

London WRG News



Issue 65 October 2007

From The Editor

“It’s like Navvies but cheaper” – how London WRG news was explained to a new volunteer at this years National.

I’m trying to get this edition of London WRG News off before I move house (again? I hear you say.) hopefully I won’t have to move again for a while though. It’s been a busy and fulfilling year for canal restoration – we are back working on some of old favourite canals (Ipswich and Stowmarket canal and the Cotswold Canals) and work has carried on at a great rate on the Wilts and Berks in the last year. Dig reports from a few of these sites are included in this issue – unfortunately we seem to be missing a large number of reports from digs earlier this year.

See people at the Bonfire Bash.

Ed Walker.

Dig Deep

At the recent Dig Deep meeting (Dig Deep is a coordinated approach to organising volunteers on certain projects between London WRG, KESCRG, NWPG, BITM and Essex WRG) it was decided that next year’s Dig Deep projects will be on the Basingstoke Canal (works on the new backpumping project on Brookwood locks), Thames and Severn Canal (Probably on Eisey lock), Wilts & Berks (Continuing work on seven locks) and the Mon & Brec (further work on the Crumlin Arm locks).

A Reminder

Dig organisers should not only fill in the insurance form giving numbers of volunteers and types of work undertaken and forward it to head office, but from now onwards should also send in a list of names of volunteers who worked on site each day.

Bonfire Bash...

...is only just around the corner! The WRG Bonfire Bash this year is being organised by KESCRG as part of their 30-year anniversary celebration. This year we will be working on a number of sites on the Wilts & Berks canal (yours truly is leading a away team to seven locks to do a concrete pour), Nic Bennett is running the real ale bar again and I hope everyone is booked on? (Bookings via head office, see www.wrg.org.uk/bonfire_bash_2007.htm for details) Martin will be taking the LWRG van up from London, a few seats are still available – contact him to book one.

LWRG/KESCRG/WRG-SW Christmas Dig
See page 10 for details and a booking form.

LWRG Christmas Party

Continuing the party theme this years London WRG Christmas party will be held on the evening of Tuesday 11th December and Liz Wilson has volunteered to host it. Further details will be available closer to the time but I am sure offers of food and help will be appreciated!



Above: Richard Cool felling wind damaged tree (Wilts & Berks, Ed Walker)

Cover Photo: Rebuilding lock 4 on the Wilts & Berks, Joint LWRG/KESCRG/WRG-SW dig, April 2007 (Ed Walker)

Mon & Brec, 8/9th September 2007

Being the only girl (and the only vegetarian) on the latest London WRG weekend wasn't at all a problem, and it was nice to have my own bathroom (and my own a la carte meals – cheers Frank!). Here's my diary for the duration.

Friday 7pm, Waterloo

“You won't believe the smashes we've had in this thing,” says Martin starting the engine. “Went into the back of a ParcelForce van doing ninety on the M11 just last week. Lucky to be alive we are. And then the weekend before that I drove it into the Grand Western canal. Talk about laugh!” I grip the roof handle tightly. As we build up speed on the Hammersmith flyover the mysterious rattling sounds begin.

It's late when we get to the village of Cross Keys just outside Newport and you can't see the mountains because all the darkness is getting in the way. At least the church hall seems pretty comfortable. There are eleven of us including some faces I recognise from the National, although luckily I don't feel awkward about being the only new person. We waste no time in getting to the pub.

Friday night 11pm

We order ten-and-a-half pints and the barman laughs. I don't know why he's laughing; the inside of this pub hasn't changed since the miners' strike.

“Is Thatcher still in power?” one of the customers asks me. “Or is it safe to go outside now?”

“This is a local pub, for local people,” explains Mafys the proprietess. And later: “Ten and a half pints again, is it?”

Saturday

We need to have a safety induction. “Don't fall in the canal. And don't eat the lime” pretty much covers it. Then they spend half an hour teaching me to put cement in cracks. “Think of it like icing a cake,” says Tim, pleased to have found a simile he thinks I'll be able to relate to. “Hold the trowel by the wooden end. We call that ‘the handle’.” He pats me on the head and I start work.

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Working Party Reports

After about twenty minutes we have a tea break. The group talks about how great Top Gear is and I worry about Amy Winehouse's chaotic lifestyle. When all the good biscuits are gone, we start work again.

Nigel comes over every few minutes to check my work. “Think of it like icing a cake,” he explains. Tim comes over to explain to me why you should never leave an automatic car in gear and I take the opportunity to decide whether I like Keira Knightley's new haircut, or if it really does make her jaw look too strong.

We break for lunch. Sort of getting used to throwing tea bags into the canal now but somehow it feels *wrong*. Martin gives me a brief geopolitical history of the Mon & Brec canal whilst I wonder whether it really is ankle straps or nothing this autumn, or if I can get away with last year's rouché pixie boots at least until Christmas.

Saturday 5pm

Really pleased to have repointed a whole section of the wall by the end of the day. To celebrate our hard work on this overflow drain, we take a walk up about a mile of overgrown, crumbling canal and the fourteen plant-clogged locks which have fallen into disrepair. Realise it's just the tip of a very big iceberg and unlike an iceberg, it isn't going to help by melting even a little bit. Feel a bit depressed by this when we get back to base but luckily what Frank is cooking smells delicious.

Disgusted to report very little evidence of washing taking place before dinner. Most of group now looking like coalminers. I scrub and scrub to get the lime out of my skin – worried it'll eat big holes in my face while I sleep, and I'll wake up looking like Daniella Westbrook.

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Working Party Reports

Later we go to the pub again where the landlady is training her fat spaniel to be in the circus. She throws snooker balls which the dog gamely catches. It doesn't have any teeth left but the act is really coming on.

I get my knitting out and as everyone's too tired to talk about car engines, Top Gear and plumbing tonight, we sit around and watch me knit until midnight.

You make your own fun in South Wales.

Sunday 8am

Slept okay but getting really grumpy now. Luckily builders' tea really perks me up, also thought that television will be arriving. Wonder if there's a film on this afternoon?

Sunday 9am

Argh! It isn't a television but a television *crew* that are arriving, to film something called Waterways' World (I think it's a sequel to a Kevin Costner turkey). Luckily I will be wearing a hard hat so no-one'll notice I haven't washed my hair since Friday. Everyone pretends not to be really excited about the telly crew getting here but I notice quite a few people seem to have ironed their red t-shirts.

All the excitement of the telly crew visit over, we get back to the real business of the day – drinking tea.

Sunday 11pm

Finally get home, no thanks to Transport for London. Darling is delighted to see me. "The washing machine broke. I've had these pants on for three days now. Did you know you're getting mud all over the floor?"

Despite all this, I am hoping to do another weekend soon...

Sophie Smith



The bywash after we'd finished (Ed Walker)

Ipswich & Stowmarket, 29/30th September 2007

Return to Dingly Dell...

...otherwise known as Baylham Lock on the Ipswich and Stowmarket Navigation and the site of our London wrg dig on 29th-30th September. A really beautiful site made even more picturesque than last time some of us were there (back in August for a Canal Camp) by the fact that the cofferdam had bust and the river was flowing through the site again.

If you're racking your brains trying to figure out why the name 'Baylham' is familiar, it's because it's also home to Baylham Rare Breeds farm, recently made infamous by an outbreak of Blue Tongue disease. It seemed as though the outbreak might force our dig to relocate for the weekend, but it turned out that the press were making a bit of a big deal out of not much, and the site was duly opened again in time for us to visit.

I met Martin and Helena on Friday at Tottenham Hale and we set off for Ipswich along the never-ending A12. We had two pick-ups from the station, Matthew and Colin, both new recruits to LWRG, and then headed for Somersham Village hall to collect keys and unload the van. Hot on our heels were Nigel, Moose and Maria, who stayed at the hall while the rest of us got back in the van and headed to the supermarket. After a brief discussion as to which exit from the motorway we wanted, we found Morrisons, despite looking for Tesco or Asda. Four people made the shopping go very quickly, and we were soon back in Somersham in the Duke of Marlborough pub, which had deigned to stay open past 9pm (in contrast with the summer camp!). Glad to see that Helen had found the place after travelling in ever-decreasing circles, as had Ed and Suzie.

Saturday morning I awoke everyone gently by using the snooze function on the fire alarm. Most effective. (Note to next person using Somersham village hall – keep the kitchen door shut when cooking bacon!). After breakfast and an efficient bout of sandwich making we headed to Baylham lock, 15 minutes down the road. A beautiful sunny day awaited us.

Working Party Reports

Colin Turner greeted us with his usual cheerful smile and outlined the work for the weekend: Bricklaying and backfilling a new retaining wall (for which we'd installed the foundations back in August), demolition of the old concrete wall (lying sideways in the canal), and excavation/removal of the lock-side coping stones to enable eventual demolition and rebuilding of the lock wall.

The work to the lock was borne of Roy Sutton's structural report from the summer, which identified that most of the wall would have to come down, as would most of the bank behind it, to a depth of 2.5m back from the lock side. This being due to some significant detachment of the brick facing from the earth behind, and a visible bowing-out of the existing wall. In short, the wall's got a bit of a belly on it. A job for next summer!?



Another little job - cutting steelwork off old lock gates (Suzie Pounce)

Working Party Reports

Maria & co set to work on the top of the lock, removing debris and starting on rolling the copers back, using Ed's Landrover as a dead weight. Winching the Landrover closer and closer to the ditch brought a definite smile to Suzie's face.

Helena was happily installed on the cement mixer, with occasional help from others. A steady stream of concrete and mortar kept the brickies and backfillers happy (except when they were tripping over each other). Martin did some sterling work training Mel and Matthew in bricklaying, at great sacrifice to his own addiction for it! Nigel was multi-tasking with much success as he co-ordinated bricklaying, concrete shovelling and vibrating all in equal measures.



You want MORE concrete!?! (Suzie Pounce)

Sleepy David and Moose jumped at the chance to have a go on the pneumatic hammer and set to work on the huge chunks of concrete which used to be a retaining wall. I can't imagine anything less fun than breaking up 40-yr old concrete using something that looked like a toothpick, but they seemed to enjoy it.

During the day, Frank, Adrian and Graham (another new recruit) also turned up, and Mark 'II' Richardson put in an appearance for dinner, which was excellently provided by Melanie. Fabulous lasagne followed by scrumptious pear and apple tart. That third helping was just too good to resist...

Back to the pub where we were relegated to the garden after Mel groped an old lady and got us thrown out. Just kidding; but we did get a few sniffy looks. Probably because we hadn't showered.

Day two was sunny again and the work continued. More moving coping stones, more bricklaying, more demolition and more sandwiches. I had to sneak off after lunch as I had to get to a wedding in London but I am reliably informed that the brickies made good progress and got the wall up to the minimum level required to enable the complete removal of the cofferdam. Colin Turner was very pleased with our progress, and happy that he also managed to get a bit of bricklaying done himself!

Moose unfortunately sprained his ankle in the afternoon (a very passé injury if you ask me!) and had to sit with his foot in a bucket of cold water. Luckily nothing was broken but I know from (much) experience that it's still not fun.

Apart from that I think everyone had a pretty good time, and we would certainly accept an invitation back to such a well-run and interesting site. Thank you to everyone for making it a very enjoyable dig, particularly to Mel and Frank for cooking and Martin for driving and collecting kit.

Liz Wilson

London WRG – WRG-SW joint dig, Stroudwater Canal, 20-21st October 2007.

London WRG's first joint dig with the newest mobile group in WRG.

Friday

Arrived quite early at the pub and met up with WRG-SW for dinner and rugby, Argentina proceeded to run France into the grass. The rest of London WRG rolled in over time and a number of beers were consumed. Accom was the always-nice Selsey Scout hut (custodian of the finest accommodation view in canal restoration) where toast was consumed.

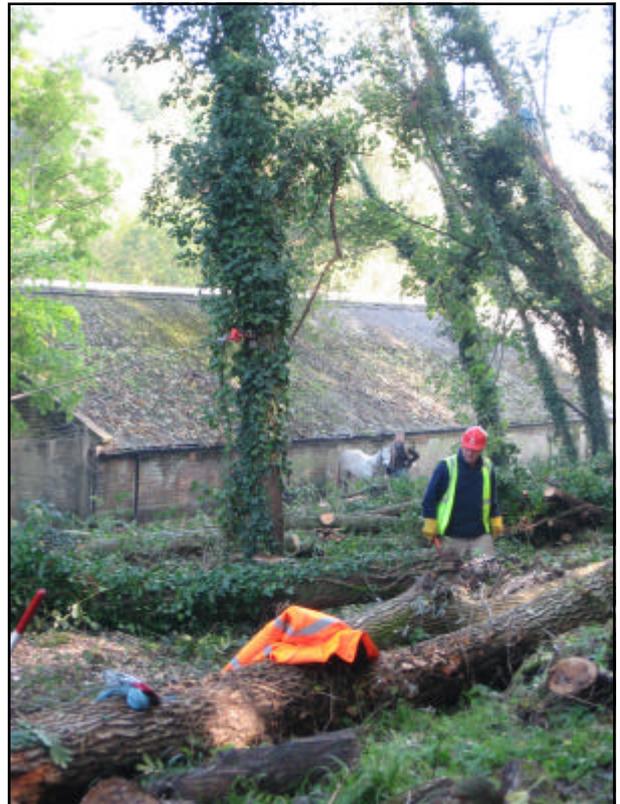
Saturday

Martin disappeared early to go to a ResCom meeting near Lincoln, Harri T fed us a good breakfast and Rick B went over the plan for the day and a brief safety talk – the plan being “if its made out of wood and on the old canal, burn it.”



Working Party Reports

Once on site (we were working at Gough's Orchard lock near Brimscombe Port where the Stroudwater canal used to meet the Thames & Severn) we split into two teams. Helena, Young Chris and I worked with the BW chainsaw man who was felling the larger trees near the road end of site. The rest of the combined group were working nearer the lock clearing scrub and felling smaller trees. By lunch we had a number of good fires going and site was looking much smarter. The locals group (Cotswold Canal Trust) by this point were going great guns with putting up a wooden fence along the old lock while we continued to scrub bash away.



Left: David on Tirfor duty (Ed Walker)

Above: A tree goes over (Ed Walker).

Working Party Reports

By 5pm everyone was starting to flag – so we headed back to the accom to find James Butler, Moose and Maria had arrived. Showers(!) and dinner (an excellent Lasagne and chocolate pudding by Harri) quickly followed and we managed to make the pub in time for the England v South Africa rugby match. With the rugby match being shown in the lower bar we had the middle bar to ourselves, keeping score by the cheers and groans from the room next door.

Below: Nigel and Frank start a fire the easy way
(Ed Walker)



Sunday

An extra early breakfast is never the nicest thing on a Sunday (we had to be clear of the hall by 9.30am) but everyone set to and we were soon on site. We had a new BW chainsaw operator today and soon started to remove the final few trees. These being quite close to some workshops, a degree of control over the felling was required – attaching a Tirfor to the tree and applying some tension as the trunk was cut seemed to work well, pity the BW chainsaw gave up after two trees! This led to the alternate method of felling trees – cut the wedge, saw halfway through and then winch it over. By 3pm the only things left standing on site were the piles of logs and a few trees that required the use of an access platform to cut down.

All in all a very good scrub bash, nice to be working on the Cotswold Canals again after so many years. Thanks to Rick B for organising the dig and to Harri T for the cooking, see everyone at Bonfire Bash!

Ed Walker

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

www.london.wrg.org.uk

London WRG Dates List

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.

Dates	Location	Organiser
3-4/11/06	Bonfire Bash, Wilts & Berks	Centrally Booked
17-18/11/06	Hereford and Gloucester	David Miller
1-2/12/06	KESCRG/LWRG Xmas Party, Droitwich	Centrally Booked
12-13/01/08	Chelmer & Blackwater	Helen Dobbie
2-3/02/08	Wendove Arm & AGM	Ed Walker
23-24/02/08	TBA	TBA
15-16/03/08	TBA	TBA
5-6/04/08	BCN Cleanup	Aileen Butler
26-27/04/08	TBA	TBA
31/05-1//07/07	TBA	TBA

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, NWPG, KESCRG and WRG BITM).

Social Gatherings: Tuesday night, normally 11 days before each dig i.e. 6th November, 20th November, 8th January, 22nd January etc. at the **Star Tavern** Belgrave Mews West, behind German Embassy on Chesham Place, from about 19.30 till 23.00.

Other Events:

02/02/08	London WRG AGM, Wendover Dig	-
01/03/08	KESCRG/LWRG Barn Dance, Benson	-
3-5/05/08	Canalway Cavalcade, Little Venice	-
10-11/05/07	WRG Training Weekend	Ali Bottomley

Who to contact:

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Xmas Party Dig

KESCRG / LWRG/ WRG SW Christmas Dig, December 1-2

The annual joint Christmas Party Dig this year is happening on the Droitwich Junction Canal. The exact task list is in the process of being confirmed but will involve work on the section below Hanbury Locks, where we are to be doing some hedge removal, newt hibernacula building and nature reserve work.

A crack team of cooks will be cooking up the usual roast dinner for Saturday night and the usual real ale bar and silly games will be happening. To coincide with the 30th birthday celebrations for KESCRG the theme for the Saturday night party will be “1977”. That’s right - the year of Saturday Night Fever, the Queen’s Silver Jubilee, the death of Elvis, Star Wars, punk rock, and a British winner in the Wimbledon Women’s Singles. (Oh yes, and Canal Camps on the Droitwich and the Mont, the Deepcut Big Dig on the Basingstoke, and Navvies editorials concerned about what we could do to save the waterways from Government cuts...)

Bookings this year will be through head office using the form opposite. Cost is £16 for the whole weekend. Tickets will also be available at the Bonfire Bash. Further details of the work and accommodation will be on the WRG website as soon as we know them...

Ed Walker and Liz Wilson



Can anyone beat this fancy dress from a few years ago? (Xmas dig 2003, Ed Walker)

Xmas Party Dig

London WRG KESCRG and WRG SW Droitwich Christmas party dig

I would like to attend the London WRG / KESCRG / WRG South West Christmas party dig on the Droitwich Canals on December 1st-2nd

Forename: _____ Surname: _____

Address: _____

email: _____

Phone: _____

Any special dietary requirements? _____

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

I enclose payment of £16 (please make cheques payable to 'WRG') for food

How will you be travelling to the Christmas party dig? _____

Do you suffer from any illness, such as epilepsy or diabetes, about which we 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: _____

Please send this form to:

Droitwich Christmas dig bookings, PO Box 114, Rickmansworth WD3 1ZY



Above: Beer prices have got so high volunteers are arm wrestling over getting the next round (Martin Ludgate).

Below: David Miller stone laying (Ed Walker)

