

London WRG News

Issue 69 :
June 2010



Editors Note:

Hello again!!!

Are you proud that I worked out how to write on the picture and make it look reasonably good? Does anyone other than me feel that this issue should have slightly sexual air due to being the 69th?

Anyways, having thrilled you all via e-mail with a list of reasons why I missed most of the camps (my favourite of which was spending the February Basingstoke weekend covered in red spots, though fitting two Christenings into one weekend earlier in the month was a close second), I have some new material (thanks to Jon, Paul, Pete and Nigel) and some recycled material (thanks to Paul and Jon). I think that so long as we are all clear that **the cartoon on page 6 belongs to Private Eye** we aren't violating any copyright rules as we aren't selling you this lovely little news-letter!

If you think differently let me know by writing a letter to the editor!! Maybe we can be like Navvies and produce a magazines worth of content about a singular topic (though please—this time not dogs, though I would be interested to see how much total page space was filled due to one over exaggerated comment made by Sophie!).

Other things you could let me know about include happy or sad events that you feel need to be recorded. From now on I will make a note of anything that goes around the mailing list that I notice—however not everything gets included in an e-mail at any point.

Some things Navvies has helpfully reminded me of, for example LWRG News' ex-editor getting married—the amazingly good reason for not having time to be editor any more.

Also related to our Ed, it has been mentioned that I am incredibly rude as I totally forgot to thank Ed last issue. Hence, slightly belatedly but nether-the-less sincerely, I would like to thank Ed for all his hard work in putting LWRG News together over the past 10 years (longer than I have been digging) and apologies for not saying so last time.

Helena Howarth

NON-DIG NEWS

CONGRATULATIONS to
Ed Walker and Suzie
Pounce on their
marriage on
20th March
2010

Congratulations also go to:

Mel and Nat Belderson
on the arrival of Austin Brunel
on 14th February

Alison Smedley MBE
whose name appears on the New
Years Honours list for services to
Waterways

Spencer Collins and
Victoria Westwood
on their engagement

JANUARY 2010

We didn't play out in January because we are a safety conscious bunch and it would have probably looked like this...



Image:
Tim Lewis

6/7TH FEBRUARY 2010 (HEREFORD AND GLOUCESTER)

There were 3 sites – 1 at the slipway in the country park, 1 at the bottom of the road from the accommodation, 1 behind a row of houses. Accommodation was an old school house with a wood burner in the dining room.

Saturday: I worked with Martin, Tim, Garry, new volunteer Debbie and some locals at the site at the bottom of the road. Trees had been felled across the canal (3 foot deep water) from the offside bank. Work involved cutting as much bulk as possible from the trees with bow saws and loppers, this small material was then burnt on bonfires. Once the bulk had been removed along with any additional awkward branches, the digger was used to drag the trunks back across the canal and up the bank, ready for sawing into logs at a later time. The technique to this was refined throughout the day until the digger lost a track which took a fair while and some head scratching to re-fit. After lunch a stroll was taken down the canal to the recently exposed lock site and leaking culvert before work on clearing yet more trees commenced until darkness hinted that it was time to pack up.

Sunday: I went to the site behind the row of houses where we continued scrub bashing. The '4 inch chipper' which was less effective than a paper shredder for

the task was left in the van and two bonfires were lit. Scrub and rubbish was cleared from around the site and we kept the fires burning well until it was decided to let them burn out as we wanted to leave before it got dark.

Pete Fleming

Pictures Of the dig give some additional information about this weekend dig not included in Pete's report:



Fact 1: There was a digger involved.



Fact 2: New volunteer, Debbie, brought a dog who bore an uncanny resemblance to a bear.

Fact 3: There were some small controlled fires and logs that looked to have been attacked with chainsaws



Fact 4: Chairs were supplied at tea-break.



27/28 FEBRUARY 2010 (BASINGSTOKE)

Apparently this was a dig for those that like to play with toys. Not only was there the van...



...but also a dumper AND a digger...



... an air compressor (identified by Nigel not me - **Hel**) and an actual **BOAT!!**



All that kit just to put a few pilings into the bank ready to fill in behind with clay and make the canal waterproof.

27/28 MARCH 2010 (EISEY LOCK)

Waterworld: can you dig it?

It was the end of another hectic week in the capital, commuters rushing in every direction. There was limited prior information about what I was getting myself into – a last-minute decision on my part. A couple of emails, maybe coded. Mention of some ringleaders, maybe using false names. Meet the connection, a bearded man, in a shadowy underpass near Waterloo station. There would be a van, marked only with the mysterious letters 'WRG'. Rapid exit for a weekend of initiation at a training camp in some secluded provincial location. WRG? World Revolution Guaranteed? Wacky Religious Gathering? After the next 48 hours, as events unfolded, my surroundings would never appear the same again...

Things started well. Lively introductory conversation in the van, driven by Martin, surfing the rush hour traffic out to the M4 and Swindon. Destination Stratton scout hut for work on Eisey/Eysey (?) Lock, part of the former Thames-Swindon canal. And I wasn't the only newbie, Jan was also looking forward to some fresh air, even though the forecast was rain. Sophie was the van's navigator (of navvies?!) and Aileen was in the back, with London knowledge and stories such as the canal museum near Kings Cross, Little Venice, the 'Cavalcade' and more. And I reflected on my own form, growing up on a small farm now long gone, between the Oxford and Grand Union Canals near Banbury, with school trips to Stoke Bruerne waterways museum.

Priorities were clearly in order. After picking up my WRG-friend Rachel from the railway station, after she'd exotically flown in from Malaga, it was straight to the pub. The Rat Trap, with a decent range of local Akells beers, which was dominated by the nearly 20-strong WRG platoon in energetic mood. More introductions and top stories followed, notably Helena's 'guess the dissertation' of, er, evolution and body

symmetry, sponsored by Playboy magazine. And coffins in canals...

From previous nature conservation volunteering experience, the team had a healthy demographic of age mix and gender balance. As part of a national structure I was surprised there were no territorial disputes over which canals to work on – it was like discovering a new England, covered by a previously invisible and vibrant society.

The next morning, even after this keen socialising, everyone was up early, scarily chirpy. A much-welcomed full English wolfed down and lunch prepared on time, all as if guided by unconscious signals in a termite colony. And so to work.

After choosing hard hat (what is the ranking of those colours?) there was the rigorous health and safety induction for Jan and me by Sophie and Helena: how many people could we identify in the photos in the handbook? And how much had the beards grown in the years since the photos were taken?

'John the local' gave a succinct introduction to the site: 90 rather than 70 ft lock, lime mortar, taking existing brickwork back to previous repairs rather than concrete infill and pinning, removal of 'the b***ard', etc. And then, with two sub-groups organically forming, it was time for one half to pick up the bow saw for scrub bashing along the emerging tow path between lock and restored Rucks bridge. This was a job you could really get stuck into, working up a sweat in the surprisingly beautiful Spring weather, with the pace picking up during the day, with liberal supply of tea to keep energy levels up. Adrian felled his fair share of increasingly ambitious trees and Tim(ber) managed a roaring fire, always,

of course, of appropriate proportions. Rachel, Elanor and Nigel's chip-off-the-block Chris, amongst others, kept those fires burning, with some assistance from a stylish local gent in Burberry chaps!

After a satisfying day of slash and burn I had a slightly guilty feeling about the remarkable effectiveness (and enjoyableness) of this napalming, but there's a bigger picture, a waterway is being brought back and maybe a few non-tow-path trees could be kept. The Essex group were mentioned as the special forces of chain-saw action.

Sophie prepared a classy evening menu including Butterbean and lemon soup, Germanic main of frankfurters, potatoes with mustard and Tabasco, followed by sticky toffee pudding. This dessert was later spotted on the pub chalkboard for £5 a portion.

Even with loosing an hour for British summertime, and a range of snoring (although at differing frequencies that seemed to have a mitigating white noise effect), Sunday breakfast was as on-schedule as before, albeit with some, including myself, a bit quieter than others.

Back on site, with Nigel's effortless coordination, I got a look at the lock end of work, where Jan, Aileen, Helen and Martin in particular were doing sterling work, swinging lump hammer at increasingly stubborn brickwork nearer the base of the structure. Alan was kango-king.

With work wrapping up around 4pm, a mark had been made by the combined activities that weekend. And for me, I was suitably knackered, having enjoyed welcoming company, top food and beer, funny anecdotes and lovely weather.



Mission accomplished!

On to Birmingham?!

Jon Gascoigne

Images: David Miller

17/18 APRIL 2010 (BCN CLEAN-UP)

A Goon Treasure Hunt on the BCN

I am Spud Canal-Goon and I have heard through whispers that some treasure could be found in the area of Walsall on the BCN.

My associate Grip Wheel-Tight advised me to search the web for the information and after several encounters with black widows and tarantulas, I realised that the web, I needed was the computer type and after parting with my money for the adventure. I was instructed to meet my transport at Waterloo Station at 7.00pm on Friday, I meet three other treasure seekers and we departed in our red van transport for Birmingham.

Our accommodation was a school youth centre and we joined many other treasure hunters although comments like "What pub in on your right Tit" from Aileen to Mike did raise a few eyebrows. I retired to bed to prepare to find my fortune tomorrow.

Saturday

After a hearty breakfast cooked by Cooks Mike Chase & Vulcan Dave, we departed to the Oker Centre for our equipment and briefing. Two groups formed and were led by experienced personnel to ensure our safety. One group was led by Tim "Where's my phone" Lewis, while the other was led by Moose "I'm going to rip your nuts off" Hearnden.

I was in the Moose mob and arrived at a bridge hole by the canal. With the phrase 'Sling your Hooks', we throw our grappling hooks into the water. Young Welsh Owen was the first person in our group to pull out a bike and then a shopping trolley. After several hours in which some of us got dirty (JU) while some of us felt like slinging our hooks into a local hostelry, we arrived back at the Oker centre for lunch.

We met the other group lazing in the sun as the food had been delayed. In conversation, I found out that one of the other groups party had been presented a medal by royalty. Could this treasure hunt be my way to fame? No more comedy shaving routine. I vowed to find treasure for queen & country.

Paul Ireson

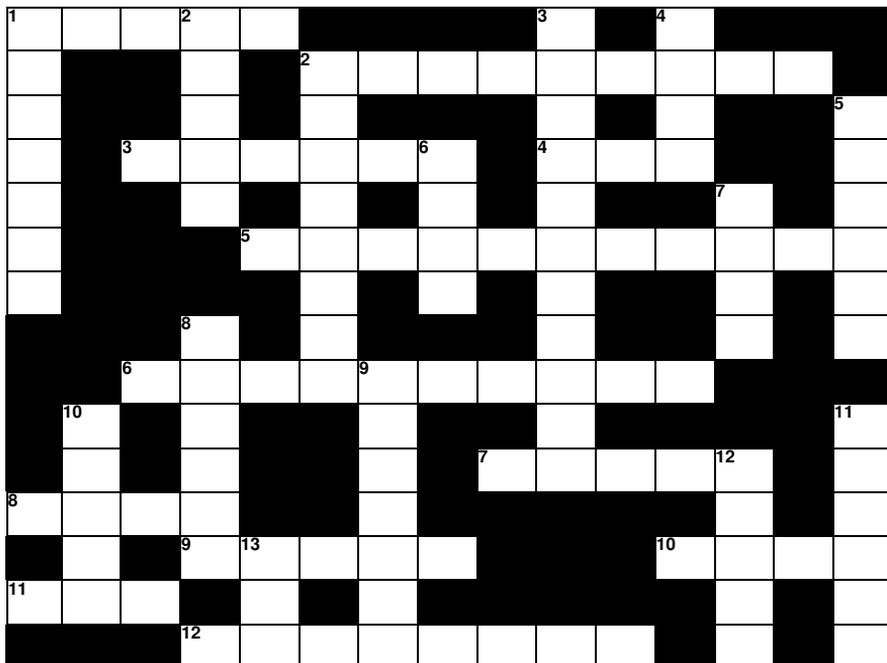


Copyright: Private Eye

Following the BCN clean-up this year Private Eye published proof that our work was noticed - though how close we were willing to get to the water black sludge in the BCN was exaggerated. My thanks to Jon Gascoigne for pointing out this excellent cartoon.

BCN CROSSWORD

All the words in the grid below have been found in the Birmingham Canal Navigations during past BCN clean-ups.



DOWN

1. To come to grips with (7)
2. Neck warmer (5)
3. A lever used on site (8,3)
4. A posted notice (4)
5. The steering device on vehicles (6)
6. A long upholstered seat (4)
7. A unit of area equal to a square rod (4)
8. Fitted coverings for the hand (6)
9. A wheeled carriage, cage, or basket (7)
10. The person who presides over a meeting (10)
11. Probably Martin or Tim's (6)
12. Paul has one (5)
13. A self-propelled road vehicle (3)

ACROSS

1. Holds beer (5)
2. Ridden by Gordon Brown (5,4)
3. Easily broken in the van (6)
4. A toilet or restroom (3)
5. Possession of this indicates a good night out (7,4)
6. Required to take boots home (7,3)
7. Material used for constructing locks (5)
8. Secure from danger, harm, or evil (4)
9. Instruments that show the quantity of something (6)
10. Goes around 5 down
11. Girls underwear (3)
12. Can be English or American (8)

22/23RD MAY 2010 (INGLESHAM LOCK)

London WRG was invited to be the first organised group to visit Inglesham lock by the owner of the round house Nick. The job for the weekend was to be infilling of the potholes on the drive from the access round up to the bridge over the river before the lock.

After all arriving and settling in to where everyone was to sleep, the groups departed for the pub in Lechlade. While one group went via the track to close and secure all the gates, a second group went over the bridge crossing the Thames and walked along the Thames path. Arriving in the town and hearing the noise from a pub up the road where a band was playing the second group stopped at the pub besides the river (along with the insects that bit us). However, the other group went to the other pub. Eventually both groups resided in the riverside pub.

The next morning, the group was split up to do the different tasks required.

While four people were given the task of digging out the more pronounced potholes with shovels and mattocks. A second group was following in filling the holes with sand and gravel being off-loaded from the KESCRG trailer attached to Alan Lines vehicle. A smaller band then followed them with rakes to even out the infill while Martin brought up the rear with the roller. A final inspection by Nick ensured that the pothole was up to satisfaction before proceeding.

This task continued all day with tea breaks and lunch breaks as well as shelter breaks due to the warm weather as well as boater's cars disrupting the chain gang.



During the late afternoon after work had reached just over halfway, we had a tour of the Round House and the land around the lock, this gave us a view of the possible work to come when the project to rebuild the lock starts.

The next morning, the discovery that we had been robbed of several electrical items put a damper on the atmosphere and therefore while Nick held conversations with the police the rest of us returned to complete the infilling of the rest of the track. This was achieved by just before our late lunch and after consuming it, Sophie had organised a social event to visit the local church. The sight of 11 London WRG going to church on a Sunday must have sent shockwaves around the country.

Now we are all awaiting the next dig to do some scrub bashing around the lock.

Paul Ireson

5/6TH JUNE 2010 (PIG AND GIG)

This is how it started: I was sat reading emails and there was one for a 'Pig and Gig' at Nic Bennett's house. I thought this sounded interesting but it was down in Reading and I didn't know Nic.

So a week or so later when I was talking to my sister on the phone I said how I would like to go and how I was missing everyone and would like to see them again as I am up North and they are all down South. However the thing was going to cost me a lot of money which at the time I didn't have. I was fully expecting Helena to talk me out of going. But this time she didn't she said she would help me with the cost off the train ticket!

So then it was time for me to see who would be going from up North and as it happen at the time Ju was going down on the Saturday and she said it was fine and she would give me a lift. This keeps the cost down. So all I had to do now was get the day of work which I managed.

Friday

I was really looking forward to the weekend and seeing everyone again—but on Friday Ju sent me a text saying that she was not very well and was not going down. So I texted Helena and she offered to pay for the train which was going to cost a lot of money so I said lets go halves and we did, but I also texted James as I knew he was going as well and thought if I could get to Banbury then get a lift the rest of the way with him this would save on money as well.

In the middle of this I had got Nic's number from Helena and texted him to make sure that I could come down a day earlier; I also said I would help where I could. He sent text back saying that would be fine, James also sent a text back saying if I could get to Banbury in the next half hour then yes but obviously this was not going to happen as it is about three hours on the train to Banbury. Happily he did say that he would pick me up from Reading station if it was not going to be to late.

So then I had to rush around because I had twenty minutes before my train. I got my dad to give me a lift home to pack and then down to the station and I just made it in time for the train!

Five hours later I was down in Reading, I had just got off the train when James phone to let me know where he was and that Anne was going to meet me - the thing was I had never meet Anne before but luckily we found each other. When I got to Nic's house there was Alan who I know Nic and Mark2 who I didn't know but were very nice to me. We all had an Indian supper, talked for a while and then sorted out who was sleeping where.

Saturday

On Saturday morning we all got woken up by Nic starting the fire for the pig but managed to go back to sleep, but then got woken again because Nic was chopping more wood for the fire. I looked at James and asked him the time—it was 5:30 or 6:30 and this was just to early to be up. However we had to get up as Nic needed the boys to help put the pig on to cook.



By this time we were all up and had had coffee and some off us were even dressed (James) so we watched the pig go round and round for about two hours, then Anne and I went and did the shopping.

Our first stop was Asda where we ended up with a trolley full of food and some Pimm's, then to Anne's house to pick up the things she needed for cooking, then back to Nic's to drop it all off, have coffee and put up a gazebo.

Then it was time to go shopping for lunch and bread. By the time we got back the tent for the band was up and the boys were mending a chair in Nic's garden. They then mended the table so we could put lunch on it.

After lunch people started to arrive; including Eddie and his Blues band. Helena and Emma were picked up for the station by James and others had arrived in their own transport.



By late afternoon the band had set up and were doing a sound check, by early evening a lot of people had arrive (some had

19/20TH JUNE 2010 (GOUGHS ORCHARD)

even put up tents at the end of Nic's garden) at this point the pig is just about ready for everyone to eat so we all tucked into the pig - the band ate first so that when they had finished they could start playing the blue's!

There was lots of people there; some I knew and some I got to know. It was good to see a lot of the London lot again as I had missed them.

The pig was good and so was the band, the sun was out and we all had a great time.

Good food, Good friends and Good music what more could you ask for on a sunny evening in June?



Sunday

Sunday morning was time to clean up from the night before so those of us who had stopped over all pitched in. We got the cleaning up outside done in no time at all however there was the washing up to be done. Unfortunately (*because we really did want to help with the washing up – Hel!*) by this point Helena and I had to get trains back home so James took us down to the train station where Helena had to run for her train. Lucky for her the train was running a minute late so she just made it, I made my way after saying bye to James and thank you for the lift.

When I got back to Skipton I got Amy from my mum's and then went home for tea and bed.

A BIG THANK YOU TO NIC AND EDDIE'S BLUES BAND - I HAD A FANTASTIC WEEKEND!!

Tracy Howarth

Images: Tracy Howarth and Tim Lewis

After a slightly delayed start I managed to pick Helena up at Winchester train station at about 8.20pm (only 20 minutes late, oops) Having negotiated lots of narrow back roads in Winchester to avoid a long diversion, We finally managed to have a clear run to the accommodation for the weekend – Selsley Scout Hall nr Stroud in Gloucestershire.

Having parked at the hall we walked around the corner to the "Bell" pub to meet up with everyone else. As it was about 10.10pm we thought we were the last to arrive but in fact it was Frank who was last with some poor excuse about "going shopping".

Now the "Bell" is not the biggest pub we visit, so 18 London wrgies in a small room means "not a lot of room for the locals" so we soon had the room to ourselves, not that the landlord minded with the extra takings this weekend!

Saturday.

Well we all enjoyed a lovely and surprising "Lie in". Frank was doing breakfast and had decided to do "for a change" pancakes with bacon and maple syrup. He did however have "Timing issues" hence the "Lie in". Lovely though breakfast was, we had to rush it and get to site a.s.a.p. – 30mins late – oops. (Sorry Rick)

After a quick talk with Rick Barnes, we soon got to work. James and Emma got the job of measuring and numbering the Copping stones that need to be replaced on the Tow path side wall on one of the camps that are starting soon.

A couple of guys found a pump which they set up to pump the water out of the chamber, whilst, Paul, Richard and I started to demolish part of the off side head wall near to the paddle culvert. This area had been patched in c1930 and needed to be repaired properly. The rest of the group did other important jobs, like

setting the “Burco” up and getting it ready for Tea break.

Work proceeded at a pace so by lunch time all the demo work was finished and the rebuild had begun. Martin had started to add the last 2 courses of bricks on the off side wing wall whilst at the same time teaching Emma to lay bricks. Helena was covered in mud having volunteered to clear the top cill of all the muck and silt that had built up.

Tim, Bob and Pete had sorted through some of the coping stones on the off side and had decided that there were not enough decent stones to lay on the wing walls.

Sophie and Frank arrived with lunch having been shopping for supper, although Frank had apparently had another “senior” moment whilst trying to dry his hands under the condom machine instead of the hand dryer! (Sorry Frank)

After a relaxed lunch in glorious sunshine we continued the rebuild. Tim, Bob and Pete, having made some phone calls, took the van to “Eisey lock” to meet up with Wrg Bit in the middle who were working at that lock. They had arranged to relocate some “Surplus to requirement” coping stone’s from “Eisey lock” to “Gough’s Orchard lock” so that they could be put to good use. Helena was joined by

Sophie in the getting “muddy department” for a while, whilst RAF Martin started to lay another 2 courses of bricks to the off-side gate recess wall. Having retired to the hall for a well earned rest and supper we were delighted to have a massive ballooning event start from across the valley which entertained us for quite some time. The evening was once again spent enjoying a pint or three in the “Bell Inn”.

Sunday

Breakfast was again cooked by Frank and thankfully he did not have any “timing issues” so we all made it to site by 9am. Jobs for the day were basically – finish off from where we left off yesterday. So the coping stones got laid on both the upper wing walls, RAF Martin finished the brick work to the off side gate recess wall ready for the coping stones. Whilst I rebuilt the head wall by the off side paddle culvert.

By the end of the day a lot of prep work had been done ready for the 4 weeks of camps to start the following weekend. We had all had a great time in the lovely sunshine and I for one cannot wait for the lock to be finished and back working again in the next couple of years.

Finally, thanks must go to Frank for cooking and generally making me laugh ☺

Nigel Lee

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

Has anyone else noticed the resemblance between the London WRG Burco and Nic Bennett’s recently acquired property the Inglesham Roundhouse? Might they perhaps be distantly related? I think we should be told.

Yours sincerely

Martin Ludgate



Above: The Inglesham Roundhouse



Above: The London WRG Burco



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Images: Tim Lewis, Alan Lines and Jenny Black