

Wey & Arun Canal News

June 2022

A review of recent events on the Wey & Arun Canal

Scenic canal walk opens near Bramley

An attractive canalside walk has opened at Birtley, south of Bramley in Surrey, thanks to the efforts of Wey & Arun Canal Trust volunteers and visiting groups.

The stunning 1km circular route is flanked by the Downs Link path (the former Guildford to Horsham railway line) above and Cranleigh Waters in the valley below and as such has quickly become popular with local walkers. The walk crosses a new bridge constructed by the Canal Trust, starting in 2018. This bridge is planned to have a lifting deck but currently has a temporary fixed deck.

The Birtley stretch was purchased thanks to a generous donation from a Trust member. Planning Permission has been granted for a second lift bridge and Canal Trust volunteers are now starting work on this project. The Trust is working with Surrey County Council to agree the final design of the lifting mechanism on both bridges.

The Trust also has plans for 1km of canal south of the bridges and hopes to restore the section here to provide another length of canal where small craft can navigate and with towpaths suitable for walkers, cyclists and horseriders.



Now part of the new circular walk - the first bridge at Birtley.

Spring tree planting campaign



Volunteers plant trees at Shalford Information Centre.

Since the beginning of the year the Trust has planted more than 2,500 trees and shrubs. Volunteers have planted native species everywhere from Lee Place, near Wisborough Green in the south, to the operational section at Loxwood and Hunt Nature Park in Shalford, near Guildford, in the north.

Saplings have been kindly donated by the Woodland Trust, Chichester District Council and Greenscape to help increase wildlife biodiversity and reduce the effect of global warming.

The planting comes as estimates predict ash dieback will kill 80% of ash trees nationally. The Trust has carried out an independent survey to identify diseased and dying ash trees along the canal as the trees can present a danger to the public and so sadly need to be removed.

A programme of dealing with those identified has been set out for the next three years.

Boost for youth groups



Top picture: Canoeists on the Loxwood section.
Right: Volunteers work on upgrading the slipway access track.

Interest in watersports has soared over the past few years and now the canal is well used by canoeists, kayakers and paddleboarders of all ages. The waterway is also proving a great asset to local youth groups such as Sea Scouts, Scouts and youth clubs who regularly bring their own craft to the slipway at Drungewick, near Loxwood. However, the track used by the canoeing groups could get very muddy so volunteers have recently spent a weekend improving the surface, erecting new signage and even building a new timber picnic bench.

As well as youth groups, local firm Fluid Adventures operates from Drungewick, hiring out single and double kayaks and open canoes.

Upgrade for Loxwood towpath

Teams have been working hard on the longest restored section of the canal at Loxwood in West Sussex. Recently they have cleared a section of canal near Ifold and Loxwood (close to the Sussex Border Path) and upgraded the towpath for the thousands of visitors and local people who enjoy the peaceful route along the water's edge.

Thanks to kind permission from a landowner, volunteers have been able to remove a causeway and clear the canal bed of fallen trees. The result is that views along the canal have been opened up and the canal is now in water, attracting a variety of birds and insects.

Volunteers have also improved drainage in the area and built up and resurfaced the towpath with Fittleworth stone, so making the path much better able to withstand the British winter.



A section of the newly upgraded towpath.



The first boat trips of the season proved a hit with the public. A full programme of cruises is planned to run until October, including the ever-popular cream tea and special school holiday cruises.

Footbridge opens at Tickner's Heath

Visitors to Tickner's Heath in Alford, near Cranleigh, can now see Surrey's latest stretch of canal for themselves.

The footbridge built to take pedestrians and horse riders has been completed and is now open for those interested in viewing the work going on here to divert the canal under Dunsfold Road.

The next step for the project is to complete a road diversion, allowing the construction of the road bridge. A new canal cut some 200 metres long will then be excavated to rejoin the original canal.



Volunteers celebrate opening the new footbridge.

Switch to green fuel a success

The Trust has switched to using HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil) biofuel, a much greener alternative to diesel. The synthetic HVO is made from 100% renewable waste fats and vegetable oils and claims to be better for the environment than normal diesel, reducing net CO2 greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 90%.

As well as significantly reducing greenhouse gases the fuel is biodegradable and so safe to use near water. The fuel is best used in newer machinery.

The cost of the fuel works out at roughly the same as normal diesel, but while it may not be a cost-saver it is a greener choice. Another small bonus is that it smells much more pleasant than diesel fuel.

