

Norwich access to be improved

The River Wensum Strategy is proposed to improve water quality in the river in Norwich with floating platforms of vegetation, floating restaurants and a Broads Authority river festival. It is expected to provide better access for canoeists in the city although paddling through the city is already unrestricted, many powered craft coming this far from the Broads.

Where now for Swansea Bay?

Failure of the Westminster Government to support financially the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon has also thrown into doubt five other tidal lagoons proposed around the coast and the development of what was proposed as a new green industry. Developers Tidal Lagoon Power still hope to find funding from elsewhere but have hinted that they may take the technology to Europe, even though the Welsh coast has one of the world's largest tidal ranges.

Shropshire jellyfish

Jellyfish some 20mm in diameter have been found in the Middlewich Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal. They are normally found in China's Yangtze river basin, are transparent, do not sting people and may have escaped from an ornamental pond.

Rubbish collection in Bridgwater

A group entitled Rage Against Rubbish are holding monthly clearups on the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal, mostly at the Bridgwater end. They use canoes and have had up to 35 people out together. The local YMCA boating club, sited on the canal, will lend canoes and buoyancy aids to those wishing to take part.

ACCESS & environment



The extension of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal to Liverpool's Albert Dock left a problem for canoeists in that the bottom lock of the Stanley flight had a large drop to the water for those portaging. PI took this up with CRT, who have now installed a ramp and pontoon to allow portage in either direction.

Scottish canals in crisis

The Scottish canals, of which there are relatively few, are in crisis with failing infrastructure. Closures to powered craft are not a major problem for canoes in the short term, able to portage obstructions. However, as we have seen with the EA in East Anglia, once powered craft are prevented from such waterways, vegetation grows up and the waterways become too choked even for canoes, perhaps not to the disappointment of those who prefer reeds to navigation.

Whitstable still unclear

Regarding the ban on using the beach at Whitstable (May, p19), the Marine Management Organisation have now responded and directed us to the Marico report, from which the following is noted.

- * Unusually, the beach is privately owned.
- * The public slipway may be used, although this is a long way from any reliable parking.
- * It is not known why the restricted area has been increased markedly in size.
- * Although there have been consultations, these have not been with beach users, swimmers or paddlers, presumably the majority of stakeholders, only with sailing interests.
- * Risk assessments seem to have related solely to collision with the oyster trestles, not with users having to go elsewhere or being prevented from launching or landing when travelling along the coast, especially when crossing the Swale.
- * Most paddlers are considered to be locals, close to the shoreline. While this may be true, others from outside the area and travelling further offshore may be at greater risk but are ignored.
- * Publicity to interested bodies and media has been poor or non-existent.

Because Whitstable Oyster Fishery Co refused to answer my emails I called in person but nobody was available to speak to me. The International Sea Kayak Association and *Canoeist* have had no communication whatsoever about the dangers arising from restrictions on use of the beach at Whitstable, other than what has been shown on the MMO website. Prevention of launching from or landing near the obvious carpark is also a significant inconvenience to local users.

What are the implications of ignoring the watersports ban which is now posted on the beach? In a dire

emergency it will be used but there will be times when the situation has not yet become that serious.

Beware the Ides of March

A Joint Statement on Access has been signed by top BC Officials and by Pam Bell of Waters of Wales. It plays up BC's Stronger Together concept. 'It advocates strongly that the best way to achieve the significant ambitions within the strategy is for all parties to work together and operate in a more united British Canoeing. The strategy encourages all who share its ambitions to regard themselves as a part of British Canoeing, to work as one team'. That BC will hold the reins is implicit, a concept not unique to access. For example, they were happy to have others do the work in publishing as long as they controlled the content and there are other areas where things do not happen without their approval.

In 2013 PI set up a meeting on access with then Waterways Minister Richard Benyon. Beforehand, the members of the group we were asked to assemble agreed unanimously and emphatically that the BCU should not be involved. It was well known that involvement of the union always resulted in any signs of access movement grinding to a halt. They have achieved nothing in access over many decades. As a sport they have been funded better and better by the Government, much better than some sports of comparable size. CRACK claimed 30 years ago that these two facts were not unrelated, that there would be cash if they did not rock the access boat, that canoeists kept off most rivers. The evidence is circumstantial. Indeed, it may be that the BCU themselves are the long running cause of our access problems.

The Federal Agreement is coming up for review but it is hard to see how this will change things. It was the introduction of federalization in the first place which allowed the SCA to break free of the BCU and contribute to the Land Reform Act confirming all Scottish rivers are open to boats at all times in normal circumstances. Canoe Wales dumped all their access agreements in one go, in contrast to the BCU's policy. This statement appears to relate to England only.

The call was for the BC board to 'Make an unequivocal commitment to campaign for legislation to secure open access for all recreational users of water and waterside, accompanied by a code of conduct.'

The code of conduct idea is fine. One accompanies the Land Reform (Scotland) Act and it has been around a lot longer in the Countryside Code. What is not acceptable is seeking changes in legislation without clarifying the present position which appears already to give us what we need, what is normal in other countries, and which contrary interests are so keen not to have clarified. New legislation cannot come without considering and adjusting existing conflicting legislation so it will have to come out into the open first. Only if clarification proves that we do not have a right of navigation and that our legislation really is the worst in the world do we need to call for something new. New legislation could well be worse than what appears to be already in existence and there are interests who would try to make that the case, not least Defra. The qualifications 'fair, shared, sustainable open access' may be desirable but should not be included in any legislation as they are all too easy to twist into an excuse for preventing the public right. At the first anniversary celebration of the National Rivers Authority, precursor