

Skeleton markers

A life sized metal open canoe skeleton has been installed in Leeds as a Desmond canoe trail marker. Others will be placed at Eldonian Village in Liverpool on the original line of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal and at Burscough, Wigan, Blackburn, Burnley and Skipton, also at Castleford, Knottingley and Goole on the Aire & Calder Navigation. Each will give the distance to Goole and Liverpool on this 261km route.

Welsh adventure hub approved

A £4,000,000 adventure hub is to receive EU funding. A visitor adventure centre will be built at Pontymoel canal basin on the Monmouth & Brecon Canal in Pontypool, there will be a new canal basin to the south of Sebastopol, the Cwmbran lock flight will be restored, a road having been built along it in 1954, and the public will be encouraged to use the high land westwards to the Crumlin Arm.

Not for novices

PI was concerned about an article in a local free magazine, suggesting that novices might like to paddle kayaks on the Thames in central London in the dark. Below Teddington Lock there are increasingly fast tidal flows and below Westminster there are also large washes thrown up by the Clipper ferries. This is not a place for novices, even in daylight.

EA licence charge consultation

The EA have held a consultation on their licence fees and related issues. Among points made by PI were:

- *The EA repeatedly use boaters as a cash cow.
- *Their increases repeatedly run way ahead of inflation.
- * They make a big issue of the licences which are compulsory for members of BC, the majority of whom do not use their waterways because they are not suitable for their interests or are not in their geographical areas.
- * Significant is the difficulty of obtaining a short term licence at short notice when the weather proves suitable. Having to speculate on the weather some days ahead is not just inconvenient, it can be dangerous and deaths have resulted from such a policy in the past when people have felt obliged to go on the days their licences allowed, even when conditions did not suit their abilities.
- * A body which cannot balance its books should look to get out of the business. They get little sympathy for refusing to let the CRT take control of the remaining navigations and then complaining that they cannot afford to look after them themselves. The CRT's licence fee increases are repeatedly much more modest than those of the EA.

* 'boat registration charges... contribute... 25% of the total amount spent on operational services' yet they are paid by perhaps only 3% of users of river corridors.

* 'Safe navigation... would not be possible without the network of... locks and weirs'. Most of our rivers would be improved for canoeing without these obstructions. However, where they do exist it is important that safe routes are available past them, not the case in a number of places. Why are combined canoe and fish passes not used as in other countries?

* Canoeist has probably not received any press releases from the EA in more than 20 years and it takes several weeks for press queries to receive responses. Other editors of national boating publications report the same. One was told that she could only receive river closure notices for the river on which she had paid a boat licence fee. The CRT issue information on their forthcoming licence fee increases, unlike the EA, and we usually issue relevant CRT press releases on their activities more than once a week.

* 'The team's role is to maintain the public right of navigation'. The EA say they do not express an opinion on whether there is a right of public navigation on 98% of the rivers in England and Wales although their website

claims there is no right of way for a river on which there is more than usual supporting evidence. They have refused to respond to academic supporting legal evidence presented to them from 2004 onwards, will not meet to discuss it and have made no attempt over many decades to improve the situation.

* 'We manage water levels to balance the many uses of the river, including boating'. There is repeated evidence that boating is given a low priority.

* 'respond to reports of obstructions in the navigation (such as trees)... if they are a serious danger or if they cannot be removed within a few days'. A large tree which fell across the Thames at water level between Cricklade and Lechlade and could only be passed by climbing over it in deep water posed a danger to users for several years before it was removed. Other dangers result from EA works, including unsafe designs for recent works.

Most of these are policy rather than funding issues.

Storm wrecks Llandysul centre

The Llandysul Paddlers Canoe Centre took the full force of the mid October storm. With the Teifi in flood, way over its banks, the centre building had up to 1.8m of water inside, knocking down walls and racking and washing away the contents of a tool shed, five trailers, 15 canoes, 15 kayaks and a 60 gate slalom course. Damage was put at £200,000. A call for help quickly brought in £14,000 in donations, volunteers from all over to help restore the building and others to supply them with food while they worked while yet more went down the river to recover boats and other missing equipment. The centre is an important facility for the village and there has been concern to get it operational again as quickly as possible.



Some boats can be adapted for speed.



Some can't. Careless parking in the Walney Channel at Vickerstown.