

Horses and Buffaloes, Martians and Boots....

...is not, as you might have thought, a line from the song "My Favourite Things" from "The Sound of Music". It is, in fact, a list of what London WRG have dressed up as in their last four attempts to win the coveted "Best Decorated Boat" award at the Canalway Cavalcade Rally organised over the May Day Bank Holiday weekend by the London branch of the Inland Waterways Association. This year's event will be held on the 1st to 3rd of May, with the pageant of boats starting around lunchtime on Saturday 1st. We have more-or-less decided our theme for this year, so if you want to find out more, turn up at one of our social meetings at the Founders Arms on April 7th, 21st April & 28th April. Note the extra one on the 21st. This is partly to provide us with an extra chance to volunteer people to help at Cavalcade and partly to make up for the fact that, in an unprecedented outbreak of abstinence, London WRG seem to have given up drink for Lent, having not held a social since February 10th.

Last ever dig on the Chelmsford feeder?

27-28/2/93

I know they said that about the Basingstoke, but the Chelmsford feeder really is approaching completion. Amid forecasts of blizzards, an intrepid group gathered outside Casey Jones at Waterloo and headed for the frozen wastes of Essex. We arrived at the accommodation (the hall with no windows in) and headed for the Crown, where we met our organiser Ron and played an amusing variant of Charades, in which everyone has to try and guess the identity of the final member of the working party, who we must have left at Waterloo. Just to add to the confusion, we seemed to have brought Glyn, who nobody knew was coming (except possibly Glyn). Eventually we decided that we hadn't left anyone behind, it was just that the organiser couldn't count.

First job on Saturday was to set up some trestles and planks in the top end of the feeder and start mixing mortar. Then, as the promised snow started falling, the pointing team got to work re-pointing the brickwork of the sides of this part of the feeder, while the rest of us (and some of Cambridge University Canal society) were dismantling and rebuilding parts of the walls around the next section of the feeder. At one point we were dismantling a wall from one side while the Cambridge lot were rebuilding the other side. Then we realised we were taking out the bricks they'd just put in. We used a special traditional mortar mix of one part cement, two parts lime and three parts snow. In the afternoon we drove to a bit of historic woodland near Epping, where the people managing the woodland had donated some spare oak trees for making lock-gates, provided that they were cut down by horses and taken away by hand. Or was it cut down by hand and taken away by horses? It was quite an education to us townies, most of whom didn't realise wood came from trees. (We thought it came from B & Q). Anyway after we had helped tidy up the mounds of sawdust from where the timber was being squared-up we returned to the accommodation for some cottage pie & home-made Elderberry wine before braving the elements again on the way to the Crown.

On Sunday, the bricking and pointing (and a bit of kangoing) continued, while a small group went to retrieve a raft from down the canal, using shovels as oars, following which those who hadn't already been trained to drive dumpers were instructed by John Gale. The general consensus was that while the dumper was marginally easier to steer, the raft had better brakes.

Dig Deep - some concrete progress

20-21/3/93

About 11 tons of concrete progress, in fact, at Boxwell Springs Lock, where the nearside lock chamber wall is currently being rebuilt in concrete blocks. Since our last visit in January when the wall was demolished, Newbury Working Party Group & KESCRG, the other groups involved in Dig Deep, had laid a solid concrete base for the new wall to be built on. Our job was to start building it. The blocks are about 18" x 9" x 8" and weigh about 100lb each (or for you metric types, that's 450mm x 225mm x 200mm and bloody heavy). The good news was that the first 400 or so had already been delivered. The bad news was that they were all at the other end of the lane and we had to spend half of Saturday morning humping them into the lock chamber. Alison demonstrated her recently-acquired dumper-driving skills - she didn't tip them out in the wrong place a single time. Then a lorry-load of cement arrived and had to be unloaded. The local organiser, Neil, makes signs for a living and our next job was to install a smart-looking sign telling passers by who we were and what we were doing (and only containing one misprint). Meanwhile, as the bricklayer's line was set up ready for laying the first blocks, the scaffolding team were turning a large heap of scaffolding into something bearing a worrying resemblance to a gallows. Possibly as an incentive to the mortar-mixing team to get the mix right? No, it turned out to be part of the supporting structure for a block-and-tackle for lowering barrow-loads of mortar into the lock chamber. After lunch the block-laying started in earnest and by evening over 100 had been laid, almost completing the front row of headers of the first course and making a start on the second row. The lower courses of the wall are built of 2 rows of headers, one of stretchers and a front row of facing blocks (which almost look like stone).

On Sunday we laid the second row of headers and the row of stretchers, laid the first few blocks of the second course and started on the facing blocks. These were laid using a technique involving Darryl holding a block against his chest while Lesley covered it in mortar (the block, not Darryl's chest), then Darryl attempted to plonk the block down in the right place. At this point, usually there turned out to be not enough mortar behind it or under it or it was too wet and squigged out, at which point there would be some cursing and they would start again. By lunchtime they had to stop as it was raining and making the mortar too soft and anyway they had used up all the swear-words they knew and needed to learn some more. Sunday afternoon was spent arguing about which blocks to lay next, laying the remaining stretchers along the back of the wall and laying the first few of the next course, so we will have something to set our line up on next time.

Highlights of the weekend included:

Two new recruits on the same dig! Good grief! That's four this year! We must be doing something right for a change.

The first outing for our new frying pan. Regular readers of London WRG News will recall that Ron Jones was involved in a collision with the old one in the back of the van, injuring his leg in the process. If it happens with this one it will probably mean amputation.

Using up the last bit of food from the Christmas Party. The final French loaf was given the garlic treatment on Saturday night.

Having to push the dumper out of the shed after failing to get it started. Two minutes later new recruit Roger asked how it worked. "Well, you pull out the cold-start, here, then you start turning this handle, then you flick this lever over and..." chug chug chug... yes, you guessed it, it started first time.

Wot no statues?

AGM REPORT 10/03/93

The London WRG Annual General Meeting was held at the Rugby on 10th March. Thanks to everyone who attended, to the record number of people who sent their apologies for not attending, to the one person who sent apologies for not managing to organise a booze-up in a brewery since last year's AGM, to Tim for chairing the meeting & to Lesley for taking the minutes.

The first entry in the Minutes refers to it being a "non-statuary AGM". This presumably refers to the total lack of effigies, idols, plaster busts of Alan Jervis & other such statuary which might normally (in the opinion of the minutes secretary) be expected to grace the proceedings. Or it might be a reference to the general willingness of those present to join in, make constructive comments & suggestions and generally behave in a lively, animated manner, rather than sitting like statues as has happened on some occasions in the past. Or possibly it should have said "non-statutory AGM", implying that we aren't compelled to hold one at all and we do it because we want to. No, on second thoughts that sounds rather unlikely.

Tim opened the meeting by giving a brief resume of our achievements over the past year. We held working parties on the Chelmer Navigation, the Wilts & Berks Canal, the Chesterfield Canal, the Basingstoke Canal, the Montgomery Canal, Hanwell locks, the Hatherton Branch and our first contribution to the Dig Deep projects on the Cotswolds (Thames & Severn) Canal & the Wey & Arun Canal. We also took part in Canalway Cavalcade, the Big-ish dig & the IWA Canal Cleanup Weekend, only cancelled one dig (scheduled for the Hereford & Gloucester Canal), got round to buying the brush-cutter we had decided to buy in 1991, didn't give away as much of our catering gear as the previous year and actually managed to recruit some new members.

We then agreed dates, venues and organisers for the rest of our 1993 digs and the first few next year. We decided once again to hold our working parties every three weeks generally (mainly because we realised that if we reduced the frequency of our digs, we would also be reducing the frequency of our Wednesday night drinks) but we would vary the schedule to give longer gaps around August Bank Holiday & Christmas / New Year. We are committed to 3 weekends on each of the Thames & Severn and Wey & Arun Canals and one weekend on the Neath Canal, as our contribution to the Dig Deep initiative, during each of the two years of the current Dig Deep projects. The Dig Deep year starts at the beginning of October, so our digs on the Thames & Severn on 17-18 April, the Neath on 28-30 May and the Wey & Arun on 10-11 July & 11-12 September complete our commitment to Year 1. We have scheduled 2 weekends each on the Wey & Arun and the Thames & Severn in early 1994, which leaves us to schedule one more visit to each of these projects before October 1994. After much studying of Filofax road atlases, Nicholson's guides, London bus maps etc. we came to the conclusion that the Neath Canal is a long way away, probably nearer to Waterford than Waterloo and we would have to set off back before we arrived there if we tried to do it on a 2-day weekend. So this means that our 3-day digs on the late spring Bank Holiday in both 1993 & 1994 will be on the Neath Canal and any other long-distance projects that we may have wanted to visit will have to wait until another year. We also scheduled 3 weekends on the Wilts & Berks, one (joint with KESCRG) on the Basingstoke, and one the Ipswich & Stowmarket (River Gipping) Navigation. We also pencilled in one weekend each on the Hereford & Gloucester Canal, Chesterfield Canal & Lichfield / Hatherton Canals, but we have not managed to confirm any of these, and the Chesterfield cannot take us on the weekend we suggested, 19th-20th June. WRG hope to organise another national Big-ish Dig & Canal Camps reunion sometime in October, possibly on the Thames & Severn Canal, so depending on which weekend they choose, we may have to change our schedule slightly & Darryl & Cath's joint debut as London WRG Organisers on the Gipping may be on either 2-3 or 23-24 October. Let's hope they both organise it the same weekend.

Darryl then gave us a progress report on the first 6 months of the Dig Deep Initiative. Apparently it's all going very well, the local canal societies are all very pleased with progress and there will be a presentation this autumn to the societies who may be interested in bidding for Dig Deep projects to start when the current projects are completed in Autumn 1994. Certainly those of us who have worked on the Thames & Severn recently are pleased with the way the work is going and we are happy to continue our commitment to Dig Deep.

Darryl also mentioned that the Dig Deep operational fund could do with some more money in it, and would welcome donations from groups and/or suggestions for fundraising.

Unfortunately at the moment we don't have that much money ourselves and there are a number of things that we need to buy, so we couldn't offer any financial support at the moment.

This brought us to the next item on the agenda: how much money did we have, how much more were we likely to get (and where from?) and what were we going to spend the money we didn't have on. The London WRG News editor had just produced a nice computer-generated inventory of all our kit (for WRG insurance purposes) and copies of this intriguing document were circulated and studied with interest. Why do we have 3 fish-knives? What have we got a set of nut-crackers for? (Answer: for cracking nuts with.) Do we really need three corkscrews and only one tin-opener? How often do we use our snow-broom?

We then went through the list writing down various tools and catering implements that we needed. We could do with some more blades for the brush-cutter, for cutting different types of scrub. We need a new set of loppers as the ends of the handles of our present set are bent sufficiently close together that male navvies have to wear cricket-boxes when lopping in confined spaces. We could do with one of those saw-on-a-stick things they had on the big-ish dig so that the shorter members of the group can cut branches off trees, and Winnie can do it sitting down. We need more bricklaying tools - small trowels, lump-hammers, bolsters, scutch-hammers and a hand-brush. We could do with a couple more shovels / mattocks / spades etc. I have also written down "Sledge" on the list, by which I assume I meant a sledgehammer, although perhaps this gives us some idea of how we might have acquired a snow-broom. (Actually a sledge and a snow-broom might both have been useful on the last Chelmsford dig) We needed a wheel-brace for the van. Dave Moore offered us a bottlejack. (This is for the van, not as a complement to the three corkscrews.) Some rope for pulling trees down. Peter Smith suggested a yard-broom. Doesn't he know we've gone metric? We need some more safety gear. Tim hasn't given away as much of our catering gear as in the past (and I found one of the lost mixing bowls in my own kitchen - I bet it was Tim who put it there.) but we seem to have mislaid our frying pan and we're short on bowls, chopping boards, jugs, plastic plates, rolling pins and roasting tins.

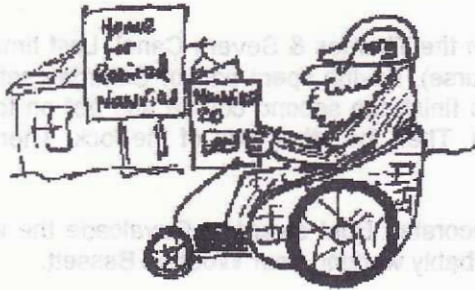
By this point we had accounted for all the money we had, all the money we're likely to get and quite a lot of money we're highly unlikely ever to set eyes on. We decided to start by spending about £60-£80 on catering gear - a decent frying pan, a big roasting-tin, a rolling pin and some jugs, mixing bowls and chopping boards plus some more crates to keep it all in, and around £100 on tools, starting with the digging tools and attachments for the brush-cutter, and leaving the bricklaying stuff till later as some of us have our own bricklaying gear that we can bring. We may be able to buy more later, depending on what we raise from t-shirt sales & Cavalcade and whether our funds have to cover hiring transport for any of our digs when the canal camps season starts and NUH goes away on its hols.

Despite all the time that this took up, we still failed to stretch it out till closing time, so we had to go on to the next item on the agenda: recruitment. Actually, this isn't quite the as bad as it used to be; at last year's AGM we noted that we had almost doubled the size of our working parties without doing anything to recruit new people. So far in 1993 we seem to be averaging one new person per dig, so whatever we're doing, we seem to be doing it right. Anyway the only thing we did apart from the usual exhortation to everyone to try to persuade their friends/colleagues/neighbours/relatives/enemies to come along (that's how most of our current members were recruited) was to agree to produce some sort of single-sheet handout that we can print in large quantities for not much money, with a brief description of the group's activities on one on side and the current dates list and contact names on the back. Then we can give these out at boat rallies/on digs/in the pub/on the 22:17 to Orpington/at IWA meetings/you name it.

Next the London WRG News editor was thanked and congratulated on his efforts over the past year and by the time he recovered he had not only agreed to carry on doing it but had agreed to produce the London WRG leaflet mentioned above, write some stuff for "Navvies" and do an article for the IWA Chelmsford branch magazine.

We then got on to social events, and agreed that the Christmas party had been a success and we would hold it in the same place next year if possible. We also decided that a London WRG slide show in the Autumn would give those of us who don't take prints the chance to bore the rest of you with our photographs. Finally it was reported that Bob had actually got round to writing to Harvey's brewery about organising a visit, but had not heard back.

Aileen agreed to take over producing the London WRG T-shirts and we agreed not to have another AGM till next year.



An occasional series of excerpts from old issues of London WRG News and its predecessor "Dig This"

Ten years ago.....

Jeremy Frankel's end-of year round-up of London WRG's progress in 1992 reported that we had visited the Basingstoke, Thames & Severn, Montgomery & Wey & Arun canals. Does this sound familiar? He also listed all the people who had been on digs in the last year, all 35 of them, including Tips, Acom, Burgerbar, Chief, John the wife, Martin Dar Es Salaam, Mirage, Plinger, Trainee & Winnie. To anyone who can remember who all these people were and how they acquired their nicknames, one year's free subscription to London WRG News.

We had recently changed our meeting place to Casey Jones at Waterloo. Unfortunately it burnt down the night before our trip to the Montgomery. On Saturday night "Martin had rather too much to drink ... got his sleeping bag, went outside and attempted to sleep in sub-zero temperatures. He took some persuading that pneumonia was not a good present to take back to London. I don't know why we bothered." This dig was described as "the culmination of Bob's piece de resistance, as he had somehow acquired a relatively new (R reg) WRG Transit, nine seater give or take a few." This was PFD, for those who remember, and sure enough it broke down in Walsall on the way back and we arrived back in London at sunrise on Monday.

On 23rd February 1983 we held the "London WRG Cultural evening". This was not a euphemism for a booze-up, it was (believe it or not) a concert of Mozart, Rackmaninov & Tchaikovsky at the Royal Festival Hall.

Five years ago.....

The end of lock chamber demolition work on the Basingstoke Canal (a joint dig with KESCRG entitled "Last Kango with Parish") and the reopening ceremony at St. Johns locks in Woking.

Plans for Canalway Cavalcade: "Basingstoke the Pantomime Horse is willing to make himself available again. Matched pairs of people to dance in the horse are needed. The nature of the beast is such that a smaller person is the head and a taller person (bent over) is the back and legs. We will match disparate halves..."

A trip to the Huddersfield planned for May: "Travel to exciting far-off places and shift their mud. It's scenic and well away from London and we usually meet a group of barely civilised, half-navvy, half-WRGplant northern friends..."

The AGM notice: "All are welcome to bring ideas (not dynamiting the Croydon Canal though)"

Our next working party is on 16-17 April on the Thames & Severn Canal. Last time we laid 250 concrete blocks (almost a complete course), having spent part of Saturday setting-up. With a whole weekend we should be able to finish the second course and get on to the third. Then there's only two or three more to do. Then the other side of the lock. Then the other 2 locks.

On the 8-9 May, having won the Best Decorated Boat award at Cavalcade the week before, we return to the Wilts & Berks Canal, probably working near Wootton Bassett.

Regular readers of this newsletter may remember some confusion concerning a village apparently named "Foxham Martin" which turned out to be a slight misprint - it was a dig at Foxham organised by Martin. No such confusion need arise on May 29-31 when Glyn organises a dig on the Neath canal. There really is a village called Glyn Neath, and what's more, it's more-or-less where we're working. This is our annual 3-day dig and our first trip to the third "Dig Deep" project, which aims to restore 3 locks on this Canal.

For the next dig, we currently have an organiser but no site. We had hoped to go to the Chesterfield Canal, but they can't take us that weekend. We also have not yet confirmed the venue for 31 July - 1 August, when we were hoping to go to the Hereford and Gloucester Canal.

All our remaining dates for this year are more-or-less confirmed. If they are changed at all it will be to fit in with re-scheduling our visits to the Chesterfield / Hereford & Gloucester, or to fit in with the WRG centrally organised big-ish dig, which we understand will happen sometime in October, leaving the Ipswich & Stowmarket dig to take place on our other available date that month.

Nearer to home, the following events in East London are being organised by Newham Council. Contact Kevin Saint on 081 521 6399 (home) or 071 3877050 x2750 (work) for more information:

As part of National Spring Clean Up Week:

Saturday 24 - Sunday 25 April

Painting at City Mill and Carpenters Locks, installing railings and towpath clearance

As part of BT Environment Week

Saturday 22 - Sunday 23 May

Debris removal from rivers and towpaths.

LONDON WRG NEWS

Dates List

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

17-18/04/93 Thames & Severn Canal	organiser	Lesley McFadyen
08-09/05/93 Wilts & Berks Canal		Tim Lewis
29-31/05/93 Neath Canal		Glyn Davies
19-20/06/93 to be arranged		Ron Jones
10-11/07/93 Wey & Arun Canal		Martin Ludgate
31/7-01/8/93 to be arranged		Lesley McFadyen
11-12/09/93 Wey & Arun Canal		to be arranged
02-03/10/93 Ipswich & Stowmarket Navigation**		Darryl / Cath**
23-24/10/93 Ipswich & Stowmarket Navigation**		Darryl / Cath**
13-14/11/93 Wilts & Berks Canal		Kevin Saint
04-05/12/93 Basingstoke Canal (KESCRG Xmas party)		Tim Lewis

**one of these two weekends will be a working party on the Ipswich & Stowmarket Navigation organised by Darryl Foster & Cath Coolican. The other (which may have to be moved forward or back by 1 week) will be the WRG national big-ish dig & Canal Camps reunion, for which Martin Ludgate will take London WRG names.

Social Gatherings: Wednesday Night, 10 days before each dig i.e. 7/4/93, 28/4/93 etc. at the Founders Arms, Bankside, London SE1 (on the South bank, 100 yards East of Blackfriars bridge.) about 19:30 till 23:00. Note **an extra drink night on 21/04/93** as we've been missing out lately.

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

1-3/05/93	IWA Canalway Cavalcade rally at Little Venice.
Sometime	Booze up in a brewery (if anyone can organise one)
Autumn	London WRG members slide show.
15/12/93	Christmas party

Who to contact:

Tim Lewis, 5, Herongate Road, Wanstead, London E12.	Overall London WRG Co-ordinator Phone 081-530 7926
Martin Ludgate, 35, Silvester Road, London SE22 9PB	London WRG News Phone 081-693 3266
Lesley McFadyen, 35, Silvester Road, London SE22 9PB	Membership list Phone 081-693 3266 (eves) 071-405 8400 x402 (days)