

## Undercurrents

### Pooling resources

In a Lords debate on schoolchildren's swimming, brought by Lord Cryer (Lab), Baroness Smith of Malvern (Lab) claimed 591 swimming pools had closed in the last 16 years, Baroness Davies of Devonport (Con) adding that 25 are closing per year, wages and fuel costs being major factors. As a result, many fewer children are learning to swim. As a watersport, we should all strive to be able to swim.

Lord Storey (LD) added that safe water rescue should include line throwing. The canoe lifeguards have taught us that we are mostly not as good as we would like to think.

Pools are often used for canoe polo. Even when these facilities do not close, the closure of others puts pressure on those remaining.

The Canal & River Trust have launched a new programme in Nottingham to help black men feel safer and more confident in and around water.

Funded by Sport England, Mandem Swim offers black men the chance to learn to swim in a supportive environment, build water confidence and start to enjoy the benefits of spending time by water. The sessions are aimed at men who have never learned to swim as well as those who feel nervous in or near water and would like help overcoming their fears.

The charity has been running a similar programme aimed at black women in Nottingham, Swim Sista Swim, for the past two years. In that time, the award winning programme has seen more than 150 women taking to the water for the first time with some going on to compete in national paddling competitions.

Research from the World Health Organisation shows that members of the black community are statistically at greater risk of drowning. At the same time, black men are underrepresented in the water based wellbeing activities run by the trust, including canoeing.

### Montgomery mast removal

During the Second World War the SS *Richard Montgomery* sank in the Thames estuary. It contains more explosives than any other wreck in the world and could cause an explosion exceeded only by a nuclear device. Its three masts project above the water but there is concern that corrosion could cause one to fall and trigger an explosion so they are to be removed. While the wreck is well buoyed, the masts give a precise indication of its position and would show if it rolled.

### Getting the hits

While in the school Scouts we undertook a climbing trip to the Cairngorms that took in four of Britain's five highest peaks. We were well equipped, well briefed and had undertaken previous trips preparing us. High on Cairngorm we encountered a couple from Abington with two young children in wellington boots. I remember the details because we were horrified about how ill prepared they were and the risks they were running.

Sadly, unprepared and ill equipped people on mountains are becoming increasingly common. Mountain rescue teams are carrying out ever more rescues. Often, their patients are not injured, just out of their depth, depending on rescue calls to get them out of trouble. The 50 years old injured climber of the past has been replaced by the early 20s adventurer who has read that the mountains are a fun place to be for excitement.

It seems that ever more people are being encouraged onto the hills by social media. This is being countered, especially in America, with

warning notices and with barriers to stop people falling over drops. The wild places are becoming more like theme parks.

Back in those earlier days there was a trickle of incidents of Scouts in canvas kayaks, again without safety equipment and limited knowledge of the risks. These days they are more likely to be on paddleboards, often on the sea, unaware of the risks and assuming they can do anything a sea kayak can do. Even on the coast or at lochs there have been fatalities of people swimming or walking off beaches with subsequent complaints that there were no notices to tell them that the outdoors can be dangerous.

The issue seems to be social media sources trying to promote the excitement of the outdoors for maximum hits rather than giving the rather boring safety education.

### Grand Union Canal extra locks

The Grand Union Canal Transfer scheme will use the canal to move up to 113l/s of water from Minworth to Chaul End, near Luton, with a flow rate up to an additional 1.1km/h. A number of additional locks will be installed and water levels will rise but the canal should have a more secure water supply with less risk of drought closures.

### Pill boxes to bat boxes

CRT have converted two pill boxes on the Kennet & Avon Canal to bat caves at Garston and Hamstead locks. Unlike the £100,000,000 HS2 bat tunnel, bats are expected to be on the inside. At the same time humans are locked out, avoiding the less savoury activity to which some of them have been subjected.



*The bat cave at Garston Lock.*

### Registering personal locator beacons

New measures to strengthen search and rescue response to incidents involving people with Personal Locator Beacons have come into force.

When PLBs are discarded or change ownership the new details must also be provided.

When a registered PLB or EPIRB is activated, HM Coastguard can use the details supplied, such as emergency contacts, to gain crucial information to support rescue efforts and send the best resources to help.

False alarms can be traced more efficiently, too, keeping rescue teams on readiness for real emergencies and avoiding unnecessary missions into potentially dangerous conditions.

The registration requirement does not apply to PLBs on unpowered