



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

Issue: 2/98 February 1998

NABO NEWS



**N.A.B.O.
NEEDS
YOU !!**

**See
pages
11 & 22**

Editorial

Firstly, thank you to all those members who took the trouble to contact me after the last edition. Their constructive criticism and comments were most helpful.

I have received one report of canal rage !

"It started when, seeing us, he made a move and left a pin behind. We pointed out the pin and he put crew ashore to walk several hundred yards to collect it, ignoring all enquiries as to us passing. We were in no hurry and might have waited but the current moved us and when our bow was level with his stern, he backed and rammed. We thought this was just bad boat control as the canal was deep and wide enough for him to move without touching us, but he drove forward then back - ramming us again.

Having been pushed under trees onto mud, I told my wife that he was an idiot. He must have heard me as a torrent of abuse followed, together with ramming repeated again and again. We said not another rude word although they

screamed insults between tirades about our "b.b.b. impatience". We poled off the mud and backed away but this seemed to incense them further for they threatened to beat us up. The couple were in their late 30s with two very embarrassed teenage children, who said not a word. We were planning to moor for lunch so did so, and a boat coming the opposite way moored in front of us. In chatting they told us of a boat recently met which jumped a queue for the lock, rammed them as they left the lock and whose crew were last seen screaming abuse at the boaters whose lock they had stolen. From the description it was the same boat and crew. All this took place in the morning, so we assume drink was not involved and from his actions we also assume he had hired boats before (and may again). Boaters beware"

What a sad and frightening tale !
The waterways should be a place of peace for all to enjoy without such things happening. I wonder what the boat hirers think of such ramming; their boats could sustain considerable damage if this irresponsible behaviour continued.

Wendy Hook

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Chairman's Comment

Channel dimensions and BW's trust proposals continue to dominate meetings and discussions.

NABO's response to BW's proposed new standards and channel dimensions has now been issued. We support the principle of standards, but consider the channel depths and widths in the consultation document to be inadequate, particularly on the Trent and Severn. For instance, on some stretches a minimum channel depth of 5'11" is supposed to be sufficient for pleasure craft drawing 5'6". This is on a river where boats have to keep up a reasonable speed to beat the current when going upstream and therefore need more depth under them. We also do not accept depths of 2'11" and 3'3" as adequate for most canals.

We also doubt whether BW's planned drastic reductions in maintenance of river channels have been discussed with, or agreed by, the Environment Agency or the local riparian councils.

BW's plans fudge the question of when the canals would actually be dredged. Operations Director Stewart Sim explicitly rejects the idea that the proposed minimum depths are re-dredging trigger points. Instead waterways reaching the minimum standard would be "put on the list" for dredging. However, he says it is "not BW's intention" to let any waterway reach category C3, which he defines as worse than the minimum quoted dimensions. As waterways continuously fill up - rivers quickly,

canals more slowly - and dredging won't be carried out when they reach the quoted minimum (they have to move up the waiting list first), it is hard to see how that intention can be achieved. Particularly as dredging costs and targets have not been published. BW says waterways will be dredged to full channel dimensions, except where safety factors prevail. Fine, although there appear to be several exceptions to this, such as large chunks of the Kennet & Avon. But how long will a river or canal languish at its minimum (or worse)? If it knows, BW isn't saying.

We also do not agree that maintenance standards on commercial and cruiseway waterways should be compromised for the sake of a proposal to reclassify a block of remainder waterways, particularly as the Minister has so far not committed herself to do any such thing. We continue to support the reclassification of the individual waterways when further funds become available.

As I write, Philip Ogden and I are going to a meeting with other user groups to see whether we can agree a common position. We shall be arguing that BW should be required to maintain its current published channel dimensions on rivers, and that the minimum canal depth of 4' recommended in the Fraenkel Report should be adhered to.

Turning to the BW Trust, Angela Eagle's speech to the Parliamentary Waterways Group on 4th February was

interesting. The Minister said the proposals had some attractions, but also some difficulties. She cited the investment opportunities and the freedom from the government's annual spending round as the main attractions. But she went on to highlight the protection of users from the trust's monopoly position, the appointment of trustees, the protection of the public interest in the waterways, and the questions of the government's liability as areas of difficulty. She said that other options were being examined in detail, and warned that any legislative window was two to three years away. She promised she would adopt a pragmatic approach - she wanted a solution that would work - and there would be no decisions without consultation. A very down to earth and reassuring approach!

I have been having meetings and discussions with the Environment Agency and British Waterways over the withdrawal of last year's reciprocal licence arrangements and their plans for craft licencing in future. The upshot is that while the concession of the Thames has gone, the long-standing 14-day reciprocal agreement covering the Nene and the canal network will continue. At my request, the EA and BW are also looking at the possibility of setting up a similar arrangement in the north east, particularly for the Ancholme. The EA are committed to work for a computerised national licencing system which would cover all nationally owned waterways and as many privately owned ones as would

join. The advantage from the authorities' point of view is that there should be substantial cost savings. The advantage to the users is the comparative ease of booking temporary licences on other waterways.

However, I see this as a means of introducing additional flexibility into the licencing system. Why not make visitor licences cheaper out of season, or for OAPs? Why not encourage new boat owners by introductory one or two year discounts? These things can be done with a modern computer system - airlines, railways, travel agencies and theatres all do so and find they gain business. It is time to bring boat licencing and mooring into the 20th century.

***Minister adopts
pragmatic approach -
wants a solution that
will work***

Speaking of licences, we hear reports that boaters on some canals are being refused licences because they do not have a permanent mooring and are not continuously cruising. BW are perfectly within their rights to do this, but it apparently isn't always warning the boat owners first. Instead, the owner receives a letter saying his/her new licence has been refused, and he has three months to find a mooring or get off the waterways. While NABO fully supports the principle that users should pay for moorings and licences according to the law, we will not support the use of jackboots by BW staff. On the southern Grand Union a few years ago, Chris Mitchell got good results with a series of two or three warning letters before getting tough with those who failed to respond. This is the sort of

approach which should be adopted throughout the system.

A couple of local issues which have been in the news lately are the Chinese junk in Gas Street Basin, and the ongoing saga of mooring pontoons at Stourport. BW on behalf of a developer, applied for planning permission to erect a four storey floating (not if I know Gas Street!) restaurant in the form of a Chinese junk in the basin. Now some of us feel the basin has been ruined already, but this would finish it off totally. It would also make it impossible to moor or wind in the basin. Denis Smith objected to the proposals on our behalf. He tells us the local planning authority have postponed hearing the application because they have had more responses to it than they have ever had to any application before! All in favour, no doubt! I ask: is this an indication of the sensitivity to and concern for the character of the canals and their heritage that we can expect from the officials of a BW trust? If so, forget it now!

At Stourport, the BW manager, Roger Herrington, appears to have fallen out with English Heritage, the local council, the local civic society, the local branch of the IWA and NABO (my apologies to anyone I've missed) over his plans for pontoons in the basin. He has attracted adverse publicity in the local press, radio and TV, and the local MP has been involved. This man is rapidly becoming the black hole of BW's public relations. I admire the Chief

Executive's grit in continuing to support him, but isn't it time - and in BW's interest - that he were moved to a job where his skills can be used without any contact whatsoever with the public or the media? I ask without commenting on the actual plans for the pontoon mooring, which could be quite acceptable if they were modified a bit. It is really Roger's refusal to consult users properly, and his unwillingness to listen to and accommodate what they have been saying, which have led to this situation.

***Congratulations
to British
Waterways***

On a more positive note, my congratulations to BW's Chris Mitchell for excellent consultation over the revised Code for Anglers. The last

draft of the Code had been accepted by all boating groups, but unfortunately nobody at BW remembered to show it to the National Federation of Anglers. Ken Ball, the head of the NFA, exploded when he found out - quite reasonably. Some of the wording was not acceptable to him, so Chris Mitchell did a lot of work behind the scenes to put together a new draft. David Daines of the hNBOC and I, on behalf of boaters, attended a meeting chaired by Chris in early January to thrash out the last contentious points. An hour of negotiation achieved a satisfactory compromise with the anglers. BW are planning to revise all their user codes - I understand the boaters' code is next. I wonder how long it will be before they're actually published?

NABO Council Agrees to Establishment of River Section

Following the recommendation made by the membership at the 1997 AGM the full Council met and decided that there was considerable merit in setting up a section to cater for the needs and concerns of boat owners who use river navigations.

The new section will operate entirely within the existing Council structure, initially with our River Users' co-ordinator, Stephen Peters, and North East Representative, Peter Foster setting the parameters and agenda for future actions.

Council recommended that another river user should be co-opted from our members based on the River Thames to give us direct contact with boat owners who use Environment Agency waterways. If any member based on the Thames would like to offer his or her services and strengthen the Council please contact Stephen or Peter.

We have already identified topics for future attention: BW's attitude to short term river licences, the need for improvements on the River Severn, the threat to navigation on the River Cam, the implications of the Wye Navigation Order, Gloucester Harbour byelaws, introduction of the Boat Safety Scheme on the Medway, safety issues or any other matters as they arise.

We can only represent river users if they let us know of their concerns - so please write your letters, contact Council members and tell us whether we are doing a good job, or could do better!

British Waterways Fined by Environment Agency

In November 1997 the Environment Agency successfully prosecuted BW for permitting over-abstraction from the Shropshire Union Canal.

BW pleaded guilty at Newtown Magistrates Court to permitting another person to abstract water in breach of its Licence. They were charged with 10 offences of over abstraction during the period April 1995 - March 1996 and were fined a total of £30,000 (£3,000 for each offence) plus £750 costs.

By a strange coincidence the autumn 1997 edition of *Waterways News* asked customers to contact the BW Licence Evasion Hotline number 01923 20 11 22 to report any water abstraction that is not displaying a licence.

We hope BW will also review its own abstraction licence conditions because any transgressions clearly waste considerable sums of money that could be better spent on improving navigation.

SITUATION VACANT

A NABO Member is required to be co-opted onto Council.

Must be based on the River Thames and be willing to attend Council meetings, normally in Birmingham.

Contact Stephen Peters
or Peter Foster
for more details

NABO is an equal opportunity organisation

Boat Safety

No ! this is not another article about the Boat Safety Scheme, but a request to our members for their observations and suggestions to move the agenda forward.

As owners of boats we know that merely obtaining a Safety Certificate does not remove dangers from our waterways.

Water can be a dangerous medium - people drown in it, commit suicide, fall into it, get swept away in floods.

Can we as boat owners together with the navigation authorities act to improve public safety on our waterways?

What about unguarded weirs on rivers? Or lack of safety features at locks? Absence of lock keepers on large river locks with no one present to oversee them? The dangers of navigating in floods or on tidal stretches of rivers?

Lack of dredging or tree cutting leading to collisions between pleasure boats and commercial craft? Collision risks, misuse of VHF radio, re-fuelling dangers, unsuitable craft, wearing of life-jackets, carrying of first aid kits, etc.....

Tell us how you think the waterways can be made safer for everyone and we'll look at your suggestions and demand improvements if warranted.

Lower Avon Boat Owners Fined

The Lower Avon Navigation Trust successfully prosecuted two boat owners in September 1997 for failing to register their craft.

In this test case (the first under the LANT Byelaws), Cheltenham Magistrates Court imposed fines totalling £900 plus £300 costs on the two owners who had "persistently failed to heed LANT warnings" during 1996. Both defendants had pleaded guilty to the offences.

This is an interesting case because the boats were moored in a marina and not on the River Avon proper. It appears that the LANT byelaws extend to backwaters, basins and marinas unlike the byelaws of BW or the Environment Agency, for instance.

LANT is insisting that all craft should have adequate Third Party insurance and comply with the Boat Safety Scheme with effect from 1 January 1998 before a licence can be issued. This could lead to other interesting "test cases" because the LANT Byelaws do not mention compliance with the BSS as being a condition for licensing. They do have a clause which requires craft to be "fit for navigation and in a reasonably watertight condition" but how could they justify saying that a boat which had been registered under the same byelaws in previous years was now considered not to be fit for navigation?

Michael Stimpson & Associates
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of Boat Owners**
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All you have to do to obtain a special quotation with no obligation is to fill in the quotation request form and send it to

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For the right protection for your boat
PERHAPS WE SHOULD BE TALKING

Towpath Telegraph

 - bits and pieces you may or may not have heard

First the Gladiators - now the Lions !

From 29 June to 3 July around 40,000 Lions (the international charitable organisation) will be attending a Convention in Birmingham.

You may be wondering how this will affect you - well, some Lions are attending by boat and they will have exclusive mooring rights for 8 days from 27th June between Farmers Bridge junction and Sheepcote Street Bridge by arrangement with British Waterways.

They are inviting boaters who are in Birmingham that week to visit them on their boats to meet the Lions and find out about their achievements.

On 30th June there will be a grand International Parade, commencing at the National Indoor Arena to the City Centre. There will be bands from various countries and Lions from many countries, many of them in their national costume.

Items of general interest and snippets of information for this column would be welcomed by the editor.

Is there anyone out there who can draw?

We are looking for someone who would be willing to draw one or two illustrations for this newsletter. A cartoonist who would be willing to contribute to each edition would also be appreciated.

Contact Wendy for more details.

Butane Gas Regulation SRG S41.10

This has been recalled due to a potential safety problem - like leaking gas. There is a date stamped on the unit and if yours was made by a German company, Schulz and Reckow between September 1996 and November 1997, get in touch with Calo Gas Ltd, Freepost, Mid 02915, Athena Drive, Tachbrook Park, Warwick CV34 6BR



Well, did you ever!

In the eighteenth century, life at sea was harsh and cruel with punishments handed out to offenders. But seamen sometimes got together to fight their bad conditions. They would "strike" (lower) the sails of their ships. Thus originated the saying "going on strike".

Someone once wrote an article about the late Sir Francis Chichester and the caption under the accompanying picture read... " *the great yachtsman who, with his 24 foot cutter, circumcised the world.*"

View from the Council: held on 31st January 1998

I enjoyed the meeting so maybe I will continue attending and reporting unless I get the sack. I just hope that you can put up with my ramblings.

BW's Trust received a knock when it was reported that the government has stated that it can't interfere over the increased mooring fees to be charged by the Port of London authority. Will this make BW's trust completely unaccountable also? A worrying thought. It is comforting to know that we have a council and members who are willing to tackle issues on our behalf. There are several who once they get their teeth into something will not let go. The NABO council is proving that the British bulldog is alive and well.

There was quite a lot of gloom with patrol officers in some areas being reported as getting more officious and boaters on the K&A being told at very short notice that their licences would not be renewed because BW disputed whether they were continuously cruising. Disputes always need time to sort and with time can usually be sorted amicably. Shortage of time leads to panic and bad decisions. Some areas handle this much more sympathetically and Chris Mitchell received a pat on the back for this.

Channel dimensions were discussed with C1s, C2s and C3s being explained. Apparently a C1 is 15% better than a C2 and a C3 is worse. The only problem being do we want the C2 ? and if we don't are we prepared to lose our remainder waterways because that seems to be the deal. A draft angling

code (draft 3) has been agreed between boaters and BW.

Unfortunately it hasn't been shown to the anglers yet. It is to be double sided with the other side for a boaters code, which we haven't seen yet. Will there be one for cyclists and walkers? Or will this have to have four sides? Why is it that BW doesn't have any shortage of money to spend on pretty leaflets whilst pleading poverty when it comes to real work being done to the canals.

There was a lively discussion on RCBs of which I didn't understand a word, but if you have one it seems that it could be possible to trip the electrics of everyone in a marina . Why does a light come on when when you flick a switch?

And an explanation on gas, which seems as though only a Corgi gas fitter can gas fit. A Corgi gas fitter can't gas fit on a boat because it isn't a house and an examiner can't test gas on a boat unless he is a Corgi fitter and then he can't because it isn't a house. Oh to be technically minded!

The boat safety certificate continues to be a minefield for the unwary but Nigel Parkinson is always willing to help so do send your problems and queries to him.

The plans for a Junk (a boat not the usual kind) BW are proposing to have in Gas Street Basin is being closely monitored. Apparently it is needed to make the basin more interesting now that there are fewer boats moored there.

It was lovely to hear that members are offering to help and we hope many of you will offer to pass on information from meetings that you attend and come to the various festivals and rallies to offer the volunteers manning the stands breaks. Also how about offering to put up info. at any event that you are attending?

Happy Boating from Pseudonym

NABO Needs YOU !!

Volunteers Wanted

During 1998 NABO will be having stands at various events throughout the country. Helpers are needed - it is fun. The more people involved the easier it is for everyone to enjoy the rest of the events as a rota can be organised.

People are needed in many capacities
erecting or dismantling the tent
leaflet dropping *manning stands*
talking to prospective members

It is hoped to be at Braunston Boat Show, Pelsall and Trent Boating Association Rally - all in May - and Salford Quays in August. There are other events where NABO would like to be represented - if we have enough willing volunteers. Contact Christine Denton, details on back cover if you are prepared to help in any way.

If you know of a local event and would be willing to attend on NABO's behalf we have a pack to help you run a stall and leaflets etc for your use. Contact Christine if you would like to do this.

Small Ads

a free service to members - contact editor

Squirrel Stove

7yrs old. little used. Needs new chimney collar (rain damage) and back plate (but works nonetheless) £100 o.n.o.

Utopia Unlimited, Braunston.

Available to Members

"Launderettes throughout the

Country" - Don't take your dirty washing home with you, take advantage of this 18 page list of launderettes in the canal's vicinity..

£2.50 + large SAE with 38p postage.

Contact: c/o Aylesbury
Canal Society, Canal Basin, Aylesbury,

John & Christine Denton will be pleased to see you at any time if you are passing their moorings at Mancetter on the Coventry Canal (nb India).

Call in and buy your Dunston Double Windlass, or get your friends to join NABO.

Diesel for sale to NABO members at a special price of 75p per gallon.

Just down the road is a pub with splendid beer and good food.

If the moorings are full, tie up opposite - we have a dinghy and will send over for you!

THE BROADS - AN EXTRA CRUISING DIMENSION

We do not at present have many members based on the Broads but certainly wish to attract more new recruits from the waterways of Norfolk and Suffolk. This wish was expressed at the 1997 AGM.

The majority of our members will not be familiar with these fascinating waterways because they are not physically connected to the rest of the system and their remoteness means that many boat owners never get the opportunity to sample the extensive network of rivers which make up the Broads.

The Broads Authority controls the 120 or so miles of interconnected rivers - the Yare, Bure, Waveney, Thurne and Ant - which stretch from Great Yarmouth inland to Norwich, south to Beccles and north to Stalham.

Some of the distant navigable limits end within a mile of the North Sea coast but access to the sea can only be gained via Gt. Yarmouth or through Mutford Lock which links Oulton Broad with Lowestoft Harbour.

There are no other locks on the navigable sections although disused locks still exist on the upper reaches of the Bure, the Waveney and the North Walsham & Dilham Canal. The Broads are subject to tidal rise and fall which can affect the navigable headroom

under the many bridges which cross the rivers, the lowest being the notorious Potter Heigham bridge which bears the scars of many a misjudged navigation attempt.

There are approximately 20,000 craft registered with the Broads Authority. Registration is free but annual licence charges are also levied. Byelaws exist to control navigation and speed limits and to restrict wide beam craft such as the familiar large hire craft. Relaxations from the byelaws are granted to the thriving boat-building industry to enable the passage of mega-motor yachts and to undergo speed trials.

The traditional commercial sailing craft (called wherries) were once a familiar sight but are now only historic working exhibits - and long may they and other sailing craft continue to grace these waters. Nowadays, commercial carrying continues in the form of sizeable coasters which ply between Yarmouth and Norwich.

The expansive Broads system is portrayed on two excellent maps. An Ordnance Survey Outdoor Leisure map to a scale of 1:25,000 is available printed on 2 sides and showing features such as rights of way and places of visitor interest. The map also shows bridge

clearance heights and locations of public moorings or staitthes in the local parlance.

The other map is produced by GEO Projects in association with the Broads Authority and is arguably better suited for navigation but does not show the surrounding land features or details. Members will know of this company which produces maps of other inland waterways. This map does include large scale insets of important boating locations and there is a wealth of useful information on the reverse side.

The Broads Authority originally intended to introduce the national Boat Safety Scheme but it withdrew from the joint venture with British

Waterways and the Environment Agency to pursue its own scheme. Draft details have recently been published and it is based on the BSS but with more exemptions for existing craft and, more importantly, compliance will be voluntary for a number of years before the scheme is reviewed.

Boat owners who do not find the BW/EA Boat Safety Scheme agreeable to their craft or their pockets might wish to opt for taking their boats on to the Broads instead. They can be assured of a fascinating new boating experience with many excellent facilities to be enjoyed and new places to explore. But beware of the many hire craft!

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River Review

The River Trent

The Trent valley has seen some horrendous flooding and only through investment has the situation been improved. However without proper dredging, including that below Gainsborough administered by Associated British Ports, the old flood plains will get wet again, including those now covered with houses and roads!

The river needs to be treated with respect and can be very dangerous, flowing faster than some narrowboats can travel. If a boat is not suitable, cruiser or narrowboat, then do not risk your boat or yourself. Get advice, charts, adequate safety equipment - including a good anchor, long enough ropes and fenders.

The Trent below Nottingham is three different rivers in a way:

- there is the non-tidal stretch, down to a mile or so below Newark (Cromwell Lock);
- the stretch down to Torksey and the Fossdyke (leading to Lincoln and Boston) which is tidal but in normal circumstances not too hazardous so long as you have a chart, keep to the channel and take advice from the lock-keeper;
- and then there is the rest! You need to have knowledge for this part as it can flow pretty quickly - in each direction, so you need tide tables and a vessel which will not ship water as the wind and tide together can form waves which will seem big to a low-bowed boat. We have a number of

instances each year where people have got a bit wet.



I am not trying to frighten anyone but the Trent is not a still-water canal; and needs care if you want to go to West Stockwith or Keadby, which are only accessible at certain states of the tide.

In order to assist you when on the Trust, I am organising a series of articles for future issues, with the assistance of other NABO members who are also Trent users, regarding the use of the river. There will be three articles covering the three parts into which the river naturally falls:

1) Nottingham to Newark 2) Newark to Torksey 3) Torksey to Keadby

Later there may be one for Keadby to Hull - which should never be undertaken by a narrowboat unless you are "Captain B", or of equal experience of the lower Trent and Humber.

Finally there is a shortage of moorings along the river. You can't just tie up at any bit of bank. So that we all enjoy ourselves, when you tie up at a mooring site, show how clever you are by going at the end or near those already there. It's only those who can't handle a boat that need to go in the middle of the biggest space available and thus prevent others from being able to moor up at all. Another thing, if your boat is not too wide to go on the side of the pontoon nearest the bank, then do that and leave more space for the wider boats that can't get in the back.

Happy boating, in whatever, wherever.
Peter Foster.

Speed Limits on Tidal Waters

A KNOT is the nautical measure of speed through the water. It is the number of nautical miles travelled in an hour. A nautical mile is equal, or as near as damn it, to 2,000 yards; and a cable is approximately 200 yards or a tenth of a nautical mile.

Now this has caused those people who have "EUitis" to think it is all purely based on English Imperialism and so must be decimalised (or is it decimated).

However, they are wrong. It is based on the internationally recognised measurement of latitude, which one can find on maps and charts all over the world, including France. One minute of latitude is equal to one nautical mile, in any language, and it can be measured off the side of a chart.

I think the "EUitis" merchants in both BW and the EA are wrong to force kilometres on us. They would have been better sticking to miles, where 7 knots is 8 miles per hour, as it always was on the Thames in the good old days. I am pleased to say that the EA have accepted that they are wrong and reverted to KNOTS on tidal waters. How about all waters used by sea-going vessels? Sadly BW have yet to see the light.

On the Trent we get illogical problems, which may well occur on other rivers. From Nottingham to Cromwell (near Newark) the river is locked and thus

only flows "down-hill" at roughly 2 mile per hour normally, in the summer, when it is running at low level. So the fact that there is a difference in speed limit between going up-stream and down-stream is acceptable, seeing as it is based on overland speeds (which is not acceptable really!).

However when travelling below Cromwell, a different limit for up-stream from that for down-stream is totally illogical. The river is tidal and thus runs both up and down, sometimes at a considerable speed. If one is going down-stream (north) when the river has 'a bit of a fresh on' on a falling tide, the river can almost break the speed limit by itself. How can a boat remain under control on such a turbulent river at less than 3 knots? It is not possible. Similarly when going up-stream (south) when the river does not have any fresh on, the rising tide (especially on 'springs') will break the speed limit. So how does the poor boat skipper cope then? Imagine going astern yet also going forward. Where is there any control and safety? I'm sure the fishermen would still complain, because they cannot understand boats and their needs.

It is essential that we persuade BW that the speed limits on their shortish part of the tidal Trent are not correct and first should be a through the water speed and secondly should be in KNOTS. I would suggest 7 knots is a sensible figure.

If you have any views on this, drop me a line.

Peter Foster (address on back cover)

RED DIESEL UNDER THREAT

A proposal for an EU Directive on restructuring taxation on fuels has been put forward by the European Commission and if (when?) adopted it will spell the end for cheap diesel fuel for pleasure craft.

At present only 4 EU countries, including the UK and Ireland, have the concession of duty free or duty rebated diesel fuel and in order to harmonise the taxation regime the duties are likely to be imposed for all except commercial vessels and agricultural users (the farming lobby is very influential!).

This would mean that boat diesel would become the same price as DERV for road vehicle use, and red diesel could not legally be used.

For many boat owners who purchase only small volumes of diesel each year the price hike would probably be bearable but this is yet another example of the inexorable increase in the cost of boating.

Owners of larger motor yachts would be financially affected to a much greater extent. If your boat has 2 large turbo-charged diesel engines each consuming perhaps 10 gallons per hour or even more at cruising speed, the bill would soon add up appreciably.

Putting aside any arguments about ability to pay the increased prices we would urge the Government to resist any changes for a number of reasons:

- ◆ If marine diesel became subjected to the same taxation as road fuel, boat owners would be tempted to obtain their fuel in cans from local garages. Worse still, some might be tempted to obtain duty free fuel from "unofficial" sources. What controls and checking procedures would there be? And who would pay?
- ◆ Boatyards would be unable to compete on price with the larger outlets and diesel fuel could become more difficult to obtain on the inland waterways. The availability of petrol on our waterways is already becoming restricted due to stricter safety regulations and zero profit margins.
- ◆ If boat owners obtained diesel fuel in cans this would lead to pollution of our waterways as a result of inevitable spillages and leakages.
- ◆ The running cost of boats with diesel engines would increase and make ownership of such craft less attractive. The use of petrol as a fuel would increase, bringing with it greater risk of fire and explosions. At present petrol engined craft are generally cheaper to buy than their diesel-powered counterparts but the situation could be reversed if fuel prices were to be equalized. Diesel engined craft could become devalued and difficult to sell and the marine trade would soon feel the effects.

-
- ◆ Diesel engines are more economical and energy efficient than petrol engines. Any tendency for owners to switch to petrol would mean less efficient use of fossil fuels.

What are our members' views on this topic?

Would higher fuel prices put you off boating? Would you use your boat less?

We hope the implications will be discussed widely before any irrevocable decisions are made by the bureaucrats.

[Quiz Question: Boat diesel is dyed red in the UK. But what colour is it in Ireland? Do you know or can you guess?]

However, all is not yet lost, as the directive is only a proposal so far. But if we are to prevent it, we have to act now. NABO is already working with the other national waterways groups, but this is one case where individual input may prove crucial.

Perhaps the most effective thing you can do is write to your MEP. Many UK MEPs are not yet aware of the proposal, but are likely to be sympathetic. The proposed directive is called "Restructuring the Community Framework for the Taxation of Energy Products". Points you might like to make in your letter include:

1. The proposal will have the effect of tripling the price of diesel for boating. This will cause many to reduce their boating, or stop altogether. This is likely to lead to the failure of many

waterways-related businesses with corresponding loss of employment. It will also threaten the waterways themselves, as a result of loss of revenue to the navigation authorities.

2. The proposal is unfair. It aims to tax boat fuel to the same level as road fuel, although the social and environmental costs of boating are negligible compared to those of driving. In the UK the government is progressively increasing the tax on road fuel to discourage road use. Why should this apply to boating?

3. Increasing the tax on diesel will encourage a switch to petrol, because petrol engines are cheaper than diesel. Diesel is a very safe fuel, but petrol on boats can be a major hazard and causes serious fires each year.

4. The proposal retains lower tax for several motor fuel uses, such as stationary motors, generators, agriculture, construction and vehicles intended for use off the public roadway. It also allows for exemptions for fuel used for navigation, except in "private pleasure craft" (which explicitly includes hire boats). Private pleasure craft should also be offered these favourable provisions, and should not be singled out in this way. The loss in tax revenue would be negligible at the national level.

5. Obtaining a short-term exemption for the UK is not enough. If the overall EU policy is not changed, there will continue to be similar initiatives in the future to bring the UK into line.

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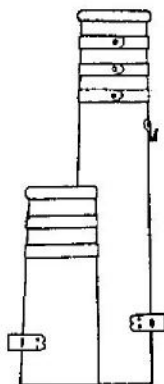
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NABO World Wide Web Site

In the middle of October 1997 the official NABO World Wide Web site went 'live'. That is to say that it was announced on the Internet. After a meeting with Chairman Peter in August, originally concerning the editorship of the newsletter, it was agreed that yours truly would set up the official site and act as Webmaster for NABO. Previous to this there were two unofficial sites, one hosted at the 'Folkwise' site and the other at the '@Amphicar' site, and we wish to thank both Jeff and Dave for their time and effort on behalf of NABO.

Other useful address of the web that may be of interest to boaters are:

RBOA:

<http://members.tripod.com/~RBOA/>

IAW:

<http://www.man.ac.uk/CME/IWA/iwahome.htm>

Several Council members can be contacted on E-mail.

Penny Barber: rep for RBOA and disabled matters

Roger Davis: Membership Secretary

Wendy Hook: Newsletter Editor

Michael Wooding: NABO webmaster

The NABO site is hosted at Clearlight.com in the USA, although as users of the Internet will know, it matters not where the actual WWW server is, but the quality of its connection to the net is of paramount importance.

As I use Clearlight for my own commercial site I was able to recommend their level of service as being excellent.

The WWW site is a useful means of advertising NABO and the Association's activities. In this modern world it is my personal opinion that no organisation or commercial body, no matter how large or small, should be without a WWW site. Although a site such as ours has limited interest, I feel that the modest annual cost is well outweighed by the interest it generates. It is also a means of getting news to 'connected' members quickly, as the medium is relatively immediate, i.e. within a hour or so of receiving information from Council I can have it on the site.

For those of you who are not yet 'on the net' it is possible that we may have live connections at the Braunston Boat Show and at the National Rally. If this comes to fruition be assured that we will let you know through the newsletter, so that you can have a look at what NABO on the World Wide Web is all about. For those who are connected, the URL for the site is:

<http://www.clearlight.com/~nabo>

Bye for now ... Michael J Wooding

IS YOUR BOAT ADEQUATELY INSURED ?

Users of British Waterways navigations will be aware that they are required to have Third Party insurance cover of at least £1 million by the date at which the Boat Safety Scheme will apply to their craft. For most people, this means NOW.

Responsible boat owners generally have more comprehensive insurance cover for their valuable boats to safeguard against other perils such as sinking, fire, theft, etc. However, you may have noticed in recent months that your insurer has issued revised policy wording when you renewed your boat insurance. This has caused considerable anguish within the yachting and boating fraternity to the extent that the Royal Yachting Association has now decided to draw up its own yacht insurance policy for its members, incorporating the best of the old "Institute Yacht Clauses" which many insurance companies now seem to disfavour.

We would urge our members to check that they are covered for the perils they anticipate. If in doubt ask your broker to confirm in writing exactly what you are covered for.

Unlike BW, the Environment Agency does not have the legal powers to insist on vessels being insured by their owners. This anomaly is likely to be corrected at a future date by new legislation, but for the time being beware - not all craft are insured. This could lead to complications if you are involved in an incident with a less responsible boat owner.

Finally, an interesting development from the River Wey. The National Trust, which controls the navigation, now insists on Third Party insurance cover for all powered craft together with written confirmation of wreck recovery and salvage. This requirement appears to exceed even that which BW imposes. Has the National Trust identified an obvious omission in the present insurance regime?



THOSE SIGNS , AGAIN!

We hope you have memorised the plethora of new navigation signs which the Environment Agency has introduced on its waterways (see last issue of newsletter).

But how many of you spotted the deliberate error?

The EA has issued correction stickers for their leaflet because the meaning of two of the signs was transposed. The leaflet will be reprinted with the necessary corrections incorporated.

Before you ask us - No, we don't know which ones they got wrong either!

Should make an interesting New Year puzzle - spot the wrong signs!!

Find at least 37 waterways, places, objects and organisations

I was speaking to Mr Mitchel Merrow in a boat belonging to canal critic Rick Jones but he had a grouse about it. So are you ready?

It is a sublime houseboat called "Tropical Donkey" but it appears he has to stand on a box for driving the boat. My heart bleeds for him! It's all well and good but one never knows if the box is to put his glass on.

Rick recently took his new ark to a rally with ample time to find deep water and have a meal in "Eve's Hamper".

Unfortunately, he was turned away by an official named Vernon and told "The most our port can hold is decreed by the Cam Bridge Water Company or other people".

"They are not anti-boating and are making a bid for dredging the canal".

Rick's wife asked if they could use their dinghy but the official retorted "There will be no rowing tonight".

Then he noticed her bandaged finger and felt sorry. "And how did Anna burn her hand?" he asked "On the hob?"

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"Well," replied Rick "you see that ring on her finger?" "Anna was smoking whilst steering. The breeze was strong and turned my boat broadside on. Face the wind, lass, I cried. Just then the cigarette flared up and scorched the ring causing her to trap her thumb erroneously under the tiller".

"Sorry to hear that" said the official.

"That's a poor response, Vern" said Rick.

"Sorry" replied Vern. "I owe you a quiet nap tonight, and tomorrow I'll buy some of your merchandise".

"Unfortunately, I don't have my stock with me" Rick replied. "Now let me count a flock of sheep. Goodnight!"

Cycle Route Proposals Threaten Sharpness Marina

A recently published report produced by the Cyclists' Touring Club proposes the establishment of a cycle way along the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal between Sharpness and Rea Bridge near Gloucester.

There are proposals for many such schemes throughout the country, mainly instigated by Sustrans which has plans for a national network of cycle routes funded partly by the National Lottery.

NABO supports the principle of multi-use of our waterways system but the success of such schemes depends upon agreement and satisfactory accommodation of all legitimate users.

We were somewhat surprised, to say the least, to discover that the proposals for Sharpness envisage a lightweight footbridge being constructed across the entrance to the "Old Arm" which presently provides sheltered moorings and other facilities for numerous craft at the marina.

The report is critical of the present access arrangements for cyclist via a track, marina car park, ramps and steps leading to a path which crosses the two disused lock chambers. It describes the access as "inconvenient" and calls for a footbridge with a headroom of 2 metres and an opening section 5 metres wide on the premise that "large would never use the Old Arm". Existing users of the arm might not agree with the cyclists' assertions!

Many fairly large sea-going pleasure craft moor in the arm and the construction of the proposed footbridge would undoubtedly threaten the livelihood of the marina proprietor.

NABO has lodged a formal and forthright objection to the footbridge scheme and will continue to resist this and any other similar plans which present a threat to navigation.

PRESS CUTTINGS

It would help the Association enormously if all members would act as eyes and ears for Council.

If you read anything in your local newspaper concerning boating incidents, reports of crimes, court proceedings, development plans, public notices regarding byelaws, etc. please forward them to us for information or action. Don't forget to tell us the name and date of the publication!

This is an easy way for you to help yourself and others and remember - the British Waterways General Powers Bill (now the BW Act 1995) started off life as an innocuous public notice in a local paper, then things started to hot up!!

JOIN A CLUB -

In fact, join more than one. No, this is not a recruitment drive; it's a self preservation message. There are strange goings-on in the northeast regarding the BSS certificate and threatened legal actions, so I hear. If what I hear is true, then we all need to be concerned. I cannot say more at the moment, but will be keeping a close watch on the matter. As it happens, the person being threatened is a member of a few clubs.

Clubs are a bit like government, but more use to boaters perhaps, as there is no politics.

1. A boat club based on a group of boats in a particular location, such as Penton Hook or Farndon, providing social activities at a local level and looking after local interests - a bit like a parish or town council.
2. Organisations such as the Trent Boating Association or Great Ouse Boating Association, operate at a wider level and generally are pressure groups looking after boaters' interests over a wider area. They are always pushing the Navigation Authority for better facilities, etc. They are a bit like District Councils.
3. Then there are the national bodies, NABO, RYA, IWA. Hopefully they have great influence with Government, BW, EA and other navigation authorities. They compare with County Councils.

Each type need Your PERSONAL MEMBERSHIP to be able to function effectively on your behalf and for your benefit. Join now, you may well need powerful friends, if what I have been told is true - and I certainly trust my informants.

Peter Foster

Letters

Dear Editor

I write with reference to Simon Greer's two letters in an attempt to inform your readers of the true facts relative to the malicious and misguided allegations made by Mr Greer.

a. 'Nearly £200,000 , missing from BW Accounts' on Senior Employee Emoluments?

The 1996/7 Annual Report and Accounts (page 29) show that the £1,093,000 relates to Staff Costs on Sharpness Dock and not to Senior Employee Emoluments (shown on page 32 of the Accounts). There is thus no discrepancy in the Senior Employee Emoluments in the BW Accounts. Mr Greer created a difference just by comparing two completely different costs.

b. 'Size and scope of secret Senior Management Payment-by-results-performance bonus rumoured to be a shareout of the unspent budget'

There is no basis for the alleged rumours of a secret share out of unspent budget to Senior Management. All income and expenditure is shown in the accounts and has been independently audited by outside companies to be correct.

c. 'BW having to return to the Treasury all surplus income each year' and not being short of funds.

The regime under which BW received grant is explained on page 20 (Statutory & Financial Framework) of the 1996/7 Annual Report & Accounts. From this it can be seen that BW is only able to claim grant from Government in accordance with its

needs, but subject to a pre-determined maximum. Whilst BW could be required to return surplus income should it occur, the situation has not arisen in recent years, because, as is well known, BW has insufficient income for its requirements, as shown by the £93.8m backlog of maintenance accumulated at 31.3.97.

d. 'Boat licences up by 30%' The boat licence income constitutes about 6% of BW's total annual costs. The 30% increase to pleasure craft licences will take place over a 4 year period and remains a similar percentage of turnover. Many of us believe that, despite the increases which are hard to bear, the licence gives outstanding value for money when compared with the access it gives to our wonderful waterways.

e. 'More legislation to repeal Cruising & Remainder Waterways' BW are not proposing legislation to repeal the distinction between waterways. BW intend, if users support it, to get a Ministerial Order to reclassify 400 kms of Remainder Waterways to Cruising status.

g. 'BW trying to slip through extinguishment of Historical Rights' BW is openly seeking to establish that reasonable charges can be made to those like property developers and utilities who exploit the facility and value of the waterways. Without these payments, the backlog of repairs will increase or boat licences will increase further.



h. 'Inclusion of a few Boaters on the Board' The Chairman and one other Board Member are boaters, together with the Chief Executive. There are several vacancies on the Board in 1998. They will be filled as a result of open competition by those with the best ability and experience. Those who have the ability and are willing to take on the onerous responsibilities are encouraged to apply for the job.

D J Fletcher

Chief Executive, British Waterways.

(NB I have not cut this letter in any way - there was no item (f) in the original letter - Ed)

-o-o-O-o-o

Dear Editor

BW as a Trust

As a boater of thirty years standing and as a member of NABO I am sickened by the endless complaints about the British Waterways Board. All that they are doing is predictable. They are doing what any other undemocratic oligarchy would do. **They are doing what suits them.**

Many companies negotiate agreements with their staff to consult and promptly ignore the agreement. Only a monopoly like BWB could agree to consult their customers and at best consistently ignore their customers wishes and worst still ignore all agreements.

With regard to the endless bickering over broken agreements, over board dictatorship, the Board knows best, and all the indifference to customers views and opinions are merely symptoms of a monopoly.

The struggle to save a few yards of canal here, or get a mile dredged there, is attempting to nibble at the problem from the wrong end. We are attempting to tackle the symptoms of an ailment when we should be going for the cause.

The cause of the problem is simple: **We don't own the canals**, and a trust deed, written by the Board for the Board, will not give us ownership. The radical solution is to get control of the waterways is to own them.

Do I hear people saying we can't afford it?

"How do you know ?"

Proposal

1: With or without the aid of other waterways users, draw up a democratic trust deed. With trustees elected every few years from the full membership of the constituent associations.

2: Establish the trust and elect the trustees giving it a nominal cash balance.

3: Have the new trustees approach the minister as the democratically elected trustees to oversee the board and management and ensure that the canals are run for the benefit of users and for the conservation of our canal heritage. The board will then be employed and answerable to the trustees who are democratically elected by us, the customers. The trustees will be responsible for ensuring that the board run the waterways according to a trust deed written by us, the users.

To those who say we can't afford it, remember how many millions are being paid each year in subsidies by

are responsible for nothing. The Inspector is only responsible on the day the vessel was examined. The boat owner is responsible at all times after that. If the work carried out [to obtain the certificate] has made the boat unsafe to go to sea, who is responsible? A warning is also printed informing prospective buyers to make sure the vessel meets the safety standard set by the navigation authority. How can the buyer be sure of this - must he engage another examiner to be sure the certificate is valid?

My conclusion is to sell the boat, after 47 years boating. 21 boating friends have reached the same conclusion, the boats being removed to waterways not controlled by BW or EA. The safety record on inland waterways must be one of the best in leisure and outdoor pursuits. Enough is enough - so NABO, TBA and all other user organisations, get your act together before it is too late for the boater and the industry on inland waterways.

Mr R Careless

(Name and address supplied)

-o-o-O-o-o-

Dear Editor

Montgomery Canal

Talking to the local IWA branch chairman, Mr Farmer, he mentioned that he had suggested to BW that the current system of pre-booking passage through Frankton locks 24 hours in advance should be changed. Under this rule many boaters arrive to find they should have booked and because

of various circumstances they cannot then make use of the locks. There are signs to warn that passage must be prebooked at various sites along the Llangollen but they are easily missed and the Frankton keeper (when on site for pre-booked boats) will only allow those prebooked to use the locks.

Mr Farmer's suggestion is that this system is scrapped and replaced with one whereby the locks will be open for a couple of hours per day - times to be published - and boaters will be allowed through on a first-come first-served basis. Thus allowing the lock-keeper to work elsewhere most of the day whilst making passage easier for the majority who arrive and the hours of opening could be increased in the future.

Incidentally, BW insist that staff be present when the locks are in use because of the risks of flooding from the double top lock, such risks being intensified by the 9 million gallons of water moving down the canal everyday to be sold as drinking water. Mind you, one understands that inexperienced BW keepers have achieved floods of nearby gardens without assistance from the public.

This does seem a good idea and I wonder if NABO could put its clout behind it. It has been suggested that BW's projection of 80 boat passages a week would be increased if this system we followed.

David H S Cragg

(Name and address supplied)

All correspondence to:
Editor, NABO News

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RBOA Liaison/Disabled

Geoffrey Barnett

N W Rep

Sue Burchett

Secretary

Roger Davis

Membership Secretary

Christine Denton

Marketing/Rallies

John Denton

Strategic Planning

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N E Rep

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