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Canal Boat WELCOME

April 2020

Watching four TV celebrities bash their way along the Forth and Clyde, Leeds & Liverpool and the Grand Union, it's clear that they dodged a bullet.

Battered by storms Ciara and Dennis, the network is now reeling in the aftermath of truly Biblical weather.

Response teams were swift to react to make sites safe but now the CRT faces a mammoth task and announcements on reopening schedules won't be made for some time.

Fortunately, it appears that the damage is not as widespread as four years ago and did not bring as much flooding as feared. But funds will be required – early estimates put the bill between £4-5m.

All eyes will be on the skies as we prepare to return to the water and we aim to keep you up to date with repair plans.

On a lighter note, one of the boating stars was Pete Waterman, who dropped in on Tim Coghlan at Braunston Marina as part of the C5 series. He'll return in June to open the Historic Narrowboat Rally & Canal Festival. Well, with a surname like that...

Christopher McGine



Pete Waterman with Tim Coghlan at Braunston

Meet the *Canal Boat* team



Christopher McGine

A writer for 35 years, he fell in love with the waterways after living near the Canal du Midi



Adam Porter

A journalist in print and broadcast for some 25 years and a boater for almost as long



Tony Brooks

What he doesn't know about canal boats just isn't worth knowing



Andy Annable

Marine/aviation stills and video photographer and CAA-approved drone pilot but still won't do weddings



Martin Ludgate

Our Deputy Ed is quite simply a guru on all things connected with our canals



Melissa Blease

With skills in creative cuisine, our writer is the perfect ally in the galley



Andy Summers

Our *Canal Boat* designer is a keen angler and loves life by the banks of our wonderful canals

CB APRIL 2020



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CRUISE GUIDE



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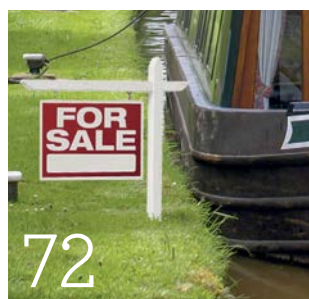
As they struggle under the impact of storms Ciara and Dennis, the waterways have a new celebrity ally in the form of Pete Waterman

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This month's Boat Test boat by Knights Narrowboats, photographed by Andy R Annable



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CANAL BOAT NEWS

Your monthly feast of all the gossip
and news from the waterways of
Great Britain and beyond

Tell us your news
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Storms hit Pennine routes

Storms Ciara and Dennis have made themselves felt on the north of England's canals and rivers, with the Rochdale Canal and Calder & Hebble Navigation bearing the brunt of the impact – and no firm news expected for some time on when they will reopen.

Although there have been problems across large parts of the network, in most areas this has largely been limited to wind-blown trees (plus a building roof which landed on Perry Barr Locks on the BCN) and high water levels closing river navigations (and in some cases such as the Severn and Soar, damage might not be apparent until the floods recede). But as in the 2015-16 floods, it has been the two waterways which form the route through the Calder valley in West Yorkshire which have suffered serious damage to the fabric of the navigations (not to mention to a number of boats beached by the floods) from the waters of the swollen Calder.

Canal Boat spoke to David Baldacchino, CRT Head of Safety & Operations Support, who confirmed that the major issues involved three sites:

- Figure of Three Locks, Calder & Hebble Navigation. Here, flood water has washed out almost almost the entire lockside behind one of the lock chamber walls – as well as filling much of the chamber with material carried by the floods. The lock wall itself is still standing, but how much of it will need to be taken down and rebuilt is not yet

clear, and until it can be examined more closely Mr Baldacchino can only say that it seems likely that it will take “a number of months” to repair.

- White Lee culvert, Mytholmroyd, Rochdale Canal. A culvert carrying a stream under the canal “blew up” into the canal as a result of pressure from the swollen waters of the stream, and when levels receded the canal emptied into the damaged culvert, which will need to be rebuilt.
- Between Locks 15 and 16, east of Todmorden. A length of towpath, which in this area forms a narrow causeway with the canal on one side and the river and floodplain on the other, has been damaged by the river. Although this only affects the ‘back’ of the path, and the canal side is sound, it will need rebuilding and the canal water has been lowered as a precaution. These two problems on the Rochdale are also likely to take quite some months to repair.

Elsewhere erosion and cracking of the towpath, damage to the washwalls (canal side walls), and large amounts of silt and rubble deposited have affected both waterways at various places along the Calder Valley.

We asked Mr Baldacchino how the damage compared to the floods of four years earlier. His response was that the damage appeared less severe – and indeed not quite as bad as had been anticipated at one point, as Storm Dennis didn't bring

quite as much flooding to this area as had been feared. And regarding how well the repair work following the earlier floods had stood up, he replied that sadly some will need to be redone – and unfortunately, there was some work actually in hand which could have helped reduce the damage this time.

It would, he added, be “a balancing act” given the available funds to decide what should be repaired to the same standard, and what should be more heavily reinforced.

And on the subject of available funds, he suggests that it might cost £4-5m to repair the damage this time.

Then there will be the impact of any maintenance work elsewhere which needs to be deferred to spare the funds and resources; the effect on any scheduled maintenance delayed by floods; and the level of collaboration achieved with other bodies such as Calderdale Council to ensure that the waterways are properly considered in flood plans.

As we went to press, CRT was still in the very early stages of moving on from the initial response (and Mr Baldacchino paid tribute to the Trust's response teams for getting out there and making the sites safe) and into planning for repairs – and meantime the weather remained very unsettled. We hope to bring you an update with more definite information on repair plans in the next issue.



ANGLIAN RIVERS

ANGLIAN BOATERS FINED

Recent recovery of unpaid boat registration fees through the courts has brought the total recovered by the Environment Agency in the 2019-20 financial year to almost £100,000. The EA is the navigation authority for a

number of rivers including the Thames and Medway, but the recent nine court cases relate to its Anglian rivers, Nene, Great Ouse and tributaries, where the Agency has been cracking down on boaters not registering their

craft (similar to licensing, and required for all craft kept on the rivers).

Two boaters from Bedford were ordered to pay £1,149.24 and £1,014.24 in fines, costs, victim surcharges and unpaid fees after

pleading guilty to keeping unregistered craft at the Great Ouse's Priory Marina, while two boaters with unregistered vessels at Oundle Marina on the Nene also had to pay up. Altogether there were nine prosecutions.



ANDERTON LIFT

Lift doors open...

Visitors are pictured inspecting the machinery deck at the top of the Anderton Lift, as the unique structure opened its doors during one of the Canal & River Trust's series of public open days showcasing winter maintenance work under way.

On a Saturday in February, more than 2,000 people took advantage of the opportunity to explore the lift including a rare chance to climb down underneath the caissons which raise and lower boats 50ft

between the River Weaver and the Trent & Mersey Canal, during a family day of free activities.

Sadly the arrival of Storm Ciara put paid to plans for a second day on the Sunday, while Storm Dennis put the kybosh on the first of a series of planned open weekends and children's activities at Foxton staircase Locks in Leicestershire the following weekend; however the remaining Foxton weekends up to 7-8 March were still on schedule as we went to press.

'Improper mooring' targeted

As promised by the Canal & River Trust last year, 'improper mooring' has now joined non-compliant continuous cruising as the target of an enforcement process which could ultimately lead to boaters having to leave the waterways if they fail to comply.

Improper mooring covers a multitude of sins including tying up:

- On a lock landing
- On a water point while not using it
- In a way that obstructs navigation
- Near a weir
- On a canoe launching place
- Opposite a turning point
- On a sharp bend

CRT's Matthew Symonds said that "much of the time a boater may not realise that the way they're moored may be causing a problem", so the first step will be a "polite reminder" in the form of a letter and explanatory mooring booklet sent to the licence holder. However if boaters don't mend their ways this will be followed by a formal reminder, a final warning, and a notice suspending the boat's licence and instructing the boater to move to a specified location while an investigation concludes whether to terminate the licence – which would mean them having to sell their boat or move off CRT's waters.

LLANGOLLEN CANAL

HURLESTON WIDENING ON TRACK

The Llangollen Canal's Hurleston Bottom Lock is pictured (below) with work to rebuild one lock wall under way, as the Canal & River Trust's winter work programme aims for completion on or near the target of 13 March – barring any further weather-related delays.

The Hurleston work aims to cure problems with wall movement in recent years which has narrowed the chamber to the point where boats were getting stuck.

Meanwhile several stoppages have been delayed as a result of the storms – for example works on the Lune Aqueduct have been extended to 9 April, while the Sheffield Canal will not reopen until 31 March. However as we went to press, barring any further serious 'weather events' CRT believed most major works were on track for completion.

Canal Boat visited the Hurleston site and also an embankment lining project at Bollington on the Macclesfield to check up on progress: see our feature on page 42.



Hurleston lock wall being rebuilt in concrete

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Change at the top...

The election of two liveaboard boaters, an active boat club member and boat handling trainer, and the owner of the same boat for almost half a century, have ensured that boater representation on the Canal & River Trust's governing body will cover a wide spectrum of boating backgrounds and interests for the next four years.

The successful candidates in the elections for the four representatives of private boating on the charity's Council are:

- Tim Allen, active member of a boat club, with charity experience outside of the waterways, and also an RYA trainer (using his boat under a roving trader licence), as well as a member of the Royal Yachting Association's inland navigation panel, in a position to help to influence all navigation authorities, not just CRT.
- Helen Hutt, an experienced liveaboard single-handed narrowboater, with a mooring on the Avon but navigating most of the system. A council member of the National Association of Boat Owners (and member of RBOA and IWA), she says she will campaign for better boater facilities and improved maintenance.
- Dave Mendes da Costa, a liveaboard narrowboater who has chaired the London Branch of the National Barge Travellers Association, helping to set up the Lea Boaters Collective which challenged the authorities' handling of a major oil spill; he says he will challenge the reduction of CRT staff with knowledge and experience.
- Phil Prettyman, the only representative who stood for re-election, who has owned a camping narrowboat since 1972. Involved in negotiations on issues such as dredging, he sees his role on CRT Appointments Committee as being to look for genuine enthusiasm for waterways, and has encouraged staff and

trustees to get on the water.

Although the 'turnout' of 2,556 voters showed a modest increase from 1860 last time, it was still low compared to the 7,556 who voted in the first CRT elections in 2012, and compared with the total of something in the region of 30,000 eligible to vote.

Elections were also held for representatives of volunteering (existing member Ian McCarthy was re-elected alongside new member David Williams); CRT staff (John Ellis was elected); and business boating (Heather Duncan of family business Union Canal Carriers and head of ABC Leisure Carl Onens were elected).

Finally Stella Ridgway, former NABO Chair (and a current council member representing private boating), was elected unopposed to represent the Friends of CRT, the other candidate in the rescheduled election having withdrawn.

The new council meets for the first time in March.

...BUT NO CHANGE AT THE TOP HERE

The same two sites have come top in the annual Canal & River Trust Annual Lockage Report, showing that the Oxford and Llangollen canals retain their popularity – but at the same time the report shows some interesting trends.

Once again regular winner Hillmorton Locks on the north Oxford, handy for numerous marinas and featuring in two cruising rings, came top with 8,362 operations in 2019.

But that's for a pair of side-by-side locks; the busiest individual lock was at New Marton on the Llangollen Canal, operated 7,711 times.

However both of these declined since 2018, and perhaps Lock 4 at



A rare quiet moment at the canal system's busiest locks, New Marton

Cholmondeston, in third place with 7,545, could catch up next year.

In fact Cholmondeston, on the Middlewich Arm of the Shropshire Union, was one of a few places in the north west which saw a 'bounce back' after reopenings following long-term closures for repairs at the Middlewich breach

and Marple Locks.

The rest of the network, in contrast, saw a slight decline (some of it due to restrictions due to water shortage), with a number of waterways recording drops of between 5 percent and 10 percent, all regions except the north west seeing at least a small fall, and overall, national

total lockage falling 16 percent. And finally, for those wanting quiet boating it seems that the Pennines (particularly the Rochdale and Huddersfield), Pocklington, Chesterfield and northern BCN are the places to go, with many figures of under 500 lockages.

TOW PATH TELEGRAPH

Showcasing restoration

Last year's canal restoration showcase hosted by historic Manchester Ship Canal steamer *Daniel Adamson* in Liverpool is to be repeated on 22-23 August, but with the *Dam* moored at the Anderton Lift. Once again it will feature displays and talks by restoration groups from the north western quarter of the country, but in addition to last year's projects (which included the Lancaster, Montgomery, Shrewsbury & Newport and Runcorn Locks), there will be new appearances by the Stafford, Uttoxeter, Burslem, Hollinwood, Stockport and Plas Kyanston schemes.

Tim & Pru retire

Actors Timothy West and Prunella Scales, the couple who have presented the TV series *Great Canal Journeys* since 2014, have announced their retirement amid her continuing battle with dementia. They filmed their final episode last year, and have given their best wishes to new presenters Shelia Hancock and Gyles Brandeth.

Boost for President

The appeal by the Friends of President to raise £80,000 to replace the historic steam working narrowboat has been boosted by £20,000 from Braunston Marina, matching a similar sum from the boat's owners the Black Country Living Museum.



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Future looking more hopeful?
This bridge in Glasgow was one of four whose failure closed the Forth & Clyde and Union canals

SCOTTISH CANALS

Major funding boost for Scots waterways

The annual grant from the Scottish Government to Scottish Canals has been boosted by an increase of £8.2m for the 2020-21 financial year, raising the total by more than 50 percent from £15m to £23.2m, and potentially putting the system back on track in terms of the additional funding requirements identified in a 2018 report.

The news follows a worrying couple of years especially for the Lowland (Forth & Clyde and Union) canals, which were hit by a series of liftbridge failures that cut the coast-to-coast route in three places as well as cutting off the Edinburgh terminus, with no cash available to replace the unsafe mechanisms. Following campaigning by waterways organisations and businesses the Scottish Government took

action, with three tranches of extra money totalling over £7m awarded in the second half of 2018, enabling reopening of the bridges plus other overdue engineering work and investment in new equipment. However at the same time an Asset Management report gave a stark warning that without something like £6m extra every year, the system would continue to deteriorate and for some section, permanent closure was on the cards.

The newly announced increase, if sustained in following years (and there's no guarantee that it will be, unlike the Canal & River Trust's 15-year contract, where the main concern is what might happen after it ends in 2027) could stave off these fears. The Scottish Government said it would "ensure that regeneration

and sustainability work continues apace", citing recent large-scale renewals and rebuilding work on the Caledonian and Union canals, while SC Chief Executive Catherine Topley added that she was "excited to be at the helm of what is sure to be a period of continued transformation and success", and SC Chairman Andrew Thin promised that a priority would be to work together with other public, private and charity bodies to share ideas about protecting Scotland's canals for the future.

A three-year plan due out the start of the new financial year will "outline Scottish Canals' strategic priorities and vision" and could give some more clarity on how that future is likely to pan out.

FEN FEES ON THE WAY

As we went to press, the introduction of licences and fees on the Middle Level Navigations, the system of Fenland drainage and navigation channels linking the Great Ouse and Nene, was still planned for this year.

The waterways have up until now been free to navigate, with no licences and no requirement for insurance or a Boat Safety Scheme

certificate, but following the passing of an Act of Parliament allowing their introduction all of these are to be brought in by new bylaws created by the Middle Level Commissioners. They are set to come into effect from the 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 year, with the MLC contacting individual boat owners during February. Fees will be broadly similar to Environment Agency

registration fees on the Nene and Great Ouse, but with a 15 percent discount for the first year, and with no requirement for a BSC certificate during the first year.

The Commissioners say that they will work with the EA to make licensing as simple and straightforward as possible for those using the network to transit between the Nene and Great Ouse.

TOW PATH TELEGRAPH

Backing for Monty funding

Local politicians are backing a bid for restoration funding for the Montgomery Canal from the Mid Wales Growth Deal fund. The Government has pledged £55m to the funding pot, which it is hoped that the Welsh Assembly will match. Conservative MP Craig Williams and Assembly Member Russell George are backing a bid for the canal's reopening to be included in projects supported by the Fund, having met with Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust leading members John Dodwell and Michael Limbrey.

Shroppie marina?

A proposal to build a new marina at Market Drayton on the Shropshire Union Canal has been included in Shropshire Council's 'place plan' for the town. The idea, proposed in the past as part of a development of 300-400 houses alongside a 300 berth mooring basin, was described as "phenomenal" by local councillor Mark Whittle, who said it would bring dozens of jobs to the town.

Boater for CRT London role

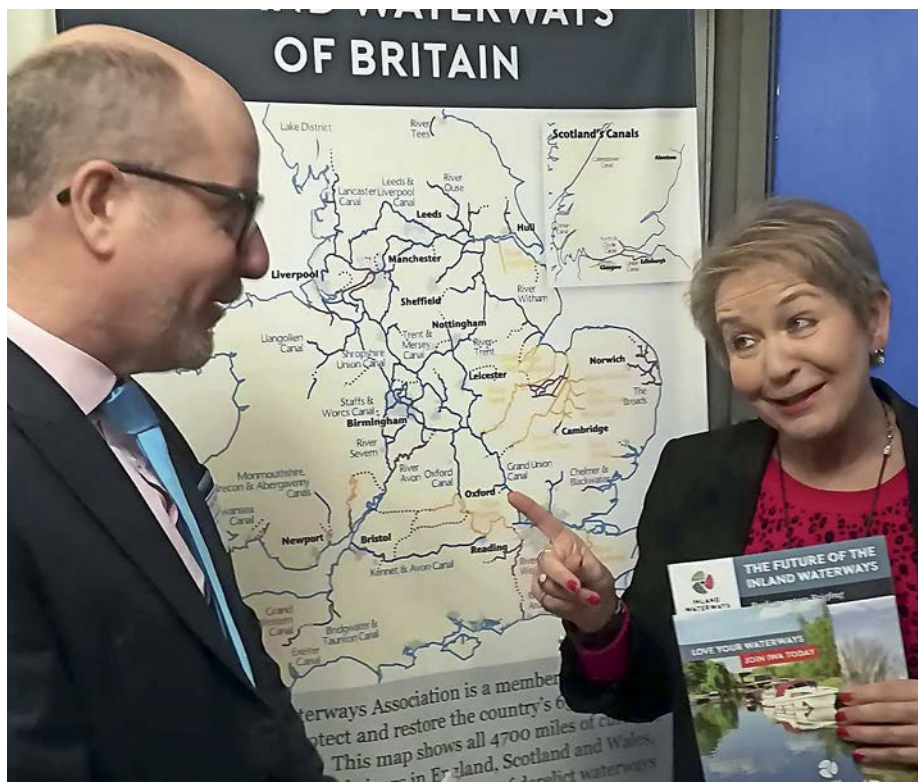
Liveaboard boater Sarah Lee is the Canal & River Trust's new London & South East Region boating and customer service manager. She takes over from Sorwar Ahmed, who, after six years, moves on to interim community engagement manager.

IWA meets new MPs...

The Inland Waterways Association's new national Chairman Paul Rodgers is pictured discussing the waterways network with Rosie Winterton, MP for Doncaster Central, at a parliamentary reception held to brief MPs in the new Parliament and members of the House of Lords about the waterways - and to encourage them to join the All Party Parliamentary Group for Waterways (APPGW).

Hot topics for IWA included the need to ensure that public funding continues when the 15-year Canal & River Trust contract ends in 2027, and issues of heritage, sustainability, restoration and regeneration.

Altogether 60 people attended, and a number showed an interest in joining the APPGW, which forms a useful resource for communication between Parliament and other bodies on the subject of the waterways (and for which IWA provides the secretarial support), but according to parliamentary procedures must be re-constituted after each General Election.



ASHBY CANAL

...AWARDS ITS FIRST WATERWAYS IN PROGRESS GRANT...

The Ashby Canal Trust's project to restore the derelict northern reaches of the canal has been awarded £10,000 by the Inland Waterways Association, as the first of four schemes sharing the £100,000 IWA Waterways in Progress Award.

The grant takes its name from a report published by IWA, highlighting how canal restoration projects whose timescales may run into decades can deliver benefits right from the start (for example by channelling

local regeneration, preserving heritage or helping communities) while not losing sight of the long-term objective of opening the canal - indeed, these short-term gains can help build partnerships which keep things moving forward. The grants are therefore specifically for projects which facilitate wider benefits in the short term, to bring in support for full reopening in due course.

In the case of the Ashby, this is the Ashby Canal Trail which - thanks to the IWA grant

- will now create a safe pathway from the current limit of the main navigable length at Snarestone to the next restoration objective of Measham. Opening the route (which follows part of the original canal line plus a diversion via an old railway) to walkers will provide benefits for local people and form a first step towards opening the canal.

The remaining three projects to benefit from the IWA award were still to be announced as we went to press.

Response on clean air shake-up

The Inland Waterways Association has replied to the Government's Call for Evidence on Air Pollutant Emissions from Domestic Vessels and Inland Waterways - which seeks to gauge the issues of engine exhausts and other emissions (in the context of the Government target of being 'net zero' on greenhouse gases by 2050), what barriers there are in the way of emissions reduction, and how these might be mitigated.

IWA's response is that while emissions from inland boats are relatively small (and mainly from high speed craft) they

will become more significant as pollution from roads is cut, and that stoves and engines used for generation are particularly affecting some areas (such as London and Oxford). IWA therefore supports more charging points to (it sees the lack of these as a main barrier to mitigation of emissions - along with the long life of canal boats meaning that gradual wholesale replacement of craft over the years with less polluting ones is far less practicable than with road vehicles), and more Government research into alternative fuels such as

combinations of electric, solar, hybrid, hydrogen, and ground source heat pumps - together with the development of the necessary refuelling infrastructure..

IWA also proposes more incentives (such as licence discounts) for electric boats, feels that a solution to the 'chicken and egg' situation regarding fuelling might be to begin with hire fleets (such as the electric ones on the Monmouthshire & Brecon) and believes more research is needed into biodiesel, hydrogen conversion, battery power and wind generation.

Bruce Napier R.I.P.

One of the founders of the Braidbar Owners' Group, Bruce Napier, has died, almost exactly a year after becoming ill with what was later diagnosed as cancer.

Having had shares in two boats, Bruce and his wife, Sheila, had their first boat built in the winter of 2003-4 by Braidbar Boats – after he'd retired early from his job as a clinical psychologist. They lived on *Sanity* for six years, before having *Sanity Again* built – another Braidbar, but longer.

Bruce was an enthusiastic supporter of Braidbar Boats, setting up the Owners' Group, helping to organise owners' days and open days at the yard in Cheshire, and marshalling volunteers to help out at the Crick Boat Show. The former owner of Braidbar, Peter Mason, said a love of boating ran through Bruce's veins; the current owners, James Attwood and Donna Hitchen said he had a cheeky humour and extensive knowledge.

Bruce and Sheila also volunteered at many IWA



Bruce Napier

National Festivals and Canalway Cavalcades at Little Venice. They also showed their extensive knowledge by routinely winning Canal Boat's Christmas Quiz.

Bruce leaves his wife, Sheila, two children, and two grandchildren.

HS2 WATERWAYS CAMPAIGN GOES ON

Although there have already been changes to the plans for the HS2 high speed railway to reduce its impact on the canals, the Inland Waterways Association has vowed to "continue our decade-long campaign to protect the waterways from the worst effects of its construction and operation" following the Government's announcement that it will go ahead.

Changes already introduced include:

- IWA helping persuade

the Government to change the route of a spur railway line near Lichfield to avoid two crossings of the Trent & Mersey Canal near Fradley Junction

- Working with Lichfield Cruising Club and Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust to secure agreement that HS2 will create a new canal restoration route and mooring basin when railway construction impacts the Club



One of HS2's future impacts on the canals near Crewe

moorings and original Lichfield canal line. However IWA is still concerned at the impact on the quiet Oxford Canal summit, the Trent & Mersey at Great Haywood, and the later phases of the railway which will affect 16 waterways in 22 locations including the Trent & Mersey north of Middlewich, and the Ashby and Chesterfield restoration schemes.



REGENT' CANAL

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, LONDON'S CANAL!

Exactly 200 years ago this year, London's Regent's Canal opened – and the London Canal Museum and other organisations in the capital are making sure that the anniversary of the eight-mile waterway linking Little Venice to Limehouse Basin is appropriately marked, with a series of events throughout 2020.

These began with an

entertaining illustrated talk at the Museum by Lester Hillman which managed to link the canal with various important figures from history, the non-existent Canals of Mars, and a table ornament at the dinner celebrating the Regency of Prince George! Forthcoming events include a temporary exhibition at the

Museum running from May to August, two exhibitions at Tower Hamlet Archives on the subject of the East End canals, a guided towpath walk highlighting the canal's historic features, a photographic competition run by the museum, an East End Canal Festival at Mile End promoted by Regent's Canal Heritage on 1 August,

and a book *East End Canal Tales* – see review on page 14.

The anniversary will also be the theme of this year's Canalway Cavalcade, the popular annual festival at Little Venice organised by the Inland Waterways Association.

For details of events and activities run at or by the museum, see canalmuseum.org.uk/whatson

TOW PATH TELEGRAPH

The Crick feelgood factor

Sunday night headliners in the entertainments marquee at the Crick Boat Show this year have been confirmed as veteran rockers Doctor Feelgood. They will be joined on the show entertainments bill by Queen tribute band Mercury on the Saturday evening and 13 other acts entertaining the visitors all weekend. Show tickets have already gone on sale, with reductions for advance bookings – see crickboatshow.com. We will be previewing the show in next month's *Canal Boat*.

T&M towpath upgrade

The Canal & River Trust has secured external funding for improvement of length of the Trent & Mersey Canal towpath in the Rugeley area. The £437,240 project to upgrade the length from Leathermill Lane to the A51 bridge on the Rugeley Bypass is supported by Staffordshire Council and three local authorities.

Brum's next development

Birmingham's next big canalside regeneration and development scheme has been given the go-ahead, with a £165m project approved which will see 750 homes built on derelict land bordered by the BCN Soho Loop. It follows on from developments already under way on the canal's Icknield Port Loop.

Tracking network's otters

The CRT is carrying out the largest-ever survey of the otter population in the West Midlands after sightings of the protected animals in the heart of Birmingham.

The survey will establish where otters, once hunted to the brink of extinction, have been making a surprising come-back. Initial research suggests that the animals are making use of the region's canals for the first time since the waterways were built.

Since the 1950s the number of otters on Britain's rivers has been in decline due to a combination of habitat loss, persecution and the use of pesticides. Over recent years otter numbers have been making a comeback due to better water quality and efforts to improve their habitats. There is now evidence of otter territories being found in the heart of Birmingham, in the canal near to Brindleyplace.

Tom Wilding, environmental scientist for the Canal & River Trust, said: "Our previous survey helped us identify a number of otters living across the West Midlands region using our canals. This year we are hoping to find that these otters are still here and that we have even more living along our waterways."

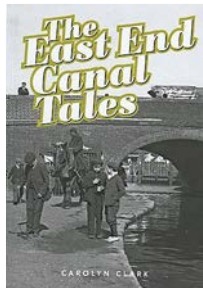


REVIEWS:

The East End Canal Tales

Since it opened exactly 200 years ago the Regent's Canal has cut a path through London's East End. And as this book published by the London Canal Museum to mark the anniversary shows, it has also cut through a slice of East London life – with its colourful (and sometimes dubious) characters and activities. Using the collected memories of the people who lived and worked there, chapters cover life on the canal – the long-distance narrowboats, the local lighter traffic, the hazards such as horses falling in the canal or of trying to steer a towpath tractor hauling a barge while feeling your way along in a 'pea souper' fog with one outstretched hand on the wall – and the canalside trades that were its lifeblood. These included numerous gasworks ("gas workers are very rough and drink like fishes" observed a visitor in 1899), chemical works, drug companies (Wenlock basin was found to be full of medicine

bottles when it was finally dredged in the 1980s), timber yards with their attendant fire hazards, foundries and glue factories – you could tell where you were on the canal, just from the smells. And then there was the life around the canal – especially for children, for whom it was an added attraction that it was officially a no-go area for most of its life. Access was blocked off by barbed wire, locked gates and hoardings at bridges, so you needed to know where you could squeeze through the railings to get to your unofficial adventure playground and swimming pool, at risk of drowning or 'catching it' if your parents found you'd been there. It wasn't just the kids that got up to things they shouldn't, either – robbers would go over the wall and use the towpath as a getaway; barge steerers would get a bash on the head as they went through a bridge, and



have a few sacks of coal missing when they came to their senses; stolen goods (and occasionally bodies) would be dumped in the water; and there's a report of an 18-year-old prostitute plying her trade by the cut with

"a vocabulary that would have shocked a sergeant-major" and who thought nothing of diving into the icy water in January to evade arrest. And there were the war years, with everything from the 'Idle Women' female narrowboat crews to some of the Dunkirk 'little ships' arriving via the canal, the devastating effects of the bombing on the canalside industries (one V-bomb hit a gasholder and set fire to two million cubic feet of gas), and the bravery of the fire-watchers. The canal has many tales to tell, and many of them are in this book. *The East End Canal Tales*, Carolyn Clark, London Canal Museum, canalmuseum.org.uk, £9.95, 978-1-5272-5407-7

AND FINALLY...

Canal campaigning takes many forms, but one couple in Poland appear to have found a new one. Well, actually a new way of campaigning against a canal.

There are controversial plans for a short new canal cutting through from the Vistula Lagoon to the Black Sea: those in favour (including the Polish Government) say it's necessary for waterborne trade and national security, as the only route now available goes through a Russian enclave, giving Russia control over Poland's trade. But it will cause serious harm to the environment, say its opponents including environmental campaigners Mayra Wojciechowicz and Rudolf Robak. To mark St Valentine's Day, in a scene reminiscent of John Lennon & Yoko Ono's more famous 1969 bed-ins for world peace, they set up a double bed on the site of the (as it were) canal bed, and held a naked in-bed protest, complete with "Make Love Not Canal" posters.



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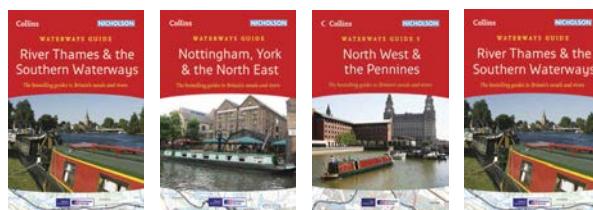
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Contact Editor, Canal Boat, Cumberland House,
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LETTERS

Fears for wildlife on Lancaster?

Lancaster Canal Trust is laying almost 24,000 concrete blocks to hold down a waterproof liner on a restored section of canal, to extend the Stainton to Crooklands section, owned by Canal & River Trust. Canal builders used clay.

I asked Lancaster Trust if there has been any ecological study on how concrete blocks will affect wildlife. I received no answer.

I contacted CRT to ask if were they happy with blocks. I was told they would look into it and reply. Despite reminders, I received no reply.

Sir David Attenborough says it should be resolved locally.

The Environment Agency is against concrete blocks, which turn the water alkaline, but "were not contacted, as this is a man made structure".

Inland Waterways Association and several other organisations or groups produced no reply. Meanwhile, over 50 per cent of bumble bees and pollinators have gone, wild birds and butterflies are in decline. Dormice, which have been



around 30 million years, and other small animals are in decline.

Micro organisms in the Lancaster canal are in decline and 50 percent of swans have gone from a 15-mile stretch of the Lancaster in the last three years.

This lack of interest causes great concern and we must learn to live with nature and stop giving them problems.

Frank Sanderson
Kendal



WHY IS NOBODY HAVING FUN ON WIDEBEAMS?

Widebeams seem to be more popular than ever and having been on them at Crick, I can appreciate the amount of space they give.

I prefer the look of narrow beams and on every boat we have hired they always have room to seat a minimum of four around the dinette whichever style is fitted.

Can you please explain why every widebeam I have seen in tests, adverts or been on at shows only ever has seating for two people usually at a breakfast bar.

Despite offering four permanent beds there is never a permanent dinette or four chairs or stools!

In a widebeam test you featured, the couple had their two teenage children living on board as well yet only two stools featured in the photos.

What's going on here? Don't people eat or entertain on their widebeam despite having all that space? Any ideas?

Peter Scott
Southampton

ALBERT ADVICE

We have a narrow boat based at Swanley Marina on the Llangollen Canal. Later this year we would like to go into the Albert Dock, Liverpool.

It sounds pretty daunting and having no friends who have done it, we are looking for advice and guidance.

How easy is it?

We would love to make contact with others who have been.

Sue Wilshaw

DON'T DROP RED DIESEL CAMPAIGN

Your February edition included an article on Ireland going 'white', which concluded with the phrase: "the UK may not be far behind".

The article misses a fundamental point: Ireland is part of the EU, the UK is not! The British Government and HMRC wanted to retain the existing arrangements for red diesel to be used by pleasure craft, and it was only the EU that wanted to impose an extra tax.

My MP, who happens to be

the Home Secretary, has assured me that the UK will not be subjected to the rulings of the EU, so there is no reason to expect any change.

The RYA is pressing Government to avoid any changes, but to ensure that all MPs are aware of the strength of feeling amongst boaters, it is essential that all readers write to their own MP, and demand that red diesel is retained for use by all boaters.

Simon Mitchell
Tiptree, Essex

NEW WATER SOURCE?

I read with interest your article about the repairs to the Toddbrook dam and have to ask the question why rebuild@

At the time last year I emailed the CRT suggesting they remove the dam and any future risk to Whaley Bridge and install back pumping from the river Goyte at a fraction of the cost. Perhaps this solution is too simple or just common sense.

davidrwood

CALLING VOLUNTEERS

IWA: Dates for your April diary

SUNDAY 5TH & TUESDAY

21st APRIL

IWA Northampton Branch

Fortnightly work party on the Northampton Arm to help maintain the waterway following the Branch's adoption of the navigation. 10am–2pm. Work usually includes a variety of tasks such as painting, vegetation clearance and litter picking. Location is dependent on work completed at the previous work party so is still to be confirmed. All volunteers are welcome and should wear sturdy shoes, old clothes, be prepared for the weather and bring a packed lunch.

For more information contact Geoff Wood:

geoff.wood@waterways.org.uk

THURSDAY 9th APRIL

IWA North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch and Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust

Monthly work party on the Uttoxeter Canal. 10am to 3pm. Bridge 70, Crumpwood. No parking available at site so please meet at 9.30am at Denstone Village Hall, College Rd, Denstone, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire ST14 5HR for a lift, or meet on site at Bridge 70 at 10am having made your own way on foot. Please wear old clothes, stout shoes and bring waterproofs and a packed lunch if staying all day.

For more information contact Steve Wood:

steve.wood@waterways.org.uk or 07976 805858

SUNDAY 12th APRIL – IWA incolnshire Branch supporting Sleaford Navigation Trust

Regular work parties on the second Sunday of the month. Volunteers carry out a variety of tasks to maintain the navigable section of the Sleaford Navigation at these work parties. Dates are subject to change



Contact Mel Sowerby
01522 856810 to confirm date and
location: workparty@
sleafordnavigation.co.uk

THURSDAY 16th APRIL

IWA North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch and Trent & Mersey Canal Society

Monthly work party on the Cheshire Locks, Trent & Mersey Canal. 10am to 3pm. Meet at Church Lawton flight, to re-furbish the four sets of locks in the flight, starting at top Lock 49 – (Halls Lock) – a double lock in poor condition. Meet at Cherry Tree Avenue, Church Lawton ST7 3EL. Please wear stout shoes, old clothing and bring a waterproof. If you are staying all day you may also want to bring a packed lunch.

This work party is held in partnership with the Trent & Mersey Canal Society.

Contact: John Lawson John.
lawson@waterways.org.uk;
or 07940 878923.

SATURDAY 11th APRIL

IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch

Monthly work party in the Chester area working at various locations alongside the Shropshire Union

Canal. 10am to 4pm. Work will include painting and vegetation clearance. Please wear stout shoes and old clothes and bring waterproofs and a packed lunch if staying all day.

For further details contact Jason Watts: jason.watts@canalrivertrust.org.uk

SATURDAY 11th APRIL

IWA Manchester Branch

Monthly work party at a venue to be confirmed in Greater Manchester. 10am to 4pm. Tasks will include vegetation clearance, litter picking, painting and pulling rubbish out of the canal

For more information contact: barry_m@manchester-iwa.co.uk or 0787 5999 825

TUESDAY 14th & 21st APRIL

IWA Oxfordshire Branch supporting Banbury Canal Partnership

Regular work parties on the Oxford Canal near Banbury. 9am to 1pm. Tasks to be confirmed. All tools will be provided, please wear old clothes and stout shoes and take waterproofs in case of rain. For more details please contact Colin Garnham-Edge:

bcpontheoxford@gmail.com

EVERY SATURDAY IN APRIL

IWA West Country Branch (Taunton)

weekly work party in the Taunton area. 10am – 1:30pm. Exact work and location to be confirmed. Volunteers are advised to wear clothing suitable for the weather conditions and sturdy boots or shoes and bring a bottle of water. Please let us know if you are intend to join us, by 6pm the day before. For further details contact Mike Slade: mdslope8@gmail.com on 07977 263840.

EVERY TUESDAY & SATURDAY IN APRIL

IWA West Country Branch (Bridgwater)

Twice weekly work parties in the Bridgwater area. 10am – 1:30pm. Exact work and location to be confirmed. Volunteers are advised to wear clothing suitable for the weather conditions and sturdy boots or shoes and bring a bottle of water. Please let us know if you are intend to join us, by 6pm the day before.

For further details contact Mike Slade: mdslope8@gmail.com on 07977 263840



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HERE COMES THE SUN

Beatles fans Steven and Carolyn Easdale travel 10,000 miles to enjoy the shrine to their heroes and warmer weather than their Australian home

To most English people, the idea of a winter escape to the industrial heartland of the Black Country area, instead of southern Europe may sound a little strange. But that is exactly what my husband Steve and I do every June to August. "June to August?" I hear you ask. Well that is when our home on the southern coast of Victoria, Australia, is at its coldest and we 'follow

the sun' to the Midlands. By English standards, our home in Ocean Grove is not that cold, we never have snow and the only things that ice over are vegetables in the freezer. But when the cold wind howls in off Bass Straight, next stop Antarctica 5,000km away, we begin to think of sunny days in Worcestershire where our 60ft narrowboat Emmaus is moored at the Droitwich Spa marina. Okay, so England is not exactly

sunny every day between June and August. In 2019, we were saturated through to our skin twice in one day as we cruised through Stone in the Staffordshire Potteries. (And we were wearing waterproofs!)

Luckily, we were joined by a friend from Melbourne for dinner, who had a car and had managed to find us a canalside pub that was wonderfully warm and served a good Prosecco!



The Albert Dock in Liverpool

In 2018, we had fun in the rain when we sailed to the Crick Boat Show. We had attended before by car, but this was our first time by boat. Being the show weekend, there were moments of sunshine mixed with biblically proportioned thunderstorms. Since we were staying on site for the whole weekend, Steve was looking forward to attending the evening music performances and was quite excited when he heard there would be an ABBA tribute band. We had returned to the boat to cook dinner, collect our fold up chairs and rug up for the concert when the heavens opened. Lightning and thunder shook the boat and things looked bleak. Steve nearly lost his nerve – something he never does – but we put on our hiking boots and off we went. Luckily the rain held off as we walked up to the enormous

concert tent and safely found ourselves a comfy position inside. When the heavens opened again we felt smug as we stayed dry inside the marquee. What we hadn't allowed for was that as the rain continued to pour the water started coming in under the sides of the tent and across the grassed floor. Soon the grass was mud, then it was six inches of water and mud. We were seated on the walkway to the bar and were entertained by watching people trying to make their way past carrying their drinks and trying not to spill them as they pulled their well stuck feet out of the sloppy mess. The crowd seemed to be equally divided between sensible people wearing gumboots (Australian for Wellies) and unprepared people wearing thongs (Australian for flip-flops) I absolutely love the way dogs are allowed into just about

anything in the UK, especially in the countryside. Unfortunately in Australia they are very blinkered in their acceptance of dogs in public places and they would certainly not be at a boat show or concert. So the sight of so many dogs in the marquee – saturated, covered in mud and shaking water and mud over everyone as their owners danced to *Mamma Mia* made it such a wonderful event. I never realised how much fun it is to dance in ankle deep mud.

Even though there are days like that, there really has been some awesome weather in the UK these last two summers. In July 2019 as we were charging back from an amazing five-night stay in Liverpool's Salthouse Dock, the temperature got to 34C and *Emmaus* overheated. This was a new experience for

us, so we moored in the shade, had a cool drink and waited for her to cool down. We were also surprised to find ourselves looking for shade during the August Bank Holiday weekend. All our English boating friends tell us it rains every Bank Holiday, so this was a welcome change. We decided it was too hot to return to the marina, so we spent two nights plonked under deep shady trees at Hanbury Wharf. Luckily they happened to be directly outside our local pub, the Eagle and Sun.

Another surprising difference between our countries is the interaction with wildlife. Australia is well known for an abundance of both cute and scary creatures. Several English people we have met refuse to consider a visit Down Under for fear of what might sting or eat them. When I assure them that I have never seen a shark and hardly ever seen a snake (is four times “hardly”?) I don’t think they believe me. Yet I think I have had more scary interactions with wildlife in England. Steve was pecked on the back of the leg by a swan, unhappy with the lack of attention he was getting and on another day we were chased screaming (well I was screaming), by two huge swans who thought they liked the look of our salad rolls and John Smith pints more than we did.

In 2017, on a return trip from spectacular Llangollen we were moored in the middle of nowhere on the border between Wales and Shropshire. We were alarmed to find a sign warning of the dangers of adders and what to do if we were bitten. We were shocked and a debate followed. “England doesn’t have dangerous snakes. Does it? This can’t be right!” The sign also warned to not leave the footpath due to the risk of being swallowed alive in a bog. What kind of scary place had we landed in? The sign



Flying the flag for Oz

Terrible images flashed through my mind of the duckling being crushed by our 17-tonne boat in front of horrified onlookers including several children. This was not going to be good for international relations

advised the if we were bitten by an adder we should “stay calm, stay still, and phone for help”. This was going to prove difficult as there was no phone reception in this remote area, with the nearest being on an elevated bridge half a mile away. Luckily, we did not have any encounters with these slithery locals and we were sure to check the decks for legless intruders before we left in the morning.

We have had dramas with less scary and much cuter creatures as well. One day as we sailed for ‘home’ on our favourite canal, the lovely Staffordshire and Worcestershire, we came into a lock heading downwards next to a pub just as a duckling decided to join us. The duckling was too small to fly or jump and could not get out. The beer garden of the pub was full and was only inches from the lock. Terrible images flashed through my mind of the duckling being crushed by our 17-tonne boat in front of horrified onlookers including several children. This was not going to be good for international relations. Some patrons, who may or may not have had several beers, offered to help. More horrific images came to mind. Bar

trays from the pub and a food strainer from our kitchen were tried but to no avail. Eventually with some suggestions and team work from the pub patrons we developed the plan to push the boat against one side of the lock while leaving the back gate open. Finally the hysterical little duckling figured things out and fled at top speed. Another day a tray from the galley was needed again to encourage a young hedgehog to return to the hedgerow and not to come onto our rear deck.

2019 was our fifth year of spending our winter in the Midlands after purchasing Emmaus in 2015 following ten years of planning and dreaming. Buying, storing and using a boat when you live on the other side of the world takes a bit of organising. So far it has proved to be a wonderful experience. At the start of this year’s trip we clocked up our 1,000th lock in Emmaus near the start of our local epic flight at Tarrdebigge. We have travelled the Avon Ring, as far as Nottingham on the Trent, to Llangollen and to Liverpool. All very different places with varying experiences to match. The 2019 trip into Liverpool was quite a highlight. Sailing



Lovely weather for ducks

though the carefully designated route amongst such enormous and old dockyards is an experience of a lifetime. Being moored in a world-famous tourist area surrounded by so many excellent museums, many of which are free, was amazing. The Beatles, maritime and Liverpool museums are not to be missed. I would also highly recommend the National Trust minibus tour of the inside of the childhood homes of John Lennon and Paul McCartney that leave from near the public moorings. You do need to book the tour online in advance but it is totally worth it.

Dealing with CRT bookings for our time in the excellent moorings at Salthouse Dock, some broken bridges, bridges that only open at set times and a huge oak tree that had fallen over the canal added to the excitement of our trip to Liverpool. Cox's bridge 20 had been vandalised and was only open for limited times twice a week. This resulted in a few extra days of waiting in the Wigan area. After initial total confusion about the situation, we signed up to the CRT's email alerts and were suddenly right on top of things. Twenty four hours before the infamous bridge was due to have one of its limited openings we received an email to say it had been repaired 'early'. We headed off and as we approached the bridge we passed a long line of boats who had obviously not received the email and were patiently waiting for tomorrow's opening. Many of the boaters glared at us. I could read their minds – "Look at those cheeky Aussies jumping the queue, they won't get far when the bridge doesn't open!" As we moored at the landing stage and I approached the controls, the other boaters were now busily telling us the bridge was



Course set for the Potteries

broken and why didn't we know. I proudly stated that "we had an email" and as I put the CRT key in and turned it I hoped like hell that it worked. I was so relieved when the panel lit up came to life. There were a number of stunned looks from the other

boaters as the bridge swung open and we sailed off into the sunset.

We will be back in 2020 to 'follow the sun' again as we head south for the first time towards Oxford. Look out for us with our 'Kangaroos for the next 14kms' sign on the side and our Aussie flag on the back. We get so many comments on our flag. "Is that the flag of Australia or New Zealand?" (That confuses many people, the NZ stars are red.) "Did you sail your boat all the way from Australia?" (Some people who have asked that have been serious!) "Do you know my cousins in Perth?" (They're often disappointed to hear Perth is 3,500km from our place) "Do you follow the rugby?" (no) "Do you follow the cricket?" (sometimes) and "When is Australia going to take the Union Jack off their flag?" (Never, God Save the Queen!). Our flag obviously made one reveller homesick in the Gas Street Basin in Birmingham this year. He woke us up during the night singing the National Anthem as he stood next to our bedroom porthole. Amazingly for an Aussie he knew all the words of *Advance Australia Fair*; a rare feat indeed. **CB**



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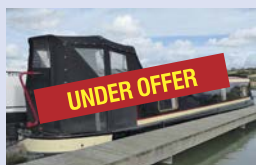
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LENGTH 57 feet **BEAM** Narrow
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LENGTH 44 feet **BEAM** Narrow
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MODEL S W Durham **YEAR** 2005
LENGTH 56 feet **BEAM** Narrow **STERN**
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LENGTH 48 feet **BEAM** Narrow
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LENGTH 60x12 ft **BEAM** Wide
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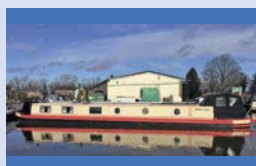
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BLUEBELL - £69,950
MODEL Aqualine **YEAR** 2007
LENGTH 60 ft **TYPE** Narrow **STERN**
Semi-Trad **LYING AT** Mercia



CHEZ NOUS - £124,950
MODEL Collingwood Abode **YEAR** 2015
LENGTH 60x10 ft **BEAM** Wide
STERN Cruiser **LYING AT** Outlying



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STERN Cruiser **LYING AT** Mercia



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MODEL Heritage BB **YEAR** 2007
LENGTH 70 ft **BEAM** Narrow **TYPE**
Cruiser **LYING AT** Dunchurch Pools



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MODEL Liverpool **YEAR** 2010
LENGTH 65 ft **TYPE** Narrow **STERN**
Trad **LYING AT** Droitwich Spa

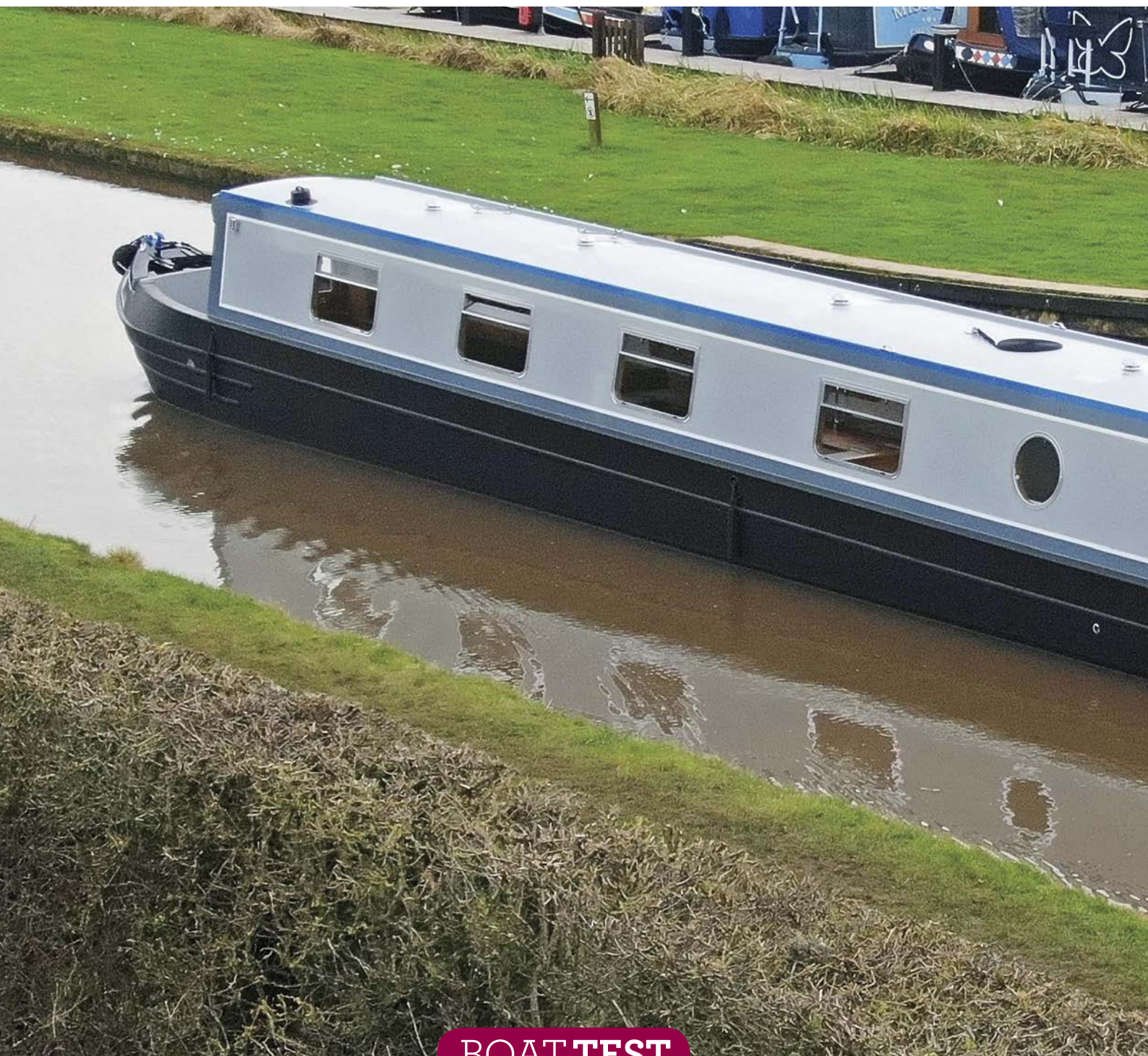


CARPE DIEM - £113,950
MODEL Pendle NB **YEAR** 2017
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TAKE THE LONG WAY

Agonising over the length of your next spec boat is a popular pastime for many but this Tyler Wilson shell has a simple message...go large

WORDS BY **ADAM PORTER** PICTURES BY **ANDY R ANNABLE**



Boat length is one of those issues that people agonise over. They want to make sure they get a boat of the right length – or at least that they don’t get one of the wrong length. But really it’s quite simple: you want a boat that’s long enough to holiday or live on comfortably, and short enough to go through the locks in the area where you intend to cruise.

Over the years, the received wisdom is that around 58ft is the ideal go-anywhere length. At that size, you’ll be able to get

through all the locks on the northern waterways, even if you have to go in diagonally. But fixating on that length could be a mistake if you’re going to be one of the many boaters who spends their whole time in the Midlands and the south. You’ll still have many hundreds of miles of waterways to cover, and could enjoy a bit of extra space.

As far as spec boats go (these are boats that builders build and then put up for sale, rather than being custom-built for an owner), it’s rare to find one that not 57 or

58ft. But here is one: a 65ft semi-trad built by Knights Narrowboats. The reason for the length is a story in itself. The shell was bought on finance by a hire company in Cheshire which wanted to start renewing its fleet. But before it could be fitted out, the firm folded. The finance company didn’t even know where the shell was, and probably thought they’d be writing off the whole sum they’d lent.

As it happened, the shell was in storage at Aqueduct Marina on the Middlewich Arm, which is where Knights is also based.

Glenn Knight put in what he calls a cheeky offer, which was accepted. He slotted the boat into his build schedule as a spec boat.

The shell already had the window holes cut out, so rather than weld them up and cut new ones, Glenn has worked around them. As a 65ft hire boat, it would almost certainly have had two bedrooms, but Glenn has decided instead to use the extra length to create a very spacious boat which could easily suit a liveaboard. So there's both a dinette and a breakfast bar, a very long galley, and plenty of room in both the saloon and the cabin.

Exterior

This boat is built on one of Tyler Wilson's Mike Christian shells. It means it lacks some of the fancy details seen on their more expensive shells – so, for example, the handrails end in simple curves rather than scrolls. But what's the same is the underwater shape with long swims and excellent handling, plus a long well deck and a very pretty Josher-style bow. In fact, the whole boat looks very elegant. The gas locker is at the nose and there's a water

tank under the well deck. At the stern, the semi-trad deck has storage lockers both sides.

The colour scheme uses a popular and contemporary combination of dark grey borders and pale grey panels, with a white coach line in between. But at the stern, the greys switch around, giving a nice bit of interest. And the handrails are a bright blue, which really pops and lifts the whole boat; the same blue is used for the stern dollies and one of the tunnel bands for a splash of extra colour.

Knights boats are painted in house, using a two-pack system which is tougher than traditional boat paint. It should last well.

All the trim such as the mushroom vents are chrome, which adds to the contemporary look and cuts down on cleaning. Nav lights are also fitted. Knights use Andy Russell for their sign writing, and he's painted the boat's number in a panel. The larger panel is currently blank, until a new owner chooses what the boat will be called.

Layout and fitout

The layout of this boat was governed by where the window holes were. With portholes at the stern and windows further forward, it had to be a standard layout boat. So the saloon is at the bow followed by a generous galley and a Pullman dinette. The walk-through shower room comes next, with the cabin at the stern.

The fitout uses a popular combination of oak faced panels below the gunwales, and painted ones above. In fact, the painted panels are exactly the same as the unpainted ones below, and the grain still shows through the paint, giving a nice bit of texture.

The ceiling is also painted white, adding to the bright airy feel. All the trim



The Morso Swift stove sits on a metal hearth

is solid oak, and the floor is a lovely engineered oak. The whole fitout is nicely done, with quality joinery on show. One feature we particularly like is that there's no boxing along the floor for plumbing and the like; all the services are hidden behind floor-level panels, so they're accessible if necessary but not obtrusive.



Steps are removable



Taking centre stage is the walnut woodblock worktop



The dinette converts into a guest bed



Saloon

We'll begin at the bow, where a couple of removable steps lead down into the boat from the well deck. Behind them is a door, giving access to the water tank and the bit of space around it which can be used as storage. On one side of the glazed bow doors is a tall coat cupboard. The water pump is under the floor of the cupboard. Just forward is the stove, with attractive slim mosaic tiles behind, and a metal hearth with a lip. An air gap has been built in to protect the boat from the heat.

The stove itself is a Morso Swift, which is very similar to the more common Squirrel; it has a double insulated flue, so meets the latest installation guidelines. On the other side of the boat is a full height unit with a cupboard at the base and shelves above. Further down the boat is a low-level TV unit, with a walnut blockwork top. The cupboard below offers some storage, and somewhere to hide whatever type of box is providing your TV picture.

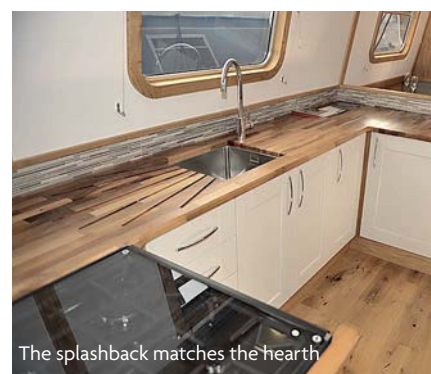
The saloon has been left open for armchairs or a sofa. If you put a sofa bed in here, the boat would become a six berth.

There's also an attractive grey column radiator.

Galley

Two things immediately strike you about this U-shaped galley. One is that it's a full 10ft long; the other is the beautiful walnut woodblock worktop. The colour is wonderfully rich, and having such an expanse only emphasises how opulent it looks. It's nicely finished with chamfered edges, while on a practical front, there are routed drainer grooves, leading to an undermounted Smeg stainless steel sink with a tall arched tap. The low splashback is made from the same slim mosaic seen by the hearth.

There is a full size 12 volt fridge with freezer box, and the oven is a full size model by Belling. With such a long galley there is also a host of storage options, with painted cupboard doors and drawer fronts. There's also an under-gunwale unit on the opposite side. On the saloon side of the galley is a breakfast bar with a couple of stools. Underneath, there's also a door on this side of the unit, giving access to what



The splashback matches the hearth

would otherwise be a dead corner. A set of side doors makes this a nice place to sit.

Dinette

This is a Pullman dinette, which converts into a guest bed. There is storage in the bench seats, and there's also a useful space under the raised floor.

Shower room

This is a very smart shower room, with a good-sized quadrant shower cubicle which is tiled and has a feature stripe of mosaics.

Between the cubicle and the cabin side is a cupboard and some shelves. The loo is a Thetford cassette, but it's the model which has a proper ceramic bowl. Access to the cassette is under the bed in the cabin behind. There's a rectangular unit alongside with a cupboard underneath and a good sized sink above. There's also a high level unit above, with three mirrored doors. There's a grey, heated towel rail and a shaver point.

Cabin

The cabin at the stern has an in-line bed, with storage in the base. There are high level cupboards at the head of the bed and along its length, with reading lights.

There's plenty of storage at the very stern of the boat. On one side there's a washing machine with a cupboard above, plus a tall cupboard beside the steps leading up to the stern deck. On the opposite side is a long cupboard with a smaller one above, forming a sort of dressing table with more of that lovely walnut worktop. Beyond that is the electrical cupboard.

Technical

This boat is fairly straightforward technically – which is a good thing. It's powered by the ubiquitous Beta 43 engine, which is a workhorse of the waterways and will be familiar to every boatyard in the land. Electrical power comes from four 110Ah batteries, plus another for the engine. For a 240 volt supply, there's a 3.5kw Sterling inverter. The installation in the electrical cupboard looks neat and tidy. All the sockets and switches throughout the boat are chrome, and some of the sockets have useful USB ports for charging.

Heating is by an Eberspacher diesel



The dinette converts into a guest bed

boiler, with a control in the cabin. The calorifier is in the engine hole.

On the water

At 65ft, this boat feels quite long when manoeuvring round a marina. But as you might expect from a Tyler Wilson hull, it handles very well. We did a surprising amount of reversing and turning in our test, and the boat coped admirably; there's no bow thruster to help either. At the helm, the tiller is at a nice height and the Morse control falls easily to hand. The instrument panel is inside the boat, so you have to make an effort if you want to look at it.

The lockers on the stern deck provide somewhere for crew to sit, and there's a set of doors at the very stern, which you could close during bad weather for some extra protection.



Knights Narrowboats

Glenn Knight has been around boats since he was a child, because one of his uncles worked at the British Waterways yard at Nantwich Basin for nearly 20 years. He and other members of the family got roped in to do odd jobs, and quickly learned to handle boats. Knights Narrowboats has been going for about eight years. Initially, the firm did repairs and maintenance, and then moved into new builds. There are three other members of staff, including another of Glenn's uncles – and everything is done in house. The builds happen at a unit at Aqueduct Marina at Church Minshull on the Middlewich Arm.

A few years ago, Glenn took an unusual



The in-line bed has storage in the base

approach to the Crick Boat Show by displaying a boat which was deliberately only half finished. As it turned out, people liked seeing all those things which are usually covered up, such as how the plumbing and electrics were installed. Knights builds four or five boats a year – usually three or four bespoke commissions, plus a spec boat like this one. And this boat seems to have started a bit of a trend, because the next couple in build are also slightly longer than usual. **CB**



Plenty of storage on board



VERDICT

This boat has an interesting back story which has governed how the boat is laid out, but Glenn Knight's decision to use the extra space that a 65ft boat offers to provide a generous saloon, galley, and cabin has really paid off. This would be a very comfortable boat to spend extended periods of time on, and would make a great liveaboard. There's masses of storage too.

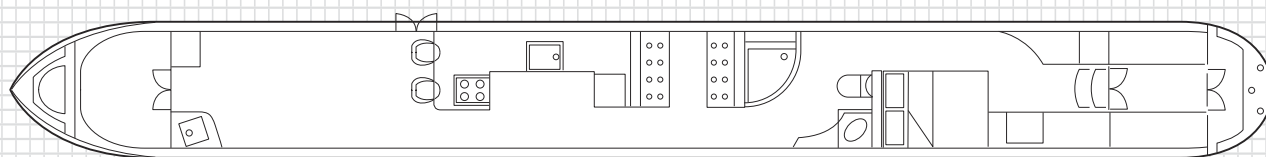
The price, at a touch

under £106,000 is exceptional; you get a great deal of boat for the money – and it's good quality too, both in terms of the shell and the fitout. This too is down to the boat's history; it would not have been possible to market the boat at this figure without Glenn Knight picking up the shell at a bargain price, and he's to be congratulated for passing the saving on to whoever buys it. So if

you're wondering whether a slightly longer boat would suit your lifestyle better, it's worth checking out how much more space you get in a boat of this sort of length. If you're content that you've got enough canals and rivers to explore without the Leeds and Liverpool and some of the other Yorkshire waterways, then a boat with a few extra feet of length could be the answer.

SPECIFICATIONS

Total Price: £105,950



Saloon
13ft 6in

Galley
10ft

Dinette
6ft

Shower
7ft

Cabin
12ft

LENGTH: 65ft
BEAM: 6ft 10in
SHELL: Tyler Wilson
www.tylervilsonboats.com
STYLE: Semi-trad
LAYOUT: Standard

BERTHS: 2+2(+2)
FIT-OUT: Painted panels and oak
ENGINE: Beta 43
www.betamarine.co.uk
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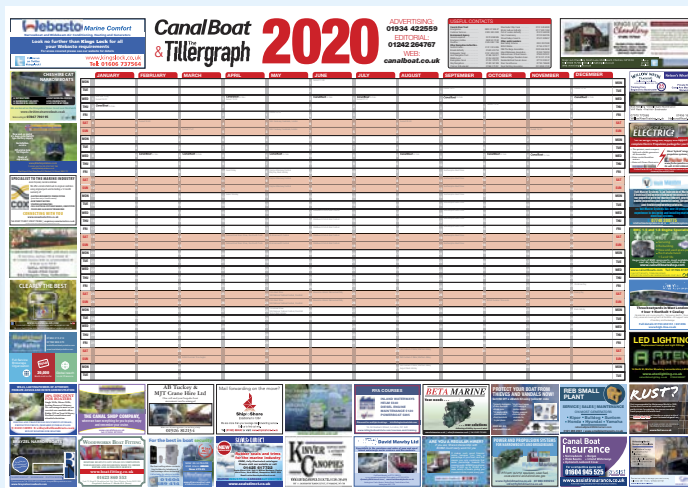
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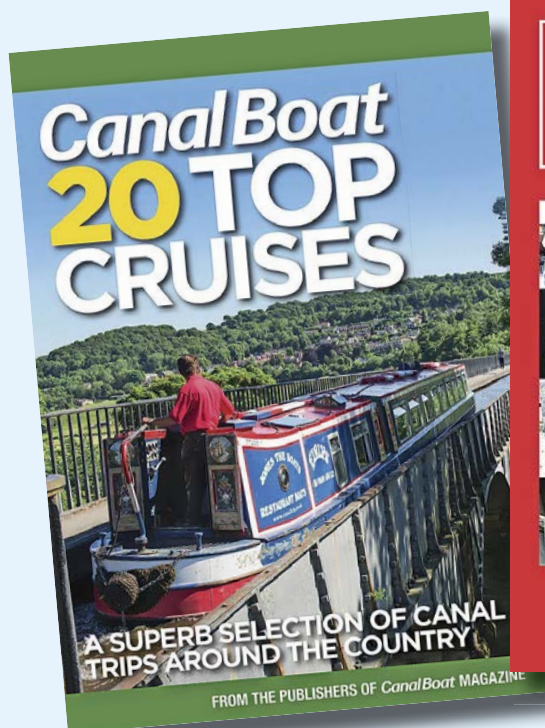
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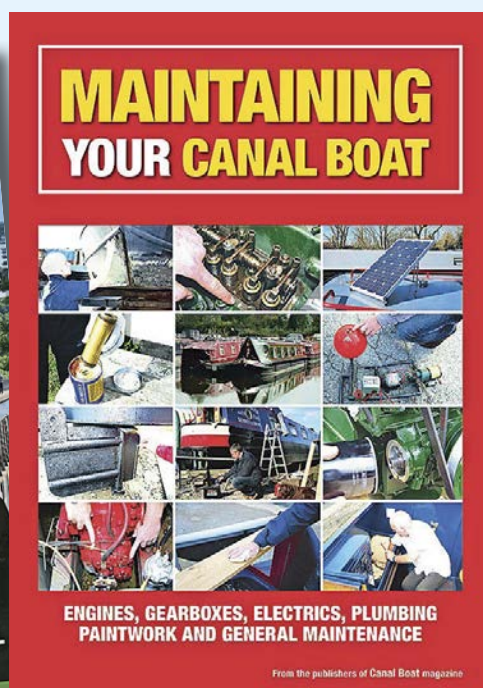
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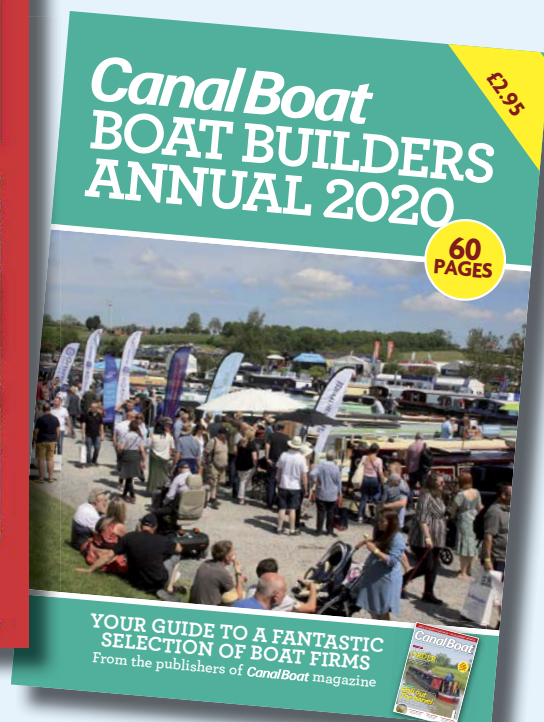
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A 40ft bee ensures you won't miss the ice cream farm

MAKING A BEELINE

Liveaboard Emma catches up on check-ups and enjoys the mixed attractions of Nantwich which ticks all the boating boxes

What makes a great boater town? For us, it's a combination of things. On a practical level, we are always looking for good access to shops and a post office. More recently, because we have been moored up for a longer period of time, we have taken advantage of doctors, dentists, opticians and vet services. The slower pace of cruising in winter gives you extra time to catch up on appointments and check-ups, that can be more difficult to arrange in Spring and Summer. We also like great places to visit, and interesting canal history and architecture. Having been in one place for a while, we also got to get to know the local boating community, who we can sometimes not



Greg the goat...possibly his name!

fully appreciate when we are cruising more frequently. So Nantwich and the surrounding area has ticked all our boxes and will be one of our top places we can recommend visiting.

Nantwich is a market town in Cheshire, on the Shropshire Union Canal. It is one of the many places with 'wich' in its name, that indicates the area's involvement in the salt industry. In fact, Nantwich has been associated with the salt trade since Roman times. The town centre has many Tudor and Georgian buildings, along with its busy shops and businesses.

Recently the town its annual celebrations for the Battle of Nantwich on January 26, which took place in 1644 during the English Civil War between

the Parliamentary and Royalist forces. The Nantwich Parliamentary forces were victorious and the town has celebrated with a re-enactment every year since 1973.

The canal runs through the town on an embankment, via an iron aqueduct. It is a popular place to moor in both summer and winter due to its great access to shops and CRT facilities. The Nantwich Marina gives you access to all the usual services but also includes a great shop, cafe, laundrette, chandlers and dog grooming parlour.

We had a great visit to the amazing Shop by the Canal run by Sharon, based in Nantwich Marina. Here you can buy great crafts, many of them made by fellow boaters. Sharon also has a great selection of boater essentials including tasty free-range eggs. She also has a very non-judgemental view on the number of times I visited her shop in order to buy chocolate!

But the Shop by the Canal is more than



Snowfall in Crewe

just a shop. It is an important part of the boating community. Its warm, welcoming atmosphere encourages you to stay and chat and every week Sharon teams up with the Waterways Chaplaincy to encourage boaters to come in for a drink and a chat and some



The Shop by the Canal

support if needed. We will definitely miss our regular visits to the shop once we have moved to another area.

There is not much cruising that can be done at the moment, due to CRT winter stoppages.

The Llangollen Canal is closed at Hurlston until the end of March and there has been an unexpected stoppage just before the Barbridge Junction with the Middlewich Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal.

If we cruised in the other direction, the Adderley Locks are closed until the end of February. We, therefore, took advantage of a timely visit from the fuel boat *Halsall* to top up with lots of coal

 We had a great visit to the amazing Shop by the Canal run by Sharon based in Nantwich Marina. Here you can buy great crafts, many of them made by fellow boaters

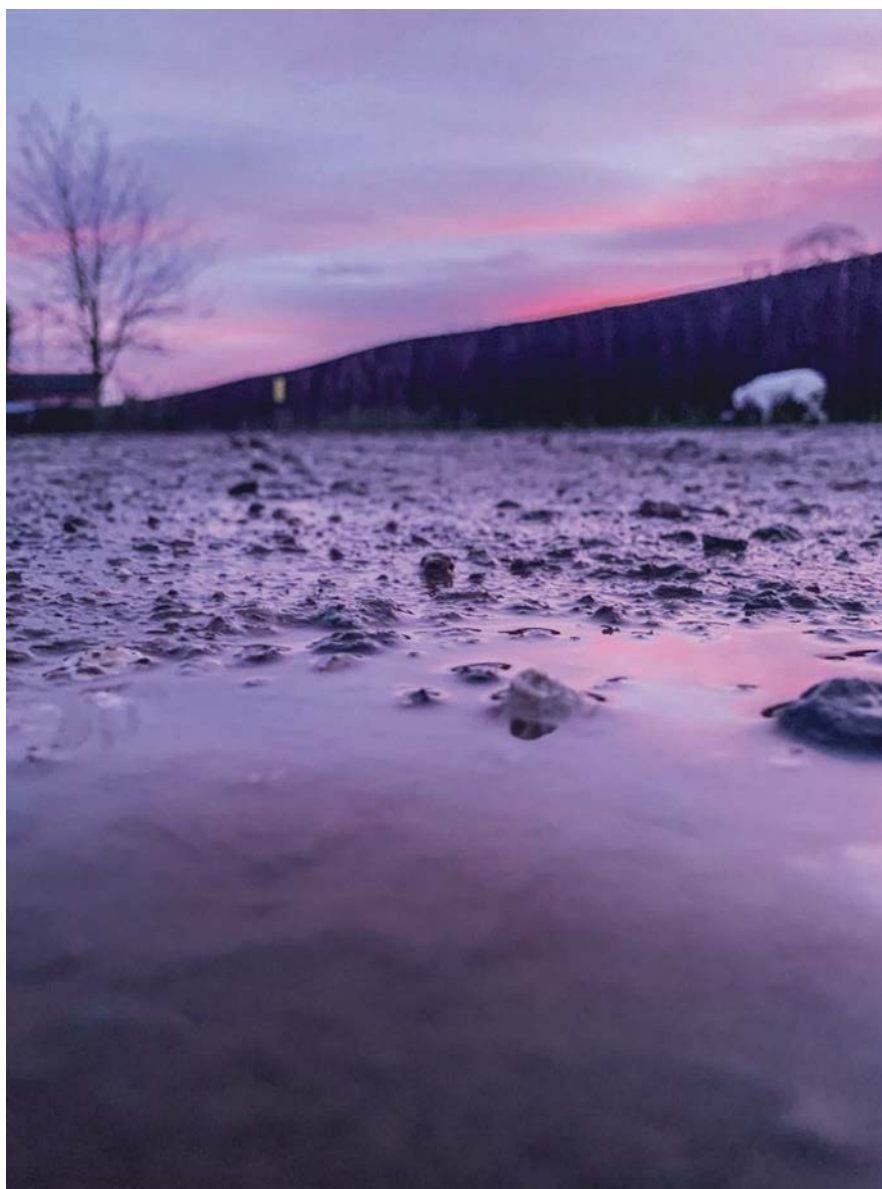


The moorings at Nantwich Basin

and kindling to keep us warm for the next few weeks.

We have taken advantage of our lack of cruising to visit some places in the nearby area. My favourite visit was to the home of Snugbury's Ice Cream. This is an amazing family run business, with the most delicious ice cream, with so many different flavours that you will definitely struggle to make a choice. I can definitely recommend their various chocolate ice creams. They have an amazing 40ft straw bee sculpture, to raise awareness of the importance of bee conservation. They also get much of the power needed for their farm from their many solar panels.

A place that we are planning on visiting soon is the Hack Green Secret Nuclear Bunker. This is a Government-



owned nuclear bunker that was first used during World War Two. In 1992 at the end of the Cold War it was bought by a private company and eventually opened as a museum. I am really interested in this era of history and I am looking forward to my visit. I will, of course, be filming my visit for my YouTube channel, but it will also be great for my homeschooling.

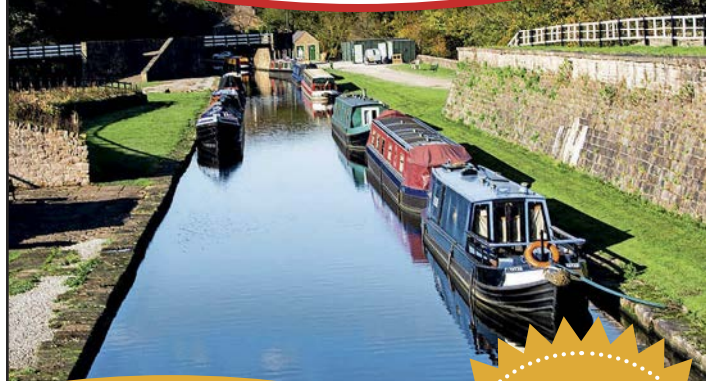
Movement on the canal has been quiet, partly due to the winter closures but also due to the bad weather. It has not been particularly cold but we have just had a visit from Storm Ciara and are about to get another storm this time called Dennis. Storm Ciara has caused widespread problems across the country. Sadly some narrowboats have been hit by falling trees. Others have been affected by floods and high waters. Many people are now unable to get on or off rivers where there are flood alerts. Cruising in

heavy winds can be really dangerous. It harder to control your boat in high winds and pulling your boat into moor can be really tricky. It is certainly not pleasant cruising in the rain, but high winds also often make it too dangerous to move. We are moored in quite a sheltered place and the canal water levels didn't seem to rise too far. Our boat certainly rocked a lot and the noise of the wind, particularly at night was a bit scary at times. We are hoping that Storm Dennis won't be as bad as Storm Ciara. A couple of days after Storm Ciara I was treated to an unexpected downfall of the fluffiest snow I have seen for a long time. It settled for a couple of hours, enough time for me to throw a few snowballs at my mum, but not enough time or enough snow to build a snowman. I know snow can be really disruptive but I am really hoping to get at least one opportunity this year to build at least one great snowman! 



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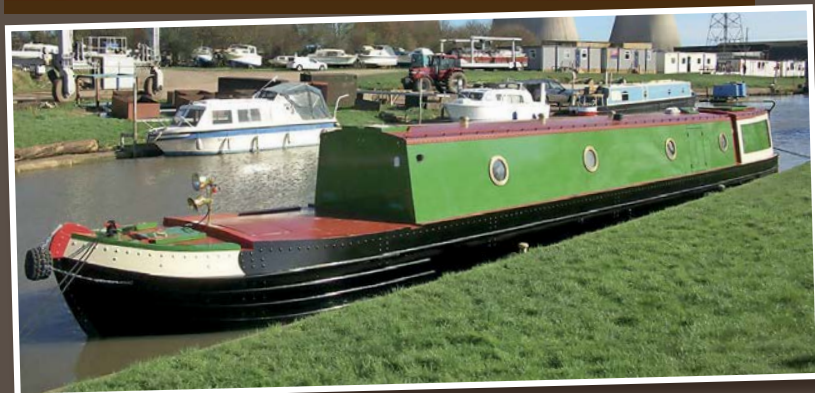
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The new reinforced concrete canal channel taking shape in Bollington

WORK IN PROGRESS

As the winter repair and maintenance programme on the canals enters its final stages, we visit two of this year's major projects – rebuilding a problematic tight lock on the Llangollen and lining a leaking embankment on the Macclesfield...

Alongside the many routine closures for regular maintenance work – such as lock gate replacement – during the Canal & River Trust's winter stoppage season, there are a smaller number of much more major jobs being tackled. We've visited two: one a well-known problem site that's been causing difficulties for boaters for some years; the other a far less high-profile but equally important project...

MACCLESFIELD CANAL PALMERSTON STREET EMBANKMENT, BOLLINGTON

Cruising through Bollington, you can't help but notice one of the Macclesfield Canal's major engineering features, the huge embankment crossing a small valley. But that's not actually where the trouble lies: you might not even notice that a little way further north, where the canal passes the impressive Clarence

Mill (a former textile mill now converted for a variety of modern uses), there's another significant length of embanked canal. It's not at all obvious, because it's only embanked on one side – the west side, opposite the mill – and it's largely hidden by trees. But the lie of the land, and the widening of the channel to provide moorings, mean that it's built up some 10 to 15 metres above the ground level below. It's been giving some problems in recent years, and this winter it's the subject of a major £1m project by CRT's main engineering contractors Kier to reline the canal.

CRT Project Manager Darren explains that the problems are probably at least as much down to the mill as the canal itself: its original water supply, various land drains running under it, and voids under the roadway running between the canal and the mill, have led to water working its way under the canal bed, leaking through the embankment



Setting up reinforcing mesh ready to cast the final section of the channel base

and washing out more voids. And this, in turn, has led to leaks developing in the canal bed and causing flooding in a site below the embankment.

It's been known about for some time, and temporary repairs – grouting the known holes – has kept the problem at bay. But the Trust knew that something more substantial needed to be planned. "This time we're not messing around", as Darren puts it.

I can see what he means. A new reinforced concrete channel is taking shape within the canal: it consists of a level base, with sloping sides leading to two vertical walls created within the original stone wharf walls. Looking at one end of it we can appreciate its heavy construction, 300mm thick. A concrete mixer lorry and a concrete pump with a long multiple-hinged pipe (the most practicable way to get the concrete to



where it's needed) are about to begin pouring the next section of the side walls.

Walking up the towpath to the far end of the 88m length, we can see where the final 10m section of the bed is about to be laid. A team are at work assembling the steel reinforcing mesh and inserting supports to make sure it will be at the right height, giving the necessary

thickness of concrete all around it to stop any water getting in and rusting the reinforcing. And where the new section will meet up with the previous one, a flexible membrane and sliding locating pins are being installed. This will form a joint between the sections which will allow some movement along the line of the canal as temperature changes cause the concrete to expand and contract, but retain a watertight seal and prevent any vertical or lateral movement.

This is the main job, but it isn't the only one: a little further north, a skilled mason is putting the finishing touches on a 66m rebuilt length of towpath wall. This had been in a state of collapse, but rather than replace it with the ubiquitous steel piling it's been rebuilt with the original stone, and the joints are now being pointed-up with the correct heritage lime mortar. Meanwhile, a small excavator is



Pointing the rebuilt stone towpath wall

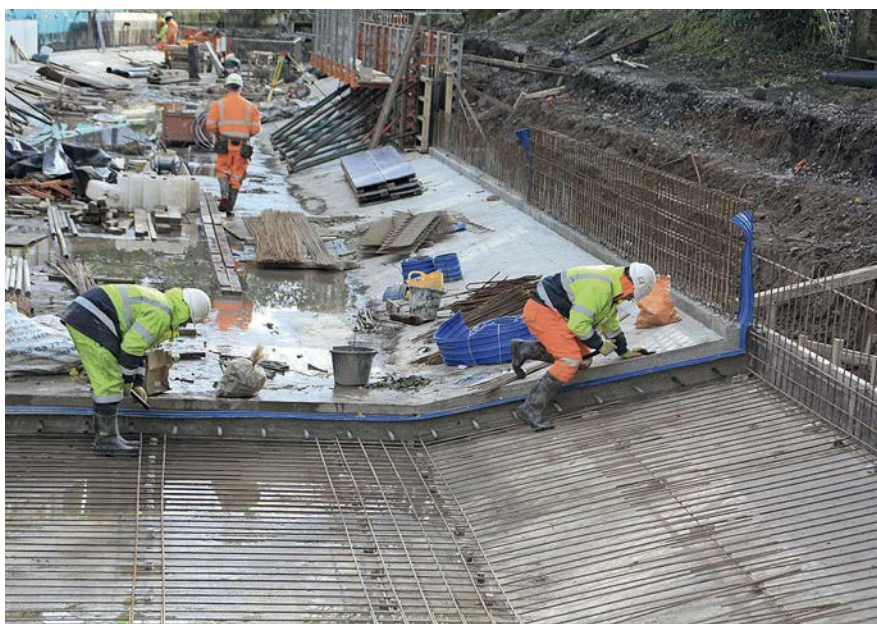


Backfilling the towpath wall with puddled clay

backfilling the completed wall with traditional puddled clay.

So how's the job going? Darren admits that despite an early start (it began in October, before the main stoppage programme began), a couple of weeks have been lost as a result of the weather and unexpected problems. There were more voids than anticipated, and parts of the offside (mill side) canal wall were in a poor state and showing signs of movement, so more needed to be taken down and rebuilt than originally planned. Incidentally, in the process they found various interesting remains including fragments of narrow-gauge railway tracks which once carried hand-pushed wagons delivering goods to and from the mill, and abutments of the swingbridge where they crossed the canal.

Although the main concreting is not all that far from completion, there are still the 'tie-in details' – the joins between the new construction and the original clay-lined channel at each end - to be dealt with. But all in all Darren says it's "gone well" and the choice of a higher-specification concrete has helped. This not only cures faster (allowing machinery to be driven over it after just five days rather than the usual eight) but is also suitable for casting the sloping side sections in a single pour, where a weaker mix would have slumped. And as long as the weather doesn't cause too many further delays, he's still hopeful that the work will be close enough to completion for the canal to reopen on the scheduled 13 March (Was Friday the 13th a good choice of date?) although towpath reinstatement will probably take longer.



Preparing to join the sections together with pins and a (blue) flexible waterproof membrane

LLANGOLLEN CANAL LOCK 4, HURLESTON

If our first site visit was to a project where few boaters will have been aware of the embankment or the need for major work, the same cannot be said for our much more high-profile second site.

Lock 4, the bottom lock of the flight of four giving access to the Llangollen Canal, had been getting narrower for some time. From 15 years ago (I took a 7ft ½in Grand Union former working boat through in 2003 with no more than perhaps a slight scrape), ground movement had restricted the width down to the point where even typical modern 6ft 10in narrowboats were sometimes

having problems. Much longer, and what is probably Britain's busiest canal could have become inaccessible to most boats. Clearly whichever lock wall was moving would need to be rebuilt, and in a way which would prevent a recurrence.

This winter's work is the second attempt. CRT Project Manager Rob gives me the back-story: as originally planned for winter 2018-19, the work would have involved securing the new lock wall to a line of concrete reaching down some 8m below ground level to anchor it well enough to prevent future movement. But there would have been difficulties getting the piling rig to the site (it would have needed to pass the other three locks, where there could have been problems with ground stability), investigations revealed an 'artesian layer' (groundwater under pressure) around the maximum depth of the proposed piling which could have caused problems of water coming up into the worksite (indeed, it might well be what caused the lock wall movement in the first place), and the shortage of available time before the end of the winter work programme (work had only begun after Christmas) led to a postponement and a rethink.

Careful manned operation got the lock through another year without too many boats getting stuck, while a new solution was designed. And having arrived at the site along the new access track which was built as the first part of the work (and this time it started in October to give the maximum time), I'm now being shown the recently completed major part of the work, another contract for Kier. The old lock wall has been completely



The newly cast chamber wall at Hurleston Lock 4

demolished, the lockside has been dug out for about 4-5 metres back from the lockside, and a massive L-shaped (when viewed looking along the lock from the top end) concrete casting has been made. The vertical part of the 'L' is the new lock wall, cast (in two pours, the bottom half and the top half) in 450mm thick reinforced concrete. The base of the 'L' is a 4m slab of similar thickness, reaching right back into the lockside to anchor it. And the two are tied together with plenty of reinforcing inside the angle.

This solution has the advantage that it doesn't need to go right down to the artesian layer, so there has been no water ingress. I can see that it's only recently been completed, as on the back of the new wall the last sections of the shuttering for the concrete pours have still to be removed. Crossing the lock to look at it from the other side, the lock wall looks rather stark in new white concrete, but Rob explains that a traditional brick facing is to be added, tied in to the concrete. There's been some discussion about exactly which tradition - during the work, evidence of past rebuildings at different dates has been uncovered. They're going for blue bricks to match the opposite wall (rebuilt in Shropshire Union Railways & Canal Company days), before reinstating the 1960s concrete coping 'stones'.

As with the Bollington job, attention needs to be given to tying in the new work to the old: at the bottom end of the lock a short section will be rebuilt in brick and stone (with some concrete behind it) to link the new wall to the original bottom gate recess.

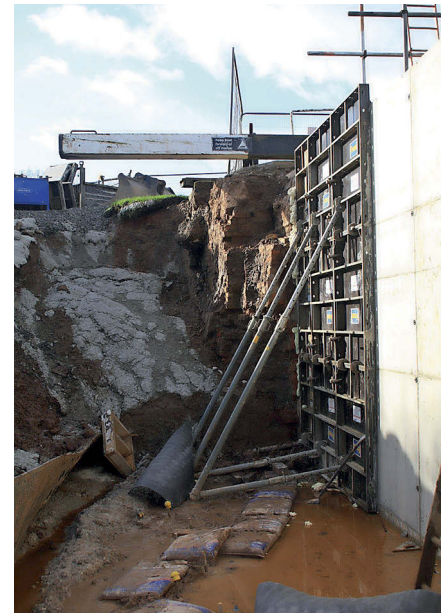
I ask whether CRT's engineers are confident that the opposite wall won't suffer from the same issues and need the same treatment. Rob replies that CRT's predecessors appear to have already done the job a century ago - it's built in later blue brick, and appears to be anchored back to a large buried concrete block some distance back from the lockside, in a rebuilding exercise which matches old plans CRT has for work in the 1920s on Lock 3 on the same flight.

With the main task finished, the work is on track for completion. But besides the brickwork, copings, joints to the original lock head and tail, there's all the removed soil from the lockside (currently piled up in a mound on the offside) to reinstate. This will be carefully compacted in layers, so that its weight will anchor the concrete base of the 'L' in place, which in turn will prevent the lockside from moving again. "It will take a lot to move it with that lot holding it," said Rob.

And then finally the 'quadrant' (the curved series of brick ridges that you put your feet against when opening and

closing the lock gates) will need to be reinstated by the bottom gate.

And will it open on time? Rob is confident, although he does mention 'weather events' so far this winter. And will it have returned the lock to a generous enough width that historic working boats will fit? Well, one of them has been invited to the official opening on 13 March as the first boat through...**CB**



The last of the shuttering awaits removal



The new wall (left) and original (right) will be joined together with brick and stonework

(Pic by Harry Brown)

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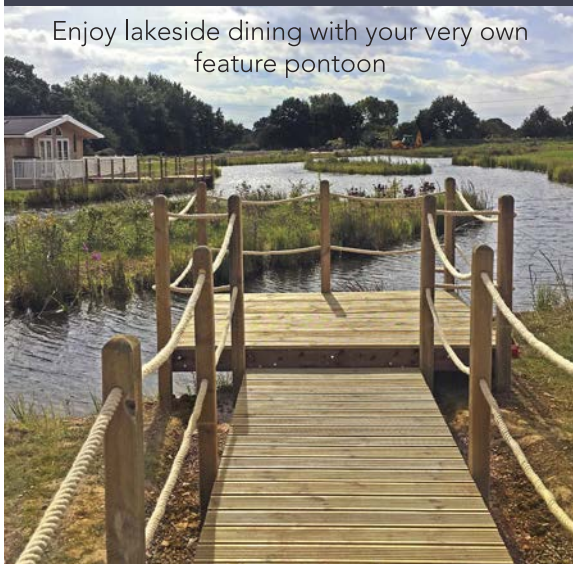
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- 8 Hamstead** Green La, Great Barr. 0121358 6720. 5 mins south of Chimney Bridge. Large family-friendly pub, (Stonegate chain), affordable food, real ale and garden
- 9 Tennis Court** Walsall Road, Perry Barr. 0121356 8124. 10 mins south east of top lock. Family-friendly Stonegate chain pub with real ale, food and garden. Sports TV, live music
- 10 Village Green** Marsh Hill, Erdington. 0121373 1191. 15 mins east of Brookvale Road Bridge. Real ale, food (part of Flaming Grill chain), garden
Details are likely to change: you are advised to phone to be sure

MUST SEE



ASTON HALL

Aston Hall, not far from the canal near Salford Junction, is a large and impressive mansion built in the Jacobean style in the early 17th Century. Now owned by Birmingham city, it is open in summer with a series of period rooms decorated with furniture, paintings and fittings from the city's museums and art galleries collections.



To some boaters, the formerly industrial waterways of the Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN) are at best a means to an end: a length of urban canal to be traversed to reach the more attractive rural cruising grounds on the far side. To others, the surviving 100 miles of what was the country's most intensely industrial network have an attraction in their own right: these BCN enthusiasts will seek out every dead end, looking for signs of old wharves, basins and arms and the history that they reveal.

By and large, boaters in the first group

will most likely take the BCN Main Line, covering the distance from Aldersley Junction near Wolverhampton to Gas Street Basin in Birmingham in the shortest distance and the least time. Those in the second group will like nothing better than to wander off to the far northern reaches, heading up the Wyrley & Essington to Anglesey Basin, Norton Canes and the Daw End Branch before returning south down the Rushall Canal to Birmingham.

But we're going to take a third route through the system from west to east, possibly one cruised even less than those already mentioned – taking in the Walsall

JOURNEY PLANNER

Follow the route with our map showing distances, locks and pubs



Distances/locks between pins



Direction of locks



Tunnel



Waterway junction



Our top ten pubs see panel

ALDERSLEY JCT

↑ TO HEYWOOD

↓ TO STOURPORT

Climbing the 21 locks
into Wolverhampton



and Tame Valley canals, quiet routes whose surroundings were once industrial heartland, but (at least in places) are getting greener with every year.

We begin at Aldersley Junction, where we turn off the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal to enter what is now the Main Line of the BCN, but was originally simply the Birmingham Canal.

Completed as early as 1772, this consisted of one route linking Birmingham to Wolverhampton and Aldersley Junction, and a second branching off to Wednesbury. The first of these, heavily rebuilt over the years (including whole new sections of

straight canal to bypass the original windings) has come down to us in the form of today's BCN Main Line.

For all these rebuildings, the canal which leads from Aldersley Junction straight into the 21 locks of the Wolverhampton flight isn't that much different from when pioneering canal engineer James Brindley first laid it out. The locks wind onward and upward: there's no great impressive vista of them rising up the hill, but there are always several within sight. And as we climb, the surroundings are transformed from a semi-rural beginning with the racecourse on one side, via the housing

estates, and railway viaducts and formerly industrial surroundings Wolverhampton's outskirts, until by the time we leave the top lock we're in the city centre.

Oh, an aside: one thing that has changed is that they were originally a flight of 20. The observant boater (and BCN enthusiast) will spot the 'extra' lock: it's the one with single bottom gate rather than a pair, reflecting changes in BCN practice over the years.

A former wharf with boaters' facilities and moorings for the city is followed by a 'tunnel' – actually a long bridge, and another later addition dating from a





The 'curly Wyrley' looking rural near Wednesfield

straightening of the canal – which passes under the railway station approaches. Then the centre of Wolverhampton is gradually left behind as the canal leads through an industrial area rapidly being transformed by new developments, to reach Horseley Fields Junction.

One of a number of BCN junctions with deceptively rural sounding names (the others include Deepfields and Pudding Green), this industrial location was an important connection in the canals' working life, especially in the early days when it was the only link between the Main Line and the Wyrley & Essington Canal, onto which we now take a left turn.

Opened in 1797, this 23-mile canal ran through the northern part of the Black Country industrial area and past Lichfield

to meet the Coventry Canal at Huddlesford. Originally an independent waterway, it became part of the BCN in 1840.

30 locks were all in the last few miles as it descended to Huddlesford, a section abandoned in 1956 (but being restored by the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust). So our next few miles are lock-free, and form part of the 'Wolverhampton Level': over 40 miles of canal all on the same level, 473ft above sea level, which includes part of the Main Line and various branches. There was once a local type of boat (known as a 'wharf boat' or 'Ampton Boat') used exclusively for local traffic on this level: longer and wider than the standard 70ft by 7ft narrowboat, it carried considerably more cargo, but was

too big for the locks.

Sometimes nicknamed the Curly Wyrley on account of its typical early construction, bending this way and that to follow the lie of the land, the first few miles are nonetheless fairly straight as the canal heads for Wednesfield. Look out for a small mooring basin under a towpath bridge on the right: this was the Bentley Canal, a short-cut to the Walsall closed as recently as 1961, but with little remaining today.

The Curly Wyrley begins to live up to its nickname over the next few miles – indeed, a drive along the A4174 used to involve crossing the canal eight times between Wolverhampton and Brownhills, until the road was diverted. One of the tightest bends is at Sneyd – and this was once a junction with the W&E's second route. You can just see the remains of the first of a series of locks climbing northwards to serve Great Wyrley itself. A second branch off this line then led to Essington, and reached what some would say was the highest ever navigable level on the BCN. Others would disagree, pointing out that the Essington line had already closed by the time of the 1840 merger, so it was never actually part of the BCN. Such is BCN pedantry...

Another mile brings us to Birchills



Industrial surroundings on the Wyrley & Essington



Passing the junction at Birchills



SEE ALSO



ROUGH WOOD CHASE NATURE RESERVE

The nature reserve is made up of six separate reserves inked by the towpath of the Wyrley & Essington Canal west of Sneyd. They include Rough Wood, a series of pools surrounded by oak woodland, and Sneyd Reservoir, a former canal water supply. They are haven for wildflowers, waterfowl, insects and amphibians.



A BCN Explorer Cruise provides a rare sight of a busy Walsall Locks flight

Junction, and another opportunity for pedantry. In common parlance the canal which we now bear right into is called the Walsall Canal, which takes a somewhat circuitous route southwards through the middle of the BCN network to reach the New Main Line at Pudding Green. But the truth, as usual, is more complex: the through route from Birchills to Pudding Green was actually built in at least five sections, over a period of around 70 years, and only one of them under the name of the Walsall Canal.

After half a mile we reach the eight Walsall Locks, a closely spaced flight leading down into the town. Look out for the attractive old boatmen's mission building by the top lock: it operated as a small but interesting canal museum in the 1980s and 1990s but has been closed for many years.

A tall factory chimney dominates the scene around the junction below the locks, where the short Walsall Town Arm branches off to the left, leading to a basin with moorings for the town centre's shops and pubs, and a small warehouse building now home to a restaurant.

The Walsall Canal continues through an industrial area which had something of a reputation a few decades back: in the late 1990s an early BCN Clean Up volunteer effort pulled out an unlikely number of shopping trolleys from a single short length, while a little longer ago a waterways guide book suggested that the easiest way to get a feel for the essence of the Walsall Canal was to stand in your dustbin.

While it still won't win any beauty contests and it's not entirely free of rubbish, my experience from recent years



Leaving the basin at the end of the Walsall Arm

is that it's no worse to navigate than many urban stretches (and better than some), and nature is doing its best to soften the ex-industrial landscapes in many places (although I do miss the occasional exciting view straight into a canalside metalworking furnace in earlier times).

The canal follows an S-shaped course through the heart of the Black Country, passing Darlaston and Moxley before reaching Ocker Hill. Look out for the remains of a couple of lost connections: the old Anson Branch (which used to lead to the Bentley Canal, mentioned earlier) and the Bradley Locks Branch, another potentially useful connection to the Wednesbury Oak Loop and BCN Main Line, abandoned in the 1950s. However unlike the Bentley, much has survived buried but unobstructed, and the Bradley Canal Restoration Society hopes to reopen it.

At Tame Valley Junction near Ocker Hill, we leave the Walsall and take a left turn onto the Tame Valley Canal. Compared to the canals we've followed so



The Walsall Canal had a bad reputation, but can be a haven for wildlife today

6

5 MILES / NO LOCKS

7

OCKER HILL

TO PUDDING GREEN

far, its course is direct and its history is straightforward. Opened in 1844, it provided a bypass for the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal's increasingly busy, congested and constricted Farmer's Bridge Locks. The Tame Valley by contrast features a wide, straight channel with twin towpaths, high embankments and deep cuttings (providing a curious sense of isolation from the surrounding housing estates and industries) as it heads eastwards past Wednesbury.

A series of high aqueducts carry the canal over a railway line, a spur of the M5 / M6 motorway junction, and the River Tame (here just a small stream). The Rushall Canal (another link to the Wyrley & Essington) enters on the left, then a deep cutting leads to Perry Barr Locks. Known by the working boatmen as the New Thirteen (by comparison to the Old Thirteen at Farmer's Bridge), the first seven chambers lead down the hill in an impressively dead straight line, before a gentle bend is followed by the remaining more spread-out lock. Playing fields and a cemetery, Birmingham's largest, provide some relief from the built-up surroundings, but the M6 motorway begins to make itself felt, crossing the canal twice before paralleling it on the approach to Salford.

Meanwhile the A38(M) Aston Expressway approaches from the right,



Lone angler on the straight, wide Tame Valley

and they (and a couple of other roads for good measure) meet directly above the canal at the interchange known as Spaghetti Junction, with sliproads crossing at multiple levels and lengthy sections of canal bridged over. But few of the people driving past will realise that there was a junction here long before the motorways were planned. Here the Tame Valley Canal ends – but you have a choice of three routes to continue your journey at the rather overshadowed four-way canal junction.

Bear left to join the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal eastbound, passing directly under a factory building before gradually leaving Birmingham for open country on the way to Fazeley. Or take the first sharp right to take the B&F uphill via the Aston



The 'New Thirteen' Perry Barr Locks

and Farmers Bridge flights through the heart of Birmingham to reach Gas Street Basin, the BCN Main Line and the Worcester & Birmingham Canal. Or finally, take the second right for the Saltley Cut, or to use its full title, the Birmingham & Warwick Junction Canal. This is one of two routes from Birmingham onto the Grand Union Canal – you can tell there's a change of waterway from the (now gateless) former shallow stop-lock just past the junction, built to separate the two companies' water supplies. It's a somewhat low-key meeting point between two giants of the waterways system, the GU and the BCN, but it marks the end of your BCN cruise and the beginning of the GU's long route south to London.



Motorways and sliproads converge above the canal on the approach to Salford Junction



SEE ALSO WEDNESBURY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

An easy walk from the Tame Valley or Walsall canal, this small but interesting collection is suitable for family visits. As well as fine art paintings and pottery, there are collections of toys, and 'nostalgia rooms' with displays of everyday objects from the 1960s-70s. Admission free, open Wed, Thu and Sat April-September

OCKER HILL

5 MILES / NO LOCKS



TO RUSHALL

PERRY BARR





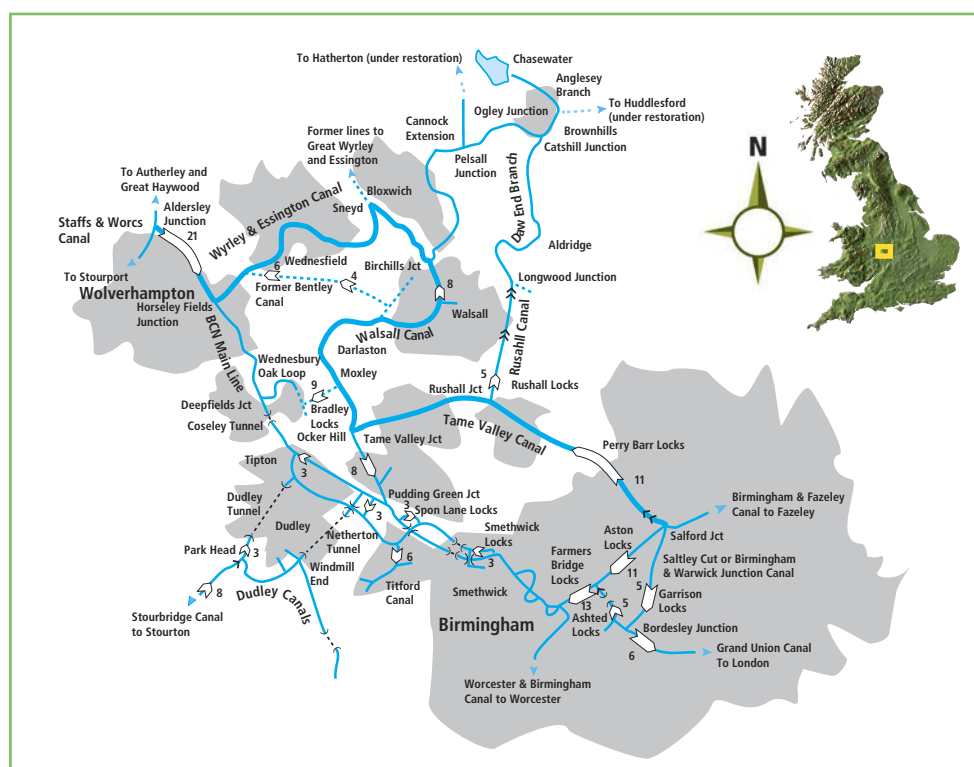
And then where? There's a choice of routes from Salford: the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal heading east...



...or west up Aston Locks...



...or south up the Birmingham & Warwick Junction



WATERWAYS FACTFILE

BOATYARD SERVICES



There are no boatyards on this month's route, so here are a selection on nearby canals:

Hatherton Marina, Staffs & Worcs Canal 07919466368

Limekiln Chandlers, Compton, Staffs & Worcs Canal 01902 751147

Oxley Marina, Staffs & Worcs Canal 01902 789522

Napton Narrowboats, Atherley, Shropshire Union Canal 01902 789942

Canal Transport Services, Norton Canes, Cannock Extension Canal 01543 374370

Coombeswood Canal Trust, Hawne basin, Dudley No 2 Canal 0121550 1355

Caggy's Boatyard, Tipton, BCN New Main Line 0121520 5362

Sherborne Wharf, Birmingham, BCN Main Line Oozells Street Loop 0121455 6163

Lyon Boatyard, Warstock Stratford Canal 0121474 4977

Copt Heath Wharf, Solihull, Grand Union Canal 0121704 4464

4 MILES / 13 LOCKS



TO BIRMINGHAM

TO BORDESLEY

TO FAZELEY

SALFORD JCT

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 - 63ft x 13ft Bespoke Dutch Barge
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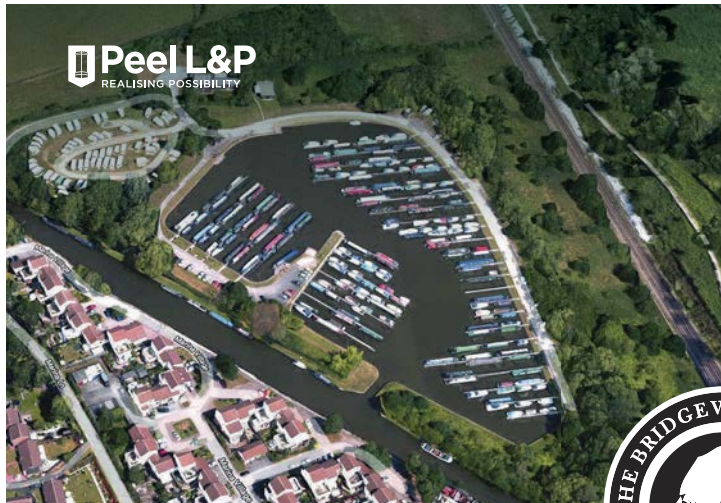


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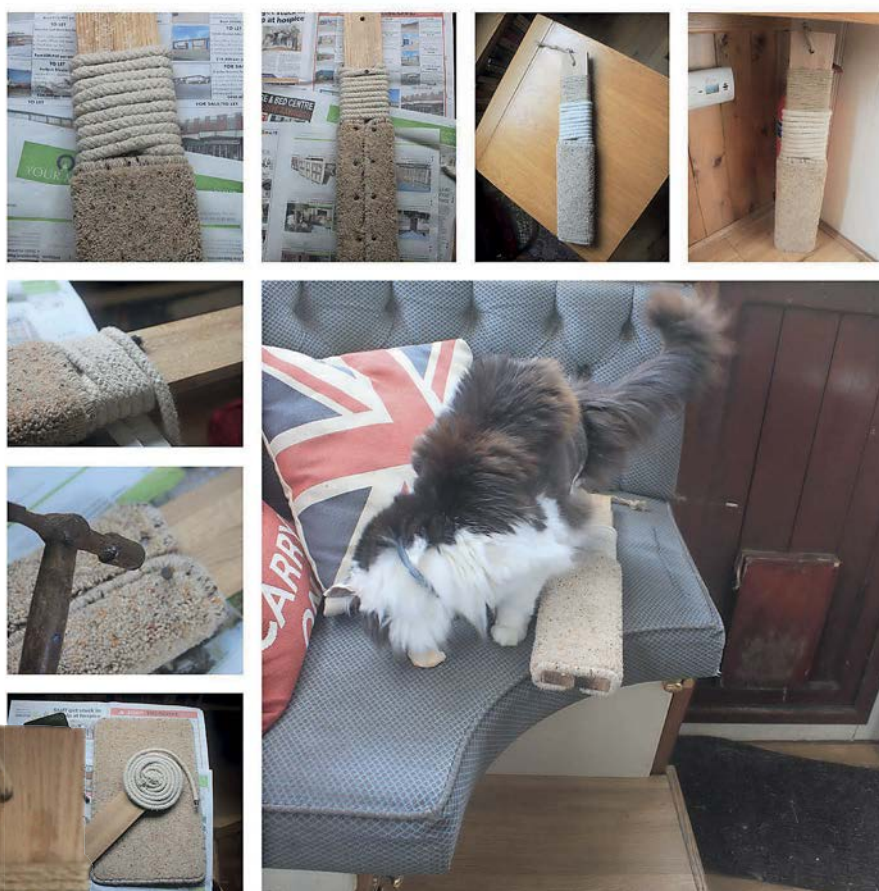
BECOMING BOSUN'S MATE

What do you give a cool cat who has everything – even down to his own on-board catflap for those late nights? Helen Tidy shows us from scratch

Last year I had a tremendous time making things for my favourite dog, Boots. This was so successful that I decided to have a crack at making things for cats. There was just the one problem. Andy is severely allergic to cats, so much so he cannot venture into anyone's home with a feline.

I can parade around with cats as much as I fancy, so long as I have a washing machine on standby for a swift change of clothes prior to meeting up with him. And this is not always practical when boating.

Undeterred, I still decided it was worth a go. After all, what are a few allergies between friends? We were cruising down the Thames and knew we would be meeting up with our friends Karen and Bret and their gorgeous Dutch Barge, *Edith*. We first met a few years ago at the Ware Festival where we were selling jam and Karen was selling her book *Isn't It Cold in Winter?* and we've kept in touch ever since. Principle shipmate is their lovely cat Bosun, a half Persian, half 57 varieties mix, who has his very own catflap entrance to enable him to board *Edith* independently. Like most cats, Bosun is a law unto himself. There was no way to know in advance whether he'd like any of the things I was making, and even if he did, there was no guarantee he'd perform for the camera. But it was



too good an opportunity to miss. Particularly as our friends are especially good at al fresco entertaining meaning that Andy could avoid cat allergens with ease. With a flurry of texts flying back and forth the week before our appointed meeting, we established that the weather would be fine, and we would barbecue outdoors at Beale Park with a gazebo erected in case of a change in the weather. Of course, come the day, it was absolutely tipping down, proper stair rod rain, but we pressed on regardless.

Sitting under the gazebo, admiring the rain torrents pouring into the Thames, we had the most delightful evening dining on delicious food and sharing lots of laughter. We even managed to find time to dodge the deluge and try out Bosun with the things I'd been creating.

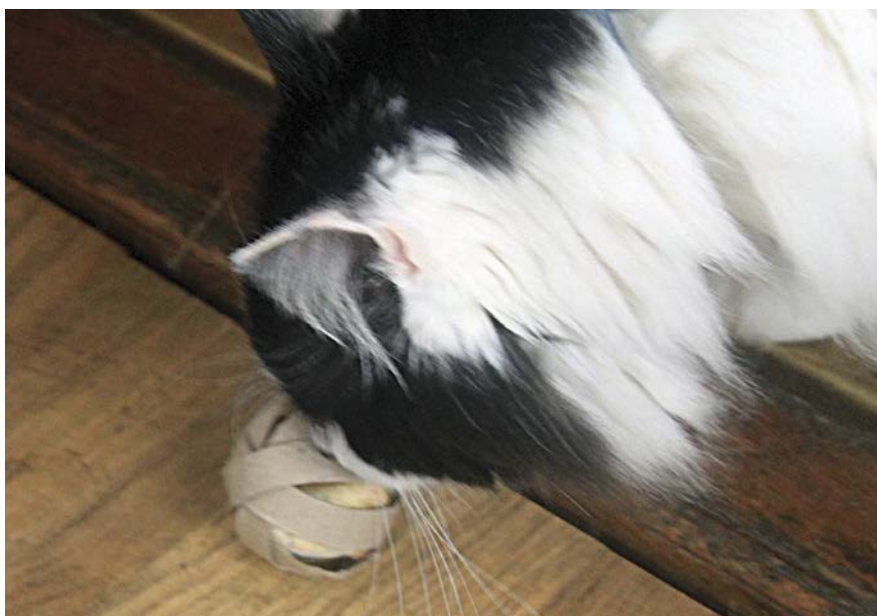
My first make was a scratching post. I know from my sister that something for cats to on scratch other than the furniture can be a welcome addition to any cat owner's life. For this I needed a short length of wood, a piece of carpet (I used a sample tile discarded by a carpet shop), a couple of different thicknesses of rope or string, and some carpet tacks. First, I drilled a hole in one end of the wood to hold a hanging loop and then at the opposite

end I wrapped the carpet tile around until the wood was totally encased. Some contact adhesive may be helpful here, I certainly found my carpet held better for its use. I then hammered in some carpet tacks to make sure all was secure. This done, I used my thickest piece of string, which was more like rope, and wound it around snugly above the carpet. Its end was tucked in and once more tacks were hammered in to hold it all together. Next, I used a thinner string to cover the remaining wood and provide a different texture for scratching. A hanging loop was fashioned out of the remaining string and that was that. It was the perfect height to fit under a shelf in our cabin which was unfortunate as it was not destined for us.

Knowing that cats are not the obliging creatures that dogs can be, I thought I'd go armed with a batch of cat treats as back up bribery. These were extremely easy to make though I'm afraid to say I have no idea how long they would keep for.

CAT TREATS

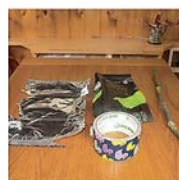
Oven to Gas 4
250g plain flour
1 ½ tsp catnip
40g skimmed milk powder
35g Margarine, melted
100mls Milk
1 tbsp honey
1 egg



The dry ingredients were mixed together first, with melted margarine and egg added next. The milk was poured in a little at a time until a soft dough formed. This was then rolled out, cut into small rounds, and baked for 20-30 minutes.

On first encountering his scratching post, Bosun seemed totally nonplussed so I pulled out the cat treats in the hopes of encouraging him. With great elegance, he simply stepped over the scratching post to get to the treat and then retired to his corner in the wheelhouse. Thankfully his owners kept the scratching post in the hopes of encouraging him to use it a later date. They have a sofa that is currently Bosun's favourite thing to scratch and are rather hoping to wean him off this and onto the post. Here's hoping!

The cat treats were far more successful. For added interest I'd tucked one into the centre of 4 interlocking circles cut from a cardboard tube and formed into a ball. The treat in the middle gave the ball a bit of weight and a rattle, and skittered off across the floor pleasingly when Bosun knocked it with his paw. It has to be said that the ball lasted approximately five seconds as with a second bat of his paw, Bosun succeeded in scattering the component



parts and tucked into its centre. From his perch in the wheelhouse, Bosun did get a little more excited by the toy I made out of a stick, an empty foil tea packet and some gaffer tape. This really was the work of a moment but was something that cats (and their owners) could have a great deal of fun with. Just make sure your empty packet is not lined with plastic, which caused me to discard the more colourful coffee bag. Simply cut the foil packet into a rectangle and snip three quarters of the way all along its width. Then stick this to a length of gaffer tape, wrap it around the end of your stick and voilà!

A shiny toy to play with! Bosun wasn't prepared to move to play with this when the camera was on him, but he did enjoy the light bouncing off the foil and engaged with it in a just-moving-his-head kind of way. Every time I put the camera down he would tantalisingly reach out to paw it. Note to self: never put camera down when trying to photograph cats.

My next play thing was a little more successful. Using a medium sized cardboard box, picked up from a supermarket, I stretched an old/worn-out T-shirt over it so that the neck hole was directly in front of the open box end. The bottom of the tee shirt was tied to secure it to the box and the sleeves tucked into themselves on the sides. Couldn't have been easier. Bosun was really quite delighted with this. As soon as it was



placed near him, he leapt down from his wheelhouse perch to investigate. After a couple of sniffs, he was straight in giving me just enough time to snatch a shot of his disappearing tail.

On the whole, the makes were fairly successful, and certainly they were all very easy to make. The scratching post took the most amount effort but even that was simple. It would make a lovely gift for either a boat or house dwelling cat and is certainly a lot more cost effective than the vast range of products on the market. Of course, there is no guarantee that your chosen feline recipient will use it anymore than the all singing all dancing ones available for purchase. At least with this, you only have wasted your time and a few scrap

WATERSIDE WILDLIFE

TREEWATCHERS LOOK TO SPRING FORECASTS

DASH FOR ASH?

...or will oak win the race to come into leaf

“Oak before ash we’re in for a splash, ash before oak we’re in for a soak.” After this wet winter we’re all

wondering what the summer will bring. Both trees come into leaf between late March and May, but oak leaves are more dependent on temperature and ash leaves on the number of hours of daylight. A warm spring usually means that oak wins the race, but either way the old rhyme does not forecast a dry summer.

Mature ash trees are tall and graceful with pale brown to grey bark that fissures as the tree ages. Winter trees are distinguished by smooth twigs with black, velvety leaf buds arranged opposite each other. Purple flowers appear before the leaves in spring, growing in spiked clusters at the tips of twigs. The leaves have three to six pairs of light green, oval leaflets with a single terminal leaflet. Ash timber is strong, durable and flexible, making it useful for tool handles, flooring, and rowing oars.

In Nordic mythology, the entire universe was supported and sheltered by a huge ash tree. But our ash trees are in big trouble: a fungal disease, Ash Dieback, originating in Asia and arriving in the UK via Europe, is spreading rapidly and is now expected to kill more than 70 percent of our native ash trees – a level of devastation similar to that caused by Dutch Elm Disease back in the 1970s. Stricken trees are prone to shedding limbs



or collapsing completely, so don’t moor beneath one. Symptoms include lesions at the base of dead side shoots, wilting and lost leaves, and dead new growth on mature trees. Airborne spores from fruiting bodies on leaf litter can spread for miles, sticking to ash leaves where they germinate and grow within the tree, eventually blocking the water transport system.

There is some hope on the horizon: research workers are trying to identify tolerant trees to propagate via cuttings, the eventual aim to re-establish the ash tree in the wild, but it would take about 50 years for the population to recover. In the meantime our environment will take a multi-billion pound economic shock and many species that are dependent on the Ash tree will follow it into local extinction.

Spring tree canopies are laden with caterpillars busy munching the fresh leaves. The handsome little acrobat, the Blue Tit, only produces one brood of chicks a year and it has to time the hatching of the eggs to coincide with the bumper harvest of caterpillars. Each chick can eat 100 caterpillars a day and, with eight to 12 chicks in the average brood, that’s an awful lot of caterpillars the parents must find.

With its colourful mix of blue, yellow, white and green, “Tomtit” is one of our most attractive small birds. Originally a resident of oak woodland, it has spread throughout the countryside: look for it clinging upside down to the outermost twigs of trees searching for food – mostly insects and spiders, but also seeds, pollen and nectar. The depth of the colour of the sulphur yellow underparts reflects the number of yellow-green caterpillars the bird has eaten: females prefer mates with very yellow breasts. The sexes look the same to us, but birds can see in the ultra-violet and males have a brighter blue crown.

Blue tits sing mostly in late winter and spring to defend their territory and attract a mate. The female builds the nest in a natural tree cavity before laying one egg a day for up to 16 days – some of the largest clutches of any song bird. The male feeds her during this energetically demanding period – you may see them sitting side by side on a branch, the female accepting a beakful of caterpillars with rapidly fluttering wings. You won’t see the fledglings until May, but you can recognise them by their generally yellower appearance than the adults (all



A Blue Tit keeps watch from an ash tree



ROOFTOP GARDENING

with Julie Clark

This is the month many of us wait for because it is the time most plants, flowers and vegetables, can be started from seed. To my mind, there is little more exciting than watching tiny seedlings appear and develop into pots full of colourful flowers or mouth watering vegetables.

Whether you are going to sow seeds into new pots or recycled containers, I find five litre water bottles particularly good for this, it is essential to ensure you have good drainage and compost. If choosing plastic remember to add some pebbles in the bottom for extra weight. This month I want to get some summer annuals going, a particularly good thing if you live in an urban environment to help bees and butterflies. Seed varieties can be mixed together or grown alone and if you check on the seed packet it should tell you how many weeks it will be before flowering – some take as little as eight weeks! Pretty pink and mauve Candytuft is very easy to grow as is the brightly coloured Linaria with its clusters of

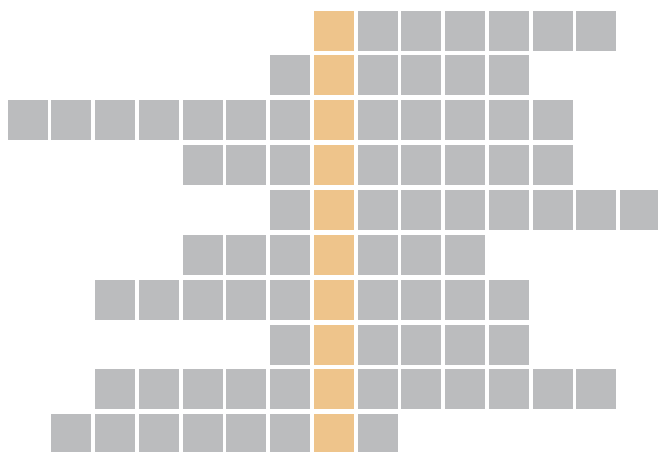


tiny Snapdragon flowers. Nemesis is a firm favourite and will often flower all the year round in milder areas. Other reliable and fast flowering plants include tagetes, sometimes called marigolds, nasturtiums which have varieties that dramatically trail everywhere as well as bedding varieties with a more bush like habit. An advantage of nasturtiums is that they are edible as well as beautiful and would make any summer salad a thing of delight! Poppies, corn flowers and dwarf varieties of cosmos would all grow happily in pots. Take a browse in any seed department

and see what takes your fancy! It is worth bearing in mind it is still springtime and the true delights of daffodils and tulips are at their best right now. Dainty primroses and violets really sum up spring days and with all the bright and exotic varieties now available there is no excuse for not having something on the front of the boat. Almost everywhere you shop there will be pots of bulbs and polyanthus which will give a few weeks of cheerful colour.

On the vegetable front, the one thing I can't do without, other than herbs, is a couple of tomato plants and a few dwarf beans. It is still a bit early for the beans but a few tomato seeds will be planted ready to be planted outside in a few weeks. The best variety I have found for the boat to date is called Summerlast from Suttons Seeds, however, there are a number of alternative varieties suitable for growing in small spaces such as tomato 'Balconi' from Thompson and Morgan as well as Pot Minibel and Tom Thumb. Pop a few seeds in a pot now and they will soon be ready for the summer!

WATERWAYS ACROSTIC



Name the following lock flights in the North of England

- ◆ A staircase below a city wall
- ◆ It shares its name with a junction and an aqueduct
- ◆ Also known as Slatlocks
- ◆ Three locks, one with a guillotine gate
- ◆ Two locks on the Ashton which were once duplicated
- ◆ A famous staircase of five locks
- ◆ Three locks which raise the Leeds & Liverpool to its highest level
- ◆ They used to carry the Lancaster Canal towards Kendal
- ◆ A flight of four on the Ashton
- ◆ The only flight on the Macclesfield
- ◆ Fit your answers into the grid so that the letters in the coloured box spell out the name of another flight of locks in the North of England

LAST MONTH'S ANSWERS: Lincoln, Wakefield, Bath, Oxford, Leeds, Tewkesbury, Newark, Northampton, Chester, Godalming

Putting your answers into the grid in the correct order spells out the final answer: MAIDENHEAD

THE BIG SKY with Seb Jay

From April and through into the summer months, you're certain to hear reports from folk about strings of moving lights in the sky.

The reason for this explosion of 'strange' sightings is two-fold. The procession of lights that others and perhaps yourself will see is the glint of sunlight off the surfaces of satellites, but lots of them gathered together in a constellation all moving

together. They are Starlink satellites, launched by Elon Musk's Space X company, and are set to provide satellite broadband internet access on a global scale.

Over the next decade, Space X plans to launch as many as 12,000 of these tiny satellites. No bigger than the galley area on your boat, they are currently sent up in packets of 60 at a time every few weeks. After launch

they travel together in a train about 340 miles above us, eventually spreading further apart from each other.

The second reason why you'll hear a lot more about them is that in the spring and summer months, they'll be easier to see. It's simply that the sun drops more shallowly below our horizon at night than during winter, illuminating them more readily to our earthbound eyes.



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GRAPHIC NOVEL

William and Michelle Graham of the Graphics Boat found leaving the cut was too hard

If you ever need proof that bad events can sometimes lead to good outcomes, just ask William Graham.

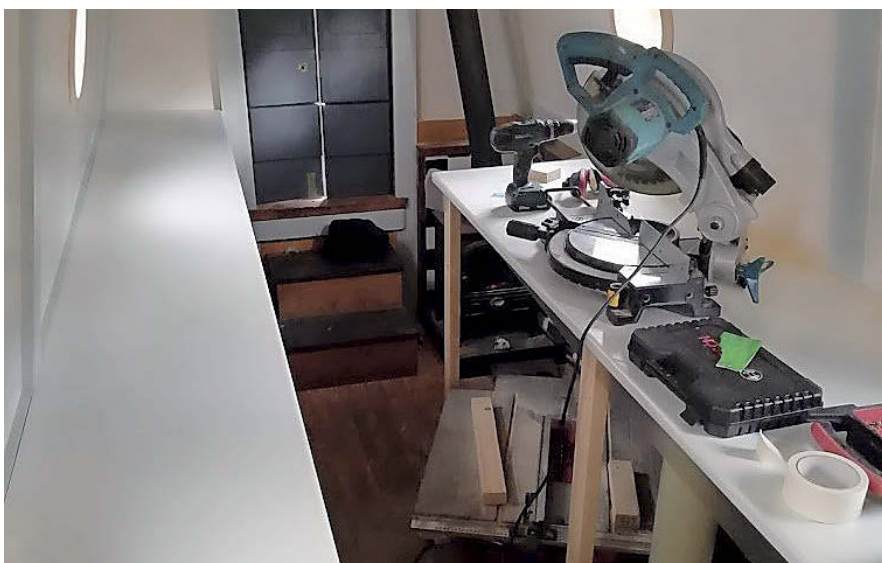
With his wife Michelle, William runs The Graphics Boat, which tours the inland waterways offering a vinyl signwriting graphics (the couple also work with clothing).

"We both had full-time jobs," said William. "I worked in the construction sector with my brother, but things became difficult with the recession. We already had a boat and wondered how we could make a living travelling round the country."

So, in 2007, Michelle gave up an accountancy career to get the business going and the couple began their new life, discovering a seasonal element to canalside



Space is at a premium



demand for its product; so online business is very important.

William confesses that the equipment needed to produce vinyl graphics necessitates some compromise when it's on a narrow boat that is also a home.

"It's difficult. There are raw materials, equipment such as a roll slicer and printer and there's lots of stuff to run so you need an inverter to ensure uninterrupted power. The front lounge has gone. The dinette is where we socialise."

Having a strong grasp on what people want is particularly important, so that William and Michelle have the right vinyl to hand and have to be prepared for changes in taste. "We sold a lot of cream

vinyl, now we sell very little of it. All you can do is try to have a minimum level of stock."

The couple have traded in three boats (having the first one lengthened by six feet), and also have a house in Scotland, whose garage doubles as a store.

"We were getting quite busy on the boat and thought we'd go land based, so we moved into a house in Scotland," said William. "We missed the canals too much so we bought another boat. We're transitioning to live full time on it, and at the moment we're 50 per cent land based, 50 per cent afloat."

Their current base is a 57ft CTS with a marinised Armstrong Siddeley motor more

commonly found in farm machinery. William describes this as "a modern traditional engine. It looks and sounds nice".

A 125cc motorcycle is another essential piece of equipment, as the couple try to moor in areas close a post office and use the bike to despatch deliveries.

The couple are clearly delighted at being back on the cut.

"We like making things and it's great to look out of the window and see a different view every day." 

*The Graphics Boat,
Telephone: 01644 625 005
Thegraphicsboat.co.uk*

SMOKE ON THE WATER

Safety must come first every time – so we don't need regulations to install smoke detectors, do we, asks James Millsop?

Over the past couple of winters, there have been several reports of fires on narrowboats. I had never seen the effects of a boat fire first hand until recently when we were asked to recover one from the water to load onto a lorry. This particular fire was reportedly started by an arsonist, but most are accidental. To see the damage caused is sobering to say the least, and in the (thankfully rare) cases where there are fatalities, the effects are life changing for those close to those involved.

Yes, boats can offer a haven of tranquility and peace and they can offer a way of life which some can only dream of and others cannot comprehend, but the need for respect of the dangers on board must be paramount. There are killers that lurk; carbon monoxide (I had my own scare / close call with this many years ago), gas, smoke, naked flames, 230V electricity, generator exhaust fumes...and I suppose alcohol and angry wives could be added to the list!

Last April, the Boat Safety rules were



quite wisely changed to add carbon monoxide detectors to the list of requirements.

There is, however, still no requirement for smoke detectors.

We shouldn't need rules though, as most of the safety precautions which should be taken are common sense and I would urge all those who have a boat or are thinking about getting one to take these considerations extremely seriously. You're a long time dead. **CE**

The BSS leaflet **Fire Safety on Boats** gives valuable advice on how to prevent fire hazards on boats. It recommends fitting optical sensor smoke alarms with hush buttons and 'sealed for life' batteries. They are much less prone to nuisance alarms from cooking fumes and the hush button allows rapid silencing if a nuisance alarm occurs.

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NUNS, NORMANDY & NIGHTLIFE

After replacing weary wiring, finding his feet with marina manoeuvres and opting for a sex change, Ian Hutson is ready to cast off for cardinal points

When I met my boat he was a she and was called Mooreen. It was only after I'd signed on the dotted line that Dame Julie Anderson...

also did admirable things such as running the counter...

WIN £100 ME & MY BOATS



The view from the boat looking out over the canal.

I had reached the end of my life when I was looking for a change. I had a job, a house, a car, a family and a boat. I was happy with everything, but I felt like I was missing something. I was looking for a change, a new challenge, a new adventure. I was looking for a boat that was different, a boat that was special. I was looking for a boat that was mine.



Ian Hutson on his boat, looking out over the canal.

WIN £100 ME & MY BOATS



Wapped up for winter on the tow path

I found my pontoon alright, and then the wind lost it for me and pinned us against the towpath

again, briefly, as we blew past sideways in the opposite direction, and became pinned up against the boats on the other side of the marina. On the third time of being blown past I just managed to edge the Cardinal's bows into our slot. Unfortunately, by that time I was in a physical fluster. Instead of the required touch of engines half-astern please, I gave some sort of directional dyslexia ordered up throttle-head torpedoes, full-ahead and damn the torpedoes. My mooring evoked the spirit of the Hornet's Landing.

We've been seriously grounded on the Shropshire Shelf. We've gone around in circles in unfamiliar marinas, looking for the hidden service piers. I've bought a coil of eight like smugglers moving tobacco and brandy.

I summed the pontoon so hard that I wouldn't have been surprised to see 50 Marines leap off the bow and engage the enemy. Glasses tinkled, every boat in the marina rocked, and the resident heron hid his puffers under a wing. Well, that's all in the distant past now (distant past is an insurance industry term) and the Cardinal and I are in our second year of slightly glacially-paced adventure, a journey of discovery.

There was one experience though that took my breath away. One windy April night I was awoken at 3:00am by an almighty banging and scraping noise at the stern. Something



The boat on the towpath, looking out over the canal.

ME & MY BOATS

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SEEKING A SEA CHANGE

It may well be the call of the wild or simply the search for new sights but when you've got to go... and what better way than life as a liveaboard as Fiona Wright and daughter Emma discovered on board the Pendle



Fiona Wright on her boat, looking out over the canal.

For someone as close to the water as I am, I was looking for a change. I was looking for a new challenge, a new adventure. I was looking for a boat that was different, a boat that was special. I was looking for a boat that was mine.



Fiona Wright on her boat, looking out over the canal.

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The boat on the towpath, looking out over the canal.

VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

When 14-year-old Anesha Salem stepped on board, it was the start of family adventures on the waterways

I was just one kid, who works with young people and had been working with a group of young people. I was looking for a change, a new challenge, a new adventure. I was looking for a boat that was different, a boat that was special. I was looking for a boat that was mine.



Anesha Salem and her family on their boat, looking out over the canal.

After looking on many websites and visiting boats around the country we came across Haggar - a 40ft narrowboat at the Normanton Sear Boat Club



The boat on the towpath, looking out over the canal.

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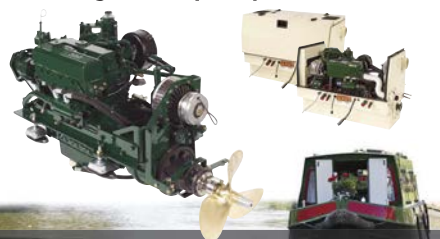
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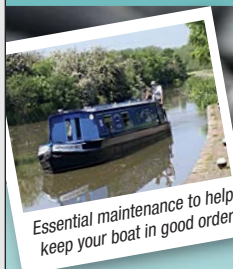
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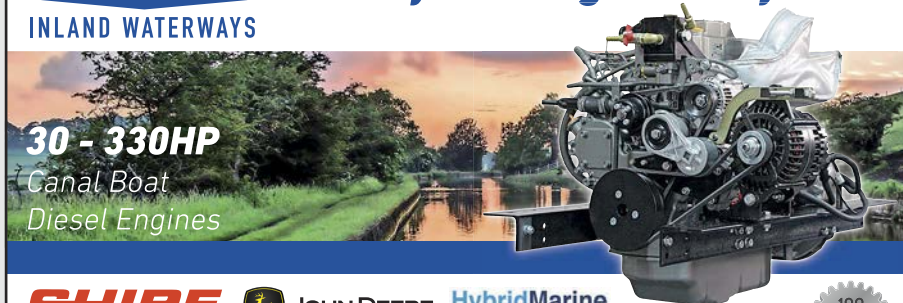
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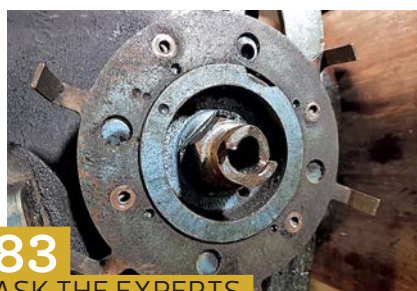
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Expert advice on avoiding the pitfalls of buying a boat



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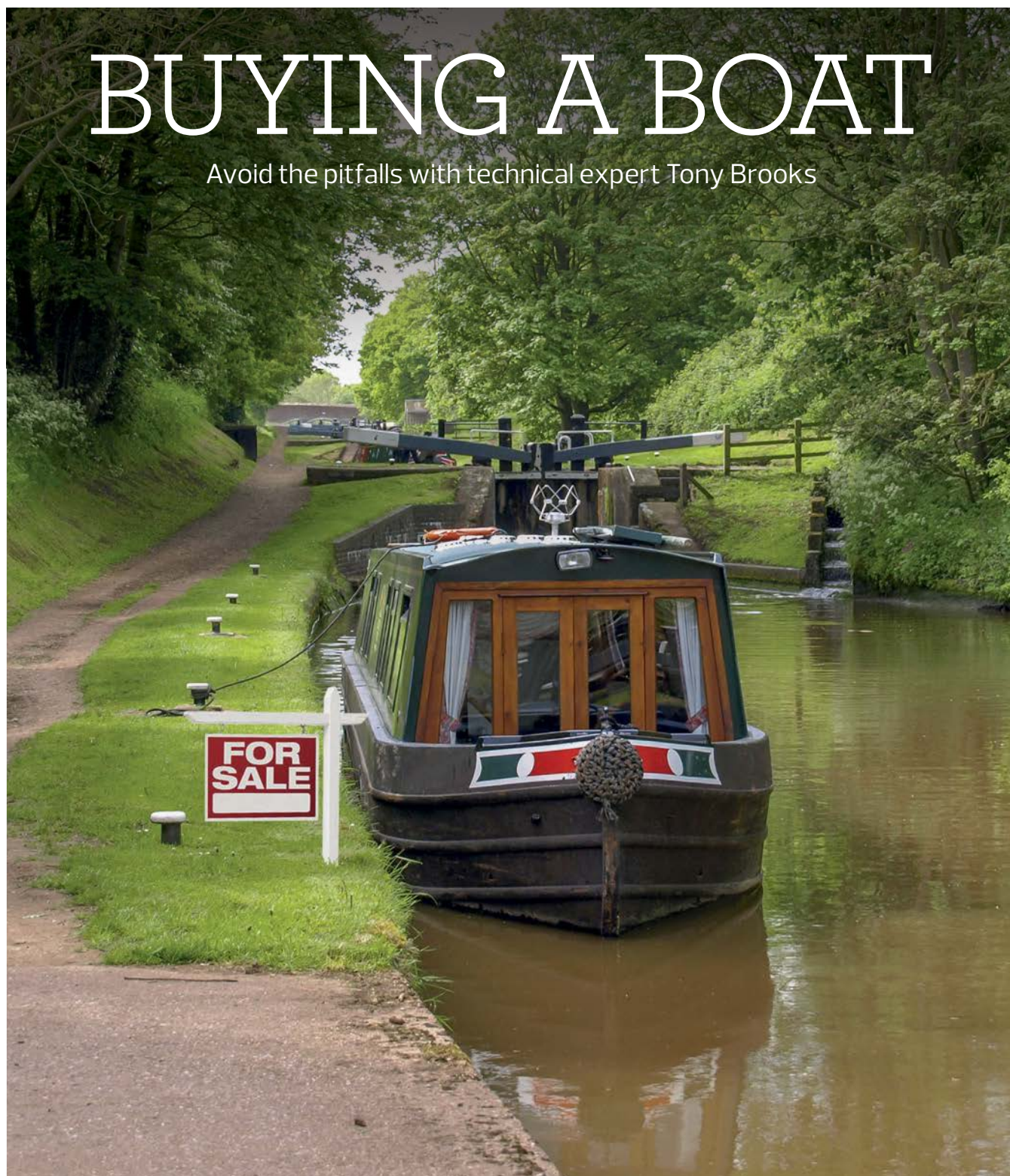
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TECHNICAL

BUYING A BOAT

Avoid the pitfalls with technical expert Tony Brooks



People who have hired or share owned boats for years will know what features they want in a boat, but people who have only had the odd holiday will almost certainly not. They may think they know – but after a year's boating they often change their minds.

If insufficient time is given to deciding what you want it may turn out to be an expensive mistake. Hire brochures show internal plans and outside pictures. Boat shows and visiting brokers give the opportunity to go over boats. Do not be tempted to part with money at this stage.

Whatever else you do take, time visiting boats and seeing how plans work in practice.

Think about getting right through the boat in an emergency, how using the toilet/shower/galley will affect people moving through the boat and where your guests will sit in the open. Most important of all, involve your partner otherwise you might get a quick course in single-handing!

Having defined what you think you need hire a few similar boats. Make sure some trips are in the winter, you may alter your plans! This will give you the opportunity to sample different types of equipment such as heating, toilets, cookers, engine type, the need for a cratch & cover (the "tent" at the front) and type of water tank (some need regular cleaning and painting). Try walking along the outside of the hull and decide what style of handrail you feel safest with. Use the opportunity to talk to boaters you meet. Most will happily tell you why they chose what they did and



Fig. 1

some may show you over their boat.

Hiring also gives a yardstick to judge boats against.

Read the newsgroups and other boat related sites on the internet and do not be afraid to ask for advice – you will probably get too much, a lot conflicting.

Download or send for the latest Boat Safety Scheme regulations, study and



Fig. 2

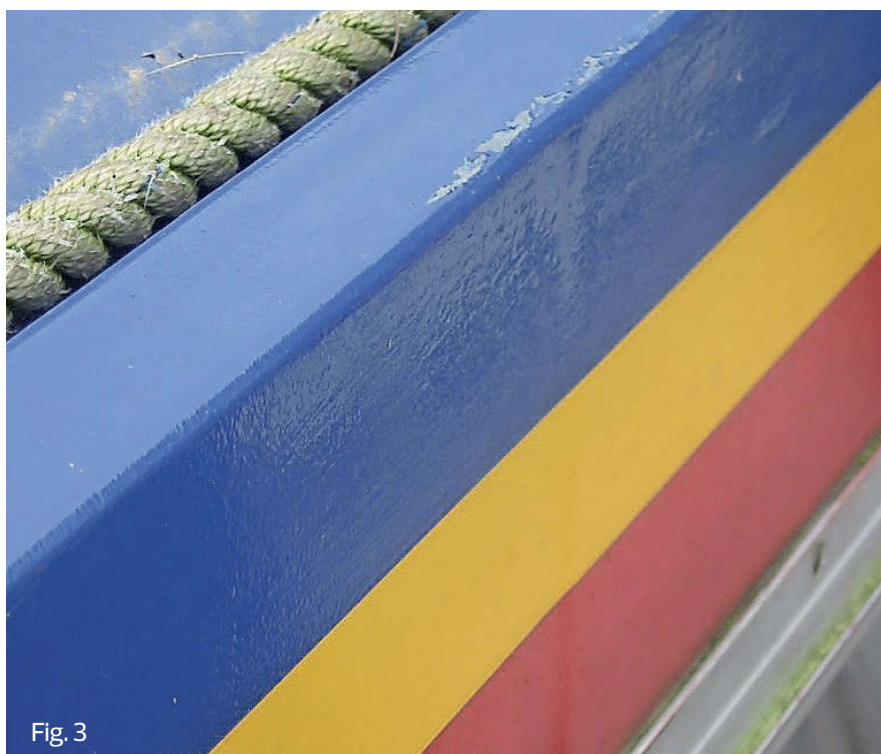


Fig. 3

learn them. This will allow you to judge the validity of a boat's certificate..

Before you start looking at boats with an intention to actually purchase visit any local builders who are renovating old properties. Ask them if they have any wet or dry rot (fig. 1 and 2) that you can smell. You need to remember this musty, mushroomy smell.

Boat hulls come in a variety of "qualities". Bottom of the range will always fetch low prices, however good you make them look. A top range hull bought in poor condition will fetch a good price once you smarten it.

Most, but not all, narrowboats are built on an absolutely flat base-plate that is slightly wider than the actual boat so it protects the welds and lower part of the hull side. A mid-range (fig. 3) narrow boat today will have a specification of 10-6-4.

This means the base-plate is 10mm thick, the hull sides 6mm thick and the cabin sides and roof 4mm thick. If there is an extra number quoted it is the thickness of the roof. A cheaper hull (fig. 4) may be 8-5-3 and older boats may have 6mm or thinner base plates. Now you can use the sales sheet to get an impression of hull quality. Generally the bigger the numbers the better.

Typically better quality hulls have longer swims (The “pointy” bits at either end). Expect them to be between 6 and 8 feet long on a mid-range hull.

Now inspect the welds on the cabin sides. Cheap boats will have wavy cabin sides and the welds standing proud as shown. Mid range hulls will have the welds ground flush, but you will still see indentations unless someone has filled them with body filler. Top class hulls should have no visible welds and the cabin sides should be absolutely flat.

You should now be able to tell if the price of the boat reflects its underlying value.

Inspect the hull for signs of rust pitting. Look around the waterline and below any vents in the hull (sink/basin drain, gas tank drain, and exhaust). On a modern hull pits of less than 0.5mm or so should cause no concern. A few larger ones can be filled with weld when the boat is being blacked. Check the anodes (Silvery lumps of metal perhaps 12ins x by a steel bar, often two at the front and back) Very pitted and eroded anodes or missing anodes indicate poor maintenance and cost cutting in the past.

Remember that a private seller can almost lie with impunity whilst a broker will have a clause in all their descriptions saying that anything in the sales brochure might be untrue so check the hull specification. Try to borrow (or even buy – £12 from Screwfix) a 0 to 25mm micrometer. You are only interested in measuring to the nearest mm which is dead easy. Measure the thickness through the drains for the front cockpit and through engine room vents or where the gunnels turns over in the cockpit.



Fig. 4

Measure the roof and cabin side where it hangs at the front or back. In all these cases allow say 0.5 mm for paint thickness. If the boat is ashore you can measure the base plate “overhang” - expect it to be worn.

Now inspect the cabin sides and roof. Areas of rust that are not very pitted may lower the price, but as long as they are in full view they are repairable during painting. If, however, you see rust bubbles emanating from, say, behind a window frame there is a problem. Unless you take the frame out, fully treat the rust and repaint, the rust will keep creeping out from below the frame, and as the steel below the frame rusts it expands, pushing the frame away from the side, giving rise to leaks.

Look inside cockpit lockers and all round the engine room to ensure the inside of the hull is not badly pitted.

Walk through the boat sniffing and looking around windows, chimneys and

roof vents. Wet cloth and rot smells tells you there is a problem with the woodwork. “Toilet” smells may indicate a lack of cleanliness or it may indicate a leaking toilet tank, low quality toilet hoses or even a gas leak.

Black streaks in the wood (fig. 5) or “water marks”, bowing gaps, delamination of plywood or blockboard and swelling MDF all indicate present or past water leaks. At the same time look for signs of “Conti-board” or other chipboard. This is not suitable for damp environments. Good quality fit-outs will use solid wood and possibly plywood, whilst cheaper fitouts use a lot of MDF – look in the base of any routed features. If it’s a uniform brown with no marked grain it’s MDF.

Look in the internal channels of the windows. If they are full of moss etc the long term care of the boat is suspect, as it is if rubber (fig. 6) cord is pulled out of place (between glass and frame) and is lying across the corners of the window. Also check for missing varnish (fig. 8).

Unscrew a switch or speaker so you can check the type and thickness of thermal insulation.

Look under the gunwales and in the back of cupboards to find the wiring. This should be clipped up in neat bundles and if any individual cable feels “stiff” when bent between two fingers and the thumb it is probably solid strand domestic cable (fig. 7) that will fracture in time.

If you find any “flat” “three strand” mains cable (not mains flex) it is again an indication of poor fitting out unless it is a very old boat.



Fig. 5

Light every gas burner and ensure they all work and none burn with a yellow flame. If the fridge is gas then light that and again ensure there is no yellow in the flame. Test all the electrical equipment. The more that does not work the worse the boat has been looked after. Turn on a number of lights and operate the water pump or electric toilet, if the lights dim noticeably there is a problem.

If it's not flat batteries it is probably expensive and may be dangerous.

Now turn your attention to the bilges. Most boats built over the last 20 years will be of the two-bilge design. An accommodation bilge that is separated from the engine or stern bilge; but there are a few exceptions. Older boats may have "all in one" bilges, a front, accommodation, and engine bilge (again separate) or the front bilge may be piped through the accommodation bilge into the engine bilge.

At the back of the cabin, usually under the steps or in a cupboard there should be a trap to give access to the accommodation bilge. The bilge should be dry in an insulated boat.

If it is not it indicates leaking, possibly windows, water system, toilet system, or shower/bath system and pump. If it's the latter you may well see soap scum or smell the soap. If you have turned the water pump on and you hear it running now and again it may well indicate a domestic water leak. If the water is clear and the pump is silent then it is probably condensation or window leaks. Very often this is the area where wood rot can be found.

You can expect the baseplate to be rusty on an older boat and it is of little consequence unless either the baseplate is thin or deeply pitted (say 1mm +). There should not be any wet carpet or floor covering in this area. If there is water present or wet floor coverings question the maintenance.

Now look at the engine - make it clear to the vendor/broker that you will be running the engine and checking the gearbox.

Look into the engine coolant header tank. The level should be at least an inch below the filler neck, but it can be far lower



Fig. 6

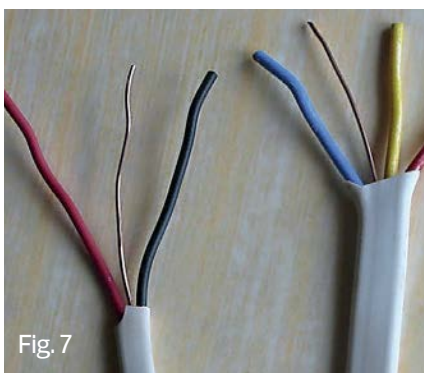


Fig. 7

as long as you can see the coolant. It should not be thick and brown like cocoa, the colour of the antifreeze should be visible. Very rusty, "thick" water indicates a lack of maintenance and possible corrosion inside the cooling system.

Run your hand over the batteries and engine. If you feel warmth make another appointment and insist that the batteries are not charged nor the engine without you being present.

If there are any explanations or excuses as to why the batteries needed charging just before viewing or why they are flat question the charging system and estimate between £60 and £120 per battery for new ones.

The engine should start easily from cold and any white smoke should stop after a few minutes.

If the engine is equipped with heater/glow plugs allow up to 30 seconds for these to do their job. The longer it takes to start and the more/longer it smokes the worse condition the engine is in.

Move the control lever to ahead and rev the engine. Note how long it takes for the propeller shaft to start to rotate. Repeat with reverse. Both should take similar time for the shaft to come up to speed and the longer it takes the more chance the gearbox is worn out. A clang or thud as the gears engage may indicate a faulty drive plate or gearbox. Leave the engine running.

Inspect the batteries. If they have grown "fur" on the terminals the boat has not been well looked after. If the end of any battery is bowing out and swelling the battery is nearing the end of its life. The larger the bow the shorter its remaining life.

At either side of the engine and behind it there is a bilge where there may be a little water but there should be no oil. If the whole area is covered in black oil with pieces of dirt or rag floating in it the boat has not been well looked after. Under the engine there should be a sealed area. I would like to see this clean and free from all oil and water.

A bilge blanket here to absorb oil or fuel drips shows care. Again if this area is full of oil and water the boat has not been maintained well. Ideally the whole of the area should be well painted with little signs of rust, a film of dust and the odd oily area is acceptable.

There should be no major oil or rust streaks on the engine, no build up of oily dirt and no pools of oil or water on it.

Now the engine is getting warm, take off the oil filler cap and rev the engine. There will be a certain amount of pressure coming from the filler (compare with other boats and even your car) but excess pressure or smoky fumes indicate engine problems. If there is a pressure gauge check the oil pressure. On a modern (not air-cooled Listers) expect more than 15psi on idle and over 35psi when revving when hot.

Stop the engine, pause, and check the engine and gearbox dipstick for level. The engine oil should be fairly black but runny. Water gives oils a whitish tinge, this is a bad sign.

Smell the engine oil, if you can smell diesel there is a problem.

At last - take the boat for a run, if a river is nearby give it a bit of an upstream thrash to ensure the engine does not overheat or make excessive smoke.

Compare the vibration, noise and "stopping ability" with the boats you hired.

If you are still satisfied it is time to make an offer "subject to survey" and make sure it is understood that final price is dependant upon the survey.

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Fig. 8



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TONY BROOKS Technical Consultant



Last month I talked about the need to get to know your boat and the proof occurred over the Christmas shutdown. A young residential family just moved onto a narrowboat were moored at a boatyard using a shoreline for electric heating and battery charging. All seemed well until the shoreline tripped overnight and they lost all power, 12V and 240V. Even when the shore line was

restored they then found that the engine would not start. Having young children and with no hope of professional help for some days I went to see them. The boater had decided he needed a new start battery so we fitted it and the engine sprung into life. As for the domestic side of things we think that when the power failed the inverter stepped in to run the heaters and that very quickly

flattened the domestic bank. The owner did not know that on older boat's battery chargers often only charge the domestic bank so the engine battery was not being charged. I explained how a simple jump lead can be used to charge both banks from the charger and since then the owner has been investigating his systems and asking about the equipment he found.

Finding BMC parts

Q A while ago we talked about a high frequency noise my engine makes. Recently I replaced the oil thrower behind the pulley to top an oil leak. The two parts of the pulley were slipping when I tightened the nut. I think I have to replace the pulley. I also want to replace the Lock washer of the bolt. Ring F (crankshaft oil seal) outside 70mm. The hole is far too large – it rotates freely – so I have to replace it. Maybe this is the main cause of the noise – I hope so.



I tried to obtain the spare parts. I contacted several shops in Holland and looked on the sites of ASAP supplies and Calcuttboats shop, but did not succeed. Are there any other internet shops in the UK that I can try?

Leo Groen (Holland)



The reluctor on the pulley

A TONY REPLIES: Easy part first. If you have only looked online I suggest you email or telephone Calcutt Boats. They are the only supplier I know of for the majority of BMC parts for boats. Many people stock service parts, a few marinisation parts but Calcutt seem to stock all available parts and they also rebuild BMC 1.5 engines.

Part F is an oil thrower, not an oil seal. The oil seal is a "rubber" lip-type seal that is located in

the timing cover. The thrower is normally a sliding fit on the shaft and when the parts are finally assembled it is clamped between the back of the pulley boss and the front of the crankshaft timing gear. If the oil thrower (F) has 1mm or so of radial movement and you can't get another one then I would suggest that you place it on a flat surface and tap around the hole with a ballpeen hammer. This may well spread the metal enough to close up the hole



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but as I said it is not a tight fit on the shaft.

I cannot see that part being able to make a high frequency noise. What I can see are bright score marks on the back of the pulley that should not be there. It looks to me as if the pulley has been rubbing on the timing cover and that may well produce a high frequency noise. This suggests that the crankshaft thrust washers may be badly worn so the shaft can float forwards and backwards. Please check the crankshaft end float.

The pulley does not look as if the rubber between the inner and outer part is damaged but if it is then do not run the engine. The pulley is a torsional oscillation damper so if you run it damaged the crankshaft may snap. I have seen people saying that an MGB pulley fits and it may well do but unless the BMC part numbers are the same I fear the damper tuning might be different so I cannot advise you to try that source.

I am concerned that perhaps the pulley was damaged while you were removing or tightening the pulley bolt.

The bent 'teeth' on the rev counter reluctor suggest that you had a bar between its teeth to stop the crankshaft revolving and that is likely to

damage the rubber damper element. Please remove the starter and use a big screwdriver to jamb the flywheel teeth.

Charging advice 1

Q I have a twin alternator Vetus engine with 95amp leisure alternator and 50amp starter alternator. My batteries are lead acid I am thinking of fitting a DC to DC Charger with the benefits of three-step charging and higher current charging for longer periods of time, therefore charging my leisure batteries quicker and always at the correct voltage. The DC to DC charger would be connected from the starter battery to leisure bank and therefore run using the starter alternator. This would then effectively leave the leisure alternator redundant. How could I take the benefits of a DC to DC charger and not make my leisure alternator redundant, as this would seem a waste. This is the DC to DC I'm thinking of using <https://www.victronenergy.com/dc-dc-converters/orion-tr%20smart>

Mark Howard

ANTONY REPLIES: So you think that replacing what is probably a 95 Amp alternator with a 30 amp or less DC to DC charger will do a faster charging job? The first point you need to grasp is that for the vast majority of charging time from whatever source it is the BATTERIES that control the charge they will accept – not the alternator and not any fancy controller you decide to fit. The only time the charge source controls the charging current is right at the start of charging when its working flat out but after a comparatively short time – maybe half an hour or so – the batteries start limiting the charge they will accept. At that point the charge source voltage regulator will be operating and holding the charging voltage at a safe maximum. Fit whatever you want but you can't put more current into a battery bank than it will accept. If the charging voltage is raised the current will also rise but with modern alternators the margin between the regulated voltage and the voltage that will damage batteries is small, maybe only about 0.2V and even then much of any of the extra current the charging ammeter shows may well be wasted in heating the batteries and turning the electrolyte to gas.

Experience shows that when boaters start looking at such devices they are usually trying to cover up faults in their charging system, charging regime, or excess electrical consumption. In all cases it is usually far cheaper to address the problem areas than try to hide them by expensive add ons. You do not say how you use your boat or what type of boat it is but if you are a leisure boater using it mostly during the warmer months of the year then the cost of that device would probably do more good being spent on solar charging but solar does very little for liveaboard boaters during the winter.

That device would come into its own on a single alternator dual voltage boat with 12V domestics and 24V starting but its low 400 watt output would still be very limiting re domestic battery charging.

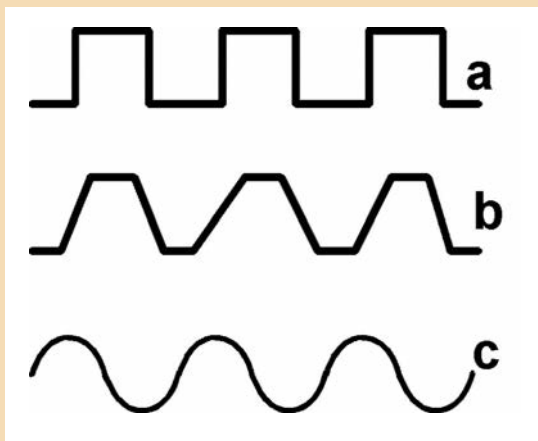
If you want to speed up that first stage of charging then simply fit a dual sensed voltage sensitive relay between the domestic and engine battery banks but be aware one alternator may shut down once their regulators start to work. If you want to overcome battery charging problems then do a power audit and charging calculations to see how you can reduce your electrical consumption or increase the length of time you charge for each day. Typically when you are on the boat and without any charge monitoring equipment you need to charge for a minimum of four hours each day and well over eight hours at the weekend.

I might be able to give you better advice if you tell me exactly what the problem you are trying to solve is, including the age of the batteries

Inverter for TV

Q I have a Victron Energy Phoenix 12-1200 inverter and also a Silverline 300 watt inverter no.204757. Are either of these suitable for powering a 240v TV. I understand it is something to do with some waves. If it's a case of try it and see will I damage anything?

Derek Sutton



ANTONY REPLIES: As far as damage goes then possibly yes.

In the diagram a and b are inverter output wave forms that are not sine waves like the mains supply c. There are other non-sine wave forms such as saw tooth and stepped square wave and all of them may, not will, cause problems or damage equipment.

The Silverline entry on Amazon states it has a modified sine wave output but that could mean anything. Only pure sine waves can be used with no

fear of malfunction or damage. There are a number of reports of hair curlers and electric tooth brushes being damaged by non-sine waves, motors may overheat and run noisily, audio-visual equipment might buzz or suffer picture break up and so on. Even if 300 Watts is enough to run your TV I would advise you not to use the Silverline inverter.

Without a model number I can not look up the specification for your

particular Victron inverter but I would expect Victron to have a pure sine wave output and at 1.2kW output it should power the TV without any problems. The only slight "problem" may be with larger inverters is that the current (amps) it draws just to work itself might be higher than smaller ones but as Victron is a quality make I suspect it will need less current than the Silverline for the same output power.

and how you charge them. If you have been reading adverts and the boost to charging voltage seems a good idea to you then just remember most copywriters are not technical experts and will almost always overstate any potential benefits of what they are trying to sell you.

Charging advice 2

I have a narrowboat that I only use April to October. I have four X 110AH lead acid batteries and use on average 70–100Ah in 24 hours, I have 300 watts of solar panels, the batteries are never discharged by more than 30 to 35 percent. For the past five years I've had no issues at all. I replaced the batteries in spring 2019 and within a couple of months the batteries lost their capacity, going to 11.9 Volts overnight. I complained to the battery supplier who capacity checked the batteries and confirmed they had lost 50 percent of their capacity. They replaced the batteries for me. When in marina batteries are on a three-step Mastervolt combi. My leisure alternator is kicking out 14.15 Volts, could this be the issue? I'm advised this should be 14.4 Volts. Can the voltage be adjusted? Or did I just get a dud set of batteries

Mark Howard

ANTONY REPLIES: Who said your alternator should produce 14.4 volts? Many modern ones do and some produce 14.7V or more but others have a regulated voltage of between 13.8 (rare now) and 14.2 volts. If your manual says 14.4 then fair enough but be aware that at higher charging currents the charging voltage is automatically suppressed so that 14.15 volts may be the result of a higher electrical load or partiality discharged batteries. It might also be caused by a loose alternator belt, resistance in the charge wiring, or a shorting cell in a battery.

A likely explanation for the loss of battery capacity is that the shoreline mains tripped and an incorrect setting caused the Mastervolt unit to feed its charging circuits from its inverter. This inevitably discharges the batteries and allows them to sulphate that in turn causes a loss of capacity.

If any cells need more topping up, a battery or local spots on a battery are getting hotter than the rest, or if the batteries stink of rotten eggs when charging then you are likely to have a shorting cell that will discharge and sulphate the whole bank.

A low charging voltage can also be caused by a diode in the alternator failing so if you are sure the batteries are fully charged then I would take the alternator to a specialist for testing and talk to them about the possibility of getting a 14.4 volt or slightly higher regulator fitted.

Water heaters in boats

Q I do have a hook up and a battery charger so I am hoping to go down the immersion heater road to have hot water all the time, I am hoping this will be cheaper than using gas. I fitted an Alde timer thermostat for my comfort (I think 2328) boiler so I could wake up to a hot shower, but then I program the timer to go off as I think I will get through a lot of gas keeping the water hot throughout the day?

I have just ordered an electric element from Marine Mart. My boat is only three years old and the water heater is foam insulated, do you think I need a jacket as well? I just hope this won't use a lot of electric.

I have my battery charger on 24/7 – someone told me to switch it off for 24 hours once a week, what do you think?

Helen Timms

ANTONY REPLIES: Any extra insulation will help, but it's a question of diminishing returns for the money you spend. If it's a relatively modern cylinder you may not notice the difference extra insulation makes. It would be worth checking that the engine coil is not thermo-siphoning so the calorifier heat is being passed to the cold engine. If this is happening (check the hoses in the engine room for warmth last thing at night) try swapping the engine connections on the calorifier. It may prevent it, but it may also reduce or prevent the engine warming the water. It's trial and error.

Many calorifiers (boat hot water cylinders) have an immersion heater boss under the insulation so to save buying a new cylinder have a poke about to see if yours has. You can also get what is known as an Essex Flange to fit an immersion

heater into a cylinder without a boss. Put the immersion heater on a time switch so it comes on perhaps an hour before you get up and then again an hour before you get back at night and compare the cost of leaving it on all the time. I suspect the cost differences will be small, but please let me know how they compare.

As long as the battery charger is designated multi-stage or two stage then it is fine to leave it on 24/7. It should reduce its voltage to what is known as a float charge once it thinks the batteries are "full". It can safely stay like this all the time. However if there is ever the slightest hint a battery might be failing you need to identify that battery and take it out of use at once or turn the charger off. If you do not then eventually you will get a rotten egg smell and possibly a battery explosion.

Charging advice 3

Q If I fit a DC to DC charger powered by the engine battery and supplying the domestic battery what happens when its output voltage exceeds the alternator voltage.

Mark Howard

ANTONY REPLIES: This is true of any system with two or more charge sources. During the early period of charging while the current demand is high so the voltage is depressed the charge will be the sum of the charge from all sources. As the batteries charge the current drops and the voltage rises until the point where voltage regulation starts to be applied. It is unlikely that all sources will regulate at exactly the same voltage but if they do then each will supply a proportion of the current the batteries demand. More likely the source with the lowest regulated voltage will just shut down. This can cause confusion because if it's the alternator the warning lamps may glow and the buzzer sound. However this will be late on in the charging cycle where the current demand is small and that will be properly met

by the working device. If you then apply a high domestic load the voltage will fall so all devices start to charge until that load is turned off.

Fuel question

Q I have a Russell Newbury DM2, in view of the impending change from red diesel to white will my engine run okay on 28 second heating oil or maybe 50/50 and would there be any long term damage.

Ian Fletcher

ANTONY REPLIES: Apart from any other considerations once the legislation comes into effect to do what you suggest for leisure marine use would be illegal.

28 second heating oil is commonly known as paraffin or kerosene. Gas oil, red diesel and DERV has a 35 second viscosity so is "thicker" taking seven seconds longer for a measured amount to run through a certain sized hole. I also think 28 second oil will prove to be a far less effective lubricant for the injector pump and injectors. Using a 28 second fuel is also

likely to increase the fuel consumption because each litre of fuel will contain less energy.

If this were a more modern design of engine I would leave the answer there but many years ago the Lister SL manual used to state that their engines could be run on a mixture of 28 second fuel and lubricating oil. I think the ratio was 8 to 1 but can't remember now. Those engines' basic design were of a similarly age to yours so I suspect in extremis you could run your Russell Newbury on a similar mixture but I must make it clear it would be totally at your own risk. I could never agree no damage would be done.

Actually you have been running on dyed white diesel for years now with some suppliers selling fuel with no bio-diesel in it that is mandatory for road vehicles. I doubt any white diesel will be available without 7% of bio-diesel in it.

Overheating 70A alternator

Q I have a problem with the 70amp alternator getting very hot and eventually burning out the stator wiring. A separate 45A alternator charges the starter battery and so there is no split charger or external alternator regulator fitted. The wiring is as originally installed and I have not altered it or added anything. The 45A alternator runs fine, only getting as warm as the engine.

The 70amp alternator gets very very hot when charging at lower voltages and I assume higher currents. It is charging the batteries okay and on reaching 14.3/14.4 volts (usually no

longer than one hour after an overnight drain on the batteries) it then runs nice and cool. If I put a big load on the batteries (e.g. 240V vacuum cleaner) as you would expect the voltage drops and the alternator gets very hot again. The over heating is so extreme it has burnt out two alternators, the original unit and a replacement supplied a couple of years ago by Beta Marine (ISKRA AAK3119). I had the alternators checked and in each case the stator winding was burnt out. The diodes are okay. I have checked the wiring against the original Beta Marine schematic and its correct. I have checked the voltage drop between B+ and the +ve terminal of the battery (0.1V) and between the alternator case and the -ve terminal of the battery (0.02V). Until the alternators burnt out completely the alarm light/buzzer did not sound on the engine panel. I have checked the fan and it spins in the direction of the little arrow and there is good air flow.

The engine has an oversize pulley and a micro V-belt spins the alternator at a ratio of approx 3:1 so with the engine at 1000rpm I estimate its spinning at 3000rpm. I normally run the engine between 1000 rpm for battery charging and 1200 rpm for cruising. There is no sign of belt wear or slippage, no heat or noise from the pulley and no black dust.

I have tried to improve the cooling (by removing the engine covers) but even open to the November air the alternator gets so hot it smells of burning insulation. The engine temp is fine at ~70degC on the dial.

I want to find a permanent solution to this problem rather than keep replacing the

alternator. Do I need a higher output alternator, or an alternator regulator or both? Before I invest heavily in either I want to understand why so much current is going through the alternator. I understand a modern alternator regulator will significantly improve battery charging but I'm concerned the extra power demand on the alternator will only make things worse.

Is it unreasonable to expect an alternator to charge 600 amp/hour of leisure batteries. My present set of batteries are two years old and we use the boat all year round about one week in four.

I have always kept the new batteries well charged and they appear to be in good condition. I leave the batteries well charged and there appears to be no drain when we leave the boat because the alternator will reach 14.3V within less than a minute of starting the engine. Unfortunately where I am moored I do not have access to a shoreline to run a battery charger. I'm beginning to understand why so many boaters have portable generators but I'm still reluctant to store petrol on board.

Mike Roberts

ANTONY REPLIES: In theory this cannot happen. An alternator self limits the current to the design maximum, so as long as the designer got his sums right it simply should not burn out – even if it was running into a short circuit. This suggests to me that it is a cooling problem which may be related to lack of engine room venting, the fan behind the alternator pulley, or fan/alternator speed. You seem to have covered the possibility of a wrong handed fan and engine room venting so that leaves fan speed although it's always possible an undersized fan has been fitted at some time. I think trying to charge flattish batteries at 1000 rpm is asking for a lack of cooling air flow. I always advise that when charging while tied up you set the engine speed to that which gives you the maximum alternator output (Amps) and then as the amps fall gradually reduce the speed. I think Beta have supplied some engines with their own alternator controllers that have since been withdrawn because of unspecified problems. Make sure your alternator is using the Iskra built in regulator.

A 35 amp alternator will charge a 600 Ah bank – eventually, so it's not the size of the alternator and in most cases after about half an hour the batteries start limiting the current they will accept. This is why your alternator eventually cools down.

Alternators often get almost too hot to touch so do not get too hung up on temperature. A 70 amp alternator will produce well nearly 1kW under full load and as they are often said to be 50 percent efficient it means they are also producing about 1kW of heat. I suspect a Bosch, Leece-Nevil or Balmar alternator would be better quality than Iskra.

Gardner 2LW prop

Q We have a 42ft Narrowboat Tug, we've just fitted with a Gardner 2LW. Would you by any chance know what the optimum propeller diameter and pitch for this size boat. Mainly canal applications, but it would be nice to have a little reserve for some river work. Also (last question) would you by any chance know the best people to speak with who may have one in stock.

Peter Kukla

ANTONY REPLIES: Unless this is part of an old working boat or it has been built with a deep

draught I fear you may find you can not accommodate the optimum diameter prop. This will mean you may need to have a special "large blade area" one made. Much depends upon the gearbox ratio. Many people sell props but only one company seems to get it right most of the time for inland craft and that is Crowther Marine in Oldham. They will not tell you what speed to expect and they will have to make it specially for you but I would not go anywhere else. They will work out the size you need. I purchased a special 16 x 12 for my boat from them.

Just for fun and background knowledge there are a number of propeller calculators on the internet that you can play with. This will give you some idea of the info you will need to supply Crowthers and also a rough idea about prop size. If you hawk this size around the chandlers and prop specialists neither myself nor the supplier will accept any blame for unacceptable performance. Be wary of bargain priced props, some are not strong enough for canal work, especially on a deep draught boats.



MELISSA'S

GALLEY GRUB

LIGHT YOUR FIRE

Cosy up with a curry...complete with coriander and cumin

Curry doesn't have to be complicated! And this dish proves the point.

This comforting dish of spicy satisfaction can be as hot or mellow as you choose; because you're letting a decent curry powder do the hard work, you can choose to turn the heat up or down accordingly, while the coriander and cumin further enhances the flavour, the fresh ginger adds warmth without fire – and the fresh red chilli is there if you want it.

During cooking, the butternut squash breaks down into a velvety sauce that binds the dish together, while the chutney elevates this curry to stellar heights, bringing depth and a unique sweet/sour personality to the party; I prefer to use a fruity, complex aubergine pickle, but milder mango chutney works just as well. Meanwhile, if you like your curries creamy, the coconut milk does the trick.

This is a classic low'n'slow dish, happy to wait for when you're ready to eat it rather than the other way around. It also benefits from being made 24 hours before you plan to tuck in, which allows the sauce to thicken while the meat relaxes and the spices get to know each other. As with all curries and casseroles, it also freezes well.

**INGREDIENTS** SERVES SIX

1.5kg beef, cut into approx.
3cm cubes
750g peeled, diced butternut
squash
1tsp ground coriander
1tsp ground cumin
2 onions, sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
5cm knob of ginger, grated
Finely sliced fresh red chilli to
taste (optional)
3–5 tsps curry powder
(choose your strength)

500g good chutney/Indian
pickle
Approx 800ml beef stock
400ml tin coconut milk (optional)
Oil for frying
To serve: plain boiled rice (pref.
Basmati); roti

METHOD

- 1 Preheat the oven to 150C or set the slow cooker to low.
- 2 Season the beef with the cumin and coriander.

3 Heat the oil in a large ovenproof casserole dish and brown the beef in batches, putting each batch aside as soon as the chunks have caramelised around the edges.

4 Add more oil to the pan if necessary and sauté the onion, butternut squash, garlic, ginger, fresh chilli (if using) and curry powder for 4–5 minutes, until soft and fragrant.

5 Tip the browned beef back into the casserole

dish with the chutney, stock and coconut milk (if you're not using coconut milk, add an extra 400ml of water or stock) and stir well.

6 Cover the pot and cook in the oven for around four hours (stirring occasionally and adding more water/stock if necessary) or in the slow cooker for up to eight hours, until the meat is very tender.

7 Serve to hungry guests with rice and roti.

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2004 49FT **SWAN VALLEY**

£39,995

This former Alvechurch Boat Centres trad stern has four berths and at 49ft is convenient to navigate on most waterways and suitable for both short breaks and extended stays.

Entering from the semi traditional stern there is the bedroom cabin.

This has a flexible layout option of either a double or two single beds together with wardrobe space for storage.

The bathroom is next and has a WC, washbasin and hipbath with a shower overhead.

As you progress, there is a walk-through galley which is fully equipped

with a fridge, oven with hob, microwave and stainless steel sink and drainer unit. There is storage by way of built in cupboard units under smart black marble effect worktops.

Finally, there is a dinette/saloon area at the bow of the boat. This provides a L-shaped seating area, with a table for dining.

This can be removed to convert to an additional double berth to cater for extra guests. Steps lead out to the bow.

Swan Valley is powered by a Beta engine with a Newage PRM150 gearbox and heated by an Eberspacher boiler.



CONTACT: 0330 3330593
abclg.com

VERDICT: Great size for cruising

Three-pot Beta

1998 61FT **PATHFINDER**

£62,500

Pathfinder has a distinctive joshier style bow, low deck, portholed elevation, replica rivets, pigeon box and signature bulkhead rings.

There is a Beta three-cylinder engine situated in its own engine room forward of the Boatman's cabin, both of which are traditionally scumbled and painted. You may not have considered a boat of this style but it has many benefits; in inclement weather steering is a real pleasure with the warmth of the range at your feet and the delicious smell of a casserole slowly simmering away on the range.

Secondly you have the



added advantage of a totally separate sleeping cabin for family or friends, plus with the engine further away from the steerer, mechanical noise is greatly reduced, allowing you to enjoy the mellow note from the exhaust stack. 230V power is not only supplied

by the inverter but also from the fitted 3.5kW engine driven generator. *Pathfinder* is powered by a Beta Tug BD3 diesel engine.

CONTACT: 01788 822115
abnb.co.uk

VERDICT: Ripe for a refurb

Reverse layout

2002 45FT **DEBBIE'S DELIGHT**

£34,950

Former ex-fleet cruiser *Debbie's Delight* has a reverse layout with the saloon and galley at the stern.

The 2002 45-footer has four berths and is the ideal size for tackling the network.

The saloon has an L-shaped settee which can be converted in to a double bed. The galley is well equipped with a four-burner hob, oven and grill, a stainless steel sink with draining board, and under counter fridge. The built-in units also provide you with useful storage for all of your kitchen items.

Next is the bathroom



which has a WC, wash basin with vanity unit and a hip bath with an overhead shower. At the bow of the boat is the bedroom, which contains a fixed double bed and wardrobe space. Near the foot of the bed is a side hatch with steps.

Powered by a Beta Marine 35 with a PRM120 gearbox.

CONTACT: 0330 3330593
abclg.com

VERDICT: Built for cruising



£89,500

2009 69FT **GONE BUSH**

This Jonathan Wilson boat with a Fernwood fitout is traditional on the outside – in vast contrast to the modern inside fitout with a plentiful use of solid hardwoods and a well styled shower room. A new Eberspacer compact diesel boiler is included in this sale, ready to be fitted to the existing central heating system, and will complement the diesel stove; both of which will do a grand job of keeping you warm while you watch TV with your feet up. Side doors either side of the cabin give a bright, airy feel and can be used all year round thanks to the internal glazed doors.

CONTACT: abnb.co.uk
01788 822115

VERDICT: Hardwood fit-out



£37,950

1999 58FT **WELVAREN**

This 58ft semi-trad is powered by a four-cylinder Lister engine and heated by a Webasto central heating system plus two Morso Squirrel stoves. There are four berths on board and the galley is equipped – a Thetford Triplex cooker, Fridgemaster and Candy washing machine – to cater for guests.

CONTACT: venetianmarina.co.uk
01270 528251

VERDICT: Striking looks

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Africa

65x10.6ft / Scott Welding Fabrications Wide Beam
£74,900

Been with the current owner since new. Sand blasted and Epoxied in April 2018, very well maintained and is presented in a lovely condition. Stereo system throughout the boat, second cabin converted into an office and there is the facility of changing to a pump out toilet, all the plumbing and tank is in place. Built in 2005. Fitted by Owner. Isuzu 70hp diesel engine. berth - fixed double in own cabin. Kabola central heating and solid fuel stove with back boiler. Cassette toilet... BSC to 10/2021.

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DUCKETT

45ft Trad built 1979 by Hancock & Lane
Lister SR2 engine, hull has been overplated.
This boat is a Project.

£14,000



SHEARWATER

55 ft Trad 1997,
Hull by GT Boatbuilders, Refitted 2011, BMC 1.8,
Diesel Heating & S/F Stove with Rads
4 Berths

£47,500



NINEVEH

57ft Semi Trad, 2000
Hull by JL Pinder, F/O DB Boatfitting Ltd, Barrus Shire
2000, Diesel heating with Rads & S/F Stove
8 Berths

£48,950



DREAMCATCHER

70ft Trad by Graham Edgeson 1989
Russel Newbury Engine,
2/4 Berth

£37,500



WILD ROSE

57ft Reverse layout
Traditional Style Narrowboat
Hull - Liverpool 2008
Vetus Bow Thruster

£39,950



WOZATITCH

43ft Cruiser, 1985
Hull by Clubline Cruisers
Yanmar 3JH25a diesel
Boatman stove with Rads, 2 Berth

£27,500



ROSALIND

42ft Cruiser Stern 2002
Hull Liverpool Boats,
F/O Liverpool
Beta 35, 4 Berth

£32,500



SLIPSTREAM

42ft Cruiser Style Narrowboat 2010
Hull unknown/Professional FO
Barrus Shire Diesel 35HP
2 Berth

£32,500



CHENNAI

32ft Trad Style Narrowboat 1994
Hull by Jonathan Wilson/FO Venetian
F/O by Venetian Marine
Lister, 2 Berth

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An 18ft 1977 Wilderness GRP motor cruiser.
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Tel: 01873 880516



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Tel: 01691 624391



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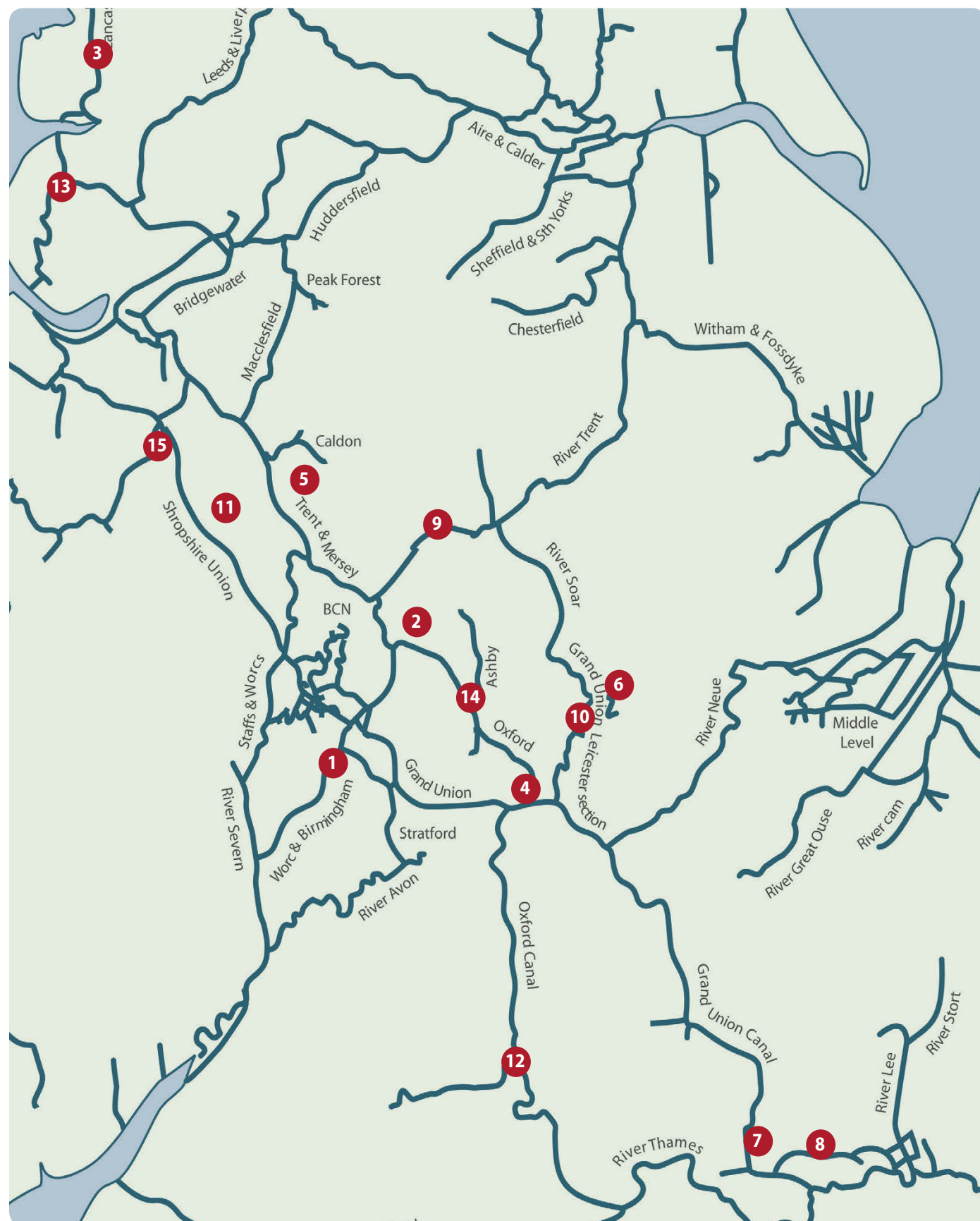
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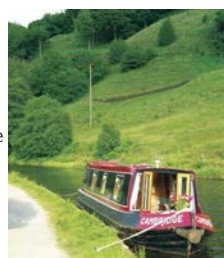
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20 QUESTIONS

Michelle Dunsmuir, general manager, River Canal Rescue

“There are all sorts of personalities to deal with

1 When did you join RCR?
I joined RCR as the general manager in July 2019.

2 Where are you based?
Stafford head office.

3 What attracted you to support the waterways?
I believe we should look after our heritage and try to be as environmentally friendly as possible, something RCR advocates, so the organisation 'fits' with how I feel.

4 What's your boating experience?
Zero! But I'm learning.

5 What do your friends think of your skills?
My skill set is more around training and management so it's utilised within the company, as opposed to on the waterways. My friends think this role is perfect for me.

6 And your parents?
My parents are always proud of everything I do and have always supported me.

7 What does your job entail?
As the title suggests, I get involved in a broad range of things – from human resources issues and customer service to marketing and team management.

8 How can we improve the waterways?
By being environmentally-friendly and making sure we don't put anything in them that shouldn't naturally be there.



9 Where in Britain would you most like to sail?
Anywhere; our country is a beautiful place.

10 What are your career plans?
To take RCR into a new expanding area and develop relationships with businesses both locally and nationally. I'm also keen to expand the membership side of things, working with customer services.

11 Do you need to be physically fit?
It's more of a mentally than physically challenging role, so mentally yes!

12 Have techniques changed over the years?
I can only comment on management techniques which over the years, while

they've not necessarily changed, are improving.

13 Is it a tough learning curve?
My previous roles were in training (leadership, business development and management) and I worked for Stafford Chamber of Commerce, so getting to grips with a new sector has been a learning curve. But as is the same everywhere, there are all sorts of personalities to deal with.

14 When are the busiest times?
Given the nature of the business – every day – it's 24/7!

15 Any plans to buy a boat?
Not at the moment, I do have a caravan, however.

16 What's your favourite aspect of your job?
I love all of it as each day is different.

17 And the hardest?
Nothing is hard, but sometimes it can be challenging; but this is also what I love about the position I'm in.

18 What are you reading at the moment?
Who Moved My Cheese? by Dr Spencer Johnson He also wrote One Minute Manager.

19 What would your superpower be?
Invisibility – oh to be that invisible fly on the wall



20
What did you want to be aged 12?
A policewoman.



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