



Caroline Lucas, the Greens' only MP, is to stand down at the next general election. She has probably done more than any other MP to pursue the access issue for boaters.



Michael Fabricant, who chairs the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways, has been awarded a knighthood. He also has tried to obtain river access information for PI.

No fence intended

This picture of Willow Walk Bridge and its flowers is a publicity painting for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme. The channel leads from the Thames back to the Thames and, as such, is subject to the 1932 Thames Conservancy Act which says clearly that there is a right of navigation on any channel leading from the Thames and back to it. PI queried why there was a fence obstructing the channel. Matilda Norris of the EA replied 'Presuming you are referring to the dark fence-

like representation above the waterline, this is the artist representation of a shadow. We do see how the confusion was made but it is actually meant to be from the bridge above. We can confirm that there will not be anything at water level.' Look closely. With the Jubilee River at Maidenhead it was only an administrative error when papers were being signed that prevented navigation from being banned, following which trees were planted at very close centres at Taplow, preventing launching onto the channel.



Willow Walk Bridge, a shadow or a fence across the navigation? Look closely.

INCIDENT FILE

Poole Harbour rescue

A paddler fell out of his canoe and called for help around 11pm in June near Lake Pier in Poole Harbour, west of Poole. A dog walker dialled for assistance and called encouragement until help arrived. The RNLI sent Poole inshore lifeboat and two coastguard rescue teams. Condor ferries offered a fast rescue boat. The paddler was pulled from the water, cold and tired, and taken to Poole, from where he was taken to hospital by ambulance.

Incident growth area

HM Coastguard expressed concern that Thursday August 17th was a particularly bad day with multiple rescues of people using inflatables and paddleboards but without any safety equipment or means of calling for help. There were some 30 incidents in the Holyhead MRCC area (mid Wales to the Mull of Galloway) alone, mostly children and young people. It was encouraging to have no mention of kayakers.

The right information

News on the Maritime & Coastguard Agency's activities is placed on their blog these days. An incident on Aug 21st saw eight kayak paddlers rescued from the mouth of Loch Nevis. The accompanying picture showed two kayakers in millpond conditions, posing the question why all eight capsized and were not able to self rescue. In answer to a question by PI it was admitted that the picture did not relate to the incident at all but was just a stock photo. Not only did it not show the group but it did not show the conditions, which were rough, for which they were fully kitted out.

Commander Matt West, their Maritime Operations Commander, said 'each kayaker was wearing a lifejacket, which meant we were able to find and rescue them quickly and safely.' That suggests that they would not have been found quickly if they had not been wearing lifejackets. The blog subheading said they 'were rescued by the Coastguard thanks to lifejackets', again with the same implications. Surely, they were found because there were eight kayakers in the water, visible and providing support.

The obvious question for us was whether they were competent. The MCA do not comment publicly on this. If a group are experienced why can they not say so, just as the report says they had the correct kit?

Equally, if they are a group of novice paying customers on their first trip, such as in the Haverfordwest weir paddleboard incident, then they should be able to find a form of factual words that give the lie of the land.

If we think back to the Bournemouth beach fatalities and the question of whether a boat captain should have been prosecuted then it is inevitable that there would have been much speculation as to what he might have done. It is only recently, from a parliamentary debate, that I learned that the issue in question was whether the boat had caused a rip flow.

The MCA's most informative report for us was the helicopter rescue from the River Moriston two years ago, giving the situation from the helicopter which hovered over the gorge for at least 13 minutes. This kind of information is highly instructive. If there is one thing better than learning from your mistakes it is learning from the mistakes of others, which is why we report on accidents, not for entertainment. People need to think why safety rules are suggested and follow them when appropriate, not obey them blindly.

Probably my longest day of paddling ever was from Red Point to Ullapool, mostly in smooth and hot conditions such as shown in the picture. At the mouth of Little Loch Broom, however, the wind went from calm to force 5 in a couple of boat lengths as it blasted out of the loch. I could see the change and stopped to put on my spraydeck and buoyancy aid before proceeding as hyperthermia was no longer a risk.

Eight kayakers rescued thanks to the right safety kit

September 06, 2023



Eight kayakers in trouble along the west coast of Scotland were rescued by the Coastguard thanks to lifejackets.