

Wey & Arun Canal News

A review of recent events on the Wey & Arun Canal

December 2022

Opening up Birtley

Volunteers have begun restoring the canal at Birtley, near Bramley in Surrey, in a project to remove the current blockage to the canal route, construct a lift bridge and open up this picturesque stretch for canoeists, kayakers and paddleboarders to use in the future.

It hasn't been an easy project as water pours into the site from under the west bank and so specialist equipment has had to be brought in and the working area pumped out regularly. The team has now begun constructing the bridge abutments. Apart from specialist piling contractors all the construction work has been carried out by volunteers.



Excavation at the original bridge (centre) and the diverted bridleway (right)

Unexpected discovery

While excavating the Birtley Bridge site volunteers came across the foundations of the original bridge and called in our consultant archaeologists to take a look. They found evidence to suggest that unlike the other hump-backed bridges found along the canal, the bridge here was a swing bridge.

The archaeologists also made another unexpected discovery: an iron stirrup to which was attached a short section of chain. The archaeologists say that this is likely a relic of a 'Sunday chain' which would have been stretched across the canal - typically at a lock or bridge - to discourage navigation on Sundays in an age of religious piety. All the findings have been photographed and catalogued for future investigation.

Trust invests in Hippo Dam

Work began with a first for the Trust – an investment in a Hippo Dam, a water inflated dam more usually put to use to protect against flooding but now being adopted by canal teams as a fast method of creating a protective barrier during construction work.

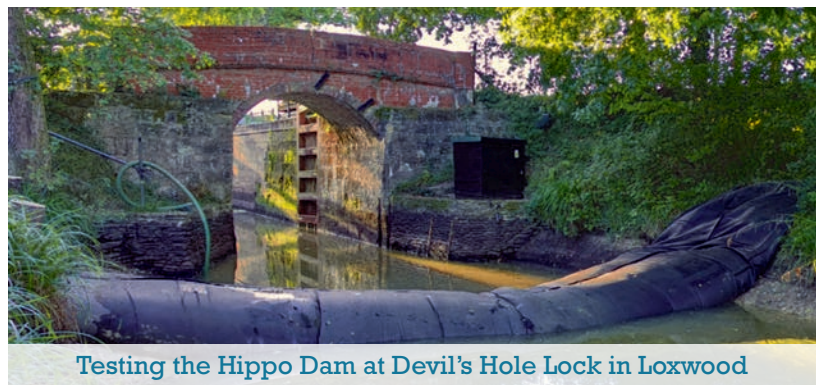
At Birtley the sausage-shaped device was positioned on the towpath in its rolled up state and pumped full of canal water, causing the dam to roll out across the canal, creating a seal in a matter of hours. Volunteers then created a temporary bridlepath to allow the well used bridleway here to remain open throughout the project and worked with power firm SGN to divert a gas main that runs under the canal.



Archaeology at Birtley Bridge

Tickner's Heath bridges

A new pedestrian bridge at Tickner's Heath in Alfold, Surrey, was completed by volunteers and opened to the public earlier this year. Teams have been planting trees and improving the footpath to Sidney Wood as they wait for the green light from Surrey County Council to build a temporary road crossing and begin construction of a new road bridge.



Testing the Hippo Dam at Devil's Hole Lock in Loxwood

Three new landing stages at Loxwood

Restoration of the Wey & Arun Canal attracts supporters from across the UK and many are keen to lend a hand with physical jobs. This summer Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) volunteers joined the Trust's own working party members to spend a week helping to build new landing stages on the restored section at Loxwood in West Sussex.

More and more canoeists, kayakers and paddleboarders flock to this part of the canal each year and a grant from the Canoe Foundation enabled the work to go ahead.



Building a landing stage at Loxwood

During this working holiday the volunteers built three landing stages, one of which was a double designed for boat crew and canoeists to use. The visitors also helped carry out towpath improvements following a generous donation from Loxwood Parish Council and Loxwood Fete Committee to fund materials and plant hire.



Ensuring the towpath remains safe - forestry work at Loxwood

Ash dieback project

Visiting volunteers from fellow restoration groups KESCRG, London WRG and a week-long visit from the WRG Forestry team have helped with the major project of removing dead and dying ash trees at Loxwood from September.

Ash dieback disease is predicted to kill 95% of ash trees across the UK and an independent survey commissioned by the Trust has identified those along the canal that are affected. The volunteers gave up their time to help fell, saw and chip the designated ash trees, giving priority to those that might pose a risk to canal users in the future. The Trust also took the opportunity to train two more of its volunteers in becoming qualified chainsaw users.

Planning update

The Trust has submitted planning applications for several projects along the length of the canal. At Elmbridge in Cranleigh, Surrey, proposed highway improvements to the current single-lane road will include construction of new canal bridge, which the Trust anticipates will be built and funded by Surrey County Council. The application was submitted to Waverley Borough Council in October 2020. Just north of here at Rye Farm we are also awaiting the result of an application made in February this year to Waverley Borough Council to restore a 320m length of canal and realign the bridleway.

Waverley Borough Council are also considering another application that would open up public access to a restored section of canal in the Rooks Hill area, south of Bramley in Surrey.

Summer boat trips

The record-breaking dry spring and summer meant the Trust was forced to suspend boat trips from late summer but the boat team took the opportunity to ensure all three tripboats were looking their best for when cruises resumed in October. A full programme of trips is planned for 2023.



Free guided walks

Members of the public were treated to a series of free guided walks throughout the year. Wey & Arun Canal Trust director and historian Alan Johnson led the walks from Shalford in Surrey, explaining the origins of London's Lost Route to the Sea.



WEY & ARUN
Canal
Trust

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust Ltd
Bridge End, Somerswey,
Shalford, Guildford, GU4 8EQ
Tel: 01483 505566

Email support@weyandarun.co.uk
Website www.weyarun.org.uk
Facebook [weyandaruncanal](https://www.facebook.com/weyandaruncanal)
Instagram [@weyandarun](https://www.instagram.com/weyandarun)