



London WRG News

**Issue 78:
December
2014**

Editors Note:

Over the last six months I became, as Moose put it, an increasingly ‘wide load’ (seen in the first image below when it was felt that the sign was appropriate to me). This was followed by a much thinner load with a beautiful little girl in tow (seen in the second image below having hugs with Sophie at her first LWRG dig).

Throughout those months I have been increasingly ‘baby brained’ and so I thank all those who remembered that I nagged them into producing a dig report and also for then producing those



dig reports. Without you this publication would not be possible.

Keep up the good work next year— when I will mostly be nagging from my armchair.

Helena Rosiecka

(Cover photo: Alan Lines)

Date	Canal	Leader
17-18 Jan	Chelmer & Blackwater	Adrian Crow / Helen Dobbie
17-18 Jan	Wey & Arun TBC	Martin Ludgate
28 Feb/1 Mar	Cotswold	David Miller
21-22 Mar	Chesterfield	George Rogers (Joint NW)
17-19 Apr	B.C.N. Clean Up	Centrally booked
1-3 May	Canalway Cavalcade	TBA
16-17 May	TBA	TBA
6-7 Jun	TBA	TBA
27-28 Jun	TBA	TBA
July & August dates to be set (May be joint digs with KESCRG)		
12-13 Sep	TBA	TBA
3-4 Oct	TBA	TBA
24-25 Oct	TBA	TBA
7-8 Nov	TBA (Bonfire Bash)	TBA
21-22 Nov	TBA	TBA
5-6 Dec	TBA (Christmas Party)	TBA

12/13TH JULY 2014 (BASINGSTOKE)

London's outing to the Basingstoke didn't initially look promising. Basingstoke is responsible for more disaster camps than any other waterway. Our accommodation was known to have burned down twice. Rain, thunder and lightning were predicted, we had no van and Helena initially despaired of getting any concrete RSVPs off her indecisive volunteers. The absence of London WRG stalwarts Tim Lewis and Martin Ludgate gave the rest of us an unsettled feeling.

But it all turned out beautifully in the end. The weather was stunning, we had a solid turnout and the accommodation was excellent. It took a concerted effort to juggle the kit between various cars and locations but we managed it. The accom at Mayford village hall was particularly good and exceptionally clean.

Site was just by the notorious Deepcut barracks near Woking, in some beautiful fern-filled woods at lock 28. Here the canal is a much-used local asset and we were passed by many cyclists and joggers as we worked.

We had a mixed bag of work to attempt but were asked not to start any job we couldn't finish. A few jobs revealed themselves as more complicated than we'd initially hoped but we managed to

'sort of' finish everything.

The most pressing job was to sort out a troublesome weir, which needed mending rather urgently. Once we investigated it became clear the job was more involved than it appeared. We couldn't repair the shot brickwork because there was too much concrete in the way. The situation was complicated by the near presence of an unstable looking wall belonging to a neighboring property. We hoiked out the top soil on the other side, backfilled with concrete and repointed to improve the situation as much as was possible in a weekend. Helen and Paul found it a good excuse for a swim in the canal on an especially hot day, watched by some rather astonished canoeists.

New recruit Charlie was joining for her first weekend dig following an enjoyable Easter camp at the Cotswolds. She took on the task of repainting the lock gates, which were in quite a state, with me. Krzysiek and Adrian applied themselves to putting concrete bases round two rickety old water taps. This



was another job that reveal itself to be less straightforward that immediately appeared. They managed to complete one tap but the other one needed more serious plumbing work than we could complete that weekend.



We were also tasked to improve a stretch of track up to the dry dock using a nearby pile of aggregate. This was jeopardized when, midway through the first day, the hydraulic cable on the digger snapped.

We worked late on the Saturday to compensate for our disgracefully late arrival on site that morning and to finish the most pressing work on the weir. It had been a hot day but we were pleased with what we had managed to achieve and we fit in a cold beer before dinner, sitting on the lawn at the accommodation's own bowling green. Krzysiek did his best to



catch a bunny but it was just a little too fast for him. We had a beautiful pie cooked by Maria, followed by trifle, and later a small number of people ventured out to the pub. It was an early night for most people however.

Finding we didn't have an auger, we weren't able to install the bollards on the Sunday as we'd hoped. Neither was there time to tackle the washout or to dismantle the lock gates.

We managed to repair the arm on the digger in time to get more gravel laid on the track. Everyone pitched in with a rake at the end to ensure we got this done. We were in a terrific hurry to leave site as we were required to leave the accommodation at 4. With a flurry of activity at the end we managed it with moments to spare.

This was really a dig that depended on everyone pitching in and they certainly did so. From the complex shuffle of kit between various peoples' vehicles, to the team effort getting people to the station, everyone was very generous with their help. London WRG is sad to lose Helena as she goes off on maternity leave but we're

optimistic she will find some way to come back soon.

Sophie Smith

(Images: Alan Lines)

2ND/3RD AUGUST 2014 (WEY & ARUN)

* TEA IN THE CHAIRMAN'S GARDEN *

Friday: As normal for a summer dig, we had no van and transport arrangements for the kit had been sorted previously. The accommodation at Win Hall in the village of Dunsfold was a new hall for most of us. Arriving at the hall Martin, Adrian Pete and Paul went over to the Sun pub and awaited the arrival of David and Colin. They were unfortunately delayed by about an hour around Stonehenge. After wallet busting rounds in the pub we retired to the hall.

Saturday: Next morning following breakfast and lunch preparation, the six of us drove to the site at Cranleigh Waters to work on the projects requested along with Anne who came straight to site. We soon found two problems with the plant provided to the canal society.

1. A narrow wheeled dumper none of us were authorised to drive (this was parked out of the way and left for the rest of the dig).
2. Just one key to operate both the sit on roller and the other normal sized dumper.

After a tour of the site and where the jobs were, we set about clearing the old compound which is located next to the main road and cycle route. When tea break was declared, we departed over the

bridge to sit in the chairman's back garden besides the line of the original canal. Sally produced a cake which was consumed between the seven London WRG's and the directors of the Wey and Arun trust.

After getting fuel for the strimmer, Paul was despatched to cut out an area of overgrown scrub

for the new viewing platform proposed for the area downstream of the horse bridge. This contained ferns as well as Himalayan Balsam and most was well above his head height (*Comment from Colin – Not difficult*). Meanwhile Martin, Adrian and Anne were loading the dumper of the topsoil from the old compound and starting on the ramp which was required by the contractors. The rest unloaded the trailer of the compound fence panels and posts - although Bill Nicholson's estimate of 12 turned out to be 26—and started on the first post hole.



After lunch back at Sally's, where more cake was consumed, the afternoon session continued with Anne on the excavator, Adrian on the dumper and Martin raking the slope while Paul raked back the cuttings from his morning strimming. Mean while Dave, Pete and Colin continued their post hole and compound building.

At the end of the day Anne departed and we returned to the accommodation where Natalie and Andy had arrived and everyone started on preparing dinner. Departure to the pub after dinner but Paul returned early after falling asleep in the pub.

Sunday': The following morning we returned to site to finish off the tasks. Dave, Martin and Adrian continued the slope construction including using the roller to flatten it into shape, Here the single key issue meant relays of use between the two pieces of plant. Meanwhile Paul and Natalie widened out the area of scrub using the strimmer and rakes, while Pete, Andy and Colin started hanging the gates on an area of the compound and positioning more post holes.

After morning tea break back at Sally's the plant using team commenced with some footpath repairs,



while the rest continued the building of the compound. This was partially interrupted by Sally bringing the brand new flat pack temporary display unit for the society and asking for some assistance in its construction. Colin, Paul and Adrian attempted this and finally succeeded after using every flat panel provided in the kit as the base and shelves. Sally was advised to label each item ready for the next construction. The post lunch push was for all to finish off digging the post holes, inserting the panels and filling the post holes with the post Crete provided.

During the afternoon it came to the groups notice that WRG Forestry were also on the same canal and that Nigel's chain saw had joined the WRG swimming team (I think an honorary mention in the LWRG awards is due!)

The team would like to thank everyone for the work done during the weekend and a big thank you to Sally for the use of her garden as our tea area and for the provision of cakes. We would also like to thank the locals for their support and guidance on the tasks.

Paul Ireson

(Images: David Miller and Martin Ludgate)

13/14TH SEPT 2014 (CROMFORD)

Life often presents metaphorical obstacles, but at the start of the weekend we were presented with a rather more physical one – the owners of the cottage adjacent to the access track to the accommodation had decided that 7pm on a Friday evening was an excellent time to fell a tree across the track. Thankfully it was cleared reasonably quickly and the group could assemble in the luxurious Wharf Shed.



(dubious) comfy chairs. It also has more doors than is humanly possible to count – I gave up trying to work out whether there were more doors than beds, but I think it was a close run thing! Enjoying a dig that was close to home (my commute from work to the accommodation takes me past my house), I was delightfully early and so spent some of the evening cooking the following night's meal – which was a useful exercise as the hob is not very efficient! One hour after I put 6 eggs on to boil, the pan of water still wasn't boiling...



Parking logistics were complicated, and Pete managed to make them more so by misunderstanding the instructions and parking in a car park over a mile away, rather than the one that was only ¼ mile away. Either that or our company isn't as good as we thought... The Wharf Shed is rather posh – it has an upstairs, bunk rooms, showers, a dining room, a kitchen and some

The following morning, dutifully fed and watered, we split into two groups and headed to site. One group were to be working with Derbyshire County Council filling clay bags and trying to repair a long-running leak, whilst the other was heading to Sawmills to continue building the wall. Lesson number 1 for the weekend – as a local, don't assume everyone knows where they're going. I la-



belled up a map very helpfully for the group going to work with DCC, which directed them to the car park. Unfortunately I forgot to tell them which way down the canal to walk. They found it in the end!

At Sawmills, the focus for the day was to fill in the gap – a good section of wall - but the gap was soon shrinking as teams were in competition to lay the biggest stones possible. This included some fabulous temporary works arrangements involving stacks of pallets and demo bars, and great entertainment for those of doing ‘supervisory’ duties.

At Whatstandwell (with DCC), the group were successfully filling bags and Mark (the ranger) was in waders installing them in the canal. In the evening we continued the quest to count the doors, pondered the question of what was underneath the dining room, and ate Eton Mess. There was probably alcohol

consumed, but my memory of that is somewhat hazy... On Sunday the teams reconvened at their respective sites.

Sunday was a big day at Sawmills, as we were going to be concreting behind the wall built the day before (and in the previous summers). We (that being the Friends of the Cromford Canal, my other hat for the weekend) had found a concrete delivery driver who was happy to deliver on a Sunday (something about his wife and daughter being somewhat less than happy at getting up on a Sunday morning). He dutifully manoeuvred his wagon up the lane and we set to work on a barrow run. Only an hour or two later, several cubic metres of concrete had been placed, my credit card was £600 poorer (Lesson number 2 – when somebody tells you that the concrete delivery driver will need paying, you are supposed to get a blank cheque from the treasurer at the meeting before) and we were wondering what to do for the rest of the day. In the end, London being London decided that they’d lay some coping stones.



At Whatstandwell work continued in the same manner as before. Mark didn't seem to register that many WRGies will go in a canal quite happily without waders, so he was busy installing. The good news is that the leak does now seem to be fixed – considering the number of times this has been tackled in the 16 years I have lived there this is quite an achievement!

Back at the Wharf Shed, it was time to pack kit in boxes, clean up, have a final attempt at counting the doors, play musical cars and head home. Thanks all!

George Rogers

(Images Tim Lewis)

p.s. I've been back to the Wharf Shed since. I still haven't counted the number of doors...

HALF AGM MINUTES—13TH SEPT 2014

Present:

Martin Ludgate, Tim Lewis, David Miller, Paul Ireson, Pete Fleming, George Rogers, Fran Burrell, Ian Rutledge, Ju Davenport, Darren Piotrowicz, Laurence Herniman, Robin Stait, Rob Cummings.

Apologies:

None declared.

Dig dates and locations:

For current dig dates and locations see page 2. These have been updated since the AGM following correspondence with the local groups. Possible other sites include: Grantham, Shrewsbury and Newport, Buckingham, Wilts and Berks, Hereford and Gloucester, Ashby, and Lupal.

Weekend costs:

It was agreed that £10 still covers weekend food normally (numbers dependent) so no increase is required. This will continue to be monitored with feedback from leaders/cooks. Van costs remain capped at £10. Martin is monitoring this and claiming additional money from funds if required. The benefit of van for transporting tools far outweighs the costs.

Cavalcade/Little Venice:

Although LWRG official presence was limited in 2014 (some members were part of the work camp) a donation was made for Martin running the Friday evening quiz. Presence at 2015 to be discussed at AGM in February with regard to fundraising needs. **ACTION: Martin to request value of funds from treasurer in advance of AGM.**

Tools:

- ⇒ Wrecking bars: As two seem to have been lost it was considered worthwhile to replace these. **ACTION: Pete to investigate costs.**
- ⇒ PAT testing of electrical items: **ACTION: Pete to discuss with Bungle to get these tested.**
- ⇒ Tirfor test: **ACTION: Pete to confirm with Ed and Bungle as to when this needs doing and will arrange with Bungle .**
- ⇒ Brush cutter: Will be serviced before scrub bashing season starts!

LWRG News:

Thanks were given for the excellent job Helena has been doing with writing this over the past year. The group hoped that she would be able to continue this going forward considering her current priorities.

Peter Fleming

27/28th Sept 2014 (Caldon Canal - 40th Anniversary)

The Caldon and Uttoxeter Canal Trust [CUCT] were planning a day of celebration to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the re-opening of the Caldon Canal and asked me to assemble a small team to help with site services and to “pop back” to Bridge 70 on the Uttoxeter, to extend the towpath built on the July WRG Camp towards the bridge. How could I refuse?

London WRG and WRG North West responded to my call for help. We even had the pleasure of Roy Sutton who had a kip and did some washing up en route between “jobs”.

We spent most of Saturday building towpath; the tasks were:

- Hand-dig the existing dirt track and level.
- “Wack” the earth
- Install 3m parallel lengths of edging board with pegs & nails
- Check levels.
- Lay Terram barrier material,
- Back fill with 20mm MOT aggregate
- “Wack” aggregate
- Cut off and trim excess material for a neat finish.
-

Our CUCT Restoration Manager Steve Wood, set us the challenge of reaching an old gateway in a disused stock fence – I



paced it out at 27 metres. By the time we ran out of Terram, we had laid 42 metres and shifted 16 tonnes of aggregate by hand. The towpath now ends in the “shadow” of Bridge 70 and is complete.

After returning the trailer and other borrowed kit, we all adjourned to the Red Lion in Cheddleton for the evening. Entertainment included a jive demonstration from our own “strictly tandem couple” Paul and Lynda. It was a late night for us all, especially Toby “Captain Oats” Gomm, who for some reason decided to go walkabout star gazing between midnight and 1am. Luckily an “emergency” text from Amber woke him up from his moonlit kip in a meadow adjacent to the canal and he managed to find his way back unaided.

Sunday dawned early for us as we switched from “dig” mode to “festival” mode - the main day of the weekend and lots to do. Helping at the festival involved lots and lots of walking and talking, interaction with the public and all the standard festival duties. My thanks to Alison Smedley MBE [CUCT / IWA] and Ken Marek [Stoke on Trent Boat Club] for their constant liaison throughout the day and Rupert Smedley [NB Joshua] who kindly provided a very useful water-taxi for people and equipment.

The site was centred where the Caldon crosses the main road to Leek from Cheddleton at Bridge 42 making four quarters with the canal running vertically and the road horizontally. Above Bridge 42, the NW quarter contained Bridge Cottage and was used for safe storage of kit. The NE quarter included the visitor moorings, the winding hole, the working Flint Mill museum, the exhibitors and boat trips operated by charity boat Beatrice.

Below Bridge 42, the centre-piece for the re-enactment ceremony was lock 13, the top lock of the Cheddleton locks. In the SW quarter in the garden of the Red Lion, there was a display of historic photos and other memorabilia associated with the canal, artist and author Trevor Yorke's

tent as well as “year of the boat” artist Rob Pointon, who sketched the scene live on his easel throughout the ceremony – very impressive. In the SE quarter we had the main car park, the fire engine [until it got a shout and rapidly departed, sirens wailing!] and a display tent from Staffordshire CC Cycling Team.

Highlights of the day included, a parade of historic boats, a lock operating demonstration, an open air service, the ringing of a quarter-peel of bells at St. Edwards Church and the ceremony itself—conducted by Roger Savage of IWA North Staffordshire and South Cheshire Branch in the lock aboard Beatrice

My sincere personal thanks to everyone who contributed to such a fantastic and rewarding weekend - may we go on to celebrate the re-opening of many more canals in the future!

Gary Summers

(Images: Alan Lines and Martin Ludgate)

(Abridged - for the full report see Navvies 267 (Oct-Nov 2014)



11/12TH OCT 2014 (SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL)

I told Rachel, look you will come to Somerset. I swear it's the best canal there is and you're not one to make a fuss about spiders are you? Oh hardly any of them really, just a few in the roof and walls and saucepans and occasionally they run across your knees when you're on the lav some people find that a bit disconcerting in the dark. Oh no there's no lighting in the loo, did I not mention that before? It's only a shed with a bucket really. But it's a terrific site and they have a herb garden and the farmer promised to shoot something for our supper, he doesn't know what yet he'll just have to see what walks past him that week looking juicy. Oh what a pity – are you absolutely certain you can't come?

So I called Helena to make sure she was coming. I said Helena, it's fine to bring the baby we can leave it by the bonfire and check it every half hour I'm sure it'll be fine they like fresh air when they're that age, and Helena says I don't think she's quite ready for spiders crawling over in the night. I said I don't know why everyone's so obsessed



with the spiders they have a herb garden at the accommodation; isn't that romantic? But Helena had already rung off.

So I spoke to the boys and they said – spiders, what spiders? Will there be venison? Brilliant! So we all got in the van and went to Somerset.

At Radford Mill Farm the landowner thought it might be a bit of a laugh to have a canal in his back garden, so we're all to dig one out and can we do it quickly please because he's gone and agreed to host a trailboats festival in June, oops, better dig a bit faster. Oh no we're not really bothering with a plan just grab a spade and set to. A canal's just a big trench isn't it really so off you go. A few people have misgivings about this approach but we give them spades anyway. There's stonework to do and enough stones to clean to keep us busy for months.





That's good because there are loads of us – not everyone's a wuss about spiders. Valerie even brought her brother and he doesn't crack until day 2 which is pretty good considering the relentless teasing he undergoes.

On site it's very nice and sunny when it isn't raining and everybody's in a good mood. I've promised them beer which I've made myself and they aren't yet to know how absolutely terrible it is. We admit to the farmer that we've no idea how to hedgelay so we just cut things down and burn them. I've noticed before that WRG's often better at destroying than creating.



Around 3 o'clock I go back in some trepidation to the kitchen. We've been promised venison by the farmer, although he didn't specify how dead it would be. Luckily it's massively dead by the time I get to it, so I pour a bottle of wine over it and stick it in the oven. Martin Danks takes the other half of the venison and roasts it with garlic so the place is smelling pretty good by dinner-time. He also makes 2 kinds of soup which are very well-received by the volunteers.

It gets dark early so everyone's back from site to start drinking well ahead of dinner. I made beer, I said. Sorry. Everyone agrees it isn't as bad as you think it's going to be but I notice not many bottles get finished.

The venison is terrific, everyone agrees. Do you remember that terrific chicken casserole

you did last time, asks Valerie. Remind me again how you did it? I poured a bottle of wine over it and stuck it in the oven, I tell her.

Joe, who's recently turned vegan, asks how I made his peanut stew so delicious. I poured a bottle of wine over it and put it in the oven I tell him. Everyone agrees I must be a genius to keep coming up with all these recipes.

We're joined for dinner by our host Richard Fox, who shot part of the meal and grew the rest, and Adrian, our local from the canal society. Adrian works in restoring old recordings; recently he's been working on some old wax cylinders that turned out to be from one of the Nuremberg trials. The 2 different kinds of soup and 2 different kinds of venison do a good job of disguising the taste of the beer. We've got a few new faces on this dig and we sternly tell them not to get used to this, it's usually Value mince but we also normally have indoor plumbing.

Next day on site it is mostly sunny again and Hamon joins us for the day. Hamon says, I can't remember the person I was before I found WRG. It's so restorative, I feel so calm and so tranquil and OHJESUSGODMYEYE! What is it? I said, gosh Hamon your eye looks very red OHHOLYFUUCK-THATSALOTOFBLOOD. Luckily it is mostly just a flesh wound even if quite a bloody one and we manage to plug the hole with some antiseptic wipes, in fact most of the



antiseptic wipes. Tim walks past and tuts at how profligate I am being with the alcohol wipes, they don't grow on trees you know. What happened? Everyone asks. Hamon tells them he pulled too hard on a pile of branches and one twanged back and hit him next to the eye.

Once Hamon stops bleeding we manage to get some really good fires going and clear the meadow of branches. We make good progress with clearing the hedge line and the stonework's coming along nicely. At tea break we listen to a cow bellowing through the mist. It's like Jurassic Park, says Tony, who's new. I think he's looking for a lady, I say. I'm looking for a lady, says Hamon, but I don't go about it that way.

After packing up fairly efficiently, everyone heads off clutching sprigs of thyme and sage from the herb garden. We make it back to London in miraculously good time. Thanks to everyone involved!

Sophie Smith

(Images: David Miller and Alan Lines)

8/9TH NOVEMBER (CHESTERFIELD REUNION)

[ABRIDGED—For the full version please see Navvies]

The WRG Reunion 2014 started off with the roar of chainsaws and the falling of trees over at Renishaw as the forestry team lead by Paul Shaw arrived late on Thursday evening to get a good head start on the Friday. Their task was the thinning of the line of trees between the canal and the Trans Pennine Trail.

Next onto Spinkhill [and Norbriggs]. The tasks on this site were to clear the line of the canal as much as possible, including the removal of scrub and the felling of small trees. The stumps also needed to be removed and forestry was to work on a section clearing the larger trees.

[At Renishaw] Tea break was held under the concrete gazebo with a number of complaints about the mug shelf being too high for some/most to reach. Bacon baps were consumed as quickly as they could be supplied by man in a van in the carpark.

[At Staveley Town Basin] The block laying that was planned unfortunately was unable to progress however they did manage to back fill a wall with concrete. The pumps were going but I don't think they made a great deal of difference with the vast amount of water that was coming over.

Saturday afternoon saw the WRG committee meeting [and] at around 4.30 very wet volunteers started to migrate back to the hall to dry off and get warm once again. That evening we had a lovely meal of chicken and pasta and amazing cakes for dessert.

There were a few bleary eyes on Sunday morning but ... The weather had improved greatly over night and everyone was in high spirits.

Brush cutting continued with large areas being cleared at each end of the work area and a substantial area in the middle. Training was given to allow a number of new users experience in operating these.

Just before 11am a group of Young people from Chesterfield College who were undertaking their National Citizen Services arrived to volunteer. At 11am everyone stood and paid their respects on remembrance Sunday with a minute's silence.

At 1 o'clock everyone gathered back at the hall for lunch and to collect their belongings.

A big Thank you to everyone involved in a great weekend. Hopefully see you all next year!

Amber Jenkins

22/23RD NOVEMBER (THAMES & MEDWAY)

This is a LWRG News report I from an epic weekend. This is a very special report for me because this was my first weekend with London WRG or KESCRG! I was quite nervous at first but it was great.

On Friday everybody arrived. The three main questions which I ask every time on camp are: 1) where do we sleep 2) where is the kitchen and the most important question is 3) do we have showers? Unhappily the answer to the last was 'no', (and by the end of the weekend it was 'no' to boys toilets too!)

Everybody arrived on time except two people, Chris B and I. No Chris did not get lost but had a slit triangle car journey which took from 15:00 to you guessed it 22:30ish.

Saturday morning after a fanatic cooked breakfast we were all on site by 09:00. The weather was well sunny with blue skies - I wish! Like the weekend before on the WRG reunion weekend it was really wet. But I knew I was with new and old friends so the laughs would be good and worth the wetness.

The work on site was scrub bashing and bonfires. The weather changed after lunch and it started to dry out in the afternoon (but it was still wet). Everybody was enjoying it and looking forward to the



roast dinner that night (which was amazing) and the entertainment. This was a fancy dress competition and a quiz - well that was great but the team names were... different.

Sunday was another great day on site but Sunday is when you have to say goodbye to everyone so not as good as Saturday. But we all know that 2015 will be an epic year for restoration projects up and down the UK—I just hope that the next weekend I do with London WRG it will be sunny and dry. But that might be asking too much.

Thanks to Steve D for organising.

Matthew Ward Baines

(Images: Martin Ludgate)

CAPTION COMPETITION



6/7TH DECEMBER (COTSWOLDS)

In an odd change from the norm I went from having no dig report to having two - my thanks to Valerie (Comic Sans) and Alan (Times New Roman).

It was a dark and stormy night at Brimscombe Port and Nigel and I succumbed to the warmth of the Ship Inn, Steaks and a few pints of excellent Robert were most agreeable. We were soon joined by Matthew and his (this is my first dig) girlfriend Becky, Chris, Pete, Ian, and Val, Richard, RAF, David and Colin, Joe soon followed by the London Wrg van crew, Yay Inka at last with Martin, Tim and Paul,

This was the 'not Christmas' weekend, with Tim Lewis leading the gallant band of London (plus others) on the 'extra ' weekend , accom at Brimscombe, and work at Bowbridge.

Kicking out time meant back to unit 1 for cheese and biscuits (Fine Cheddar and Stinking Bishop) washed down with 2 bottles of Otima port (allegedly)

I make no apology for offering a very specialised view of the weekend; it may well bear no relation to the memory of those who (for example) stayed up late on the Friday with stinky cheese and port.

Present: Martin Ludgate, Ben Douglas (newbie) Joe Atwill, me and Iain, Dave (David) Miller, Alan Lines, Matt 'Duracell' Baines and g/ f Becky (a new face, but hopefully will become a regular) Chris Byrne, Colin and Paul Ireson (the breakfast double act), Martin (RAF), Richard Thomas, Inka and Pete Fleming. Hamon appeared on Sunday as id Nigel Lee (with a cold). Also Mich Gozna appeared briefly while in uniform.

Breakfast, ably cooked by Colin and Paul, was not without its challenges. No Griddle (it failed the PAT test) no frying pans, so everything was cooked on baking trays with the exception of Becky's Brek-kie (Token Veggie) which was cooked in a frying pan borrowed off Ian. Washing up done, sandwiches made and its off to Bowbridge Lock to make a start on J P's To Do list

Tim soon had everyone hard at work with a team carrying on de-



molishing the non towpath wall and a team removing the coping stones from the towpath side using the excavator, not normally a problem but who would drive said excavator as last nights beer/larger and port had left some feeling a bit "wobbly".

Pete was nominated to unload the excavator and track it down the road and then along the towpath.

Meanwhile the crack team of RAF, Inka, Val, Martin, Ian, Joe, Matthew and Becky took more bricks out of the wall using hand tools and the fancy Arbortec thingie which apparently did stuff to the mortar joints quicker than any chisel. Tim meanwhile oversaw the site and made sure everyone was working safely.

The work: Get out the bricks sprayed blue and make it good to start filling in with new bricks. Which Mr Ludgate managed to do by the end of one day and a course of bricks were laid, (or begun) if memory serves. I spent most of a whole day getting one brick out that simply did NOT want to be removed, I was thinking 'flip blime if it's that well in it should stay, on the dentistry principle'.

Mr C was well away with a kango or similar name and was getting bricks out with apparent ease, although his back suffered. Not all right. Meanwhile the copers (or coping stones, to the uninitiated) were being re-

moved with the aid of a mini digger and hoists; plus 5 men, who whenever I looked over, were doing that standing around looking thoughtful schtick.

Finally the excavator arrived and work started removing the coping stones, a fine team consisting of Pete, Colin, Nigel, Paul, David and Richard led by err well no one in particular soon started removing the coping stones and stacking them neatly up against the wall.

Jon P and Martin T got stuck in to removing detritus and piles of guff including old rubble and that from around the portaloos. This was mini diggered out to the back of a flat bed lorry and taken away. To Brimscombe, I think. *wonders what will become of all this junk being squirreled away*

Just before lunch break the Police arrived, well it was Mitch in a firms BMW X5 on a pre planned visit (Nigel had ham sandwiches ready for her). After Lunch break Mitch departed with all the bells and whistles and Blue lights on (later found out she was called to a RTA)

Work continued apace on the wall with the intention to start rebuilding on Sunday. Meanwhile the coping stone team had removed and reset 3 coping stones adjacent to the temporary bridge and continued removing the coping



bridge bridge), and so a very cunning plan worthy of Baldrick and involving a tirfor, a roof and a tree was implemented, successfully. The older hands of wrgs past would have been proud .Get it done, was the motto, and 'we didn't know it was impossible, so we did it anyway' were all invoked.

stones up to and beyond the site container having to drag them back with the excavator.

Eventually it was time to pack up as it was getting dark and Martin was eager to prep the evening meal. An excellent meal of Roast Potatoes accompanied by Roast Potatoes, Chicken and a variety of veg was served up followed by an excellent tart and (Roast Potatoes were also available)Thank you Martin (Ludgate that is, although other Martins were available)

Sunday and breakfast was excellent due to Colin and Paul having perfected cooking without Griddle and Frying Pans.

Towards the end of the weekend the ingenuity and resourcefulness were tested to the utter limits as there was no way of getting said mini digger to the place needed (to hoist the coping stones up from nearer the steps down from Bow-

Back to Bowbridge and and the challenge of how to remove the remaining coping stones adjacent to the Hospitality Cabin. The excavator was now employed loading brick rubble into a trailer from the vets car park so a cunning plan was needed.

Enter "The Norton Tirfor",and 7 strops 2 snatch blocks one large tree one fencing post, one hospitality cabin a ladder and a crack team of eager volunteers (Partridges and a Pear Tree were unavailable at the time). 3 different set ups were devised to:

- a. lift the coping stones onto wooden skids on the tow[path
- b. drag the stones to the space at the far end of the cabin
- c. Lift the stones and stack them on top of one another.

All in all an excellent teamwork job carried out safely and efficiently. Well done Pete, Colin Paul David and well Me.

Meanwhile back at the wall Ian was finishing cutting out the stop

plank grooves and Martin started to lay the first bricks Yay.

Stop planks were soon fitted and more bricks were layed by Martin, all in all we had an excellent and productive weekend with lovely new brickwork and neatly stacked coping stones. John Pontifract was way pleased with the progress made and I think Tim was pleased he didn't leave anything behind.

Fun times included: a wonderful chicken 'something' that is Martin Ludgate's signature dish and copious amounts of garlic (that made my hands smell for days after) as I was garlic chopper for the night.

We then played various games which had Martin T giggling, especially when he was told he was most probably a security guard or drag artist, (or combo of both) for his day job. Ben Douglas and others strolled along the towpath back to Brimscombe after a days 'chibbling' and were thunderstruck by the beauty

of Griffin Mill lock. 'Here's one we made earlier.'

On the Sunday we took a perambulate down to look at the 'works' across the bridge where the pilings are going in for canal side developments, and marvelled anew at how we have given new life to Stroud's wildlife, and others who will live by the canal and never know to whom they owe their beautiful water-side views.

So thanks to Tim for organising, Martin for Cooking Saturdays evening meal, Colin and Paul for cooking breakfast with minimum equipment and everyone else for there immense contribution towards getting Bowbridge Lock finished, and of course John Pontifract for providing the work and devising a winter mortar mix.

**Alan Lines /
Valerie Goodwin**

(Images: As above)

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