

Coastwatch updates

The National Coastwatch Institution have updated their list of stations. Burnham on Sea and Minehead are new, Meolfre has reverted to Point Lynas and Caister and Herne Bay have closed. Daylight watch is kept up to 365 days per year by a team of 2,650 volunteers who can spot distress flares, capsizes and other emergencies, beyond the ability of computers.

Safety conflicts

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch's *Safety Digest* is always published in three sections, merchant, fishing and recreational vessels. One of this year's editions has the latter introduced by Samantha Ward, who has been a member of Royal Leamington Spa and Cardiff University canoe clubs. Although there were no canoeing incidents in that issue, it explains that she is the safety lead for PUK, one of whose key safety messages is 'Always wear a buoyancy aid' although that is often inappropriate. She added that she had learned from many inspiring paddlers over the years who evoked admiration for their ability to make fast decisions. However, 'if plans change an updated written assessment must be completed'.

She says, quite correctly, 'we are probably all familiar with choosing a date, travelling a long way, and going ahead with an activity in unsuitable conditions'. Indeed, paddlers have died as the result of access restraints that have prevented paddlers from selecting a date when river and weather conditions were appropriate.

Boat numbers down

CRT have seen a 1.4% drop in boat numbers and a 1.2% drop in licence payments. Both figures were most significant in London and the southeast.

At the CRT Annual Meeting the subject of PUK's compulsory canal licences was raised, CRT being paid



Tim FitzHigham at Tower Bridge.



Cuatrin/Szubska setting their record on the Thames.

£300,000 by PUK last year. They said 'We know that many members don't use our navigations, so we gain from it being an all inclusive payment that offsets the lower amount paid per member.' In other words, CRT make more money than if only selling to canoeists requiring licences and paying the full cost.

The Broads Authority cannot balance their books for navigation, expecting a £400,000 shortfall for the next year. Broads tourism brings £780,000,000 to the region's economy, the boating being the central attraction. Defra provide a grant but none of it is allowed to be used on navigation. Navigation all has to be funded by boat licences but boat numbers have been declining.

Impact of sport

One of the more depressing debates in the Lords this year was on Community Sports: Impact on Young people. In a maiden speech Lord Shamash (Lab) said 'Central to this is working within communities in which clubs - not just football clubs - are based.' Many of their lordships could not get beyond football. The Earl of Effingham mentioned rowing but, apart from a couple of references to the cost of swimming pools, there was no other mention of watersports in over two hours of debate. Too many of them could not distinguish between watching sport and actually taking part. It was noted that 22% of British adults 'play' at least one sport but school sports have declined by 12% since the London Olympics. Other than promoting the football clubs they prefer to watch it was difficult to see what these people achieved in that time.

A Commons debate in October considered sport and the performance of TeamGB and Paralympics in 2024. The range of sports considered was far superior to those considered earlier by the Lords. At a time when much is being said about sewage pollution, Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset & Poole, LD) in a maiden speech stressed the difference of being on the water from being in the water and made reference to Poole Harbour Canoe Club on the River Stour. Steve Yemm (Mansfield, Lab) paid tribute to local Charlotte Henshaw.

Another debate in November on TeamGB and the Olympic and Paralympic Games did spend more time on swimming pools, the only watersport mentioned, of most interest being the Minister learning to swim by being thrown in at the deep end of a pool. As before, little distinction was made between taking part in sport and watching others participating.

On a more positive note, Jane Hunt (Loughborough, Con) presented a petition signed by 66,000 people with a request 'that the House of Commons urges the Government to introduce a requirement for schools to provide annual swimming lessons as part of the physical education curriculum.'

Are they thieves?

National Highways said proudly that more than 94.6%o drivers crossing the Thames at Dartford paid the Dart crossing correctly. Put another way, more than one in every twenty drivers got fined. In 2023 the contract for collecting fees changed and the rate changed to one in every dozen being fined. Are these all dishonest drivers? Should we be proud of such a charging system? The same method is used for the Mersey Gateway and is being proposed for the Lower Thames Crossing.

Thomas promoted

Gareth Thomas (Lab) has less time for freestyle paddling this year, having been promoted to Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Dept for Business & Trade). Sir Michael Fabricant (Con), who chaired the All Party Parliamentary Group for Waterways and helped PI with access, was one of the Conservatives who failed to make it through the General Election. Caroline Lucas (Green), who did more than any other MP to address river access, had already announced her intention not to stand again.

More Lichfield

Restoration of the Lichfield Canal continues. Another 500m has been reopened from Darnford Lane towards Huddlesford and then towards linking up with the Coventry Canal.

Kestrel rescue

A Norwich family rescued a kestrel from the River Wensum while paddling their open canoe. The bird was happy to perch on their canoe trolley and recover until they reached a portage.

Sustainable AI?

Alibaba Cloud have been helping the ICF to find ways of increasing sustainability. Considering the vast quantities of power needed to process AI data, this seems a two edged sword.

New Maori queen

Nga Waiho i te po has been selected as only the second Maori Kuini. Just 27 years old and with a Masters degree in Maori cultural studies, she is expected to see a shift in Maori representation. Her installation ceremony involved a wooden throne on a war canoe and a flotilla of waka or war canoes took part in the funeral of her father, Kiingi Tuheitia.

Leven restoration

The River Leven in Fife has been subject to changes by SEPA. Kirkland Dam has had rocks added below it to remove the stopper. Burn Mill Dam has been removed completely to allow the river to restore itself naturally.

City centre rivers petition

Following the death of a 16 year old in the River Ouse in York, a petition has been presented to Parliament calling for all city centre rivers to be well lit at night and with CCTV coverage. The petition was signed by 1,428 people. Are there better ways of addressing this?