water in) has now begun in earnest and we were there for week two of this summer's camps. Week one had made a grand start [see above] and left us with a clear route to follow, so off we went!

The leadership team on the camp was Harry Watts (leader), Anne Lilliman (cook) and undersigned (assistant leader) – in a slightly late change to plan due to some last-minute changes to the Hanwell camp. We had no fewer than six lovely "DoE'ers" - young volunteers taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (Cameron, Darcy, Elvis, James, Lola and Meggie) on our camp plus another two newbies, so lots of fresh faces who will hopefully come back in the future.

Saturday started with the usual amount of running around and setting things up, before heading off to site for a little look-around to prepare people for the work ahead. We also met up with the volunteer who had inexplicably elected to stay with his brother who lives locally (which of course meant missing out on Anne's lovely meals – but also meant an actual bed – you win some, you lose some…). Evening rounded off with chilli for dinner before a delegation ran off to watch the footie.

Sunday morning saw us all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed on site and most of us got stuck into what quickly was to become the theme of the week – filling gabions, giant wire cages which are filled with stone to form the canal bank.

It rapidly became clear to everybody that the Rook's Hill site comes in two flavours – dust or quagmire. Due to the hot weather and lack of rain, we got lashings of the former which - unpleasant as it might be - was still much preferable to the latter.

The site settled into a routine with the ground being levelled to very precise measurements, Adrian drilling holes after careful instructions from Pete, posts being inserted into the holes, postcrete and concrete being applied after more careful measurements. Then the ground was levelled, gabions erected and finally filled with stones – apparently known as 'bold' locally. If anyone knows why it's called bold, let us know! We just know we filled a lot of gabions with the things. Midway through the afternoon a somewhat distraught Adrian thought there was something really wrong with the digger as it would not auger (we will leave out the obvious puns on how well this augured). Alternatively, a switch MAY have been knocked out of position…

As we had six DoE'ers and six days on site a cunning plan was quickly hatched on Saturday and one of them assisted Anne in the kitchen each day which worked really well and provided many lovely cakes and puddings during the week. In amongst the many gorgeous meals, the stand-out mention has to go to Meggie for the Biscoffi ice-cream she made! Quote of the day from



The Rooks Hill site comes in two flavours: dust or quagmire. This summer it was the former…

Beth to Adrian – 'Yes, but I can run faster than you!' – what prompted this remains unclear. A delegation once again sallied forth to the pub to watch the World Cup final – the general consensus was that the England v. France match the previous day was considerably more entertaining.

On Monday the work on the gabions had progressed far enough to start putting in the back-strips and fasten the geogrid. Gabions continued to be filled at such a fast rate we ran out of bold by lunchtime and were just contemplating scrabbling around in the dirt like a particularly dishevelled version of Oliver Twist when the lovely delivery man turned up at the 11th hour with a selection of bold, aggregate, postcrete and concrete. Posts continued being installed very carefully (auger wasn't broken after all as it turned out – who knew there was an extra switch in the cab! Well, Adrian does - NOW) – work proceeding at rate of knots until running headlong into a too-high-level-between-posts issue. Heads were being scratched and some remedial careful scraping with a digger was decided would likely be on the cards for Tuesday morning. There had been lots of plans for games in the evening, but in the end we were all too tired and it was suddenly too late for games!



It doesn't augur well… until you find the secret switch

Tuesday morning and the too-high-level was dealt with by dual efforts from Adrian with a digger and multiple people (not including Adrian) with mattocks and shovels. Back-strips and geogrid were being put in so fast it caught everybody else up so was put



Lola installs geogrids

on the back burner for a few days. The day's biggest problem – generators. The Wey & Arun one just stopped and wouldn't start up again – the WRG one started but then put-put-putted out. After much head-scratching and poking about, a blockage was found and dislodged in the outlet pipe from the fuel tank of the WRG generator – after our glorious leader had first tried clearing the pipe by blowing into it, a slightly less foul-tasting method involving some thin metal strips being wiggled about met with more success. Leader smelt somewhat of diesel afterwards, but at least the process of concreting in the posts could continue. The Wey & Arun generator refused to cooperate again and the locals promised it would be taken away for corrective action and a stern talking-to.

As the gabions continued being filled at pace, it was time to start thinking about what to do with the backfill. Harry thought he would test out a Jumping Jack to see if the backfill could be tamped down with it – as the jack went down, Harry went up and vice versa. Control was limited and the decision was made that perhaps this wasn't the right tool for the job right next to carefully installed gabions, so the tamping-in had to be done by more manual means – a combination of feet-stomping and sledgehammer whacking. In the evening, the assistant tried leading people astray with card games and suddenly it was well past bedtime!

On Wednesday a group of locals from the Wey & Arun Canal Trust were on site, initially for a concrete pour and then continued a push on bricklaying the parapet on the bridge. We did lots more drilling of holes and lots of people got some taster-sessions on the digger, under the watchful eyes of either Adrian or Harry. Felt like quite a luxury having not only one, but two digger-instructors on the camp! William had a go at some post-hole-augering and decided it wasn't as easy as it looked (and it didn't look particularly easy in the first place). As we were drilling the holes we realised that the clay that was being drilled up was actually quite wet and malleable so we decided to use this as the underlay for the backfill behind the gabions. Tamping-in with feet and sledgehammer was hard work, but worked quite well. This had to be done pretty much immediately after digging up the clay as it hardens quite quickly and turns into something more akin to stone. We left





Culprit No 1 and (below) Culprit No 2

site early for a quick scoot through the showers and then a mass-outing to Wonersh for skittles. Darcy had kept his skittles-prowess under a bushel and proceeded to trounce the rest of us by some margin!

By Thursday morning it was clear the vans were in need of refuelling, which involved a trip via Dunsfold aerodrome first thing. The W&A have their compound here and some people got very excited by all the things they had on site! When we got to site there were another W&A-delegation working on the bridge and they very kindly gave Darcy and Julie a chance to try some bricklaying as well. Several more people got to try their hand at driving the digger and Beth and Lola did sterling work with the saw on preparing a load of posts with decorative chamfering. When they ran out of posts to chamfer they had completed 21 of the 10 they were asked to do – above and beyond! Numpty-prize of the week awarded to the assistant for walking off site with one of the

dumper keys in her pockets… D'oh! It was a jolly fine thing that Adrian had a spare set of keys, otherwise there would have been Problems. In the evening most of the crew went for a walk along the already operational bit of the canal, some at a leisurely pace whilst learning about the history of the canal whilst others hot-footed to the pub for a restorative pint or two.

On Friday it was time for a final bit of tidying up, filling the last gabions, tidying up the site, drilling the last holes and backfilling as far as the tamping-in would let us – and as far as geogrid installation would let us. The lovely delivery-man from earlier in the week also turned up and put lots more bags of bold very delicately next to where we were working which saved us from a lot of double-handling of the bags. We all found watching it quite mesmerising and agreed that level of precision took some serious skill. In the evening most of us popped along to the pub next door to prop up the local economy.

The clearing up on Saturday went really quickly and most were away before 11am – the regular cleaners at the hall sent us a very lovely letter afterwards expressing their delight at how well we'd cleaned up and what a nice state we'd left the hall in. That's the kind of testimony we like and goes to show what a reputation we are building wherever a WRG camp lands. Various members of the local W&A group came to visit during the week and were also very happy and impressed with the work and felt the two weeks WRG had been there has laid an excellent foundation for them to continue from.

Finally – as always, the food throughout the week was excellent and Anne ran a tight ship in the kitchen. The quote of the week came from Darcy – 'Canal camps are worth it for the food alone!' – and from the quality of the work and enthusiasm from all the campers, newbies and old hands alike, all I can say is I hope you will all want to come back on future camps!

Hild Watts
Assistant leader and chief-forgetter-of-keys



Darcy lays bricks on the bridge



Progress at the end of the last day

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 'Navvy 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	Navvy only on front	WRG logo front / navvy 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	Navvy back print only £11.50	Small WRG front Navvy back £14.50	



Left: the 'navvyman' logo

Right: the WRG logo (modelled by the editor)



NAVVIES DIARY

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

Sep 12-13	**KESCRG**	Wilts & Berks Canal: Scrub clearance & profiling 80m above Dauntsey Lock
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 Sat	**WRG**	WRG Autumn Leaders Day: Lowsonford Village Hall. See page 37
Sep 26-27	**wrgBITM**	Maidenhead Waterways: Bray Cut
Oct 3-4	**KESCRG**	To be arranged
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 17 Sat	**WRG**	One-day first aid course at Hinton Parva. See page 37
Oct 18 Sun	**WRG**	One-day first aid course at Hinton Parva. See page 37
Oct 19 Mon	**WRG**	One-day first aid course at Hinton Parva. See page 37
Oct 24-31	**wrg Forestry Team**	Wilts & Berks Canal: East Vale & Abingdon branch. Return to Grove Locks. Accom at Kemp
Nov 7-8	**WRG**	Possible WRG Reunion: Date and venue TBA
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 N
Dec 12-13	**KESCRG**	Joint Christmas dig with WRG Forestry and London WRG on the Chelmer & Blackwat
Dec 11-13	**wrg Forestry Team**	Joint Christmas dig with London WRG and KESCRG on the Chelmer & Blackwater Na
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 *Navvies*
Jan 22-24	**wrg Forestry Team**	To be arranged

WRG and mobile groups

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

	Ed Walker	07887-568029	**ed@edwalker.org.uk**
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	**london@wrg.org.uk**
	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	**samklancs@yahoo.com**
	Mike Palmer	01494 783453	**enquiries@wrg.org.uk**
	Nigel Lee	07802-854694	**nigel.lee@wrg.org.uk**
	Mike Palmer	01494 783453	**enquiries@wrg.org.uk**
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	**dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk**
	Ed Walker	07887-568029	**ed@edwalker.org.uk**
	Tim Lewis	07802-518094	**london@wrg.org.uk**
	Sam Kennion	07843-394161	**samklancs@yahoo.com**
	Dave Wedd	07816-175454	**dave.wedd@wrgbitm.org.uk**
	George Eycott		**bungle@wrg.org.uk**
	George Eycott		**bungle@wrg.org.uk**
	George Eycott		**bungle@wrg.org.uk**
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**
avigation	**Tim Lewis**	07802-518094	**london@wrg.org.uk**
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**
	Nigel Lee	07802-854694	**nigel.lee@wrg.org.uk**

CAMP REPORT Lichfield Canal

An epic fortnight of setting up reinforcing, building Stepoc walls and concreting leaves the Lichfield Canal with a new section of channel

Lichfield Canal Camps 2026 "Concrete, Stepoc and Strawberries"

A fortnight of rebar, concrete deadlines, canalside adventures, rockets, birthday cake and around 2,000 volunteer hours.

Week One: giving Week Two a footing

The first Lichfield camp arrived at Darnford Moors on the edge of Lichfield knowing that the following week depended on us leaving behind a sound reinforced concrete base for the section of canal channel under construction. The job was divided into 5m by 7m bays. Road forms had to be set and levelled, liners placed, reinforcement cages assembled and starter bars fixed accurately before the concrete trucks arrived. Each bay took seven sheets of A393 mesh and about 15 cubic metres of concrete.

For several of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award volunteers it was a steep learning curve. Sunday was spent getting to grips with rebar (steel reinforcing bar) tying, site terminology and the metalwork that would eventually disappear beneath the concrete. By Monday the group was working more independently, despite the heat. That evening brought a welcome change of pace: kayaking on the canal. One volunteer described starting out at 'all odd angles' before finally getting the kayak to go roughly where intended.

Tuesday was the long one. A few volunteers went to site early and were at Greggs for breakfast at 5.00am. With bays 1

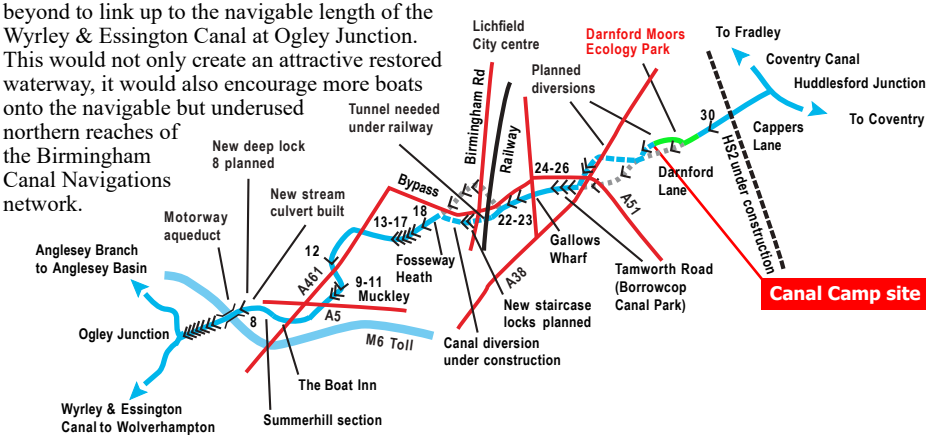
FACT FILE Lichfield Canal

Length: 7 miles **Locks:** 30
Date closed: 1954

The Canal Camp project: Building sections of reinforced concrete canal channel at Drnford Moors

Why? The canal runs in a cutting through sandy porous soil, and will need a waterproof channel and banks that will retain the cutting sides.

The wider picture: This is actually a new section of canal, excavated some years ago. It will bypass a length of original channel, running at a different level and on a different alignment. This is to make it easier to get build a new bridge (for which the concrete bridge sections are already on site) to carry the canal under Darnford Lane. It's all part of a medium-term plan to connect together various sections of new and restored canal (some already complete) to create a route running from the Coventry Canal at Huddlesford Junction to Lichfield. In the longer term the aim is to continue beyond to link up to the navigable length of the Wyrley & Essington Canal at Ogley Junction. This would not only create an attractive restored waterway, it would also encourage more boats onto the navigable but underused northern reaches of the Birmingham Canal Navigations network.



and 3 needing to be ready for Wednesday's pour, work continued into the evening. Incorrectly spaced L-bars had to be corrected and more mesh shifted into position. It was hot, tiring work, but it meant the first concreting day could go ahead.

Wednesday's concrete arrived even earlier than expected. The first bay quickly became memorable when a side bracket began to give way and concrete started escaping. Plywood, extra supports and ratchet straps came to the rescue. Lessons were learned immediately and the second pour was much better behaved. Two bays were completed that day, followed by two more on Friday: four bases and about 60 cubic metres of concrete in the week.

By Thursday the team was noticeably faster and more confident. A simple marked timber guide helped keep starter bars at the correct spacing, and two bays were prepared in a single day. Friday brought the final pours, a chance to try the excavator, a curry from Tina, paper rockets and the inevitable pub visit. The DofE volunteers summed it up well: they had worked hard, learned a lot and achieved something worthwhile.

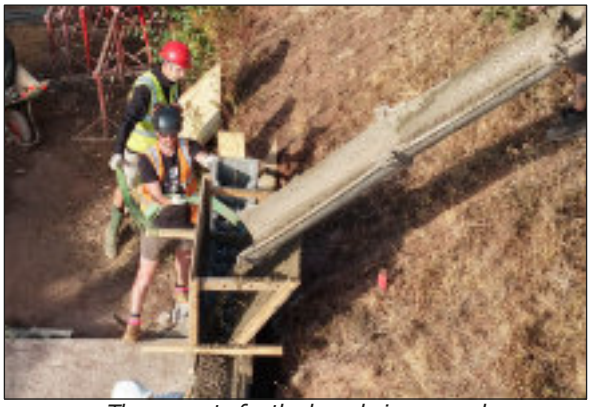
A well-earned evening paddle after a hot day on site. By the end of Week One, the difference on site was obvious. What had begun as setting out, loose reinforcement and empty bays had become four substantial reinforced foundations. Just as importantly, the volunteers had become a team: jobs that had seemed unfamiliar at the start of the week were being tackled confidently, with people checking levels, tying steel, moving mesh and helping one another without waiting to be told every step.



Week 1: reinforcement, starter bars etc ready for base pours



Rebar on the move during week 1



The concrete for the base being poured

Week Two: the walls go up A completed reinforcement bay ready for concrete. Week Two inherited the footing and immediately started going upwards. Road forms were removed, equipment sorted and the first Stepoc [*see below*] courses laid. Keeping the base swept clean mattered: every block depended on the course below being level. Mortar that was too wet had to be reworked, and plenty of blocks needed cutting to keep the lines right.

The walls grew course by course, with horizontal and vertical rebar installed through the hollow Stepoc blocks. The work demanded patience: courses had to remain straight, level and correctly tied into the reinforcement, because small errors low down would become much more obvious as the walls rose. The double towpath wall reached four courses while the single wall was already four high; later both reached seven blocks before the first concrete fill. Cracks and gaps were sealed to stop the concrete escaping when the hollow Stepoc was filled. By the end, the second wall was eight blocks high and ready for an early 7:30am concrete operation.



The Stepoc wall is filled with concrete via David's chute

When it came time to fill the Stepoc, access from the concrete wagon above the cutting presented another practical problem. David made a wooden chute to guide the concrete safely towards the wall, a simple site-made solution that became an important part of the pour. The team controlled the flow, filled the hollow blocks and kept a close eye out for leaks while working along the wall.

The quantities tell only part of the story: around 1,600 Stepoc blocks, roughly 15 tonnes of rebar and about 4,000 ties went into the work, with approximately 20 cubic metres of concrete used to fill the Stepoc walls. Combined with Week One, the camp handled around 80 cubic metres of concrete. Volunteers contributed roughly 1,000 hours each week.

There was a strong effort to make sure everyone could take part, even when heavy lifting meant jobs had to be shared. The DofE notes particularly mention Rex for regularly offering to share his tasks. That spirit mattered during the slower periods as much as during the busy concrete fills.

Of course, a canal camp needs stories that have nothing to do with cubic metres. On the canoeing trip Nigel attempted to stand on a moving board, collided with the canal wall and ended up in the water. Andy, acting as unofficial photographer, made sure

What is Stepoc?



Stepoc is a precast concrete block retaining wall system that can be laid dry. The wall is built from hollow blocks allowing reinforcing bars to be threaded through the blocks. They are then filled with concrete, turning the construction into a strong reinforced wall

the evidence survived. Indoor bowls provided another evening's entertainment, with competition apparently becoming rather intense.

As the walls climbed, the job changed character. There was less room for improvisation in the setting-out and more emphasis on keeping every course true. Blocks had to be cut, reinforcement threaded through, gaps sealed and the next lift prepared for concrete. It was repetitive at times, but each course gave the team a visible measure of progress. By concrete day the Stepoc walls were no longer a collection of individual blocks: they had become the unmistakable outline of the restored canal structure.

Another day on the wall - teamwork, levels and plenty of lifting.

Lichfield Camps in figures

- **60m³** Base concrete
- **28** A393 mesh sheets
- **4** Base bays
- **5mx7m** Each base bay
- **15 tonnes** Rebar
- **2000** Volunteer hours
- **4000** Ties
- **1080** Van miles
- **2** Vans
- **1600** Stepoc blocks
- **20m³** Stepoc fill
- **Lots** Strawberries

Sue's birthday, rockets and camp food

Day Four of Week Two was also Sue's birthday. After the concrete fill and an evening at the bowls club, everyone returned to birthday cake - a particularly welcome reward after a long day. The celebration deserves its place in the camp record alongside the engineering achievements.

The final rocket session was equally memorable. Paper rockets were launched with very mixed results: some flew impressively, some exploded, some reached the canal and one reportedly finished up on the accommodation roof. The team did its best to retrieve the resulting litter.

Food was a major part of keeping both camps going. Tina's cooking was repeatedly praised by the Week One DofE volunteers, while Week Two enjoyed fantastic two-course evening meals from Matthew. There were also lots of strawberries - enough to earn a mention in the unofficial camp statistics.

A footing for what comes next The camp leader's verdict after Week One was simple: pride in the amount and standard of work completed, despite the heat, long hours and the pressure of fixed concrete delivery slots. Lichfield and Hatherton Canal Restoration Trust were equally appreciative of the volunteers' efforts. Week Two then turned that footing into substantial reinforced walls. Across the fortnight, the visible transformation was enormous.

But the best measure of the camp was not just concrete, steel or blocks. It was two groups of volunteers learning new skills, solving problems together and making the sort of memories that involve kayaks, birthday cake, paper rockets and the occasional person falling into a canal. That's a pretty good fortnight by any WRG standard.

With thanks to all volunteers, the Lichfield and Hatherton Canal Restoration Trust, and the DofE volunteers whose notes helped tell the story.

Colin Hobbs



A well-earned evening paddle after a hot day on site

CAMP REPORT Hanwell locks

Evvo reports on a couple of Canal Camps with a difference: working on an active navigable canal, restoring a set of historic water-saving side-ponds



Camp report – Hanwell Flight: A TALE OF TWO CAMPS

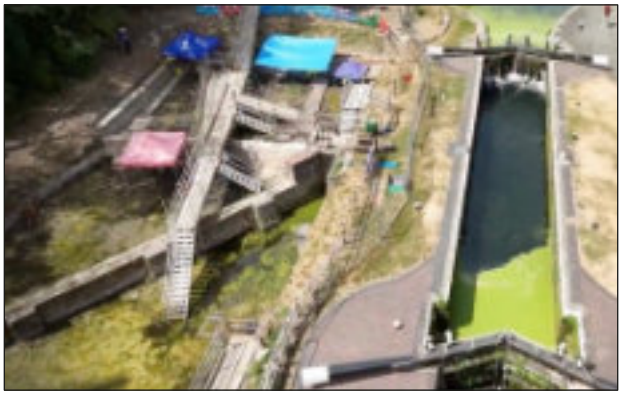
Now, what the Dickens am I going to write?! Not about two sites across a channel, but just the one at Lock 95 on the Hanwell Flight of the Grand Union Canal in West London.

Camp Demographics (Author's note: I am always interested in where the volunteers come from and their careers. It also shows what a fabulous and varied community we are.)

The two camps provided 239 WRG volunteer days. Lots more days and half days should be added to this total by the Canal & River Trust people who were helping us daily and also the many interested visitors, who included individuals and groups from Historic England, CRT Heritage, Engineering and Planning, ITV News and WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association..

The WRG citizenry were: Martin D, Bev W, Dan N, Ted M, Charlotte T, Andy C, David M, Susan M, Michael H, Nick H, William H, Emily L, Eve T, Ziv C, Yollande E, Claire R, Dave P, Mikk B, Martin L, Paul S, Anne L, Daniel M, Ben E, Jonny L, Charlie H, Sam T, Tilly B, Ajay S, Adem C, Jacob F, Chris B, John R, Philip S and yours truly. Eleven were doing the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award Residential Session. Is eight DofEs in one week a record?

As with all WRG Canal Camps, we had a wonderful range of ages (18 to 82), home locations (as near as Hanwell, as far as Stockholm via such places as a few more London boroughs, Gosport, Marlborough, Swindon, Cardiff, Hereford, Birmingham, Ottery St Mary, Dundee, Paris, Delft, Sheffield, Wigan, Milton Keynes, Bradford and Bedford, to name just some. Occupations (former or intended) included engineering (electrical, mechanical, chemical, software, landscape and aeronautical), Health Service, teaching, military, photography, climate, IT, construction, meteorology, dentistry, psychiatry, law enforcement and a Clerk in Holy Orders. A wonderful melange, who all worked and lived together so well.



Pond A at top, Pond B with faded WRG gazebo (gets more use than the CRT ones!) Pond C at bottom, lock on right

That's the Foreword out of the way, now for the story. With the ponds having been drained as much as possible, we were ready to start repairing, restoring, rebuilding, renovating (choose any appropriate '-ing' word) the walls. They were built 200 years ago to conserve water by storing it when the lock was emptied, and then the ponds were drained and the water reused to start refilling the lock to allow boats to rise up through the flight. This side-pond system has not been operational for decades and has been on Historic England's At Risk Register for many years. HE want it off the register so are providing most of the funding to CRT to get this done.



Pond A walls 4, 3, 1 (left to right) in some disrepair at start of camps

The work was generally repetitive and strength-sapping but this didn't weaken anyone's resolve or good humour during the heatwave conditions we 'enjoyed'. We weren't allowed in the lowest pond because Mr and Mrs Moorhen and their four new arrivals had set up home there. Good job they chose Pond C and not Pond A, where we had agreed with CRT to concentrate our work.

The first task was to clear muddy sludge away from the walls and place pallets and other appropriate objects to walk on and work from.

The first week was all about taking down / out the rotten elements of the three brick walls (Walls 1, 3 and 4) in Pond A (the top one - see diagram overleaf) with hand tools only. There were horrible repairs from years ago involving engineering bricks and cement mortar which were incredibly hard to chop out. Few bricks came out whole!



Evvo

Week 1 team chip out engineering bricks on wall 3

The second week still had some chopping out of bricks to do but concentrated on bricklaying with lime mortar, most of which was laying them in and around existing bricks in the wall; like playing Jenga in reverse.

There were six significant cracks in the three walls which needed stitching, three in the left third of Wall 1.

Each crack needed:

- Loose material to be removed
- Mortar beds on three courses to be chased out to a depth of 50mm and a distance of 500mm each side of the crack
- Dust to be blown out
- A spray of water
- Special extra sticky mortar to be squashed in
- Helical stainless steel bars (like stainless steel fusilli) to be inserted
- More special extra sticky mortar to be pressed in
- When dry, the joints to be repointed

This work took two WRGies two days, most of which was on their knees.

As the end of the second week approached, we changed our strategy slightly. We were never going to complete the three walls so we focused on getting a few small key sections completed to include the coping bricks. This would help whoever came next (more WRG?) by giving them the levels to work to and the coping detail to be used (different on Wall 4 – a weir wall – from Walls 1 and 3).



Evvo



Martin Ludgate



Martin Ludgate



Evvo

'Stitching': The cracks in walls before repairs, inserting grout into the chased-out mortar beds, putting in the stainless steel bars, and the completed job with little sign of the cracks

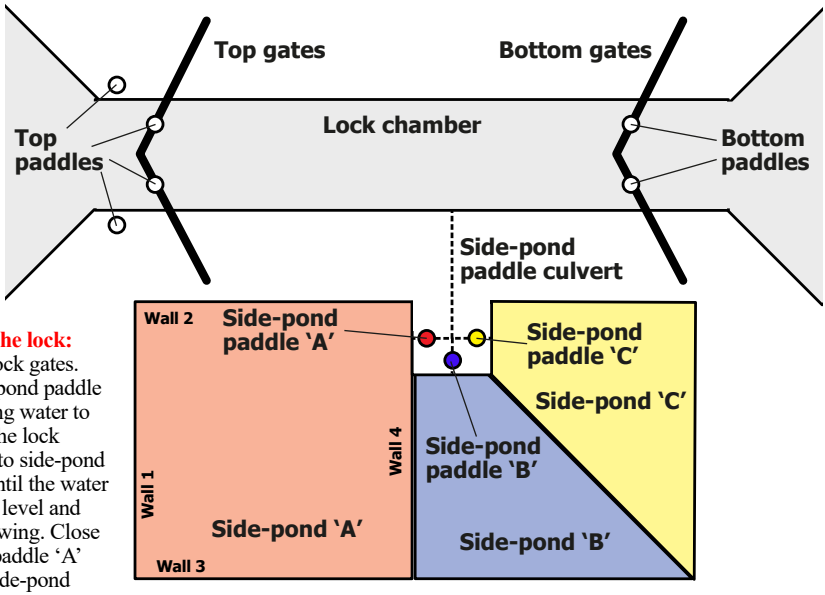
Our Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award Volunteers All 11 of the DofE volunteers played magnificent parts in their different ways. To reward them, they were asked to give 90 second-ish presentations to the rest of the camp after dinner on the Fridays. Just like their work, they enthusiastically did this and we enjoyed very much hearing about the fun had on site and socially, more about the Grand Union Canal and its history, a mini-quiz about the week gone by to see how much we had remembered, the story of one volunteer's DofE award progress and, the highlight for me, a poem about the people who were there for the last days on Week 2 [see page 38].



Evvo

The Week 2 crew dining al fresco

How the Hanwell triple side-ponds work



To empty the lock: Close the lock gates. Open side-pond paddle 'A', allowing water to pass from the lock chamber into side-pond 'A'. Wait until the water has made a level and stopped flowing. Close side-pond paddle 'A' and open side-pond paddle 'B' allowing water to flow into side-pond 'B'. Wait until the water has made a level and stopped flowing. Close side-pond paddle 'B' and open side-pond paddle 'C', allowing water to flow into side-pond 'C'. Wait until the water has made a level and stopped flowing. Close side-pond paddle 'C' and open the bottom paddles to empty the remaining water into the canal below the lock. Open the bottom gates and close the bottom paddles.

To refill the lock: Basically it's the reverse of the above. Having closed the bottom gates, use side-pond paddle 'C' to start filling the lock from side-pond 'C', then side-pond paddle 'B' to fill it some more from side-pond 'B', then side-pond paddle 'A' to fill it a bit more from side-pond 'A', and then fill the last bit of the lock from the canal above, using the top paddles. Congratulations, you've saved something like 60 percent of a lockful of water

At the end of every book, there are the acknowledgements. Many, many thanks to all the WRGies on the two teams, and additional pats-on-the-back to Bev and Anne (the cooks) and Paul and Martin (my assistant leaders). The CRT heroes were Phil E, Morgan H, Emillie, Mick and Sophie who all did their bit to help and look after us. Last but not least, to Mamta, the manager at the Short Breaks special needs educational facility in Green Lane for allowing us to park the vans there, saving someone nearly £500 in parking licence fees and making our lives much easier.

Evvo (David Evans)



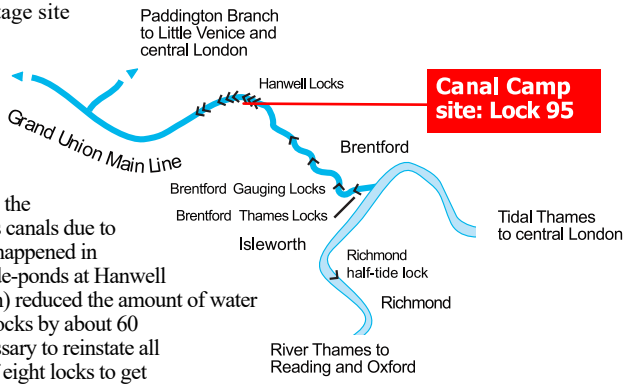
Wall 1 where it meets wall 2 at the end of the camp

PS - ITV News visited us on 04 Aug and we appeared at the end of that day's 6pm London news programme. I thought the back of my head looked particularly.....grey! Ben and Ajay spoke very well in their interviews. Here is the link: https://www.itv.com/watch/news/historic-canal-engineering-could-help-conserve-water-in-a-changing-climate/thghg36

FACT FILE Hanwell Locks

The Canal Camp project: Restoring a water-saving side-pond system on the Grand Union Canal

Why? Because it's a unique heritage site falling into dereliction



The wider picture:
Although the work is largely being done for reasons of heritage conservation, side-ponds could have a useful role in reducing the need to temporarily close numerous canals due to water shortage in dry years (as has happened in 2025 and 2026). Using the triple side-ponds at Hanwell (the only triples anywhere in Britain) reduced the amount of water used by boats passing through the locks by about 60 percent. Although it would be necessary to reinstate all the side-ponds in the entire flight of eight locks to get the full saving (which would be difficult as one set have been filled in and the land sold) smaller savings could be made by concentrating on the deeper locks (which use the most water). Whilst the Canal & River Trust has said that it does not currently plan to put them back into use, the three side-ponds at Lock 95 are being restored to working order (including replacing the paddles, and CRT says the work could inform any future work to put side-ponds in operational use either at Hanwell or on the numerous other locks around the system where they survive out-of-use. The ability of CRT's volunteer lock keepers to supervise operation could negate one of the main earlier objections by CRT (and its predecessor British Waterways) - who argued that boaters unfamiliar with them could use side-ponds incorrectly and waste more water than they save.

PROGRESS Chesterfield Canal

The Staveley Town Deal supported project reaches a major milestone with the rewatering of the canal - and a public walk-through first…

Chesterfield Canal

Progress on the Staveley Town Deal project (which is reinstating a short but critical length extending from the Staveley end of the five mile isolated restored Chesterfield to Staveley length) has reached the re-watering stage. To mark this, a 'walk through' was organised for the public and press to see the site before the water was let in.

The pictures show most of the main elements: (below) the former skew railway bridge in the foreground, the new Keith Ayling Lock (with plastic gates) and the new Trans Pennine Trail bridge beyond; and (bottom) the abutments for the new Bell Lane Bridge and the recreated former gasworks arm junction basin beyond.



Martin Ludgate



Martin Ludgate

PROGRESS Shrewsbury & Newport

On the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals, work continues on converting the historic Wappenshall warehouses - and restoring a lift bridge

Shrewsbury and Newport Canals

At Wappenshall Junction, where the Shrewsbury Canal met the Newport Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal, the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust's volunteers have been converting the two historic transhipment warehouses for use as a canal centre, community centre and café, starting with the smaller warehouse which houses the café.

Progress has been rapid to complete the second kitchen above the first one to cope with demand at the café.

The new kitchen opened for business on 5th June and has been instrumental in increasing efficiency in successfully serving our many customers. The dumb waiter is working as planned too.

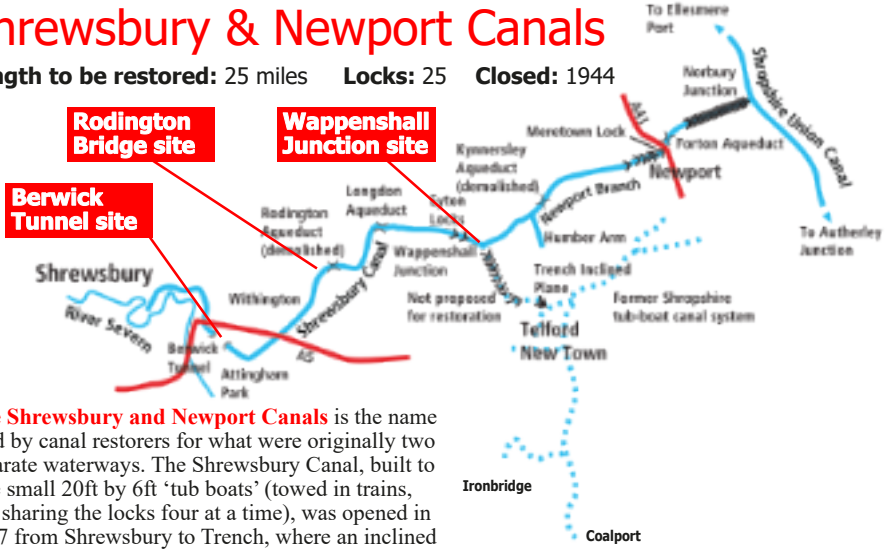
Meanwhile work is continuing to restore the larger transhipment warehouse that will become a Visitor Centre to celebrate the life of engineer Thomas Telford. After completing the roof insulation, first fix electrics were installed for lighting, emergency lighting and fire detection. We have just had the plasterboards delivered and have started fixing the interstitial barrier, so this can be fixed over it.

Also at Wappenshall, the damaged stone wall that abuts the skew bridge over the canal at the junction of the two waterways needs to be repaired and we have now obtained the stone to do this.

Bernie Jones

Shrewsbury & Newport Canals

Length to be restored: 25 miles **Locks:** 25 **Closed:** 1944



The Shrewsbury and Newport Canals is the name used by canal restorers for what were originally two separate waterways. The Shrewsbury Canal, built to take small 20ft by 6ft 'tub boats' (towed in trains, and sharing the locks four at a time), was opened in 1797 from Shrewsbury to Trench, where an inclined plane boat lift linked it to the network of tub boat canals that already existed around what is now Telford New Town. The Newport Branch of what is now the Shropshire Union Canal opened in 1835 from the Shropshire Union Main Line at Norbury to meet the Shrewsbury Canal at Wappenshall.

The locks between Shrewsbury and Wappenshall were widened to take standard 70ft by 7ft narrow boats, but the length south of Wappenshall including the Trench inclined plane was never enlarged, and went out of use in 1921. The rest of the Shrewsbury Canal, and the whole of the Newport Branch were abandoned by the canal's then owners the LMS Railway in 1944

Right: *Wappenshall warehouses - in the smaller warehouse the new 'upper deck' second kitchen is all nicely fitted out and ready to go*

Below: *Wappenshall skew bridge - a selection of stone assembled ready for repairing the wall that abuts the skew bridge at the junction of the Shrewsbury Canal and the Newport Branch.*



Pictures by Bernie Jones



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

Montgomery Canal

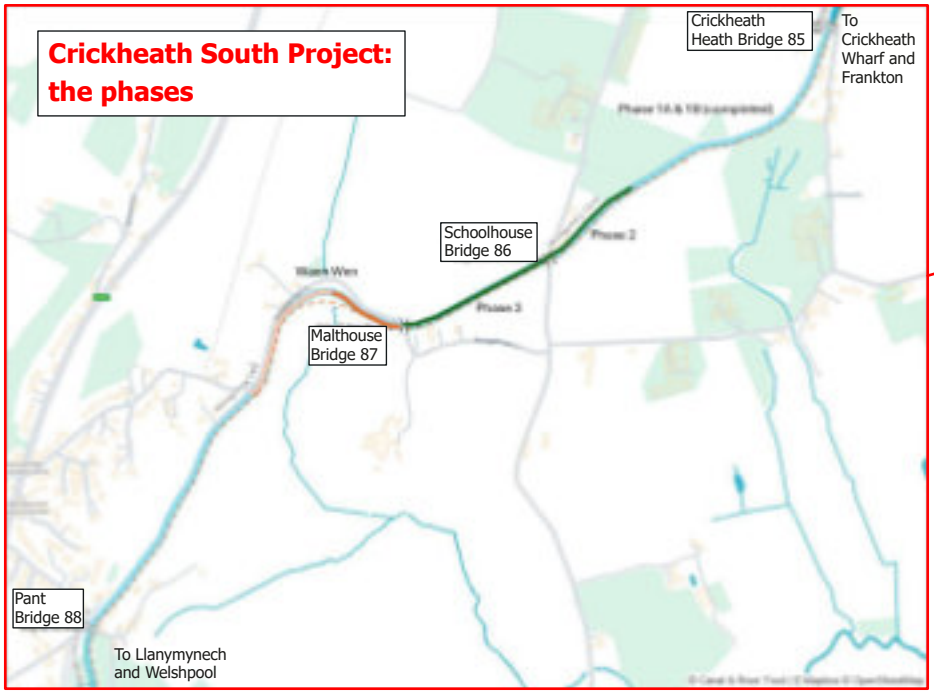
Crickheath South work party report 2-5 July: Progress brings a change of activities. The focus for the Shropshire Union Canal Society's volunteers has now firmly shifted to the Schoolhouse Bridge wash wall (the vertical channel wall through the new bridge) and Phase 3 (see map for explanation of the phases).

Although there was no lining (laying the waterproof liner that's necessary on what was a persistently leaky section of canal) and blocking (laying a protective layer of concrete blocks on top of the liner) scheduled this time, a prep day before the main work party started on Friday still proved valuable. Further excavation and spoil removal to the heap in the compound was carried out, primarily from the wash wall site. This allowed for final setting out



Pictures by SUCS

Setting out before building the wash wall



and levels to progress smoothly on Friday and by Saturday, the task of installing shuttering for the footings began.

The wash wall will run for approximately 44 metres, extending either side of the bridge hole, and will be constructed using a proprietary system of dry-joint, hollow interlocking blocks. Horizontal and vertical reinforcing bar will run through the wall and once assembled, the wall will be filled with pumped concrete. However, we are getting ahead of ourselves: the task this time was to prepare the footings which include two layers of mesh and

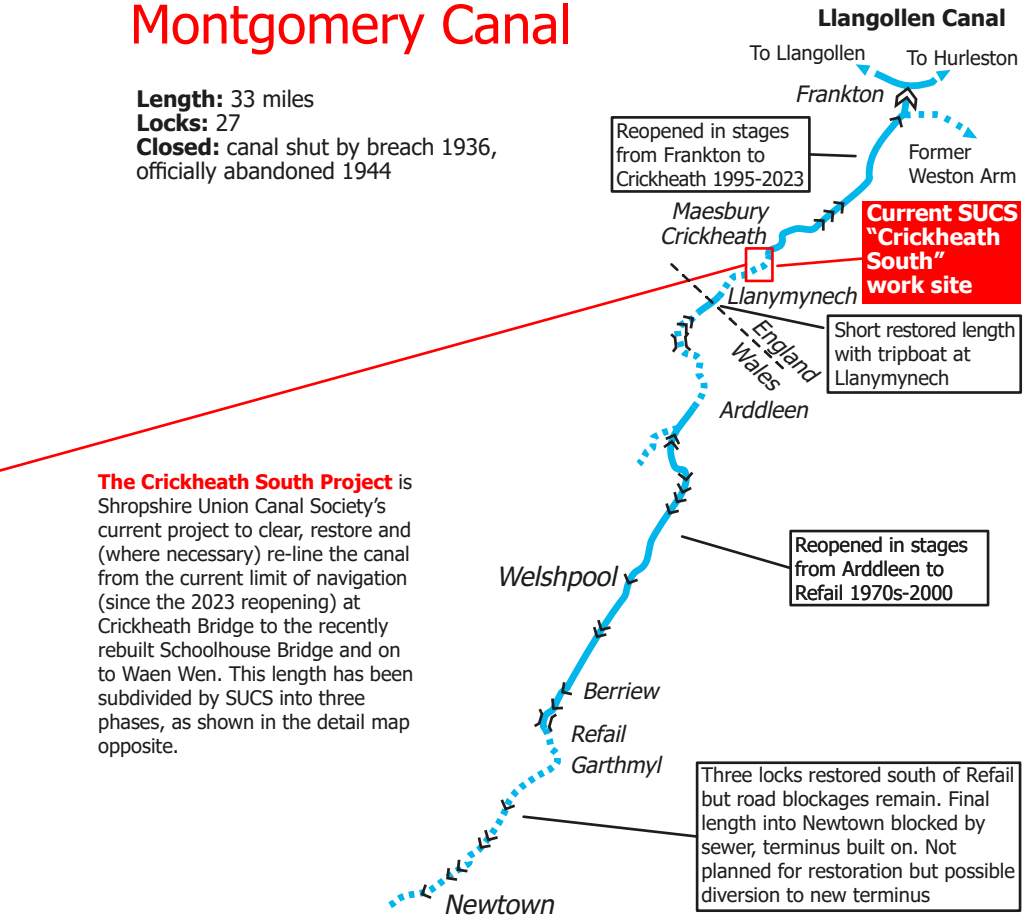


Shuttering and rebar ready for wash wall footings

Montgomery Canal

Length: 33 miles
Locks: 27
Closed: canal shut by breach 1936, officially abandoned 1944

The Crickheath South Project is Shropshire Union Canal Society's current project to clear, restore and (where necessary) re-line the canal from the current limit of navigation (since the 2023 reopening) at Crickheath Bridge to the recently rebuilt Schoolhouse Bridge and on to Waen Wen. This length has been subdivided by SUCS into three phases, as shown in the detail map opposite.



incorporate the vertical rebar. There were a number of details to puzzle through: footings are at three different levels to accommodate reclaimed coping stones of three different heights and a method for keeping the vertical rebar correctly aligned and held upright prior to pouring concrete for the footing needed to be determined. Excellent progress was made – by the end of the work party, the system had been developed and finessed. All being well, the footing shuttering and steelwork was expected to be complete in August.

In addition to the work on the wash wall, strong numbers of volunteers attending on Friday and Saturday enabled two further work groups to be established. In Phase 2, rip rap (coarse grade stone) and soil, which covers the liners above block level, was completed for the last remaining 20 metres of lined channel – always a laborious job. There are a further 30 metres of channel in Phase 2 that can be lined before the compound access point is reached. This month, some progress was achieved in profiling this remainder, in between other tasks. It will be completed before the autumn, as time permits.



The Phase 3 length before vegetation clearance…

However, in Phase 3 – the length between Schoolhouse Bridge and Malthouse Bridge – dramatic progress was achieved. Joined by five corporate volunteers from Aico on Friday, vegetation clearance along the entire 340 metre length was completed by Saturday afternoon. A handful of thickets remained untouched as potential nesting sites. These, and some remaining trees growing up the channel banks, will now wait till September before being removed prior to site strip.



…and after completion of vegetation clearance…

Plenty more odd jobs were undertaken, including a new lick of paint for the welfare cabin.

NAVVIES NEWS Leaders Day 2

The WRG Driver Authorisation system is back up and running at last, there's some first aid training, and another WRG Leader Training Day

Driver Authorisation Scheme

Good news, the WRG DA (Driver Authorisation) system, used by WRG and some other restoration organisations to control who is authorised to operate various plant, vehicles and power tools) is now back in operation and all outstanding cards have been sent out (or queries have been raised with those requesting them) as have renewals.

Note that if your card was due for renewal AND you have asked for more categories, we have added them to the record without printing a card then sent your renewal form (rather than starting by sending you an expired card with your new categories and then sending a renewal request….).

Although we are now up to date there will still be a glut of processing the incoming renewals as they are returned as well as a number of new applications following the summer camps so the turnaround may still be a bit slower than normal. It is also worth adding that with such a big backlog we have shown no mercy, so whereas some "known" people would often get a direct email or phone call from me if something was going to lapse I'm really sorry but this time I'm afraid the process just ran its course (including rather awkwardly sending a final remainder for a licence check to my wife…..).

Lastly, please send all DA related emails to da@wrg.org.uk and not direct to me or head office as that way when processing DA stuff we know where to look rather than hunting for it spread around different inboxes.

George 'Bungle' Eycott

First Aid training

WRG is funding a first aid training course again. This will be the normal one day emergency first aid course but with the additional forestry module which now covers tourniquets, haemostatic dressings and tick bites, so it will be a full day.

Location will be Hinton Parva (just off M4 J15) and we are running the course for two or possibly three days (depending if we get enough takers). Dates are 17, 18 and 19 October.

Anyone wanting a place should email me at bungle@wrg.org.uk with a contact number and which of the days of the three they can make; at this stage I will only be acknowledging the request and will sort who is going to be going on which day nearer the time.

Note, following some issues in past years, please ask those who want to go on the course to contact me directly rather than someone in between attempting to "collate" a list.

George 'Bungle' Eycott

Autumn Leaders Day

We are planning to run a second WRG Leadership Day this year. Details are:

When: Sat 26 September (10:00 to 16:00)
Where: Lowsonford Village Hall, Rookery Ln, Henley-in-Arden, B95 5ER
Who should attend: Volunteers interested in knowing more about Canal Camp leadership, assistant leaders considering the step up to leadership, and leaders who have only recently started their leadership journey.
What we will cover: The agenda is being finalised, but will include undertaking a site visit, site planning, demystifying the paperwork, canal camp logistics, and what to consider away from site.

The day will specifically be focused around WRG Canal Camps, and a back-to-basics look at leadership.

The Autumn Leaders Day is free to attend, but spaces are limited. To secure your place, please book online.

Go to waterways.org.uk (home page of WRG's parent body the Inland Waterways Association); from the 'support' drop-down menu select 'events'; and scroll down until you see 'WRG Autumn Leaders day'

Thank you and we look forward to seeing some of you there.

INFILL including 'Dear Deirdre'

A poem about fellow Canal Camp volunteers, George's sideline, and how can you have a canal when there's no water to be seen?

Charlie's End of Camp Poem

As camp leader Evvo mentioned in his Camp Report from Hanwell (pages 26-30), volunteer Charlie, taking part in the Canal Camp for his Duke of Edinburgh's Award, wrote a poem about all of the other volunteers on the second week's camp…

Tilly's been fun and helpful and kind,
And done well to put up with Jonny's interesting mind.

Adem's been shy at times but fun when you know him,
It felt like our room was full to the brim.

Jonny is figuring out which hammer he likes best,
And only liked demolition, wasn't too keen on the rest.

Anne's smashing cooking welcomed us home in the evening,
I'm sad we won't get it again, now that we're leaving.

Ajay's non-stop chatter about his girl best friend,
Like his chatter in general, never seemed to end.

John's bricklaying skills were a 10 out of 10
Slapping down bricks, again and again.

Philip and I were speedy on Thursday,
And he was super quick every workday.

Paul's jokes about Jonny made us all laugh,
Even though on reflection they were all pretty naff.

Jacob always asking where his glasses were hid,
Then always realising they were stuck on his head.

Sam was the lifeline that kept us all here,
Cracking the jokes and bringing good cheer.

Ben was amazing, but destroyed me at chess,
But our shared love for music made up for the rest.

Evvo's patience was put to the test,
But in the end we all know he knows best.

Chris' snores tried keeping us up all night long,
But in our room we made him feel he belonged.

While carrying the bricks, Daniel proved he was strong,
And in general was perfect, never did any wrong.

Dave was a machine, so needed his batteries,
And that's the end, coz nothing rhymes with batteries…

Dear Deirdre **Can you ask the Editor to stop pestering me about writing a report for my Easter camp. I've still got 2 to do from last year. I'm not a machine!**
- Malcolm, Sutton-under-Lyne
Deirdre writes Just hang in there Malcolm, he mostly gives up after the first 3 years.

Dear Deirdre **No matter how hard I scrub I don't seem to be able to get the mud off from my recent camp. It's completely stained my skin brown. Is it going to stay like this?**
- JJ, Newport Drayton
Deirdre writes I know it's unfamiliar but don't worry, that tan will fade in a few weeks. Use some sunblock next year.

Dear Deirdre **I went on a canal camp this summer but I'm worried it was some kind of con. There was absolutely no water anywhere to be seen but those lunatics were building a lock anyway. How can we have a canal when there's no water?**
- Sally, Stratford-in-Arden
Deirdre writes This is just one of those situations where you need to take Noah's approach and trust in God that the water will come. Failing that, I'm sure it can be converted into a skateboard park for the kids.

I am indebted to George Rogers of Chesterfield Canal Trust (not to mention WRG Canal Camps sites group and more) for the fascinating statistic that the new length of canal between Staveley Town Lock and the new Keith Ayling Lock holds enough water for everyone in Staveley to have a bath. I'm afraid this led to some uncharitable comments… "But has it ever happened?" "Not since the last mine closed and the pit-head baths shut down…"



…he's either found a sideline, or a novel way of getting boats around the Killamarsh blockage

