

THE MAGAZINE OF THE




President: Bill O'Brien J.P. M.P.

ISSUE 6/03 - October 2003

AGM/ Consultation responses/ Avon views

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2003 CALENDAR

**AGM
15th
November**

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Hello all, and farewell!

This is my last Chairman's report as I stand down from Council at the AGM.

I have been on Council six years as Minute's Secretary, Chairman, Vice Chairman and Chairman again.

I haven't enjoyed the last year and it is time to go. I didn't want the job, which is why I didn't stand at the last AGM but circumstances made it imperative that someone took the job on. This time I believe others will come forward so we have to wait till the AGM to find out.

My main aims were to keep Council together and to improve efficiency. It has ended with me refusing to chair Council meetings since June due to the animosity between one or two members. It has also taken most of the year to get proposals to increase the efficiency in place. I would like to thank especially the council members who joined this year. Celia has tackled the Midlands region with flair and enthusiasm. Adrian is his usual knowledgeable and efficient self and London is well served with his representation. I may not always agree with Adrian's ideas but they are always worth listening to. David Harle has ceased to be our treasurer but continues to do our bookkeeping, until November, thus avoiding meetings.

NABO needs members to take an interest and get involved. Membership is increasing but this is of little use if the membership is sitting back saying Council will sort everything. Members can help by feeding information back to Councillors. There are often meetings



held by local authorities or other organisations of which we are unaware, Please go to them and report back. If you can find time to join Council do so. It can be challenging but rewarding. Spaces left after the election can always be filled by co-option, just let the new Chairman know you are interested.

Now to external matters.

BW has produced a consultation document on "*Improving Openness and Accountability*", but actions speak louder than words. Whilst they are advocating better consultation they have cancelled one National meeting at a week's notice with no date set for the next. Conspicuous by their absence are local user group meetings, usually set for the Spring and Autumn. The autumn round has got lost in the re-organisation process. So much for the intention to improve consultation.

We are continuing with our call for a Regulator and Lord Robin Corbett of Castle Vale has taken this up. He asked (in the House of Lords) the question, "What is Her Majesty's Government doing to improve the regulation of the United Kingdom's rivers, canals and other inland waterways?" NABO was mentioned in the ensuing debate, which didn't rule out a Regulator. We found this extremely encouraging and this is a goal we shall continue to pursue.

We are also querying whether the Charter Mark is still relevant. We sent a letter to BW, on 12th August, about the legality of the Mooring Code as suggested by our Solicitors. We have

received an acknowledgment but are still waiting for a reply, which we should have had by the 28th September. No change there then, so much for a full reply in 21 days.

Please keep sending in your experiences, as we know we aren't the only ones to be treated in this fashion and our file is growing.

Enjoy your boating, I am going to.

Sue Burchett

BW PUBLISHES PROTOCOL FOR ITS MARINA BUSINESS

There has been considerable disquiet over recent years from boat owners and the trade with the acquisition by British Waterways of many inland marinas. The BMF and its members have been vociferous in condemning BW for operating on an un-level playing field. For instance, BW does not have to pay business rates or levy connection charges on itself.

The criticism seems to have touched a nerve within BW and it has now published a consultation document (available on its website) establishing a protocol for its ownership and operation of marinas.

Although BW owns or controls many assets and sites it intends to transfer just 10 of them into a new wholly owned subsidiary company to be called British Waterways Marinas Ltd (BWML). This company will publish separate accounts and be managed on a commercial basis in such a way that it does not gain unfair competitive advantage over privately owned marina businesses.

The main areas of concern that are addressed are rents paid for site leases, network connection charges, provision of services, planning consents, payment of rates, data protection and marketing. In all respects, BWML will operate and trade just like any other company and not derive any special advantage from its relationship with BW.

The one aspect that is likely to affect boat owners is the commitment that BW will demand payment from BWML of an amount equivalent to the business rates that would be payable on a marina (if such rates are not actually paid). The levy will be ring-fenced and used by BW for marketing initiatives to attract more users and visitors to the waterways. Will this mean that mooring charges will increase? Probably.

If you moor in the following marinas you may wish to respond to the consultation or let NABO have your views before the end of November:

Bath Marina,
Apsley Basin (Hemel Hempstead),
White Bear Marina (Chorley),
Galgate Marina Park (Lancaster),
Packet Boat Marina (Cowley Peachey),

Kings Marina (Newark),
Hull Marina,
Ripon Racecourse Marina,
Sawley Marina,
Priory Marina (Bedford).

Stephen Peters

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Members will have been informed in a separate mailshot that:-

“The 12th Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Boat Owners will be held on Saturday 15th November 2003 at The Willow Tree Rufford Way, West Bridgford, Nottingham commencing at 11a.m.”

Since there have been no resolutions tendered by members, the agenda will be as follows:-

1. To agree the minutes of the 2002 AGM (Copies will be available at the meeting, or can be requested by post from the General Secretary or downloaded from-
www.nabo.org.uk/members/agm_mins.html)
2. To receive the Chairman's report
3. To receive the financial statements for the year ended 31/3/2003
4. To determine the annual subscription fees
5. To elect Council members for the year 2003-2004
6. To appoint the auditor
7. To agree changes to the Constitution (All members should have received a document showing the changes that Council are recommending)

After lunch, we hope that our President, Bill O'Brien MP, will be present to address members and to join in the general discussion and answering of questions from the floor. It is also hoped to include a presentation on a new Waterway Dossier initiative which is intended to organise reporting of local waterway issues and involve members more.

Council elections

There have been no new candidates for Council this time, and, with a number of members leaving, it looks as though it is going to be a small band of stalwarts next year, assuming they are re-elected. This will leave room for people to be co-opted, even if the members approve the proposal to limit the Council size to twelve as part of the revised Constitution. With a little reshuffling, those co-opted could be slotted into almost any role.

NABO is definitely losing its Chairman and South Secretary, and has had no nomination forms from our current Vice Chairman, the Northern Rivers Co-ordinator, the London Secretary and David Harle, who was Treasurer for the greater part of the year. Peter Lea is ending the year as he promised us, too. We must thank all of these for the time and effort they have put in on NABO's behalf.

If you don't like the idea of coming to Council meetings, you could still help. There are precious few jobs where being on Council is absolutely essential. Please come forward even if you can't commit yourself to a lot, every bit helps, even if it is just attending two waterway meetings a year, manning a stand for a few hours at a show, becoming our expert on a very specific topic etc. Don't be afraid to tell us that there are limits to your commitments. We will be making specific requests in future months - for a start, would anyone be prepared to take on NABO News so the current editor can be of more use to Council?

YOUR COUNCIL ELECTION CANDIDATES



AILEEN BUTLER

I have experience of being a council member and also of administering events.

CELIA KENNEDY

I feel I can represent wide-ranging views. I know people working / living / holidaying and cruising. I don't ever discriminate. Everyone has bad days, especially me! Apologies to anyone inadvertently upset by me or my family's actions this year. My help is always objective and fair for all. I don't believe any canal or towpath users should be harassed - this is happening. I would like to see all users united together, after all, we all have similar complaints.



STEPHEN PETERS

The longest-serving Council member; still enthusiastic to represent all boaters including river users on whose behalf I have worked tirelessly over the years. Council has faced many unplanned challenges and I wish to serve on Council to continue the improvements that have been made. I am conscious of the need to balance the views of members and tread a path that is neither too complacent nor too confrontational.

Declaration of interest - small-scale leisure boating consultancy and publications service.

GORDON REECE

I joined NABO Council three years ago, and have represented members on the User Groups / forums in the Northwest where I have acted as Regional Secretary. At the present time, I am also in the Treasurer's chair and have just started to get to grips with the financial position of the organisation. There are challenging times ahead, and NABO needs to ensure that our views are put forward to the various waterway and navigation authorities, safe-guarding boaters' rights. I am pleased to put my name forward for re-election.



GEOFFREY ROGERSON

My major interest in NABO is the need to constantly monitor BW's activities to ensure that they are reasonably appropriate, in the interests of all boaters, and above all, LEGAL. It is very common for public bodies to assume powers they haven't got and exceed powers they have, or think they have, and to ensure that discussions are national and not dependent on which canal you happen to be on.



CAROLE SAMPSON

During the last year, I have campaigned for the replacement of removed safety railings, and attended two social evenings to talk to the members of boat clubs, which I hope has gained more members for NABO. I have advised boaters on such diverse topics as a lengthy redevelopment which has caused problems for moored boats, a Mooring Warden behaving in an aggressive manner, and on liability of BW after a burglary. I have also been General Secretary, with special responsibility for organising the AGM, I am offering myself for re-election.

STUART SAMPSON

I have been terrorising oncoming boaters over the whole connected system for over a quarter of a century so I know it well. I have been on Council for three years now, most of the time editing this periodical and other NABO publications, in an attempt to keep members and the world at large informed of what the Association does and thinks, in as balanced and impartial way as I can.



I am prepared to continue this, or serve NABO in whichever way I am best suited.

PETER WHITE



I have been boating for over thirtyfive years and will endeavour to do my best for others on the waterways.

STOP PRESS

The Management Committee of the BSS is withdrawing the proposed ban on existing non-room sealed appliances on private boats which was due to take effect after January 1, 2006. The original proposal was published in the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) Essential Guide (page 8/3) as follows, “... *it's intended to prohibit the installation and use of non-room sealed gas refrigerators or central heating appliances on inland waterways boats after January 1, 2006*”.

The decision at the committee meeting on the 9th September, followed liaison with the Health and Safety Executive and the development of the navigation authorities objectives for the Scheme's requirements as ‘...*the minimum necessary to help prevent explosions, fires, the spread of fires and pollution.*’ The members of the BSS committees concluded that the intended ban did not match these objectives for private craft and would also be a retrospective action.

However gas refrigerators with burners not enclosed by a suitable flame trap are already, and will continue to be banned from petrol-engined craft because of the high risk of fire and explosion from stray petrol vapours.

NABO RESPONDS TO BW CONSULTATION PAPER “IMPROVING OPENNESS & ACCOUNTABILITY”

NABO has been asked to respond to this paper and Council is trying to be positive, as we see this paper as a beneficial consequence of our campaign for an independent waterways regulator. Here are some ‘edited highlights’ from a comprehensive reply. It begins :-

‘The National Association of Boat Owners (NABO) welcomes this initiative by BW to update its relationships with users of its waterways. The document appears to be a sincere attempt to introduce a new spirit of co-operation between BW and its customers and NABO looks forward to an improvement in relationships as a result of this positive step by BW.

BW has devised some far-ranging and constructive ideas which, if implemented, would go a long way towards improving their accountability to users.

The suggested improvements in procedures are generally well conceived and the document contains so many excellent ideas that the Chairman of BW, Dr George Greener, suggested at the Annual Meeting that the new procedures should be introduced with immediate effect, without following the recommendations contained within this consultation document itself!

We look forward to the final outcome of this consultation process and assert our desire to become actively and constructively involved in the various structures that emerge.’

Our response then takes the paragraphs in turn. We ask for clarification of the new two-tier complaints procedure where complaints should be directed first to the Unit General Manager, and then a Managing Director to whom the former does **not** report. We approve of complaints not following the ‘management line’, but ask why the Waterway Service Manager is not shown as the first person to be approached, and who is to deal with complaints regarding Head Office.

NABO has not given up the call for an independent regulator – in its reply to the section regarding the Ombudsman:-

‘We still consider that a Regulator is required to oversee and scrutinise the business practices of BW, particularly where they interface directly with users of its services. Boat owners, in particular, have experienced inconsiderate and excessive behaviour by BW over a period of many years....’ [followed by examples familiar to readers of this magazine!]

On the appointment of the Ombudsman:-

‘NABO supports the concept of a committee with the power to appoint and dismiss the Waterways Ombudsman but we firmly believe that the Waterways Ombudsman should be completely separated from BW and we have misgivings with paragraph 26 which envisages that BW should have some (minor) representation on the committee. Furthermore, this is an ideal opportunity for the Ombudsman service to be made available in respect to disputes involving all UK inland waterway authorities.’

Regarding the Consultative Body:

‘NABO considers the proposal that user groups should be appointed to the consultative body by ministers to be preferable to nomination by BW itself. In the interests of fair-play we would request that the appointment process be open and transparent and that membership be for a pre-determined period of time, with other bodies having the opportunity to be appointed as circumstances dictate.’

On the subject of specific interest consultation:-

‘NABO does not support the distinction between “National” and “Local” interest consultations utilising different procedures. Frequently, matters which start as local issues take on national importance and relevance. If there is to be a two-tier system we would still expect the same standards to apply to both.’

We also have concerns regarding local user group meetings which are an essential part of the two-way communication process between BW and its customers. Following organisational changes within BW it is not clear where or when these meetings will take place or what role they have in the future plans of BW’

As you see, NABO would like to see no direct involvement of BW (or any other waterway authority should the case arise) in any external party who is asked to mediate, but the document is certainly a big step in the right direction.

NABO also asked about the future of IWAAC...

‘The National Association of Boat Owners (NABO) welcomes the opportunity to express its views and ideas on the future role of IWAAC. This consultation comes at an opportune time in a year when users’ requests for an Independent Regulator for the inland waterways have reached a zenith. This has resulted from a series of unwelcome actions and policies introduced by British Waterways (BW) which have seriously impacted on boat owners.

This consultation also coincides with a separate initiative from BW to improve its openness and accountability and NABO believes that its campaign for a Regulator has influenced BW’s attitude towards its customers. However, we remain convinced of the need for a body, truly independent of BW, to regulate and safeguard the interests of all inland waterways users.

It is possible that IWAAC could fulfil the role of an Independent Regulator, subject to the necessary legislation and revised constitution for IWAAC. The following responses and comments from NABO are offered in the context of the above statements and we would welcome the opportunity to engage in formulating a new role for IWAAC to serve the needs of waterway users.’

The response then asks that IWAAC’s remit should cover all navigable waterways and not have any specific ties with BW . The Appointment of its members should be more transparent, as should its proceedings.

Finally the NABO response outlines in more detail what would be needed if IWAAC were to take on the function of an independent regulatory body.

BOATERS' COURSES

Reading College will be running Marine Diesel and Boat Maintenance courses again with a £10 discount for NABO members, reducing the price from £50 to £40. Also Electrics or Welding for Boaters at £55 for members.

The weekend courses run 9.30 to 5 on Saturdays, 9 to 4.30 on Sundays. A light buffet lunch at a nearby waterside pub can be pre-booked for £4.95.

Dates for the **Diesel & Boat Maintenance** courses are :-

18/10/03	Narrow beam
8/11/03	Cruiser and Yacht
22/11/03	Narrow beam
17/1/04	Narrow beam
31/1/04	Cruiser and Yacht
14/2/04	Narrow beam

The syllabus includes engine, fuel, cooling and electric system servicing and 'layup and refit'. Don't be alarmed at the mention of BLEEDING at the end of the first day!

Electrics for Boaters will be arranged on March 2004. This is a new venture and will develop according to customer needs.

The sample programme is geared to designing and fitting boat electrics, starting with basic electrical theory and how to use meters, and goes on to choosing the right components, BSS requirements, how to build systems and testing them.

Welding for Boaters on 22-23/11/03 will introduce you to welding equipment, what makes a good weld and about soldering and brazing techniques. You should be able to produce a non-critical join by the end of it, but it does not claim to make you a welder and is certainly not geared for thin car body repairs.

Extra course dates may be arranged for any of the above if demand is sufficient.

Contact:- Tony Brooks (that kind gentleman who wrote for us on bore glazing) on **0118 967 5246** ("term time") or marine@reading-college.ac.uk

Also refer to www.reading-college.ac.uk/marine.

Tony is also offering to provide speakers to address gatherings, charging only for travelling.

ISSUE 5/03 RIBBLE LINK PRINTING ERRORS

On the 'picture' page of the Ribble Estuary, some of the wording was cut off in the printing process. You can see white where it was supposed to be

Under 'ASLAND LAMP' it should read "Until close enough to see it, head for right hand white building. Give it a wide berth to **PORT**"

Under 'PRESTON' add: "**DOCK**. Keep **RIGHT** on entry"

After the sentence about Mile Perches add: "(Half mile perches not shown)"

After 'Spit and Wall' add: "covered at high water"

After 'Boatyard with', add: "floating jetty"

After 'Beware tidal flow' add: "across lock mouth"

If you want a complete version, C5 sized S.A.E to the Editor please

WORRIED WOMAN of the WATERWAYS

Are you old enough to remember being told to 'Mind your Ps & Qs'? Of course you aren't, and what did it mean anyway?

There are disagreements as to what the letters stood for but in my youth I had it (forcibly) explained that it means 'Please and Thank You' or, 'mind your manners!' Maybe canal users of today don't know the old saying, but the question that worries me is, 'Do they mind their manners? Are they polite?'

By tradition boaters greet each other as they are passing. If I help someone at a bridge or lock or by taking a rope, I do appreciate them saying 'Thank you'. If they don't then I'm in no rush to help next time. This summer I have seen examples of people taking the P in Qs! Holding up a line of boats while they stop to have a chat rather than get on with the job in hand. 'Whistle and Ride' my Grannie used to say, meaning you can get on with the job at the same time as having the chat. The worst example of selfish behaviour I have seen this year in a Q was a woman who thought that it was a good time to practice working a lock single handed, and despite holding up a long line of boats, insisted that no one else helped her so she could learn to do it on her own, even though she had others on the boat with her. I think she could have considered others and tried it out at a more suitable time!

Are you worried about **policing** along the canals? If stone throwing and other forms of crime are reported then the authorities know where the trouble spots are. I worry that most of us don't bother to report things, feeling that no action will be taken if we do. Well then how do the authorities know in which places crimes are being committed?

It's a worry when taking a **pair** of boats about the cut as some boaters in a hurry try to overtake the butty and wonder what that bit of string is doing in their way! However there are some people who are a pain when moving a pair as they have some silly idea that they have a right to work an empty lock as they take the pair along together, and that no one bringing a boat the other way should come between the pair to make use of the lock of water. What pointless rubbish!

Have you studied BW's **policies**? Good cure for insomnia I've found. Here is one - 'To design a fee structure which is fair, efficient and simple. We wish to encourage growth and participation in boating on our waterways.' You see, they mean well, it's just a worry that we don't get to appreciate the end product of all these good intentions.

Do you feel encouraged to participate in boating when know that they are going to pick on you if you dare to boat for more than a quota of 42 days at a time, even though you have purchased a licence for a year?

I think it is to do with their **priorities**, navigation and boaters are low on the list.

BW and EA **personnel** get fed up with things. It's all paperwork now, or getting sent on pointless courses so they can't get on with the job that they thought they were employed to do. When a job needs doing there seems to be nobody who can just get on with it. There have to be inspections, reports then everything has to go into the computer and be '**prioritised**' whatever that means before it appears on a work schedule and something practical gets done about it. They are not there anymore to maintain a navigation, but are told they are participating in a leisure industry.

One confided 'They'll have us walking up and down the locks selling ice-cream next instead of seeing to aspects of the navigation!'

Other worries over priorities concern the fact that anglers, cyclists and walkers seem to get preferential treatment on the tow path. We are just the ones that pay the most.

Boats are no longer the **quintessence** of the canals.

It is no longer a question of considering our **quality** of life.

We are there to complete the scene for the tourists, we qualify as being **quaint**.

Oh for the **quondam** days of the canals!

Are you surprised that I worry?

Your friend WWW DOT

Advertisement

BSS examiners field assessment

We would like to thank NABO for inviting us to respond to the point raised by Sue in her thought-provoking column in this magazine's July edition (#4/03)

Elsewhere in the same issue, *Testing the Tests*, mentioned that NABO's input to the 2001 review process was to prompt a re-appraisal of the BSS Standards. This was not the only success that the users groups had in that review. Your combined voices were also listened to when you called for greater examination consistency. Firstly a better recording system was implemented. Then changes were made to the training and testing of recruits.

The next stage was the launch of the BSS field assessments this April. The concept is simple; an Examiner carries out a full BSS Certificate examination under observation by a BSS Assessor. Working as a team, the Assessor basically records the decisions and actions the Examiner takes in applying the BSS Checking Procedures. The Assessor then offers feedback on those observations. We have this process to give you and us the assurance that every Examiner is working to the published requirements and checks – the target being a consistent, objective and fair examination for everyone.

Equally, the BSS Assessors' work will be documented and they too will be subject to tight controls in the way that they carry out their duties. They undergo a rigorous and documented appraisal before being allowed into the

field. It's worth noting that the training is to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) principles for Assessors.

The project will also be under constant review, indeed Examiners and their customers are encouraged to comment constructively on the assessment and contribute to the monitoring and possible refinement of the field assessment system.

Again referring to the *Testing The Tests* article, the potential for minimal, simply defined standards so well described in that piece, will only work if the Scheme is delivering high quality and consistent checks.

So from out of two key demands of the user groups, for quality and for simple, minimal standards, we see the need for quality. That is why we would urge you to help us to keep the improvements in consistency moving forward.

Whether you're the owner of a vehicle that is your business; a motor caravan that is your home or even of a building, you expect your MOT examiner, your building inspector or your planning officer to be sensitive when entering your very private, very personal spaces. The BSS must also live up to those expectations, and in doing so, we hope for the reasons above, you will support our continuing efforts to give you the quality and shape of BSS that your representatives demand.

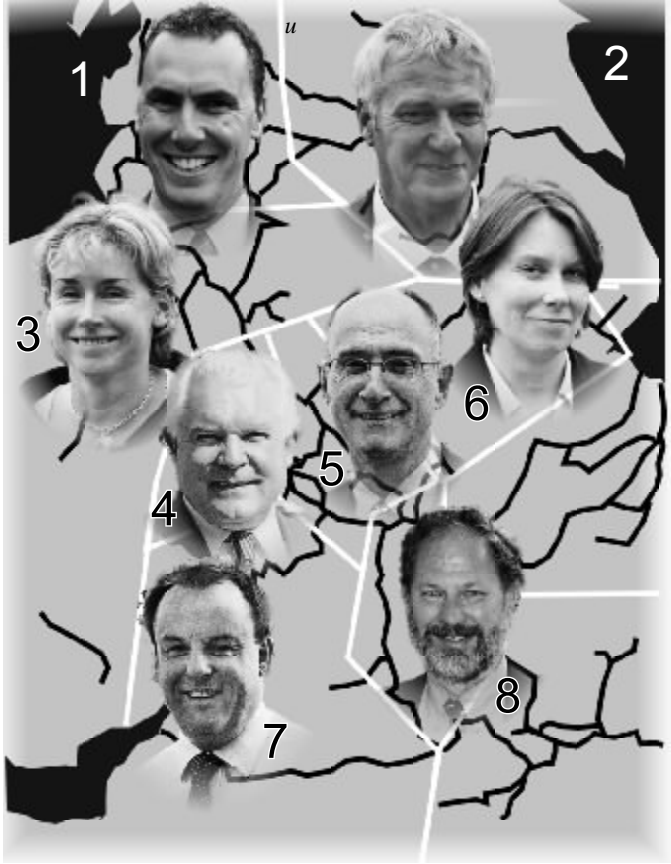
Robert McLean
Communications Manager
Boat Safety Scheme

BW RE-ORGANISES!

NABO has received a new map for the Business Unit Boundaries, which also seems to include some re-organising, and renaming, of the canals themselves. The Huddelfield Narrow canal is now to the east of Huddersfield, with the Huddelfield Broad canal to the west. We have been pressing for some time that some of the Diggle locks need widening, but that much?

The map is based on Ordnance Survey material, so we can't reproduce it here without Crown permission, so instead, based on photos kindly provided by *BW Monthly*, the magazine for British Waterways staff, we give you an illustrated guide to the Unit heads.

BW Monthly is also publishing 'CVs' this autumn, featuring these eight Waterway Unit General Managers, presumably to dispel the myths that the Units are being run by faceless 'suits', and it is good to see the new areas being called 'Waterway Units' not 'Business Units', a term surely more applicable to an industrial estate.



Predictably the majority have civil engineering in their background, and three are aged 49, only one is older, the youngest is 34. Their passions for football vary from total disinterest to a delight in screaming at referees during matches. Two prefer the variety using the elongated ball.

Music is a common theme in the answers to 'What is your idea of a perfect night out?', and we know that extends to the North Region Manging Director too, who is an avid folk fan, (critics of the Middlewich Festival beware!)

So, the challenge is to identify them. Whose perfect night out begins with two hours on a motorbike, who admits to being a terrible procrastinator, who is Gadget Girl, who is learning to play the piano, and who is it who comes home hoarse after Manchester City have played?

Key

1) Adrian Sains	Northwest	Warrington*
2) Laurence Morgan	Yorkshire	Leeds
3) Julie Sharman	Border Counties	Northwich
4) Roger Herrington	West Midlands	Tipton*
5) Tony Harvey	Central Shires	Fazeley
6) Caroline Killeavy	East Midlands	Newark
7) Ian Jarvis	Southwest	Gloucester
8) Chris Mitchell	Southeast	Watford*

**Some of the base locations may change*

Don't count on our illustration to be accurate regarding boundaries, but it shouldn't matter too much as we are led to believe they should be seamless. As one BW spokesman put it, the Units should be like different stores from the same chain, offering the same standard of service no matter which one you visit.

We just hope this is how things will work out, especially as the border between the Yorkshire and Northwest Units follows the line of Bedlam Dike!

MIDDLEWICH FOLK FESTIVAL

In reponse to our correspondent who penned the letter 'Death of a boater gathering', in the August issue of NABO News, and any other like-minded boaters, we have been forwarded a statement via Derek Cochrane, Managing Director, Northern Waterways.

It comes from Stephen Dent, Chairman, Middlewich Folk and Boat Festival, and expresses his concern and disappointment regarding the number of boaters who boycotted the event, apparently due to the misapprehension that British Waterways had hijacked the festival and introduced mooring fees for the sole purpose of increasing their income.

He goes on to explain that the Festival Committee has for a long time worked with goodwill in partnership with BW. Now that the event had become so large they had to take a more professional approach to health and safety, because navigation through the town was becoming hazardous, particularly effecting the hire companies there.

The Festival Committee, not BW, decided to employ three people to facilitate moorings and act as information points for visitors, but as they were a non-profit-making organisation, the only way to pay for these moorings officers was for the Committee to charge visiting boaters £12. Although BW collected the fees, all the money was passed on to the Committee, without any charges being deducted by BW for the time, effort and administration.

Here I am, staring at the same tree from the office window day after day, and the boat back on its moorings, or perhaps I should say ‘dry standing’ as the water level in our pound was a metre down when I last visited. “Again?”, I here you all say! I suppose there has to be a downside to all this dry weather we have been having.

There has also been a downside to all the canalside ‘regeneration’ in the North, our final cruise up and down the Rochdale was like moving from one building site to the next. To crown it, at Hebden Bridge they were using the dry dock too, so we were treated to a concertino for stone saws, cement mixer and three petrol-driven water pumps!

To business, firstly my sympathies to all those who opened their latest missive and found a pink mailshot about the AGM rather than a more verbally colourful ‘News’. Boring, maybe, but necessary, and no rest for me either. To get it to you on time it was yours truly that had to help my better half print, collate, staple, chop, assemble, pack, seal, label and stamp every single one of them. One comforting thought though, as we started the next batch of five hundred, was that ninety-seven percent of the maps enclosed would be safely consigned to the bin, along with the rest of the stuff. At least there they could pose no threat of getting their owners irretrievably lost! Seriously though, please try to attend the AGM. NABO needs you as much as ever.

The August NABO News was such a long time ago that some of the issues in this magazine’s letters may seem a bit outdated. I humbly beg you to dig out your old News or try to remember them. Also apologies to anyone who felt NABO was out of line including the questionnaire from the Boaters Coalition. It arrived after the copy deadline when the magazine artwork was done and dusted, but our esteemed Chairman decided the insert couldn’t wait and arranged its insertion directly with the printers. I would have much preferred the chance to ensure it was properly introduced. We mustn’t complain though, Sue stood in at the last minute to keep NABO afloat so has to be indulged a bit. Let us hope that the ‘boat’ can be steadier next year.

Talking about rocking boats, the swell from BW’s shake up is still about. To its credit, it did allow its staff to vent their spleens in *BW Monthly* and it almost made our letters column look tame, with accusations of ‘corporate and hollow’ being thrown at the answers from senior management. For once we could stand outside the cage and not have to be the ones rattling the bars!

When all has settled down and we find out whom to talk to about what, I’m sure we can get down to some constructive dialogue about boaters’ concerns again. But then, will BW know who is to speak on behalf of NABO next year? Our elections are a week or two away and anything could happen. One way or another, this could be my last Editorial. It’s your call.

Stuart Sampson

NOTICES

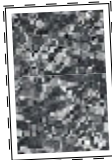
POST FOR NABO NEWS

For issue 7/03 please send contributions to

48 Old Lane, Bramhope,
Leeds LS16 9AZ

E-mail -

news.editor@nabo.org.uk



Did you know?

BW Monthly tell us that Dave Legg is measuring the forces required to open and close lock paddles and gates. *'The information will be used to establish standards which will form the basics of lock gate training programmes.'* (Training lock gates to do what? Ed.)

If you have any gates or paddles that are difficult to operate please contact Dave on 01923 201347

Prowatt 1500W Inverter.
Has run low-tech washing machine with hot fill, breadmaker, computers, printers etc in spite of impure 'sine wave' £75

Digital alternator controller, new & boxed, by Sterling £90

Contact Carole Sampson.
Can bring to AGM or post at cost

0113 2842046 or
gen.sec@nabo.org.uk

PLEASE - PLEASE - PLEASE

Tell us if your address has changed. We can't afford our PAID administration lady chasing up membership matters with folks who have moved and not told us. It needn't cost you even a stamp

PASSWORDS

Any guidance papers tables still protected will open with password 'Branch' (Capital B)

The members-only website section has a **new password**, which has been sent out to on-line members via the members' bulletin list. This is because many copies of NABO News have been given out at events with the old password in them.

If you have not been given the new word please e-mail: webmaster@nabo.org.uk with your name and membership number to be given the password, and, if you want, to be put onto the bulletin list.

A nonsense ? Or a sense of déjà-vu ?

Our usual Easter 'shakedown' cruise was this year somewhat shaken up by the receipt - on the very morning of our departure for the Oxford Canal – of BW's new Mooring Code info. As I read it over the weekend I had to put my mind through more twists and turns than Brindley created on the Oxford summit; and as I read - in particular part 2 section b :-

"You must also travel: ? at least 20 different lock miles every 15 days (the same stretch will not normally count more than once), and ? at least 40 different lock miles every 30 days, and ? at least 120 different lock miles every 3 months",

... then the glazing of my eyes must have stood comparison with the bores of a lightly loaded Lister !

However, in best Brindley tradition I struggled on, and eventually realised that this was but an heroic attempt to introduce consistency and clarity – dare one say 'clearwater' - into a previously turbid topic. As I read deeper into the text I realised that the proposals, despite their honourable intentions, fell far short of perfection. Therefore to ensure a much fairer fairness I feel that more factors need to be introduced into 'the equation'.

First of all, the definition of lock-miles needs clarification. Traditionally – at least here in the midlands – we divide the number of locks by 2 before adding them to our mileage, as this better reflects the time taken to traverse a narrow lock - compared with a mile 'on the flat'. Therefore to ensure a nationally consistent understanding of the meaning of the term then either :-

a) BW should introduce a modifying factor which takes into account the

national ratio of narrow locks to wide locks under their control, or

b) They should erect a whole new series of enamel signs at the head and tail of each lock telling boaters that they are entering a lock which is officially classified as either wide or narrow.

Some locks – such as the very wide river locks, staircases, or paired locks may have to be given a different classification, and called 'Special Structure - Status Indeterminate', and sport a different coloured enamel sign stating 'SSSI'; and outside bodies such as UNESCO may have to be consulted when interpreting the 'value' of these sites. It is important to note that under option (b) on our narrow canals here in the midlands we will have to traverse twice as many locks as our northern and southern cousins. However, this could have the perverse pleasure of making the midland network less attractive, and therefore help to relieve the pressure on some of our local 'honeypots'.

My second concern is that pressure on visitor moorings not only varies from area to area, but from week to week throughout the season; therefore to cater for this extra dimension some form of matrix is needed to encompass all these factors. As the intention of the code is to keep us moving, I propose that it be called the 'Moving Matrix'.

Obviously - for those who overstay their times on these moorings - some penalty needs to be applied. Rather than the draconian refusal of a future license that has been suggested, I propose that for fairness and clarity it should reflect the spirit of the original

code and be done on a sliding points scale against the boat licence - determined by the relationship between the length of the boat in feet, divided by the total length of that mooring in metres, multiplied by the matrix factor for that location, and multiplied again by the length of the overstay in days, divided by an 'open factor' (ie the number of days that that waterway had been open in the previous 12 months). Of course that may give some of us a problem to calculate - but this can easily be solved by making a B grade in GCSE maths the minimum qualification for holding a BW licence.

With hire, and shared-ownership boats the problem is more complex – after-all it is the boat that is licensed and not the ever-changing crew mooring it. However, this potential problem can also easily be solved, by insisting that all hirers and share-owners are capable of working out the differential equations that will be necessary to allocate the mooring time per crew, per boat, per week, per location. This can be done by insisting that those in charge of all such boats must either hold at least a 2.2 in maths or – to avoid charges of elitism – must prove to the yard operator on changeover day that they have a basic understanding of calculus.

To meet a demand the 'trinket chandlers' will start to offer 'Rosie & Jim' calculators, while traditionalists will no doubt proudly dust off their slide-rules and log tables. Such measures will obviously meet with opposition from some quarters - and campaign groups will therefore be formed. Prominent among these could be :- Innumerate Waterways Addicts, and Non-Arithmetic Boat Owners (an affiliate of the National Anti-Bureaucracy Organisation). Any confusion with existing bodies using similar initials would be as short-lived as the need for these new organisations themselves: because no-doubt, there is already a Watford wunderkind waiting in the wings to launch - in 3 or 4 years time - a revolutionary new concept in the management of visitor moorings – in fact I hear that a secret sub-committee is already working on it under the code name 'Element' – short for Local Manager Entrustment. At my next license renewal I think I'll re-name my boat Déjà-vu.

Ian Fletcher

Have you heard?

'The Millennium Commission, which still has a small amount of residual funds, has agreed a further grant of £150,000 to benefit the Ribble Link. The money will help finance a new community boat, an outdoor classroom at lock 5, visitor seating, a new footbridge, a wetland area to encourage wildlife and an extension to the existing arts trail. The work to provide the above facilities is likely to take about twelve months.'

Nothing towards dredging Savick Brook?



RIVERS



AVON AFFAIRS

Following the article by our River Users Co-ordinator entitled '*Avon Power Struggle takes New Turn*', NABO News has benefited from two further opinions on the matter.

David Bezzant, a NABO member 'since year one', wrote to Sue Burchett on behalf of the Avon Committee. In summary, he points out that:-

- 1) There is no power struggle, all parties are in favour of the Avon extension and the security of navigation on the river.
- 2) Mr Holroyde's name was misspelt and Roger Clay was omitted.
- 3) The 'surnames only' protocol was abandoned thirty years ago and certainly the LANT meetings have been well attended.
- 4) Amalgamation was supported at the LANT AGM but later rejected by UANT. However the amalgamation of the offices is progressing.
- 5) The 'slow demise of the trusts' is not happening.
- 6) It would be more constructive to compare the costs of full licences for Avon boaters with those levied in other parts of the system, rather than the costs of visitor licences.

David Bolton, also a NABO member, sent NABO News the following statement on behalf of the Upper Avon Navigation Trust:-

THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE AVON NAVIGATION

The issue of the future of the proposed extension of the River Avon navigation between Stratford-upon-Avon and the Grand Union Canal at Leamington Spa has been raised by an ad hoc group calling themselves the Avon Committee. This self-styled committee has no connection with the two statutory navigation authorities, the Lower and Upper Avon Navigation Trusts, and its members are self-appointed and do not represent any other other body of opinion.

The Upper Avon Navigation Trust (UANT), which was responsible for the restoration of the totally derelict navigation in 1969-1974, has been trying for 30 years to extend the present limit of navigation above Alveston weir, and has expended considerable time and finance on this project, so far unsuccessfully. Although there are no engineering problems in carrying out the project which the Trust, with its considerable experience of waterways management, could not handle. The Trust is convinced that this scheme cannot be achieved until the relevant local authorities give support and the well-resourced opposition is won over.

The Trust is in agreement – as it would be with any group wishing to support the extension of navigation – with the Avon Committee's stated aim to encourage the extension and, in fact, has requested the ad hoc group to concentrate their efforts on this single issue. Where the two Trusts differ with the group is in the suggestion that existing navigation management should be changed by bringing in one or other of the nationalised bodies, British Waterways or the Environment Agency.

The way in which the existing Avon navigation is run is a totally separate issue from the proposed extension and the two Trusts cannot see how a change in management can help the present navigation. LANT and UANT are only two out of 20 navigations run by non-State authorities and are members of the Association of Independent Navigation Authorities. The navigation is well run with extensive improvements being made each year and it is entirely self-financing with no cost at all to the Treasury. This would change if either BW or EA took over, together with substantial increases in costs to boaters based on the Avon.

Following a long and detailed review of the way in which the nation's inland waterways are run, the Government rejected three years ago the strongly promoted concept of a single national authority in favour of continuing with the existing structure.

UANT has stated that it will encourage and support any responsible organisation that attempts to bring about the extension of the navigation. Should they then accomplish the building of the navigation, UANT would be willing to hand over its interests in the navigation for the stretch of river upstream of Alveston weir. Licensing problems could be solved by offering free passage between the weir and Bancroft basin for any boaters not intending to use the Upper Avon.

At present, boaters who wish to cruise the Avon can purchase a long or short-term licence to cover either the Upper or the Lower, or both. This is no different from entering any navigation from another. It is noteworthy that both UANT and LANT adopt a policy of keeping the cost of licences and moorings to the minimum whereas British Waterways apparently allow market forces to dictate.

Following recent changes in the management and organisation of the UANT, the Trust is now working more closely than ever before with LANT. Engineering personnel, plant and vessels are available to both Trusts to their mutual benefit, and they share the same administrative secretary and office facilities at Wyre Mill, near Pershore, Worcestershire. All of this has been achieved within the past year and an on-going sub-committee is exploring the way ahead, including the possibility of eventual amalgamation.

“The Trust is in good heart. We have modern plant, vessels and installations with improvements to the navigation being undertaken each year. Financially, we are secure,” reports Russ Braithwaire, Chairman.” In this light, the Council reaffirms its intention to remain an independent navigation authority, with the way forward being to foster and strengthen our ties with the Lower Avon, to the advantage of boaters who use the river.”

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BOOK REVIEW: **KISS AND TELL**

– a crime novel set around life on the Grand Union Canal.

It's not one of those wide-margined giant-print books that's on its way to the second-hand bookstall after just a few hours reading, this one will keep your canal withdrawal symptoms at bay for a good number of winter evenings. The story is divided into forty-four 'parts' rather than chapters. but, like chocolates in a box, they are small enough to tempt you to indulge in 'just one more!'



True to form, a body is discovered before you reach the end of the first page, but the following scene painting, to my taste, is a bit too weighed down with adjectives. For instance, the author takes great pains to ensure that, as the characters are introduced, you are informed their hair is short, which was, I suppose, fashionable for the central figure, a female interior designer who favoured eating red mullet on board her boat at a time when the party in power was blue and BW was freshly in green.

However you are soon drawn in as intrigue develops round a mystery boater in a nameless narrowboat and the story moves into higher circles than would be expected of a tale of ordinary boating folk, although the canal remains central to the plot.

The author, Leo McNeir, lives close to the setting for this novel, and has his own narrowboat. Is he a NABO member? Well, that remains a mystery as much as whether one of the characters in the book really was intending to take his own life by overdosing on pills and, of all things – Glenmorangie!

Kiss and Tell (ISBN 0 9531742 1 2) is published by Enigma Publishing, PO Box 1901, MK19 6DN, who tell us:-

*Our publications are available from waterways and canalside shops and museums, from the IWA Bookshop and can also be ordered from any high street bookshop. The price is £7.99. We would however like to make a special offer available to your members. If they would like to send us a cheque for £6.99 per copy (made payable to 'Enigma Publishing'), we will send them a copy direct with no charge for postage-and-packing. In addition, we can arrange for Leo to do signed copies, with dedications to individual people if they want to give them as presents. We can keep this offer open until the end of the year. The offer applies to both '**Kiss and Tell**' and '**Death in Little Venice**'.*

SS

Advertisement

More on books . . .

RYA Inland Waterways Handbook

The Royal Yachting Association have just updated and modernised this publication, which they claim is a must for any waterways user and also is used as the course companion guide for the RYA Inland Waterways Helmsman Certificate.

As one would expect, this book covers river cruising as well as canal boating. Clear, but stylised, diagrams illustrate all the points made in the book, which cover basic boat handling, safety, and navigation of rivers and canals, including working locks, mooring up etc.



From an experienced boater's standpoint, it is quite salutary to see laid out what a novice has yet to learn, and even if you think you know it all, there is still much to be said for having a copy aboard for visitors' bedtime reading.

One could pick a few nits, they illustrate a cruiser-sterned narrowboat with the legend 'CANAL CRUISER', and they have let a bush grow between the towpath and the water on one illustration! There are a few other places where it doesn't quite ring true enough to have been produced by genuine experts in the field, but the advice is sound and it provides a fair introduction to inland boating – to confirm that I will pass it on to someone who has never cruised before.

We are told you can get the book direct from the RYA shop online at - www.rya.org.uk or by calling 0845 345 0372 - price £7.50

AT LAST – A ROAD ATLAS WITH CANAL BRIDGE NUMBERS

NABO has campaigned for many years to get the Ordnance Survey to put bridge numbers on their maps to help users and emergency services to identify locations along the waterways. So far, this has been to no avail but members may be interested to know that an excellent road atlas of Great Britain is available and it does have bridge numbers on very detailed maps. The maps are sourced from OS maps with the canal bridge numbers supplied by GEOprojects (UK) Limited.

The atlas in question is called "Philip's Navigator Britain" fifth edition 2003 published by Philip's, a division of Octopus Publishing Group Limited of 2-4 Heron Quays London E14 4JP web address www.philips-maps.co.uk

The book has ultra-large scale maps to a scale of 1.1/2 miles to 1 inch and is physically very large (290mm x 390mm) with 380 pages and weighs something approaching 4kg. So you will need a fairly large car or boat to carry it! Recommended price is £19.99.

BORIS THE BLOODHOUND

'sme agen. Sum fokes liked mi bit las' time, so ure ed's asked mi agen. Trubble is, tha's how yus gets lumberd. Summat ta do wi Fly not havin' time ta think!

Beedubbleu's got nu ideas fa openness 'n accountabili'y, but 'as decided not ta folla t' system itsen! An thi forgot ta ansa NABO's letta, slapt rists, nice won Robin, then thi forgot abaht them fokes wot use t' waterways an' 'ave made no plans ta tawk to 'em, an then thi wonder if thi can change t' law usin' summat call'd consensus. Ova mi hed that won.

I' seems moorin' wardens are springin' up all ova t' place. Theys supposed to jus' report, bu' sum o' them's gettin' a bi' officius. Beedubbleu's settin' up a nu compani fa its marinas: mos' a Council think its a good idea, unless thi pu' up moorin' fees.

Them on council's a bi' sad 'cos none of ya's bothered to stand fa Council. I reckon its becus ya like wot thi do, bu' thi do like sum encoridgement. Looks as if t' president will get t' t' aygeem this year, so I'd like ta c ya all there. Rememba t' bring mi a bone. Inishiativ was a word used. Sumones 'ad a gud idea fa collectin' info abaht each waterway, £ bi £, so's thi cun talk to orthorities abaht wot's rong, like over'angin' trees, paddles not workin' an' so on. P'r'aps thin's might improove fa boaters a' last. I 'ope u'll bi keen ta 'elp wi this when u 's asked.

I' wor a short meetin', or p'r'aps I fell asleep. Gotta go an' collect mi p-mail. Ya friend

Boris



TO LET OR NOT TO LET?

Jill Levick speaks from experience

I will not go into the horror stories. Let's just say that there are times when things are running smoothly, and when they are not, when you wonder why you are paying your agent as much as 20% to 25% of your rental income. But if you don't want the hassle of serving the right notices on bad tenants, finding new ones and organising change-over, you need an agent.

If you can find one situated near your house, they will then have less excuse for not making their agreed checks on the property once a tenant is installed. They could also be more likely to find prospective tenants who want to live in the area. It is helpful if they are one of the ones offering insurance. This means that rent for the agreed period of tenancy and court costs are guaranteed should the tenant default. This puts the agent's costs on the high side but it can be well worth the extra expense.

Try not to depend on your rental income for direct debit payments and day to day living. You never know when the agents will sit on your money once they have deducted their fee, or forget to tell you that your tenant has forgotten to pay this month's rent. If the tenant leaves at the end of, say, a six month's tenancy, the agents will probably not have a new one waiting to move in. Sod's Law means that this is when your boat licence is due for renewal.

However if you regard the income from your property as a useful bonus, then letting is for you. Even if you will eventually be liable for Capital Gains Tax, which is not a certainty, property continues to be the safest investment and the most beneficial. Even if you have sold your house to liberate capital to buy your boat, it would be prudent to invest the remainder in a cheaper property such as a flat, as the market stands.

The freedom of owning nothing on dry land can be a tempting thought, but I would say, let it remain a thought unless you intend to stay afloat to the end.

Jill

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LETTERS



That Questionnaire

I read your e-mailed notice of the issue of a questionnaire with surprise. I recognise that this was an attempt to provide some explanation of an unusual event, and hope that it is successful.

I write because I am not at all sure that it was a good move for NABO to become associated with the 'Boaters Coalition', without the positive involvement and approval of Council. I have already seen the questionnaire as, using the Chair@nabo address, it was posted on the internet. The questionnaire could hardly be described as objective and we, in distributing it, will almost certainly become tarred with that brush, regardless of the disclaimer. That disclaimer was also not helped by the use of an 'official' NABO address on the Web. I doubt that the questionnaire will make any legitimate contribution to the overstaying on moorings argument, regardless of the statistical ability and qualifications of its deviser.

The facts remain:

* Many members perceive that some 'continuous cruisers' are abusing the present legal position.

*Unfortunately for the legitimate continuous cruisers they are invisible-

so it's only the abusers who get noticed, but all suffer as a consequence.

*This situation is largely of BW's own making.

*The BW attempt to rectify the position is clumsy, impossible to enforce without appearing either discriminatory or draconian, and quite possibly legally unsound.

*The problem is not being addressed, using BW's existing powers, because BW could only address it in Court and they either don't want to or have been warned off trying by their own legal advisers.

*The boaters acceptance is the key to any arrangement which attempts to define what is reasonable and what is not.

Our position is a sound one. We do not condone abuse of the ability to have a licence without a permanent mooring when cruising continuously. It would though be better if we fully understood what 'abuse' means. The extremes are easy and even BW can manage those, but the greyer area in the middle merits proper attention. We play into BW's hands by ignoring it because its too difficult.

NABO should surely try to work constructively with BW and the other organisations to evolve a workable set

of guidelines which can be enforced, are supported and imposed centrally by BW, so that individual business units can't make up different rules, and have an independent appeals process to guard against any personality issues creeping in. I recognise that neither Robin Evans nor any other of BW's management have so far shown any willingness to participate, but that doesn't mean we should not try. If we can't get involvement from BW then the alternative route is through Whitehall and Westminster. This route will be easier if we start with a realistic proposition which recognises the real issues and addresses them.

The alternative is to be marginalised, leaving boaters once again without a voice.

Nigel Parkinson

Sue Burchett replies

I have read your letter with interest. I would like to point out that our constitution specifically states that we may assist other bodies.

To put the posting of the Questionnaire on the internet into context, Eugene Baston (BW Customer Relations Manager) and myself both subscribe to Topica. In a posting by Eugene (digest 690) he stated that he welcomed the efforts of the Luffs and their acquaintances but he hadn't seen a copy of the questionnaire. I replied by sending a copy of it using my private e-mail address. I don't know where you got the idea that I used chair@nabo. As expected, the questionnaire has received a mixed reception, as all

questionnaires do. At the IWA National Festival people returned the form and asked to join NABO.

I believe yours is the only letter received in criticism.*

I fully agree with the "facts" as you state them. We are happy to work with BW producing "legal" guidelines and have indeed suggested alternatives but they are determined on their course of action.

*Only one letter, but I've had several ear-bendings on my travels. Ed.

It's OK on the K&A

I can't help but respond to your readers letter of last month regarding the situation on the K&A. I moved onto a boat just under two years ago and have spent this time cruising up and down the K&A. I moved from a big city and have been unfailing impressed by all the other boaters on the canal, finding them all, across the whole spectrum of people, completely delightful, supportive of me as a beginner and polite, helpful and charming.

I am a woman on my own and have never felt so safe. I've rarely found a problem in mooring except occasionally maybe next to a pub! (I think this is surely the case on any stretch?) I can only surmise that this person is on an entirely different K&A to me?

Anna Jolly

Also. . .

NABO has received a telephone complaint that the use of the term 'water gypsy' in the letter had unwelcome racist overtones. I am sure the author meant

no offence to anyone other than those he was condemning, and would endorse any apology we would extend to anyone else offended. (Ed.)

The editor has also received a letter which just missed the copy date, from Liz Currell who cruised the K&A aboard nb Toastie Eccles. She considers the writer of the letter in issue 5/03 to be a 'bigoted snob' and lists the many favours she had from boaters on that canal. e.g loans of vacuum cleaners, lift to doctor, gifts of hand-made keyfob, recipe etc.

Sorry, this is as much as I can include at this late hour. (Ed.)

Care to do a swap?

Two years ago we did a swap with an English couple who had the use of our motorhome in New Zealand in exchange for the use of theirs in England. This worked extremely well and we have, through that exchange, become very good friends with them.

What we would like to do is swap the use of our motor home in New Zealand for the use of a canal boat in England.

I have navigated a hired canal boat around the Four Counties Ring some years back so I am well acquainted with their operation. Furthermore I was a deck officer in the British Merchant Navy for ten years and gained my Captains certificate before I left. For the past 20 years I have owned a boat. For the first 16 years a yacht and more recently a motorboat. So you can see that I am well able and qualified to handle a canal boat.

If you are interested in this exchange please e-mail us for more information to bolsters@free.net.nz

Many thanks, Michael Bolster

Mail redirect service

My husband and I are considering setting up a mail re-direct service for boaters - live-aboards and short term cruisers.

We have lived aboard for 9 years and because of all the troubles we have experienced with mail decided to try and do something about it. We know there is a service in operation that deals mainly with sea going craft but nothing tailored for canal boaters.

Before we put quite costly systems into operation we would like to ask NABO members whether there is a call for this service. We intend to provide a service that covers mail re-direct for one month up to a year or more.

Any answers or suggestions would be gratefully received.

We can be contacted on 07980 871163 or by e-mail on aeraldine@prescott643.freeserve.co.uk

Contractors safety

Am I alone in wondering about the BOATERS' health and safety aspect as BW employ more and more contractors, some of whom maintain they are in charge at locks etc. where they are working while knowing nothing about how their landlubber ideas of health and safety actually endangers us boaters.

As an example, we came up the Worcester and Birmingham where

contractors were installing bywash weirs round a couple of locks. Our get-off point had to be where their barriers allowed below the first lock – a space barely long enough before the boat hit the lock. Then the man 'in charge' ordered us to enter the lock over his outflow pipe, which scraped the boat in a way he would no doubt object to if it was his car being rubbed against.

But then the health and safety dangers started. We were instructed that he would work one side of the lock and WE must not infringe health and safety by walking on that side. He then slammed up the paddle without a by-your-leave and walked away leaving the windlass in place! My wife asked him to remove it and in reply got an 'I know what I am doing' and "I am in charge of this lock". I objected more strongly as I, on the boat, was in line with his windlass, and he did remove it but objected to me saying 'Oi' to get his attention, from the bottom of the lock, over the noise of his pumps and our engine .

On leaving the lock we were told my wife could not walk the perfectly usable but fenced off towpath to the next lock, but ride on the boat. We quickly realised that the contractors had lowered the level so we could not get the boat in to let my wife step off. She had to risk a jump onto a hard towpath. (Not much health and safety there)

Having emptied the next lock, which had the top gates open, we found out why the gate had been left that way. The gate side was blocked off so if you shut the gate there was no way of

getting back on the boat. We left it open much to the mirth of two more watching 'in-charge experts' and drove away feeling that all the fencing was designed not for the H & S of us and that the knowledge of the contractors of CANAL safety was zilch.

Still, isn't it BW's responsibility to make sure all is OK and safe for us boaters? - but then one wonders how much those in charge actually know or care about their canals. The more so on this canal where the track is often restricted to one boat's width by reed beds and where the lock landings have high uncut grass instead of a length of X yards of cut grass allowing you to get off your boats safely to work the locks.

David H.S. Cragg

You should be thankful it's grass rather than an unknown depth of 'marginal plants' as on the K&A! Ed.

Apologies

To Jill Levick who has given us the benefit of her views on just about everything. I can't find space so a quick summary:-

Boaters should be able to pay for casual towpath mooring away from 'honeypots' if they want to stay more than 14 days. BW staff on the ground think the Moorings Code draconian and unworkable.

Beta say their engines don't need to charge in gear if revved up a bit.

Fishing matches on K&A encroaching on lock landings. Organiser quotes from handbook that only 50 ft needed to be kept clear for boats! . . .

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