

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS

NABO



NEWS

- **Red Diesel Latest**
- **Chairman and Gen. Sec. Quitting?**
- **Window on the Wash**



Issue 2 March/April 2008

IN THIS ISSUE

3	Red Diesel Latest	Stephen Peters
3	Other Latest	Stuart Sampson
4	Member Survey - Findings so far	Howard Anguish
5	Survey Form - 2nd chance	(cut out page)
7	Recruiting Members	Hon. Treasurer
7	Shared Ownership Update	Howard Anguish
8	A Tale of Two Tails	Howard Anguish
9	Advice on Renewing Licences	Simon Robbins
10	Moorings Trial Consultation Timetable	(BW)
11	A Point to Ponder	Anon
12	Chairman's Column	The Chairman
14	Car Rental Discount	(Enterprise)
15	RCR Information	RCR
16	Rivers - Trent Lock Manning resolved	Stephen Peters
17	Rivers - Thames Meetings (EA & PLA)	Simon Robbins
19	A Window on the Wash	Ian Fletcher
22	BCN Explorer Cruise	BCNS
23	Save Our Waterways Reforms	Will Chapman
24	Letters	Your Good Selves
25	Chumston and Slawit? - Around the Severn	Stephen Peters
26	NABO supplies	
27	Contacts and Council	

Editor's Notes

'You Say' in this issue is still taking comments from the rich pickings from the CSS survey. Thank you.

Photos

Colour isn't needed so you can send it as a greyscale image if it saves you time or hassle .

The important part of a pictures doesn't need to be any bigger than 1500 pixels wide either so you might want to crop or reduce the definition of a shot before you send it.

2008 CALENDAR

Council meeting	NN Copy date
19th Apr	26th Apr
7th June	14th June
12th July	19th July
6th Sept	13th Sept
22nd Nov AGM	
29th Nov	6th Dec

RED DIESEL LATEST

Stephen Peters reports

HM Revenue and Customs have announced their proposals for the ending of the sale of rebated fuel oil for pleasure craft with effect from November 2008.

Pleasure craft can use red-dyed fuel but it will be subject to full duty from November. During the consultation process, NABO favoured the continued use of red fuel because it would be impractical and very expensive to purge all traces of the dye from tanks and fuel systems. We also urged the continued sale of red diesel to ensure easy availability of fuel at the waterside.

Commercial operators will continue to be able to purchase rebated fuel at a reduced price but private boat owners will be faced with a massive hike in the price at the pump because the Government has decided to impose the maximum rate of duty on the fuel for propulsion use. We now pay approximately 10p per litre fuel duty and 5 per cent VAT for our fuel. With effect from November this will increase to approximately 57p per litre and VAT at the rate of 17.5 per cent will also be levied. The compound result could be that our fuel may double in price overnight.

Many boat owners may find it cheaper to buy DERV from their local supermarket and this could lead to incidents of pollution from leaking cans or when filling boat tanks. It may also, unwittingly, result in boatyards ceasing to stock the fuel if their customer base reduces to an uneconomic level.

HMRC recognises that many boat owners use diesel for domestic heating and cooking purposes on board their boats and a mechanism will be introduced to permit owners to self-certify the intended use when buying red diesel and pay the appropriate lower price for that fuel which will be subject to a reduced rate of duty and VAT. Quite how this will work out in practice remains to be seen and its success will very much depend upon the honesty of boat owners and the acceptance of their word by the fuel retailers. NABO's input has been invited and your representatives may be meeting with HMRC about the time you read this.

No doubt, more information about this topic will emerge during the course of the year and the moral must be - buy your fuel whilst it is still cheap and enjoy your boating this year whilst you can afford it. The long-term consequences are open to conjecture but it could be that many boat owners, especially those with thirsty sea-going cruisers, will decide to give up their pastime altogether and opt for a cheaper leisure activity. The effect on the boating industry remains to be seen.

OTHER LATEST

BW is consulting regarding the new Licence Terms and Conditions, including the £130 Late Payment charge and 'clearer' wording on Continuous Cruising. NABO is considering the wording, but is disappointed that the Customer Service Standards have not been included in BW's obligations as requested in the fee consultations.

At the Parliamentary Waterways Group on 19th March, Jonathan Shaw announced good progress on the Cross Department Committee front and that 'Waterways For Tomorrow' would be revamped in 2008/9, a good means of focussing Government minds.

MEMBERS SURVEY 2008

Thank you to all those members who took the trouble to respond to the survey in the last NABO News. Although the number of responses was disappointing, the input we received was useful and will be helpful to Council in the coming months. It's still not too late to let us know your thoughts if you wish to send in a response – use the form opposite or you can, of course, just e-mail or write, to the Vice Chairman. Not surprisingly, we had little response to our requests for help in Council & Admin matters – you're all too busy doing other things – even boating!

Because we have received a number of comments concerning the Waterway Reports Forum, we will be monitoring the use of the WRF over the coming next few months to see whether it is worth keeping it in its present form. We will let you know the result later in the year.

In an organisation which represents a wide group of opinions it is not surprising that there are some differing views – for example, some members wish us to continue campaigning hard for red diesel whereas others see this as a waste of time and wish us to concentrate on other issues. A brief summary of some of the issues and suggestions can be seen below;

What should we concentrate on?	Back burner or Scrap?
Mooring auction issues	The web site – either reduce or scrap altogether
Red diesel	Crime reporting
More funding for waterways from Central Government	Boat Safety Scheme issues
Control of vegetation	Navigation issues at local level
Lobbying MP's and Licencing authorities	Mooring list
Working with other organisations such as IWA, RBOA, canal societies	NABO Supplies
Some responses called for a merger with IWA & RBOA	Sealed tender bids
Vandalism issues	Red Diesel
Practical advice to members	Waterway Report Forum
Customer Service Standards	
BW Maintenance	
Dredging (or the lack of)	
Recycling facilities	
NABO News – this is seen as a key part of NABO	
Maintain strong links with SOW	

NABO MEMBERS SURVEY - 2008

- 1 What issues do you think we should concentrate on in the coming months – including any new issues which you might wish us to take up on behalf of members?
- 2 What issues (if any) are we presently pursuing which you think could be put on the ‘back burner’?
- 3 Are there any services which you regard as ‘redundant’?
- 4 Is there anything else you would wish us to provide as part of your membership?
- 5 Have you any other comments/ suggestions or ideas which you would like us to consider? (e.g regarding relationships with other voluntary bodies)



NABO MEMBERS SURVEY - 2008 PAGE 2

6 Would you be willing to consider putting your name forward for Council?

7 Can you offer any help or advice with the production of NABO News?

8 NABO's website needs someone to run it on a day to day basis to keep it up to date – do you have the skills and are you willing to help?

9 After November we may need someone to take on the role of General Secretary – this does not necessarily have to be a Council member. Are you interested?

10 Have you any other skills which you think may help NABO?

11 Last but not least - your name please.



HON TREASURER REMINDS YOU ABOUT NEW MEMBER RECRUITMENT OFFER

The strength and effectiveness of any organisation depends upon its membership base and involvement of members in its policy and decisions. This applies to NABO and may I remind you that recruitment is the responsibility of all members, not just Council?

If you think membership of NABO is a good idea and that the Association is fulfilling a vital function on behalf of boat owners, then why not tell other boat owners and encourage them to join us. There is a membership form in the centre of every edition of NABO News, so you have no excuse. Just think what we could achieve if every member managed to enrol just one new member. Better still, **you will receive a £5 bonus** for every new member that you introduce (up to a maximum of 3 new members in each calendar year). This means that if you enrol 3 new members you effectively get your own **subscription for the year totally free** and although I don't generally like writing out cheques, I will make an exception for this very worthwhile exercise. Just remember to insert your own name at the bottom of the membership application form and we will do the rest.

Let's make 2008 the year when we spread the word about NABO and increase our membership. There are approximately 60,000 boat owners out there somewhere who have not yet joined NABO.

LATE NEWS FOR SHARED OWNERSHIPS BOATERS

As NABO News goes to press we have heard through contacts that BW may be entering discussions with APCO about the possibility of changes to the licensing structure regarding shared ownership boats. This despite a recent Ombudsman Ruling which ruled against BW's policy of charging shared ownership boats at a commercial rate when they are wholly privately owned. NABO has asked to be included in the consultation process and will keep all interested parties informed, either by a bulletin or in the next issue of NABO News.

A TALE OF TWO TAILS!



Howard anguish relates...



Speaking to colleagues before the Council meeting started last Saturday, someone mentioned about a rat being found on board a boat (Yuk!) They were somewhat mystified when I said you would have been taken to task if you had said that word (R**) in some parts of Hull, so let me explain.....and believe me I'm not superstitious so I won't incur any bad luck (touch wood).

I hail from West Yorkshire – as far from the sea as you can get, but since Hilary & I were married we have lived in East Yorkshire not far from Hull. Now Hull people are proud to tell you that for many years Hull was the largest fishing port in the World – a fact hotly disputed by Grimsby –leading to friendly rivalry over the years, summed up in the phrase “Hull for quantity – Grimsby for quality!” What is undisputed is that the distant water fishing industry bred a unique type of seafarer and one who was fiercely superstitious. This has lasted into the present day, and many of these superstitions are now part of everyday life. Even those who have never been further than Bridlington Pier on a wet Wednesday are quick to pull you up if you mention some of the taboo words or tempt fate in some horrific manner.

As an example, to come back to the animal I mentioned at the beginning, it would have been perfectly acceptable to have described the beast in question as a ‘long tail’ but never as r**. In this part of the world, it was also essential that the animal where the bacon buttoy comes from should be called a ‘curly tail’ or a ‘grunter’ (I think it warrants two names because it tastes so good) and a rabbit was always a ‘bunny’. Trawler men had many such superstitions which were also shared by their wives and families – such things as never wash your husband’s clothes on the day when he went back to sea for fear of washing him away i.e. washing him overboard, or don’t wave him goodbye or a wave might wash him away. These superstitions are possibly understandable but there are others which are much more obscure. Why, for example was it regarded as very bad luck to carry your own sea bag on board at the start of a trip? Or why a loaf of bread must never be put on its side after a slice had been cut?

A favourite one which is very common in Hull to this day is the aversion for the colour green. For instance a colleague (an ex seafarer but with no direct connection to the trawling industry) once refused to take delivery of a brand new company car because it was green, preferring to wait until he could get one of any other colour. It is often said that there are fewer green cars in Hull than anywhere else.

Clergy, cross-eyed people, black cats, all played their part and a long standing aversion was the threat of putting to sea on a Friday. I myself have come across this when managing ships manned by Hull crews. I can remember many occasions when I have been told that a ship wasn’t ready to sail until the early hours of a Saturday morning when there was no earthly reason for it not to sail

the previous evening and there were many moans and groans when they were made to sail! For many years there was a story about an attempt to rid seafarers generally of this fear by the Royal Navy who are supposed to have commissioned a ship on a Friday, launched it on a Friday, named it HMS Friday, it sailed on its maiden voyage on a Friday, commanded by Captain Fridayand it was never seen again! Unfortunately, in recent years research at the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich has found no trace of this ship, but it's a nice story anyway.

I started by implying that these superstitions are mainly shared by trawler men, but I have to say that some of my colleagues in the Merchant Navy weren't averse to a bit themselves. That universal ban on whistling – said to 'whistle up a wind' still exists at sea, and I well remember as a young navigating officer on a large Cunard passenger liner, when steaming across the Grand Banks of Newfoundland in thick fog in the days before GPS, the Captain – a very imposing figure in bridge coat and gold braid - came on to the bridge while I was staring into the radar and hoping that we didn't meet anyone coming the other way. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him sidle out onto the wing of the bridge, put his hand in his pocket and pull out a handful of change. Looking round to make sure he wasn't being watched he threw the coins into the sea. He then saw that I was watching him in some surprise. He told me that it was a common practice among Newfoundland fishermen that if they paid Neptune his dues he would take away the fog. He grinned at me sheepishly and said as Tesco's now also say – "every little helps". I don't think he regarded this as superstition – just insurance.

RENEWING BW LICENCES & PERMITS

Simon Robbins advises proof of posting

I strongly advise BW customers to follow the advice that BW mention in the notes accompanying renewal forms for Boat Licences and BW Moorings Permits. Get proof of posting when you send in your application form and payment, (also where applicable, in order to protect your prompt payment discount). You can get a free proof of posting by taking the form and payment to the counter of a post office. My local sub-post office was fine with this when I posted my money and forms off ten days ago and it costs nothing.

Why? - Well when I rang "customer service" last week, they refused to even confirm receipt of my forms and payment because "I had to allow 15 days". On querying this I was told that they cannot even acknowledge receipt for fifteen days because it takes craft licensing that long to be sure they have your papers! They did however confirm that as long as I had proof of posting the prompt payment would be honoured if it should prove to be an issue later.

It seems then that to be sure of what is going on before your renewal date, you really need to apply three weeks in advance.

MOORING TENDER TRIAL

BW sets timetable for consultation

There should be three phases in the consultation process.

1. An outline paper to develop the scope of the consultation
2. An interim review of the issues
3. Formal public consultation

We will publish all papers on our website and welcome feedback from boating user groups and members of the public alike. All published papers will be available in paper form on request from BW Customer Services.

Our proposed timetable and communication plan is as shown in the table below. We aim to meet these target dates but minor adjustments may be necessary. The programme will include opportunities for face-to-face discussions at local regular BW user group meetings and with BW directors and relevant senior managers during a series of summer public meetings currently being planned.

OUTLINE PHASE	Date (provisional)
Distribute outline paper to WUSIG / BWAf, publish on BW website and send to people who have already written to us with comments about the mooring tenders trial	11 March
Closing date for comments	31 March
Copies available for discussion at user group meetings falling within this period, hosted by local BW managers	

INTERIM REVIEW	
Publish Interim paper ; send to WUSIG / BWAf,	4 April
Discussion at WUSIG	16th April
Closing date for comments	17 April
Copies available for discussion at user group meetings falling within this period, hosted by local BW managers	

PUBLIC CONSULTATION	
Preview draft final consultation paper to BWAf	8 May
Discussion at BWAf meeting	16 May
Publish formal consultation paper	19 May
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email or post to all logged individuals• Email all who have registered on tendering website• Mail all who were on waiting lists in May 2007• Advertise the consultation in all relevant written communications to BW mooring customers	
<i>Consultation closing date</i>	<i>8 August</i>

Copies of consultation paper available for discussion at user group meetings falling within this period, hosted by local BW managers

DECISION AND REPORT

Analyse responses	30 June – 25 August
Prepare report considering consultation submissions	25 Aug – 15 Sept
BW board considers report & recommendations	25 Sept
Final report and proposals published	6 Oct

PLANNING FOR POST-TRIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Contingency planning for all assessed options	30 June – 29 Sept
Final implementation plans	29 Sep – 27 Oct onwards

A POINT TO PONDER

Caution - opinions expressed here will remain anonymous, are independent of NABO official policy, and statements herein have not been verified as true fact.

Feel free to challenge anything said.

Dear BW

I find page one of your Tendering Consultation paper, under the heading, "**1. Background**", to say the least a bit alarming: I would go so far as to say that some of what you have set out is a Ministry of Truth style re-writing of history. You say: (my personal answers interspersed.)

'a) Our annual price setting exercise involves local research and judgement and is time-consuming. It is subject to regular customer challenge and can be imprecise.'

So the existing policy wasn't working? Would that be the pricing policy you introduced, which you subsequently admitted was introduced without doing adequate consultation?

'b) The national shortage of moorings: because BW provides over 25% of long term moorings, the investment climate for new moorings is sensitive to BW's pricing policy.'

Would this be the national moorings shortage that was pointed out to you approximately 15 years ago which you only started tackling in a meaningful way about 4 years ago when you came to the current Marina's Investment

policies? Those policies' predecessors of course were the ones challenged by the BMF who alleged that previously you and your subsidiary BWML were acting anti competitively.

'c) We therefore need to be confident that our prices are set to reflect local market conditions. We cannot subsidise long term moorings.'

So you finally admit it, that after five years of trying since 2002, the last policy (you know, the one you unilaterally imposed without consultation) has failed to achieve its main stated aim and you are not yet confident that prices reflect local market conditions or even yet sure how to measure that ?

'd) We are concerned about the reliability of our waiting lists as indicators of demand.'

You were only concerned once the Ombudsman told you that you should be - apparently the word of your boating customers was not good enough?

I and others think its gone beyond the point where some people at BW should be sacked...



Quitting?

I have obviously got to spell it out as I have been dropping hints galore about our plans to 'move on', but it still seems to have caught many people by surprise.

Perhaps the word '*quitting*', as was used in NarrowboatWorld.com, is a bit of journalistic exaggeration, but it does seem to have concentrated some minds. Carole and I were elected to serve as officers up till the 2008 AGM and that we will do, unless you want us to go sooner. After that we are definitely standing down. I should also point out that when Howard Anguish accepted the post of Vice-Chairman last year, it was on the strict understanding that he had no desire or aspirations to become Chairman.

That implies one of three outcomes: either:-

- Two people are going to hit a very steep ramp in the promotion stakes; or
- NABO is to be without a Chairman and/or Gen. Sec. after 22/11/08; or
- There won't be a NABO for anyone to chair.

OK – I've spelt it out.

• The Steep Ramp

Not unheard of in NABO's history, but the least of the evils I am sure you will agree – but for whom?

Actually neither job is that onerous, unless you make it so. Someone is needed to call, and generally preside over, meetings of Council and the AGM, and to present a report to the AGM. If you can manage that, go for chairman!

However there are two other duties expected of a chairman, but they can be

delegated or shared. One is to be 'Chief Representative' and be invited to meetings with the authorities, and the other, probably more demanding, is to be the central 'information hub', keeping abreast of everything that is going on – a task made much easier by having a good General Secretary.

Qualifications? A command of your main weapon, the English Language, helps, as does hands-on boating experience, but the latter should go automatically with the one essential qualification, namely, being a member of NABO.

• No Chairman?

The NABO Constitution won't allow it so that is not actually an option.

• No NABO?

Perish the thought that the investors of over a billion pounds sterling in the 'floating stock' of the waterways lose their co-ordinated representation.

You may remember the chart opposite appearing in this magazine a few years ago. Take out NABO and it would leave a large proportion of narrowboat and cruiser owners without any specific representation, and the brunt of navigation, safety, licensing and moorings issues would have to be entrusted either to the IWA or specialist boating groups. Yes, it is true that, before the BSS fiasco, boaters managed, but can they now?

The second contributor to '*Points to Ponder*' in the last issue advocated the IWA handing over all boating related issues to NABO. But if NABO loses

two officers and cannot replace them, would it not make sense to merge the organisations again and then 'make the cut' in a different way? Combining the power and influence of the IWA Navigation Committee with that of NABO could make for a very powerful lobbying group for all boaters. It would also release the main part of the IWA to get on with promoting waterways as such without being accused of following the self interests of boaters at the expense of their motto 'Waterways for All'.

I can't see this happening, but with SOW becoming democratic there is a lot of change in the waterways scene and many things are possible, especially if **you** want it. That is why NABO wants more of your views on where we should be going.

Finally

Have my strivings throughout my term of office to improve BW consultation at last borne fruit? It is a possibility – the next few months will tell.

Stuart

Interest:-	Waters:	Canals	Rivers	Coastal	Sea	Continent
Boat Builder						
Hire fleet operator		APCO				
Freight fleet operator		CBOA				
Freight boat owner						
Trip boat owner		APCO				
Hotel boat owner						
Horse boater		Horse B.S.				
Barge owner						
Cruiser owner						
Cruising club boater		AWCC				
Narrowboat owner						
Historic nb owner		HNbOC				
Boat dweller						
Boat share owner						
Timeshare owner						
Boat hirer						
Restoration						
Heritage						
Towpath user						
Nature						

Enterprise Advert

RCR Advert

RIVER TRENT LOCK MANNING FIASCO SORTED

It all started as a rumour in January 2008. Boaters heard from “reliable sources” that British Waterways had an intention to cease manning of the locks on the River Trent in the summer, except at weekends. Could this bombshell actually be true?

Correspondence from a number of user organisations ensued and the NABO Rep in the area made some enquiries. It appeared that BW actually intended to man the locks on a Friday to Monday basis over summer weekends. Such a move would be totally unacceptable to river users not least because of the health and safety implications at the large, mechanised locks. Only very able bodied crews would be able to negotiate the slippery lock ladders which were out-of-bounds to BW employees!

A meeting of interested users was hastily convened at the beginning of February at Colwick Marina Boat Club, attended by Peter Foster on behalf of NABO. Factual information was sparse and since BW was not in attendance little could be decided until a subsequent meeting a fortnight later. This was attended by NABO representatives from the area and it transpired that BW proposed to redeploy staff to provide customer service at other bottleneck sites elsewhere in the East Midlands.

One proposal for the river locks was to man the 6 locks upstream of Cromwell from Fridays to Tuesdays on a 0900 – 1700 basis. Concerns were expressed about the possibility of inexperienced staff operating locks, manning at Bank holidays and the fear of accidents. BW revealed that it had carried out a risk assessment and concluded that this option was not favoured.

The preferred option was to continue 7-day manning of the non-tidal locks on a 9-5 or 10-6 basis. Users present at the meeting considered that 9.30 am to 6 pm would be more practical and BW undertook to consider this.

The final outcome is that the locks will continue to be manned 7 days a week between the hours of 9.30am to 6 pm employing seasonal lock keepers from Fridays to Tuesdays and customer operations resource manning on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The operation of tidal locks at Cromwell, Boston, West Stockwith and Torksey would not be affected.

The result appears to be a fairly acceptable compromise and demonstrates what can be achieved by user groups speaking with one voice. But would the outcome have been different if fears had not been expressed by users? We must convey our thanks to Peter Foster and Ben and Marilyn Clarke for representing NABO. And thank you to BW for resolving this matter.

Thames meetings, by Simon Robbins



Non Tidal (EA)

Like buses, none for ages, then two come along together!

River Thames Alliance and EA start work towards increasing moorings provision on the EA administered Thames.

In late January I represented NABO at the planning meeting for this. In short there are four main themes being looked into.

1. To try where possible to work towards more consistent policies across different local authorities, parishes and riparian owners towards increasing and improving moorings provision, especially visitor moorings.
2. Identify hot-spots where visitor moorings are most in demand and investigate ways to improve local provision.
3. Manage existing moorings better where possible and EA to investigate closer working arrangements with riparian owners as well as looking to improve management of those sites it controls.
4. Promote maintenance and new provision of visitor moorings more strongly to local communities especially for tourism/visitor potential.

EA is taking the lead by example by doing work to review and consolidate visitor charges on its own sites and by looking into enforcement strategies against over-stayers and continuous moorers (who are also apparently about down there as well as on the canals). There is also an acceptance that in an ideal world there is a need for more long-term moorings though this depends heavily on planning and riparian owners, so may not be something that can be directly influenced in the short term.)

EA and other members of the Alliance have also got detailed task lists going into some specific things that were suggested at the meeting and which sit variously under the four headings above. I have more details and notes and any members interested who want to see more, please let me know and I will e-mail or print and post on request.

The intention is that this will be a long term project over the next eighteen months or so. The next main discussion will be at the River Thames Alliance annual meeting in July.



Port of London

More recently I attended the first PLA public meeting at the delightful Docklands Museum (near Canary Wharf). It followed much the format of the BW annual meeting, a short presentation from the PLA officers and then questions and answers from the floor. Main issues raised which I thought would interest NABO members:

Lots of attention being given to navigational speed and wash and a consultation is probably to come forward this year to extend PLA byelaws to allow them more powers to manage speeds of craft especially in central London. A trial of some of the ideas, including what is in effect voluntary speed restrictions in some areas, brought positive feedback from the floor. As well as wash, there are issues about better and more safely managing all craft traffic in the upper PLA reaches which appears to be growing steadily.

PLA are looking at low wash hull designs for any new craft they commission, which it seems often also have benefits when it comes to fuel efficiency.

PLA are also very keen to develop more freight trans-shipments from the big ports and terminals down river up into central London by water, and in the Thames Gateway as a whole. Prescott Lock, the Olympics and its legacy are seen as a big area of interest and potential in this respect.

PLA are satisfied with the outcomes of the River Works Licences consultation last year (the nearest equivalent on the PLA to moorings permits) and on a question from yours truly said that where they had been in detailed negotiations with moorings operators since, matters had in all cases to date reached a mutually agreeable resolution.

A very welcoming and informative meeting.

More help wanted!

Between myself, Tony Haynes and Louis Jankel we will doubtless keep an eye on all this anyway, but if there are any Thames based members who would be interested in becoming more involved too, I for one will gratefully delegate! I love the Thames but I rarely go there myself by boat, so anyone out there with greater local knowledge of either PLA or EA Thames waters is heartily encouraged to get involved!

Simon

Websites

River Thames Alliance web site is at: www.riverthamesalliance.com/

Port of London Authority : www.portoflondon.co.uk/

Museum In Docklands: www.museumindocklands.org.uk/

A WINDOW ON THE WASH

Ian Fletcher has been there and done it - twice!

Although NABO's planned trip across the Wash will not now take place that's no excuse for not undertaking the trip yourself - its a fantastic experience. Having done the Wisbech to Boston trip (probably the easiest / safest / optimum option) twice in the last few years I cannot recommend it highly enough to anyone who's 'up to it' - in mind, body and boat.

Provided that you :- a) Check your insurance, b) Carry out an honest assessment on your boat's, your crew's and your own abilities, c) Employ pilots – such as Daryl Hill and Andy Thrower, and d) Are prepared to wait for the right weather window; then you can experience a thrill and sense of adventure without too much risk. In addition of course, to do it in a convoy not only gives you a feeling of 'safety in numbers' – important when you, quite literally, can be out of sight of land, but it also makes for a better 'beach-party' and barbecue when - part way through your trip - you while-away a couple of hours on Roger Sands, right out in the middle of the Wash. Also being with others enables you to swap photos of each others boats after the event - so that you can then show your incredulous friends where you've been.

Both my trips were undertaken in mid-June because:- First you need plenty of daylight to catch the right 'double-tide window', and second, statistically, mid-June usually gives the best weather window – with high pressure, therefore low wind and calm seas. On my first trip we were actually delayed in Wisbech by the weather for 25 hours. However, even this problem had a silver lining, because we were made very welcome by The Port of Wisbech, and it also gave us time to visit Elgoods brewery to sample their superb 'hospitality' !



Probably the most experienced Wash pilot for narrow-boat passages is Daryl Hill, who provides a comprehensive briefing and boat check before setting off. All tidal work seems to start at some unearthly hour of the morning, and my Wash trips were no exception. The first 10 miles or so down the ebbing Nene, to its mouth near Guys Head, take some 2 - 2½ hours (depending on tide). It is an uneventful part of the journey – with only Sutton Bridge to relieve the monotony of travelling between high flood banks. But suddenly there you are, in the wide-open world that is The Wash. I will never forget that first occasion when we 'broke out' from the river estuary into the sea; the sun was reflecting off calm, but gently rippling, water. It created an amazing silvery shimmer that took our breath away

and caused us to dive for sunglasses and cameras - as we saw the complete panorama from the Norfolk coast to Lincolnshire. It was an experience that I can only liken to one of my first aircraft flights, nearly fifty years ago - when we took-off and climbed through dull clouds, but a few minutes later 'broke through' into an ever-blue yonder. The boats – we were in a convoy of eight at the time – also liked it; they responded well to the throttle and seemed to enjoy the chance to 'clear their tubes'.

On my second trip the barometric pressure was even higher, and the sea was flat-calm (honestly, I've seen more waves on Tixall Wide !), but the morning haze reduced the visibility to a few hundred yards - and we were soon out of sight of land. Luckily the Nene / Wisbech channel is well marked for a few miles out towards the middle of the Wash. The map shown in December's NABO News gives the impression that you soon turn north-west and head straight for Boston; and once 'out there' the eagle-eyed should soon be able to see 'The Stump' on the Lincolnshire coast; but head for it at your peril. The reason that you cannot 'cut the corner' here is because of The Old South Bank. Not only do you run the risk of grounding on its sands; but the fact that it is an RAF bombing range is probably an even greater reason for not getting stuck there. You can get an idea of Daryl's sense of humour at the briefing as he casts his eye over the assembled boats when telling you of this hazard, he then reassures crews not to worry too much about the planes because - “ they only go for the ***** coloured boats !” *(please insert here the least popular boat colour in your flotilla on your day !).

After an hour or so of winding and twisting through the Nene Channel you run out of buoys and by GPS or dead-reckoning set a course for the Freeman channel, that ultimately leads to the Witham. You are now approaching low slack and seal-covered sand-banks start to emerge from the sea around you – so that even on clear days you tend to lose sight of land. By now you've been on the go for some 4 or 5 hours, a beautiful beach beckons on your port side, its time for lunch so its 'hard a port' and gently run aground on Roger Sands. At this point shorts are the order of the day, because even if you drop a gang-plank from the foredeck you still have to wade through about a foot of water to get ashore and plant an anchor: but its well worth it, and dogs in particular enjoy the experience of being able to escape from the confines of a boat and run around.



On my first trip the flotilla of eight was well organised, a barbecue was soon lit and some brave souls even went for a pre-lunch swim. On my second trip – helping a friend on her boat - I wish I'd taken my DJ. (Yes, you read it right D.J.!) When I'd got to Wisbech the evening before the crossing 'the girls' suddenly sprung it on me that they were going to 'do a Vettriano' on the beach at Roger Sands. This meant that slightly more formal dining was envisaged – table cloth and long dresses were already packed. It's a pity that they didn't tell me in advance because I fancied myself in the role of 'The Singing Butler'. While everyone enjoys their lunch-break Daryl and Andy are also keeping an eye on the weather, and on one of the trips we did actually 'cut it a bit short'. Soon perhaps the most difficult part of the trip is encountered – getting back onto the bow of a narrow-boat beached in a foot of water. Gangplanks tend to be steep and slippery, and many resort to the ungainly act of hauling themselves over the side to get back into the well-deck. Fortunately no-one takes photos of this activity, or few would follow. Engines are restarted and everyone backs-off – leaving behind nothing but footprints – soon to be washed away by the incoming tide.

From Roger Sands it's about a 1_ hour open sea passage to Tabs Head – where you enter the tidal section of the Witham known as The Haven. Go straight on at this point and you'd enter the River Welland – and then its next stop Spalding ! One day I fancy doing this, but I'll probably wait until the first part of the Fens Link is complete - because that will open up an interesting 'mini-ring'. You get a sense of relief when you enter The Haven – almost a feeling that it's all over. However, you've still got another hour to go up the tideway. At this point 'The Stump' fills the frame of your camera, but it seems to take such a long time to get any nearer. Then suddenly you're into 'civilisation' the docks on your left, then Black Sluice on your right – where, if you go this summer, you should see signs of the new lock into 'The South Forty Foot' being constructed. Next come photogenic fishing boats - perched on their 'mud shelves'. Photograph them now, because the whole of this waterscape will soon change.

I would advise against rushing up The Haven too quickly - and getting to Grand Sluice too soon before high tide, because if you are more than about 40 feet long you can only pass through Grand Sluice when the tidal and non-tidal Witham are level - and its not much fun hanging around between muddy banks below Grand Sluice waiting for levels to match. The good thing is that you can get four narrow-boats abreast through the lock – despite what the lock-keeper may tell you !

Waiting for the tide to make level with the river seems to take an age, but eventually you are out onto more 'normal' cruising grounds – including:- pub, water-point and a superb new sanitary station. The visitor moorings are a good area for you all to congregate for a celebratory 'Boston Tea Party' – or even for something stronger ! - it all helps to lower the adrenalin after several hours at sea. Here you can compare your experiences and swap tales of daring-do, before heading for fresh cruising grounds. My final piece of advice would be:- while in this part of the world (boat headroom permitting) don't forget The Navigable

Drains and Kyme-Eau. They may not match the excitement of crossing the Wash, but in their own way they can be even more of a challenge.

Enjoy your trip, I really am envious: all I can do is content myself with the thought that if you enjoy your Wash trip half as much as I did mine, then I'll be the lucky one - because I'll have enjoyed it twice as much as you !!

Ian Fletcher.

BCN EXPLORER CRUISE

**organised by the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society in
conjunction with The IWA 13th – 19th August 2008**

It is the intention of both the BCNS & IWA to encourage boaters to explore the Birmingham Canal Navigations prior to the IWA National Festival and the Dudley Canal Improvements 150 years of the Netherton Tunnel opening. We have found that many boaters prefer the additional security of cruising in company with a small number of others and they enjoy the social side of informal gatherings at the designated mooring locations.

Details of the first Explorer Cruise are given below. We feel that 15 boats per cruise is a maximum, having managed 24 last year from Anglesey Basin we know how long it takes to navigate locks and the occasional weedy channel. As we expect considerably more participants, other Explorer Cruises will be planned with slightly different routes over this period. Details will be available when the actual number of boats is known.

The first cruise will commence from Birmingham on the morning of Wednesday 13th August finishing at Windmill End ready for the DCI 150 celebrations on the morning of 20th. The boaters will then have the opportunity to further explore to the end of navigation of the Dudley No. 2 canal at Hawne Basin and/or continue on to the IWA Festival via Stourbridge or Wolverhampton.

The planned route is as follows:

Meet in Birmingham on the evening of 12th August
Provisional stops for the night:- Wednesday 13th - Ocker Hill,
Thursday 14th – Walsall,
Friday 15th - Cannock Extention,
Saturday 16th – Longwood B.C.
Sunday 17th - Top of Ryders Green Locks,
Monday 18th - BCNS Titford Pumphouse,
Tuesday 19th - Windmill End

Applications from: Brenda Ward, 9 Wylde Green Road, Sutton Coldfield
B72 1HB or email: boundarypost@gmail.com

SOW GOES FOR CONSTITUTION AND ELECTIONS

The Save Our Waterways (SoW) campaign has adopted a Constitution - <http://tinyurl.com/2ueo63>.

Typical of SoW, the constitution it is much to the point, just a single page of A4, which describes the purpose, aims and structure of the new membership-based organisation (subject, of course, to the approval of the first General meeting of members).



The prime objective hasn't changed, which is to campaign: -

To ensure the long term future of the inland waterways of Great Britain.

Since its inception some 18 months ago, SoW has endeavoured to identify and implement strategies that would complement rather than compete with existing user groups.

Recently, SoW held two open meetings with the aim of identifying a handful of key strategies that would be largely acceptable to all user groups. Following this exercise it was recognised that the vast majority of casual users of our waterways - the 95% that don't own boats - are largely unrepresented. Yet this group, primarily local residents of waterway communities, would experience a significant impact on their lifestyle if their local waterway went into decline whilst also having much to gain if it was improved. It made sense therefore, for SoW to offer a low cost membership (£5/pa) to anyone who has an interest in 'their' canal, river or towpath.

Whilst it is SoW's intention to complement what other groups are doing, rather than compete with them, it is hoped that members of other user groups will value the aims espoused in the SoW constitution and join. One can join by logging on to www.saveourwaterways.org.uk/join where a membership form can be filled in and the subscription paid by PayPal, Debit/Credit Card, Bank Transfer or Cheque. In the near future, membership forms will be made available widely throughout the waterway network.

The date for the first General meeting, which is expected to take place during the April, is now being decided and will be announced on the website www.saveourwaterway.org.uk and to all current members.

Your Letters

End of Garden Moorings,

I wondered if you had had any complaints from NABO members about end-of-garden-moorings fees, and confusion about exactly what they are for, and why boaters have to pay them.

I am acting as an advocate on behalf of a friend who is ill and owns a narrowboat.

She is expected to pay end-of-garden-moorings, on top of a licence and a private moorings fee, and has been unable to get a straight answer from BW about what the fee is for. They won't tell her what it is for!

Please could you print this in NABO News and ask anyone with a similar dilemma to get in touch with me at:-

andyowens7@hotmail.co.uk

Thanks for your help

Andy Owens

Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Policy

Well I'll be UP CPed. What the [BEEP]'s that?

Substitute text: *'Don't ask us difficult questions' and 'please don't keep asking us the same question repeatedly when we don't give you a proper answer. And*

certainly don't ask any further questions that our inadequate answer may raise'.

I ask if NABO can use the 'Freedom of Information Act' to find out what sort of questions have been asked and with what frequency such that this new BW policy was thought necessary? Daily? Weekly? Monthly?

Please BW, can we have some examples?... What reasonable complaints have been unreasonably persistently raised. i.e. When will you dredge the canal alongside my boat so I can move? When will you consider you have raised prices enough? When will you resign?

Can anyone request to be put on the offender list so I can talk my problems through with a named person at a prescribed time and hold him/her to task?

And another thing. When precisely does persistence become unreasonable? What a load of [BEEP].

There ought to be another policy drawn up by BW. ie [BEEP]. BW should be warned, censured and asked to enter into an agreement about their future intentions for the canal network... persistently.

Simon Greer

YOU SAY



"Depth at some visitor moorings (and even some long term!) is sometimes inadequate. Underwater obstructions like stones from collapsed banks which can't be seen until you bash into them should be dealt with within a reasonable time. I know of some that have been there for 7 years to my knowledge.

"Anyone who thinks that the bollards at a lock are used for mooring has not got a clue. They are used for stopping engineless boats and steadying shorter/lighter boats. Bollards should not be higher than 200mm so that the length of the bollard cannot be used by heavy boats to pull the lock sides in. Bollards are not required at locks with little fall i.e. stop locks."

CHUMSTON AND SLAWIT?

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAY, IT'S THE WAY THAT YOU SAY IT!

Users of the River Severn will have passed through the lock at Bevere, just north of Worcester, but did you pronounce it correctly? Many people struggle with the name and call it Beveer – but No, it is known locally as BEVERY (to rhyme with every).

South of Worcester you pass Kempsey known as KEMZEE by the locals (no P!)

Down on the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal you will pass through a bridge spelt REA. The locals call it REE.

But venture on to the Worcester and Birmingham Canal to Kings Norton Junction and you will pass over the river REA (with stop gates either side for protection) and this is pronounced RAY.

On the way to the latter you will have negotiated the 59 locks on the W&B culminating with the top lock at Tardebigge pronounced TARDY BIG.

In the Black Country you may be flummoxed (a local dialect word for confused) when the Staffs and Worcs canal passes through Wightwick, west of Wolverhampton. You are excused if you did not know it is called WITTICK.

Finally, just north of that city you come across Brewood whose economy hinges on turf grown at BROOD.

Stephen Peters

DBA PROPANE BUYING SCHEME

NABO members can participate in the national bottled propane buying scheme run by the Barge Association (DBA). This scheme includes a healthy discount from normal retail prices, and includes free delivery to the boat.

For discussions with the scheme supplier concerning the level of the discount, we now need to get a better idea of how many boaters are using the scheme.

I am the scheme administrator for DBA. If you are already a scheme member, could you please let me know? My contact details are:

Adrian Stott
Box 65, Hertford SG13 7GJ
Tel. 07956-299966
dba@sdfg.co.uk

If you would like to join the scheme, just tell me and I will send you the details.

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