

## Northenden Weir breakup

Northenden Weir on the River Mersey, which has been in a poor state, began to break up significantly in the centre at the beginning of November although the edges are often dry. It was of particular danger to canoeists as the damage on the sloping face could not be seen from upstream. The EA were working with the local canoe club to address the dangers to users.



Confusing notice on the New River Ancholme at Brigg, where there is nothing to portage.

to Ellesmere Port National Waterway Museum, the Peak Forest Canal and Bugsworth Basin, the Lancaster Canal, Stanley Flight to Wigan Top Lock on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, the Weaver Navigation including Anderton Boat Lift and the Trent & Mersey Canal. To achieve Green Heritage Site Accreditation winners must understand and take action to conserve the heritage value of their sites and help people to understand and enjoy the unique history of these places and communities.

## Weed issues

The weed azolla has been a particular nuisance in the East Midlands this year. CRT have been tackling it by releasing 2mm long weevils which eat into only this plant, which then sinks to the bottom of a canal and rots. Locations treated include the Chesterfield Canal, the Grantham Canal and the Dearne & Dove Canal at Barnsley. The weevils will not tackle other invasive weeds, however. To clear floating pennywort a floating digger had been used between Meadow Lane Lock and Beeston on the Nottingham & Beeston Canal. Contractors tackled 35km of the River Soar and Grand Union Canal between Aylestone Meadows in Leicester and Kegworth and canoeists have been helping to clear places hard to reach. Over 500t of the weed has been removed this year in the East Midlands. It was introduced 40 years ago as a garden pool decoration but can grow at up to 200mm per day, requiring a constant battle to prevent it from choking our waterways.

Also unwanted is litter. Long Eaton United under 11 boys' football team swapped to CRT canoes to collect



Before and after views of the Dearne & Dove Canal at Swinton.

four large bags of litter from the Erewash Canal upstream of Trent Lock.

## Illegal beaver imports

Defra have confirmed that the only legal beaver releases in England have been on the River Otter although these are bound to have spread elsewhere. All others are illegal. Wales has not accepted beavers as native species. A Devon Wildlife Trust official said releases require a process 'to support communities to live alongside beavers', which suggests that beavers are the central residents around which others must adapt. Landowners who make space for beavers could be rewarded through agri environment schemes although farmers are far from being the only people whose properties are being damaged by beavers. The damming of rivers has yet to get serious.

## Green remodelled

The Green River in North Carolina was one of the hardest hit by November's hurricane. Nearly every rapid on the river has changed, often substantially, with sediment gone, leaving large bare rocks, often undercut, some of which will roll. Infrastructure has suffered major damage in the area, the access road having been severed both upstream and downstream, making emergency access difficult. Other rivers in the area will have their own problems, perhaps not so obvious. Damage to roads approaches 10,000km with 1,000 bridges and culverts gone. It is not going to be a canoeists' playground for a while.

## Helmsdale wires

The suspension footbridge over the Helmsdale River at Kildonan Lodge (NC903224) is being replaced. Wires above the river are not generally a problem but could be dangerous if not seen when the river is in spate. Portage of this grade 1 rapid is straightforward on the grass banks.

# INCIDENT FILE

## Bren Orton drowned

White water expert Bren Orton was drowned in May in the Melezza River in Ticino after getting caught in a recirculating feature. A search by 15 paddlers failed to find him and he was finally recovered a fortnight later from Lake Maggiore by a sailor. A specialist in running big water and falls, he drew many expressions of regret from across the white water community.

## Teifi fatality

The body of a missing canoeist was found near Cardigan bridge at the beginning of June. The 24 year old from Tewkesbury had capsized and gone missing the previous evening, following which an extensive six hour search had taken place.

## Curtains for two

Two paddlers died after going over the 9m Curtain Falls with two open canoes in Crooked Lake in the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness Area. The incident began about 4pm in May and continued into the dark. A search helicopter was called but the pilot had difficulty finding anywhere to land, initially on a rock island and then on the bank. Used to carrying out search operations only, she had to make several journeys carrying medics as well as the injured. None was wearing a buoyancy aid and two were lost. The following day a float plane was sent to recover a fifth member of the party who had chosen to go angling rather than canoeing on that afternoon.

## Surfski provides buoyancy

A 17 year old kayak paddler was rescued off Hawaii after 12 hours overnight clinging to his capsized surfski. High winds had tipped him over and separated him from his paddle and his group. He was located at 4am, the ski giving him support and making him easier to locate.

## Are accident statistics misleading?

United States Coast Guard fatal accident statistics for 2023 show paddler deaths up 5% to 183 while total boating fatalities were down 11% to 564. Only open powerboats had a greater fatality rate. However, I have the full Recreational Boating Statistics for 2022 and think that the figures given could be misleading. Of those who drowned, 87% were not wearing buoyancy aids and 75% had not received safety instruction. How did those figures compare with the total participation levels? What proportion of non registered canoes and kayaks did not have fatalities despite not wearing buoyancy aids? Of paddlers who died, over a third had less than 10 hours of experience and nearly three quarters had less than 100 hours.

I was trying to compare the number of people who had accidents with the total number of users as a proportion for each category of user, particularly canoes, kayaks and paddleboards (separately). What are the implications of the present sharp rise in paddleboard user numbers?

How representative were the number of registered boats of each kind compared with the total number of users? What proportion of canoes, kayaks and paddleboards were registered (as a rough figure, accepting that it varies from state to state)? If group A have 20 fatalities compared with 10 for group B it points the finger at group A, wrongly if group A is far larger than group B. It sounds bad if 47 of those who died were not wearing buoyancy aids or had been drinking or using drugs but how do such numbers compare with the total population of users? The nature of causes of death suggested powered craft were involved primarily yet how do their numbers compare with the numbers of canoes, for example?

We had a particularly wet and windy June and July in Britain in 2022 which would have reduced the number of non serious users. Did the Americans? I would be inclined to compare statistics over several years rather than read too much into what happened in a single year, which could have produced isolated unusual results, as with Covid in 2020 and 2021. I asked for further details but was unable to obtain a response.

Rhode Island now has a law requiring all paddlers to wear buoyancy aids at all times. Are they required for swimmers who are in the water but do not have a large, buoyant, conspicuous object to hold?