

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS

NABO



NEWS

- **BW Licence banding resolved**
- **BW 'Boating Issues' Update**
- **Horseboat through Standedge**



Issue 4 June 2006

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2006 CALENDAR

Council meeting	Copy date
July 15th	July 22nd
Sept 16th	Sept 23rd
Nov 18th	AGM
Nov 25th	Dec 7th

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



Another couple of months has passed and it seems we are making progress. BW's headquarters staff are now bending over backwards to take advantage of our offers to help and I hope you will soon be seeing results.

BW Development - NABO consulted

NABO has even started dialogue with ISIS, BW's property development partner. This news was volunteered by BW's Commercial Director, James Froomberg, in front of everyone at the BW Advisory Forum, up to and including the Chairman of the Board.

It all started at a local User Group level in Yorkshire. ISIS gave a ten minute presentation on plans for Leeds Granary Wharf with not one mention of the word 'boat', even though there are two listed dry docks on the site. After our Northeast Secretary reminded them what canals were for, she is now part of a working group helping the planners to incorporate improvements for boaters and hopefully to keep a dock operational. Why didn't BW Yorkshire do this? Because the staff involved didn't have a boating background?

However, to put it into perspective, even though we maybe getting involved with BW's own development schemes, they only cover 3% of the waterside. We also have to urge the BW Units to stop other development travesties by getting their navigation savvy people in on the planning approval process.

The chain of command

BW's central management may be listening to boaters, and even doing some boating themselves, but what about those outside Watford? Robin Evans re-organised BW into Business Units and gave them a degree of

autonomy. Was it too much, and has NABO enough people around the country keeping tabs on the situation? We need you more than ever.

Thankfully we have two in London, where BWL, as it likes to call itself, seems to have grand ideas. From my perch in England's largest county, with the largest BW Unit, London's waterways look like that little bit in the far left hand corner! "Treason", I hear you cry - send in the Beefeaters and take me in shackles to the Tower! However it does seem BWL has let through a number of navigation unfriendly developments, without any meaningful consultation.

One headquarters directive which seems to be lapsing is Robin Evan's Veg Pledge. Trees are still growing out of the towpath bank on the Grand Union, River Stort (London again!) and the Macclesfield, as discovered first hand when BW's External Affairs manager shed his office tie and went truly external as a hire boater. He also noticed how cow parsley and nettles are growing rampant along many banks.

Dredging remains an issue, with the Units still not asking users about where and how much needs taking out. Surely not London again?

All right, let's have a go at West Midlands (no particular reason except we are on the BCN at present). Like any BW Unit, it has various duties:-

- Ensure everything in its domain conforms to Health and Safety
- Balance its books
- Look after its waterways
- Please its customers

The Government appointed Robin Evans at a time when it knew BW customer engagement was lacking, and part of his re-organisation was supposed to put customer relations higher up the list. With so many civil engineers in senior positions in the Units he attempted to redress the balance by creating Service and Customer Operations Manager posts. Has this worked?

Certainly in the West Midlands there are still work boats littering Visitor and Facility Moorings, a sure sign that BW's paying customers are still low on the priority list, despite posts being created to champion their cause. For example: the Black Country Museum 48 hour moorings are due to be occupied by contractors' boats for the whole summer and when we went there was a hopper on the 8 hour moorings too. No effort was being made to minimise the inconvenience caused – time they were introduced to EA's 'Moor Alongside' campaign!

Customer services are also failing to provide consistent information as to where and for how long a boat can moor, something especially important around the BCN for visitors. I assume this is because the staff brought in with the customer insight don't know the Unit's waterways well enough.

For instance: Cuckoo Wharf, a very strategic overnight stop on the Birmingham and Fazeley, is billed in one document as 14 day moorings and in another leaflet as 48 hours. In reality a big sign proclaims 'Residential Moorings', but, if you can see it behind the work boats, there is a small sign saying '*14 days max*'. Not very long for residents, so we assume these were visitor moorings. No mention at all is made of Cuckoo Wharf as a mooring site on the BW information boards.

Boating Facility Consultation

These tales of woe might make us wonder about the worth of our efforts, but fear not, there are promises of a 'culture change'. The Head of Boating Development has been going external too, not only afloat, but also with a firm of consultants to gather boaters' opinions about what they believe can best be done with a limited budget to improve the network. It is part of BW's Customer Insight Programme.

One of the spin-offs from this will be that BW will have to take stock of its existing facilities, something already started with Waterscape's Boaters Guides.

One may wonder why NABO isn't the one gathering boater's views and presenting them, but, no matter how many times we are proved right, the hard core in BW has yet to be convinced of our credibility. We did, however, accept with open arms BW's invitation to help plan the survey and I hope if you were approached by one of the team's personable young ladies, you found her questions well informed.

BW is also promising a culture change recognising the value of the NABO Waterway Reports Forum. but you know all about that, don't you?

Etiquette

I mentioned earlier that Eugene Baston had gone 'external'. It was in a Black Prince hire boat and it is a pity that some private owners let the side down by assuming all hirers are speed merchants and totally devoid of courtesy and etiquette. Members of his crew were quite put off by the endless signs and needless gesticulations to *slow down*. We complain about excess BW signage but what about our own?

Are we not capable of tying up a boat, particularly on a long-term online

mooring, in such a way that it can be passed at a reasonable cruising speed without damage? Has nobody heard of the benefits of a spring line or two and some decent fenders? You see lots of men 'fettling' their moorings to get the most comfortable ride when boats pass. I do it, I don't know if it is a 'man thing' but it keeps us out of mischief while the ladies are doing something more important!

We all know that some boaters are excusably ignorant, others the uncaringly ignorant, but why not forget the imperative for once, and not always assume that the approaching boat will be travelling too fast? I hope the NABO window slogan is more friendly: "*Thank you for passing us slowly*".

EA funding

There may be optimism on the BW front, but what **are** we going to do with the EA? How can a navigation authority possibly survive without enough money? Can it ever make ends meet if it must increase its charges to boaters so much that it is in danger of driving them all off the rivers?

We have tried writing to the Waterways Minister, but how can you aim ahead of a moving target when you don't know which way it will move next? By the way, as we go to press, the target is Barry Gardiner MP.

Is it time for another '*Write to your MP*' campaign? At the Parliamentary Waterways Group AGM on the 13th we learned that the total Government spending on waterways is less what is

spent on Hyde Park in London, which is in reach of far less users - none of whom are charged a penny.

Waterways get in a year less than the Highways Agency get in a day, and over the last 10 years Grants In Aid have been, barring a few 'blips', in steady decline. You know the form - get writing!

Council

Unfortunately Merleen Watson will not be working for NABO on Council any more. She has resigned for a number of reasons but I felt she was never really able to get into it and I am sorry if that was my failing. It is a shame but I hope she finds another way to fulfill her desire to help the waterways cause.

One thing she did mention though was people on Council with specific agendas. This should not be a problem, providing their interests are in the open and balanced. In fact that is one of our strengths – you can't paint a true picture without some strong colours on your palette.

Finally

If you see the boat depicted below on your travels, please don't hesitate to say hello. Carole and I may be officers of a national association but we are primarily boaters and like a good chat with others of like mind. Talk 'shop' if you wish but you don't have to. If you want a good rant, please give us a chance to get tied up properly first!

Happy Cruising

Stuart



FINAL DECISION ON LICENSING CONSULTATION

BW has ended its consultation leaving private and business licences much as they were a year ago. However to satisfy the ruling of the Waterway Ombudsman of the time, it has clarified its classification of shared boats as follows:-

4. To resolve the confusion over the licence requirement for ‘hybrid’ boats that straddle the “private” v. “business” classification, we conclude that the status of the licence applicant should determine the licence category:

a) if the joint owners of a boat are able and content to nominate one of their number as its lawful keeper for British Waterways’ purposes, then BW will licence it as a private boat. The responsibilities of the lawful keeper are to pay the licence fee and ensure full understanding and compliance with licence terms and conditions at all times, regardless of who is using the boat.

b) where the company contract does not permit this, or where the joint owners choose to look to the company for administration and maintenance services, the boat should be treated for licensing purposes as part of a business.

c) If it comes to BW’s attention that a private individual is licensing multiple boats, it may be presumed that they are acting as a business.

We believe that this solution is fair in that groups of owners will self-select on the basis of their dependence on the commercial boat share company. This company is always responsible for selling the initial shares in the boat and for managing it initially. Its operation during this period is similar to that of a traditional hire company. In some cases the individual share owners over time form a strong bond and, depending on their contract with the company, may take over greater responsibility for the boat’s operation and maintenance. In other words, they behave more like private boat owners.

This is very much in line with NABO’s thinking all along and we are confident the views we expressed played a major role in resolving this issue.

BW BOATING ISSUES UPDATE

Some comments about and *extracts from* a very helpful paper issued by Amanda Strang of BW’s External Relations department updating us on developments since the meeting in March.

BOATING ETIQUETTE

External Relations to circulate the original ‘Safe and Friendly Cruising Guide’ to user group representatives and ask them to provide comments.

We concur with RBOA’s comment that if the guide is to be revamped the etiquette and safety side should not be combined. BW feels its Boaters Handbook covers the safety messages and is reluctant to add an etiquette publication to its workload until its facility survey and other ongoing consultations are done.

ALIEN / INVASIVE SPECIES

BW's Alien Species campaign will be launched in June 2006 aimed at gardeners, tropical fish enthusiasts, the garden and aquatic trade and the general public. It will highlight the most problematic invasive species on our waterways, for example: Ragwort, floating Pennywort, Japanese Knotweed, and to provide information on their identification and advice on how to prevent them being introduced to the waterways.

The guide and media activity will be supported in June by information on www.waterscape.com

Since you know the canals better than anyone, we would like your help in promoting the survey and would welcome your support by circulating the survey to all your members. We will ensure that all waterway canal societies also receive a copy of the survey.

Also in July we will be highlighting some of the finest sites to spot wildlife on our waterways and producing a mini-guide to these sites. The guide will be published in July and circulated to user groups, ahead of the main summer holiday season.

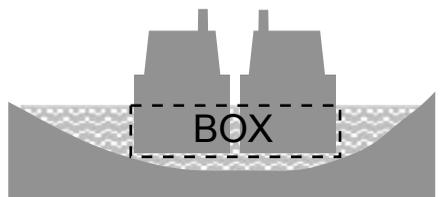
If you have any questions about this project, please contact Liz Woznicki, part of the External Relations team either by phone (01923 201166) or email (liz.woznicki@britishwaterways.co.uk) who would be happy to explain these in more detail.

WATERWAY STANDARDS, DREDGING AND CHANNEL DIMENSIONS

Following the Boating Issues meeting in March, Jim Stirling is working on providing a comprehensive response to the issues of dredging principles and standards, channel dimension and pinch-points which will be included in July's update.

At the meeting, BW's method of surveying and assessing dredging standards was discussed. We were shown a system map with waterways marked in green for 'OK', blue for 'To be surveyed' and red for 'Needs work'. Some of the green on the River Stort was vehemently challenged by Adrian Stott.

BW regards 'OK' as deep enough to allow a 'box' to pass down the majority of the length, the 'box' being as wide as two narrowboats plus passing separation and 1.5 metres draught. For broader canals the beam for the vessels was doubled.



Adrian contested that:-

- These dimensions had been adopted without consultation
- The 'box' should pass down the whole length
- Broader canals should be measured according to the historical gauge of the vessels that used it, both in terms of beam and draught.

The new Technical Director, Jim Stirling, took this message away to consider. We will keep you informed.

UPDATE ON AINA SIGNAGE - Metric Measurements

British Waterways' legal team produced the following guidance on the use of imperial signage on the British Waterways network:

- *The Units of Measurement Regulations 1995 requires, as a general rule, metric measurements to be used in the public sphere.*
- *There are some exemptions under those regulations for 'road traffic signs' on public highways.*
- *Waterways are not highways:*

Accordingly signs erected for the purposes of navigation are not 'road traffic signs' and (under the 1995 Regulations) have to be in metric measurements.

Further clauses showed towpaths could not normally be exempted either.

AVIAN INFLUENZA BRIEFING

After the finding of a dead swan off Scotland, the message remains much the same. Report dead waterfowl to BW and DEFRA, don't handle carcasses and wash hands and footwear as one would to avoid other nasties.

BW KEY AVAILABILITY

BW will review the provision of free shower facilities and asked users to provide views on where facilities should be provided and the availability of keys.

Following the Boating Issues meeting a wider discussion of 'shared use of facilities' took place at the Corridor Issues meeting in March. The outcome was that the meeting attendees favoured BW's development of a universal service card for access and as a charging system for using some canalside facilities. We will progress this work.

Watch this one! 'Some canalside facilities' could extend to visitor mooring parking meters and even locks.

WATERWATCH SCHEME

A table of reservoir holdings showed April figures, the worst being Grand Union at 78%. Little point in reproducing it here as it will be well out of date when you read this.

We remain relatively optimistic that widespread restrictions to navigation over the boating season will not be required.

We have been in touch with some of the water companies to find out more about hose pipe bans and what they mean for our boaters. We would welcome your help to provide the following advice to boaters who express concern about the current hose-pipe bans.

Guidance:

Boaters can continue to use hose pipes to fill up their vessels with drinking water and for their toilet. In addition to this boaters may wash down the deck area of the craft where they enter / exit the vessel but NOT to wash down the whole craft or water plants with a hosepipe.

We'd also be grateful if you could report: [Waterway Reports Forum]

- *leaks on water points to your local waterways office*
- *leaks to the canal embankment or lock structures so these can be addressed to conserve the water on the network.*

And

- *ensure locks gates & paddles are closed when you leave a lock*
- *share locks where possible.*

MOORING CONTRACTS

BW invited users to participate in a pre-consultation to develop a strategy for improving mooring contracts and address customers' demand for longer term security of tenure.

A working group has now been set up and includes representatives from IWA, NABO, RBOA and the AWCC. The group will review the main terms of the existing annual mooring contracts, and current practice, relating to the length of the contract, security of tenure, selling the boat on site and transferring the berth from one customer to another. A constructive first meeting was held on Monday evening, 8 May.

Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

At various Boating and Corridor Issues meetings the subject of 'anti-social behaviour' has often been discussed. It is a subject we take extremely seriously and we've implemented methods for monitoring reports of anti-social behaviour through complaint tracking and visitor incident report forms.

Local waterway units are developing a range of initiatives to help combat anti-social behaviour. Some of these initiatives are highlighted below:

Crimebuster cameras set to be installed – Shropshire Union Canal

Wales & Border Counties' waterways provided £5,000 to support Ellesmere Town Council and the local police force to install a new £45,000 CCTV system to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in Ellesmere. BW's involvement in the project came as a result of isolated incidents of antisocial behaviour and vandalism to boats moored along the Ellesmere Arm and one of the initiative's cameras is being installed along the canalside.

South East Waterways – working with local police forces

The South East Enforcement team are working with Daventry Police to implement a 'Boat Watch scheme' to tackle crime and disorder issues affecting boaters and other waterway visitors to Northamptonshire's canals.

In the meantime South East Waterways is working with the EA and Daventry Police to produce leaflets, posters, stickers for craft and signage to promote reporting of incidents, and ensuring that local police forces have maps of all access routes to and from the canal corridor to ensure that they are able to attend incidents in a timely manner.

FOR YOUR SAFETY ...

FIRE SAFETY BOOKLET

You may remember in February we mentioned the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) were offering free fire prevention checks to boaters in their county. Now they have produced a booklet to help you check for yourself. Contact them at:-

The Community Fire Safety Headquarters
Old Budbrooke Road
Budbrooke
WARWICK
CV35 7DP
Tel: 01926 466282
Email: firesafe@warwickshire.gov.uk



GAS - TO LOCK OR NOT TO LOCK?

At Crick Show the WFRS had a stand, almost opposite NABO's, where they were conducting quizzes using hand held keypads for groups of visitors. However one question they don't have a definite answer for is whether it is safer to lock or not to lock your gas box.

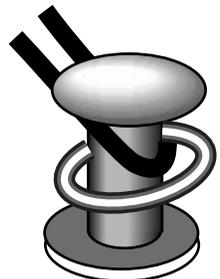
If there is a fire on a boat the first thing to do if possible is turn off the gas, yet the last thing a firefighter needs is any delay while in the danger zone of a gas locker. However some boat fires are deliberate and WFRS suggests some arsonists deliberately turn on the gas to maximise the effect. What are your views on this?

At this point it might be worth digging up a suggestion made in a previous edition of NABO News of having a diaphragm operated gas shut-off valve in the regulator assembly which is opened by air pressure from a squeeze bulb in the galley. This could easily be released when no supply is required for a while, e.g. at night. By connecting it with low melting point plastic tube running alongside the gas pipe, if there was a fire the tube would melt first and the valve shut off the supply automatically with no electricity involved.

BOLLARD SECURITY?

While on the subject of suggestions for improving boater's peace of mind, there is still a tendency for urban architects and planners to incorporate bollards rather than rings where boats are to moor overnight, and many bollards are already set in stone (or brick, concrete etc). Some boaters live in fear of being maliciously set adrift, an even worse nightmare if combined with arson as mentioned above.

A possible way to make it just that much more difficult to slip the rope off would be to give the bollard a 'belt', a



stainless steel ring around its waist just too small to lift off, but large enough for at least one turn of the rope to be threaded between the bollard and the ring before being tied back on the boat.

The rings would have to be preformed, slit and welded back together on site once sprung over the head of the bollard. When not in use they would lie unobtrusively round the base.

BW BY-LAWS AND LICENCES

The chances are that although you pay to keep your boat on a BW waterway and sign the application form stating that you will obey all the rules and regulations; you probably have no idea what the by-laws require of you.

First things first. Why pay for a canal licence at all? The answer is that since the Transport Act 1968, the Public Right of Navigation has ceased to exist on all BW canals. Consequently, you need permission (a "licence") to use its land and without such permission, you would be committing a trespass. BW has the powers to charge by virtue of its enabling act (Transport Act 1962) and other legislation but until it obtained a by-law in 1977 it had no powers to insist on a boat being licensed and having to display that licence.

The situation in respect of river waterways is different, being covered by the British Waterways Act 1971 which requires vessels to be registered and (by virtue of BW Act 1975) to display the certificate.

So you now know why you have to display your licence or river registration disc.

There are two sets of by-laws relating to BW waterways. The General Canal By-laws dated 1965 were made using the powers of the British Transport Commission Act 1954. (The Commission was the forerunner of BW set up after WW2 to run the nationalised transport system). The canal by-laws apply to all waterways controlled by BW except the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal and the River Severn Navigation. These latter two waterways have their own set of special by-laws dated 1962 made using the same legislative process. The Lee and Stort Navigation was covered by its own separate by-laws (the River Lee General By-laws dating back to 1908) until they were repealed in 1966.

BW's by-laws cover a wide range of activities including marking of vessels, lights, signals, conduct of vessels, use of structures, etc. down to mundane regulations forbidding anyone from getting over a wall or through a hedge.

The sections on speed limits are worthy of further study. The general speed limit on most canals and rivers is 4 miles per hour, but on most sections of the River Trent the limit is 6 miles per hour upstream and 8 miles per hour downstream over the bed of the river. The same applies on the River Severn. A 6 mile per hour limit applies on the Aire & Calder Navigation (except the Selby Canal), the New Junction Canal, the SSYN, the River Soar section of the GU Canal, the Weaver Navigation and the Witham Navigation; and also on the G&S Canal.

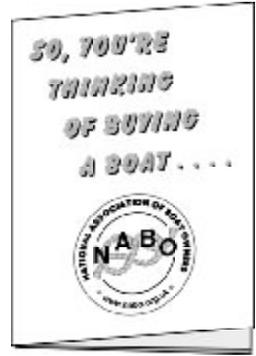
The general canal by-laws have had minor amendments over the years to prohibit or control water-skiing, and to require the display of licences.

If you have any queries relating to waterway laws and regulations our River Secretary is always willing to offer advice to members.

SO YOU ARE THINKING OF BUYING A BOAT...

NABO Council has put its heads together to compile a leaflet to be given to those who come to us at shows asking us about getting afloat. Often they have only the vaguest idea what is involved, and the most ill-informed seem to be those who have pretensions of moving on to a boat permanently as a place to live.

Far be it for us to put them off, as they are potential members, nor would it be responsible for us to encourage them without pointing out the possible snags. The pilot version ran to some 18 pages, was trialled at the Crick Show, and over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the stock went, leaving only 22 for the National, so we will now charge £1 each.



If you know someone needing a copy, we hope to make the booklet available through members when the next edition is prepared in the Autumn.

Council members debated long and hard over how off-putting it should be, with many present having had to take the rough of boating with the smooth and so drawing on their own experiences, many of which originally motivated them to volunteer as a way to save others. The things we put in ranged from the need to find moorings to fear of spiders. What we didn't include is any caution about joining the boating community, and certainly none of the following:-

ASBOaters

Life afloat can be friendly, fulfilling, and fun. But not always so. A local boating community, whether in a marina or linear, is a microcosm of life on the bank. Many years ago, communities were strong. The family unit tended to stay together. Folks moved on rarely. There was respect for the elderly and wise. People watched out for each other. Doors went unlocked, and neighbours were in and out of each other's houses. Many were part of the extended family. Of course there were the gossips and trouble-makers too.

In more modern times it is not unusual to ignore the folks next door, who become total strangers. The elderly find themselves in sheltered accommodation or care homes instead of being central to, and at the heart of their families. Children can be abusive, rude, and threatening because, rightly or wrongly, they no longer fear the traditional clip round the ear. Parents both work, and have little time and patience with neighbours or their offspring.

Modern boating communities tend to be a mixture of both. Maybe because we are mostly early retired, or at least of older stock, and we all share a common interest and way of life, we still wave and speak to each other. We will help out another boater in trouble at the drop of a paddle. We socialise in each other's boats, and take an interest in what goes on around us.

However, there is always one, or two, who quickly take umbrage when things don't go the way they want them to go. Occasionally we find the odd person who

is a busy-body, a nosey-parker, a gossip, or a trouble-maker. They may start rumours about boaters they don't like. They may be upset because they think another boater is getting better treatment from a landlord or navigational body than they are. They perhaps have been around on a site for a long time and think they run the place. They may not like the new upstarts who have just arrived, or even their scruffy boat. Such folks are the Anti Social **Boaters**.

Most of their problems arise through lack of understanding a situation, usually due to poor communication. But there is a fine line between being informed and being nosey; twixt shared issues and minding one's own business. Misinformation is often behind misapprehension.

Often the catalyst for dispute is something easily resolved; someone not paying their share of a split power hook-up, misuse of a mooring whilst the occupier is cruising, or inconsiderate running of an engine to charge batteries. Sometimes conflicts arise simply because of jealousy. Someone feels miffed. Often, when brought into the light, such ill-feeling is of their own doing.

There are other effects to consider too. In our experience a boater who has been friendly, then suddenly turns malicious, may have a serious problem of their own they are struggling to deal with. It could be a recent bereavement, serious illness, or change in financial security.

But how to deal with the situation? Certainly to return raised voices or wild tempers with like won't help resolve anything. To spread rumours about the person already spreading rumours will cause factions and just alienate everyone from everyone else. Finding a neutral third person to mediate would help a lot. However, if you are the target, please first consider whether the complainer might have a point.

Obviously to sit and talk, face-to-face, will dispel most misunderstandings. Of course, if their complaint is justified against you, then apology is the only effective answer. However, if they are the cause of injustice, then there is nothing wrong with the old parable about 'turning the other cheek'. This doesn't mean getting another slap. To turn the other cheek, instead of cowering or turning away, one has to stand up and calmly hold one's ground; not return like-for-like; not to be threatening or vengeful in return; simply to let the vitriol pass over you like water on the proverbial duck's back.

Often, this action alone will take the heat out of the situation. It might result in someone stalking off, thinking they've won some kind of personal victory, but so what? The truth will out eventually. It always does. There is a kind of Karma on the canals.

Later, a friendly wave towards a boater who has a grudge against you will cause one of two reactions. They may smart inside and duck away from you, or they may melt inside and wave back. Either way, you will have won the high ground, whatever the dispute. On the other hand, boats are mobile. You could always sail away. But then, isn't this just what the ASBOater wants you to do?

BRITISH WATERWAYS ADVISORY FORUM

I described in the Chairman's Column how we had 'mention in dispatches' at the BWA meeting regarding consultation on development plans, but I'll include a few impressions of two other agenda items here.

Restoration strategy.

BW is realising it shouldn't take the lead in deciding priorities, and that by being seen to give a scheme a lower status, there is a danger that the scheme's credibility can suffer in the eyes of others, e.g. the Bedford-MK Link. So who should decide? It seems that, in practice, circumstances decide, particularly regarding funding. BW's policy now is to be seen to support every realistic proposal in principle but not necessarily financially, maybe giving that extra push to those on the brink of success to ensure it.

There are many factors that affect the fortunes of a specific scheme. Each project needs to create 'outputs' which have to be realised, otherwise money may be clawed back. Many are social and economic, particularly on a local level to get local authority support, but there are boating 'outputs' too, e.g. extra moorings.

A very difficult criterion to quantify and put into the equation is the part that link or arm would play in the navigation network as a whole. If BW is to take a less prominent role then the navigation interests need a champion. I mentioned this at the last Council meeting but they didn't feel this was an issue NABO should put high on its priorities.

Volunteering.

The other topic was volunteering, and we were treated to an entertaining and informative presentation by Mike Palmer of WRG. Although this was centred around the much esteemed 'welly and barrow brigade' and illustrated by some very impressive examples of workmanship, the topic had much wider implications. It went without saying that at least a third of the people in that room were volunteers themselves, so the BW lot had to mind their Ps and Qs!

From BW's point of view it has, in effect, a much larger workforce looking after its network than those on its payroll, but it has an obligation to 'manage' them all. This ties in with the idea of the 100,000 'lengthsmen' mentioned in the last NABO News. BW was made well aware of its fortune in having this resource, and admitted deficiencies in making best use of it. We look forward to how this develops.

Vice-chair Elections

When we put together the Constitution for BWA, the first Vice Chairman was only intended to stand for one year to set up the appropriate stagger and the position should have been re-elected at the last meeting. This seemed to have caught the officers a bit by surprise and a postal ballot is being organised by the secretariat (BW). I feel it would be good for someone from a volunteer body with no commercial interests to fill this role. If no-one else stands I might offer.

Stuart Sampson

REGULATIONS FOR SALES OF RED DIESEL FUEL

We have been asked to remind boaters of the regulations affecting dealers selling red diesel and kerosene which are subject to a rebated rate of fuel duty. These came into effect in April 2003. If you buy fuel for your boat you may experience the regime which a number of boatyards seem to be applying incorrectly.

The new rules have been introduced to crack down on people who use rebated fuels illegally in road vehicles, and special arrangements are now in force including registration, record keeping and monthly returns to HM Customs & Excise by registered dealers in fuel oils.

The rules relating to sales of red diesel to pleasure craft are really very simple. Marina and boatyard supplies of any quantity direct into a pleasure boat fuel tank require no additional records beyond those held for the purpose of conducting the business. It is not necessary for the fuel seller to take details of your name, address, stated use of the fuel, etc.

The same rules apply to red diesel sold in loose cans for supplies not exceeding 100 litres. Larger quantities dispensed into cans or other containers will require more detailed mandatory information from the customer.

Members may find that previously obliging boatyards will now refuse to dispense small quantities of red diesel into loose cans, claiming that the regulations prevent them from doing so. This is incorrect and depending on how well you know them you may wish to question their procedure. They may simply refuse to serve you!

More information can be found in Excise Notice 192 (Oils) or on the HM Customs & Excise website www.hmce.gov.uk

EMAIL ERRORS

The following addresses have been removed from the Bulletin list as they are returning permanent errors. If one of these was yours, please email your new one to webmaster@nabo.org.uk

101656.1455@compuserve.com
alan@skinner1934.fsnet.co.uk
avid@nblupus.co.uk
cjbishop@care4free.net
claire@nbblackadder.demon.co.uk
corfield1@compuserve.com
dave.phillips@arkwood7.freemove.co.uk
fogartycastings@freenetname.co.uk
ian&myra@nbmartlet.org.uk
imsbennell@kenbennell.f9.co.uk
juliero@hotmail.com
keith@elstead.org.uk
kevin_walters@tinyworld.co.uk
mjmcDonald@mcdonald.entra.net
nbpattience@lineone.net

pandamarks@bigfoot.com
panzer@waitrose.com
paul@pegary.demon.co.uk
petemeph@ic24.net
peterwright@care4free.net
pfm01@pfmnet.info
richc@netcomuk.co.uk
rorog@fairbairn29.freemove.co.uk
royston.j@virgin.net
spokes@compuserve.com
stanmoor@msn.com
teddy.taylor@lineone.net
trevor@ladyelg.fsnet.co.uk
william@everatt.demon.co.uk

RCR Advert

NOTICES

Text your
waterway
reports to:

07930 419 981
07961 001814
07989 441674

POST FOR NABO NEWS

For issue 5/06 the editor will be afloat so please send items by email to news.editor@nabo.org.uk

Failing that by post, well in advance to:-

48 Old Lane, Bramhope,
Leeds LS16 9AZ

BEEN DESPERATE?

Overwhelmed with rubbish?
Full toilet? No water? Empty
diesel tank? Leaking boat?

Please tell NABO where you think facilities or repair yards are missing on the waterway network.

Email: fac@nabo.org.uk or write to the NABO address on page 22 with the word **'FACILITIES'** on the envelope

£5 off your sub

Money back for you when a new member joins up having put **your** name in the 'introduced by' box on his or her application form (up to a maximum of 3)

Life membership
for £150

+ £50 for 'family'

BW NW

The new number for the
BW Wigan Office is:
01942 405700

EVENTS

THE NATIONAL

STAND HELP NEEDED
August Bank Holiday

Even if you can only manage an hour or two it must be worth a free ticket. Please contact Aileen on 0770 3567764



RIVERS



NEW THAMES REPRESENTATIVE

NABO is pleased to announce that Louis Jankel is to be its Thames representative. Louis will liaise with either the Rivers, Southern or London secretaries according to the nature of the issue. He is a member of the Thames RFERAC (the Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee for the Thames area that the EA is obliged to consult by statute) and the Waterways Working Group sub-committee. This post he holds as an individual advisor not as a user group representative. He is also a member of the 'Thames User Group - navigation' (TUGn).

VISITORS TO RIVERS - A WARNING

We have had reports that boats visiting rivers are mooring stern to the flow and thereby being swept on to boats moored downstream of them when casting off. Our Humber Rivers Representative warns that narrowboat users in particular are guilty of this on the Trent and raises two points: one – that river flow may increase after one has tied up; and two – that the river flow can bring with it a load of debris which can foul the rudder and propeller.

Remember also that mooring with spring lines (rigged to prevent fore and aft movement) is particularly important on rivers so breast lines can be left slacker to account for level changes and the relative movement caused by boat wash.

EA TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT ORDER

Public consultation has now closed on the final draft of this Order. Since we last reported, the document has been through the mill with Government lawyers and a number of changes made. Most are improvements but one has perhaps gone too far.

There was a lot of debate on the maintenance of the Register regarding the conflict between the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act. Now the whole section on that subject has been renamed 'Provision of Information'. Under the Order, EA can only give boat owners' names and addresses to statutory authorities, which, though welcome in many respects, perhaps takes privacy too far. NABO has commented that in event of an accident one cannot find out who owns an involved boat, which might be vital if an insurance claim has to be made.

NABO also wants to ensure the new clause about consultation includes the words 'taken into account', which we were assured had specific legal meaning while under the guidance of Prof Jeffrey Jowell QC drafting the BWAf constitution.

THE HORSEBOATING SOCIETY BRINGS HERITAGE ALIVE

Imagine gliding along the waterway in silence, broken only by the sounds of nature, the distant footfall of hooves, the creak of the hull, the occasional gurgle of water round rudder or gentle words of encouragement from human to horse – until those words change tone – a tree has been left growing from the washwall, a railing has snagged the towline, or that footfall has been counted by one of those obscured pillars installed between the path and the water. It could, of course, be a moored boat with a TV aerial, or a tunnel....

The Huddersfield Narrow Canal and Standedge Tunnel

The horseboat Maria had the honour of being the first boat to make a full passage in 2001, since the last boat Ailsa Craig in 1948. She made return journeys of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal in 2001, 2002, and 2003. However the climax of this journey in 2006 was to be the legging of Standedge Tunnel in each direction. The year 2006 also provided another anniversary – 200 years since the appointment of Thomas Telford to complete the building of the tunnel which had been fraught with delays. Our journey started on May 4 on the Ashton Canal from the home mooring of Maria, Britain's oldest surviving wooden narrowboat, built in 1854.



Our oldest HBS member Ronnie Barnes, now 87, is believed to be the last person to have legged Standedge Tunnel along with his fellow canal maintenance workers. This was in 1946/7 after the official closure of the canal in 1944 by Act of Parliament. Ronnie and team would leg their boat because it had neither engine nor horse. The 6 men used to bowhaul the boat between Huddersfield and Mossley. When legging, they worked in 3 pairs, taking turns, while 2 others fended the boat off the tunnel sides, and one steered. A sixth man made tea or rested, Ronnie reports. He was in his late 20s at this time.

On May 7, we horseboated up the Diggle Flight then we legged from Diggle to Marsden, with Ronnie and his wife Sheila on board to watch us “follow in Ronnie’s footsteps”. The HBS allowed itself 4 pairs (not just 3) as we were all “greys” and one pair was made up of lady leggers.

One legger was Jim Woodland from Mikron Theatre Company who was on board to film the event for an inter-active CD Rom in the making. Another was Barbara Holmes from The Ashton Packet Boat Co. which restored and owns Maria, and she was filming too. We placed a large board, across planks by the towing mast, stretching across the width of the boat but with no extension beyond the hull. Standedge is very narrow in places, just allowing the boat itself through. The

hours 52 minutes. This was the approximate time Ronnie expected for our empty boat and most accounts suggest 3 to 4 hours for a passage.

The HBS ran a local competition at The Marsden Information Point to guess the leggers' time and in fact Sue Day, chairperson of The Horseboating Society guessed this to the minute, showing how consistent we are with our pace!

However of course the prize was given to the person with the next nearest guess, which was only 2 minutes out. A delighted young Steven, with his grandmother, received the prize tickets, donated by British Waterways, for a full passage of Standedge Tunnel for 4 in the BW passenger pod . With his family, he was also photographed with the Mayor of Kirklees! She had kindly accepted the invitation to attend the event, to meet all those involved.



On arrival at Tunnel End, the leggers were presented with a most wonderful surprise, which was a cake made by Christine, wife of legger Malcolm Bergin, who is a canalboat builder. The cake was the horseboat Maria, complete with a pair of leggers, coming out of the Standedge Tunnel. A cake cutting ceremony was instantly performed.

The boat had carried essential cargo through the tunnel. There were two barrels of beer on board. One was The Leggers' Bitter, especially brewed and donated to the HBS for the occasion, by the Riverhead Brewery of Marsden. The other barrel was their revival of The Standedge Admiral, the name given to Thomas Bourne who used to cross the tunnel top as his job with boathorses. The Leggers' Bitter washed our cake down well!

Bonny The Boathorse had been taken over the tunnel top by Nigel Dix, while the boat was being legged through, travelling along Boat Lane, followed by several walkers. They were all there to greet us on arrival. The HBS had arranged with Kirklees Countryside Service to make the walk along the boathorse route a part of their advertised programme.

The Diggle Band played as they had done when we entered the tunnel, playing the Standedge Fanfare commissioned for 2001. This certainly added to the sense of occasion and fun. The band was a welcome involvement from the people of Diggle. The tunnel does have two ends!

While visitors had waited for the legged boat to emerge, they could watch demonstrations from HBS waterway craft workers. Cable-laid cotton towlines were being made by The International Guild of Knot Tyers. Repairs to boathorse harness were being undertaken by trained saddlers. Harness bobbins were being made on a pole-lathe, then painted in decorative colours. Crochet work was on the go, needed for the boathorse's ears protector cap.



After that we went on to reach Huddersfield in two days. As always we really enjoyed horseboating this canal. The bluebells and wild garlic and campions were all in flower. The beautiful Pennine scenery is always a joy. A change of horse had been necessary. Bonny works the west side, best suited to the low modern bridges in Stalybridge. Queenie accepts the heavy traffic in Huddersfield which frightens Bonny.

The following day, we began our return journey. On the east side, it is essential to have Queenie, a black horse. The Horseboating Society of course banks "at the sign of the black horse". Without fail, we conduct business at our branch in Slaithwaite, where the bank is beside the canal. The staff in the bank now know us well and gain pleasure from our visits with the horse and boat. We did have a couple of pounds very low on water but nothing we could not resolve by letting a little water down to help Queenie pull Maria.

The second legging event day like the first had dull weather. The craft workers decided to play safe and go inside the marquee which BW had thoughtfully hired for the day. The farrier arrived to shoe Bonny and Queenie. He cleaned up horseshoes as presents for watching children. Sue gave a harnessing demonstration, and explained the functions of all the parts of the harness. The HBS have bought a toy horse, called Toy Bonny, which Rick Muir is making a set of harness for so that children will be able to harness up Toy Bonny for themselves.

Just after 2pm, the date rolled back 150 years so the scene of 1856 was set for the large crowd. They were reminded that the tunnel had opened in 1811 after 16 years of building it. Sue Day, acted the part of the widowed boatwoman who had enlisted the help of her two brothers to work the boat. She would steer the boat in the tunnel whilst "brother" Robert took Bonny over the top.

Young "brother" Nigel, age 35, would leg the boat from the cabin roof, legging where he could reach, or using a pole. Nigel worked constantly, even rising onto his shoulders to reach the tunnel roof at times. The tunnel water level has been dropped to facilitate passage of modern boats with their wide cabins, so the mattress under Nigel was to make up for some of this difference. The other crew

on board gave Nigel information about what lay ahead as he does not know the tunnel well. This helped prevent him getting hurt by bangs on the roof, and we would also advise him that it was time to get up to pole. We had run planks along the length of the boat so he could walk at gunwale level whilst poling. When we emerged, Nigel was tired but proud and happy, and extremely black ! He had taken 3 hours 3 minutes.

We were definitely not out to discredit the alleged record of David Whitehead who is supposed to have legged the tunnel in 1914 in 1 hour and 25 minutes. No records exist today apparently to prove the record. Nigel's efforts do however cast doubt on the reliability of the record. Alternatively David was really an outstanding hero!

There is no doubt that the local community along the 20 mile length of the canal enjoyed the project just as did HBS crew and the boathorses.



The Horseboating Society is affiliated to NABO and works tirelessly to keep the skills of the original methods of canal transport alive. Sue Day points out that you can't just couple any old nag to any old boat, or worse - new boat, and expect to cruise on fodder rather than fuel.

However people are welcome to join the HBS to find out how it should be done, but also to 'think horse', appreciate those features of our system that owe their design to the needs of the horse, and exert pressure on the authorities to preserve them and not add further impediments. Who knows, if your boat breaks down, you could be on the end of a towline!

For membership contact Tim Lucey <walter.lucey@btinternet.com>, visit www.horseboating.org.uk or phone Sue on 01457 834863

We wish to thank Sue Day and the Horseboating Society for the use of their text and pictures.



WHY?

Why is this man watering the towpath?

No, it has nothing to do with horses, more to do with cyclists. Not only does it keep the dust down, but it also seems to slow cyclists down!

Call it the Haydon Effect?

Thanks Peter.

SILLY signs

Seen from Hunts Lock near Fradley - We can read 'BOATERS', but the message is not so obvious. In fact it says 'slow down', but how can you slow down while already stopped in a lock?



Metrication comes to waterway signage?



Whoops! - Pumping out could be messy in here.



The sign on the right proclaims a 1 hour facility mooring. Totally redundant – surely you can always recognise a public mooring by the moored up work boat?

More welcome. Must be plenty on EA rivers too.

FLY ON THE WALL



at Council

I viewed the last Council meeting from a warm and sunny wall and thought of all you lucky enough to be boating on such a lovely day. But duty called and I listened to the news of different parts of the system to report them back to you. For example, the Manchester Ship Canal has advertised residential moorings at their Preston Brook Marina. Nottingham is to have new moorings too, both residential and visitor in the old dock. Cambridge Council want to abandon visitor moorings in Cambridge itself in favour of residential boats only. The Great Ouse Boating Association (GOBA) are concerned and NABO will support them in their efforts to keep some visitor moorings. However it was noted that GOBA moorings on the Ouse are for their members only....no visitors!

BW has acknowledged that it is normal in some places to sell the mooring with the boat, and are thinking how to capitalize on this. Your Council thought a fixed fee to BW for the administrative work the most acceptable form of payment. Perhaps something in the region of

£20? But how would this affect waiting lists especially in London where there appears to be a need for better administration of the lists.

The Department of Communities and Local Government have published a report following their survey on residential boats. Their recommendations were that there would be no legislation for residential boats but a best practice and mooring agreement, that there should be planning for more moorings and that navigational authorities would have departmental guidelines on their role towards residential boaters.

Your Northwest rep, Gordon, reported that the promised alteration in the mixture of the length of mooring times does not seem to have happened. For example there is still no free mooring at Llangollen except in the winter.

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) has a policy to encourage the development of small basins for mooring rather than having only large luxury marinas and miles of linear moorings. Council supported this and it was suggested they issue a NABO planning guidance on moorings.

Your River Trent rep, Peter, pointed out that unlike the Thames there was no advice there that narrowboats should moor facing upstream, which resulted in some boats crashing into the one behind when it cast off in a strong flow.

Moving on to cruising matters Council heard that the lock walls on the

Trent were no longer cleaned by the lock keepers as in the days when they lived in the lock cottages. Now the build up of slime can cause hands to slip, with nasty consequences if they are put flat on the wall to fend the boat off.

Did you know it's a public right to be able to launch a boat on a river?

Most towns on a river have their public slipway, BUT these are being closed on the Trent. Do you know of any that are being closed there or anywhere else?

Don't try to cruise the Basingstoke past Brookwood this year. Following the successful campaign rally the rest of the canal will close until November. Will it ever reopen?

The latest Environment Agency meeting produced the final draft of the Transport and Works Act Order to harmonise practice on all EA waters. Licence registration will be for one year only but the boat register will not be available to members of the public. It will now be called 'Provision of Information' and available to specific bodies only. Council will suggest to EA that in exceptional circumstances (e.g. another boat crashing into yours) a boat owner should be able to trace its owner.

Your reps in the Southeast cover different aspects of boating but have decided it's useful to meet on a regular basis to exchange information. Louis Jankel has offered to be the NABO rep on the Thames. Although there aren't many

members there they are having to cope with the problems of the 14.1% registration increase for each of the next 3 years, which may well extend to 9!

Are there any of you in other areas prepared to help their local rep? You do not need to become a council member.

More members were recruited at the muddy Crick Boat Show and thanks go to all who helped, especially John Russell and Bob Ellis who manned the stand on all 3 days and to Ken and Iris Bennell who transported all the gear from the store and back. Thanks too to those who did a short stint. The new booklet 'So, you're thinking of buying a boat' was also a winner!

Aileen would be pleased to receive offers of help for the National. Please ring her on 07703 567764.

Your General Secretary has been busy getting special offers for you. Apart from a reduction in the cost of membership to Rivers and Canal Rescue (RCR) it looks as if members could gain from insurance with Saga and hiring from Enterprise Rentacar. Watch this space!

We were sorry that Merleen has decided to resign from Council but she will still be a NABO member.

May your cruising be happy and sunny.

Byeeee

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small decorative flourish at the end.

MEDWAY CRUISE 2007

Yet more advanced information!

If you are thinking about joining the flotilla for this cruise next year, then you'll need three things:

1) Time. We have to wait for the right weather conditions. Even then, if the weather should change by the time we reach Tilbury, it will be a case of turning back to London. Also, neap tides are the ideal - these occur fortnightly. So, the minimum time spent on the Medway will be two weeks - four if we have to wait for weather.

2) Insurance. As previously stated, you'll need a company that covers you for coastal use without a pilot. *

3) Licence. Either a Gold Licence, if you wish to visit the non-tidal Thames as well, or an EA Medway Visitor Licence. (This could be the more expensive option if our return is delayed.)

* All vessels will have to comply with the regulations, which means carrying flares, charts, a suitable anchor, long warps etc.

There is no need to register your interest until the autumn, when I return home from boating.

Carole

SUGGESTED BOAT NAMES

A recent article on unusual boat names has encouraged the imaginations of some of our members to run amok. The naming of boats seems to have inspired them to take more notice of those that they encounter on their cruises and even to suggest some more for prospective owners to consider.

Recent boat spotting efforts have revealed the following interesting names:

THE EARLY GO

SENIOR MOMENTS

RECYCLED TEENAGERS

THE OLD BOVINE

OLD AGE TRAVELLER

R.G. BARGEE

NOSAM

SORTED

KNOT NORMAL

EEFER

SANITY

LETTERS



Good Afternoon

Do you want another 'boat name'? We called our 35' nb Good Afternoon, which we thought was suitable for a couple in the afternoon of their boating lives. We didn't realise that we'd go round the system to a chorus of "Good afternoon, Good Afternoon!" and 'witty' comments about our having had a bad morning and such. One fisherman crouching in the undergrowth in pouring rain muttered that it was a b***** awful afternoon, but otherwise it made people laugh, which couldn't be bad.

Valerie
nb Good Afternoon

Where is Shannon?

We lived on n/b Shannon 1988-1996 we were members of n.a.b.o. our son Carl won an easter egg competition with another child he got a certificate and a load of easter eggs. We still have the certificate. It has been looked after.

We now live in Denbigh N/Wales after selling Shannon. We would like to hear if any knows her whereabouts.

Sorry we ever sold her, we miss the canals very much .

Mrs P. M. Taylor

Veg Pledge

Here we go again!!! Vegetation up to your armpits, nettle stings, twisted ankles and dog poo hiding in the undergrowth. Yes we suffered all of these on our 'trip' up the Staffs & Worcs. Don't know who works out the parameters of how mowing should be done and who does it, but could someone explain to us why they mow the pathway(earth) plus one foot either side, leaving vegetation to carry on growing on the side of the canal. Very illogical.

The Prescotts

This complaint has been forwarded to BW who have acknowledged it and promised to rectify the situation. Ed

Spotting Ratty

I wanted to take this opportunity to let you know about our fantastic Wildlife Survey for 2006 which was launched today. This year we have put special emphasis on reporting sighting of the 'ratty the vole'. We would like you and your members to help us by completing as many surveys as possible. You can fill the survey in online by visiting www.waterscape.com

Amanda Strang

BW Headquarters

I would hope questionnaires will be in BW offices too.

Ed

Wooden Boat Spotters wanted

The Wooden Canal Boat Soc is attempting to locate and gather information of all wooden canal working boats, their condition, location and ownership. Wooden canal boats are a terribly neglected area of transport heritage and we are attempting to create a new and up to date data base.

Beside The Huddersfield Narrow Canal in Stalybridge the WCBS is setting up a heritage boatyard where wooden boats will be able to be restored. A crucial part of the work of this boatyard will be to retain and teach the skills of wooden canal boat building and maintenance. These skills are rapidly being lost. A crucial role will also be to introduce the public to wooden canal boats and the crafts associated with them.

In order to obtain funding to support this project it is necessary to prove the need for it. The need seems obvious to anyone who has a wooden boat, but proving it to a grants committee is another matter. The problem is that no-one knows how many examples survive, who owns them, what condition they are in etc. A few years ago in collaboration with the Historic Narrow Boat Owners Club the WCBS produced a list of all the wooden boats anyone could think of. This came to about 200, but it was something of a back of an envelope exercise. There were a

lot of question marks and a lot of boats that no-one had heard of for years. Proper research now needs to be done.

If you are able to help please contact the W.C.B.S. to get a pack of questionnaires.

At the same time the WCBS is looking for more people to take on ownership of wooden boats. Each year several are abandoned to their fate when people give up on them. The society is no longer in a position to adopt further boats itself. Over the last few years several boats have been saved by informally networking information. At the same time some have been lost because no new owner could be found.

The contact person for boat spotters is:-

Colin Scrivener,
17, Upland Grove,
Norton,
Bromsgrove,
Worcestershire.
B61 0EL
01527 577 994
colin@uplandgrove.freewire.co.uk

Photographs are best sent by Email if possible.

COUNTER



*Views from the
tiller 'dahn sarf'
by Canaldrifter*

Our Ed won't allow me more than one paragraph on my beloved Basingstoke Canal this month..... so here it is. OK, I eat my words. Due to heavy rain in April, the IWA Campaign Rally at Brookwood was a complete success! 130 boats up and down the canal without major mishap! Well done boaters and canal rangers! A few of the hardy ones ventured higher too. However, Deepcut Flight will be closed by the time you read this, due to water shortage on the upper levels, again. With the Joint Management Committee meeting in October to finally decide the canal's future, will it ever re-open? Keeping Deepcut closed is the cheapest option. They may well take the rally as a sign that boaters are quite happy to come up as far as it's been back-pumped only. That would be a great pity. The upper reaches are amongst the most beautiful in the country. Pity the rally wasn't held at Odiham. That really would have highlighted the canal's problems, which, after all, was the primary aim.

What is the most objectionable bit about boating? May I suggest dogs' mess? It seems that wherever the towpath is within reach of urbanity, walkers lead their dogs to it. Often it doesn't seem to bother them that dogs' mess can easily be trodden into boats. Apart from the diseases that it carries, and the by-laws that

nowadays insist you clean up after your dog, not everyone does. What is worse, some think it's OK to bag up the mess then throw it in a bush, or even hang it as a trophy on a 'convenient' branch. Someone around a canal that I can't mention any more this month, throws the bags into the cut so they get caught on the propeller.

Mind you, our little lurcher seems to think it's funny to have a poo, then stop and stand back while you bend down to her level and bag it.... then she'll do some more. We need to carry quite a few bags around with us. And what happens to it once you've deposited it in the dogs' mess bin? Do they burn it, or just spread it on the landfill site? Would it be worth feeding your dog a tracking device to find out how far a stool travels?

And can you gauge the health of your canine crew by the size, colour, and texture of its deposit? I bet there's a website on it somewhere. Probably even a museum, with each sample carefully preserved, labelled and explained. Could this be art? When I have time I might google it and find out.

I don't want to seem obsessed with doggy doos, but the editor did ask me to try to write something a bit different this month..... and I'm the sole of digression.....

Mind where you tread.

NABO News is published by
National Association of Boat Owners
FREEPOST (BM8367),
Birmingham B31 2BR

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