

SURREY AND HAMPSHIRE CANAL SOCIETY REPORT – APRIL 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Societies ability to hire Belfast Girl has resulted in almost continual use this autumn, contract work for the Dredger was completed in October and we have been able to hire during the winter period.

A range of work from upper lock gate replacements, invasive weed removal, channel clearance and SSSI recovery project at Brookwood have been undertaken by our volunteers.

1.0 WORKING PARTIES

WOODHAM AND WOKING

After fitting the new upper gates on locks 2 and 3 the working parties commenced clearing the channel and overgrowth from the junction of the River Wey, working upstream.

Invasive Hydrocotyle had formed a cover over the canal and was removed by use of the excavator Clamshell Grab. Removed weed was placed in the hopper and later deposited on the off bank where it decomposed.

Over hanging tree branches were also removed, opening up the channel; the visual improvement was dramatic.

This work continued from September into December clearing a centre channel through to Woking for the Illuminated Boats gathering.

It should be noted, and action recommended by members that a major effort is required through Woking. The Channel is silted and weed growth a significant issue, the canal still looks derelict despite our efforts. A programme of improvement works should be implemented in the autumn.

DEEPCUT

The unexpected failure of an upper gate at Lock 18 had closed the navigation, with the delivery of new upper gates and Unity unavailable we agreed to change the gates at lock 18.

A Friday passage from St. Johns was organised, the plan being to transport the new gates from Pirbright on Belfast Girl and have an early start on Saturday, a Joint BCA / SHCS working party having been arranged. The canal had unfortunately been closed for some time, debris and leaves washed into the lock as it was operated, preventing the gates from opening fully. Belfast Girl is wide beamed and we had to clear behind every gate before entering or leaving a lock.

We arrived at Deepcut bottom lock and loaded the gates in late afternoon, with an early start on Saturday to complete the passage.

Better progress on Saturday and by late morning we lifted the first gate out as Andy and James had prepared them prior to our arrival.

Some adjustments were required before the new gates could be finally fitted and work was suspended as the light failed, work continued on Sunday, on completion the dredger was turned above the lock, we started the return journey after lunch on Sunday arriving at St Johns in the dark using temporary lighting for passage from lock 12.

A successful weekend with the final fitting of the gates scheduled for the following week.

With the re-opening of the Deepcut Locks, a number of boats were able to leave Deepcut, we used the opportunity and moved a working barge to St Johns for use at Hermitage and Brookwood.

WESTERN END

Newbury Working Party Group is a mobile team of canal volunteers who work on various canal projects; they were assisting our efforts at Up Nately with bank side clearance. Heavy rain the previous week, resulted in the highest levels of water in the canal that I have experienced, water draining off Greywell Hill created a visible flow westwards from the land drain at the tunnel entrance. A number of dead trees have blown down across the canal and require removal in drier conditions, a job for our chain saw team.

WORK BOAT.

Work on the boat has been at a slower pace than planned, injected work at Woodham and Woking being the main cause. A dry weekend in January enabled us to continue work on the hull and interior. Painting in winter is not advisable, lower temperature affect the finish, therefore preparation and fabrication are currently programmed.

HERMITAGE AND BROOKWOOD

A start on the HSBC and Environment Agency Sponsored environmental recovery work at Hermitage has started. Assembling the equipment depended on the various canal closures allowing movement. A tug, two barges and Belfast Girl are now moored at St Johns, dredging commenced at Hermitage Bridge, the silt being unloaded to form shallows between a Nicospan barrier and the north bank of the canal. A reed bed will be planted in the shallows, providing habitat and cleaning of surface water entering the canal.

The society consider this project has the potential to aid SSSI recovery programme in conjunction with navigation of the canal, achieving aims and objectives of all partners, if successful it could be a basis for future projects.

The volunteer dredging at Hermitage is the first Society programmed dredging since 1993 when Perseverance and her crew completed the volunteer efforts in Hampshire and the teams disbanded.

2.0 RESOURCES.

Volunteer details for the March 2007 to March 2008 period

SHCS WORK PARTIES	339 days
VISITING GROUPS	37 days
TOTAL VOLUNTEER INPUT	376 days

3.0 FINANCE

3.1 CONTRIBUTIONS

I have changed the format for this section, identifying the Societies contribution for the year 2007.

Society direct costs Jan 2007 -Dec 2007

Fuel	£ 1,951)	
Work Parties	£17,526)	
Insurance	£ 3,686)	Subject to audit
Maintenance	£ 2,566)	
Projects -Work Boat	£ 564)	£27,387
Dredger Hire	£ 1058)	

Contribution in kind for 2006

376 Volunteer days at £50 per day £ 18,800

Total contributions for 2007

£46,151

4.0 BACKPUMPING

Design and Technical Report for Back Pumping the Brookwood Locks have been prepared during 2007. Project plans and fund raising are in preparation with project launch in 2008.

5.0 CANAL CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

John Eaton (Liverpool University) has been a member of the Basingstoke Canal Conservation Working Party, later Steering Group, for many years. John's recommendations on Navigation and Ecology issues were a key factor in resolving the conflict prior to SSSI Designation. Natural England has consulted John on monitoring recovery of the SSSI; his original advice on Navigation issues remains valid.

The Society commented on the first and second Draft Canal Conservation Management Plans. The plan provides a framework for future management of the canal as a navigation, Nature and Leisure facility, recognising the wide range of interests whilst achieving a practical working balance. The level of boat movements has been endorsed as a mechanism for helping achieve a species rich aquatic environment and remains unchanged.

We have agreed that after dredging, the dredged section of canal will be subject to a speed limit for boats. Normal usage and through navigation, within the boat movement limits, will continue, speed restrictions for the dredged section remain in force for a year.

Boating events, will not be organised on dredged sections for a year, this is a precaution, allowing time for the aquatic environment to stabilise.

We welcome the concept of informal mooring locations for overnight stops; soft bank protection and deeper water reduce potential scour from boat propeller. Choice of location, easy mooring conditions and users will respond. We have offered to assist in providing mooring facilities.

Regular boating events have been included in the plan, this provides confidence for the organisers that last minutes technicalities will not disrupt the planning as has been the case on previous events. Planning needs to commence a year in advance for most events; small informal club meets are easier to arrange.

6.0 NAVIGATION ISSUES

The canal was closed to navigation for considerable periods in 2007, a year when water supplies were plentiful, and a legacy of limited resources over many years contributing to structure failures. The society has fully supported the Canal Authority in repair works and channel clearing. We have also been active in promoting the initiatives and progress made in asset management and repairs, ensuring that all waterway organisations were aware that the Canal was returning to use.

The scheduled works by Rail Track at Ash Vale, programmed during the winter period with minimum disruption to canal navigation, has now slipped, a completion date of June 2008 being quoted.

The Director has agreed that user groups should be consulted when any canal closure is proposed, he has prepared a discussion paper for the committee on his proposals.

I urge members to support the consultation process as commercial users and private owners are restricted in the use of the canal, revenue is lost and holiday plans ruined.

Peter Redway
8th April 2008