

Wey & Arun Canal News

June 2014

A review of recent events on the Wey & Arun Canal

REBUILT SUSSEX LOCK OFFICIALLY OPENS

An opening ceremony on 21st June will mark the official completion of rebuilding work at Southland Lock, near Ifold and Loxwood in West Sussex. The section of canal available for navigation is now over 3 miles (5km) long, with six restored, new or rebuilt locks.

Local builders dismantled the original Southland Lock in the early years of the 20th century, after the canal became disused. The Wey & Arun Canal Trust found only a few remains and had to rebuild the lock completely. Its appearance is similar to the original, thanks to the use of local bricks, although the dimensions are slightly larger and modern piles and concrete sit behind the brick facing. The volunteer-led rebuilding project has taken three years, at a cost of about £350,000, all raised by the Canal Trust itself.



A Canal Trust work boat seen at Southland Lock during final opening preparations.

SURREY CANAL REVIVAL MAKES PROGRESS



A canoe seen on the recently desilted section of canal near Tickner's Heath in Surrey during the Small Boats event in March this year.

The Canal Trust has announced the launch of a fundraising appeal with an initial target of £180,000 to rebuild Compasses Bridge, near Alfold and Dunsfold in Surrey. This work will remove a blockage between two sections of canal. Canadian engineers replaced the earlier bridge with a concrete causeway during the construction of Dunsfold Aerodrome in 1942. Today the causeway is heavily used by traffic into and out of Dunsfold Park. The Trust has developed a plan to build a new bridge alongside the causeway, then divert traffic to the new bridge. This will allow demolition of the causeway. Subject to planning permission and fundraising, construction work is scheduled to begin in 2015. The total cost of the project is expected to be about £750,000.

Meanwhile, significant work has been taking place to remove accumulated silt from the section of canal between Compasses Bridge and the Alfold-Dunsfold road at Tickner's Heath. By late March this work had progressed far enough to allow small boats to navigate part of this section, probably the first boats to do so for more than 140 years.

SEVERE FLOODING BUT LITTLE DAMAGE

Immediately before Christmas 2013, exceptionally heavy rain fell along the whole canal route, resulting in the worst flooding for many years. Fortunately there was no serious damage to the Wey & Arun Canal or its structures. In the Shalford area in Surrey, the Trust's office suffered flooding but only minor damage. The riverside path constructed by volunteers during the Summer of 2013 was eroded in places and has since been repaired. In the Loxwood area in Sussex, water poured from the River Lox into the canal - the floor of the Canal Centre was covered but there was no significant damage. Boxing Day boat trips went ahead as planned. The force of flood water carried the Trust's 50-foot narrowboat *Zachariah Keppel* up onto the canal bank and a delicate rescue operation was needed to return the boat to the water. In many places the floods left behind accumulations of silt that had to be removed by the Trust's dredger before the boating season began in April.



In December 2013, *Zachariah Keppel* is gently returned from the canal bank to the canal.

On the positive side, the floods have helped the Trust to understand better how the canal and rivers behave in extreme conditions. In several areas, there are opportunities for a restored canal to act as a flood relief channel and protect neighbouring properties from flood damage.

SURREY NATURE PARK VIEWING PLATFORM PLANNED

On the site of the planned Hunt Nature Park between Bramley and Shalford, Surrey, Guildford Borough Council has granted planning permission for a platform that will offer an improved view over one of the most attractive riverside areas, dominated by oak trees that are estimated to be more than 500 years old. During the Spring, Trust volunteers have been active, planting new trees and shrubs and creating an osier (willow) bed. The Trust is delighted by the number of people who are enjoying the new riverside path as a peaceful alternative to the busy cycle path along the old Horsham-Guildford railway route. The path formed part of the route of the Trust's sponsored walk, the Poddle, held in early June this year.



Volunteers planting at Shalford - in the background walkers are using the riverside path.

CANAL CENTRE WELCOMES TOURISTS AND WALKERS

Recognising that economy measures have closed many local Tourist Information Offices, the Canal Trust has stepped up its efforts to offer a warm welcome to visitors at its showpiece site in Loxwood. New for this season are foreign-language versions of canal information leaflets - French, German and Dutch are already available, with Spanish and Italian set to follow soon. The Canal Centre already offers a wide range of leaflets promoting other local attractions.

Another initiative has been the publication of a series of short walk guides, starting and finishing at the Canal Centre. The walks range from 1 to 5 miles and include not only the canal but also some highlights from the surrounding countryside.

STAYING UP TO DATE

It is always worth checking our website for the latest progress. You can also 'like' us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter or use your smartphone to scan the QR codes at our Canal Centre, in our publications and on information posts along the canal route.

Website: www.weyandarun.co.uk

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Wey & Arun Canal Trust
The Granary, Fritchfold Farm
Loxwood
Billingshurst RH14 0RH



Loxwood office: 01403 752403
Email: office@weyandarun.co.uk
Shalford office: 01483 505566
Email: northernoffice@weyandarun.co.uk