

Canal Managers Update January 2014

Works

- Capital Works – D & B finished work on Mytchett Lake reservoir in October. Bollards have been purchased for this area and just need to be installed. The towpath will be surfaced in next financial year
- New gates are to be installed at locks 5, 14 and 15 in late February and repairs were carried out on lock 24.
- Works are underway on the new moorings at the canal centre but progress has been hampered by the storms.
- Over two months of work this winter has simply been on clearing up storm damage which has put us behind on other routine winter maintenance. Over 75 reports came in during the end of October storms and 60 from the storms just prior to Christmas. Most of these have been trees or large branches down. Further storms in February have brought a further 40+ trees down. The rangers have worked really hard to re-open towpath and navigation each time and keep the canal safe for all, working in the most appalling weather conditions. With all the rain and winds it has also meant 24hr standbys and call outs which has thoroughly tested our initial emergency procedures. We have called in favours and brought in extra staff and contractors as often as possible to help clear these trees.
- We now have a firm acting as standby emergency 24hr cover for the canal if the rangers require additional resources and backup in an emergency situation. The emergency plan has also been updated and re-distributed.
- A contractor has been in to carry out 11km of winter towpath cuts in the more accessible area and the volunteers are focusing on the other areas.
- Malthouse bridge repairs were completed in December.
- Some of the abandoned boats on the canal have finally been cleared off and disposed of. Office staff are continuing to chase up unlicensed craft and audit land ownership for moorings.
- The stop plank grooves at the dry dock were repaired along with the cills and paddle
- A leak was fixed on an embankment at St Johns and at Brookwood and investigatory work was carried out on seepage on ash embankment.

Events/Income

- Santa Cruises sold out within a week with people queuing from 6am in the morning to get the prime tickets and was hugely successful and enjoyed by all. Continuing to bring in vital revenue funding for the canal.
- Lapland UK used the campsite over the winter as their base, bringing in additional campsite money of £15,000.

Staffing

- Congratulations to Canal Rangers Sara and Jon who will be having their first Canal Ranger baby girl in May!
- The BCA team received a staff award from Hampshire County Council for all their hard work over the last year to re-open and revamp the canal. We are currently planning a team event to celebrate!

Volunteers

- The Tuesday volunteer group has been fighting back the ever encroaching vegetation on the canal banks this winter and additionally carried out works to spruce up Reading Road car park in Fleet and the canal centre.
- The Canal Society Lengthsman scheme continues to provide us with regular updates from out on the Canal. They have been invaluable with their regular updates after all the storms.

Higher Level Stewardship Scheme

- Tree works (thinning, crown reduction) in consultation with Forestry Commission and Natural England and associated bank protection works are almost complete at Yew Tree Copse and Pillars Bridge in Hampshire. These works are match funded by Natural England.

Weedcutter

- The Canal Society has completed works on the weedcutter which passed its PUWER test on Friday 24 January. With further help from the Canal Society we should now be ready to tackle next seasons weed onslaught!

Consultation

- Meetings have been held with The River Wey Management, The Angling Association and there has also been a Boaters meeting to discuss the boating season. Further meetings are now booked in to regularly meet with these user groups to improve communications. We continue to meet the Basingstoke Canal Society and additionally the head lengthsman every month.

New Charges update

- We are now entering financial year two of the new licence and mooring charges for the canal. All boaters will now be required to renew at the beginning of the financial year. A direct debit option will be available to boaters to help spread the cost.
- Reading road car park implementation of charges is still underway with it having been approved by Hart district council. I am currently working with Hart DC to install electricity, parking meter, signage and white lines over the next few months. The car park will also have some improvements to fencing to spruce it up further.

Management Team

- The management team attended an AINA workshop on dredging on 7 February. Trying to get to grips with the EA requirements for disposal of dredged material and input into an improved system for the future.
- Work has been on-going to update the agreement for commercial operators on the canal
- Hampshire CC's engineers have put forward some possible engineering solutions for the landslip which are currently being discussed and modified.

Upcoming Work

- The visitor services staff are looking at volunteering on the canal and enhancing opportunities for people to get involved. They will also be revamping the education services that we offer for schools. A new barrier is also soon to be installed to help with security on the campsite.
- Projects in conjunction with the Canal Society include the winter and summer WRG camps which we hope will include new visitor moorings. We also hope that society members will help out with running the weedcutter this summer and with refurbishment of the old patrol boat.
- Once the trees are sorted and the new gates are in the rangers will try and get the canal centre mooring finished and some winter cutting done before the nesting season is upon us. A contractor will be in doing a tree survey along the whole length of the canal in March.

Brief Updates from other Meetings (full minutes available on request)

Conservation Management Steering Group 23 Oct 2013

- A discussion was held about crayfish management and the commercial fishermen came in to report on progress with a total of 1000kilos of crayfish removed from the canal during Autumn, between Deepcut to Farnborough. Discussed possible need for a longer lay of nets to improve catches in future, but this might require a section of canal to be closed to navigation for a day. Finance may also be required to support this in future years if catches are not fully economically viable for the fishermen.
- An environment agency representative came and discussed the water sampling results for the canal. The canal passed the Water Framework Directive standards, but agreed need to find more canal specific standards. EA to investigate the fish deaths between lock 1 and 2 last summer and see if there is any correlation with water quality in this area.

Asset Management Meeting 20 November 2013

- Confirmation given of details of canal inspections and monitoring regime and on-going annual inspection. Weirs and sluices still outstanding. On-going update of Asset management plan underway to include updates on the inspection frequency.
- Discussion over compilation of culvert surveys and needs for analysis of these (work now complete)
- Emergency Response plan has been revised with an exercise to be carried out in March 2014.
- Updates given on rapid improvement project and plans being made for next stages.