

SURREY AND HAMPSHIRE CANAL SOCIETY REPORT – OCTOBER 2008

INTRODUCTION

Belfast Girl continued work at Hermitage into early spring, but at the start of the growing and nesting season volunteer work was suspended and other activities planned. With work still being identified for canal safety reasons, the situation is rather changeable and plans will be altered to suit circumstances.

1.0 WORKING PARTIES

HERMITAGE / BROOKWOOD

The Hermitage / Brookwood dredging and reed bed project continued for as long as the growth conditions allowed, work on the project was then suspended until autumn. Surplus material excavated from the canal channel during construction of Ash Vale Railway Bridge was tested and authorised for transportation from Ash Vale to Hermitage and tipped. This material is partly filling the reed bed area with some quantity still to be placed.

A long reach excavator and a dredging unit will be required to complete infill of the shallows.

Works scheduled for the winter period will include preparations for the Brookwood event next year.

WORK BOAT.

With improving conditions for steel fabrication and painting, we switched working parties to Ash Loch Depot. Modifications to the hull of our work boat were followed by internal steelwork creating crew accommodation and a small workshop. Painting the hull and superstructure of the work boat and tug was carried out in ideal conditions.

WESTERN END

Clearance of fallen trees obstructing the towpath at Eastrop Bridge and the western portal of the tunnel was given priority and work at Ash was suspended.

Three large trees were removed over a weekend, two being logged and the third retained in commercial lengths for possible recovery and reuse.

A survey for the permissive path construction over the tunnel was also carried out, followed by the process of listing materials and estimating.

Natural England consents for work in an SSSI is required by the Canal Authority and the landowner. Work on the path is scheduled to start in September.

DEEPCUT

The summer work camp at lock 22 was arranged in conjunction with Waterways Recovery Group, a national canal restoration group of the Inland Waterways Association.

A pre-work camp site meeting identified towpath access restrictions for the transportation of materials and site equipment from Curzon Bridge to lock 22. Towpath improvement work and tree cutting for safer access was arranged prior to the camp starting.

Society volunteers set up the site equipment on 16, 17, 18th July, for a camp start on 19th. Canal rangers assisted with lowering water levels and on Friday a start was made on rescuing fish from below the lock; a total of two people for 2.5 days were required to rescue a large number of fish as levels were lowered.

Removal of temporary structures commenced followed by excavations. Water ingress into the working area increased, and groundwater and seepage from above the lock combined to create continual flooding of the excavations requiring constant pumping.

By the end of the first weekend of the camp, foundations for the off side lower wing wall had been cast, and preparations for extending the concrete below the lock as far as the end of the wing walls followed.

Underpinning of a section of the lower towpath side wing wall was also required. As the wall was intact, underpinning was agreed as an alternative to demolition and rebuilding. Thursday of the second week of the camp was concreting day. 30 cubic metres of pre-mix concrete was delivered and transported along the towpath by dumpers. An excavator working in the bed of the canal levelled the concrete, reinforcement steel was then installed and the final concrete cover levelled and finished.

Deliveries of concrete were arranged so that continuity of construction was completed within the initial set time of the concrete, a long day but achieving a task which was not practical for week end work parties.

Society volunteers and visiting groups will continue the construction work at weekends to completion of the project.

Waterway Recovery Group volunteers, supported by Surrey and Hants volunteers provided 220 volunteer days over a three week period, setting up, working and off hiring after the camp.

2.0 RESOURCES

Volunteer support for the period March 2008 to September 2008

SHCS WORK PARTIES	224 days
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VISITING GROUPS

WORK CAMP	220 days
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TOTAL VOLUNTEER INPUT	444 days
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3.0 FINANCE

3.1 CONTRIBUTIONS

Society contributions for Jan 2008 to August 2008

Fuel	£ 1,020
Work Parties / Camp	£10,037
Insurance	£ 1,200
Maintenance	£ 2,888
Projects -Work Boat	£ 2,660

Contribution in kind for 2008

444 Volunteer days at £50 per day	£ 22,200
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Total contributions year to date 2008 £33,956

4.0 BACKPUMPING

Design and Technical Reports for back pumping the Brookwood Locks had been prepared during 2007. The project has not progressed as the Water Resources Report has indicated a number of alternatives that could provide enhanced water supplies.

Discussions on acceptable and sustainable options between BCA, EA and the Society will establish the future strategy for water supplies.

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. He has been commissioned to draft the Conservation Management Plan (CMP). At the time of writing this report, the most recent draft has been issued, and we have made comments on a number of issues identified.

The JAG meeting clarified some issues which concerned the society, particularly tree management.

The recent draft of the Conservation Management Plan proposes a tree shading reduction target to 10% of the canal length, the society considers this unrealistic and undesirable. We propose a lower target of 50% tree shading, monitoring and analysis of SSSI recovery will confirm a threshold of tree shading which supports viable ecological recovery.

We consider public reaction and local authority planning requirements for significant tree felling would inhibit achieving the lower target.

Recovery of the SSSI should be monitored, and conservation recovery analysis examined prior to any conservation tree work permissions or authorisation made by the Conservation Steering Group. We consider this group is the medium for decisions and policy on ecological recovery.

The perception of clear felling of the trees on the canal must be avoided.

A policy of tree management is recommended rather than felling, it is, however accepted that some trees will require felling for safety reasons.

The navigation concerns we registered, have largely been accepted, our future aspirations for navigation have been tabled, including a review of boating levels as SSSI recovery is established.

We have offered to assist in creating Off Line reserves for conservation recovery, this concept has worked well for the Montgomery Canal and should be included in the Basingstoke Canal CMP

We and our colleagues within the Inland Waterways Association accept the principal of continued positive consultation in achieving our objectives for navigation and recreational use increasing as ecological recovery improves. Some concerns and issues will have to be fully explored and resolved as the CMP process continues.

6.0 NAVIGATION ISSUES

The canal was closed to navigation for considerable periods in 2007, and a year later it is still closed for through navigation. Enough is enough!

In March this year we were promised that Lock 15 and the Deepcut repairs would be carried out, and the Society agreed to assist with the Deepcut repairs. The Canal Authority has been working on the lock structures at Deepcut, but major repairs by Surrey County Council have not yet started after some six months of promises. Patience is running out fast as evidenced by letters from frustrated boat owners who are unable to use the canal facilities for maintenance, or indeed leave the canal to use River Wey facilities.

We are aware of the issues of contracting and procurement in Surrey, but a change of contractor should not create a log jam in issued work. Please Surrey can we have some work on the sites started.

After two years of virtual closure, high profile use of the canal for cruising in 2009 is, in our opinion, essential, so following a Bridge Barn event next Easter, we hope to arrange a cruise in May. It is planned to navigate to Odiham with some 30+ boats, so use of the Deepcut locks is a key requirement.

We require confirmation that Deepcut repairs will be carried out for May 2009, or, alternatively, an assessment of the minimum temporary repairs needed to reopen the locks.

The Society would consider continuing work at Deepcut to help ensure that the cruise is viable.

Two years isolated from the national waterway network is at least one year longer than acceptable.

Peter Redway
October 2008