

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS

NABO



NEWS

- **Licence Latest**
- **Ombudsman Report**
- **BW Annual Meeting**



Issue 6 – October 2008

IN THIS ISSUE

3	Licences Latest	Geoffrey Rogerson
4	Residential Boating Survey	Simon Robbins
5	Ombudsman's Report	Stephen Peters & Simon Robbins
7	Memorials to Boater Priority	Stuart Sampson
10	Chairman's Column	The Chairman
11	BW Annual Meeting	
13	Broads Registrations	Stephen Peters
14	Severn Winter Opening	Rivers Co-ordinator
14	Canalside Herbs	Sarah Walters
<< Pull-out - AGM Notice, Directions and Election Statements >>		
16	A Point to Ponder	Anon
17	Holding Points on Hold (CSS)	Stuart Sampson
18	Your Letters	Your Good Selves
23	Poetic Justice	Bessy
24	RCR Discounts	RCR
25	Car Rental Discount	(Enterprise)
26	Contacts and Council	
28	Navigation Office Contacts Map	

Editor's Notes

I would still much rather be boating, or preferably barging!

Note that in this issue we have put a contacts map for Navigation offices on the back cover so the Council Contacts are inside. You might find it handy to keep this issue on your boat to look up who to phone to report a problem.

Photos

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

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

2008 CALENDAR

Council meeting	NN Copy date
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22nd Nov AGM

29th Nov	6th Dec
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BW LICENCE LATEST

Our Legal Affairs councillor reports

This is to bring you up to date on current discussions regarding British Waterways proposals for licence increases in April 2009.

BWAF – you may not have heard of it. In full: the British Waterways Advisory Forum, a body recently formed consisting of user groups and other organisations interested or involved in the waterways.

A sub-committee with members from Association of Pleasure Cruise Operators, Association of Waterway Cruising Clubs, Dutch Barge Association, Residential Boat Owners Association, Inland Waterways Association, and NABO, was formed to look at licensing. BW would put forward proposals and options and BWAF would make comments and recommendations.

This has now reached a final stage and BW's proposals are in the public domain for comment. For instance on the BW web site, and no doubt in the waterways press. The main features of BW's response are as follows.

1. Removal of discount for river users.
2. £50 extra initial charge for wide beam boats.
3. £150 extra charge for boats with no permanent mooring.
4. Roving mooring permits.

Implications regarding the above.

1. River boats would require change to existing statute law.
2. Variable supplement for wide beam boats to be phased in over the next 3 years.
3. BW consider boats without a home mooring use the canal more and should pay more. In addition, that owners of these boats have 'a higher willingness to pay' and can subsidise those boaters with 'a lower willingness to pay'
4. This would permit boats without a home mooring to stay within a fixed distance, say 10 or 20 miles and not be forced to move further. For this privilege they would pay say £500 a year even if they had a winter mooring. In addition they would still be required to move to a different place within this area every 14 days.

NABO's views on the above are as follows:

1. If BW wishes to change statute law they will have to say so and consult user groups accordingly.
2. £50 charge one off for wide beam is fairly straightforward. What BW mean by 'variable over next 2 to 3 years' is unknown and needs to be made clear.
3. NABO together with IWA, RBOA, and DBA all strongly object to the addition of £150 for boats without a permanent mooring. We see no evidence for this and question the concept of 'willingness to pay'. BWAF recommends 'all boats should pay licence fees on a standard basis not

related to the type or extent of use”. BW's response seems to ignore this, yet in the 2005 consultation on which this whole exercise is based, BW stated quite clearly the following:-

‘Contrary to the perception of many respondents, raising fees for continuous cruisers was not the prime purpose of the proposals. When reviewing the practical implications of the new pricing strategy, they simply emerged as a group for which there might be a case for a higher fee because of higher usage. As a result of the consultation we accept that this group is too diverse to be characterised accurately by a uniform usage and price sensitivity assumptions. **We will not therefore determine licence fees by reference to whether a boat has a home mooring or not**’.

It would seem that BW have changed their mind now that they are desperate for more money, thus making consultation a mockery i.e. *‘we will listen carefully and then do what we always intended to do’*.

4. It would seem that Roving Mooring Permits are in direct contradiction to BW's own guidelines. Suddenly you don't have to move very far if you pay us £500. BW also state that enforcement of the requirement to move every 14 days is low priority as there is no money in it. Apart from the above NABO believe the introduction of “roving mooring permits” would be a restriction on navigation that exceeds their powers under the 1995 Act of Parliament.

The entire proceedings are now available from the BW web site, and for all concerned boaters are necessary reading.

www.britishwaterways.co.uk/media/documents/Boat_Licensing_Paper_5_September_2008.pdf

Or, to save you typing:- <http://tinyurl.com/3rzdyj>

Responses are requested by BW by mid November when they will make their final choices and decisions. We will try to keep you informed of developments through NABO news.

Geoffrey Rogerson

RESIDENTIAL BOATING SURVEY

In response to the sustained and continued increase in the usage of the UK's canals and rivers, including by people wishing to live afloat, the Residential Boat Owners Association (RBOA) and British Waterways (BW) are inviting current and prospective residential boaters to complete a survey to provide information on the demand for living afloat and their preferences for different types of residential moorings.

The survey will identify waterways and regions in highest demand plus preferences for locations in rural or urban areas. Visit:-

<http://www.waterscape.com/features-and-articles/news/2225/nationwide-survey-assesses-demand-for-residential-boating>

or <http://tinyurl.com/4fftn3>

RED DIESEL IMPLEMENTATION

HM Revenue and Customs have announced the arrangements that will be put into place with effect from 1 November 2008 affecting everyone buying red diesel fuel for pleasure craft.

The good news is that following the consultation that took place involving NABO and other organisations, it has been decided that red diesel will still be available at the waterside and may be used legally in private craft. The only difference is that commercial operators will pay a reduced rate of duty whilst the rest of us pay top whack.

When you visit the supplier you will be asked to confirm that the fuel is intended for a pleasure craft and to state what proportion you intend to use for propulsion. HMRC anticipate that many users will declare a 60/40 split for propulsion/domestic use but each individual may declare a different percentage if applicable. It may well be that all fuel you buy during the winter is intended for heating. You will be asked to make a declaration but this should not involve disclosure of your address or similar information.

The fuel used for propulsion will be charged at the higher rate and have VAT of 17.5 per cent added; whilst fuel intended for domestic use (heating, lighting, power generation) will have a lower rate of duty and VAT at 5 per cent.

This looks like being a nightmare for the retailers and we hope that they all understand the rules before disputes break out at the pump. We would welcome reports of our members' experiences and what price you are asked to pay.

Stephen Peters

WATERWAYS OMBUDSMAN HAS A RECORD YEAR

Two takes on this year's report

Hilary Bainbridge has issued her annual report for 2007-08 and it is obtainable free of charge from her at PO Box 35, York, YO60 6WW.

She says that it has been her busiest year so far, with a rise of 12 % in enquiries to a new total of 121 for the year. Despite wider publicity she still receives complaints unconnected with British Waterways, mainly concerned with water utility providers. 39 complaints were concluded during the year and a further 29 complaints were taken on as being eligible for investigation during the year. (No fewer than 56 other complaints were rejected as being premature because the BW internal complaints procedure had not yet run its course).

In some completed cases, BW was ordered to financially compensate customers for its maladministration but in many instances the intervention of the Ombudsman resulted in a resolution of the problems without warranting any payment. You would expect a nationalised body like BW to get things right more often and reading the individual cases highlights the dysfunctional nature of BW's organisation and management structure.

An important case concerning BW's lack of dredging on the River Severn generated a lot of public interest earlier in the year and a summary of the report

was published as a response. The outcome of the complaint by a freight operator was that BW's earlier reluctance to comply with statutory maintenance obligations was reversed once the Ombudsman became involved, but the threat of the Minister being asked to relieve BW of its dredging obligations still hangs over this case.

Stephen Peters

Of the welter of waterways literature that comes my way, this is still one document I look forward to receiving. For me the highlights were as follows:-

Hilary Bainbridge was re-appointed as Ombudsman for another three year term and the Committee published first-time findings from it's satisfaction returns. Although a small sample so far, 73% thought the Ombudsman understood their concerns 'fairly well' or 'very well' and the same proportion thought she had explained her decision on their case 'fairly well' or 'very well'. Just short of two thirds said they would recommend using the service to others.

The Committee has also agreed arrangements for her to engage extra resources if she needs extra assistance when there is a particularly heavy workload. In the year 2007/8 she completed consideration of 39 cases up 50% on the previous year.

Over a third of the complaints received were about BW mooring fees and the report notes that these all pre-date the Mooring Tenders Trial (as that only came to public knowledge after the end of the year this report relates to). Hilary again reminds us of the clear distinction, that the Ombudsman is not a regulator and cannot tell BW what policy to adopt. She can only comment on whether BW have fairly applied whatever policy they do have. However she observes that whatever system is used to set mooring fees it should be "*very carefully thought through, easy to understand and easy to monitor*", a point Council (and many others) have spent many hours berating BW over in the last few years, it has to be said, with pretty limited success to date!

One recommendation, which I know will be of interest to some NABO members, is that BW should issue written terms and conditions to boaters paying for end of garden moorings. (You mean, they don't already?!) In her summaries and elsewhere in the report she also repeats her plea of previous years, that BW must be clearer with all long term moorings customers about what exactly they get for their money. She notes that the BW Customer Service Standards are silent on this and reminds BW that this is the second year where she has suggested to BW that they must be clearer on this issue.

Although it is old news in some ways, I particularly commend to you the case report on about the Shared Ownership licensing debacle. Two complaints (considered jointly) were about how in detail BW handled the attempt during the 2006 Licence consultation to charge all shared owners a commercial licence. Members who want to get a taste of how tortuous and difficult the detailed job of getting your views properly heard in BW is, should read this one as a case study! Lack of clearness and transparency in BW consultation processes (and trying to correct it!) remains a dominant theme in much of what Council attempts on your behalf.

I for one offer thanks to Hilary Bainbridge for her all her hard work on behalf of all BW customers.

MEMORIALS TO BOATER PRIORITY?

Stuart takes up the boaters' case with the C.E.

After staggering with 15 kilos of odiferous sewage in a toilet cassette through public places to various disposal points around the system, I was beginning to wonder if BW deliberately planned such journeys to be as arduous and conspicuous as possible, and I was moved to write to BW's Chief Executive about it.

In as much as a memorial is a structure built to remind, I used this word to describe how various developments and 'improvements' on the BW network keep reminding boaters every time they visit just how low their needs come in the general order of things. Foxton and Hillmorton are good examples but Loughborough Basin must top the league because they have built a steel fence along the edge of the 'facility mooring'.

One can't deny that, compared with tying up in a rubbish strewn backwater and wending one's way to Sainsbury's through a builders yard, the new basin opened by the Waterways Minister last year is a great improvement and we must be thankful BW have acceded to Carole Sampson's recommendations and included boater amenities. But it could have been so much better if we could get to them.

'NOT IDEAL'

This is how the General Manager for East Midlands, Caroline Killeavy, described it when she took the trouble to visit us and discuss it. She claimed local boater groups were consulted at the planning stage but many boaters I have spoken to agree that on first impressions it would seem that the design had not taken boaters' needs into account at all. One might be tempted to think that either the advice she was given was misguided or misinterpreted, but one must remember that local boating groups on the Soar voice the views of cruiser owners rather than the itinerant narrowboaters that seemed to be using the basin while we were there. Seen from their point of view many of the problems are less significant, but it is still true that many of the boats using the basin are longer distance travellers in 55 to 60 foot narrowboats whose voice tends to get lost in local user groups.

The basin is now a mixed development with mooring jetties overlooked by student flats and a cafe. A facility block lurks like a submarine conning tower under forty feet of blue-green ice, yet BW champions this ugly soulless development as an example to all.

Yes it is, but I am afraid it contains many examples of how not to do it.



Let's work round the basin clockwise:-

A Canal Bank is a public road, unfenced from the water. How soon before a TWOC car goes in? (if it hasn't already)

B Finger Jetties barely 30 feet long.

C Space to get three narrowboats between the jetties but no way to tie up the middle one. Might be OK for two cruisers.

D 12 foot gap. Can't get two narrowboats in, nor one boat of the full gauge width of the waterway.

E Bollards spaced so no bollard is within 18 feet of the bows of a 58 foot boat (Should be rings on an urban mooring).

F Unprotected sandstone coping all round the mooring area, badly chipped by boat impact. Not good for the boats either.

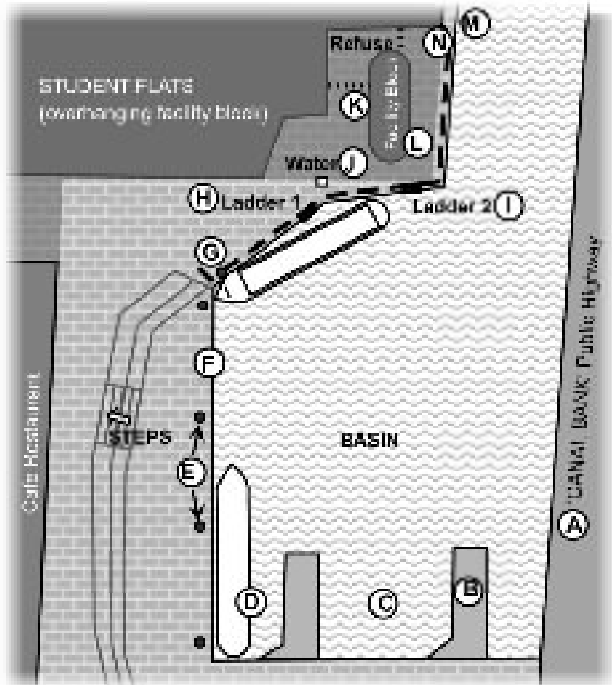
G Facility mooring. The four foot high wash wall is topped by an impregnable steel railing, except for two awkwardly placed ladders. Due to the angle in the walls it is very difficult to protect a boat over 35 foot long from abrasion at the 'corners', and there is no way to get off either end of a boat with a cratch and/or taff rails without having to edge along the wharf edge outside the fence.

This is **very dangerous**.

The bollards are positioned directly below the railing making them very difficult to use and the bottom rail is too low to pass a toilet cassette under.

H Ladder 1 is inaccessible due to the bend in the wall.

I Ladder 2 may be accessible to one end of a 70 foot boat but not one any shorter, assuming the boat is attached to the bollard at the cafe end which is the only way for a crew member to disembark to tie up. Both ladders stand proud of their 'fendering' so can impact with boats doing neither any good.



J The water point is almost inaccessible from a boat however you position it, and hoses have to be threaded through the railing.

K Refuse Disposal - Not presently in the fenced compound labelled in the drawing where we were told by one BW employee it was meant to be. It is in the electrical equipment room which was fitted with a standard BW facility lock and initially the bin must have been stored inside. There was confusion as to whether this is a temporary measure, but the outdoor refuse compound was locked with a non-BW-key padlock. No wonder the emptying contractors couldn't find it – until we complained. No signs. Health hazard. Fire hazard?



L Elsan point - no flushing chain, no hose, no working lighting. Rest of facilities were filthy until we complained.

We were told it was down to the contractors, but why didn't BW check on whether they are getting the jobs done for their money – our money! Caroline Killeavy took this point as totally valid and, as our USA cousins would say, will 'kick ass'

BW inform us the layout is temporary, awaiting Stage 2 of the development. Does that fence look temporary? Is Phase 2 ever likely to happen?



It seems that the intention is to add a line of pontoons for further visitor moorings and a facility mooring along the 'neck' of the basin (**M**) complete with a ramp going round the corner to the gap in the fence where Ladder 2 is. This has yet to attract funding but we believe steps in the corner (**N**) might have a chance of being funded sooner and as good an access to the pontoons which BW already has moored elsewhere. This would also allow a locking gate to be installed to improve security for overnight boaters on the pontoon.



Caroline Killeavy has taken note of our comments and said she would visit the basin and take measurements.

Since the visit we hear BW will weld 'D' brackets to increase security of the bollards; improve fendering; sign and sort access to the refuse point; and fix the lighting and flushing chain in the chemical disposal point. Would it not have been so much easier to have got it right in the first place?

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



Farewell

I guess this will be my last contribution to this column. My final word as chairman will be my report to the AGM, which may or may not appear in a future issue of this magazine, but in the next issue I would hope you will be reading the thoughts of an aspiring newcomer under this heading.

As I write this, we are little further on with our ambitions, and I am grateful to all those who have expressed an interest. Our new little ship is still on the drawing board but the person who made the offer on our house has backed out and we are back to 'square one' regarding finance. There is some good news on the VAT front, and this may allow us to afford an English boatbuilder, but we may have to buy 'used'.

It is unlikely we will be leaving these shores in the next year or two so I may have time to continue with some work for this country's waterways, but definitely no more NABO chairmanship. Fresh blood is essential.

One of the reasons for needing fresh blood is that people, understandably, are getting used to my voice and are developing an aural filter. However BW in particular needs feedback. The health of their waterways relies on it even more .

How to save our waterways?

Political profile building is one way, and I am gladdened by the refreshed relationship between the IWA and SOW, but as boat owners we must assert some ownership ourselves and take some responsibility. Collectively we have more capital at the mercy of

the health of the waterways than BW and we shouldn't just let things slide when we can do something about it. If something is wrong - report it.

This is particularly true of work put out to contractors who seem to have less respect for BW than we have. I was watching a team from Morrison putting fendering on the new piling below Alrewas Lock. One was drilling fixing holes in fendering while the other three were throwing stones in the river. Albeit indirectly, we are paying these people.

If
there is
something
wrong -
report
it.

Then there was state of the refuse disposal at Loughborough, pictured elsewhere in this magazine. Months must have passed with it in this state (good thing NABO News can't publish the smell!). BW hadn't checked it and worse still, users hadn't notified them. In the meantime money has been paid out to contractors for nothing.

Another example is the vegetation on the Oxford. Again contractors who don't care and BW who doesn't seem to check.

Bashing BW for wasting money is a double edged sword. It might encourage them to improve, but it might make Government less inclined to give them more. BW needs to look carefully at 'outsourcing' (using external contractors) and remember the adage: *'If you want something done properly, do it yourself'*.

I hope the Customer Service Standards Panel can help BW save some money,

To the future

If there is there is one thing I would not wish upon my successor it is further hassle and sleep loss defending the rights of those who wish to space out their cruising over the year.

I remember a meeting facing BW's Legal Director as part of my 'initiation rites' as chairman-to-be. I wouldn't wish it on anybody else, but I have done all I can.

I wish your new Council every success in the future.

Finally – A favour of you?

Please come to the AGM. Your new Council will need all the help and support you can give them, and don't give me the 'prior commitment' argument – the date has been in NABO News since the last issue of last year!

May the locks be with you (as they are with me in spite of nearly being torn out!)

Stuart

NEW MINISTER ADDRESSES BW ANNUAL MEETING

It is not so much what he said, it's when he said it

Only three days after taking up his new appointment as minister responsible for waterways, Huw Irranca-Davies MP had prepared a video speech for the assembled faithful at the British Waterways Annual Meeting in Birmingham, and what's more, he promised more money, nearly one million extra for 2009/10. This good news was accompanied by a promise to continue the interdepartmental committee set up by his predecessor, Jonathan Shaw, and its work on a revised '*Waterways for Tomorrow*' document, identifying public benefits. Huw intends to hire a boat next year but he didn't say where. His constituency is Ogmere in the Welsh Valleys which has no BW waterways within.



The meeting then heard speeches from Tony Hales, Chairman, and Robin Evans, Chief Executive.

Tony's theme was the history of the waterways, saying that they started in the 18th century at the time of the South Sea Bubble, "*when the coffee houses of London were full of sharks, spivs, harlots and charletons pedaling unimaginable fortunes built on debts, derivatives and empty promises of fool's gold. Well, we have come a long way since then!..*" Much laughter before more serious talk of how

we must pull together to support the waterways in the present economic climate.

No startling revelations in Robin's report, glossing over the reduction in boat owner satisfaction to under 50% 'good or excellent' in a few platitudes. To reinforce the predictability, the subject matter blended smoothly into the Question and Answer session in a lively debate about... BOLLARDS!

The afternoon was run as a forum with four panelists entitled *Waterways for the 21st Century*. In order left to right: Richard Fairhurst, editor of *Waterways World*; Rt Hon John Gummer MP; Tony Hales, chairman; Carole Souter, Chief Executive of the Heritage Lottery Fund, and John Edmonds as Chair of IWAC.

Despite the geography, it was John who began, with a stark portrayal of the funding gap BW faces – £30 million a year with funding from property development slowing to a trickle. He wished luck to those trying to get more from Government, *“I was a treasury official once and I understand about lost causes!”* and went on to analyse how to proceed, *“We have to establish by proper research exactly what the benefits of the waterways are”*. He implored everyone to take a wider view and get together, *“If we don’t we will just be arguing about the size of our defeat.”*

John Gummer MP, Conservative, Felixstowe, asked why waterways cannot enjoy the revival railways had. *“We have to give ourselves an image that moves away from the trainspotting aspect of our history towards one which is clearly presenting the waterways as an essential contribution for tomorrow.”* He then recognised the advantage of waterways as being very long, passing through many constituencies. *“Nothing concentrates the mind of MPs more than three letters on the same subject from their constituents...”* He reminded us that the next election will be very close and *“every vote will be thought to count even if it doesn’t”*. He felt there was mileage in stressing the environmental advantages such as heat extraction. John is a supporter of BW taking control of all waterways, and, surprisingly, wasn’t challenged by those from other authorities there.

Richard Fairhurst put the users point of view. Apart from his official role he is a boater and supporter of restoration. He stressed the scope for voluntary support for the waterways, beyond litter picking and clean-ups, and how IWA volunteers were running the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation, taking on serious management roles too. He quoted figures for the National Trust having 13 million hours of volunteer effort and asked what monetary value could be put on that.

Carole Souter stressed that the Heritage Lottery Fund is not only about the money but also about putting people together. She said, *“we have to do more with less money, but we don’t necessarily have to do more with less input”*. Her remit is much wider and asks why the ramblers, bird watchers and other groups were not represented in the debate.

There was much support for all the pleas for volunteering, but then there would be. Everyone there had given their time and so were de facto volunteers. Many were also boaters and one could be forgiven for thinking it was a boaters convention, with representatives from small dedicated groups like the Wooden Boat Society having as much say as the IWA and certainly more than the ramblers, bird watchers and cyclists. Canal societies were there in force too, but after the Cotswolds conflict were relatively silent.

However, rest assured, your NABO chairman did eventually get a chance to point out just how much capital boat owners had at the mercy of the state of the waterways.

Ruling on Registration Data

Our Rivers Representative is well known for his tenacity and as a result of receiving a rejection from the Broads Authority, when he requested registration information under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, he referred the matter to the Information Commissioner.

The Information Commissioner has finally ruled in favour of the complainant (Stephen Peters) and has instructed the Broads Authority to release the requested information.

This saga started in early 2006 when he made a personal request for information concerning the 12,000 entries on the register of boats using the Broads. He also successfully obtained similar information from a number of navigation authorities including Basingstoke Canal Authority, Bristol City Council, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and the Lake District National Park.

British Waterways provided a full list of all boats licensed or registered with them (without personal details), as the FOI Act requires. A later request for extracts from the riverboat register under the provisions of the BW Act 1971 initially met with resistance but eventually a selected number of craft and ownership details were obtained at a cost of 10p per entry as the Act stipulates.

The Environment Agency were resistant to a request for information from their 3 registers (Thames, Anglian and Southern) and only relented after an informal intervention by the Information Commissioner. They then released full details including names and addresses of owners.

The release of information from the other major waterways authorities was influential in the decision in the Broads complaint. The Broads Authority had originally agreed to release limited information about craft on their register but then reneged and when the Commissioner became involved they cited a number of reasons why they thought the information should remain confidential. They unsuccessfully claimed that disclosure would provide potential criminals with a “shopping list” of vessels which they could plunder at will. Outboard motor theft is a problem on the Broads and they asserted that disclosure of the information would identify likely targets for crime. The Information Commissioner was not impressed by the arguments or the failure of the Broads Authority to adhere to the requirements of the FOI Act and they have been given 35 days to comply and release the requested data.

It might come as a surprise to some boat owners that details of their boats and, in some cases, their names and addresses can be obtained under the FOI Act; but that is what the law says. Indeed, this information forms the basis of Jim Shead’s website where you can look up the name of your boat and find it listed.

WATCH OUT - DIESEL THIEVES ABOUT

One member reported finding his engine wouldn’t start, and after hours of investigation found a recently filled fuel tank totally empty. Secure your fuel cap

RIVERS

Revised Winter Operations on G&S Canal and River Severn

Following recent consultation, to which NABO responded, British Waterways has announced new arrangements for passage along the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal and River Severn.

Their previous plans to convert four canal bridges to user-operation to allow boats to pass along almost half the length of the canal when the bridges were unmanned have come to nought. This was due to a number of factors including lack of funding and opposition from local authorities. They would still like to convert Parkend Bridge to user-operation in 2009/10 but funding for further conversions is unlikely.

Winter operation on the G&S Canal will therefore be the same as last year. It will be open Thursday to Monday and closed on Tuesday and Wednesday each week from 4 November 2008 to 23 March 2009 inclusive. This will mean that normal operation will resume prior to Easter. The canal structures (i.e. bridges) will be manned from 8 am to 4 pm and be opened on demand.

Arrangements for winter operation on the River Severn will differ this year due to the very low demand for passage through the locks. As a consequence, the locks will not be manned and operated to a pre-published schedule but will be available on a booked passage system with bookings being made by telephone up to 7 days in advance and not less than 1 hour before the intended use. This will enable the roving lock keepers to travel to the sites as required instead of wasting fuel and time manning locks with no customers. Opening times and days of operation will be the same as for the canal.

Please let us know if you experience any difficulties as a result of these changes.

Stephen Peters

CANAL SIDE HERBS

Sarah Walters finds good use for some of that vegetation

Most of our Canal banks are abundant with trees and plants, many uncultivated for years. Not only does this make the towpath a beautiful and attractive place to walk or moor, but also can provide us with food and healing herbs if we know what we are looking for!

Years ago it was common practice to forage for food and herbs in the wild, especially when food and money were scarce. Common fruits found are Blackberries, Damsons, Sloes, Crab Apples, Rosehips and Elderberries. Roots such as Dandelion and Burdock were often used, as well as Nettles and Ramsons (Wild Garlic) for soup. In the Autumn mushrooms and Fungi can also be found.

Many people relied on native medicinal Herbs for their well-being and health care, and the canal is a haven for these. Elderberry and Rosehip syrups would be made to ward off winter colds and flu, these are packed with Vitamin C and are immune

boosting. Meadowsweet flowers and leaves would be picked, dried and stored to be used for pain killing properties, and being particularly good for upset stomachs and arthritis. Incidentally Meadowsweet like Willow contains a substance from which Aspirin was developed. Comfrey leaves and roots were used as a poultice to wrap around sprains, bruises and broken bones, its common name is knit bone – which may give you a big clue!

The leaves of Plantain species would be collected and dried to use for digestive upsets or sinus problems. It is nature's great standby, if you are out walking and get bitten or stung crush a leaf rolling it between your hands and place over the affected area, letting the juice cool and soothe the skin – magic!

Nettles are rich in Minerals and are very nutritious, especially the young spring plants; these would be put into soups or cooked like spinach. Medicinally Nettles are used for arthritis, gout, hay fever and those who need a boost of iron or convalescing. The Romans used to flog their joints with nettles if they suffered from arthritis to get their circulation going! Dandelion and Burdock are traditionally used together to cleanse the blood and improve the bowels. It was common to take daily a glass of bitter tonic herbs to improve digestion and health in general.

If you are interested in foraging for food or herbs there are a few important considerations. Know what you are picking – get yourself a good identification book and never take it if you are uncertain! Only take what you need where there is an abundance, leave plenty for the birds and others, and make sure the plant or tree will live on after you have foraged. Only pick what looks good and healthy, and after gathering say a little thanks to mother nature – it makes the food or herbs even better!

Rosehip Syrup

2 lb Rosehips

4 1/2 pints water

1 1/4 lb sugar

Mince the fruit coarsely and put into 3 pints of boiling water, continue to boil for 15 minutes. Strain this through a jelly bag or muslin. Put the pulp back in the pan and add 1 1/2 pints of boiling water, stir and allow to stand for 10 minutes, then put this through a jelly bag for up to 12 hours. Boil all the juice until it is reduced to about 1 1/2 pints. Add the sugar, dissolve and boil for 5 minutes. Pour into warm, sterile bottles and seal immediately.

Once opened this must be used within 4 weeks or so unless refrigerated.

A teaspoon a day will ward off the winter lurgies, take up to 6 tsp per day if you have a cold or the flu.

This is delicious on porridge in the morning or poured hot over ice cream – as Nigella would say, 'There isn't a bad way to eat this!'

Sarah Walters

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.

It really hits you.

Moorings, miles from anywhere and with no road access, all beautifully mowed, banks edged nicely with wood so that a boat can easily get in, free pump-outs, bollards painted, rings visible, staff equally visible, smiling, helpful, eager to please, asking if boaters have encountered any problems - here's my phone number: ring anytime if you have a problem - the same staff, happy in their work, inspecting waterways from a boat (novel idea) actually working through the locks to see how they function.

This versus overgrown bank edges, leaky locks with paddles that are not repaired, unhappy staff with little job satisfaction, dirty facilities with overflowing rubbish, stinging nettles around bollards, shallow channels made worse by encroaching reeds

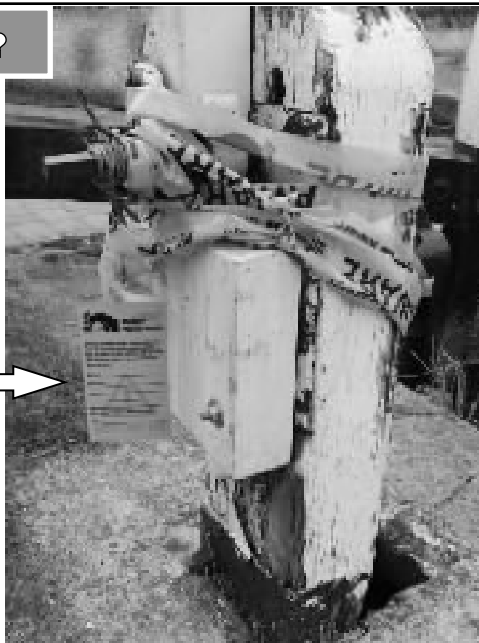
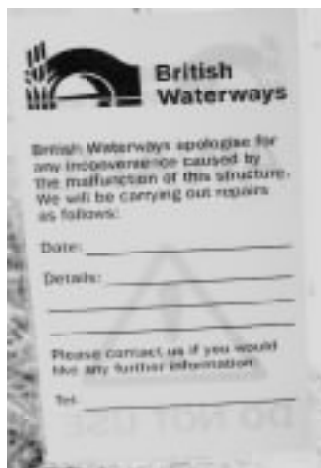
(can't do anything about them - SSSI - as a result of years of neglect), overhanging and fallen trees, and major failures occurring with increasing regularity just days after 'inspections': the list could go on and on.

I won't insult you by identifying which is which of the scenarios above.

Every so often, the debate rages as to whether BW should take over EA's navigation responsibilities. To date, BW has received fulsome support from boaters, but maybe the time has come to ask if EA should take over BW. The cost differential of a Gold Licence, or for short term Visitor Licences for EA waterways has increased dramatically, but when I see what we get for the money, I think the EA is worth every penny, and the question must be asked: "Is BW fit for purpose?"

A PICTURE SAYS IT ALL?

Twine round the spindle in blue, tape and label in yellow. No date on it, though. New standard needed - DATE ALL LABELS?



'HOLDING POINTS' ON HOLD

Stuart goes to first CSS Panel meeting

At last, BW has called for the advice of customers, nearly a year since the Customer Services Standards were 'rolled out'. It is true that small working party, originally the Boating Facilities group, were asked to comment on an embryonic version of the list, but then a year of silence before they came out, followed by a year of noise, not 'Rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb' but 'Bollards, bollards, bollards!' (*Holding Points* in the wording of the standards, if you please.)

The meeting itself was a welcome relief from political stuff once the recriminations were over. We introduced ourselves with a quick C.V. of our waterway experiences, but no organisations were mentioned as we were invited as individuals and not on behalf of our groups. However I cleared it with the chairman, Simon Salem, that all proceedings could be reported and that feedback from NABO through me would be welcomed.



The panel must have had centuries of accumulated boating experience between them but I could only claim a third of one! There were bargees and boatmen, single-handers and fishermen, and BW folks there from the front line too, including a lock-keeper, so this was a meeting where we could get down to brass tacks. So much so that, however much effort was made to keep things general, discussion always seemed to end up with bollards!

We discussed what the standards were for and how they were to be measured, including BW's survey and NABO's. The BW survey only measured their performance, albeit more objectively. Ours rated perceived priority too.

I introduced them to what I call the 'hour-glass' effect, in that, however much work is put into each standard, it has to be defined in one sentence to pass through 'the neck', a Filofax format leaflet for staff. It then has to be expanded into an implementation. In this process I felt that quite a lot of the original thinking seems to have been lost. The meeting agreed that original risk assessments and other documentation should be made available to the panel members. At present it is on the BW Intranet.

We then started going through each standard but couldn't manage all eighty in the time. We discussed work-wear and name tags, and how this made staff identifiable. Bridges numbered or named, or both, and how? We were assured the bollard installation programme at narrow locks had been suspended and we recommended they remove this standard for narrow locks to stop it altogether. There was also doubt expressed regarding the priority and expense of installing second lock ladders on wide locks, e.g. the L&L.

Undoubtedly there is much more work to do and I am glad to be part of it, at last.

Slow Down

I have recently cruised down from the Leeds and Liverpool, through the Bridgewater and on to the Trent and Mersey. No targets (apart from having a look at the Caldon) so very leisurely.

I pride myself that I consider other users in terms of moored boats and fishermen, in fact on a number of occasions I get accused of being too cautious – all along the stretch through Sale for example with so many boats moored on an interminably long straight by “keeping the wash down” it takes an age to get by!

This trip however I became a bit annoyed! There are several spots on the Trent and Mersey where boats are moored on both sides, and in some cases even these are doubled up! This time, twice I have had irate boaters scream at me to slow down when I have been on tick-over and couldn't go slower. In each case the channel had been barely wide enough for a narrow boat to get through.

The second time it happened I moored up and walked back (avoiding any confrontation) but checking the mooring. Needless to say the complaining boat was not correctly tied up – its pins were parallel to the stern of the boat and actually angled back from the bow and this was a live-aboard!

I know we have all experienced speeding and inconsiderate boaters but at the same time we should be sure we have tied our boats to best effect before we complain?

Could we have some advice from an expert in a future edition? We all like to think we are experts but it does no harm to be reminded from time to time.

The Debate

...It seems to me continuous cruisers are not the problem,, more so continuous moorers abusing the system. The options - half end of garden or % of mooring fees penalizing continuous cruisers, who, if genuine, are not doing any harm. Forget the complicated calculations and options. Surely better to monitor those abusing the 14 day rule and apply on-the-spot fines, would take one man and one boat patrolling a stretch of water possibly once a week - easy

Regarding extra fees for wide beams (waterspace rental!) was mentioned. That's what our licences pay for, isn't it? Bigger boat takes more water space. Set a rate as they do for length -easy.

Discounts and points, all too complicated and costly to enforce. Simplify the admin, cut down on office costs - more money left to keep the licences down and the waterways repaired.

By the way - moorings tenders - NO, definitely the waiting list option is fairest. See what your length of boat would cost - if you can afford it, get on the list. Fair and simple.

– or do I see things too simply??

J Mackness

...As a member of Nabo for years, I am grateful for the sterling work it does on our behalf and am thoroughly in agreement with most of its policies and views. Except for its apparent implicit - sometimes explicit - defence of the principle of CC's making little or no additional contribution for mooring. The argument for not doing so, expounded by Nabo from time to time, is so unconvincing that the more cynical could be excused for thinking that Nabo must have a disproportionate number of CC's amongst the active or higher echelons of its membership and therefore a vested interest in retaining the status quo.

All boats on the waterway have to moor somewhere each day whether cruising or not. All but CC's pay an additional amount to BW to do so. You don't have to be an economist to work out that the more revenue BW receives the greater the downward pressures on the fees it charges both for mooring and licence - and we certainly need the maximum downward pressure to counter the current and proposed increases! Basically, the less CC's pay the more the rest of us do so. Hardly fair.

There is an argument of course that genuine CC's should actually pay overall more - not less - than non-CC's as they are inevitably using the waterways and services provided by BW more often than others. I seem to recall that when this view was aired sometime ago in Nabo News, it was brushed aside as irrelevant. I suspect most objective observers would find it difficult to dismiss it so easily.

I note there is now a slight change of tone from Nabo in the CC debate, acknowledging a 'groundswell of

opinion that CC's should pay a little more'. Well, hurrah for that! Unfortunately it then continues with a technical argument about the small 'connection' charge 'levelling the playing field' rather than, e.g., the much fairer, but higher, end-of-garden fee. End-of-garden moorers pay BW for mooring on a bit of their water - nothing else. CC's also have to moor on a bit of BW water, so why should they pay less?

Not so long ago Nabo conducted an on-line poll, seeking the views of its membership about additional charges for CC's. I think we were subsequently informed that the outcome was inconclusive with similar numbers voting for and against. What we were not told was 1: What percentage of the membership actually voted and 2: Of those who voted against additional charging, how many were already claiming to be CC's. I suspect the answer to 1 is a minority and the answer to 2 is the vast majority. Those with the most to lose and therefore the greatest incentive to vote were obviously the CC's and we can be pretty certain which way they would be likely to vote. After all, we wouldn't expect turkeys to vote for Christmas!

However, what really, really irks is the considerable number of so-called CC's who not only pay nothing extra for their moorings but moor their boats not just for days or weeks but often for months at some of the better moorings, thereby denying mooring space for legitimate visiting boaters. By any reasonable interpretation of the term they are not continuously cruising but BW appears not to be interested. I regularly ply the Macclesfield Canal - a lovely canal but not blessed with many good moorings. Even off season it is

often difficult to moor at some of the better moorings as most spaces are taken up with boats that have not moved for ages - presumably claiming to be continuously cruising, but clearly not.

Come on, you CC's, start paying your way and stop scrounging off the rest of us - and Nabo, I think you should stop trying to defend the indefensible and remember you are the NABO - all boat owners - and not the NACC!

David Peck

consider, with some justification, they have paid towards a mooring and have the right to stay more than 14 days.

Furthermore if part of the reason for making an additional payment is to combat misuse of the licence, BW already has the powers to deal with so-called continuous moorers and it is unfair to penalise those of us who make every effort to comply with the terms of our licence.

R.G.Masters

...I have been continuous cruising for nearly twelve years and my patterns of cruising follows the guidelines issued by BW in 2004/5

When a boater takes out a mooring they are paying for the right and privilege of staying on one 'place' for an extended period over and above that provided in the licence. Any additional charge for NOT having a mooring would mean that continuous cruisers would, in effect, be paying a higher licence fee without any additional rights or privileges for the extra cost.

With reference to the connection charge - if BW maintains that is a charge for setting up and maintaining the mooring then it is right to include it as part of the mooring fee. If NOT then it should be abolished and if BW still insists it needs the revenue then it should be part of the licence fee visible and payable directly by all boaters.

If an additional charge on continuous cruisers were imposed then those who flout the system would be even less likely to license their boats or take out a mooring. It could also mean those paying an additional charge might

...Having been a Live-aboard Continuous Cruiser for 17 years now, I would like to respond to some of the comments in NABO News, Aug.2008. Firstly, the boating life is all about CHOICE. You choose to buy a boat, you are entitled to choose whether to have a Marina mooring, an end-of-garden or farmers-field mooring, or to be a Continuous Cruiser. If you don't own property as well [another choice] you are classed as a Vagrant, so don't pay Council Tax. This is fine by us - we are quite happy to travel to the water point in all weathers to fill our own tank; we are happy to generate our own electricity via Solar Panels and Wind Generator; we are happy to dispose of our own rubbish [at facilities provided by BW, paid for in our licence fee]; and we are happy to walk to the local waste management site with our recycling. So what would we gain by paying Council Tax? With regard to calling the Police-have you ever tried to explain where you are in relation to the nearest road so they can find you? Likewise the Fire Service-by the time they have found us it's too late! Street lighting? We are usually moored out in the country away from "civilisation", so don't need them.

If people want to have a boat sitting on a permanent mooring, apart from their annual two week bank washing sprint around the system, that is their choice. Why should we subsidise them because we choose to keep moving? BW must be rubbing their hands with glee at this division in our ranks. They have only ever tolerated Continuous Cruisers, and now their major role is property and Marina development they are even keener to get rid of us. They do the bare minimum of maintenance, most sanitary facilities are abysmal and all they are concerned about is putting our licence fee up yet again so they can pay a bigger bonus to someone for doing beggar-all for the genuine boaters.

We have enough to put up with with increasing diesel and gas prices, and deteriorating canals, without a lot of petty jealousies getting at us. If you don't like the system, such as it is, either join us and fight for improvements or get off the canals!

V. A. Roberts

...The possibility of raising the licence fee for continuous cruisers seems to come up on a fairly regular basis. As far as we can see, the reasons for rejecting the proposal remain the same.

Genuine continuous cruisers are nearly all retired people - with a few exceptions they have to be in order to be able to participate in this type of boat use. Being retired, these people, including ourselves, struggle to live on very small pensions which are, at best, linked to the RPI, and which bear no comparison with wages and salaries. We know countless continuous cruisers who struggle to live on fairly

typical pensions of between £7000 and £8000 per annum, and these people are already struggling to pay BW's current very high licence charge. These people simply cannot afford to pay 8W any more, and many of them, like us, with any further increase, will suffer great hardship or be made homeless.

It is suggested in NABO News that continuous cruisers should pay an additional amount equivalent to the connection charge contributed by holiday boaters who moor in marinas, or "the equivalent bit of the mooring fee that is inherent in pricing according to the 'market.'" Apart from the fact that, as I wrote above, most continuous cruisers are living on pensions and simply cannot afford to pay any more, continuous cruisers do not enjoy the benefits of a safe and secure mooring with all the facilities always close at hand.

For these reasons, any increase in the licence fee surely cannot be justified. Furthermore,

British waterway users already pay a much higher licence fee than their counterparts in any other European country, and with the new tax on diesel - an expense which will hit continuous cruisers far more severely than any other category of user - I really do not see how such an increase in the licence fee can be thought to be reasonable.

Roger Hamilton

Editor's comments

The only significant communications I have had in support of charging 'CCers' extra were the one from David Peck and the one in the last issue about 'CCers' contributing to Council Tax, and yet Narrowboatworld.com

claims there is a 'silent' majority, supposedly composed of those who aren't members of user groups, who are in favour.

Unfortunately emails and polls on an unofficial website, or even NABO's, don't carry much weight with those in positions of influence. David is right to question NABO's survey, but two things I would say in its defence. Firstly it was held to verify or otherwise the APCO poll that claimed a 98% support for extra charging for CCers, so had to use exactly the same wording rather than what we would have preferred. The result disproved that level of support but as a proper survey it left a lot to be desired in establishing the true feelings of a wide church of boat owners and verifying the width of that church.

Secondly, being an online poll, it could only be answered by CCers with internet on their boats. This would tend to counter the bias David assumes.

If the aforementioned 'silent majority' wants, and can justify, a charge, then they should join a recognised user group and make those feelings known.

In the meantime, unless instructed otherwise by the membership, NABO will oppose extra charging, in line with the IWA, RBOA, DBA and AWCC.

Finally I must make it clear I am not a Continuous Cruiser, and there are only two on NABO Council.

Help at hand

My husband and myself own a narrowboat called Calon Lan and until this year had never had any major problems. On Wednesday 6th August we went to Brewood Wharf for a pump out diesel and water before heading back to our marina at Great Haywood. At this point our good boating luck changed and something happened I still don't know what, it seemed that 1 minute I was standing at the front of our boat ready to jump off and the next (although I think it was longer than 1 minute!) I was lying on the ground surrounded by people.

The staff at Countrywide cruisers (and in particular Peter) ran over to help as apparently I was lying on the ground groaning with my legs stuck out over the canal so my husband was unable to moor the boat. They helped my husband moor the boat covered me with blankets and called for an ambulance. The ambulance staff felt that I needed to be checked at hospital so while they took my husband and I away the staff moved our boat to a safer place and checked on our 2 dogs that we'd had to leave on board.

Thankfully the hospital found that I hadn't broken any bones just had severe bruising on my face, shoulder, hand wrist and leg. When my husband arrived later that day to collect the dogs they refused any payment for overnight mooring and helped him the next day to get his fuel pump out and water.

You hear and read so much in the media about people not wanting to help others and this just wasn't the case with Countrywide Cruisers.

Pauline Williams

POETIC JUSTICE?

It's not fair! It shouldn't even happen to a dog.

Well it did, and I know. I am a dog and it happened to me.

I have been boating on and off all my life, over one hundred and five doggy years of it. What a shame I had to wait so long for this. It all started when the boat was turning tightly at speed to negotiate the bends of the river. I was inside and was there to witness the goodies drawer roll open as the boat heeled over, and, not being one to let an opportunity pass me by, thought I would help myself.



Low profile!

Well, you know how us dogs live for the moment and hang the consequences – in the middle of the night I began to realise why we are only given one munchie a day rather than twenty or more. A kind human became aware of my plight and, thinking more of consequences than we do, helped my ageing frame up the back steps and opened the back door for me. Like Agatha Christie's old ladies, I get a little confused, and forgot to check which side the bank was....

The river water was decidedly cold, but, being of portly physique, in addition to being somewhat bloated, swimming was no problem for me. Getting out was a different story, but again my human friend took pity and, still in bare feet and night attire, dragged me out so I could share the cold river water with him.

Poetic justice – I have no idea what poets have to do with anything, and justice? I just think it was most unfair, but perhaps dogs should learn one thing from humans – *Look Before You Leap!*



Guillotine gate on the Nene, for dogs!

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