

Mail Room Services

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Cotswold Canals Restoration

My thoughts, comments, ideas, recommendations etc on the restoration so far

Received

Not in any particular order.

On completion the Cotswold Canal will be a popular canal forming part of a 3-4 week cruising ring from Saul, Gloucester, Tewksbury, Stratford on Avon, Kingswood Junction, on to the Grand Union to Napton, down the southern Oxford, through the Duke's cut, onto the Thames to Lechlade, then up on to the Cotswold Canal and back to Saul

Until completion, however, the Cotswold Canal remains an isolated canal. True it will be connected to the National Waterway Network but it can only be accessed by a two and half hour trip down the River Severn from Tewksbury. The River Severn is tidal as far as Tewksbury, and at best is a boring waterway with high banks, nothing to see and at times high flow rates. Together with the nightmare which is Gloucester Lock, the Severn is not a popular waterway.

Bear in mind that many of the cheaper boat insurances only cover non tidal waters. This will preclude many boats from visiting the Cotswold Canal.

Certainly boats moored on the G and S canal will be keen to see what has been done but any boat turning on to the Cotswold Canal at Saul will be committed to a two day, 20 mile, 20 lock trip even if they only want to shop in Stonehouse. This is solely due to the current lack of winding holes, the only one we have at the moment is at Stroud Brewery but several sites exist where winding holes can be constructed.

Sapperton Tunnel was surveyed in the mid 70s by Freeman Fox who concluded that restoration would cost £10M. Multiply £10M by inflation, less a bit perhaps because tunnelling techniques have improved since then, and the Trust will be faced with a huge expense to reopen the tunnel. The Freeman Fox report is on file somewhere.

I feel that too many, especially Stroud D C, expect too much from a restored canal. Certainly to live or work beside a restored canal is very attractive but I can't see that the canal will generate hundreds of jobs. Certainly contractors will be used during the restoration but these jobs will evaporate on completion. Hopefully maintenance work will be done by volunteers.

Money will always be a problem. As I have said so many times before any fund raising is good fundraising but the level of fundraising at the moment is totally inadequate. Selling books, logs or boat trips yield an income which in terms of canal restoration is just petty cash.

Whilst income from donations, gifts, appeals etc are always welcome, there is no substitute for a reliable, regular and substantial income.

To this end I have suggested that the Trust invest in a very well equipped marina with a target of raising £1M gross per annum, £100,000 being available on the day it opens

This suggestion was rejected out of hand by the Chairman with no reason given. Apparently my letter was passed to our Fundraiser who again saw no reason to reply to my letter. All this at a time when the Trust is appealing for fundraising ideas.

True, there is a proposal to build a small mooring capable of taking perhaps 20 boats plus a pub/cafe which even if it was highly successful would only put the income from such a project into the upper reaches of petty cash.

I am reminded of the definition of a camel. A camel is a horse designed by a committee! There are just too many involved in the restoration at the moment and those involved seem to have no experience of canals. A minor and unimportant example of this is the installation of mooring pins just on the Stroud side of the railway viaduct. For the longer boat this will be quite a tight turn and the last thing they want are boats moored in the available manoeuvring space.

Far more serious is the decision to incorporate a river that floods at any time of the year in to the canal system in the Whitminster area.

No one in their right mind would incorporate a river into a canal when an alternative solution is available.

The black clouds of the future must centre on the unbelievable decision to install lock gates so early in the restoration when stop planks would have been adequate. By the time the canal is open as far as Brimscombe these wooden gates will be more than 50% life expired needing perhaps £1M plus to replace, wooden gates having, generally a life of about 20 years.

Far better to replace these gates, and any new ones, with steel gates. Design and costing for steel gates already exist which indicate that steel gates could be in place for 60 years, depending on the water quality, after which they could be removed, any mechanical damaged repaired, regalvanised and refitted for another 60 years.

Whatever material or design the Trust chose, lock gate replacement will be very expensive.

We shall need that marina!

The latest nail in Stroud's coffin is the new Lidl in Dudbridge. Boaters will shop here rather than Stroud.

Nearer Brimscombe I would suggest that Goughs Orchard Lock is dismantled to be rebuilt in the port area. Keeping the canal at a lower level will substantially reduce the cost of the road crossing.

Brimscombe Port. Be honest with the developer and warn them that there is an unknown quantity of asbestos in the port area. Might be 10 tons, might be 1000 ton. Failure to do so could result in lengthy delays and increased costs

So, I look forward to the reopening of the Stroudwater Canal. I shall invite all the surviving members of the old Stroudwater Canal Society on to my boat to take part in the grand reopening cruise. Perhaps we could be the second boat in the procession?

An observation. In the early days of the Stroudwater Canal Society the average age at the AGM was perhaps 35. Today the average age of those attending a Cotswold Canal AGM is over 70. How do we get younger people involved?

Suggestions.

Construct more winding holes Perswade Green King that it would be their interest to finance a winding hole and moorings on the Saul side of the A38 roundabout

There could be a winding hole between Downton road bridge and Ryeford double lock

A third winding hole could be located just above Dudbridge top lock on the edge of Marling School playing field.

The Stroud News and Journal of 19May details a scheme to improve the Wallbridge area adjacent to the canal. This would be an ideal opportunity to incorporate a winding hole.

Ensure that controls for lift bridges and swing bridges are sited on the towpath side of the canal otherwise single handed boaters will be unlikely to use the canal.

Since the demise of horse drawn boats boaters have little use for towpaths and seldom use them. Certainly towpaths attract the general public to the canal side which may result in more support for the restoration

However if boaters have no use for the towpath perhaps local Parish Councils should contribute financially to towpath improvements (Perhaps they already do) but leave the actual work to Trust volunteers who do such a good job. So I would like to see Trust money spent on canal restoration rather than towpath improvements

Reconsider the financial benefits of a marina



One of the founder members of the Stroudwater Canal Society

Appointed the first Fundraiser

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