

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS



- **Condition Survey Reports**
- **Chairman's Letters**
- **AGM** • **New Contacts for BW**



Issue 7 – December 2009

STOP PRESS - from a BW Press release

The UK Government has today (7 December 2009) ended recent speculation about the sale of British Waterways' property endowment in England and Wales by announcing its preferred approach to "consider alternative models for the business as a whole, such as mutual or third sector structures".

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO YOU ALL

IN THIS ISSUE:

3	Inland Waterways Deteriorating (Survey)	John Slee
4	Online matters (Including NABO bulletin)	Stuart Sampson
6	Chairman's Column	The Chairman
8	Another Year for NABO (AGM)	Richard Carpenter
11	Editor's Page	The Editor
12	NABO Objects to Moorings Auctions	The Chairman
14	Survey report - BW	John Slee
16	New Contacts for BW	(BW)
17	Council Debugged & Pseudonym	Pseudonym
18	Meeting with Enforcement Head	The Chairman
20	What Am I?	Mr Hone, I.P.
21	Mersey Cruise?	Ian Fletcher
22	Chairman Writes to Minister	The Chairman
23	Minister Writes to Chairman	Huw Irranca-Davies
24	Ooh-er!	Stuart Sampson
25	RCR	RCR
26	Your Letters	Yourselves
28	Survey report, Other Authorities	John Slee
29	'Editorial'	The Editor
30	Contacts and Council	
32	Navigation Office Telephone Numbers Map	

Contributions

Articles, letters, cartoons and photos are always welcome. Anything from one line to 1000 words considered. Plain text in email is best, or Word. It all has to be re-formatted before use, but if lists, tables or emphasis are beneficial to your articles, we will do our best to reflect the styles.

Images or photos in JPEG format please. All to nabonews@nabo.org.uk.

Letters or articles on paper also welcome, typed if possible. See inside back cover for address. Please ensure we can read your name!

NABO E-mail Bulletins

Join or leave list through www.nabo.org.uk/bulletin

2010 CALENDAR

Council meeting*	NN Copy date
23th Jan	30th Jan
6th Mar	13th Mar
17th Apr	26th Apr
5th June	12th June
10th July	17th July
4th Sep	9th Oct
20th Nov	AGM
27th Nov	4th Dec

**Members are entitled to go to these meetings. Please arrange with Chairman or Gen. Sec.*

'Inland Waterways Deteriorating', say Boaters

The funding crisis facing British Waterways (BW) has resulted in deteriorating canals and rivers that could endanger the safety of boaters, boats and those living near the waterways, two surveys by the National Association of Boat Owners have confirmed – see <http://nabo.org.uk/current/survey.htm>

At the beginning of 2009, BW Chief Executive, Robin Evans, stated that “*the network is now in better shape than at any time in decades.*” After another summer of cruising, it is clear that the majority of boaters who answered our surveys disagree.

Three-quarters of respondents felt negative about the current state of BW waterways compared to last year. In contrast, although the negative trend rose similarly, more people were consistently positive about other agencies' rivers and canals. There were a total of 458 responses.

Boaters reported a lack of necessary maintenance, which in turn creates safety issues, for example:

- Windlasses slipping on worn lock spindles endangering users and visitors
- Boats in danger of sinking by being caught up on damaged brickwork in locks
- Shallow moorings preventing narrowboats drawing alongside banks and necessitating boaters jumping onto collapsing banks and unrepaired towpaths
- Potential breaches threatening waterside homes and businesses as well as boaters

Among other symptoms, these included: lock gear out of use with signs “**BW Aware**”; more temporary fencing or netting this year marking structures yet to be repaired; locks harder to use compared to previous years; and more badly damaged bridges unrepaired.

The deterioration of the BW network is detrimental to the ease and pleasure of cruising, and if it continues, threatens the future of the inland waterways leisure industry. Boaters noticed:

- A lack of necessary dredging
- An increased number of underwater obstacles such as trolleys, sofas and fridges
- Increased weed and reed proliferation
- Inadequate vegetation control
- A shortage of available, usable visitor moorings

While there have been reductions in overall contributions from other users over the last three years via the tax system, boaters' costs, including fuel and licences, have increased above inflation. Unsurprisingly, 85% of boaters were concerned about the trend.

NABO is pleased to have been invited to discuss the reports with BW Operations Director, Vince Moran. It is hoped that the new Waterways Area Managers will find the detailed analysis of use in prioritising maintenance and repairs. More importantly, we hope that government will heed the warning that a

lack of preventative maintenance is threatening the future of one of the UK's most treasured leisure resources.

A £30 million annual underfunding cannot continue indefinitely without catastrophic consequences.

The BW survey summary can be found on page 14 of this issue. The 'Other Agencies' survey report makes much more positive reading so we are keeping you in suspense by putting it on page 24!. Both reports are on the NABO website www.nabo.org.uk

ON-LINE MATTERS

Apologies to those without Internet!

New Webmaster

John Slee has volunteered to take over the 'IT' side of NABO, administering the main site and electronic communications. However he is not taking responsibility for the website contents – that will be down to Council collectively.

Please don't contact Stuart Sampson about emails etc. any more.

New Email Addresses

You will see from the contact pages at the back of this issue that NABO is no longer using year numbers in its 'role' addresses. This should simplify matters but please don't quote the new addresses in full on newsgroups and internet forums where they are prey to 'spambots' (nasty little automated 'e-prowlors' that lurk around the World Wide Web harvesting email addresses to sell to people creating unsolicited bulk emails. If they see anything@anywhere on any website, including chatrooms and forums, they collect it.)

Waterway Reports Forum

The Waterway Reports Forum has been put 'in mothballs' (i.e. the Maintenance Mode) for the foreseeable future. Restructuring BW has meant the Forum is now sending postings to the wrong offices so it will also need to be restructured. Due to lack of support and use it is doubtful if this is worth doing.

We have sent a message to BW regarding its future and had **ZERO REPLY**. This is very worrying as the new Head of Customer services, one Caroline Killeavy, had expressed some interest in the concept, as it accorded with BW's then quoted interest in voluntary contributions to the care of their network (sorry - should that read 'our network').

If anybody objects to this course of action and is willing to pursue the matter we would be very willing to discuss it with them.

Navigation Office Contact finder

In place of the forum we have put on the NABO website a contact finder with an interactive map to give you phone numbers and addresses, both email and postal, for the navigation offices of BW and the other authorities, so you can comment directly. We hope you find this useful.

KEEPING YOU IN THE KNOW

NABO's email bulletin system explained

It seems people still don't understand ☹️

NABO can keep you in the know by email, but **you** need to register your email address for this service.

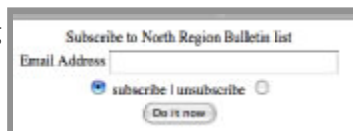
What NABO can't do

NABO is not allowed to compile a list of all your addresses on the membership records and send a bulk email to you all at once. This is the way spammers behave and NABO would quickly be blacklisted, stopping all communications.

What can be done

NABO can use 'Announcement Lists' which members opt into. To opt in (or out), call up www.nabo.org.uk/bulletin and choose a list according to whether you are interested in all or just a part of the network. Most bulletins are sent to a 'list of lists', but separating them keeps the list sizes below the maximum allowed and people can be spared irrelevant messages.

The form is simple and can be used for both adding or removing your address. Just fill in your email address, select '**subscribe**' to add, or '**unsubscribe**' to remove, and click the [**Do it now**] button.



The screenshot shows a web form titled "Subscribe to North Region Bulletin list". It features an "Email Address" input field, a "subscribe" button with a plus icon, an "unsubscribe" button with a minus icon, and a "Do it now" button.

Simple? - too simple. Any Tom, Dick or Harry could stick any old address on the list, so the system sends a checking email to the quoted address with a link the recipient can use to confirm he/she wants to be added. Your address won't be added unless you agree by clicking that link.

NABO really does want you to be in the know. Far more of you have addresses on the membership database than there are currently on the lists, so you might receive a one-off message using the address you gave NABO for its records encouraging you to join one of the lists. To get round the problem mentioned at the start, this can only be sent to a few members each time so it will be a lot of work for someone. Please don't waste that effort by trashing the request without thinking about it, after all, you did give NABO your address in the first place.

Stopping messages

If you don't want messages from NABO any more it is up to you to use the same procedure but select '**unsubscribe**' on the form.

Change of email address

If you get a new address it is up to you to remove the old address and subscribe the new one. NABO's web administrator can view and change the lists if all else fails, but this is not something you should ask him or her to do on a routine basis as it is not as easy as you doing it yourself. Please **do not expect the list to be changed automatically** when you include someone from NABO in a round-robin missive telling your friends that you have a new address.

Worry not!

NABO doesn't use this list indiscriminately and only officers with special NABO mailboxes can send messages through the lists, so you shouldn't get any junk or malicious mail by opting in. The Announcement Lists only contain email addresses, no other personal details are stored, not even your name.

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



It is a busy time for waterways politics. The last months have seen many issues debated in magazines, user meetings and even Parliament. There are items in this edition of NABO News about many of these subjects, and I hope you find them useful.

BW has been pushing the '2020' concept all year including at their Annual Meeting and with BWAF. This debate has more recently been overshadowed by the possibility of the Treasury selling off the property portfolio, which prompted the Parliamentary debate at the end of November. My own view is that any short term sell-off initiative is a high-jack of the 2020 consultation. At best it would prejudice the outcome of the discussions, at worst it will cut off a potential funding stream for the canals, stop any possibility of '2020' happening, or maybe worse. The '2020' debate needs to run its course or we will never get to the best solution.

But even the real cash contribution of the property portfolio is really not at all clear. The suspicion is that any income from this activity is currently reinvested in the property and none trickles down to the canals. We have challenged the Waterways Minister on this general issue, and his reply is printed later. You will see that he has said that despite the property losses in the last year, *"Expenditure on the waterways has been maintained..."*. So something here doesn't ring true. One minute BW is dependent on property income, the next it doesn't matter. I support the view that the property portfolio should be ring fenced, so that we can all see what is happening. Some of the key

arguments for the 2020 vision are financial: the ability to benefit from charitable donations; the ability to borrow capital; savings of management overheads; and having work done by volunteers. But I understand that these alone will not enable the waterways to be funded without Government grant, so are not a full solution to political 'on/off' funding. If we are to understand '2020', I think we need to know a bit more about current finances. There is a need for more transparency here.

So the £30m-a-year question is *"just what is the condition of the waterways?"* John Slee has done some great work for us with the survey and the results are in this magazine, and will form a press release in December. The response has been tremendous, and we have to thank the waterways press, other user organisations and the 'towpath telegraph' for passing the word. I should mention particularly RBOA, TBA and DBA. There is great deal of useful information in the comments and we will make sure that the navigation authorities receive this. Hopefully they can use it as feedback as to where boaters see priorities.

Not surprisingly, boaters are not in agreement with Robin Evans's, or the Waterways Minister's, assessment of the condition of BW's waterways. Yet boaters who have commented on the 'other navigations' are much more positive. This is a good benchmark. It disproves that 'activist boaters are always negative'. Boaters can be

positive! So other waterways users 'speak up'. Why do you love your Authority? What do they do that you like and support?

On the legal challenge, nothing much has happened in the last few weeks. For such an important issue just before the end of our year, Council wanted to wait until after the AGM, so that support from the membership could be gauged. There was full endorsement at the AGM. BW had already invited us for a discussion and that will now take place. There has been no need to publish BW's written response to us. They have put a substantial part of the legal content into their own Moorings Consultation, so you can read it there and comment on it.

That takes me neatly to current consultations. There are two on moorings and one on licence fees. Please do contribute. By the time you read this, Council will have drafted the NABO responses, but there will still be time to take your view into account. And you can send in your own response too. Please take the time over this. The outcome will affect every boater, whatever lifestyle or cruising pattern. The headline on the licence consultation is unfortunate. NABO has pressed for zero increase this coming year given the financial climate and the DEFRA grant cut. If we believe the headline from BW, we have got it. But the detail is a little different. Next year, BW proposes to reduce the Prompt Payment discount from the current 10% to 5% and offer a further 3% for Internet payment. So for most customers, a 2% increase, and of course VAT will go up by 2.5% as well. Council thought a significant prompt payment discount was an

important tool in evasion control and should be kept, and that they would rather see an RPI plus x% policy for the base licence fee. This will not suit everybody, as not all can afford the licence fee in one payment. For this group, the VAT would be the only increase next year. Please let us know what you think.

In my report to the AGM, I have referred to the need for help from the membership in undertaking a share of the work we are doing. Please do offer. We have a particular need for a new Editor or editorial team for NABO News. Please do come forward if you have these skills.

You may not be aware that there is an email circulation list that your officers use to send out Bulletins, which can draw your attention to waterways related issues or to get your views. The list now only has 200 members, quite a low part of the membership. If we rely solely upon NN, we will always be 6 weeks behind the action. Elsewhere in this edition are instructions as to how to add your name to the list. Please do so if you would like to receive these interim bulletins.

To close, I am very conscious that my column is very much BW this, and BW that, with little about other waters. I will do my best to redress this balance.

I thank you for the confidence you have shown by re electing the Council, and we all welcome Sue Burchett back to the table with her invaluable experience and contacts. I can assure you that Council are active on your behalf. I wish you a happy Christmas and good boating in the New Year.

David

ANOTHER YEAR FOR NABO

Some thoughts on the 18th AGM, by Richard Carpenter

Well, what a nice little set up they have at Wolverhampton Boat Club, warm, cosy and welcoming! Not bad on the catering front too! Many thanks and well done.

AGMs of any organisation are generally seen as a necessary evil to some extent, they have to take place constitutionally to sort out the business of running things and they are generally perceived as likely to be pretty boring.

For members of a national organisation like NABO, many of whom live or spend much of their leisure time afloat; it's a step too far. By mid November they have perhaps just got back home from the cruising season, and the daunting prospect of travel by a means of transport that most have gone boating to avoid just doesn't appeal. Add this to the fact that because NABO is national it's going to be a longish way for most, so I suppose getting forty-odd members to turn up is quite an achievement.

This year was the first for David Fletcher to report as Chairman and he ran through his thoughts, our achievements and ongoing issues (all reported elsewhere). As David gave his report, I believe the members present would have had time to reflect on just how big a job he has and how lucky we are, year after year, to find capable people stepping up to the plate to take NABO forward. The brief review of the time spent, the meetings attended and expertise we have from our dedicated Council (again reported elsewhere) probably surprised members present. I hope when they are on their travels next season they help to spread the word! I am proud to be able to try and keep the administration side of NABO going to allow these people to work on our behalf.

What all those who couldn't or didn't make the attempt to get to Wolverhampton missed, was the real opportunity to discuss in an open forum all the issues that face us. This, to some extent helps Council to focus on the boating aspects of issues which we believe is our mandate. Moorings and licence costs, boating facilities on our canals and rivers, the condition of them in relation to cruising and keeping up the battle to force BW and EA to meet their legal responsibilities to their licence payers being the core. Of course there are many other worries for the immediate and long term future of the Waterways (when has it ever been any different?) and we are always at the fore-front of those discussions too.

It was very pleasing to Council that the meeting gave unanimous support to clarifying our legal position and rights with regard to BW in particular, Council agonises about committing funds!

There were more than a few worries from the floor about the proposed or potential sell off of BW's property portfolio and the impact that might

Hyphen added before 'odd' to clarify meaning! Ed.





*David Fletcher
Chairman*

THINKS:
Do we want this lot for
another year?



Stuart Sampson

It's a nice
engraved hip
flask - thank you
all, but...



..it appears to be empty -
shame, that means I have
to stay sober for the
treasurer's report

I'm sure I wrote
down somewhere how I
was going to explain that
figure away.



Stephen Peters



...and the survey
said...

John Slee



*Richard
Fairhurst*

Plug my magazine
and get rewarded for
it - can't be bad



Pictures courtesy
of Fiona Slee

.. and look - the meeting
finished on time. Well
done Mr Chairman!

have – more so that no-one had been able to glean much about the policies of the Tories should they get in! Council were urged most strongly to ensure its voice was heard on every platform on this subject!

It was also very plain from the floor that few had any faith in the main board of BW to solve problems – again the consensus was that they really do not know or understand their customers, whatever they may say, or show any real signs of ability to run the Canal system as a business. Strangely though, no real criticism of EA and their waters – they seem not only to engage better but listen to consultation and reaction. Having said that there is strong general support for the BW people regionally and on the ground who most perceive are doing a good job without the support, finance and backing they deserve.

It was good that Stuart and Carole Sampson were able to attend and, I hope, see that things were looking promising for the future of NABO and that it was in good hands. The meeting wished them both well for their planned European Tour! Oh! and there were no increases in membership fees again – Stephen Peters, who has been on Council since 1993, again threatened to resign if they were raised. (That's something he, as Treasurer, has been doing for many years now so we hope members realise that there have been no increases for a very long time!).

After lunch we were very lucky to have Richard Fairhurst to address the meeting. Richard is Editor of *Waterways World*, where he has been for the past few years. He helped to explain how the magazine comes together, just how few people make it happen, and, most of all, was able to be a little more enlightening on his personal views as a boat owner than perhaps he could if he was in print.

It was interesting to hear, for example, that Richard's editorial staff get reports of canal infrastructure problems from readers who are not able to, or have no faith in, reporting to some BW offices!



We were also delighted to hear that any member of NABO could provide him with views – they don't have to be written perfectly – that he would be happy to publish and welcomes all points of view on the issues affecting our Waterways.

So here's to next November – make a note of the date and I can promise you it won't be a typical AGM but a chance to meet the people who represent you and have a good old chat about all things boaty!

Richard Carpenter

EDITOR'S PAGE

A big thank-you to you all for your appreciation and the token thereof given to me at the AGM. The little hip flask will be primed with a cask strength malt, but, who knows, I might one day develop a taste for brandy or calvados? The inscription reads 'S.Sampson, NABO, 2000-2009'. Maybe a bit formal. Is it a gentle reminder that perhaps I should have conducted myself in a more conventional manner as Chairman of a national organisation? Got a haircut and a grey suit? No, I don't regret walking into the Houses of Parliament almost mocking convention by combining the quasi-naval blazer with a head of decidedly un-militarily loose hair. My job, as representative of NABO, was to be noticed, and I certainly didn't blend in. Maybe that's the bit of my 'act' that David might feel hard to follow! Not that he should, it is the message we deliver that matters.

It is an on-going battle. I remember first 'going solo' at the Parliamentary Waterways Group when it was in its prime. I had to stand up in a packed Grand Committee Room in the Palace of Westminster, and ask the then 'Waterways Minister', Alun Michael, "Why should BW get a Cabinet Office Charter Mark when their customer relations were so bad and they were introducing clauses into their licence conditions without any consultation". (What goes around comes around – the right to impose arbitrary licence conditions is part of NABO's current legal challenge.)

That did put the cat amongst the pigeons. Although I got a typically flannelly answer, the questions had to be submitted in writing in advance and so it was winging its way through the

seat of government down to the desk of the Chairman of BW with a requirement for an answer. I think I got George Greener's respect as an adversary and BW knew that this long-haired newcomer couldn't be ignored any more than the pertinent questioning from his long-haired lady predecessor.

Since then? 'Three steps forward and then two point nine recurring steps back'.

- Forwards: BW's '*Openness and Accountability*', the British Waterways Advisory Forum, agreement on CC Guidelines and the scotching (nothing to do with hip flasks) of the High and Low Band licensing
- Backwards: BW's total disregard for consultation; Moorings Auctions; Narrow Lock Bollards; and BW's dismissive attitude to everything positive we were trying to do.

No, BW is not ready for engagement with waterway enthusiasts as per its 2020 vision. There still needs to be a complete change of attitude. It is all very well drowning us in 'Local Moorings Steering Groups' and Sally Ash's other panderings to the god of consultation, but will they take any notice of the results? I go back to a previous editorial when I mentioned the four 'S's' of motivation: Salary; Status; Security; and Satisfaction. Will truly embracing volunteers and volunteered opinions really do anything to enhance any one of their four 'S's'?

I hardly think so. There will be plenty of lip service I fear.

Season's Greetings to you all and le Noel joyeux.

Stuart Sampson

NABO OBJECTS TO MOORINGS AUCTIONS

NABO Chairman writes to Chief Executive

Dear Robin

BW moorings auctions.

I write to remind you that NABO is not in favour of the use of auctions for allocation and pricing of moorings. Our observation of the process so far has not changed this view. NABO maintains that the fairest system for allocation of moorings is a waiting list, and that there are alternatives for the valuation of the moorings portfolio.

In summary, it is the NABO view that the policy of auctioning moorings :

- Is against the advice of many boating groups
- Is widely disliked by customers
- Does not generate more revenue for BW
- Reduces the availability of low cost moorings
- Antagonises the waterway community
- Is discriminatory through the use of the internet
- Is not the only way to price the market
- Has been inadequately justified to customers
- Has costs equivalent to alternative methods
- Is the responsibility of BW and not Government

NABO suggests that the current practice of auctioning moorings is flawed and should be reconsidered.

We now explain the thinking behind these observations.

In the past BW have been advised consistently and repeatedly, against use of auctions to allocate moorings. The written inputs to the consultation on this issue in 2008 are displayed on the BW website under the unfortunate heading of 'Listening to You'. In the past NABO had understood from Prof Jeffrey Jowell QC, an eminent constitutional lawyer presented to us by BW, that consultations put a specific onus on BW to take notice of any consensus view expressed.

The evidence we have seen of the auction process to date indicates to us that there is no benefit to BW's overall income from moorings. Indeed because mooring occupancy has fallen the loss of income outweighs the benefits of greater income due to higher pricing. Furthermore the intended higher bidding has not been consistent, with a very mixed pattern of outcome. The advertising of guide prices and application of reserve values confirms that auctions cannot by themselves gauge the market.

There are many social issues associated with mooring auctions. Firstly the auction system is detested around the waterways system. Boaters who are involved report to us that they see it as inaccessible, elitist and unfair. It causes dislike and bad feeling. We question whether it is in BW's best interest to upset customers in this way. Even those who are not directly involved feel it to be poor behaviour on BW's part.

Secondly, BW moorings provide a significant part of the low cost, low facility moorings available on the waterways. This allows a range of affordability to owning a boat and prevents pricing out of lower income owners. This is to the benefit of the canals which should be for a cross section of society. Electronic auctioning of moorings to the highest bidder is a barrier to this important principle and supports the criticism of elitism.

Thirdly, we have a crisis of boaters who are not behaving as bona fide cruisers. This in our view is in some part due to the lack of low cost moorings. The threshold for legal moorings is best kept low as an option for such boaters, and we suggest that it makes no sense to restrict the availability at this critical time. The auction process and the reduction of the number of such moorings contribute to that effect and so exacerbate the bona fide cruiser problem.

Fourthly, for BW a mooring is a business commodity. For the boat owner who wants a permanent mooring it is a location of choice for a treasured home and an opportunity to spend time beside like minded people. Stating that it is treated merely as a commodity is poor respect of customer's needs and does nothing to foster a community that may, in the future, wish to contribute to the waterways by volunteering.

Fifthly, a system that requires bidding and setting a high price against a fellow boater and future neighbour is divisive. This is against the spirit of what we are all trying to achieve on the waterways, with a community making a contribution and respecting the work of the navigation authority. Auctions set one boater against another and both against BW.

In the past BW has justified the value of auctioning "as an independent check on our estimates of the market price for a mooring." As a main justification for employing auctions, this statement has no credibility on the waterway. There are many ways to check on market prices, and an auction is but one.

BW are on record of acknowledging that the costs of operating an improved waiting list system would be similar to the cost of running auctions.

You have also indicated that Government has instructed you to "price to the market". We have spoken in the past to DEFRA staff who have declined to comment and referred us back to yourselves. We have noted from other correspondence that you are confident of the powers given to you under the Transport Act 1962 Section 43 (3). NABO concludes that the use of auctions as a methodology is a matter for BW and reference to Government is nothing more than a distraction to the issue.

We repeat, NABO maintains that the current practice of auctioning moorings is flawed and should be stopped immediately. We ask BW to reconsider this policy. NABO would be pleased to contribute to a working group to guide the reinstatement of a waiting list system.

Yours sincerely

David Fletcher

[Reply awaited]

British Waterways - Waterways Condition Survey 2009 Summary

Two surveys initiated by the National Association of Boat Owners (NABO) have concluded that boaters believe that the inland waterways managed by British Waterways are in a parlous state.

At the beginning of 2009, BW's Chief Executive, Robin Evans, stated that "*the network is now in better shape than at any time in decades.*" It is clear that the majority of boaters that responded, both members of NABO and other waterway organisations, and non-members, disagree.

Two separate internet surveys examined the condition of the waterways controlled by BW, and those of Other Agencies (OA). 370 boaters, having between them over 7000 years of boating experience and cruising nearly 130,000 miles this year alone, responded to the survey about BW waterways. 88 contributed to the survey concerning OA waterways, with nearly 2000 years of experience and over 32,000 miles cruising in 2009.

Invitations to contribute were distributed widely to members of NABO, RBOA, TBA IWA, DBA, SOW, other waterway-related organisations and to other boat owners and hirers through Internet forums and newsgroups.

It shows that boaters' opinion is more negative about the state of BW's rivers and canals than those of Other Agencies. Three-quarters felt negative about the current state of BW waterways compared to last year, increased from two-thirds when compared to 5 years ago and half compared to 10 years ago. In contrast, although the negative trend rose similarly (but at a much lower level), more people were consistently positive about the other rivers and canals.

On BW waters, 82% of respondents had encountered lock gear out of use, with signs "BW Aware". 20% had seen such notices on more than 12 pieces of broken equipment. Over 60% had seen more temporary fencing or netting this year, marking structures yet to be repaired.

The lack of maintenance is further noticed when using operational structures. Over 80% reckoned that some locks were hard to operate and encountered lock paddles out of use; more than half found them harder this year compared to previous years. 30% found swing bridges and 23% found lift bridges too difficult for single users to operate. 57% of boaters asked saw more badly damaged bridges this year. Many of these failures create issues of safety with boats and boaters, some of which were described in submissions.

The deterioration of the BW network affected cruising and mooring to a greater extent than the past. The lack of necessary dredging, the increased number of underwater obstacles such as trolleys, sofas and fridges, weed proliferation and inadequate vegetation control affected the ease and pleasure of the experience of cruising. It also made mooring difficult through the lack of depth of water at the edges and a shortage of available visitor moorings. All these measures are quantified in the survey report.

While there have been reductions in overall contributions from other waterway users over the last three years via the tax system, boaters' costs, including fuel and licences, have increased above inflation. Unsurprisingly, cost drew the largest number of contributors' disapproval: 85% said that, compared to previous years, they felt negative to some extent about the cost of boating this year.

The analysis of the places that respondents thought BW should be paying close attention to shows how widespread is the lack of maintenance. It marks a high

level of need for repairs and shows disillusionment among many boaters. Although some of the places listed are very general (e.g. the Kennet and Avon Canal was described as suffering general deterioration, water shortages are an issue on the Huddersfield Narrow and Rochdale Canals), there are large numbers of specific lengths and structures that have been highlighted as being in urgent, medium or long-term need of attention.

These comments have been sorted by waterway within the new BW waterway areas. It is to be hoped that the lists will be given by BW to the waterway area managers to be reviewed and prioritised, bearing in mind they are the views of boating customers.

The results reported above should not mask the fact that the waterways are a wonderful resource which boaters value. In fact, praise for BW and their staff figured in the final section of general comments. Clearly, the fact that so many people were prepared to take time to complete the two NABO Internet Surveys shows a great concern for the waterways' future.

The more general responses were categorised under Routine Maintenance, Repairs and Policy.

People thought it vital that **routine maintenance** should attract much more investment, not only for cosmetic but for safety reasons. The number of recent breaches caused concern for the future of the network, questioning the standard of inspections. To continue to attract new hirers and owners as well as keeping existing ones: lock gate and paddle gear maintenance must be improved; vegetation control (particularly overhanging trees, offside growth and cutting to the towpath waterside edge); comprehensive dredging (particularly at bridge holes and moorings); and brick structure preventative maintenance need to be prioritised.

Under **Repairs**, as well as lock gear repairs, collapsing and leaky lock walls must be mended to prevent accidents, towpath edges repaired to ease mooring, and damaged bridges and piling repaired more quickly.

Under **Policy**, BW should control overstaying on visitor moorings, lock landings and water points, reduce licence evasion and provide more service facilities and visitor moorings. The proportion of boaters' contributions to the waterways should not be increased. There were many management and staffing suggestions, both constructive and critical, including increased pressure on government to ensure financing of the waterways, creation of a plan to get back to steady state and a commitment to support restorations and the new waterway links while preparing appropriate budgets.

The conclusion that we draw from the results is that no amount of positive spin can, or should, hide the fact that the reduction of the funding stream from DEFRA is causing a steady decline in the condition of the waterways, as seen from a boater's perspective. It is to be hoped that British Waterways can reverse this trend, so that a satisfactory 'steady state' can be reached and sustained.

John Slee

Did you know?

NABO attended 170 meetings with official bodies last year, and 56 with members. 300 bits of correspondence were processed, not counting emails. The list goes on, and will in the next issue. Watch this space!

BW NEW CONTACTS

We have put this in the centre so you can pull it out if needed.

Boat Licensing Team , PO Box 162, Leeds LS9 1AZ	0845 671 5530
Scotland Highlands Canals , Canal Office, Seaport Marina, Muirtown Wharf, Inverness IV3 5LE enquiries.scotland@britishwaterways.co.uk	01463 725500
Scotland Lowlands Canals , Canal House, Applecross Street, Glasgow G4 9SP enquiries.scotland@britishwaterways.co.uk	0141 332 6936
North West Waterways , Waterside House, Waterside Drive, Wigan WN3 5AZ enquiries.northwest@britishwaterways.co.uk	01942 405700
North East Waterways , Fearn's Wharf, Neptune Street, Leeds LS9 8PB enquiries.northeast@britishwaterways.co.uk	0113 2816860
Manchester & Pennine Waterways , Red Bull Wharf, Congleton Road South, Church Lawton, Stoke-on-Trent ST7 3AP enquiries.manchesterpennine@britishwaterways.co.uk	01782 785703
North Wales & Border Waterways , Navigation House, Navigation Road, Northwich CW8 1BH enquiries.northwalesborders@britishwaterways.co.uk	01606 723800
West Midlands Waterways , Peel's Wharf, Lichfield Street, Fazeley, Tamworth B78 30Z enquiries.westmidlands@britishwaterways.co.uk	01827 252000
Central Shires Waterways , Peel's Wharf, Lichfield Street, Fazeley, Tamworth B78 30Z enquiries.centralshires@britishwaterways.co.uk	01827 252000
East Midlands Waterways , The Kiln, Mather Road, Newark NG24 1FB enquiries.eastmidlands@britishwaterways.co.uk	01535 704481
South Wales & Severn Waterways , The Dock Office, Commercial Road, Gloucester GL1 2EB enquiries.southwalessevern@britishwaterways.co.uk	01452 318000
South East Waterways , 510-524 Elder House, Elder Gate, Central Milton Keynes MK9 1BW enquiries.southeast@britishwaterways.co.uk	01908 302500
Kennet & Avon Waterways , The Locks, Bath Road, Devizes SN10 1QR enquiries.kennetavon@britishwaterways.co.uk	01380 722859
London Waterways , 1 Sheldon Square, Paddington Central, London W2 6ST enquiries.london@britishwaterways.co.uk	020 7985 7200

COUNCIL DEBUGGED -

*Pest control has finally ridged Council of all bugs, flies etc, and we welcome back a contributor from days gone by, namely, or perhaps not so namely, –
PSEUDONYM*

Welcome to everyone reading this. After the AGM there was a change of roles and now there is another view from NABO Council meetings. 'The Great and the Good', let's give them some encouragement at the start of their new term of office, although what I will be calling them further into the year is anyone's guess, met at the Waggon and Horses. It has two 'G's whatever my spull chicker says. We were very well looked after by the landlord and sat comfortably around a large table.

Order was called and everyone stopped talking and looked at the agenda. Twelve items and some sub headings, we should be able to go home soon after lunch.

The first job was to fill all the positions, with those who fancied a change being accommodated. This went well until the position of newsletter editor came up. Stuart leaving has created a gap and his going abroad makes it definite. There was one volunteer but that would have made the Chairman's job vacant and no one wants that position empty. I am sure that there is a person out there who would love to put six [seven - Ed.] newsletters a year together. Don't be shy, you can do it.

Next was approving the last meeting's minutes and going through the Action Points. They are a well trained Council, most of them had been actioned. Then was a legal discussion with many acronyms and strange words but some seemed to follow the thread.

'Licensing, Mooring and Charging' was the next item. With two consultations running concurrently and a 'trial' being implemented at the same time, it really makes life confusing, but that is BW's way of doing things.

Stephen gave a financial report and we hadn't gone bust since the AGM so that was soon out of the way.

John had spent considerable time producing the results of the survey of the Condition of the Waterways, which you all contributed to. He was thanked for all his hard work. BW has asked to see this document and will in due course.

T-Mobile users are unable to access the NABO web site with T-Mobile blaming the hosting site and vice versa. John is taking on sorting this out and the web site is having a revamp. Don't hold your breath but it will be done as soon as it can be. Apologies to members having problems in the meantime.

Much amusement was had whilst mug shots were taken for the next copy of NABO News and new contact details approved. Sadie Dean was welcomed as Anglian rep so two ex members have returned to Council. It must be fun if they can't stay away.

Almost all the meeting was taken up with talk about BW problems. Does this mean the other navigations are run better? It was dark when the meeting ended, so much for getting away after lunch.

Goodbye till next time

Ψ (Pseudonym)

CHAIRMAN MEETS WITH ENFORCEMENT HEAD

I met Paul Griffin at the Milton Keynes Office and spent two hours with him. He was very friendly and open, and ducked no questions. He has normally been based at Hatton.

Paul is a long standing BW employee, having come from the ranks, through many roles including area manager. More recently he has been managing enforcement on the K and A, and then also West Midlands, which was under 'special measures'. Under the new organisation effective from November 2009, he is responsible for enforcement for England and Wales. Working for him will be five supervisors covering the regions as follows; 1. North, 2. Wales & West + BCN, 3. West side of Midlands, 4. Southeast, 5. London and K&A. Paul will probably be based at Hatton, though this is not final.

His remit is to take the model used on the K and A, and extend it across the country, to review and improve working practices, and get better consistency into the work. At the moment he sees different working practices, different tolerance levels, and different results. It is all a bit loose and they want to tighten it all up by centralising controls. Selection and recruitment where necessary is going on now.

There will be three tiers of staff.

- Data checkers collect boat sightings.
- Coordinators check the data and will make first contact to try and resolve issues and issue first letter.
- Enforcement officers deal with Section 8 and Section 13 issues.

Use of the Q1 hand-held mobile computers is part of this. These do not talk live to the database, but are updated frequently when patrol officers are in the office. Not all regions are using them properly. The enforcement programme is dependent on this and getting consistent sighting data. At the moment the team expects to get 65% coverage, about 20,000 sightings per month, mainly canal side. The data is stored long term, together with all references, reports and information from boaters. They are looking to find ways to reduce checks on marinas because this is less of an issue. Staff are being threatened from time to time on the towpath, and they will always involve the Police. They welcome boaters ringing them and telling them about mooring problems and overstays. These are recorded, so they can tell if the same boaters are overstaying repeatedly.

They can produce printouts of individual boat sightings for the last 18 months on the K and A. There are two officers covering the K & A, actively pursuing 15 boat owners without licences. They have revoked 9 licences and removed 9 boats in recent times. In addition they are working on 159 boats for not making 'a progressive journey'. Overall in June this year there were 373 boats without a home mooring on the K&A. Typically there are 250 boats without home moorings in the Bath Valley and a similar number above Devizes. Late payment charges are improving the licence evasion rates, and save money on administration. They have recovered £500,000 in licence fees. The most common response from a boater who has his boat removed is "I didn't think you would do it". The biggest boat taken and sold was a square rigged ship in Gloucester Docks.

There is a need for the Mooring Guidance note actions to be centralised for consistency. Paul's own view is that they do not want to give suggested distances for a progressive journey. He is more interested in the progressive bit than a specific distance, which can be interpreted by turning back and so just going too and fro. He says he would rather see a short distance moved in one direction than a longer distance moved too and fro. Part of the central organisation will be a support analyst who can review boat sighting data centrally, and initiate action on the same basis countrywide.

BW has reduced licence evasion well into single figures, and now intends to move on to take action against boats not making 'a progressive journey'. The K&A and West Midlands area is leading this because Paul has personally been involved in improving sighting data and has confidence in what those teams have done. They are hampered at the moment as the organisation is not in place and trained up. This is his main work at the moment.

For Section 8 actions, there are guidelines to follow and a sequence of standard letters. Paul promised to send samples to me. He said that in the past they had been tolerant on Section 8 issues, when boaters could explain why they were unable to pay. Some boaters are taking advantage of this and delaying action through repeated excuses. They will not be allowed to do this any more. The letters will be issued to start the time clock, and they will accept a reasonable excuse late in the period if that is appropriate. This will put the clock on hold, but if a boater's promises are not fulfilled, BW can act after the remaining period.

There was a boat count again in November 2009. It is nearly reaching a point when the day-to-day data is good enough, and they will not need a formal census.

On the issues of meetings with Council on the K&A, he said they had met with many councils, with a common theme of too many boats moored long term in the villages. Residents are complaining and there needs to be a way to control overstaying on visitor mooring. Paul does not want to use boater volunteers and put them in a confrontation situation, so they are looking for alternatives, and one suggestion was council parking wardens. They have got no further.

I asked about the "do not return in 12 months" issue that we had heard about in Birmingham. He said that the only case he had heard about was an individual who was shuttling up and down in and out of the centre, and was attempting to regularly moor on prime visitor moorings. I asked about officers climbing on boats. He said he did not want this. Occasionally there are problems with individuals complaining about enforcement notices being placed on boats. These will be put on mooring ropes if this is an issue.

He said that he was aware of a certain individual on the K&A and action was being taken to remove the boat.

Paul said that he welcomed communication and discussion on issues and would be prepared to come to a NABO meeting to talk about them.

I explained NABO's position on licence evasion and the mooring guidelines. I said that we were looking forward to the moorings consultations due shortly.

WHAT AM I?

- I have no sense of smell.
- I can however see and hear.
- I have a keen sense of place, I know where I am without having been there before.
- I can feel movement and touch, and know which way is up, as well as which way is north.
- I can speak, and play music.
- I am telepathic, being able to communicate with my own kind over long distances, without being able to see or hear them. This telepathy also gives me access to a huge resource of knowledge.
- I cannot, however, taste things, as I haven't the animal's need to seek nutrition and assess its quality.
- I could be a robot, I do rely on the human kind for a source of energy in exchange for assistance, but no. Unlike the traditional android image of a robot, I have no legs, wheels or tracks. I am not mobile...

..but I am **a** mobile, what humans call a 'smart phone'. I won't say what breed I am for fear of getting commercial, suffice to say I should be using a small rather than a capital 'I' to refer to myself, but there are others with similar capabilities.

"What has all this got to do with boating?", you must be justified in asking.

Helping boaters is something I am particularly suited to doing. I can tell them where they are and summon help, I can even be a pocket chart plotter. I can bring them weather forecasts and maps. I can be a compass. I can pass on stoppage information. I can photograph things and say where the shot was taken. I can even measure the boat's angle of heel, as well as keeping its owners in touch with their friends and helping them tell their friends where to come to visit. I can help them find supplies and services. I can also save them having a laptop on board for many tasks, and I can save them storing a library of CDs for their listening pleasure.

How do I do all this?

As well as an incredible array of sensors, I can detect transmissions from satellites in geostationary orbits (hasn't that got something to do with the M25?, Orbital - stationary - sorry, one sense I haven't got is a sense of humour) so I know where I am anywhere in the world. That's more than a bog standard computer can do, but I do have access to the Internet so I am effectively a mobile terminal to a huge resource of knowledge. I must admit that that knowledge isn't always perfect, but my use of the Internet is a lot more friendly than that of a computer. I do that through 'Apps', short for Applications. Many of these are just shortcuts to things on the Internet, like Google maps, weather sites etc. However the really smart thing is blending it all together.

Take an example. My owner wanted to find a carpet tile supplier to replace some on his boat. He was in Leeds when he selected my 'Maps' app and keyed in 'carpet

tiles'. I was able to show him where he was on a map and where the suppliers were. The first one wasn't there – as I say, not all the information I get is accurate, but the second was in Bradford and he wanted to be sure that that one was there. I found a website for the place so he just had to tap me on the web address with his finger and up came the web page. It said to ring before visiting, with a phone number. He tapped me on the number and I was able to put him through straight away. It turned out it was only open in the morning and it was afternoon, so I saved him an abortive trip.

Where will technology go next? It could be a bit frightening. If a smart phone is so aware and in communication with a central intelligence, what damage could it do to the owner's privacy? Does the owner know what information is being passed back and forth? The 'App' system takes a lot of the hassle out of many tasks, but it also takes away the control. My owner is for ever putting me in the 'Airplane' mode which shuts me off from the outside world. I can still do a lot for him, play him music, give him solitaire, word search and snooker to play, but I can't be passing anything on. He says it is to extend battery life, but is it to stop me giving his location away to BW? Would I do that?

No Promises ... but ... 1

If a convoy across the Mersey could be arranged, to link in with the planned
Tom Rolt Centenary Celebrations
in Chester over the weekend June 26/27th 2010 -

Would you be interested in joining it ?

The idea would be to travel independently, via Wigan and the L&L, to Liverpool in early/mid June, then :-

- ? **Go through The Link,**
- ? **Spend a few days in Liverpool,**
- ? **Cross The Mersey in convoy,**
- ? **Cruise Ship Canal to Ellesmere Port,**
- ? **Visit the Boat Museum,**
- ? **Attend the Chester Event.**

If interested (in principle) please contact **Ian Fletcher**.
preferably by e-mailing << ipsoco@btinternet.com >>
marking the subject as << **Mersey Crossing 0610** >>

NABO CHAIRMAN WRITES TO MINISTER

In September David Fletcher wrote a long letter to the Minister with responsibilities for waterways, the gist of it below. He received the reply shown.

Dear Minister

I write to you on behalf of the National Association of Boat Owners to express concern following the announcement of a reduction in DEFRA Grant in Aid to British Waterways for the year 2010/11.

British Waterways is struggling to maintain the Waterways system. The clear reports from boaters is that there is a progressive deterioration in the assets ...

In 2009 boater British Waterways licence costs rose by 7.5% ... We reluctantly had to agree that some additional contribution from our constituency was needed. There is perhaps a common misconception that boat owners on the Inland Waterways are wealthy and can afford their chosen residence and or interest....A predominance of them are on fixed incomes or investment incomes ...

It is from this perspective that we view your decision to cut BW's Grant in Aid. A cynical view would be to suggest that the additional licence fee income that the boaters reluctantly agreed to tolerate in order to support the Waterways, has actually been taken back by your Department. And you have taken back next year's increase too. You have effectively added an extra tax on the boater.

...NABO welcomes the wider public to the Waterways. Their use of the Waterways far outweighs that of boaters although their cash contribution through grant in aid is in effect reducing. ...increased tax burden through the changes to propulsion red diesel is particularly disliked because cash payment recurs again and again and the funding has not been returned to the Waterways.

The reduction in Grant-in-Aid is from our perspective a slap in the face to our goodwill. ... What is manifestly unfair is that boaters appear to be the sole group of paying a disproportionate part of the funding. ...

We must also question the ability and effectiveness of the Board and Senior Management team. We are still trying to understand the full impact of the huge losses in their property portfolio ... We will be called upon to cover these losses.

We believe that a very well remunerated senior management at BW, apparently selected for their commercial acumen rather than the core business of infrastructure management, will not publicly admit to the serious state of the Waterways....

- *It is time that representatives of boat owners were offered constituency seats on the BW Board. ...*

- *We would also like some assurance that you will use your influence with the current BW board to ensure that there is a strict cap put on annual increases in charges to boaters in the coming years ... we are not content to sit by and see increases in licence fee to offset reduced Grant in Aid, to cover BW's commercial losses or to prop up the outrageous salaries and benefits being paid to a senior management team who have been overseen serious commercial failures and losses. We would be grateful for an early meeting with you ...*

David Fletcher, Chairman, National Association of Boat Owners

Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR

Telephone 08459 335577
Email helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
Website www.defra.gov.uk

Mr David Fletcher
National Association of Boat Owners - NABO

David.f@nabo.org.uk



Your ref:
Our ref: INV151658

15 October 2009

From Huw Irranca-Davies
Minister for Marine and Natural Environment

Thank you for your email of 17 September raising a number of queries concerning the reduction of the Grant in Aid (GIA) to British Waterways and seeking a meeting with Huw Irranca-Davies to discuss the issues you have raised.

With regard to boater licence fees, these make a valuable contribution to British Waterways' income. Increases are needed to help offset the costs of operating and maintaining the waterways.

You raise concerns about the impact on the network of losses from BW's non-operation property portfolio. Losses from the property portfolio have not directly impacted on network spend despite the economic downturn. Expenditure on the waterways has been maintained at planned levels. In addition, for the first time British Waterways have put £7m from their capital into the network to help compensate the drop in profits from their joint ventures. It should also be noted that BW's capital and revenue are distinctly different and thus none of their revenue earnings from boating customers is used to support British Waterways' JVs or other capital investments.

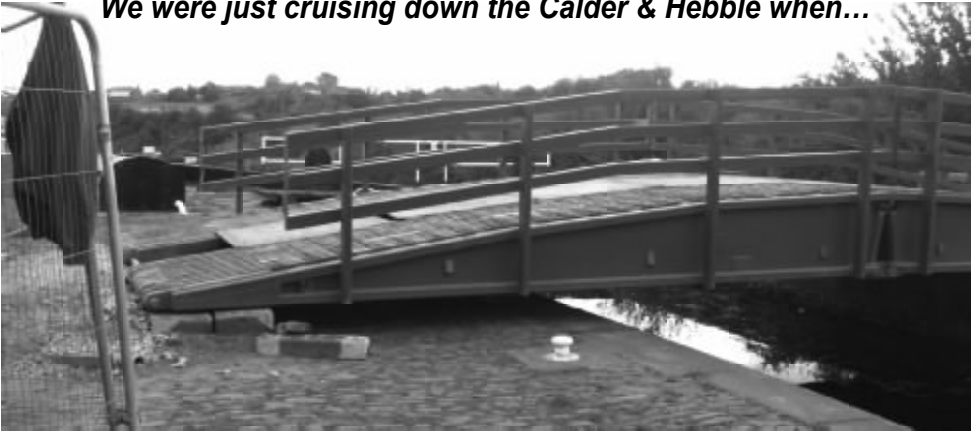
You raise concerns about the lack of a boater on the Board of British Waterways. The Board is not intended to be a representative of user groups of the waterways, of which there are many besides boaters. Boater views are already represented through the British Waterways Advisory Forum, Waterways Users Special Interest Group meetings and many local user groups. Those on the Board have a wide range of skills, talents and experience to enable them to deal with the many issues around the effective operation of a public corporation. Past Board members have been experienced boaters. British Waterways and Ministers do, however, review the Board's skill mix and experience when appointments are to be made to help ensure that it is able to effectively undertake its responsibilities. The next recruitment exercise will commence in early 2011.

I am afraid that diary commitments mean that I am not able to meet with you. However, Sarah Nason's inland waterways team at Defra is planning to hold a waterways stakeholder meeting towards the end of November which I will attend. The meeting will enable waterways stakeholders to discuss the consultation on the Government's proposed new strategy for the waterways, *Waterways for Everyone* and other issues of interest such as the funding of British Waterways. Sarah's team will shortly be in contact with you about arrangements for the meeting.

HUW IRRANCA-DAVIES

OOH-ER!

We were just cruising down the Calder & Hebble when...



...and we had gone to the expense, as BW seems to expect all boaters to do, to have email aboard the boat to keep up with stoppages, auctions etc.– and I had checked that very morning!

So, we phone Yorkshire BW. Luckily we knew that 0113 261 6800 was the wrong number despite being on BW literature. For a start it should be 281, and 6800 gets through to the main Fearn's Wharf switchboard and BW Yorkshire waterway unit was on 6860.

When we persuaded the girl that the Calder and Hebble was a Yorkshire waterway, she said there had been a stoppage at Figure-of-Three Locks but they had taken the Waterscape notice down now because it was due to have finished more than a week ago. Had anybody been to check? Could they have missed that bridge across the lock chamber? “Blame it on the EA.” (Not the navigation department we know and love, but Flood Defence who were shoring up the River Calder thereabouts). “They never told us they were overrunning, but they should crane the bridge away and you should be on your way within the hour”.

Well, it was a bit more than an hour but eventually a big JCB rolled up and swung it away.

Not that that was the first unscheduled stoppage we had encountered on our trip. There was one day of heavy rain in the Aire catchment that must have panicked someone and we had found two sets of floodgates closed in our faces to keep the supposedly rising Calder out of the ‘cut’ sections, but it wasn’t. It had hardly wetted the green section of the gauges, so we were totally flummoxed. The trouble is that even an inch or so rise makes those gates very difficult to open, as the whole cut is the ‘chamber’ to be filled even if the paddles worked, which at Thornbury they didn’t.

Moral - Don’t set yourself any cruising targets on the Calder and Hebble.

Silver Lining - BW Yorks had done a good job on the paddle gear since we last cruised it.

RCR Advrtisement

Adding positive

Having read Louis Jankel's article on the River Nene, I feel duty bound to add something positive to his assessment of Northampton.

It appears to be the best kept secret on the river that Northampton provides moorings on both sides of the new walkway bridge, between South Bridge and the Lock cut, which are protected 24 hours a day by CCTV which has tilt, pan, zoom and infrared capability. This is part of the Northampton Town Centre security system.

Visiting any town is only as good as time allowed will permit it to be but I consider that Northampton has had a bad press for too long. The next time one of your readers ventures onto the Nene at Northampton, why not take the time to enjoy what the town has to offer. There is a real risk that you will be pleasantly surprised.

*David King,
NB "Jappa".*

Pets And Waterways Society?

This is in memory of Bilbo, a seven year old Border Collie who died inexplicably and suddenly while assisting me working through Newlay Locks on the Leeds and Liverpool. It was a shock to us, calling a sudden halt to his unconditional affection, joy and service as an excellent house/boat dog. But for him, what a wonderful way to go. He had seen his predecessor grow to nearly eighteen and all the the consequences of old age that go with it. He was jumping a balance beam

when it happened, doing what he really enjoyed, and I think only his body landed, his soul carried on up. At this point I must publicly thank the lockies who rushed us to the vet, sadly to no avail.

Canal boating is one of the few pastimes or holiday opportunities that can be truly pet friendly. No need for kennelling, the whole family can be together. However, as a 'waterway user group', the canine fraternity is sadly neglected in the higher management of the waterways. Developments go up with moorings but not a blade of grass and whole stretches of canal are 'sanitised'. What they don't appreciate is that dogs are aboard more than half the private boats on the network and can't just be switched off and stowed away by a visiting boater just because some property company wants its glass, concrete and potted plants to be devoid of animal life.

We once had five. Obviously with that many, one is very aware of how they could harm neighbourly relations. It is nigh on impossible to monitor every dog every minute, so our policy was to do a 'Trowel Prowl' before leaving a mooring and hopefully remove at least one offering per dog, even if that meant clearing up after someone else's dog if you couldn't find the full total. That way at least you knew that if there was one poop unaccounted for, it was further from the range of 'little feet' than the ones you had found and you could leave with a clearer conscience. The other perpetration of the canine-knowledge-challenged is the sign

'Dogs on Leads'. There is a popular misconception that every canine is better behaved when towing a human. In some cases this is true but unless this towing is sustained over a long period the dog will miss out on proper exercise, and being attached to a human leaves the dog feeling vulnerable and cornered. Neither is good for its psychological well-being. On the towpath there are two physical problems also. Firstly the dog is forced to answer the call of nature in public and quite likely on the walking surface. This can require quick reactions from the owner walking behind it! The second problem is that dog-lead-human can be a far greater obstruction to other towpath users, particularly cyclists. Multiply that by the number of dogs you have!

Much better for the sign to insist dogs are under close control, leaving the method to the discretion of the owner. Office wallahs, spare a thought for dogs and encourage responsible dog ownership, rather than rules and regulations. Their companionship adds a lot to the enjoyment of the canals.

Stuart Sampson

Re. 'Carole's Contrasts'

in NABO News October 2009 regarding the state of the locks on the Calder and Hebble navigation and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. There is a theory that it is all part of a BW hidden agenda to discourage boaters from sailing.

The logic is that if all locks and swing bridges were properly maintained, boaters would find boating a lot more enjoyable – now we can't have that, can we? – paying for a cruising permit to enjoy yourself! What do you expect when you are a captive customer?

What with leaks, collapsed wash walls

and abandoned projects, is this the beginning of the end?

Now, on a more positive note!

A trip into Liverpool is to be recommended.

For boaters who have not been north of the Anderton Lift it's well worth the trip to Liverpool "where the cut joins the sea". From Waters Meetings on the Duke's Cut (Bridgewater) out across the Moss to Wigan, the boater is traversing a part of the 'North Pennine Ring', one of the great secrets of the waterways. After a stay in Liverpool, a week won't be long enough for the boater as there is the opportunity, if the weather and the tides are right, and the boat has a 'Certificate of Seaworthiness', of returning via the River Mersey, the Manchester Ship Canal and the River Weaver, free of charge.

There is a right of navigation between the bottom of the Liverpool locks and the River Mersey written into the Act of Parliament when Liverpool Docks were built. Access to the River Mersey from Salthouse Dock is via Brunswick Tide Lock. This lock and the docks area is under the control of British Waterways.

Access to the River Weaver from the River Mersey was originally via the Runcorn Weston Lock, but when the ship canal closed this lock without an Act of Abandonment they guaranteed as compensation a free passage for all craft wanting to make passage from the Mersey to the Weaver via Eastham Lock. This route is the 'Mersey Ring'. Sadly for wide beam craft, Anderton is the limit. Had Runcorn locks and the Weston Canal remained open they could have used this route. Were Runcorn Locks closed by an Act of Abandonment?

Alan Holden
27

Other Agencies Waterways Condition Survey 2009

Report Summary

Two surveys initiated by the National Association of Boaters (NABO) have concluded that boaters are generally inclined to be positive about the state of inland waterways managed by Agencies other than British Waterways (BW), but feel negative about the canals and rivers run by BW.

This report should be read as being supplementary to the BW Survey Report.

This survey was about non-BW waterways, to create a comparison with the BW one. 88 boaters contributed to this survey, with a total of nearly 2000 years of experience and over 32,000 miles cruising in 2009.

Invitations to contribute to the surveys were distributed widely to members of NABO, RBOA, TBA, IWA, DBA and SOW, other waterway-related organisations and to other boat owners and hirers through Internet forums and newsgroups.

Although there were only a quarter of the number of respondents to this Other Agencies (OA) Survey compared to the BW Survey, the fact that many of the same respondents' comments were positive demonstrates a useful degree of subjectivity.

The majority of boats used were narrowboats, which precipitated requests for this to be taken into account by the relevant navigation authorities: the Environmental Agency, Authority, Peel Ports, National Trust, Basingstoke Canal Authority, River Avon Trust, Devon County Council, Middle Level Commissioners and the Port of London Authority. Often moorings and lock landings are designed for cruisers, not narrowboats.

While some boaters noticed more broken equipment, temporary fencing and graffiti, they were in the minority. A minority thought other agencies' locks and moveable bridges were harder to operate than they should be. These results were in stark contrast to those in NABO's BW Survey.

A lack of dredging caused problems with cruising and mooring for about a quarter of the boaters in the survey; the number finding it difficult to moor because vegetation was not cut back adequately was more significant. The lack of visitor moorings needs remedying according to two thirds of the boaters asked. In each of these categories, criticism of the BW waterways was much higher.

Nearly half found no difference in the way that the amount of dredging, underwater obstacles and weed affected their cruising this year compared with previous years: fewer than in the BW Survey.

It was when comparisons with 1, 5 and 10 years ago were invited that non-BW agencies came off better most noticeably. These figures are illustrated in the Executive Summary of our BW Survey. Suffice it to say that over a third felt positive while under a third felt negative; the remainder felt there had been no change.

Over the last three years boaters' costs, including fuel and licences, have increased above inflation on all waterways. Cost drew the largest number of contributors' disapproval: 62% said that, compared to previous years, they felt negative to some extent about the cost of boating this year.

All the comments have been sorted by OA waterway. Each has drawn some criticism, much of it constructive. The two reports will be published on the NABO website: <http://nabo.org.uk> under 'Current Issues'.

BW and each of the Other Agencies whose waterways feature in the survey results will be made aware of their publication. NABO will be pleased to discuss the results with any navigation authority that invites us to talk.

EDITORIAL

This is a bit like being a TV news presenter when the taped report won't run and your earpiece explodes with invective from the director wanting you to fill! Yes, I have my Editor's Page for my waterway related opinions but in this gap I can be a bit more personal.

I must first apologise for almost entirely ignoring the Festive Season in this issue. I have made fatuous attempts in the past to 'lighten it up' but have never known if you appreciate it. The issue usually arrives when we are in Scotland so I don't know if anything about Christmas arrives too late.

I could include jokes about narrowboat chimneys being too small for Santa, or be a bit more serious about the dangers of leaving inflammable mince pies for him too close to the stove. Yes, there is a real danger in a small space of decorations and cards being too close, and also of the cold weather encouraging unsafe practises like blocking ventilation or overloading the stove, but I'll leave that preaching to the BSS.

As I write this we have just completed a huge pile of paperwork to set up a 'Britline Account' with the Credit Agricole, the French bank. They want copies of bank statements, proof of income, certified copies of passports, references from your British bank, proof you have been to France, and so on. So we had to go all the way down south to indulge in a day trip to Calais, just to get the ferry boarding passes. (But yes, the car came back clanking and low at the rear!)

We are now learning our CEVNI regulations and plan to get our ICCs in France in early April with Tam and Di Murrell. (I have my own web based quiz/test for CEVNI signs. Try www.canalmate.co.uk/CEVNI). The boat has to have a new pump-out/sea toilet as they use the canal in France, so a tank needs installing under the bath so we can still boat in Britain and hold 'it while in marinas in France. Much work to do, will keep you updated if you are interested.

Season's greetings



Stuart

Accurate steering needed here!

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