

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS

NABO



NEWS

- **Safety - Refillable LPG Bottles**
- **Moorings and comments on the BCN**
- **Need You Pay Council Tax?**



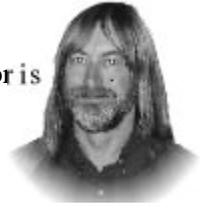
Issue 5 August 2006

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2006 CALENDAR	
Council meeting	Copy date
Sept 16th	Sept 23rd
Nov 18th	AGM
Nov 25th	Dec 7th

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



As I write this, memories are fresh from our re-acquaintance with the nether regions of the BCN, but those are the subject of later article in which I have tried to explain to the Doubting Thomas's why it should be a destination rather than somewhere to dash through as quickly as possible. I am pleased to say some are already converted – we met three private boats coming up Ryders Green Locks returning from said nether regions, all NABO members. Good on you!

Thankfully, few 'political' issues are adding much to the inescapable heat at present. HM Customs are still beavering away on the Red Diesel derogation. The EC is giving them problems but certainly rumours that all is lost are unfounded. Government funding for the waterways, particularly EA, is another battle being fought in the corridors of power. There isn't a lot we can do for now so we should recharge our batteries by getting on with what we are really about, namely boating, and enjoy a more down-to-earth perspective on things.

I did ask you to say hello when encountering us on the waterways and you have. There are two issues with the authorities at the top of your agendas, and maybe they are inter-related.

Apparent neglect?

The item that appeared in Waterways World a year or two back bemoaning the scarcity of 'the lesser spotted lengthsman' typified this concern. Why, when there are jobs to be done, nobody appears to be doing them? Vegetation management, clearing underwater obstructions, and dredging are on the tips of boaters' tongues when the subject of BW's care comes up. One member asked me, "Was the Veg

Pledge just for a year or is it supposed to be ongoing?"

Then one hears, at least once a year, that there is a breach or catastrophic failure somewhere on the system. This isn't confined to BW, the collapse of Osney Lock bullnose last year shows it happens to the EA too. Immediately it jumps to mind that if the waterways were properly inspected, a 'stitch in time might save nine'. This latter case was particularly galling as EA had been told by its staff about it and seemingly had ignored it.

BW has a handbook for lengthsman. I have seen it, albeit very briefly, as a copy was passed round during a Boating Issues Meeting, but I can't study something and follow a meeting. What I can say is that I have never seen one in the hands of a lengthsman on the bank. That isn't surprising as I haven't seen a lengthsman, or recognised one, anywhere other than with a mower on a lock flight.

I tell a lie, just this morning a BW man came down the towpath wielding a machete. Asked why he was allowed in a public place with a weapon like that he replied, "Licence evasion!"

I am not saying they aren't there, or that if they were, that they could divine a culvert about to collapse while strolling over it on the towpath. What I am saying is that, if BW could show more presence, like having 'bobbies on the beat', then much of this negative perception would go away. Even better if this presence was seen to be actively engaged in something constructive.

A classic case was the BW operative painting Hungerford Lock last year

while guests from a hotel boat had to struggle through dense vegetation to get ashore just a few yards below the lock. His office had sent him to do that job but allowed him no initiative or time to do what needed doing in the vicinity while he was there. This is why boaters despair of seeing bank staff in their little rooms or cabins forever brewing up when there is work to be done – the jobs have to be prioritised in an ever more distant office before they are given the work. This is where the NABO reporting forum can help. If a job needs doing, put it on public display and remember it does get sent automatically to the local waterway office. They can't ignore it then, or so I am told.

Meanwhile on the Titford Canal, volunteers from the BCN Society were out with their little work boat and grappling hooks looking for jobs to be done. A short but intensive day's work for three and 'Phoenix' came back laden with waterlogged barrows, trolleys, bicycles, kiddies' scooters, a Kawasaki motorbike and contractors' metal mesh fencing bearing a notice apologising for any inconvenience caused! And they are doing it for nothing!



Wasted money

The second thing that irks boaters is seeing money, that they think comes out of their licences, being wasted, and as I said, it ties in with the undiminished bank staff that Robin Evans says are still on BW's payroll and yet don't seem to be out there working. Again the EA is also to blame for not giving return for the money: the funds it collected for enlarging locks on the Thames has never been used for that. This was some years back, but boaters have long memories and won't forgive or forget.

Mutterings on the BW towpath tell of large sums ill spent too. Two examples on the Titford, BW has spent hundreds of thousands on a pumping system that cannot be used due to pollution, and along the Tat Branch, a line of expensive hook-up pillars has been installed for residential boats before it was discovered the local council won't let anybody live there. Then there are the moorings installed at Aston Science Park without, it seems, a binding contract with the landowners. I don't mean to victimise West Midlands, I am sure it happens elsewhere, and there are probably mitigating circumstances, but this sort of thing doesn't help BW's image with boaters.

Perhaps the images I paint are a bit unfair, but boaters' opinions are not fair. There are, thankfully, many letters also in the magazines praising waterway staff for pulling out the stops to help people in genuine need, so if it is not the staff themselves we should berate, it must be the system.

Antisocial boaters

Members have problems also with others on the cut. Running generators late into the evening is one, especially nasty little petrol ones that are

deliberately placed as far away from the offending boat and hence as near you as possible.

It is part of the licence conditions not to run engines and generators between 2000 and 0800 hours where anybody in earshot could be disturbed, so beware of leaving your generator unheeded, someone might sweeten your fuel with a little sugar!

Other Noise

Like anywhere in summer, blaring radios on boats can annoy others when windows are open, as can late night drunken laughter, shouting for errant dogs and slamming hatches. As for floating discos on the Thames, say no more!

Speed

This is still an issue and probably never to be resolved while humans control boats. The email column of narrowboatworld.com seems to have taken it up. With my internet connection being rather poor coming down the Shroppie I haven't been following it, but it seems one of my colleagues has also been advocating better use of spring lines for boats on online permanent moorings. Tony Brooks, diesel guru, has also been warning of the detriment to engines through extended slow running while passing endless lines of moorings, as

the cylinder walls cannot get hot enough to burn off the potential glaze.

However I was reminded after what I said in the last magazine that, however well your boat is secured, it can still heel over when passed at speed, especially on narrow shallow cuts. This shouldn't harm unoccupied boats but who knows who might be wielding a chip pan – but then they choose to moor online as it is cheaper and affords a better view than sandwiched in a marina and so they must take account of passing boats.

Certainly on the S.U. we've crawled past miles of moored boats and noticed two things. One - many were moored with lines at 90° to the bank, and so would bash other boats – even on the outboard, however slow we passed, and secondly, it is high summer and yet very few are out. How can people afford a boat and not use it?

Finally

The suggestion about making bollards safer by giving them stainless steel 'belts' seems to have inspired one member, who has passed it on to BW West Midlands for Central Birmingham. We hear it may bear fruit – watch this space!

Enjoy the peace of the waterways!

Stuart



PS If you are wondering how I can afford a boat like this and to swan about on it in a kilt, then (1) the boat is a self fit-out and (2) My boating kilt is from the USA (www.sportkilt.com), cost under \$60, is cotton, cooler than shorts, and repels biting flies better – not for the reasons you might think!

FOR YOUR SAFETY ...

There have been some harrowing stories of late regarding fires and injuries caused by paraffin lamps and portable gas and petrol fuelled equipment. Please take more care and try to get heating and lighting properly installed.

BSS RULING ON USER RE-FILLABLE LPG BOTTLES

New instructions to Boat Safety Scheme examiners have been issued concerning a specific product and the actions the examiner must take if one is found during a BSS examination. The product is considered by the BSS to introduce a potentially significant new risk to examiners as well as people using or working on the inland waterways. If one is found, it will mean the immediate cessation of the examination.

The Product

The product is one specific range of user re-fillable LPG bottles. User re-fillable LPG bottles are owned by the purchaser and are marketed to motor home owners to allow re-filling of gas bottles at service stations.

The Potential Risk

The range of re-fillable gas bottles identified in this statement does not have an 80% 'stop-fill' facility. It is vital that re-fillable LPG cylinders cannot be filled beyond 80% of the full capacity mark as the remaining 20% of the bottle's capacity allows for expansion of the liquefied gas as the ambient temperature rises.

The risk with a connected and over-filled bottle is that, if the temperature rises, liquid LPG may pass through the regulator under high-pressure and then enter the low-pressure system. If this happens, a catastrophic release of LPG is highly likely which will result in a large quantity of flammable vapour within the confines of the boat and a very high risk of explosion.

As far as the BSS is currently aware, the only UK supplier of user re-fillable LPG bottles without the 80% 'stop-fill' facility is MTH Gas System Ltd of Gloucestershire. The BSS has consulted with MTH and the company's position is that the upper part of the bottle has a 'safety overfilling control window' with a 'LPG-level visual indicator' whereby the owner can see that the bottle is filled to the proper level. Thus, MTH believes that the 'stop-fill' facility is not necessary; however MTH does not market the product for use in boats and it is willing to help boat-owning customers who may need to replace the bottle.

Examiners at risk

The BSS believes that there is a significant risk to examiners in carrying out an examination on a boat where this type of bottle is overfull. The Scheme does not believe that an examiner's safety should be solely reliant upon the correct filling by owners and so there are insufficient safeguards against a potentially serious hazard.

The Product in Detail

The only affected product of which the BSS is currently aware is the Lightw8 range of Super Lightweight Propane Bottles in 4, 10, 20 and 36 litre capacities. These products are made of HDPE and are supplied by MTH Gas System Ltd,

Castlemain Workshops, Yorkely Road, Parkend, GL15 4HH. Further details can be viewed on the MTH Gas System Ltd website on [HYPERLINK "http://www.mthautogas.co.uk" www.mthautogas.co.uk](http://www.mthautogas.co.uk) .

The Action Examiners Must Take

If a user re-fillable LPG bottle without the 80% ‘stop-fill’ facility is connected to the gas system the examination must cease and an explanation of the risks will be offered to the owner or representative. The examination may be resumed and completed if the gas bottle is disconnected and replaced with an appropriate LPG cylinder.

A very small proportion of the Lightw8 products were fitted with 80% ‘stop-fill’ valves by the manufacturer. Any boat owner using one of these aboard is advised to seek written confirmation from MTH of this product’s specification, including the ‘stop-fill’ facility. The examiner will seek advice from the BSS office as to whether to continue with the examination.

If an examiner finds a spare user re-fillable LPG bottle without the 80% ‘stop-fill’ facility which is not connected to the gas system, the risks will be explained to the owner or representative. The examiner will inform the BSS Office of the find as soon as possible. The Office may then pass this information onto the appropriate navigation authority(ies).

Similar products

A separate investigation by the BSS Technical Committee is underway into similar products, steel LPG cylinders intended to be re-filled by the user. Supplies of these include MTH and Gaslow, Edge Technology and Gasrefill.com. BSS research indicates the current known steel cylinders products have the 80% ‘stop-fill’ facility.

The MTH product should not be confused with BP’s lightweight HDPE LPG bottle called BP Gas Light, typically available from garden centres and the internet. As these are intended to be exchanged, and therefore re-filled under controlled conditions, they do not present the risks outlined in this statement.

If anyone has concerns about the information in this statement, they are encouraged to call the BSS Office on 01923 201278 or email bss.enquiries@boatsafetyscheme.com

Background facts

LPG is kept in liquid form by being stored under pressure. When it moves to normal atmospheric pressures, it changes to a gaseous state, expanding to around 250 times its liquid volume.

LPG when mixed with air at approximately concentrations between 2-10 percent becomes a flammable mix. This is highly explosive.

LPG in its gaseous state is heavier than air and will get trapped within the confines of a boat, sinking to the lowest parts. It will disperse over time if the supply is shut down and all hatches, doors, windows and vents are open. The BSS leaflet, ‘Safe Use of LPG’, has further advice about this.

Robert McLean, communications manager, BSS Tel: 01923 201353,

WHAT YOU ARE ENTITLED TO KNOW

The introduction of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in England & Wales, and similar legislation covering Scotland - the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 - has opened up the possibility of obtaining boat licensing and registration information from navigation authorities for the first time.

It is now possible for anyone to request specific information from public bodies who are under an obligation to provide it if it exists. Commonly requested material will usually be found in a publication scheme which is published by the organisation, giving details of what is available and the cost (if any). More obscure data not included in the publication scheme must be provided on request and usually free of charge to the enquirer. There are several exemptions in the Act including a public interest test which broadly means that information may be withheld if, on balance, it is not in the public interest to disclose it. Personal information which falls within the remit of the Data Protection Act 1988 is always exempt. Other grounds for non-disclosure include national security, court documents and material subject to Parliamentary privilege. In most cases there is a presumption in favour of disclosure simply because the Act says so and despite personal views on such matters it is worth reflecting on the fact that many bits of information about persons are freely available from many sources. These include the Land Registry, registers of shareholdings, births, marriages & deaths, British registered ships, etc. It is even possible to obtain information concerning the keeper of a motor vehicle from DVLA.

You have a right to know what information a navigation authority holds on vessels that it licences and this will include the name of the boat, make, type, engine size, dimensions and possibly other information. What they generally cannot disclose is the name and address of an owner.

However, the British Waterways Act 1971 contains a provision that allows full extracts from the register of pleasure craft to be obtained for a modest payment of 10p per craft. This applies to vessels with river registration certificates only and BW will not refuse the information if you ask them.

BW will also provide a print-out or disk containing the index numbers, names and lengths of all craft currently licensed or registered with them - all 28,000 of them!

The EA will also provide computerised data covering all craft registered in Thames, Southern and Anglian regions. If you want to know the name & address of an owner you will be charged £4.65 per extract for boats based on the Thames. Legislation for the other EA waterways is rather more obscure but they tend to apply the same charges.

Some navigation authorities respond to FOI Act requests very promptly - BW and EA are shining examples and seem to reply within the 20 working days specified by the Act. Bristol City and the Basingstoke Canal Authority are also very helpful, whilst Chester City Council in common with several others will

claim that the Act does not allow you to have the information you request. You have to write several times before they relent. Other public bodies such as the Broads Authority procrastinate and bluster and subsequently refuse outright to disclose any information. (There is an appeals procedure via the Information Commissioner). Some of them respond with information you did not ask for, or in a form, which is meaningless. The Lake District National Park Authority produces the information on a disk that is both encrypted and password protected so no one can read it! Ultimately, they will produce a multi-page printout if you are persistent.

If you wish to see some typical pleasure craft information that a boating enthusiast has obtained and published on his website go to Jim Shead's Waterway information (find it via a Google search). He obtained information from the EA and caused a great stir in the boating press earlier this year. Some owners thought it was a scandal, whilst others thought it was really useful and interesting. Make up your own mind.

Stephen Peters

NAVIGATION SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

AINA (the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities) has recently published a booklet setting an industry standard for signs to be used on UK inland waterways.

Unlike those that are to be found on mainland European waterways (conforming to the CEVNI rules), users will generally find the UK signs far more intuitive and simpler to comprehend.

The format of the signs resembles road signs that we are all familiar with in the Highway Code, and they have similar meanings. For example, restriction signs such as speed limits and height or depth restrictions have a red circle on a white background; mandatory signs such as "keep to starboard side of channel" have a blue circle; and prohibition signs are red circles with a diagonal red bar and are used where a specific activity such as mooring is not permitted. Hazard signs for features such as weirs are yellow triangles with black borders similar to the hazard warning signs found in industry. In addition, there are information signs which are in black and white. Nearly all of the signs have wording to explain them, unlike the abstract signs that the EA promoted in 1997; or the CEVNI signs that appear to defy all logic.

Separate appendices within the document deal with strong stream warnings, and signage for safe headroom; and warning signs to be used where angling activities take place near overhead power lines.

Taken as a whole, the booklet seems to take a sensible approach to signage and is intended to promote harmonisation across all inland waterways. Let us hope that individual navigation authorities adopt some restraint and that we are not faced with a plethora of unwanted or irrelevant signs as we cruise. Let us know if you come across any signs that you feel are inappropriate.

ARE YOU LOST?

We weren't, but that was how we were greeted when we made it to the top of Oldbury Locks, and then given a certificate to prove it!

Why were we there? - to visit Langley. Where's that? On the Titford Canal - know it well?



Maltings by the Titford Canal

Like many other boaters, I had to admit to a little hint of disincentive when faced with the prospect of the BCN, but 'her indoors' insisted we visit every potentially useful habitation within walking distance of the water - by water - so she could set off in pursuit of knowledge on your behalf for you-know-which books. Perhaps it was not quite such demanding cruising as the IWA BCN Silver Challenge, which we did many years ago, but it still meant boating just about all the Black Country waterways. It was not long before the fascination of the BCN held us in its grip once more.

So why not? - Indeed, why not?

There are certain things about the BCN that many boaters call 'par for the course', and they still apply. Some

of them are inevitable. The area is heavily populated (nearly wrote 'polluted!') with homo sapiens, and plenty of homo not-so-sapiens, so there is bound to be rubbish on or under the water. The canals are under-used so there is weed. However it is no worse than other parts of the system and getting better. The natives themselves are nowhere near as hostile as speculation would have it, and the anglers are all too keen to see a boat. Their winding gesticulations mean put the power on and 'liven 'em up a bit'.

In over six weeks we have had just one stone lobbed by a small child, which fell well short. There are secure moorings in several places, some gated, some with no land access at all, where you can overnight in peace.

Some of the 'problems' are avoidable though. Boaters are resigned to finding visitor moorings full of work boats. Just finding the visitor moorings, even when listed on the leaflets, can be a challenge in the less popular reaches, but they are there. Works and stoppages take place on the assumption there are no boaters to be inconvenienced, and many of the delights and fascinations of this hub of the narrow canal network go unsung, as the BW publicity department really hasn't a clue about the treasures in its area. The main problem though - under-use - is down to you.

Why fear the BCN?

Talking of treasures, the top of Smethwick Locks makes a canal scene that takes some beating anywhere. Of the half dozen or so canal-over-canal crossings I can think of, three are on the BCN. One has a motorway over the top, the Engine Branch does so on fine decorated cast iron aqueduct, and the other at Tividale has a misguided signpost that assumes your boat can fly! Yes, there is even humour on the BCN if you don't take it too seriously.



Nature has reclaimed some ex mining areas, such as Windmill End, Pelsall Common and Anglesey Basin creating wonderful dog walking the likes of which can be very hard to find even in the most rural parts of the country.

Some people might be put off by the prospect of climbing to the Birmingham plateaux - all those locks!



Yes, Birmingham is a very unusual city, being on a hill and not served by

a river. Once up, though, to a height of nearly 500 feet from sea level, the Main Lines and the Wyrley & Essington follow a winding but basically horseshoe shaped contour surrounding the head of the Tame Valley. This makes for extensive cruising with only three locks separating the two levels at each of their four meetings. Inside the horseshoe, canals go down into the valley at various points and the lockage water starts its long journey to the Humber Estuary. Radiating outwards, locks flights descend, mainly feeding water to the Bristol Channel, one route via one of the biggest tunnels on the system.



The whole area was rich in coal, ironstone, limestone, fireclay and moulding sand, all of which were needed to make things out of iron. The slightly carbolic smell of foundries still pervades the air in some places and people are busy making this and that, even though the mines are exhausted. It has left behind a rich history told in red and blue brick and distinctive bridges, bearing the names of long-gone foundries, whose graceful lines are

down to the practicalities of drawing boats by horse.

Obviously I am appealing here to the canal enthusiast, but the area has much for others too, concerts and theatre in central Birmingham within a short walk of your floating accommodation. Restaurants and shopping too, and more retail therapy at Merry Hill. The Black Country Museum is a must.

If you want to escape congestion, get away from lines of unauthorised residential boats or other on-line moorings, or you feel the challenge has gone from boating, try boating the BCN properly, not just rushing through as fast as possible. We need to keep reminding the planners and powers-that-be that canals were dug for boats.

Stuart Sampson

MOORING ON THE BCN

BW produces various leaflets and notices which, at the time of writing, are both inconsistent with each other and with reality as far as visitor moorings are concerned. A revision is promised, but these are some observations that might prove useful. This is not a comprehensive list and somewhat subjective.

Birmingham & Fazeley Canal

Cambrian Wharf - Mooring at the top of Farmers Bridge Locks is 14 day, gives good access to city and quieter than you might expect. Excellent gongoozling!

Aston Flight - These unlisted offside moorings are outside an office development on the second pound up the locks. Security patrols but no grass for dogs.

Cuckoo Wharf - In spite of signs there are visitor moorings, if not occupied by work boats. Signed 14 day but may change.

Dudley Canals

Merry Hill - It can be quieter and yet safe (CCTV) on the embankment rather than opposite the Waterfront

Windmill End - Better on offside. Great for dogs if you can avoid goose droppings

Grand Union Canal

Camp Hill - A member says secure moorings are good, as are the facilities.

Star City - Pontoon with no land access, quiet in spite of proximity to Spahetti Junction.

Main Lines

Wolverhampton - Top of locks now an alcohol free zone. For the hard of hearing (either before or after mooring there!) there is a no-access mooring opposite the facilities. Road noise terrible.

Black Country Museum - 48 hour moorings on right hand side only, 8 hour on left but other space available for overnight near tunnel with permission. Noisy road and liable to be occupied by work boats.

Tipton and Dudley Port - rings by several developments on Old Main Line.
Look OK but untried.

Oldbury - Big bollards either side of Whimsey Bridge. Not listed in leaflet but we have stayed overnight for Council meeting. Shallow but otherwise seems OK, Sainsbury's, garden centre and bingo close by. Main road over bridge.

Smethwick - Casual mooring on Old Main Line by Engine Arm junction. Asian natives friendly. Quiet.

Birmingham - For peace and security the Oozel Loop is recommended, but no good for dogs. Other moorings vary. Brummies don't do mornings it seems!
There have been reports of thefts of items off the top of boats near the NIA.

Titford Canal

Mooring by the pumphouse highly recommended. Secure, all facilities, hook-up and friendly souls from BCNS. Elsewhere there are rings along canal right up to the Maltings on the towpath. Nearby chemical works noisy and maybe smelly.

Walsall Canal

Birchills - One gated mooring with facilities near and own garden and bench.
Take your chance opposite.

Town Arm - Some no-access pontoons on approach. May not be official or even permanent. Jetties at the end in the basin are public domain. Town very close.

Ocker Hill - In spite of 'Residential' signs, go into the Tunnel Branch, Visitor moorings are on the right if not occupied by work boats. Secure. Friendly folk.

Wyrley & Essington Canal

Bentley Bridge - stub of Bentley Canal with family pub, cinemas, shopping etc close, so the area is well populated and busy but kids generally accompanied.

Church Bridge - Some rings on the offside with no access but very overgrown. Assume these are the 'OSM' moorings in the leaflet. Towpath side moorings in the leaflet are actually east of Pinfold Bridge and signed as visitor moorings for Wednesfield.

Lane Head - Actually on off-side and gated, but there is a pub car park on the other side of the fence so the moorings are not very private.

Sneyd Wharf - Signed 'Residential'. Look for a notice on facility block for the name of warden's boat to arrange your stay.

Pelshall Junction - Excellent undesignated mooring for dog lovers and rallies.

Brownhills - Offside but public. Excellent for shopping.

Anglesey Basin - Despite name, very limited space. Good for dogs

Northywood - Offside, fenced but no longer secure, neglected

Longwood - Quiet country mooring is possible north of junction and facilities.

We will try to put a more detailed table of BCN area moorings on the NABO Website this year.

RCR Advert

AGM Pull-out

AGM Pull-out

AGM Pull-out

AGM Pull-out

NOTICES

Text your
waterway
reports to:

07930 419 981
07961 001814
07989 441674

POST FOR NABO NEWS

For issue 6/06 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

Waterway Reports Apology

At the time of writing some malicious computer was posting hundreds of spurious messages on the forum, so we had to close the boards to anonymous postings.

By the time you read this we hope it will be sorted, but it may mean entering a password and user name. We may rely on the 'worm' responsible not being able to read a clear message to you as what name and password to use

WELCOME

to the Ripon Motor Boat
Club who have just
joined as an affiliated
organisation

**Booking passages
with BW Northwest?**

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

£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 each 'family member'



RIVERS



River Thames drought update

In June, the Thames catchment received only 31% of the rainfall that we would normally expect – the driest since 1975. As a result river flows declined significantly. The thunderstorms of 5/6 July briefly increased flows but these will soon decline again.

Under the Lower Thames Operating Agreement with Thames Water we have further reduced the target flow at Teddington from 600 Mld (megalitres/day) to 400 Mld to allow the company to continue its abstractions for water supply.

We are still trying to keep water levels higher than normal and continuing with voluntary lock restrictions where/when necessary. We are asking boaters to voluntarily wait for 15 minutes before they lock through if the lock is not full and there are few boats waiting to pass in the opposite direction. This is becoming increasingly important.

Many of our weirs are now fully “shut in” with no gates open. Although some water may still be seen flowing across some overfalls this is part of the way that the variation of water level is managed and shouldn’t be seen as “a waste of water”. If flows continue to decline we may soon need to take further measures such as staunching closed in weirs to minimise leakage.

Thames Water has applied for a drought order for London. If granted this will allow the company to further restrict use of water by its five million customers in London. The company's three million customers in the Thames Valley (covering such areas as Banbury, Didcot, Guildford, Newbury, Oxford, Reading and Swindon), where rainfall has been higher, would be unaffected by the Drought Order, but a further application remains a possibility for later in the year.

Please continue to use water wisely

- Impact of drought on the River Thames
- Low rainfall and falling water levels trigger actions to maintain river water levels for boating. In order these are:
 - Ban on the use of hoses/sprinklers - implemented (March 2006)
 - Voluntary delays to lock passage - implemented (1 May 2006)
 - Elevation of water levels above target - implemented (1 May 2006)
 - ‘Sealing’ of weir sluices (imminent if low flow conditions persist)

If and when the drought worsens, further actions are:

- Closure of fish passes
- Out-of-hours power switched off at powered locks

- Lock passage restricted to once every half hour
- Locks closed out of hours

The water levels may vary along the river and the measures will be implemented accordingly. Each lock keeper will be able to tell you the situation at their lock. Out of hours, please refer to the lock notice board. To help ease the inconvenience that delays might cause, we are looking to increase the availability of overnight mooring at our sites.

What can you do?

Enjoy the fine weather but plan your boating, given the potential delays to lock passage. To reduce delays, please:

- Be patient and follow the advice of the lockkeepers who will be working hard to keep water in the river and boats moving
- Do not speed. We will be enforcing the 8 km/h speed limit as usual, with particular concern for residential boats and banks that are usually underwater
- Display your registration certificates where our lock staff can easily see them
- Moor alongside other boats to make better use of public moorings

Give particular attention to how you deal with waste, leaks and spills and ensure that your sea cock/toilet is sealed, if you have one. The impact of pollution is worse when there is less water to move it along. See www.thegreenblue.org.uk for advice on environmentally conscious boating.

For further information

For updates on the drought position, advice on using water wisely and answers to frequently asked questions, please visit www.visitthames.co.uk/drought. If you would like to receive e-mail updates about the drought or other river information please e-mail us at visitthames@environment-agency.gov.uk and include 'Register for updates' in the title of your message. For updates on river conditions please call our free Navigation Information Line (Tel. 0845 988 1188, when prompted press 1, followed by 011131). To discuss any specific issue please call your local Waterway office.

We are working hard to keep boats moving on the river, albeit a little bit more slowly than usual!

Your Local Waterways Team

Andrew Graham
Lower Thames Manager
Waterway office
Lock Island
Ferry Lane
Shepperton
Middlesex

VHF LATEST

NABO CAN HAVE A GROUP MMSI NUMBER

We have the opportunity to obtain a Group MMSI number from Ofcom for use by our members who have marine VHF DSC radios fitted on board.

If we are allocated a Group MMSI then, in future, you will be able to programme the number into your radio and then send or receive calls to or from other NABO members using the same group identity. This will come in useful when cruising in company or in a particular location. You will be able to put out a specific intership call to speak to any members within range. This will put you in touch with fellow boaters and maybe obtain help or advice of a local nature.

In order to apply for the number we need expressions of support from members (most probably those based on rivers or commercial waterways) who already value the usefulness of a VHF radiotelephone and who have DSC-equipped sets.

If you would like to participate in the NABO Group MMSI scheme, please inform our Rivers Secretary and let him have your name, vessel name, call sign, licence no and MMSI number. This information is required by Ofcom so that they know who will be using the Group MMSI.

The foregoing will come as great news to our members who have boats equipped with marine VHF radio with Digital Selective Calling (DSC) capability and they will not need to read the remainder of this article!

Radios with DSC are now readily available and have come down in price over recent years. It is possible to pay less than £100 + about £30 for an antenna and you will then be able to communicate with other craft and lock keepers on rivers and commercial waterways, and listen to the movements of barge and ship traffic. Most importantly, if you find yourself or your boat in grave and imminent danger you will be able to transmit a Distress call with a better chance of being located by emergency services than was the case before the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) was introduced a few years ago. By linking your radio to a GPS your position will be known at all times by you and those who are searching for you. This gives great peace of mind when on open waters.

Provided you have the requisite operator's certificate and a licence for the radio you may use the DSC functions not only for Mayday, Pan-Pan and Securite calls but also for regular communications with other similarly equipped vessels or shore stations. Every vessel can request a unique identity number called a MMSI (Mobile Maritime Service Identity) rather like a telephone number and this is used by the electronic digital wizardry in the radio to ensure that your identity is made known when you transmit and also to enable you to place calls to specific vessels only. This is where the NABO Group MMSI will be useful.

The Group MMSI will be programmed into your radio and you will receive call alerts from NABO group members automatically whenever your set is switched on, via the DSC section of your radio. You will then be able to acknowledge the

call and your set will be automatically switched to the working channel for speech communication to commence.

We hope members will find this a useful additional membership bonus and will wish to participate in the scheme.

Stephen Peters

NARROW BOAT IN IRELAND

Ann and Steve Buss took their 55 ft narrow boat Carrie-Ann to Ireland 3 years ago not knowing what to expect when they got there except a friendly welcome and some uncrowded cruising.

'Within 3 days of our arrival we were invited to a boat festival at Athy on the river Barrow which we decided to attend. On passing Lowtown lock we paid our annual mooring and licence fee of 150 euro, and made our way down to Athy. Each lock you arrive at has a lock keeper waiting to let you through and if you do not arrive at the next lock in time they come looking for you and arrange a time to meet you at the lock. This help is much appreciated as some of the paddles and gates are extremely hard to do.

On our arrival at the boat gathering we were made very welcome and made a lot of very useful contacts to help us out in our travels.

After the gathering we cruised down the Barrow to Newross on the tidal stretch. There they have very good pontoon moorings for visitors.

From there we made our way up to the Grand canal again and on to the Shannon river. This river allows you to travel from Limerick up to Belleek using the Shannon Erne waterway and some very large Loughs.

These Loughs are literally like inland seas and you do need to pick your days to move across them. For instance Lough Derg is 33 miles long and at its widest point is 13 miles wide. They can be very dangerous. Any wind greater than a force three and you are advised to stay in harbour. The Shannon is very busy during summer and you do need to be aware of boats coming at you from all angles. Having said all this we thoroughly enjoyed our passages around and across these large Loughs.

If anyone wants a cheap alternative to cruising BW waters then Ireland is the place to go. Especially if you are keen on a warm welcome and friendly helpful people.

If you would like more details re costs or any other info please contact Steve at omnibuss@tiscali.co.uk

I can of course go on for a considerable amount of space describing three years worth of adventure but am aware that your magazine has limited space. My wife has sent a bulletin out for the past three years to our friends on our travels that make very good reading we are told and I am happy to provide them if you think they can be used for publication.'

FLY ON THE WALL



on holiday!

Wish you were here, or perhaps not, and please put that repellent away!

Bye!!



It can buy you a house
but not a home

It can buy you a bed
but not sleep

It can buy you a clock
but not time

It can buy you a book
but not knowledge

It can buy you a position
but not respect

It can buy you medicine
but not health

So, you see, money isn't everything.
The best things in life can't be bought,
and often we destroy ourselves trying!

I tell you all this because I am your
Friend, and, as your Friend I want to
take away all your needless pain and
suffering...

So, send me all your money and I will
suffer for you!!

A truer Friend you will never find

CASH ONLY PLEASE

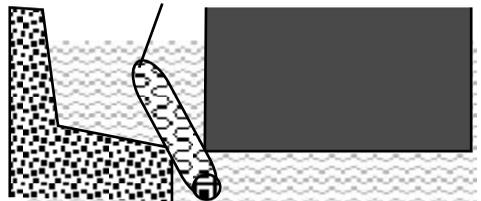
Stolen from Buoy's Own magazine

daft or not daft?

Beat the ledge

The Shoppie, Grand Union and other canals sport a notorious concrete ledge to grind against when moored. If it isn't too wide you can float a couple of launching trolley wheels in the gap. They are plastic hubbed so light and won't rust. Tie a rope through the centre to a fender eye to stop them drifting off. Full size car wheels are better but heavy, ugly and difficult to store tidily, but you could line a full sized car tyre with expanding foam so it floats.

Alternatively, if you are into rope fender making, crown stitch some rope round some chain to make two sinking side fenders that can be positioned between the hull chine and the ledge. It may help to knot the chain at the bottom as extra weight.



Lock Queues

At congested locks what is needed is a moving chain with hooks to which you tie your boat when waiting, like the conveyor belt at a supermarket check-out. You can then all stand and chat, or fetch a pint from the local while your boat queues automatically. Maybe power it from a turbine in the ground paddle tunnels?

BOATMASTER LICENCES TO CHANGE

MCA will be making new regulations about boatmasters' licences later this year, to come into force on 1 January 2007. This article aims to put to rest some of the misunderstandings circulating about the impact of these proposals.

This follows three years of discussion with a wide range of industry sectors, navigation authorities, etc, and in part will bring the UK licences more closely into line with their European counterparts. It is also intended to underpin safety, and support the policy of sustainable transport which should increase the level of commercial traffic on our waterways.

For those on canals and inland rivers, the main points of interest are –

The regulations will require everyone in charge of a vessel on inland waterways, **other than a pleasure craft**, to hold a relevant qualification;

For vessels over 24m in length or carrying more than 12 passengers, this will be the Boatmaster's Licence;

For smaller vessels, alternative qualifications will be accepted, and some existing schemes, such as the IWA/Waterways Recovery Group training scheme or National Community Boat Management Certificate will be considered for approval as equivalents;

The regulations will apply to small passenger boats from September 2008 and to small workboats from March 2009.

There remains no requirement for certification of pleasure craft operators or self-drive hire-boat users.

The new regime introduces a more stringent level of qualification for licences issued for national or European-wide operations (Tier 1), but this will not be mandatory on Category A and B waters, where a local licence (Tier 2) will be available.

The Tier 2 Boatmaster's Licence is very like the current MCA passenger boatmasters' licence for local operations. The only significant changes are:

to require everyone to undergo safety training (first aid, fire fighting and personal survival); and

to introduce a task record book so that candidates and qualified boatmasters can record new skills acquired and their work experience. Only those sections of the task record book relevant to the type of operation need to be completed for a Tier 2 licence.

For further information, see the public consultation documents available on MCA's website www.mcga.gov.uk or contact the MCA Inland Waterways Team on 023 8032 9228 or 023 8032 9209.

Tony Haynes

NEED I PAY COUNCIL TAX? Simon Robbins explains

Generally if you live on the boat on its mooring most of the year you should probably pay something. However different Councils and Valuation Offices (see below) seem to take slightly different views on the detail of this. Some places they seem to treat a set of moorings not as individual residences but as a business site as a whole, and in effect collect through business rate rather than dealing with individual boaters.

More technically, there are two parts to the process - forgive me if I'm telling you stuff you know already.

Banding

This is the decision about whether the mooring should pay at all and if so what band it is in. Very important note - it is not the local council that decides this but a separate body called the Valuation Office. If you spend a lot of time away from your mooring you may be able to persuade the valuation office that the boat is exempt from any banding i.e. zero rated. The valuation office rules on this are not entirely clear and are due to be reviewed nationally. You should be able to give evidence to them of your boats movements and ideally need to be able to demonstrate that the boat is elsewhere for something like 3 months out of 12. Just having an engine is not good enough.

Also if they have only just put the mooring in a band you can appeal either about the band or about being banded at all. Generally unless you "own" the mooring and the adjacent land, you should probably be in Band A (the cheapest).

It is also sometimes interesting to check whether the mooring operator is also paying business rate on the mooring - if so, they can't Council Tax you too - it's double counting. The valuation office are usually helpful clarifying this.

Paying once you are banded

This is the bit Councils do - they bill you and collect the money. As a general rule if you get a bill it is usually mandatory to pay it while you appeal.

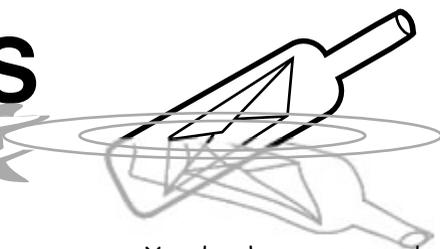
There are various exemptions which are mandatory and the simplest one is single person, which knocks 25% of the bill if you live alone. The others are about personal circumstances and you should talk to the Council about any you think might apply. There should be a list of exemptions with any bill you receive. Also if you are not working or on low income you may be able to claim Council Tax Benefit to offset the bill.

Pursuing any of this to reduce the bill does not necessarily prejudice appealing the Valuation Office in parallel. If you are successful in getting "de-listed" you get a refund.

Simon

Simon not only lives on a boat in London, but also works in housing so should be able to advise you if you have difficulty in this field, or maybe even highlight the advantages of being banded. His contact details are on the back cover.

LETTERS



Some points of view

Many thanks for latest NABO News issue 4, as always, very interesting and thought provoking! Thought you might like to insert my views in the next issue! It should provoke hopefully some response from your readers! I have loads of other points to raise, but will keep them until the next issue!

Waterway Standards- I reckon BW are already dredging to the cross section drawing shown as I find most places are too shallow at the sides to get in to moor! Yes I know canals were originally built for boats getting from A to B as quickly as possible, but now the canal usage is mainly for pleasure, dredging to a new standard enabling folk to moor up out of town should be the norm.

Alien Invasive Species.- We recently found the local children near Marple, fishing in a disused bridghole using string with bacon rind attached. Upon investigation, they were found to be pulling out loads of HUGE American Crayfish! They resembled small Lobsters and would put off anyone contemplating a paddle! I understand they were introduced for the culinary trade and as always, like the Grey Squirrel and

Xander have escaped. Another even rarer species to be occasionally found is the working BW dredger, have they migrated I wonder?!

Water Leaks- I recently noticed quite a stream of water escaping from the canal under an aqueduct. Upon reporting it to BW I was informed the leak was known to them and they are monitoring it. Perhaps they are waiting for it to grow larger like the leaking culvert on the Llangollen perhaps?! A considerable water saving could be made if all water points were checked for leaks ie the one at Whaley Bridge is probably part of the GREAT SCHEME to keep the canals full!

Gas- To Lock Or Not To Lock- I thought a sign stating GAS SHUTOFF VALVE was an obligatory requirement of passing the COC. What's the point of showing where the valve is, if no one can use it in an emergency?! A determined arsonist would not be deterred by finding the shut off valve locked anyway.

Bollard Security- Whenever we tie up to these rarely found objects, we make a point of always ensuring the lines are tight enough to not allow the unlooping of the line, after wrapping it around the

bollard several times. We have had lines cut, but never removed.

Been Desperate— Yes certainly up here on the Peak Forest and Maccy Canal. The only loo emptying points here are at Whaley Bridge, Bugsworth Basin, Marple and Bosley Locks. Why can't we have one at Macclesfield near the water point there? Why was the water point removed from Adelphi Mill Bollington some years ago?

Etiquette— Poor Eugene Baston fancy getting needless gesticulations to slow down when passing moored boats. Perhaps, just perhaps he WAS going too fast past them. Surely if he received ENDLESS gesticulations, he could possibly have been speeding! I doubt the gesticulators actually knew who he was so wouldn't have been picking on him for that reason. I have found the ratio of hire and private boats who speed past to be about 50/50. Even if the boat is tied up tightly, as a speeding boat passes, the moored boat sinks down and lurches over, a dangerous situation if, for instance, a chip pan is cooking.

Many thanks once again for all your hard work, it is appreciated, and it is now time to stop and take my blood pressure pills as another speeding boat bears down on us!

Best Wishes to you and all your Council

Graham Lambden

Doggy relics

Canaldrifter thinks that there is probably a museum somewhere with samples of doggy doos. I'll bet there are several. Dog dirt may not be a modern problem: way back in the early sixties I visited the ancient stone circle at Avebury in Wiltshire. In the museum were various relics including the remains of a stone-age human plus the remains of his dog and "excrement of dog" carefully displayed on a saucer. Actually most archaeologists seem to call it "copralite" nowadays. That way it sounds much less messy. By the way, it didn't look as though stone-age man had trodden in stone-age poo.

Ian Reid
Gentleman of Leisure(?)

Up the BCN!

The Humber Rivers Council representative was quoted in the South Notts Advertiser as objecting to the Newark Millgate development: 'Travelling along the Trent in a boat would be like going along a canal in Birmingham'

He might find it helpful to acquire a narrowboat and savour the BCN instead of knocking it.

NABO member
Nottingham

COUNTER



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

Your sarfern correspondent has just returned from an expedition to the even deeper sarf. Not by boat, but by campervan.... which is a sorta short narrowboat on wheels. However the chosen destination was the Chichester Ship Canal. This was part of the old London to Portsmouth barge route that used the Thames, River Wey, Wey and Arun, and the Portsmouth and Arundel canals, nipping across the creeks at high tide along the sarf coast. It was built in the early 19th century because we were losing too many ships to the French in the 'English' Channel. It carried a lot of coal, but there are stories of treasure trove cargoes too. An excellent website giving the full history can be found at: www.simplonpc.co.uk/Chichester.html

We went to see Chichester's new 50-seater passenger trip boat, which operates from Chichester Basin along the restored part of the waterway. Run by volunteers, the boats and the basin make an attractive watery oasis in the heart of urbanity.

At t'other end of the waterway, the sea-lock can still be viewed next to Chichester Marina, near Birdham. It is supposed to be still workable. There are some quite large vessels and houseboats moored above it. But the A286 crosses the route nearby, on the level, thus isolating the restored section. I hope to submit some images for the next newsletter. If ever you find your way that far sarf, head for

Chichester Centre, then follow the wharf signs. It is well worth the visit.

Last month I was wittering on about dogs' mess.... but there is another hazard which befalls us poor boaters at this time of year, and maybe this is even worse. I am suffering from it badly after my sarf coast foray..... Midge bites!!

The campervan club to which I belong has given advice on how to avoid being chomped by the little blighters. 'Avoid rivers and canals' they say. What chance do WE have then?

The landlord of the local pub near our sarf coast campsite reckoned the midges down there were bred on Thorney Island for germ warfare. Going by the state of my legs, I believe him! Normally Mrs Drifter is the one who suffers, and I am immune... (It's the decoy method of protection)..... but not this time! My one consolation is that they have just increased my warfarin levels. I hope the amount of rat poison in my blood is now enough to wipe out the stealthy little vampires... or at least make 'em feel a bit sick for a day or two.

I thought we human beans were at the top of the food chain, but apparently not. Anyone got any good ideas for avoiding getting bitten? We'd love to hear from you.

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