

Artificial white water

The Americans now have over 40 white water parks. These have been designed with boulders dropped into rivers which previously lacked them.

Four decades of cold turkey

One of the more unlikely events on the calendar is Viking's Boxing Day Roll. Amazingly, this antidote to Christmas reached its 40th anniversary this winter.

Dreamtime plaque

It is 25 years since Paul Caffyn completed his solo Dreamtime Voyage around Australia. To mark the occasion, a basalt plaque has been erected during a reunion with support crew at Queenscliff in Port Philip Bay.

BMK route flagged up

The Bedford - Milton Keynes Waterway has had its route marked up on land use plans by Mid Bedfordshire District Council. This prevents other development on the line of the proposed canal link.

Scots clear litter

The Clear Water initiative was a month of litter picking events by SCA members to clear rivers, lochs and the coast of rubbish. The SCA are calling for the Government to fund a project to clear the entire Scottish coast of litter.

BW moves

BW chief executive Robin Evans is to attend meetings at 18 venues around Britain over the next couple of months to discuss matters of interest with users. Details of times and venues is available from www.britishwaterways.co.uk/askbw.

• BW have moved their head office to a less salubrious location in Watford. Their boat licensing department had already moved to their Leeds office.

Undercurrents

Dead man walking

You probably cannot remember when a canoeist last made the day's main news story. You will certainly not be able to remember when he held that position for well over a week. Such was the situation for the recovery of 56 year old John Darwin. In March 2002 he paddled out from his house at Seaton Carew on the Hartlepool seafront in calm conditions but did not return. A major sea search failed to find him. Six weeks later his damaged kayak turned up. Local fishermen were dubious. They know the local currents and it should not have ended up where it did. During the search, one of the searchers had suggested they should be looking in Malaga.

Darwin's body was never found, perhaps because he was not dead. In November 2007 he walked into a London police station and said he was a missing person with no recollection of the previous 5 years. Even his amnesia did not fit the usual pattern.

His wife, Anne, had sold the family home several weeks earlier and emigrated to Panama.



So, where had he been? Allegedly, he had been secreted away in the house in Seaton Carew when he wasn't making journeys to various places in Europe and beyond. Having run up significant debts, his life insurance had been claimed and a large mortgage debt cleared. In the search for him, someone typed 'John', 'Anne' and 'Panama' into Google and there was a photograph of them with a property agent, looking surprisingly tanned and healthy. They are said to have been setting up a hotel in Panama to run canoeing holidays. It seems his parents did not know he was still alive. Neither did his sons, who immediately disowned him, which the police accepted, even though both sons had just terminated their respective employments. Cleveland police already had a file open on him for 3 months after a work colleague had overheard Anne on the telephone to John.

A former prison officer, he was not known to John Ramwell, himself a former prison officer in the north of England who ran the ISKA and introduced many to sea kayaks from both inside and outside the service. Darwin and his wife were also property owners, letting to others. A series of deception and other charges have still to come before the courts. John is claimed to have turned himself in at this time because he was missing his sons.

• The manageress of Hartlepool public house Sinatra's, being refurbished, is proposing a new name related to the story and hopes to have a selection of canoes on display. Darwin's, the Seaton Canoe, the Lost Canoeist and the Panama have all been suggested but there will be no portrait.

Government restores peace with waterway interests

Relationships between the IWA, BW and the Government have taken a turn for the better after the appointment of a new Waterways Minister and the

Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Committee report on British Waterways. While BW has kept a diplomatic silence, the IWA have been quick to welcome the new Minister for Waterways, Jonathan Shaw, the MP for Chatham & Aylesford. IWA chairman John Fletcher said 'A new page has been turned in the chapter of what has mostly been a very productive chapter of relationships with Government over several years'. The outgoing Minister was Barry Gardiner, who had been at the centre of the row over cuts in grants to BW and the EA and who caused widespread anger by his claim that BW had not been transparent with him. Numerous public demonstrations against his policies had been held around the country in November 2006 by boaters, not the kind of people usually seen as militants. These were repeated in March 2007, this time joined by other users of the inland waterways such as walkers, cyclists and anglers. The users of small boats were also unhappy with the Brighton University proposals for voluntary access agreements as the way to facilitate use of the rivers in England and Wales, a scheme launched in October 2006 by Gardiner with pilot schemes which are already mostly in disarray. Shaw promises good communications between DEFRA and BW and will consider the EFRA Committee recommendations on funding of BW. The EFRA Committee report concludes that BW generally does a good job BW does receive some rebuke over its lack of transparency and the way it relates to its stakeholders.

• Michael Fabricant secured his second Adjournment Debate on the subject of canal funding, well supported with at least four of the dozen speakers being women MPs. Fabricant suggested that those responsible for bird flu, foot and mouth and blue tongue should pay for it, not canal users. Susan Kramer said the waterways must cease being DEFRA's Cinderella. Anne McIntosh claimed DEFRA were reeling from one disaster to the next. Winding up, Jonathan Shaw, who had received a much warmer welcome than his predecessor, claimed that the waterways were not DEFRA's Cinderella and that BW were getting more financial support than some national parks. Each canal restoration increases the responsibilities on BW. His most important point was that he wanted BW to get flat cash for the next three years.

• The Government have responded to the EFRA Committee report and are most enthusiastic about the topic of relationships, particularly with the new Minister. Restoration can take place where its upkeep can be paid for by its users. Licence fees being kept at a level to encourage individual participation do not receive clear support. Developing an environmental heritage strategy gets some support although BW is seen as only a minor player in dealing with flood risk management.

Trips

Seth Warren and Tyler Bradt are claiming the longest road trip, 34,000km in 9 months from Alaska to southern Argentina. They ran 37 rivers, surfed 14 beaches, used only biofuel and visited dozens of schools.

Tyler Bradt and Rush Sturges are claiming an altitude record. They ran the 33m Alexandra Falls in Canada.

Sandy Robson took a large bite out of her schedule