

## Loch Faskally access

Paddlers are asked not to use the Boathouse Café carpark and pier for launching onto Loch Faskally at Pitlochry. It is private but there are other places which can be used to get onto the loch.

## Canadian navigation rights in danger

The Canadian government are reviewing their Navigable Waters Protection Act to speed up planning applications. Changes could result in navigation rights no longer having to be taken into consideration when new projects are being developed.

## Reservoir planning blight

Thames Water have been defeated over their proposal to build a huge reservoir between Abingdon and Grove across the line of the Wilts & Berks Canal. However, they are now intending to propose a slightly smaller version in several years' time, ensuring planning blight remains over the area and leaving the restoration route of the canal in confusion.

## Men of war

Several Portuguese men of war jellyfish have been washed up on the beaches of south Devon and Cornwall this summer. Their stings are particularly dangerous.

## Burnmouth carpark lost again

As part of the long running problems on the Tay at Burnmouth, the carpark has again been closed to paddlers after two years of permitted use. Elsewhere around Scotland there have been several unprovoked confrontations, particularly on the Avern.

# ACCESS & environment

## Welsh Assembly report recommends new access legislation

Following a petition by Canoe Wales to the National Assembly for Wales, their Petitions Committee has undertaken a study and produced the report *Access along Inland Waters*. Firstly they visited the Teifi and talked to various interests including Llandysul Paddlers Outdoor Education Centre. Both the positions of canoeists and of anglers were fully set out. A riparian owner permits launching opposite his house. The National Coracle Centre at Cenarth allow paddling on their section but anglers had put up 'no canoeing' signs regardless. While the positions of canoeists and anglers were strongly put, the positions of CCW and the EA were somewhat weak.

The party then met the Scottish Government's Policy Officer to learn that the Land Reform Act was working well with very few problems although there had been misgivings beforehand. Game anglers were strongly opposed to interpretation of the legislation rather than the legislation itself whereas coarse anglers said it had had next to no impact. The SCA had had 35 complaints about incidents in the previous year, relating to six rivers and about as many people, mainly on the Tay. The Scottish Government thought these were antisocial behavioural issues rather than access issues and should be dealt with as such.

The conclusions suggested that all should have a right to use the rivers of Wales and should not depend on the vagaries of permissions or ability to pay. Demand is likely to increase but the current position is confusing. Agreements can work but it can take years even to get opposing interests into the same room. The present situation is untenable and unworkable and there is a need for new Welsh legislation. Concerns need to be addressed, however.

The committee's clear recommendations are a detailed enquiry leading to a new statute placing all on an equal footing based on the Scottish legislation but that it should be accompanied by an enforceable code of conduct.

Canoe Wales are to be congratulated on submitting a petition which has been acted upon. The Petitions Committee are to be congratulated on bringing all the issues out into the open in a short but very clear report. Now it is time for the Welsh Assembly to act in the interests of a fairer society.

## Griff Rhys Jones reignites access debate

After a long period with access kept out of the public gaze it came back with a bang in June. Comedian Griff Rhys Jones presented a six part BBC TV series paddling rivers and did not pull his punches on access. While the series was popular in its own right, it brought access to the fore with much media debate, resulting in a number of newspaper articles, not always favourable.

For example, a *Times* leader on Jul 11th was one which was surprisingly badly informed. It was subheaded *The rivers of Britain are far too important to be*

*opened to a free-for-all*, apparently unaware of the present situation. It suggested that access legislation in Scotland would need canoeists 'to leap like salmon to navigate its cascades', apparently unaware that there is little water which salmon can ascend which canoeists have not descended or that there are unlimited supplies for those who want less extreme water. It talks of the hatred of 'privilege' rather than a wish to share our birthright in a country fit for heroes for which our parents' generation fought, not a country for the rich. Angling was claimed not to 'disturb the peace of rivers as much as canoes and larger craft' although many people know better, not least the rapidly growing numbers of kayak anglers. Anglers were claimed to 'pay for the upkeep of our waterways' through their fees although huge amounts of public money are spent on fisheries for anglers. Anglers were claimed to be 'the largest class of participatory sportsmen by far', just over half the number of walkers and with many using the sea or ponds rather than rivers. Having twice as many participants as canoeing does not justify their almost exclusive use of our rivers. Without angling the rivers 'would otherwise rot', apparently, although they have not done so in Scotland or other countries and the best salmon catches south of the border are on the Tyne, the one catchment which is largely open to canoeists. 'Fish need clean water to live' which does not explain why anglers have to be kept away from lock cuts on the Thames, the most disturbed areas of water. 'Paddles destroy spawn and spawning grounds', an allegation which is never accompanied by specific evidence. Paddlers International asked if we could hold up the example of the confrontational situation on the rivers of England and Wales and say we have got it right while Scotland and the rest of the world are all wrong.

Talking on Radio 4's *Today*, Charles Clover claimed that militant canoeists are being stirred up by the national canoeing bodies. Paddlers International suggested that 98% of canoeists don't belong to any national canoeing body. The only militant body had been CRACK, who had been told that quiet diplomacy was the way forward, a policy shown to have failed almost completely in the 21 years since the Seiont demonstration.

One of the most telling comments came at the end of a Radio 4 chat programme (*Midweek?*) with Griff Rhys Jones as a guest. An older and respectable actress said she just wanted to go out and disturb a few anglers.

Paddlers International congratulated Griff Rhys Jones and the BBC for bringing the issue out into the open.

## Marine & Coastal Access Bill passed

At the end of July Natural England released mapping of the audit of England's coastal footpath as the next stage in preparing for the Marine & Coastal Access Bill. Two thirds of the route has a secure legal right of way, the rest having only permissive use or no permitted access at all. Over the next two decades 13% will be