



The World's biggest bywash - Montgomery Canal 19th-20th June

On 19th-20th June London WRG visited the Montgomery Canal, where we spent the weekend working on the Aston Nature Reserve. This is being built by WRG in the field alongside the top lock so that the rare plants currently growing in the canal can be encouraged to move into the nature reserve, so that the canal can then be restored. It is being built in the form of 5 ponds at different levels, connected so each other and to the canal above and below the lock by a series of weirs so that it does in fact form an extended bywash for the lock, covering about four acres and involving the construction of over 1km of new channel (for you pre-metrication fogeys that's about 5 furlongs, give or take a perch or two).

After a late departure from Waterloo we made an even later arrival in Ellesmere where we just scraped into the pub moments before closing time (much to the annoyance of the landlord) and met project leader Mike Palmer who explained the weekend's work to us. Basically all the ponds and the weirs in between have to be made waterproof, by lining them in black rubber waterproof sheet. This comes in rolls 25 metres wide, so each pond liner consists of several pieces welded together and one of our jobs was to weld together the liner for the top pond. We also had to lay the readymix concrete that forms the base of the weirs and build some side walls of weirs and a pond out of concrete blocks.

Unfortunately on Saturday it was raining, which meant that we couldn't do any welding, so we set up some shuttering for the weir bases, unrolled and laid out some rubber sheets ready for welding and piled up some concrete blocks ready for building walls. Just as we were about to stop for lunch a readymix lorry turned up with something like 20 tons of concrete to be laid. By mid-afternoon the weather had dried up enough for the rubber welder to be started up and Mike Palmer (who seldom misses an opportunity to put his welding tackle to good use) assembled a welding team and put them to work. Welding is a slow process. The welder has to be clamped onto each 1ft section for 1 minute to ensure a good weld, and it takes a minute or so to set it up each time. Allow for the fact that two-thirds of the welding is carried out on a 45-degree slope on the sides of the pond and the remainder is done in a very muddy pond bottom and you can understand why it takes at least two and a half hours for a 50ft seam. To put this rate of progress into perspective, according to my Guinness Book of Records a healthy snail can manage the same distance in about an hour and a quarter.

By Saturday night one seam had been welded and two weir bases had been laid and a start had been made on building the wall along the side of pond 2. On Sunday the Chairman of WRG turned up to encourage us and to tell me how impressed he was by London WRG News and then, before I had a chance to recover, he volunteered me to be editor of Navvies.

By the time we left on Sunday afternoon another weld had been completed and the wall along the side of pond 2 had been constructed out of some rather odd shaped lumps of concrete called "Porky Blocks", which most people had assumed were something to do with the catering. Why are they called Porky Blocks? (I hear you ask) Well, it's short for Porcupine Blocks. (Well, you did ask.)

Hereford & Gloucester non-cancellation shock

31st July-1st August

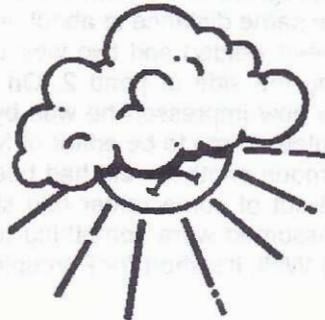
After various attempts to organise a dig on the Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal had been thwarted by a combination of lack of navvies, broken down vans, absent organisers, clashes with Christmas parties etc. etc. we amazed everyone including ourselves on Friday 30th July when we arrived at Oxenhall in time for a brisk walk down a long lane to the not-so-local pub. On Saturday morning the locals turned up early and led us to a nicely dredged section of canal, where we spent Saturday cutting down vegetation and re-grading the canal bank. We observed an interesting local custom (which other local canal societies might like to follow) which takes place several times a day and involves one of the locals handing out cups of tea and coffee to everybody.

On Saturday night the chef was faced with a serious problem concerning special dietary requirements. We are used to catering for vegetarians, non-chilli-eaters and those who don't eat red meat, white meat, or (more important to London WRG chefs) black meat. But new recruit Meredith's special requirements completely threw us. She **doesn't like garlic**. Eventually we managed to concoct a lasagne with all the garlic at one end (indicated by a letter "G" written in tomato puree)

On Sunday we finished re-grading the bank, then seeded it with grass so as to give us something to cut down next time we go. Then we spent the afternoon clearing weeds out of the canal bed by the entrance to the nearby Oxenhall Tunnel, where the local group were busy restoring a shelter built into the side of the cutting. This apparently was a donkey shelter used for stabling the donkeys that legged the boats through the tunnel while the boatmen walked over the top. Or something like that.

Digging deep on the Wey & Arun 10-11 July & 11-12 September

The final two digs of London WRG's first year's commitment to the Dig Deep initiative took place at Lee Farm Lock on the Wey & Arun Canal. As you ought to know by now, Dig Deep is a scheme that involves us and two other groups each committing ourselves to carrying out a certain number of working parties per year on certain projects, so that local canal societies can commit funds to getting those projects completed to a timescale. The Wey & Arun's Dig Deep project is to complete Lee Farm Lock and rebuild a farm accommodation bridge (although we're not sure which one yet - see elsewhere) and our last two visits saw us putting the finishing touches to the lock - backfilling chamber walls with concrete, finishing building the wing walls, installing stop-plank grooves and pointing up the original brickwork on the tail walls. The lock really looks like a lock now; all it needs is a set of gates. All very satisfying for those of us who remember it when it had 3ft diameter trees growing out of the side of it. One or two not quite so satisfying aspects of the weekends were the inevitable stints of brick-shifting and brick-cleaning (in the rain), wallowing in slime in the lock tail area attempting to push barrows of silt out of the lock (in the rain), standing knee-deep in a stream while Tim threw shovelfuls of concrete at me from a great height (in the rain), the London WRG News editor's car breaking down twice (once on each dig; I think it's allergic to Sussex or something) and finally abandoning work amid a downpour at 3pm on the Sunday of the last dig. But every silver lining has its cloud, doesn't it?



The elephant never forgets... **Wilts & Berks Canal 2nd-3rd October**

...unlike Peter Smith, who managed to forget Josie's Birthday on the Sunday of our latest effort on the Wilts & Berks Canal. We were rather lacking in numbers as most of our regulars seemed to be either in foreign parts (Germany, Prague, Milton Keynes etc.) at the time or digging with KESCRG on the Thames & Severn Canal (Traitors!). Also some of our younger navvies had just gone away to college (Good luck, Meredith & Kay) and Glyn, the organiser for the weekend (who seems to be going for the London WRG Organiser of the Year Award) had made a point of phoning up all the people who were away on holiday and not phoning any of the people who weren't away on holiday (because he thought they were away on holiday) so we only managed a total of seven and two of those were only there for one day.

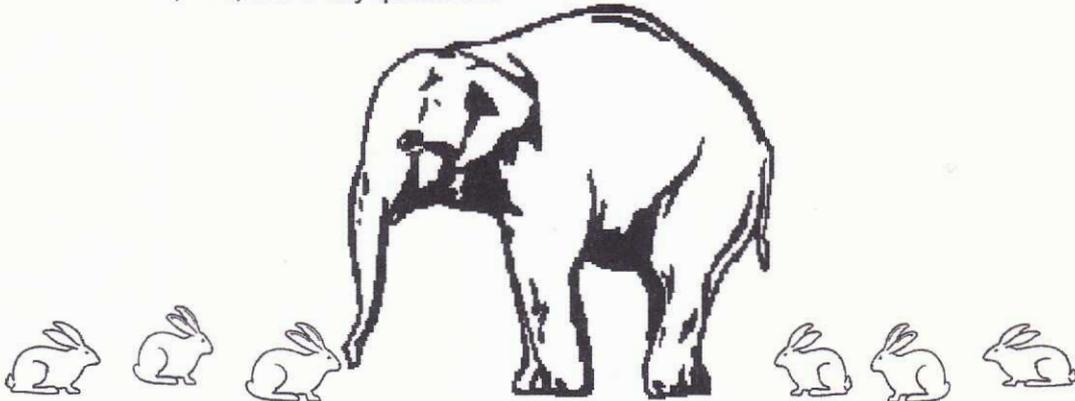
Having completed the first lift bridge above Foxham lock, work has now shifted to the second one about half a mile further up the canal. The infill has been removed, the brick abutments have been stripped down and the local working party group has started rebuilding the brickwork. For this they need a large supply of nice clean bricks, and as they appeared to have a very large supply of dirty bricks, there were no prizes for predicting the nature of one of the major jobs for the weekend. Sure enough, come Saturday morning our brick-cleaning team had soon got into overdrive (unlike our van, which finally got into overdrive at Slough on the return journey) and the wire brushes were buzzing and the brick-dust was flying.

After lunch, a small team spent the afternoon using a Smalley excavator and a dumper moving a large heap of dredgings from the side of the canal and putting it back in the canal bed. This may seem like a bit of an a*se-about-face approach to waterway restoration but in fact it did have a serious purpose - to create a waterproof dam so that a length of canal could be re-watered.

Meanwhile the rest of London WRG were busy digging up the towpath looking for rabbits holes. Contrary to popular speculation, this was not in any way connected with the catering arrangements for Saturday evening. It appears that the local bunnies, as their contribution to the restoration-versus-wildlife debate, have decided to burrow some holes through the canal bank and this causes problems when the canal society try to put the water back in.

By Sunday afternoon, various rabbit holes had been uncovered and filled in, the piles of clean bricks (neatly sorted into large bricks, small bricks and bricks that we weren't sure how big they were) outnumbered the piles of unclean ones and the local group were getting stuck into rebuilding the bridge abutments. On the way back down the M4 we caught up with KESCRG's minibus returning from the Thames & Severn. They must have had almost as good a turnout as we did; they appeared to have three people in the minibus.

And the "elephant" in the title above? Well, the lift bridge appears to be called Elephant Bridge. Why? Could it be the same reason as the Horse Bridge at Little Venice? Unlikely, as it seems to have been rather a lightweight structure. The next bridge up the canal appears to be called City Road Bridge, so could it be that the locals are renaming bits of their canal after bits of London as a way of making London WRG feel at home? Maybe next time we visit, the Foxham Arms will have become the Founders Arms and be selling Youngs beer. (So long as they don't charge London prices). No, I'm afraid it seems that the bridge is named after the Canal society shed next to it which is called the Elephant Shed. Oh, well, ask a silly question...



OK, let someone else organise it... Work programme Oct '93-Feb '94

Our next outing on 23rd-24th October will be our first ever visit to the Ipswich & Stowmarket Navigation, otherwise known as the River Gipping, in Suffolk. This is also Darryl Foster & Cath Coolican's joint debut as London WRG Organisers

On 6th-7th November we will be joining in WRG's national Big-ish dig on the Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal, when, it is hoped, several hundred navvies will clear the vegetation from at least a mile of the canal. Although this dig is advertised as a "Canal Camps Reunion" that shouldn't be taken to imply that is intended only for people who have been on Canal Camps. Most of the mobile WRG groups will be there and we will be taking a van from Waterloo as usual. This is a "Centrally Booked Weekend" so if you want to go please fill in the enclosed booking form and send it to Helen Davey with a cheque for £6, or £3 if you only want to go for one day. Please get in touch with me if you want to go travel in the London WRG van.

As our final effort for 1993 we will once again be letting somebody else organise our dig for us when we join Kent & East Sussex Canal Restoration Group (KESCRG) for their Christmas Party dig on the Wey & Arun Canal on 4th-5th December. Tim Lewis will be taking names and arranging transport for this one. This is KESCRG's chance to show us how a booze-up should be organised. Last year they forgot to organise a bar.

Speaking of organising booze-ups our own Christmas party is on the evening of Wednesday 15th December. (Admit it Bob, you thought I was going to say start talking about Breweries) We hope to hold it in the London Canal Museum and do our own catering, the same as last year (but probably with slightly less garlic involved). More details in the next newsletter.

Our first working party of 1994 takes us back to the Dig Deep site at Boxwell Springs lock on the Thames and Severn Canal, then three weeks later we return to the Wilts & Berks Canal, where Peter Smith has promised us a "virgin site" at Dauntsey. We suggested that we might have a problem rounding up enough virgins in London WRG to form a working party but Peter explained that he merely meant a site that hadn't been worked on before.

We aren't entirely sure of the dates from February onwards. They had originally been deliberately planned so that all of our Wey & Arun dates would come in the spring, when they were due to be building a new farm accommodation bridge at Toat. However, this project has had to be postponed and another project elsewhere on the canal is likely to form the second part of the Wey & Arun's "Dig Deep" project, so we may re-schedule our dates depending on when that project can start.



Apologies...

...for the misprint in the "archive" column in some early editions of London WRG News 19. Having apologised for referring to "1992" instead of "1982" in the Archive column of no. 18 I then repeated the same cockup in no. 19 by referring to our 1983 activities as "1993". Anyone who read through the article as far as the remarks about "large numbers of people turning out", "occasional quick after-dig drinks" and the "sheer dynamism, enthusiasm, zeal and modesty of the organiser" will no doubt have rapidly become aware of the error.

...for the non-appearance of the promised cartoon strip. I'm afraid I haven't managed to badger the cartoonist into drawing it yet. As anyone who saw last year's London WRG Xmas Party invitations will be well aware, my own abilities in that department are rather lacking. Maybe I could draw one where all the action takes place in Foxham Reading Rooms after lights-out, or in the back of NUH on the way back from a mid-winter dig, or possibly inside the bywash culvert at Boxwell Springs Lock...

...for the lack of an "archive" section this time as London WRG seems to have been going through a particularly quiet spell at this time in both 1983 & 1988. I can't find any "Dig his" or "London WRG News" issues and our contribution to "Navvies" consisted solely of the usual appeal by Bob for a shed to keep our tools in and a dates list which gave the dates of our "quiet drinks" but not the name of the pub. (A way of keeping our "quiet drinks" quiet?) If any of you collectors of historic waterways literature out there finds anything that I've missed please tell me and I'll put it in issue 21. Otherwise I'll just have to assume that we were too busy working to have any time left for writing about it.

...for the non-appearance of the promised Big-ish Dig booking forms in the last issue. The organisers had cleverly printed them in a rather attractive black-on-red colour scheme, which came out as a rather indecipherable black-on-black once it had been through the photocopier. There should be a black-on-white one in this issue.

...for the rather long "apologies" section this time. I'm sorry, really I am.

For the navy who has everything...

London WRG merchandise

We have just taken delivery of a large number of **London WRG Tea-towels**. These attractively designed, superior quality towels carrying the famous London WRG "tube map" as seen on the T-shirts are now available in a wide range of colours (red and white or blue and white) at the amazingly low price of only £3 each (or £6 for two.) The perfect Christmas gift for your friends & relations. Don't delay, order yours now! Hurry while stocks last!

Also available: small back-packs (Red, £6.50) and sports bags (£10.50) with the Waterway Recovery Group logo. And we still have a small number of Large and Extra large T-shirts available at £5.50 each.

All items available from Aileen Butler (phone 071-215 5339 days, 081-467 1292 eves) or turn up at any London WRG dig or social event.



Working Parties: Friday night start; meet outside Casey Jones at Waterloo station; normally at 19:00 but may be 30 minutes earlier or later depending on distance. Contact organiser of dig or overall co-ordinator Tim Lewis for details.

23-24/10/93 Ipswich & Stowmarket Navigation	Darryl Foster / Cath Coolican
06-07/11/93 Grand Union Canal Wendover Arm (big-ish dig)	Martin Ludgate*
04-05/12/93 Wey & Arun Canal (KESCRG Xmas party)	Tim Lewis
22-23/01/94 Thames & Severn Canal (Dig Deep)	Lesley McFadyen
12-13/02/94 Wilts & Berks Canal	to be arranged
05-06/03/94 Wey & Arun Canal	to be arranged
26-27/03/94 Thames & Severn Canal	to be arranged

*This dig is a centrally booked weekend. Please send the enclosed form to Helen Davey. Martin Ludgate will take names for transport to the Wendover Arm in the London WRG van.

Social Gatherings: Wednesday Night, 10 days before each dig i.e. 13/10/93, 27/10/93 etc. at the Founders Arms, Bankside, London SE1 (on the South bank, 100 yards East of Blackfriars bridge.) about 19:30 till 23:00. **Our Annual General Meeting will be held on one of the February or March dates that would normally be a social meeting. More details in next newsletter.**

Other Events: further details from Tim Lewis, Martin Ludgate or Lesley McFadyen.

15/12/93 Christmas party at the London Canal Museum (venue to be confirmed)
Feb / March Annual General meeting (more information in next newsletter)
Winter / Spring London WRG members slide show. (date & venue in next newsletter)

Who to contact:

Tim Lewis, 5, Herongate Road,
Wanstead, London E12.

Overall London WRG Co-ordinator
Phone 081-530 7926

Martin Ludgate, 35, Silvester Road,
London SE22 9PB

London WRG News
Phone 081-693 3266

Lesley McFadyen, 35, Silvester Road,
London SE22 9PB

Enquiries / Membership list
Phone 081-693 3266 (eves)
Phone 071-405 8400 x402 (days)

Coming soon...

**The 1993
London WRG
Christmas Party**



December 15th

Don't miss it!

1993 Reunion Weekend

What is a Reunion Dig??

By the time that you read this, many of you will have enjoyed spending some of your spare time with us this summer. With more camps than ever, all over the country, we have encouraged many new volunteers to take the plunge. Also, the regulars have provided valuable support and effort: many thanks to all of you.

Now comes the clever bit...We want to see all of you again! What about it? We are organising a weekend bash on the Wendover Arm, just off the Grand Union Canal in Buckinghamshire.

Just think, you'll be able to ask everyone what exam results they got, laugh at the photos and compare mud-stains on your camp T-shirt - What do you mean, you haven't bought one yet?

It'll be a great reunion party, where you can get back together and also meet even more people, regulars and new-comers. It'll be a chance to make contact with the **wrg** local groups so that you can carry on digging by joining their weekend working parties.

What will we do??

The work will include jungle-bashing and tree-stump removal.

Where is it??

The Reunion Weekend will be from Friday 6th to Sunday 8th November. Accommodation will be at Tring Comprehensive School - positive luxury! Don't panic if Buckinghamshire sounds a long way; all the local groups will be taking their vans and so a lift is often possible.

What do I do next??

All you have to do is fill in the form and send this and your money to Helen Davey. Simple!! Last year's was a terrific success and this year looks to be just as good. Don't forget your sparklers either as Saturday night looks set to go with a bang!!

waterway recovery group

waterway
recovery
group
ltd

NATIONAL CO-ORDINATING BODY
FOR VOLUNTARY LABOUR ON THE
INLAND WATERWAYS OF BRITAIN

WENDOVER ARM 6th - 7th NOVEMBER 1993

1993 Reunion Weekend

I wish to attend the REUNION WEEKEND : 6th - 7th November 1993

Forename _____ Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Tel. No. _____

Any special diet? _____

✧ Do you suffer from any illness (such as epilepsy), about which we should know? YES /NO

(if YES, please give details) _____

Please state how you intend to travel to the weekend and if you would like / can offer a lift and where from : _____

In the unlikely event that you should injure yourself, whom should we contact?

Name _____ Tel. No. _____

Signed (Parent's signature necessary if you are under 18) _____

Which group do you wish to work with? _____

✧ I am attending for Saturday / Sunday / Both Days

The cost is £3 (minimum) per day, £6 (minmum) for the whole weekend

✧ I enclose payment / Donation of £ _____ (Cheques payable to "WRG")

✧ Delete whatever is not applicable

Please return this form to :

Helen Davey, 42, Orchard Close, Alresford, Hants. SO24 9PY

☎ 0962 734909 (evenings and weekends)