

London WRG News



BBQ, Moose style! (Andy Richardson, Canalway Cavalcade)

Issue 59 August 2004

From The Editor

Apologies to everyone for not having been out digging very much recently, a similar excuse will be brought out as was used last time – I'm finishing my PhD. This means that in between putting this fine magazine together I'm trying to write up 4 years work. While I'm doing this I have moved back to my parents in darkest South Essex, new address on page 17.

Onto this issue then, and we have a bumper crop of dig reports from all over the country from fishing in the BCN to demolition work on the Wey & Arun and brickwork in Lichfield, I think this is the largest issue I have ever done! Many thanks to all those who have written me dig reports or taken photos – keep it up!

This issue also contains the details about the WRG Bonfire Bash weekend in November; see pages 18 & 19 for details. I am sure a van will be leaving Waterloo on the Friday for the event. Speaking of vans, our (t)rusty minibus, NJF, will be heading off for the great canal camp in the sky straight after the National – it will be missed.

See you at the National,

Ed Walker

Dig Deep

“We have identified six possible sites that might be suitable for adoption as future Dig Deep projects (i.e. receive co-ordinated support by ourselves, WRG BITM, Essex WRG, NWPG and KESCRG) when the current projects on the Wey & Arun and Basingstoke come to an end.

“We hope to make a decision on which of these projects to support by September, and to give details of the chosen projects and our planned London WRG working parties on them in the next London WRG News

Martin Ludgate

Cavalcade

Another Canalway Cavalcade has been and gone, and so in no particular order some thanks:

- Everyone for helping on the stands, we raised £540 to be split between LWRG funds and the “Right Tool” appeal.
- Moose for his “unique” barbecue style.
- The Indian restaurant for managing to squeeze 20 of us into the cellar again and feeding us so well.
- Martin for coming 2nd in the boat handling competition, by ½ a point!
- Bungle for winning the novice boat handling, in a bear costume!
- Moose, Maria and my parents for running the tombola while everyone else was off decorating boats – we came second, steaming a head obviously missed the judges.
- Martin and Sal for organising the stand and the tombola.
- Everyone for making it such a fun event, see you all next year!

LWRG Funds

Despite everyone's efforts at Cavalcade London WRG funds are a little tight at the moment, we have spent quite a bit on tools over the last year and have donated half of the money raised from Cavalcade to the “Right Tool” appeal. We have enough money for the future but please try not to break much more of the kit!

**IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM
IF NOONE ELSE CAN HELP
AND IF YOU CAN FIND THEM
MAYBE YOU CAN HIRE**



THE L TEAM

Surely that should be “and if you can drag them out of the pub”? (Richard Cool)

“So, what exactly WAS the New Invention?”

BCN Clean-Up, 20-21st March 2004

Did you hear about the Brummie fisherman that caught a whale in the canal? He put it back as there were no spokes on it. It's funny, that. Bicycle wheels seem either to come out of the canal spokeless, or with a near-servicable bicycle attached.

Yes, the weekend of March 20-21 once again saw an invasion of the Birmingham area by the redshirt troops as the BCN Clean-Up had its annual happening. More likely for political reasons than the state of the navigation – those who'd been to last year's sub-Spaghetti Junction trash-o-thon would be severely disappointed with the, er, quality of the retrievals – this year's exotic locale of choice was the Wyrley & Essington, in an area quite near to central Wolverhampton known as New Invention.

Does history record what it was? Answers, please, on a postcard. No, seriously, answers on a postcard (or perhaps a BBC Radio WM listener would be so kind as to ask Brummie historian Carl Chinn), as it seems not even Martin Ludgate knows!

Anyway, the accomm was in the ever-so-signposted Brownhills. Ever noticed just how signposted-from-everywhere Brownhills actually is? And when you get there? Yup, absolutely nothing to write home about. So just to add interest, we'd all been directed to the showers, which weren't open Friday night. The accommodation was, but those that knew where it was were not those who had compiled the joining instructions. Silly me for booking on in advance.

The accomm was a vast Victorian or Edwardian crumbling community edifice with a pipe which pumped obnoxious looking liquid onto a pavement and worried Jude. All the loos went bubble-bubble whichever one you flushed and the heating stayed on all night. London WRG arrived with our intrepid leader Aileen on board and decamped straight into the pub, unaware that the rest of us had already twigged that it wasn't worth it, so we had a wait a little while to see them and hear their verdict that the pub wasn't worth it.

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Saturday brought breakfast by the bucketload and wind by the skyload. The accomm being such a solid old pile, we didn't realise until stepping outside that the wind was in fact howling a ruddy gale and by the time NJF spat me out onto the first site of the weekend, I had made a decision that the Aussie hat just wasn't going to stay on (and let me tell you, it has to be *howling* for that hat not to stay on!) so it was on with the safety lid, along with the obligatory waterproof trousers, hooded hi-vis safety jacket, rubbery gloves and steelie wellies.

A lot of trawling brought up a lot of nothing, but we did hit a rich seam of scaffolding and eventually, a small and almost serviceable red child's pushbike. This was followed by a cycleway sign (complete with pole) and thus was the Wolverhampton & District Sub-Aquatic Cycleway was born, at least, in the imaginations of Martin and Mk2. Coming soon to an IWA meeting near you...

I killed time by riding the bike around and cannoning down a slope towards the canal, proving just in time that the front brakes still worked, until it was time to head back to our base for the weekend, Wolverhampton's Broad Street Basin, a wonderful inner city oasis of engineering brick, boats, smoke (what *was* being burned in Phoenix's stove?!) BW blokes and sandwiches. I could not help but notice Wolverhampton Lower Level Station, still there, sitting since the 'sixties unused and unloved but too listed for the BR merchants of doom to kill it completely like they did during the great scourges of the post-Beeching era, when even saved stations were either flattened or stripped of their fixtures and fittings in favour of bus shelters and plastic. It was too much for me. "I'm just going for a look at that station, Martin..."

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I walked 'round, talked my way in – the security guard was a very nice man who clearly understood that a bloke in a hard hat and hi-vis is probably aware of the H&S issues – and soon I was walking the platforms of quite possibly the biggest derelict station still extant, with the huge canopies rattling in the gale. The adverts on the walls were 40 years old, and the booking hall, oh, words cannot describe the combination of grandeur and dereliction and decay and potential! Whoever is in charge, please, please restore it!



Tim and Richard Cool go fishing (BCN Cleanup, Ed Walker)

The afternoon brought more wind, and a bridge 'ole through which the wind blew so hard our faces were sandblasted as we pulled miscellaneous crap out of the cut. All the alarms – car, house, factory – were going off as things rocked in the wind. I succeeded in elevating myself to Grandmaster Anorak by identifying all the car parts that were retrieved. A MkI Manta rostyle wheel (rare!), a MkIV Cortina dash panel and an early XJ6 front seat were among the treasures, and a late afternoon tea break (with no hot water, as Sue's camper van had run out) meant that I was able to identify the bonnet Andy R had pulled out. Later, at the accomm, Monsieur Floodgates said "we could have used you earlier; we found a car bonnet."

"FIAT Panda," said I. "You mean you're able to tell just like that?!" I assured Martin that I had **actually** seen the piece in question...

Saturday night's feast was beef in Guinness (and veggies in sauce for the veggies) followed by a superb choice of gungey puds. I chose trifle and it was, as ever, understatement of the year. Beer was beered, wine was wine and a thoroughly good time was had by all and all my chocolate was eaten by folks various. Thanks Ed for the port. Any port in a (wind) storm!

The next morning revealed that the wind had slightly calmed down so we set off for Broad Street to sign on and see if a fresh set of work sites might bring a slightly better class of crap. OK, so we were spoiled after Spaghetti Junction, but *really*! Things were much better once the group I was with positioned themselves at the end of a street where a recently-erected fence suggested that in the past, the fact that the street ran straight up to the cut meant it had functioned as the local rubbish tip. Out came all manner of things and as we moved up the canal the 1970s were here again. I will be restoring my trophy of the weekend, a perfect 1970s 'Super Flyer' skateboard, as a retro conversation piece!

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Hereford and Gloucester Canal – Aylesford Park Site, 17-18th April 2004

A coffee break was held in the car park of a suburban food pub where we were allocated exactly two spaces as it was Mothering Sunday. Sal did exactly that by keeping us all in order, only for Vaughan to spoil it by parking RFB across three spaces. Those sat in GCW avoiding the rain were mysteriously spirited to another work site before they could protest and spent the afternoon pulling out a big mattress, some fencing, a bed frame and various bits of (ahem) a late-1980s Vauxhall Nova. I retrieved a shopping trolley for the third time during the weekend, after a group of teenagers pushed it back in (again) and watched as it came back on the end of a grappling hook. A tip here: local youths' predilection towards all-white outfits means that as soon as you arrive, filthy with a grappling hook and equally filthy rope, they will no longer be in your way...

Lunch beside the canal, a group pic on a bridge, and it was time to pack up the kit. The usual big discussion regarding van movements and who was going via Broad Street and we were off. Our van, GCW, was ably piloted by yer actual Sal, who at one point realised that a complete turn in the road was both necessary and possible. She was thwarted, bizarrely, by a completely random bollard, placed in the opposite pavement exactly where the front bumper of the Tranny wanted to be.

So, thanks Aileen for organisational derrings-do, thanks BW for the support-of-sorts, the Brownhills Community Centre for the accomm and absolutely no thanks to the weather for being a complete git. Six lorry loads of scrap (or something like that) were removed from the canal and once again the PR level of the BCN was raised to helicopter heights. No, seriously, we were watched from a helicopter at one point.

The BCN, as ever, bizarre. See you next year. Bring beer, chocolate, a Brum A-Z and windproof headgear. Oh, and a guide to New Inventions of the Industrial Age.

Mk2

The weekend of 17-18th of April 2004 found London WRG working on the Hereford and Gloucester Canal. With Rick A having to pull out of leading due to illness (hope you get well soon Rick) the leadership role for this dig was carried out by democratic consensus – the rule being that if you asked who was doing a job this pretty much volunteered you straight into the role. With WRGies falling like proverbial flies, and the excuses pouring in (something about work/moving/someone's wedding, etc.) a select group made it out to Hereford and Gloucester. As usual the meeting place for minibus travel was the post box inside Waterloo Station. New John Gee promptly made Tim, Sally and myself feel decidedly underdressed by turning up in a suit since he had had a job interview that day. It also appears that not attending digs improves Martin's timekeeping as he turned up with NJF at Waterloo at 7.15pm for a 7pm start which most will agree is not too bad going for Martin. With plenty of room in the minibus with only four of us travelling in it we set off. With the sun shining there was a lot of good cheer and optimism in the minibus including comments along the lines of "...*bother* I forgot to bring my shorts". However, this optimism (at least about the weather) was rudely shattered once Tim started driving and the heavens opened (I should point out that it was the rain and not Tim's driving that shattered our optimism). By 10.30pm the minibus arrived at Yarkhill Hall, which appeared to be deserted. However, Marcus and James had already arrived but with nothing to do but keep each other company they decided to go to bed (at opposite ends of the hall I might add). Hot on the heels of NJF Nigel arrived along with Moose and Helen and our small band was nearing completion.

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After unloading all of the supplies and having eaten the obligatory toast we eventually all settled down to bed only to be awakened by nocturnal noises coming from one end of the hall indicating that some of us were less tired than others.

Saturday morning arrived and with it breakfast cooked by Tim. As we loaded NJF ready for the trip to site, Bob arrived bringing the essential chocolate rations. After a short detour to the petrol station, where it appeared that everyone had to get something from the shop, we arrived at the Aylesford Park site. This is the site where we recently built the plant compound. Due to problems with contamination of the canal bed the work for the weekend mainly involved the laying of a cyclepath across the Aylesford Park site. To this end we had a fleet of plant including 5 excavators, 3 dumpers and a ride-on roller as well as the hand tools. The heavy rains and plant moving in and out had turned the ground in front of the compound into a mudbath which is not good news if you are trying to drive a ride-on roller with metal rollers front and back out of the compound. After much effort (and mocking) Moose and the roller were finally towed out of the mud and onto better ground.

With the excitement over the work started with dumpers dumping, excavators excavating and rakers raking – I don't believe there was a partridge in a pear tree but will not swear to it. With the Burco being temperamental tea break was taken slightly later than anticipated and with slightly less hair on Marcus' hands and arms. With the sun shining through the clouds the weather on site was quite good and the work was progressing smoothly (although that is more than can necessarily be said for the cyclepath).

After lunch the cyclepath laying continued although Sally and myself were now working alongside the canal excavating and levelling the ground to construct a towpath. Whilst Sally and I were away Tim managed to get one of the dumpers well and truly stuck. Eventually and with the aid of Marcus' Land Rover Tim and the dumper were pulled out. The rest of the day passed with the cycleway laying only interrupted by the arrival of Sleepy Dave and afternoon tea.

We left site at about 6pm and made it back to the accommodation, with the rush to get changed less frantic than usual due to the reduced numbers. It seems that we left site just in time as the heaven's opened after we got back to the hall and didn't let up for the rest of the evening. Owing to a variety of circumstances and the number of people involved Saturday night's dinner was provided free of charge courtesy of Mr Chips in Hereford. It seems that the owner of the chip shop (which is in the Guinness Book of Records for frying the biggest bag of chips in the world) is the former Mayor and local councillor for the ward that includes Aylesford Park and the food was his way of thanking us for our efforts. After a very nice fish supper (or derivative) London WRG settled in for an evening of what they do best – namely putting the world and particularly WRG to rights. The evening also saw the very rare instance of London WRG turning down the opportunity to go to the pub, even though Alan Lines (who had turned up late in the afternoon) offered to drive us. Instead we "chewed the fat" as well as a superb Apple Strudel, which had been supplied by Alan, before turning in for the night. At 3am noises were again drifting down from the far end of the hall, however the rhythmic pumping was due to a deflated mattress.

Sunday morning saw the unusual site of me in the kitchen cooking breakfast for everyone. After breakfast and having cleared up and prepared lunch we headed out to site where we continued the work from the previous day. We were joined by local Community Service Volunteers who were putting in a few hours on the cyclepath as well.

With Helen feeling reassured that in a site the size of Aylesford Park the chances of putting a dumper in the cut was pretty remote she had agreed to be re-trained to drive dumpers. She then spent the day terrorising the Community Service mob by delivering the cyclepath bedding material to them.

Sunday also saw Bob trying to outdo Tim by getting a dumper stuck not once but twice (although he will argue that it was only stuck once since on the other occasion he managed to drive it out even if it was over the shiny, new cyclepath). The plan was to leave site at about 4pm but with the field still very wet and muddy from the rain the dumpers were starting to have trouble delivering the material to the top of the hill by early afternoon. This meant that we called it a day earlier than expected and left site at about 3pm with the heaven's again threatening to open.

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Back at the hall a quick clean up and the hall was emptied by 4.30pm. All that was then left was the drive back home for everyone including the four in NJF. Apart from a bit more rain to contend with, a quick stop at Over Basin to look at a completed part of the restoration work, and a traffic jam on the M40 the journey back into London was pretty uneventful and NJF managed to meet up with Martin at Waterloo without any problems.

Thanks to Tim for nominally being the leader, Moose for bringing along the food, others for the lunch preparations, Mr Chips for Saturday's supper, Adrian and the locals for their help and onsite organisation, Sally and Tim for driving NJF up there and everyone who turned up and made it a good weekend.

Andy Richardson



Another dumper stuck (Aylesford Park, Tim Lewis)

Working Party Reports

Wey & Arun Canal, 15-16th May 2004

It was a Friday night, and all was well. I was about half way to Kirdford village hall, in West Sussex, which was to be our home for the weekend. When my mind wondered back to a comment that I think Moose made earlier in the year (at the London wrg AGM) “Jolly Good, your leading the WOE and AGGRO, FOOL!!!!” (Apologies Moose if it wasn’t you, but it was the sort of comment you would make). Arriving in Kirdford I began to wonder if he was right. Whilst trying to find the house that the lady with the keys lives in, I discovered that there are two number 24’s (yes that’s right, two number 24’s). No one told me that the road splits into two, with no name change. After what felt like 15mins, but probably only 5, I find the keys. Oh well, what was I to expect, we were on the Woe and Aggro - I mean Wey & Arun after all.

Back at the hall, I set up my bed for the night, got all the tables and chairs out for the morning, before sitting back with my new copy of Canal Boat to await the arrival of the others.

Marcus arrived first, so we went for a site visit before it got dark. At which point Marcus started to wish he had gone some were else for the weekend! Arriving back at the hall, we find the rest of the team ensconced in the Lwrg natural habitat, the local pub. Just before last orders Moose & Maria arrived with the comment, “Nigel you forgot to post the directions to the accommodation on the email list. It was a good job we knew roughly where we were heading for, before we got lost!” OOPS.

As usual we were the last to leave, so back at the hall we started on the beer / wine / coffee supplies before turning in at some time between midnight and 2am.

Saturday arrived and after a lovely breakfast, cooked by Jenny, I split everyone into 3 teams before starting my day as Leader / Minibus driver / General dogs body / can you just nip up to “Tickners” and get ??? / Pick up people for lunch / drop people back after lunch / Just nip up to “Tickners” again / “you lazy g-t, when are you going to do some work” / Etc, Etc.

Anyway after a hectic day trying to make sure everyone got to where they needed to be and had the tools to do the job with, we all arrived back at the hall for a delicious supper cooked by the ever smiling Jenny, before retiring to the pub as usual.

Sunday arrives and proceeds much the same as the day before, except I get the same “You’ve given me a S..T job, I’ll have my revenge” comment from Moose every time we speak / meet instead of every other time the day before. Good job I am NOT going to the National this year.

Enough from me for the moment, the following are the separate version of events from the different work sites that I only visited for short periods of time during the weekend, when I wasn’t trying to add as many miles to poor old NJF as I possibly could.

Haybarn Bridge Demolition: by Ed Walker.

I am not sure what came over me to volunteer to head down to site with Marcus early on Saturday morning, I’m blaming the ropey pint of Tanglefoot I had in the Forrester’s Arms on Friday night! So with a minor hangover I climbed into “beastie” with most of London WRG’s demo equipment, half-an-hours driving later (this is the Wey & Arun, you have to drive halfway around the county first, its traditional!) we made it to the farm and got our first proper look at the bridge. This was one of the major tasks for the weekend and the four of us (Gilly and Andy “I park excavators on their side” Richardson joined us later) were to trash the structure down to bed level to allow its replacement with a swing bridge. To assist with this task we had the London WRG Stihl saw, a five tonne excavator with pecker and Marcus’s hard won knowledge from destroying the sewage works at Over. (Apparently built like the proverbial.)

Marcus took first stint with the excavator and once we figured out how jerry built (literally and figuratively in this case, built by German POW's!) the bridge was, the parapets came down quickly. In between watching Marcus and redirecting errant walkers I trained Andy and Gilly in using the Stihl saw, mostly used over the weekend for slicing through bits of rebar. Marcus finished the parapets and started on the deck, Andy, Gilly and I made some measurements to allow the swing bridge to be fitted at the right height and built a couple of steps on the footpath diversion. Lunch arrived; the bridge was down to three RSJ's across the cut and all seemed to be going well. After a delicious lunch supplied by Jenny Wilson we went back to it – well in truth Marcus and the excavator went back to it and the rest of us had a doze in the sun. By the end of the day Marcus had managed to get the concrete away from the RSJ's at one side of the canal, due to the layout of the site the other side would have to be broken out from the bottom of the canal.

The next day I again got woken up by Marcus at obscene o'clock – don't remember volunteering for that this time! Back on site and it was my turn to do my worst with the excavator, first task drive it between the RSJ's exposed yesterday to get the far bank within pecker range, a bit of work and a few slashes with the Stihl saw freed the beam and Marcus performed some nice manoeuvres with the excavator and beastie to drag the beam up to the farm.



Marcus gets to grip with the bridge (Haybarn Bridge, Ed Walker)

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Back in the cab again and with a bit more space to work the second beam seemed to be coming out with minimal effort, unfortunately while tracking the excavator out of the bed to finish the removal process I managed to snag one of the hydraulic hoses feeding the pecker and snap it off. Cue large spray of hydraulic oil and one disabled excavator, luckily I managed to track it out of the cut before it drained completely. This seemed a convenient point to have lunch.

After lunch and seeing that the other jobs around the canal were finished either due to more knackered kit or operator exhaustion everyone set about making the bridge safe, this mainly involved barring out the beam I had mostly freed and cutting back all the exposed reinforcing bars. With the site made safe we headed back to the accom. and home.

Thanks to Nigel for running a good weekend in less than ideal conditions and to Jenny Wilson for feeding us all that fine food!

Working Party Reports

Tales from the middle site: by Sally Nutt.

For Martin, Sleepy Dave, Phil and myself our destination for Saturday was the middle site, or Lordings Lock or the site without a bridge of any description new or ex!

The original plan was to continue with the local's work of bricklaying on the lock. However due to the necessary local not being available we were set to task removing a HUGE tree stump from the middle of the towpath. The morning was spent digging, mattocking, sawing and axing to uncover all the roots and cut them loose from the main trunk. Work was progressing well by lunchtime and we were grateful for the shade our site had, as nature hadn't been so kind on the other teams.

Post lunch to save Nigel having to drive us back to site we decided it would be just as quick to walk. So a leisurely walk down the towpath, with historical notes by Martin and Dave took us back to site and the stump, which was still looking firmly attached. The afternoon continued much as the morning with the site becoming more and more littered with wood chips from the axes. We also had the opportunity during the day to look at the water wheel. It pulls water from the river below up into the aqueduct, which is next to the lock. At the end of the day we wandered to the swing bridge-cleaning site to be picked up.

Sunday, back on site minus Martin but plus Nigel and two Tirfors we were hoping that some gentle persuasion or brute force and ignorance may get the tree stump out. However we had the brute force but the Tirfors didn't quite manage it, being a little too small for the size of tree. Nigel and I left Phil and Dave to cut through the extra roots, which had been found and returned the Tirfors and tools. Post lunch a van tidy and helping tidy the other sites took us to the end of the day.

Hopefully the locals will be able to get a larger Tirfor soon and finally extract the tree stump. Alternatively we were debating if we could carve it into a bollard for the lock and just leave it!!!

Needle gunning job on the Swing bridge: by Richard Thomas.

Note to reader, the events described in this part of the dig report may differ from the memories of others present, this can be ascribed to either, reporters license, sunstroke, my failing memory four weeks after the event or having snorted too much of the finest Leeds & Liverpool powdered rust at the time.

Those of us who had drawn the short straw and been assign to the de rusting team were delivered to site by Nigel to find a rather larger structure than I had anticipated. The engineer having given it the thumbs up (apparently those cross members with the lace doily appearance aren't "pertinent to the structural integrity" - no honest it does look in good nick) it was our job to remove as much of the rust flakes with hammers and nail guns prior to a contractor grit blasting and undercoating it.

While the compressor and nail guns were delivered we perused the array of protective gear, earplugs & muffs, goggles, facemasks and disposable overalls. Apparently most of the more accessible parts had already been tackled and it was our fate to attack the backbreaking underside. Some eschewed the stylish romper suits and sort the shade under the bridge, quickly applying a rust coloured coat of sun block and distributing ourselves along the bridge where Peter (shortly to be dubbed Peter Panda) began to tackle the pivot point. There we remained for most of the morning, only emerging for essential tea breaks and to see who was trip trapping across the bridge, in this case the trolls found no Billy goats gruff just a Moose in hobnail boots finding a novel way of chipping off rust (well he did volunteer me to write this). During one of the vital tea breaks we discovered the earmuffs Peter had been wearing had left him clean white circular patches around his ears like a Panda, while the misapplication of a wet wipe apparently resulted in a brief guest appearance by Groucho Marx.

Lunch was heralded by a phone call from Sal to remind Nigel to bring the “mugs” for lunch, so we all climbed aboard the mini bus to one of the other sites. The afternoon followed a similar pattern with more essential tea breaks then back to the hall where those of us who wore shorts rather than romper suits pondered the wisdom when faced with one small washbasin.

On Sunday it was yet more of the same but with John being substituted by the destructive power of Bob and his biscuits. Gradually we moved on to the even more inaccessible parts and Lesley discovered that by turning her head sideways she could get the peak of her helmet and the rest of her head up between the struts _ effectively into a large resonating metal box being hammered and nail gunned by all. By lunchtime while Richard Cool was still living up to his name lying back cross-legged wheeling a nail gun in an outstretched arm, but the rest of us were drooping as we found the other bridge team were when we arrived. All in all a hot, noisy and dirty job but good fun and if we go back to paint the bridge bags I not crawling around underneath it again.

Working Party Reports

Back to me again.

All that remains is for me to thank everyone for turning up and making the weekend an enjoyable and fun experience for me, considering it was the first weekend that I have organized.

Special thanks to Jenny Wilson for the lovely food. Moose for lots of encouragement and good reason not to attend the National.

Marcus for breaking the bridge, and Ed for breaking the excavator.

Sally and Maria for cleaning out NJF.

Also thanks to Ed, Sally, & Richard for their parts of this dig report.

Hope to see you all soon on the Woe & Aggro, Oops, Sorry I mean Wey & Arun.

Nigel Lee



London WRG tidies up. (Haybarn site, Ed Walker)

Working Party Reports

Lichfield Canal, 5-6th June 2004

A slightly hectic day for all concerned resulted in a slightly late departure from Waterloo. However, we made good time and arrived before closing time. A lot of people had already arrived. More than normal as Essex WRG were joining us.

The morning was certainly interesting as it was my first time leading a dig. Trying to organise everyone simultaneously proved difficult and so it took a little time to get everyone settled on a job. The work was varied but tended to involve walls.

The main job was to clean off an old canal-side wall to allow contractors to quote for its complete reconstruc-

tion. As an optional extra, removal of the rather large tree stump could be attempted. Bob was quickly on the case and with the help of the locals' ageing JCB it was removed.

The second wall job was to complete the brickwork. This proved quite tricky as the ends were slanted. However, with the aid of the brick saw and a little ingenuity, it was completed before the weekend was out.

The third wall job involved concrete infilling of a wall that had already been built. This proceeded at a healthy pace once the mixer had been freed from the bricklayers and was also completed.

Possibly the most challenging job was the use of a hand-held Kango to deepen a ladder recess in a lock. The job involved standing on a scaffolding platform with dust and debris going everywhere. It was hard work and we chiselled out a reasonable amount. Still a lot more work to be done however.

All in all a respectable amount of work was completed and we should be returning to Lichfield later this year.

Andy Roberts



Martin, Nigel and the "slanted wall" (Tim Lewis)

Wey and Arun Canal – Haybarn Site, 3rd-4th July 2004

Back at the London WRG AGM in January my naivety with all things WRG showed when I agreed to lead the July weekend dig. At the time nobody pointed out to me that we would likely be without NJF and also that nobody digs in the summer. So with these issues to contend with, by June I was planning the London WRG dig on the Wey and Arun canal. The first step was to send out the usual email asking who is coming along, how they are getting there and any dietary requirements (oops forgot that one in my email). By the evening of the pre-dig social 11 days before the weekend I had 3 people confirmed as attending the dig and it was not looking promising. Martin would be there on the Sunday and Lesley was a possibility if I could arrange transport but otherwise WRGies were pretty thin on the ground (surely the first time thin and WRGies have been used in the same sentence). A further complication is that I was going to spend the next 6 days in a field in Somerset listening to music, getting muddy and having the odd pint or two of hot apple juice so would not really be in a position to arrange things in advance. However, while sat in my muddy field things on the transport front started looking up. NWPG had approached the WRG board about the cost of insuring NJF for the summer, as they needed a minibus for their summer camp on the Wey and Arun Canal. With London WRG also agreeing to chip in we had an additional insured minibus for the summer. Now all we needed was a driver. After much discussion Nigel agreed to get the train to London on Friday evening and drive the minibus down to the accommodation (which is only 30 minutes or so from where Nigel lives). Martin had also agreed to get the train down on Saturday night rather than drive down, so that NJF could travel back up to London on the Sunday.

Due to Nigel's family commitments (something about the children really wanting to see Shrek 2 – of course Nigel showed no interest at all, yer right!!) the meeting time was changed to 8pm in front of the Post Box on Waterloo Station concourse. At 8.02pm Nigel came strolling up and from there Sally, Nigel and myself started off on our epic tour of South London. With Martin's (and Transport for Lon-

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don's advice) that it took only about 15 minutes by bus to get to East Dulwich we set off in a Black Cab to make the journey, thinking to save some time. Twenty minutes later we pulled up alongside NJF having seemed to take a fairly indirect route ("South of the river this time of night guv, you must be joking" had struck again). After picking up Lesley, the keys and NJF (not literally apart from the keys) we set off to try to find the A3. After visiting some of the nicer and not so nice spots of South London (Dulwich Village and Brixton) we managed to work our way to the A3 and the journey began in earnest. The Guildford junction of the A3 came and went as we continued on the A3 to get to Nigel's house to pick up his kit for the weekend.



Lesley and John breaking up the rubble (Nigel Lee)

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Running like a well-oiled machine Nigel's wife (Jackie) was there to hand him over his coffee and kit and to see us off – she seemed quite keen to get rid of Nigel for the weekend, something to do with an American warship in Portsmouth harbour and lots of American sailors milling about. With Lesley looking nervously at her watch we set off cross-country to find the accommodation in Plaistow. At 10.55pm we pulled up in front of the village pub and Lesley fairly bolted out to get to the bar before time was called. We all trooped into the pub to be met by Richard T and Sleepy Dave. After a quick pint we turned up at the hall to find Marcus asleep in the front of his Land Rover. At this point it turned out that nobody had collected the key for the hall so Nigel and I set off to find a bungalow called “Chumleigh”. Fortunately for us it turned out to be the first bungalow we came to so we quickly returned to the hall and opened up the accommodation. After unloading all of the necessary kit the regular late night toast eating started – albeit with Sally and I looking on anxiously as we weren't sure we would have enough bread for breakfast and lunch the following day if the toast eating continued. Due to the initial lack of transport and also the effort involved in getting it to NJF Sally had initially only carried out a shop for Saturday's breakfast and lunch. Finally, common sense prevailed and everybody went to get their heads down for a few hours.

Saturday morning saw me rudely awakened by the theme from the film about the “633 Squadron”. If I had to get up early to make breakfast for everyone I was at least going to pass on some of the misery. Unfortunately, breakfast took slightly longer than I planned due to an intermittently working grill and a lack of cooking oil. However, after some improvisation breakfast was

cooked and the hordes (well 7 WRGies) fed. After preparing the lunch (just a hint: don't ask Dave to grate cheese for the sandwiches) it was off to the work site, which for this weekend was the Haybarn site where we were demolishing, the bridge last time we worked on the W & A. We met up with John Gerard and the local organiser Graham, and promptly started moving plant and equipment down to the actual site. Fortunately, the landowner has started putting in some drainage so the site was a bit less waterlogged than on our last visit (at least for the time being). The list of tasks for the weekend included completing the demolition of the existing bridge and abutments; grading an access track down to the site, breaking up the rubble from the demolished bridge to use as road base, removing the rust from the container on site and painting it, and collecting tools and equipment from Tickners.

Whilst Marcus got to work moving the RSJs that we freed last time out of the way and then using the pecker to free the last RSJ, Richard T and Dave travelled up to Tickner's Heath to start the task of collecting the plant. Lesley and I started to break up the rubble with the sledgehammers whilst John, Nigel and Sally piled up the debris. Unfortunately, Lesley must have misinterpreted the instruction “please break the rubble with the sledgehammer” into “please break the sledgehammer with the rubble” as she proceeded to break two sledgehammers over the course of the weekend.

With the RSJ freed Marcus turned his and the excavator's attention to the grading of the access track, ably supported by Nigel and his dumper. Sally and myself started up the compressor and got down to demolishing the bridge abutment using the road breakers. With the arrival back on site of Richard and Dave and the Burco nearly boiling (for the first time that lunch time) I set off to Tickner's for the next epic run to shift tools and equipment for the summer camp at the site. During my visit I received a phone call from Nigel asking for some more sledgehammers due to the first instalment of Lesley's hammer breaking exploits.

On my return from Tickner's I expected to see a site full of activity with lunch having long since finished. The only problem was that lunch had had to be delayed due to some idiot not having checked that the Burco was full before putting it on for lunch (can't possibly have been my fault, honest!!). This meant that lunch had not long been finished and the WRGies were just settling into their afternoon tasks. Marcus had almost completed the grading of the access track and Richard T and Dave were now at work using the road breakers. Lesley, Sally and John were busy breaking up and shifting the rubble, and Nigel was at home in his dumper. One problem that arose on our return from Tickner's was that the track had not been graded to a sufficient width for the mobile crane and low loader that must travel down it. At this point though the weather intervened and the heavens proceeded to open turning the whole site into a mud bath. Thankfully, the new container on site had yet to be cluttered with essential tools and equipment, but instead had plenty of room for sheltering WRGies. This pretty much set the pattern for the remainder of the afternoon with the work being carried out between heavy rainfalls (and with Sally having to take an impromptu break to sew up the split in her trousers caused when she bent over).

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By 6pm most of us had had enough for one day so we tidied away the tools and equipment and headed off in NJF to Sainsbury's to buy the rest of the food for the weekend. Once we had bought the food and got back to the hall the delights of the accommodation were to come into play. This is one of those rare village halls that have showers and they were appreciated to the full by the WRGies before dinner (even Marcus had a shower). Sally and Marcus had offered to cook the Saturday meal, although they were particularly coy about what exactly they were going to cook. However, although a little late due to the delays in getting the food and getting back to the accommodation the "Toad-in-the-Hole" was greatly appreciated and the garlic mash done to just the right WRGie proportions (about enough garlic to knock out unsuspecting locals from 10m). At 9.30pm Dave and myself set off in NJF for another cross-country jaunt to pick up Martin from a local station after his epic journey



Seen this before somewhere? (Nigel Lee)

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back from the Saul Festival. On our return to the accommodation it was off to the pub to sample the local brew. The village pub seem to have a relaxed view on licensing hours (or a slow clock) and we managed to fit in a reasonable amount of drinking before having to leave the pub. Back at the accommodation pineapple and ice cream was had before people turned in for the night.

Breakfast was again prepared by me on the Sunday morning although at a slightly earlier time as the hall had to be cleared by 9.30am for use by a play group or some such. For once we were all up and out of the hall having packed our kit and tidied the accommodation by 9.15am and headed off to site. The rains of the previous days, as well as the trips



Andy and Sal destroying the last of the bridge
(Nigel Lee)

up it by the canal trust's Land Rover, had turned the nicely graded track into a bit of a quagmire, although it was still in a better state than on our previous recent visit. The work progressed pretty much as it had done on the Saturday, except that this time we had a temperamental compressor hose which eventually gave up the ghost mid-afternoon. By this stage Sally was decorating the site container with a polka dot pattern to cover the rust spots (after having undone her efforts of the previous day to put an even bigger split in her trousers), Lesley and Martin were hard at work trying to break up the rubble and Dave was profiling the spoil from the track grading to provide an access route for from one side of the canal to the other under the instruction of Marcus. The rest of us were busy doing whatever other jobs there were to be done. The afternoon was punctuated with a visit from Graham Hawke of NWPG who was checking on our progress ahead of NWPG's camp during the summer. However, as the day and the rain wore on the heads on site started to drop. With no real prospect of making anymore significant progress we called a halt to the work about 4.30pm and proceeded to clear up the site. Most of the rubble had been cleared from the bridge hole (with the exception of one large piece of concrete that Marcus just couldn't manage to move), the track had been graded (although only to a 2.3m width), the container was nicely decorated and most of the concrete had been broken out on the far abutment. Once site had been tidied it was back to the accommodation to pick up the vehicles, get changed and drop the keys for the hall off. There then followed a pretty uneventful journey back to London, aided with an almost inexhaustible supply of chicken sandwiches left over from lunch.

My thanks to all those who turned up (Nigel, Sally, Marcus, Dave, Richard T, John G, Lesley and Martin), especially Nigel and Martin for putting themselves out to drive NJF to and from the dig, Sally for doing the shopping and, along with Marcus, cooking dinner on Saturday night. My apologies to Martin for causing him to miss the excitement at the Saul Festival on Saturday night. I hope that all who turned up had a good dig and weren't too disheartened by the work and weather.

Andy Richardson

London WRG News

London WRG Dates List

For up to date information check the London WRG web pages:

www.london.wrg.org.uk

Working Parties: Transport available Friday evening in the London WRG minibus; meet by the post box outside Costa Coffee at Waterloo station; normally at 19:00 but may be earlier or later depending on distance. Contact Tim, Martin or Lesley for details.

Date	Location	Organiser
11-12/9/04	Lichfield Canal	Sal Nutt
2-3/10/04	Hereford & Gloucester Canal, joint with NW	Marcus Jones
23-24/10/04	Dig Deep on the Wilts & Berks Canal	Tunji Faley
6-7/11/04	WRG Bonfire Bash, Grantham Canal	Centrally Booked
4-5/12/04	KESCRG/LWRG Xmas Dig, Dauntsey	-
15-16/1/05	TBA	Moose & Maria
5-6/2/05	Uttoxeter Canal, Froghall	Andi Kewley
26-27/2/05	TBA	Ed Walker
12-13/3/05	BCN Cleanup	Aileen Butler

Note: Digs marked "Dig Deep" are on projects where work is being co-ordinated under the Dig Deep Initiative, a scheme involving ourselves and four other mobile groups (Essex WRG, NWP, KESCRG and WRG BITM).

Social Gatherings: Tuesday night, normally 11 days before each dig i.e, 7th September (4 days before dig), 21st September, 12th October, 26th October, 23rd November etc. at the **Star Tavern** (upstairs room) Belgrave Mews West, behind German Embassy on Chesham Place, from about 19.30 till 23.00. Extra Socials on 3rd August (GBBF) and 10th August (Star Tavern)

Other Events:

3/8/04	Extra Social at Great British Beer Festival, Olympia.	-
4/8/04	Navvies Assembly, 7pm, London Canal Museum	-
28-30/8/04	National Waterways Festival, Burton-on-Trent	-
3-5/9/04	Dorset Steam Fair	-
9-10/10/04	Tool Painting Weekend (TBC)	Moose & Maria
26/12-1/1	WRG New Year camp, Wilts & Berks	-

Who to contact:

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WRG Bonfire Bash

Grantham Canal, 6-7th November 2004

For those who haven't been on one before, the Bonfire Bash is our annual end-of-season get-together and major work party. Usually well over 100 volunteers turn up and spend a weekend helping to give a canal restoration project a big push - as well as spending the Saturday night having a big party and getting together with all the folks we've met on Canal Camps this summer and people from the regional groups that we haven't seen for ages, and generally having a good time.

It's called a Bonfire Bash because (a) it's conveniently close to Bonfire Night and we sometimes mark this with appropriate celebrations and (b) the work usually involves scrub-clearance... which usually means big bonfires on site.

But even if we can't guarantee to supply any bonfires at all, we still call it a Bonfire Bash, and we can still guarantee that it will be a good weekend.

Having bashed all the available scrub in past years on the Wilts & Berks, Basingstoke, Wey & Arun, Manchester Bolton & Bury and elsewhere, we move to pastures (or jungles) new this year: the **Grantham Canal**.

Work: Exact details of the site are still being worked out, but it looks like the work will be the usual scrub and tree clearance from the bed of the canal, with two lengths, both about half a mile long, having been identified as possibilities. We already have permission to clear one length near Cropwell Butler (close to where the last Grantham Canal Camp cleared out a flight of three locks in 2002), and we are looking at also tackling a second section near Colston Bassett.

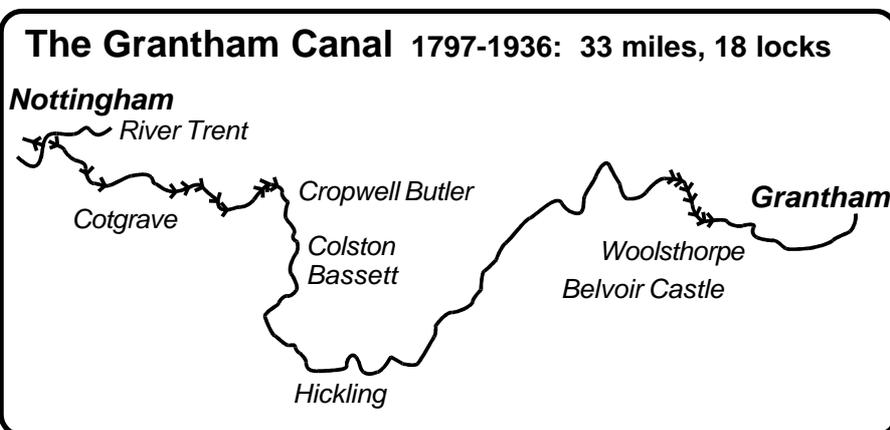
Purpose: Both of the lengths of canal that we are likely to be working on are on the 'dry section' towards the western end of the canal. With sections of canal already restored and in-water near the eastern (Grantham) end, doing some serious clearance work at the west end will not only prepare the way for future re-watering of this length too, but should also encourage the local authorities including Nottinghamshire County Council to take an interest in supporting (and maybe funding) some more restoration work on their part of the canal.

Accommodation: We've provisionally identified a large village hall at Colston Bassett that should be big enough to do the job, and is convenient for the work sites. It also - according to the local canal society - has the added attraction of a real ale pub within 50 yards, although I expect that we'll make our own arrangements for entertainment and beer on the Saturday night.

Booking: If you want to come to the Bonfire Bash, please fill in the booking form opposite and send it off to head office with your cheque.

Full details including joining instructions will be sent as soon as we have them to everyone who books in. Further information including confirmation of accommodation will appear on the website www.wrg.org.uk and in the next issue of *Navvies* - but please don't wait till then before you book! If you know you want to come (and you do, don't you?) send your form in right away - the more people that book in earlier, the better idea we have of how many people are coming, and the easier it is for us to plan the weekend to make sure you all have enough work, enough food, suitable accommodation, and everything else that will make this a weekend to remember.

Martin Ludgate



WRG Reunion Bonfire Bash 2004

I would like to attend the 2004 WRG Bonfire Bash on the Grantham Canal on November 6th-7th

Forename: _____ Surname: _____

Address: _____

email: _____

Phone: _____

Any special dietary requirements? _____

I require accommodation on **Friday night / Saturday night / both nights**

I enclose payment of £ _____ (please make cheques payable to 'WRG') for food
(cost is £10 for the whole weekend, based on £2 for each meal.)

How will you be travelling to the Bonfire Bash? _____

Do you want to work with volunteers from one of this year's Canal Camps or from one of the regional groups? If so, which camp or group? _____

Do you suffer from any illness, such as epilepsy or diabetes, about which you should know, or are you receiving treatment or under medical supervision for any condition **YES/NO If yes, please attach details on a covering letter.**

In the unlikely event that you should be injured, who should we contact?

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Signed: _____

(parent's signature also required if aged under 18): _____

Please send this form to:

Bonfire Bash Bookings, WRG, PO Box 114, Rickmansworth WD3 1ZY



Cavalcade 2004: The decorated boat competition, our theme “Steaming A Head”! (Andy Richardson)



The usual fund raising activities, here Dave runs the Splat-The-WRGie stall (Tim Lewis)