



The **R**o **e** **C**ana  
& Northern Devon  
Waterways Society

**SOCIETY NEWS and VIEWS**

**SPRING ISSUE**

**May 2014**

# Contents

<b>Chairman's Report to AGM 2014</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Treasurer's Report to AGM 2014</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Foreigners in the camp</b>	<b>9</b>
Beware the yellow peril — a 'Twitchers' delight?	
<b>Getting down and Dirty</b>	<b>10</b>
Tony Barnes and crew working hard	
<b>Here today, gone tomorrow!</b>	<b>12</b>
Adrian Wills loses a toy!	
<b>Rain nearly stops play on the GWC</b>	<b>17</b>
Hilary Wills enjoys a boating weekend	
<b>What's to come!</b>	<b>21</b>
Dates for your diary	

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO AGM 2014**

**Rolle Canal & Northern Devon Waterways Society**

**R.H.S Rosemoor,**

**West Classroom, Peter Buckley Learning Centre.**

It doesn't seem that it was a year ago when I last stood here and spoke at our 10<sup>th</sup> A.G.M . However, much has been achieved in that time and the RC&NDWS continues to go from strength to strength.

The Life's Journey Project that we were heavily involved with, has drawn to a close but has brought about considerable changes to our locality and had a major impact on raising public awareness and interest in Lord Rolle's Canal. Thanks to a grant from Heritage Lottery Fund, through this project, we have been able to erect information boards along the course of the Tarka Trail highlighting the significant features of the canal visible from the Trail.

The permissive footpath, looping behind Beam House, has been officially opened to the general public and is being heavily used, speaking volumes of its popularity.

Whilst major tree clearing along this stretch was undertaken by professional tree fellers, the towpath has been made much safer and more accessible as a direct result of our society. A small but important section of one of the dry stone revetments which had collapsed has been rebuilt. Much of this work is mainly due to a small, dedicated group of volunteers, ably led by Tony Barnes. The RC&NDWS committee is now considering ways of extending the restoration of this section

sometime in the foreseeable future. Doubtless Tony will be seeking more volunteer involvement for this soon.

New steps lead from the Tarka Trail to the Roving Bridge along this permissive footpath and a tracked excavator has cleared the ground here making the course of the canal at this point more obvious.

Considerable work has been undertaken at the bottom and top sites of the inclined plane and wheel pit. With his Devon Archaeological Society hat on, Chris Hassall, aided by Greg Smith, has been researching the base of the incline, following drainage and wall repairs carried out by SW Highways and the EA, and where an original piece of incline rail was found, (now in my safe-keeping). The archaeological work that Chris and Greg is involved in is exciting work and far from being concluded.

At the top of the incline, much invasive vegetation has been removed and the site levelled by excavator. The outline of the damaged wheel pit chamber has been defined and further investigation of this is planned for the immediate future. I hope you have noticed our new banner which will be prominently displayed at sites where our volunteers will be working from now on.

The viewing platform overlooking Sea Lock is proving to be very popular. Locals and visitors are frequently seen looking out over the entrance to the canal and much of their conversations can be clearly heard by those working below. So just be careful about what you say if you stop at this point with family or friends. Someone may be listening!

Work at Sea Lock continues steadily although has been seriously interrupted by the very poor and wet weather we experienced towards the end of last year. Considerable wall rebuilding has been achieved and quantities of stone generously donated by this society, IWA Restoration Committee and Beam Quarry near Torrington are now being used up.

The replica Tub-Boat building project is also drawing to a close. Thanks to Barry Hughes, aided by a small but elite band of volunteers, not one but two full-sized tub-boats have been constructed and hopefully, will be launched very soon.

A great deal of praise is due to the volunteers who have given up their time and effort to help drive these different projects on. Similarly the committee of this society also deserves a great deal of praise. Tony has already been mentioned for organising volunteer groups. He is also our treasurer. Chris Hassall, with his RC&NDWS hat on continues to fascinate members of the people with information about the history, flora and fauna of different sections as he guides groups along. He does a wonderful job and those joining him on the walks find great pleasure in participating. He is also our publicist.

Whilst Tony and Chris have a somewhat public face for their involvement in RC&NDWS other committee members are less often seen publically as representatives but never-the-less their involvement and dedication is equally great. Praise must be given to Chris Jewell our rep to IWA, Norman Richards our Archives officer, Mike Harper, who runs the RC&NDWS website pages and Facebook, as well as other publicity, Hilary Wills (for putting up with me) our membership secretary, and Margaret Shambrook our invaluable minutes secretary.

When the RC&NDWS was instigated in 2003 one of its stated aims, which still applies, is 'to raise public awareness of the existence of Lord Rolle's Canal. As a result of the programme of guided walks, exhibitions and illustrated talks that the society have done in the past and will continue in the future, as well as national publicity brought about by the North Devon Biosphere which oversaw the Life's Journey Project, Lord Rolle's Canal is rapidly losing its subtitle of 'Devon's Forgotten Canal'.

Already this year there have been 3 nationally circulated articles on our canal. In **Waterways World – Annual 2014**, page 96, and IWA Spring 2014 issue 243 **Waterway** publications, page 24, there are brief explanations on our canal and what's happening to it. In the May edition of **Devon Life**, pages 152/3, there is double page spread by Jo Stewart-Smith, following her visit to the canal on the official opening of the permissive footpath.

Our society continues to attract interest, is growing and flourishing. Our membership and committee should be very proud of what we have achieved to date. We have done very well so far and we should look forward to an equally exciting and productive future.

**Adrian Wills**

April 2014

*Once again, thanks must be given to R.H.S. Rosemoorand, in particular Dianna Gilding, for hosting our A.G.M and ensuring that our matters ran smoothly and trouble-free despite massive pressures on its and her own priorities.*

## TREASURER'S REPORT 2013 / 2014

		<b>£</b>
<b>ACCOUNT 1</b>	Balance as at 2 April 2013	1211.70
<b>Income</b>	Subscriptions	1164.99
	Donations	179.02
	Walks / talks	332.50
	Sales	7.99
	Grants	300.00
	Life's journey	224.47
	Total	2208.97
<b>Expenditure</b>	Printing	237.85
	IWA membership	54.00
	Insurance	265.00
	IWA Info. service	45.00
	Equipment	164.47
	Event costs	50.00
	Postage	289.10
	TTEF Membership	20.00
	Total	<u>1125.42</u>
	Balance at 1 April 2014	2295.25
	Petty cash 2 April 2013	11.94
	Income (Ridd Walk)	35.50
	Expenses (stamps)	25.00
	Total	
	Petty cash at 1st April 2014	22.44

Note 1. £300 from the Bideford Bridge Trust

Note 2 Reimbursement for materials and equipment used by volunteers at the Furzebeam site.

Note 3 Expenses for speaker at AGM

Note 4 Includes forward purchase of 2<sup>nd</sup> class stamps

**ACCOUNT 2 (Project account)**

Balance at 2nd April 2013		1531.04
Interest	0.71	
Balance at 1st April 2014		1531.75

**Stock at cost**

1. Books		
James Green, Canal Engineer	2 copies	£3.24 ea
Westcountrymen	6 copies	£2.44 ea
2. Sweat shirts in Chelsea blue with Society logo		
	2 off	£14.40 ea

**Assets (At written down values)**

Tools	£55
Volunteer's safety gear	£46
Display Boards	£216

Treasurer (A Barnes) 3 April 2014

The accounts this year show a significant rise in income from the previous year. Income from subscriptions and donations is up as well as that from organised events, so well attended thanks to Chris Hassall's management. The Society are grateful to Bideford Bridge Trust for their grant of £300 towards the Soc. operating costs. We would also like to thank RHS Rosemoor for the use of their facilities and the invitation to our members to visit the gardens.

A.Barnes 6 April 2014

## EXOTIC VISITORS *SPLASH DOWN*

As the seasons change it is fascinating to watch the flora and fauna of our environment respond accordingly. Just recently the first swallows of summer arrived, initially in small numbers but now many can be seen performing fabulous aerobatics, skilfully manoeuvring around various hazards with the greatest of ease.

The presence of visiting Warblers, the archetypal, 'little brown jobs' is becoming more and more obvious from their melodic calling whilst maintaining their extraordinary ability to keep themselves hidden from sight.

A couple of weeks ago the stretch of canal just above Sea Lock basin was temporary accommodation to a pair of very unusual visitors which had probably escaped from someone's pond. A male, resplendent in his mating plumage and accompanied by a less colourful but never-the-less attractive female, was a pair of Mandarin Ducks. Sadly they chose to stay for only a short time before continuing their journey to pastures green! AW



## Volunteers at work

The volunteer season has started and the first working party began the hard work of shifting 10 tons of quarry scalplings from the top of the accommodation bridge to the towpath behind Beam House, which had suffered from the wet winter and developed deep mud in places.

About 60% of the work has been completed, but if anyone out there feels like lending a hand, the gang would certainly make you welcome! This is, of course, only the beginning of the season and there are many jobs waiting to be tackled. The top of the inclined plane needs to be tidied up and got ready for public viewing, with an iron grill planned to cover the hole torn out by the railway (the vandals!)



The damaged roof of the wheel pit exposing the partly filled in void beneath which needs securing.

Then the area needs to be planted with shade loving wild flowers and a picnic area created. It should be a lovely place for walkers and cyclists to stop for lunch. A pity that the Hunter's Inn is no longer serving drinks!

At present we have a regular quartet of volunteers and, whilst we get a lot done there is plenty of scope for more members to take part.

So if you would like to try your hand, please contact me at **anthonybar@gmail.com** or call me on **01237 473801**.

Lunch is provided as well as all the tools, gloves and headgear if needed. Anyone with a chain saw licence would be particularly useful.

*Tony Barnes*



Exposing the stonework at the foot of the Roving Bridge, behind Beam House, on the new permissive footpath.

# **“SO LONG – AND THANKS FOR THE LIFT!”**

## **(Subtitle — *DEATH OF A CRANE*)**

Sadly the time has come to say, ‘Goodbye’, to the 22Ruston Bucyrus crane that I have been working at the Sea Lock site. The machine, built in the 1960’s, had had a hard life even before I acquired it in 2008 and I have had to source and replace many badly worn parts.

The IWA Restoration Committee kindly funded the cost of replacing the damaged and worn lifting ropes without which the machine would have been dangerous to operate. Despite past expenditure on the crane, it had finally reached a point whereby it was becoming more and more difficult to propel across the site and steering it was something of a nightmare.



The decision was only reached to dispose of this crane when I was able to acquire another one (as you do!). I heard about another 22RB coming up for auction and was fortunate (in my opinion, my wife is not so sure) to buy it at a reasonable price.

Delivery of the 'new' 22RB was organised and on the specified day the machine duly arrived on the back of a heavy transport low loader. After a great deal of strife and consternation the machine was driven to its new home on the wharf side of Sea Lock but that's another long and complicated story!

For transportation purposes all but the bottom section of the 60foot long boom had to be dismantled and consequently needed to be reassembled once on site. Not an easy job but this was eventually achieved and the crane got back into full working order.

You may be forgiven for asking why I was buying another machine of the type I was going to get rid of. Although the machine I have just acquired is another 22RB it is a much younger machine and despite the body work is a little scruffy, mechanically it is in very good condition and has suffered very little wear and tear. It has a longer boom and additional counterweight enabling it to lift even heavier loads than the redundant crane. It also has the great advantage of having a working, computerised *safe-loading* system which, hopefully, will prevent me from doing anything daft when trying to lift heavy things.

In the meantime a decision had to be made about the old machine. Ideally I would have liked to sell it for millions of pounds. I needed the money to counter the cost of acquiring and transporting the new one. Reality was that even if I could find some other obsessed, mentally deranged person to buy it,

removing it from Sea Lock site would be fraught with problems. These machines are not happy travelling up or down steep slopes at the best of times but, when the steering is very 'iffy', trying to manoeuvre such a vehicle from the site up a fairly steep, curving drive to the main road where it could be loaded on to heavy transport would require the services of a very brave man.

The simple solution was to sell the machine for its scrap value and have it cut up on site. Arrangements were made with a scrap metal dealer and before long a lorry arrived and deposited a very large skip, shortly followed by a couple of men who arrived in another large lorry complete with a Hiab lifting crane on the back and an assortment of gas cutting gear.



Cutting off the boom

Old and worn the redundant crane may have been but it did not give up without a fight!. It took nearly 3 days of cutting and hacking with the torch before the crane was finally reduced to an assortment of distorted lumps of metal of a size and weight that could be lifted onto the lorry or into the skip.

Not all of the old crane has gone to the scrap yard. The ropes kindly provided from IWA funds

have been saved, along with a number of other parts which have a lot of serviceable life left in them to be kept for spares.





The destruction of the old crane was a sad thing but at least the process provided some wonderful fireworks!      Adrian Wills



**Grand Western Canal 200 years old**  
**IWA National Trailboat Festival 23-26<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

Joining more than 30 other boats that entered the canal using the slipway right under Boehill Bridge (the last bridge on the link road, before the M6), Adrian and I took our Wilderness Trailboat to the GWC for the May Bank Holiday celebrations. We arrived on the Thursday morning to escape the rush but others had got there even earlier and the GWC Rangers had been setting up the various sites since Monday and the Waterway Recovery Group since Wednesday.

The GWC is about 11 miles long and activities were planned at 4 separate sites over the weekend. The canal was recently making headline news since a section of an embankment breached and millions of gallons of water escaped before temporary dams were able to be constructed. Thanks to huge investment by Devon County Council this breach is now fully repaired and the canal refilled.

- Friday saw a gathering of boats at Burlescombe Wharf. Children from the local school paid a visit and the PTA provided cream teas. The boaters and WRGies had first been for a guided tour of the nearby Westleigh Quarry. This enormous limestone quarry is the main reason for the canal's existence but now the transport is by road.
- Saturday was Festival Day at Hartnoll Farm, with a music tent, craft marquee, ale and cider tent, trade stalls and

canal societies, funfair, boat trips etc. The heavy rain that had started on Friday continued and before midday the decision was taken to CANCEL the event. Those who braved the downpour to step outside the shelters were amazed to see a TORNADO over Tiverton! See below.



- Sunday (which was mostly dry and warm) saw all the boaters move to Tiverton Canal Basin where they tweaked their flags and bunting and put up their lights in readiness for the evening. Crowds came to hear Samba bands, and watch boaters take part in a boat-handling competition; the Visitors Centre and the floating café/bar were busy all day. At 9.15 the boats motored off to gather at Tidcombe Bridge and at 9.30 as darkness fell the boats switched on their colourful illuminations and set off in convoy, back to the Basin, past cheering crowds on the towpath and in the

gardens on the other side of the canal. It was great fun to take part, even though some lights failed to come on.

- Monday (also blessed with dry weather) saw the festivities move to Sampford Peverell for the Navvies Fair, organised



by the WRGies. Here there were Georgian themed stalls and events; Maypole dancing, music consort, puppet shows, craft stalls and games, and a re-enactment of a historical event, a Navvies' Strike. In the evening the villagers took to the streets and canal towpath with a torchlight procession to the garden of the Merriemead Hotel and the finale was a wonderful display of fireworks.

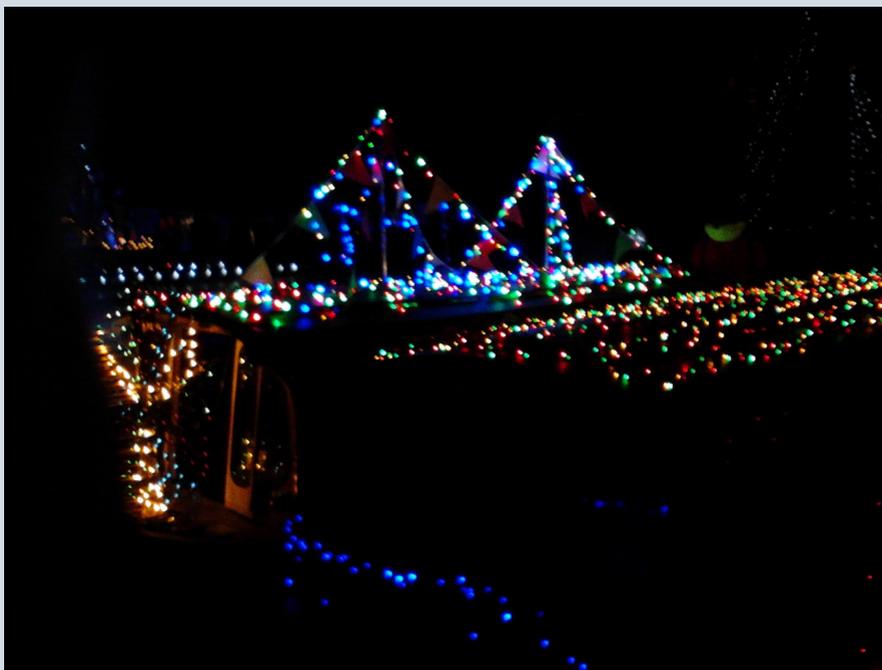
We stayed on the canal for another 2 days, travelling to the furthest point of the restored section, the last ½ mile on foot, to Loudwells Lock. There is a very low tunnel near the end,

intended for tub boats, but we actually travelled through it, in a Wilderness Beaver with 10 people and 1 Alsatian to weight it down!

We then returned our boat to its mooring at Bathpool, on the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal.

We had a great time, despite the contrary weather, met a really friendly group of people and have enormous respect for all those who planned and organised the events.

Report by **Hilary Wills**.



Picture above of some trail boat illuminations at Tiverton, taken on a mobile phone.

**Front cover picture:** A Wilderness Trail Boat in the process of being decorated, prior to the illuminated flotilla

# Down the Cut

## **DATES OF FORTHCOMING EVENTS:**

# RCS guided walks

All walks start at 2:30pm on a Sunday afternoon, can be expected to take between 2 to 2½ hours and is open to all members of the public. The distance is usually around two miles. Much of the walking is on the Tarka Trail but there will be sections of rough or damp ground where strong shoes are advisable or water resistant boots if there has been recent rain. Walking sticks or hiking poles can be very useful in places.

Dogs are allowed on most walks but must be under close control, quiet and unobtrusive.

### **Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> June Annery Kiln and Ridd Inclined Plane.**

Starting point: Annery Kiln, by Halfpenny Bridge over the Torridge, on the Weare Giffard road.

Brief history of the limestone trade and the purpose of the Rolle canal.

Walk across river meadow to the site of Ridd Incline where the tub boats were hauled up a ramp to the upper level of the canal to navigate to Torrington. See the upper canal basin and site of underground water wheel. Return along Tarka Trail

## **Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> July. Staple Vale to Taddiport.**

### **Suitable for most mobility scooters.**

Starting point: Puffing Billy, Torrington old Railway Station.

Brief history of turnpike roads, canal and railway crossings of the Torridge at Staple Vale will be provided. Follow canal/Rolle road past sewage works to Taddiport and site of swing bridge, lime kilns and milk factory.



Chris Hassall with a group visiting the site of the wheel pit at the top of the inclined plane

Return by riverside path or Rolle Road if preferred.

## **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> August. Darkham Weir & Rosemoor lime kilns.**

*Only guide dogs are permitted on this site.*

Starting point: Rosemoor Gardens, Woodland car park.

Stony path down to weir, follow leat along riverside meadows, path through wildlife habitat area, to site of Tucking Mill and Lime Kilns.

Returning through gardens (Free entry).

The tea shop should be open.

**The Rolle Canal & Northern Devon Waterways Society requests a donation of £2 per person for each walk.**

For further details, if required, watch the local press

Email <[hassallc@ymail.com](mailto:hassallc@ymail.com)> or [adrian@therollecanal.co.uk](mailto:adrian@therollecanal.co.uk)

# FESTIVALS

Sunday 20th July     **Bideford Water Festival**

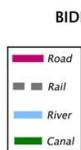
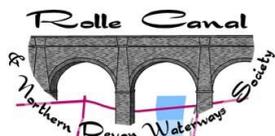
Details to follow

Saturday 27th July     **Bude Stratton Heritage Day**

11.00 am – 4.00pm     Further details to follow.

## **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR FESTIVALS**

The Rolle Canal & Northern Devon Waterways Society is hoping to participate in both of these events and volunteers to help man displays and distribute RC&NDWS information would be greatly appreciated. If you would like to lend a hand then please contact the chair or secretary— details on the back cover.



BIDEFORD

Iron Bridge

Landcross

Railway  
Tunnel

SEA LOCK

Annery Kiln

INCLINED PLANE

Weare Giffard

BEAM AQUEDUCT

Beam  
House  
Weir

GREAT TORRINGTON

Taddiport

Town Mills

Rosemoor

Darkham  
Weir

The RC&NDWS always welcomes volunteers who are prepared to help with a wide variety of society activities. Many of these tasks do not require long term commitment or massive physical ability but are all equally important to the successful running of the society. If you feel you can help in any way then please do not hesitate to make contact with the committee through the address below:

Our archives Officer, Norman Richards, is always looking for material, maps, pictures or text, relating to the Rolle family and canal. If you have anything which may be of interest to him, please contact him by email at [norm@fhsinternet.com](mailto:norm@fhsinternet.com) or at the address given below:

All other enquiries to the Chair --  
Adrian Wills tel. 01237 477705

[info@therollecanal.co.uk](mailto:info@therollecanal.co.uk)

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