

Summer Canal Camps 2009 You know you want to!

As I look out my window it is a lovely sunny day and the temperature is in double figures. This has got me thinking about my summer hols and which canal camps I am going on! This got me wondering what the work is this year. And that got me thinking that perhaps the rest of you might be having similar thoughts...

So for the aid of happy campers everywhere, here is what's happening in the first half of the WRG summer camps programme.

We start the season off with the **Montgomery Canal** on the north Wales border where we will be running two weeks of camps from 20th June to 4th July.

We'll be rebuilding the next section of channel beyond the current limit at Gronwen. This will involve soft bank protection and stone wall building at Crickheath wharf which will be the terminus for the next length to reopen. Those who were on the camps last year will also get to see how the plants WRG planted at the new nature reserve have established.

This sounds like great fun. I think I'll book on for a few days. But let's hear from this year's leaders. Over to you, Helen...

"The 1st week sees the return of Alan 'AJ' Jervis jointly leading with Lou 'I take sweets from strangers' Kellet, and cooking brought to you by Harriet 'Girl' Wood. The 2nd is led by Helen 'Bushbaby' Gardner ably assisted by 'Welsh' Phil Scott. Lou is going to make sure we don't screw up all the first week achieved by cooking on the second week and keeping an eye on us. If you can't decide then do both weeks and see which one was better. The work is at Crickheath Wharf (the wide soggy place where we got the plants from last year) and we'll be building a proper limestone wall (rocks not blocks) but we will still need the mixer (yay). There is more planting to do - we've had a look at last year's and it's not dead - (double yay) but there will be some gaps when it grows properly."

So what else is happening? Well from 27th June to 11th July there is the chance to work on the **Basingstoke Canal**.

This might be the closest you will get to London on a camp this year, but it's



New site: Wilts & Berks at Pewsham

Then what? A whole summer of Camps!

actually in some very nice country on the Surrey and Hampshire borders. The work will be installing pipes for a back pumping project: the canal never had a decent water supply so it tends to run out every summer. So we're putting in pumps to raise water back to the top of a flight of locks. There will be the chance to learn lots of new skills: for example concrete reinforcing; surveyors' levels will be used for accurate gradients of pipes being installed; and the chance to play with "bendy toys": dumpers and excavators will certainly be on site. Currently we are still confirming who the leaders are for these two camps - but the people we have in mind will certainly make it a fun week.

July 4th - 11th will see us start a new project at Pewsham, in the countryside west of Swindon on the **Wilts & Berks Canal**. Camp 200906 will be an excellent opportunity to work on the early stages of a lock restoration project. The three locks which used to raise the canal by about 25ft have been unused for over 100 years. Work will include clearing lock chambers to allow for future restoration, and repairing a culvert channelling water under the canal. So Nat Belderson, why should people book on?

"I will be leading the camp with the help of Louise Gale, and when we are not working on the site we hope to revive some ancient WRG traditions such as the infamous Tescue Valuo Challenge! To find out more, you will have to come to the camp in July!"

Are you thinking, "Of course it's not a real holiday unless I have to cross a stretch of water to get to a different country." Well sorry, we don't have camps on the Costa del Sol yet, but we do have the next best thing: across the Severn Bridge and into South Wales for the **Monmouthshire & Brecon Canals**. Now don't laugh: contrary to popular belief it doesn't always rain there.

The last few years camps it has been sunny. Honestly!

The work will be building a footbridge across the canal ready for next year's Trailboat festival. The bridge structure will be constructed entirely of oak, secured to a concrete base. In addition we plan to construct timber landing stages at each of the four locks on this length of canal so wood-

working skills will be in demand. This will be Heaven for Toby Parrott our jack-of-all-trades. He is a fantastic teacher too, so he'll be able to impart some of his skills to you.

Cutting back overhanging trees will be part of the project plus lock painting and pointing of stone and brickwork. The date? Well again we have two one-week camps back-to-back starting on July 11th and going through to July 25th. The height of the summer sun!!

I like the sound of these camps. I'm going to send my booking off to Jenny Black right away. Oh hang on, actually I'm leading the first week with my assistant Gordon Brown (not that one!) And the cook? That's another of the many skills of our jack-of-all-trades Toby, and his partner Sam Dent will be keeping him in check! This camp is booking up fast so book early to avoid disappointment.

But in case you can't make it to my camp here's a few words from Rob Daffern, the leader of week two, to encourage you to book onto his camp...

"The week should be the usual balance of hard work and enjoyment. Myself and Assistant Rachael Bowers will do our best to keep James under control. Everyone welcome, the sunshine has been pre-booked. See you there..."

By the way, this will be a bit of a doggy camp with a few of us on both weeks bringing our four-legged friends - who I'm sure won't say no to being stroked! [*but who will of course be kept safely out of the way of the work - see letters page ...Ed*]

If Wales isn't your cup of tea then the opposite side of the country sees the first of two camps. On the **Ipswich and Stowmarket Navigation** at Baylham Lock the two weeks of camps have been cunningly split apart by a few weeks to allow the first section of new concrete to go off properly before we lay the second batch. In 2008 wrg



Martin Ludgate

Cotswolds: Eisey Lock awaits our attention

got muddy demolishing and then rebuilding the lock head. This year Liz Wilson will lead you into the lock chamber for a major rebuild of the main chamber walls, beginning on 11th July to 18th July. What do you reckon, Liz?

"Could this be the best site for a canal camp this summer? I think so! It's picturesque, the work is interesting, the locals are lovely and the village hall is practically your dream accommodation. We'll be doing some big-style lock repairs with a chance to have a go on the excavator or dumper, and of course a mix of social activities."

Chris wicks will be assisting Liz, with Chad Reed as her head chef extraordinaire!

Next we head down to the **Cotswold Canals** and to Eisey Lock, in a very pretty area and very quiet and relaxing... until the Canal Camps fun begins! Our friends in NWPG and KESCRG will each be leading a week's camp there, running from July 11 to 25. Thanks to the visiting weekend work parties throughout the winter things are moving along well and this summer will see work start on rebuilding the lock chamber walls. But enough from me: let's hear about it from Adam 'Digger' Morris:

"Hello all, Digger here, the last Navvies said that I am assistant leader of the KESCRG camp, it's always nice to be kept in the loop! Bobby is leading us all at Eisey Lock this year and our main task is to start rebuilding the brickwork chamber - so we need bricklayers and muck mixers and some people who want to learn how to do this as well. I'm sure that other jobs will crop up throughout the week such as 'sun cream application operatives'! Our chefs for the week are Nigella Gaskell and Delia Penn so no worries there. However, a slight concern at present is that we don't have any accommodation - we are on the 93rd e-mail about this so hopefully it'll get sorted in time! Another concern is that we don't have many bookings yet so come on regulars, pull your trowels out!"

That's all for now. Next time we'll have the latest on the August camps. In the meantime go to www.wrg.org.uk and get booking!

James Butler