

Wey & Arun Canal News

June 2019

A review of recent events on the Wey & Arun Canal

Work on Surrey waterside path begins

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust has embarked on a major volunteer-led restoration project after acquiring a 900-metre stretch of abandoned canal near Bramley in Surrey.

Work has begun in the Birtley Reach area to create a new circular walk including a long section of restored canal, providing an attractive amenity for locals and visitors. This stretch is particularly picturesque thanks to its position on a slope between the Downs Link path above (which follows the route of the former Horsham-Guildford railway) and the Cranleigh Waters in the valley below. Once restored, this section of canal will also offer opportunities for fishing and use by canoes, kayaks and paddleboards. The purchase was made possible by the generosity of an overseas Trust member.

Bramley Link manager Philip Oliver said: "There is a lot of work to do, but when restored this area will undoubtedly be an asset for Bramley and for Surrey. We look forward to giving the public access to this beautiful waterside path and to the restored canal itself, while also improving the environmental value of the land."

Trust volunteers and visiting working parties have created temporary surfacing for vehicle access to the canal, erected 1km of stock-proof boundary fencing, including seven field gates, and begun levelling and surfacing the canalside track, creating a three-metre wide towpath.

Planning permission for a lift bridge was granted in April and preparatory work is now underway, with a view to completion by the end of the year.

The bridge will provide a new access to the land-locked agricultural land to the south-west and act as a replacement for the existing causeway which prohibits the free flow of traffic along the canal. It will be a traditional counter-weight lift bridge, operated by a manually wound mechanical system. In readiness for its installation a temporary scaffold bridge has been erected to allow easier transport of equipment and manpower. All work will be carried out by volunteers.



Volunteers have started creating the towpath walk, which will link to the Downs Link path in Birtley, Surrey.

Southern Water staff get planting

A team of volunteers from Southern Water gave the Trust a helping hand in March when hedge planting was needed.

A band of seven employees headed to Tickner's Heath on the Surrey/Sussex border, where they spent the day planting and mulching new hedges. The team managed to create a new hedgerow consisting of 720 plants, all native species - a mix of hawthorn, hazel, wild cherry and dog rose.

Swapping the office for the scenic countryside is part of Southern Water's community volunteering programme, which allows employees to spend two days of paid leave working individually or in a team for their chosen charity or community project each year.

Commercial contracts manager Barnaby Holliker said fun was had by all. "The teamwork shone out on this task and we stormed through the hedge planting and mulching."



The Southern Water team created a hedgerow with 720 plants.



The River Arun rally attracted its biggest number of paddlers yet.

Record turnout for River Arun Rally

Canoeists, kayakers, small boat owners and paddleboarders turned out in force in May to celebrate the long tradition of boats navigating a river which was once part of the route from London to the South Coast.

The River Arun Rally began in 1983 and the annual event has been run by the Wey & Arun Canal Trust since 2011. The aim is to ensure that when restoration of the Wey & Arun Canal is complete, there will be no legal reason why boats cannot venture from the canal into the Arun.

Local paddlers and enthusiasts from canoe clubs across the South East made for a colourful sight as they launched from Pulborough and Stopham in West Sussex, with the aim of reaching Pallingham Quay, the highest point navigable by boats on the Arun.

Chairman Sally Schupke said: "It was fantastic to see so much support for this free event, with more than 80 people registered to attend. All said how much they enjoyed their time on the water, and being part of a group it made it especially enjoyable."

Shalford visitor centre approved

In early April, Guildford Borough Council approved the Trust's plans for a new visitor centre in the Hunt Nature Park at Shalford, Surrey. The centre will be close to the park entrance near the A281 Guildford-Horsham Road. It will act as a focal point for visitors to the riverside nature reserve created by the Canal Trust.

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The value of restoration

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust has been praised in a new report by the Inland Waterways Association, designed to show how well thought-out, partial restoration initiatives can deliver benefits to communities from the very beginning.

The *Waterways in Progress* report looks at the positive differences ongoing waterway restoration brings to communities, documenting the quantifiable benefits to be had even if full restoration is some years off.

IWA Chairman and actor David Suchet said the report showed the magic that could be created by visionary groups of volunteers who are determined to make a difference to our waterways.

He added: "Once restored, a short stretch of water can host a trip boat, which may offer people their first ever taste of life on the water. A new towpath can encourage us to get out and about, improving both our physical and mental health, and a canalside community room can bring local people together in a variety of ways."

The report uses case studies from across the UK to illustrate the gains to be had from canal restoration, from volunteers' increased personal wellbeing to creating community spaces and enhancing heritage and the natural environment.

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust was singled out for the creation of the Wey-South Path, a walking route from Guildford, Surrey, to a junction with the South Downs Way above Amberley, West Sussex. Devised in the early 1970s on behalf of the Trust, the Path utilises almost all of the canal's towpath which is open to the public – necessarily diverting to avoid sections where a right of way does not exist through private land.

Along the route, walkers have the chance to see the large amount of restoration work already completed on the canal.



Boat trips on the fully restored section at Loxwood, West Sussex, began on a high with a full house for the special Mother's Day Cruises in March and glorious weather over Easter. The Trust's trip boats had been refurbished ahead of the season, with new flooring and signage, ready for the busy summer.

Staying up to date

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