



Operations report October 2021

Introduction

This month's work party ran for two weeks, and the weather was reasonably good. The work site had sufficient distance between work areas to keep the Covid 19 risk low for our volunteers.

However, when the term "Space, the final frontier" was used in Star Trek, little did they know that there was a second meaning which applies to canal restoration! As other restoration teams have found, when working on a linear project, you start with plenty of space to store materials, machines, and tools. As the restoration progresses the space available for that storage decreases and every available flat area space becomes precious.

In our case the first two days of the work party were taken up with moving the "carefully" piled "things that might be useful one day" to piles in new places to give working space. Bearing in mind that disposal always costs money, we actually managed to discard some items for minimal cash!

Bridge 4 Swing bridge walls: - Bricklaying



The offside wall is coming along nicely!

For those of you who have been following our progress, the towpath wall has been finished, including various brick features and stop plank grooves. Whilst we know what the stop plank slots were there for, we don't know why most of the brick features are there. Maybe the walls have been rebuilt and modified over the years.

Many photos were taken of the offside wall before it was carefully demolished because it was beyond simple repair and also unsafe. All we have to do now is to follow the pictures and the towpath wall

example and rebuild it all, including the curved “lead in wall” whose foundations were only found relatively recently.



Here we can see part of the “features”, including part of an arch, being rebuilt.

We had teams of bricklayers working away on most days during the work period.

Dog and Badger steps

Bob looks pleased to have finished the animal steps and takes a short rest.



We took the decision to introduce what we call “dog steps” some time ago. It seems that dog walkers were happy to let their dogs go for a swim in the rewatered canal sections, but we weren’t so happy to see that the dogs scrabbled the bank away when it was time for them to get out of the canal. The most wear and tear occurs at features such as bridge abutments and mooring walls where the sloping bank is the first opportunity for animals to get out, since they can’t climb the vertical faces.

We also know that many other animals need to cross the canal, and some may fall in accidentally and need a way of getting out. The concept is simple. We put in a few rows of concrete blocks with every other layer pushed forward to make a step. Concrete has been used behind the “raised” blocks to make sure they stay put. When the canal is in water the bottom step will be at water level. These features will be placed at intervals along the bank and at the ends of any bank structures

Some concrete can be seen between the “steps” and the brick wall. It is there to make sure the Bentonite paste water seal, between the Bentomat waterproof liner and the wall, is protected from damage and doesn’t move in future.

Bank excavation and lining



Looking towards Little Tring from Bridge 4. In the centre is the concrete pipe “roadway”. On either side the Bentomat lining and solid blocking has been extended even more!



Again, for those you who haven't seen this before, this is the working conditions in the same place a year ago! (300mm plus water depth)

Pipe capping /Concrete roadway



Yes, it does look like more mud! But this is the new end of the concrete pipe capping/roadway, and we can now see the fence at the beginning of the old refuse tip.

The reason for the pipe capping/roadway is that: - where the glazed ceramic pipeline to take water from Wendover to the pumping station still exists (starting at Drayton Beauchamp), it represents a long-term possibility of damage to the new Bentomat lining system should the pipe collapse. The canal bed was excavated and more concrete laid to extend the roadway/pipe capping. As the picture shows we are now reaching the area where the historic refuse tip starts (also our car park and storage area!). The capping/roadway now extends some 500m from bridge 4. We are now making a roadway only (no pipe underneath) because the pipeline makes an exit through the bank to Little Tring pumping station, at the place where the concrete was laid last month. The roadway will help to overcome the winter mud problems that have been an unpleasant feature of restoration for many years!

Training day

Training Volunteers to work on our projects is a vital and ongoing part of our programme. We can easily hire excavators and dumpers, but drivers have to be trained and approved before they can be set to work. The Waterways Recovery Group section of the Inland Waterways Association runs a training and assessment scheme for new (and older) drivers. Under that scheme volunteers from our team are trained to be Instructor/Assessors and then they, in turn, train and assess the rest of our volunteer driving group. Once someone is trained, does some practice work, and is then assessed they get a "licence card" to allow them to operate the machines within the boundaries of our work site. As with all new drivers, getting basic driving and safety instructions takes them to a skill level where they can then safely go on to learn the finer arts for all the site tasks required. This part can take many months or years!

Over two days of the work party our existing trainer/Assessor was able to train another volunteer to become a trainer/assessor. This will spread the workload and ensure we can continue to train as many volunteers as required.

Duke of Edinburgh Bronze volunteering

Over the course of the last three work parties, we have had the help and assistance of three younger volunteers who are working their way through the DofE scheme. They were put to work on a variety of tasks including using a surveying telescope, trimming back overgrown hedges, mixing concrete in our ancient mixer, and helping with concreting the hollow blocks on the bank lining. We enjoyed having them on site and we can only hope that it will encourage them to volunteer on a canal or two in the future!

Tidy Friday

Another successful day! The Whitehouses area is to be converted into a Wildflower meadow. The first stage of cutting the existing grass etc to ground level was completed over half of the area ready for seeding. The other half was strimmed down but will need a second round of strimming before it can be seeded.

We will be receiving another large batch of tree saplings from the Woodland Trust. We are planning to have a tree planting session on Friday 19th November. All welcome!

Tony Bardwell

Wendover Canal Trust

Operations Director