

Wey & Arun Canal News

November 2013

A review of recent events on the Wey & Arun Canal

VOLUNTEERS IMPROVE SURREY RIVERSIDE PATH

Canal Trust volunteers have been hard at work this Summer on the site of the future Hunt Park in Shalford. After Guildford Borough Council had granted planning permission, the Trust organised two week-long work camps to improve a narrow and overgrown path alongside the Cranleigh Waters. The path can now accommodate wheelchairs and pushchairs. One of the largest single work items was to provide a wooden bridge with handrails across a ditch where previously walkers had to balance on narrow planks.

The path is already proving very popular with local residents and walkers as a more peaceful alternative to the route along the old Guildford-Horsham railway. This is part of the National Cycle Network (route 22 from London to Portsmouth) and is heavily used by fast-moving cyclists.



Volunteers work on the improved path with the Cranleigh Waters in the background.

SUSSEX CANAL REVIVAL MOVES AHEAD

During 2013, the Trust has concentrated its fundraising activities on plans to rebuild the northernmost lock on the Sussex section of the canal route. Gennets Bridge Lock, near Ifold, was completely dismantled during the early years of the 20th century. For many years the site of the lock has only been recognisable by the slight change in the ground level.

Now the appeal to members and supporters has progressed so well that the Trust expects contractors to install the concrete shell of the new Gennets Bridge Lock early in 2014. When this work has finished, volunteers will undertake the long list of tasks needed to complete the new lock, including facing the concrete shell with locally-made bricks. This is the same approach as the Trust successfully used at Southland Lock, slightly further south towards Loxwood. Work is now in progress to prepare the section of canal between Devil's Hole Lock and Southland Lock for use by the Trust's trip boats. Just north of Southland Lock, Chichester District Council has granted planning permission for a swingbridge to replace a causeway that currently blocks the canal route.



The section of canal between Devil's Hole Lock and Southland Lock, near Loxwood and Ifold, after heavy rain in October.

SURREY HILLS LEADER GRANT SUCCESS

Earlier this year, the Canal Trust was delighted to be awarded £21,750 from the Surrey Hills LEADER Grant Scheme. The grant is funding removal of silt that has built up in the canal since it closed to regular commercial traffic in the late 19th century. The desilting work will allow the Trust to open up another section of the “Dunsfold cutting”, which was the most significant piece of engineering on the canal route. A workforce of many hundreds, using only hand tools and horse power, constructed this section between 1813 and 1816. Today the cutting runs along the edge of the Dunsfold Park site.

In September 1816, a ceremony at the Three Compasses in Alfold marked the official opening of the Wey & Arun Canal and a procession of barges set off towards Guildford. At the Three Compasses, a causeway currently blocks the canal to navigation. On one side of the causeway (towards Guildford), the canal route is navigable and saw



The Canal Trust's trip boat *John Smallpeice* is seen carrying passengers near Alfold in the Summer of 2013.



The Trust's consultant archaeologist records the results of the excavation at Gosden Aqueduct.

public boat trips during 2012 and 2013. Once the desilting work is complete, boats will also be able to use the section on the other side (towards Sussex and Loxwood). The Trust is making good progress with plans to replace the causeway so that the two sections are once again linked by water and boat trips will be possible along an attractive wooded section of about 2km.

The Trust is very grateful to the Surrey Hills LEADER scheme for helping to advance plans for regular canal boat trips on the Surrey section of the route.

“MINI-DIG” EXPLORES AQUEDUCT

The most important original structure that survives on the canal route is Gosden Aqueduct near Bramley in Surrey. The Trust regards the aqueduct as a valuable heritage asset. To enable plans to be developed for safeguarding the structure against further deterioration, it is necessary to understand better how the aqueduct was constructed. During September, the Trust organised a small-scale archaeological dig on the site, carried out by volunteers under professional supervision. The dig revealed the original towpath and part of the clay lining of the canal bed, allowing the experts to map out the techniques that the builders used between 1813 and 1815, when records tell us that cargo barges began using this section of canal.

A grant from Surrey Archaeological Society helped to fund the “mini-dig”.



Canal Trust representatives receive the award.

CANAL TRUST WINS NATIONAL AWARD

At the National Waterways Festival, held at Watford in July 2013, the Wey & Arun Canal Trust won an award for the Best Non-Commercial Stand. The judges' attention was caught by the model canal boat (named *Loxwood*) standing in front of the Trust's smart mobile display vehicle. The Trust's publicity team spreads the word by taking the vehicle to a wide variety of events throughout the Summer.

STAYING UP TO DATE

It is always worth checking our website for the latest progress. You can also join us on Facebook 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

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

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