

Undercurrents

Nobody is above the law

New South Wales now requires paddlers to wear buoyancy aids at all times, although presumably not when they are swimming in the sea with no boat to hold onto. One transgressor was Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, who was fined several hundred dollars like everyone else.

Canoeing at Keswick

Keswick Mountain Festival over Jun 8-10th will have the usual dynamic mix of ingredients from the Peatbog Faeries to Timothy Taylor. Canoeing is one of the taster activities on offer.

Leisure symposium

The Athens Institute for Education & Research are organizing the third International Symposium on Leisure & Recreation on May 14/15th. The event will be in Athens, where the world association of academics and researchers are based.

K&A to be split

The CRT are reorganizing their management, as they do from time to time. Of particular concern this time is that the Kennet & Avon Canal will be split between two different regions.

Paddling poet

Oxford kayak paddler Nancy Campbell has been appointed the CRT's third canal laureate. Her first poem was about capsizing drill. She has spent several years in Greenland and Iceland.

More water

Work has been completed on the York stream in Maidenhead. This channel, long derelict, will form the western side of a loop allowing powered craft to return to the centre of the town.

Prince Charles has officially reopened Phase 1A of the Stroudwater Navigation, bringing the length in water to 6.4km with a further 1.6km being dredged by Cotswold Canal Trust volunteers. Consideration will now be given to the section from Ocean at Stonehouse to the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal, crossing the main railway from Birmingham to Bristol, the M5 and the A38, to allow powered craft from the outside world as far as Brimscombe Port, just onto the Thames & Severn Canal. Then there will be the matter of connecting through to the Thames at Lechlade via the partially collapsed Sapperton Tunnel. Meanwhile, planning is going ahead on the North Wilts Canal which connected the Thames & Severn Canal at Cricklade with the Wilts & Berks Canal at Swindon, the latter seeing successive reopenings of its main line which linked the Thames at Abingdon with the Kennet & Avon Canal near Melksham. A 1.2km section between Pewsham near Chippenham and Reybridge near Lacock has recently been returned to water. A little further away, the Hereford & Gloucester is being restored and the Somerset Coal Canal's restoration has just been given a significant boost by Bath & NE Somerset's Waterspace Plus study.

Ant restoration continues

Much of the River Ant was made navigable as the North Walsham & Dilham Canal for working craft, subject to restoration in recent years. Our guide (Aug 95 p37) started at Ebridge Mill but a further 1.6km upstream from Bacton Wood is back in water. Laurie Ashton, who owns the 3.7km from the original head of navigation at Swaffield bridge to Ebridge Mill, has been restoring Bacton Wood Lock. Work continues on restoring the final 2.1km but a trip boat is already operating from Ebridge.

Danger of magnets

Magnets are being used increasingly on mobile phone covers and as closures on items of clothing such as gloves. This runs the risk of compass polarity being reversed when kept in the vicinity of magnets and serious situations have developed in the mountains as a result. The advice is to keep compasses well away from magnets, especially in phone cases.

Granted

Phil Holden has secured a grant from Sport England for six K1s and paddles. These are to encourage flat water paddling in Shrewsbury Canoe Club.



lean.Ashley

Any ministry but Defra

Defra have stated that the transfer of EA river navigations to the CRT is not to go ahead. Once again the mood is 'any ministry but Defra' to run navigations or, for that matter, flood and coastal defences. Meanwhile, the CRT will concentrate on proposals to take over the Basingtoke Canal from Surrey and Hampshire county councils, a canal which has been dogged by water supply problems and restrictions. However, widespread support for the transfer (except by Thames users) continues and the EA were instructed to report back to Waterways Minister Thérèse Coffey with a revised proposal on Apr 26th.

A Lords Select Committee, to which PI responded, has said that Defra are focused too much on farming and agriculture. Their report talks of a consistent failure over a number of years to prioritize the 'rural affairs' aspect of their remit. The committee say that rural affairs should be transferred to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. Natural England is largely ineffective. Some of the worst spots for deprivation and intergenerational poverty are in rural England, worse than inner city areas. Not enough is being done to promote responsible access to the countryside. We need a body which works with the public, not against them.

Licence hikes

CRT annual licences have risen by 3% to £53.71 for a canoe under 5m long. The one day licence has risen by 3% to £4.49 but in 2019 this one day licence will be withdrawn, leaving the week licence as the cheapest option, meaning a tripling of the minimum licence fee for those who want to take only a brief outing on a canal or river navigation.

The EA, with a much shorter distance of water on offer, are imposing a massive 7.7% price rise for their canoe licences, the annual licence being £38.20 this year and a minimum licence of seven days at £9.10.

The Middle Level Bill is going through Parliament, allowing a licence fee to be charged here for the first time. A new clause to remember is that 'The Commissioners must ensure that the water in the waterways is maintained to a minimum depth of three feet across two thirds of the width of any defined navigable waterway. In the event that the said depth of water is not maintained no boater should be required to pay any charge.' It is not clear whether that would apply only at that point or everywhere.

The CRT say licence evasion is at a record low of 3.1%, down from 3.7% the previous year. Boat number increases are slowing down. London saw 2.4% growth in 2017/18 compared with 9% the previous year. The north increased 2.3% but the rest of the country was static.

Nene repairs

The EA have worked on several of the Nene locks this winter. They have talked of the possibility of additional landing stages and repair of existing ones without being specific. Most of the proposals relate to powered craft but there are some portages which need rethinking.

Anglers want paddlers as members

In direct competition to the BC union, the Angling Trust are now offering kayak membership at £29 per year, to include public liability insurance. CRT Riverboat Licence and Waterways Wanderer permit seems to be restricted to some 15% of canals and is an