

# ACCESS & environment

## Will highly protected Welsh marine reserves affect you?

Recreational interests are still not being properly represented at discussions on implementing Highly Protected Marine Reserves which have the potential to be restrictive to those who use the sea. Kirsty Lindenbaum led a symposium in Bangor on November 19th on Coastal Mapping for Integrated Management to look at zoning the Menai Strait, Conwy Bay and Anglesey. Only the ISKA represented recreation, together with people who happened to have diving and sailing as personal interests. Other recreational users will have to hope that environmentalists will look after their needs.

Local stakeholders will be consulted, which may be of little consolation to the Birmingham Navy and other users from outside the area. Restrictions may include the sometimes extensive intertidal zone and 20km out to sea.

Much use will be made of modern technology. It was suggested that a website could include multilayer information including detailed marine charts, terrestrial maps, maps showing the location of each species, access and launching points, footpaths, where to eat and drink and far more. It will be a one stop shop for information, even if nobody had given any thought to the legal implications of failing to keep charts updated. As well as showing the restricted zones, it could help event organizers with their planning. The information should also flag up on the satnav systems (sic) which most boats are now assumed to carry, telling them when they are about to enter a forbidden zone.

Consultation on zoning will be via the website although it is unclear how users will learn of its existence. Most canal users are still unaware of the Waterscape website, for example, despite the fortune spent on it. Amazingly, the organizers in north Wales did not know if there are comparable websites for other parts of the British coast.

Feedback from another area of Wales came from Tom Luddington, who talked of his work for the Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum. This involves direct contact with many outdoor interests, is not an environmental organization as such, produces fact sheets on the voluntary Pembrokeshire Marine Code for instructors and users and suggests preferred locations for activities rather than imposing banned zones. Pembrokeshire has seen a 6% increase in watersports in the last year with a sharp increase in sit on top kayaks.

Tom had been only partially successful in rerouting the Round Britain Powerboat Race away from wildlife areas and had failed to impose a speed limit for the race over part of the route. His presentation raised the question that if seals or seabirds vacate land to come out to inspect a boat does that constitute disturbance?

Elsewhere, environmentalists have been known to take inspired guesses at what conditions their chosen species would like and then extrapolate this to suggest what they might like better if changes were made. This may included getting cleaner conditions which may be better for people but less advantageous to wildlife. The Sandford Principle of erring in favour of assumed wildlife preferences gives environmentalists tremendous

power to disrupt other legitimate interests, including tourism and recreation.

## Canal maintenance will be top priority

Charlotte Atkins' Adjournment Debate on the future restoration of the inland waterways drew the largest attendance for some time, not just on canals but on any topic at Westminster. Cross party support heard 18 MPs speak and discuss as many schemes across the country.

The central issue is funding shortfall. There is not enough cash for maintaining the existing network and undertaking restoration work on further sections of canal. Government funding peaked in 2004 and British Waterways are now retrenching, notably having pulled out of the Cotswold Canals restoration partnership without consultation when faced with the repair costs of a major breach on the Monmouth & Brecon Canal. David Drew was keen that BW should not be allowed to sell their stake in Brimscombe Port, at the heart of the project. BW's action is having an adverse effect on funding, confidence and volunteers, who are a vital part of canal restoration.

While only 3% of visitors are boat users, they are an essential part of this unique network which provides facilities for so many other users, walkers, cyclists, anglers, wildlife and canalside businesses. Yet boats are facing increasing problems. Recently there has been a dramatic drop in boater satisfaction. Angler Mike Penning said there is only half a metre of water over the silt in the Grand Union Canal at Hemel Hempstead but he has seen no dredging over a period of years.

The canals have implications for drainage and flooding, where they can be a valuable tool. Yet the Environment Agency say dredging is not the answer, complained Alistair Burt. Scouring does not work on rivers in East Anglia, with their slow flows. The EA must be made to change their policy and listen to advice. A report on the 2003 floods in Bedfordshire has been put back repeatedly and he wanted to know when it would be made public.

David Heyes, talking of the Hollinwood restoration work in Manchester, drew attention to the need to preserve lines. Local authorities need to consult on plans with guidance mandatory and a requirement to tighten up on planning law.

Several restoration schemes were discussed. These will pay for themselves many times over in social benefits, work creation and increasing property values but there will be no financial benefit to BW, who will only acquire further maintenance responsibilities they cannot afford and will have little chance to develop new businesses alongside. The credit crunch is even reducing the value of any major city centre sites they may wish to sell to raise funds.

The Minister was encouraged to look outside DEFRA for funding. The benefits of the canals spill over to health, education, culture, sport, transport, tourism and the economy. They are levers for recovery. The Government need to draw support from the relevant ministries. They will miss the canals at their peril. A joined up solution is needed, even if other ministries are struggling with current financial difficulties without additional payment for canals. It was suggested that if any job creation schemes are planned, canals will be an

## And I quote...

... 'Our problem is not that we are running out of water. It is one of mismanagement.' This prominent quote was in the Aug - Oct issue of *Your Environment*, published by the EA themselves.

## Roy boulder

A large boulder has fallen into Heidbanger rapid at the top of the Roy gorge. Most people would already have been portaging it but it is now extremely dangerous at lower levels although there may still be a route through at high level for those who insist.

## Scottish access confrontations

There was a marked increase in the number of access confrontations in Scotland last summer with violence threatened or actually taking place, including a hook and line being cast into a paddler's leg. A common theme seemed to be an individual angler unaware of modern Scottish law while anglers around him remained friendly.

## Lyon parking

New parking has been set up at the lower end of Glen Lyon where many paddlers take out. There is also a gauge at this point so that you can check whether to go any further up the glen.

## Don't disturb the birds

An environmentalist has told ISKA that paddlers have disturbed birds on the islands near the Menai Bridge. She asks that care should be taken not to cause disturbance during the breeding season.