

Wey & Arun Canal News

December 2018

A review of recent events on the Wey & Arun Canal

Slipway gets a stylish opening

In September Mayor of Waverley Councillor Denise Le Gal cut the ribbon to mark the official opening of the Wey & Arun Canal Trust's latest achievement, a slipway for small boats at Dunsfold Park near Alfold, Surrey, close to the Surrey/Sussex border.

Hardy volunteers had faced floods, arctic temperatures and searing heat over the course of the slipway's construction, thanks to the Beasts from the East and this summer's record temperatures. However, the dedication of the workers was not to be thwarted and the slipway – along with an accompanying wharf and landing stage for canoes and kayaks – was completed in time for the official opening.

The slipway was made possible thanks to a generous donation from the Thriscutt family in memory of their parents, Nancy and Sydney. Son and Trust member Andrew Thriscutt came over from Canada to see the slipway named the Thriscutt Slipway.

Andrew Thriscutt said his parents would have been proud of all that has been done to make the slipway a reality and praised the Trust for its vision. He stressed the growing importance of recreation in today's technology-led world and said he looked forward to the slipway being able to add to the usefulness of the canal.

The celebrations included inviting boats, canoes and kayaks into the water and among them was a stunning amphibious car. The German-made amphibious vehicle made quite a splash with the 90 or so supporters who attended, and Mayor Le Gal and Andrew Thriscutt were treated to a trip by Amphicar owner Mike Stallwood. Mayor Le Gal admitted it was her first experience of such a vehicle, one of only a handful in the UK today.

Also joining the Amphicar in the water was a trailable boat, a Wilderness Beaver, which was the first to use the slipway. The slipway has been built to Inland Waterways Association (IWA) guidelines and it is hoped that the Canal Trust will be able to host the IWA National Trailboat Rally at the site in the next few years.



Above: Crowds gathered to see the slipway officially opened.



Left: Mayor of Waverley Denise Le Gal, with Andrew Thriscutt (rear) and Amphicar owner Mike Stallwood.

Trust acquires freehold for beauty spot

The Canal Trust is pleased to announce that in October it acquired the freehold for the picturesque Lordings Lock and Lordings Aqueduct site, including the waterwheel, from the Environment Agency.

The area, near Wisborough Green in West Sussex, makes an ideal stopping point for visitors, with stunning views, tables provided by the Trust for picnics, as well as an information board detailing the site's renovation history.

Lordings Lock, Lordings Aqueduct and the waterwheel have undergone extensive renovation over past decades. The waterwheel is thought to be the only one of its kind in the country, and when in full working order is capable of lifting water from the river level into the canal, about 3m above.

The renovation of the waterwheel has been an especially difficult task given there are no original drawings to call on. In September 2011 a small boat rally marked the official recommissioning of the wheel. However, work to keep it in operation is ongoing and the Trust hopes to see it in its full glory once more.



The waterwheel at Lordings Aqueduct in operation in 2007

The next step in restoration

Volunteers began work at the Birtley Reach section of the canal, just south of Bramley in Surrey, towards the end of this year. Thanks to a generous donation from a member, the Canal Trust is about to complete the purchase of a section of canal about 900 metres long, and a visiting working party camp spent a week creating a temporary access track to the canal.



Driving on: work at Birtley Reach gets under way

The Birtley Reach is very attractive thanks to its position on a slope between the Downs Link path (which uses the route of the former Horsham-Guildford railway) uphill and the Cranleigh Waters river in the valley. The team has mapped out three phases of work aimed initially at making a circular canalside walk available, with connections to the Downs Link. The volunteers also erected fencing to section off the canalside walk from adjacent fields containing livestock.

Planning ahead

2019 will see the start of a two-year programme to remove silt obstructing navigation from the canal near Alfold, Surrey, between the A281 at Fast Bridge and Tickner's Heath.

The section of about 500 metres between Compasses Bridge and the Thriscutt Slipway may sometimes appear to contain water, but this is mainly an illusion – it is only a few inches deep with a vast amount of silt beneath.

A second-hand dredger, tug and two barges have been purchased to carry out the task of desilting and these will be lifted into the canal at Compasses Bridge. The barges will carry the removed silt to the new wharf next to the Thriscutt Slipway, from where it will be transported by dumper to a nearby field. The desilting programme has been carefully planned to be sensitive to the natural environment.

The Trust also expects to submit a planning application in spring 2019 for the new bridge that will remove the current blockage where the Dunsfold-Alfold road crosses the canal. (The new bridge will not be exactly where the road currently crosses the canal.) The Highways team at Surrey County Council has agreed the road and bridge layout, which includes a separate footbridge, in response to local consultation.

Once the desilting programme and the new bridge are complete, a very attractive canal section of about 2km will be available. In due course, the Trust plans to organise public boat trips.

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust Ltd
Bridge End, Somerswey
Shalford, Guildford
GU4 8EQ



A united front pays dividends

It was a case of many hands make light work when the Wey & Arun Canal Trust's Midweek Working Party joined forces with West Sussex County Council (WSCC) Public Rights of Way volunteers for two days in September.

The teams came together to clear overgrown vegetation around Rowner Lock and the public footpath to Loves Bridge near Billingshurst.

Their hard work over a mile of countryside now means the footpath is more easily accessible and walkers can better enjoy the views of the canal from the path and bridge. New signposts also help mark the footpath routes.

The project was a big success and Midweek Working Party organiser Margaret Darvill said the 20 Trust volunteers and 12 WSCC Public Rights of Way volunteers all enjoyed working together.

Margaret added: "The area is now much more accessible and the clearance work shows off the wonderful view of the canal. The initiative was so successful that we hope to make it an annual event."

Earlier in the year the Canal Trust joined forces with volunteers from several businesses in successful collaborations. The employees of local pharmaceutical firm Sanofi and investment firms Newton Investment Management and BNY Mellon worked with Trust staff to carry out maintenance projects.

Some 42 members of Sanofi headed to the Hunt Nature Park in Shalford to do battle with invasive, non-native plant species, while the London bankers set to painting lock furniture and erecting fence posts at the Loxwood stretch of the canal.

All those involved agreed it was fantastic to be able to work together to deliver something that the public can enjoy.



Brush work: Corporate volunteers help out on the canal at Loxwood

Staying up to date

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Facebook: [weyandaruncanal](https://www.facebook.com/weyandaruncanal)

Twitter: [@weyandarun](https://twitter.com/weyandarun)

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