

MONMOUTHSHIRE & BRECON CANAL REGENERATION SITE VISIT – 1 NOVEMBER 2017

Andrew Stumpf, Sam Anderson-Brown & Emily Lewis (Canal River Trust)
Councillors David Mayer (Newport), Richard Roden (Monmouthshire), Anthony Hunt, Alan Jones & Stuart Ashley (Torfaen) & Jackie Charlton (Powys)
Community Councillor Stewart Matthews (Croesyceiliog & Llanyrafon Community Council)
Richard Dommett, Roger Francis & Wyn Mitchell (MBACT)
Kate Blewitt (Torfaen) & Joy Howells (Newport)

1. Overview

An important trip took place especially for new members to view various regeneration project sites along the Mon Brecon canal between Brecon and Cwmcarn undertaken over a 25 year period, almost during the same time that the MBC Regeneration Members Partnership has existed. The itinerary began in Cwmcarn followed by Brecon Basin, Brynich Lock, Talybont, Llangynidr, Llangattock, Goytre, Pontymoile Basin, South Sebastopol, Five Locks, Crindau, Fourteen Locks and returning to Cwmcarn. Stops were made at the following destinations:

2. Cwmcarn Aqueduct

The first stop was Cwmcarn Aqueduct. K Kinsey 'Principal Engineer from Caerphilly County Borough Council was in attendance to show members the relining work which had been carried out in this area.

This stretch of the canal had suffered from leakage for many years. The structure which is listed as an ancient monument had been dewatered for a very long time. Under CADW guidance the structure has been re-lined. The new lining has been covered in a protective concrete with the retaining walls and copings being replaced with the original engineering bricks and stone copings. Beyond the Aqueduct walls the original stone supporting structure has been faced with recycled plastic piles which give the appearance of wood. The water feed for the Cwmcarn aqueduct and canal channel to Newport is feed from the Cwmcarn reservoir which has been reinstated.

During the restoration of the aqueduct a sluice and old lock had been discovered. Unfortunately the lock had been filled with rubble following the construction of the A467. Caerphilly Council are hoping to carry out some work on the adjacent green area of land were the first locks of the Cwmcarn flight was located including some historical display about the site. If funds become available the Council is looking at the possibility of restoring the lock, whilst it would not be a working lock it would prove an interesting feature and provide a turning facility for visiting craft.

3. Brecon Basin

David Morgan of Canal River Trust was on hand to speak to participants about the continued restoration works on the Watton Lime following a programme of industrial structural restoration project which commenced in 1993 with the reconstruction of Llangattocks and Goytre Wharf Lime Kilns. At this stop on the trip the training of volunteers in the use lime mortar and adopting a length of canal to maintain had been a particular success.

During 1994 a partnership project team was put together by British Waterways, Powys County Council, The National Parks Authority, Brecknock Borough Council and members of the local community. In 1995 the canal site was chosen for a new theatre, two canal basins, historically constructed bridge and adjacent cottages. The joint venture was made possible by Powys County Council giving up its highway yard, British Waterway providing additional land and the two authority's architects working together on the design. The 6.5 million pound project was part funded with a European grant. Richard Dommett advised this had been a very successful partnership project.

The Dragon Fly passenger trip boat and smaller boats were available for hire and visiting craft can stay for the night. This was also the start of the walking and cycling route for the Taff Trail. Lime kilns had recently been discovered in close proximity to the basin and many volunteers were involved in restoring the kilns and help set up the Lime Kiln Trail which was funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Brecon Beacons Trust.

The theatre was designed for multi-use function and is in general use throughout the year

A Stumpf informed members that since Canal River Trust had become a charitable organisation in 2012 it had attracted a lot of volunteers which had resulted in 16% of the waterways in Wales being adopted by communities. He also confirmed that 96% of use of the canal is use of the towpath.

4. Llangattock

Unfortunately this section of the canal was constructed on a bed of sand and soil so it was not as stable as other parts some of which had been lined with clay. This had resulted in a large number of leaks and due to the presence of sand any breach of the banks would result in the water/sand mixture travelling far distance. This section of the canal had been re-lined last Winter using Welsh Government funds of £2m. Funds had been forthcoming as the Welsh Government had recognised the positive role of the canal and how it helped improve the economy and how it fitted in with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

Thirteen training sessions had been held for volunteers during the above work and there had also been filming by the programme Countryside of schoolchildren at the canal.

Councillor Charlton left the trip following the stop at Llangattock.

5. Goytre Wharf

The woods surrounding the car park for Goytre Wharf are the property of Natural Resources Wales. Canal River Trust owns approximately 8 acres of land.

Goytre Wharf is home to Redline boats where canoes, day boats or a narrow boat for the day or week can be hired. There is a café in place and also a small exhibition area which is run by a unique alliance between CRT and MBACT volunteers. There is a holiday cottage on site (which originally housed the weighbridge mechanism). Once again the lime kilns were restored in 1993 along with the original wharf buildings, weighbridge cottage and the provision of an operating base for Red Line Boats.

Goytre Wharf is also recognised as a must visit site for students of any age and has excellent disabled access.

The MBACT new trip boat (The Lord Raglan) is moored at the Wharf and is presently being refurbished. It will be operating next year.

It is being suggested that next year's Canalathon start at Goytre Wharf passing through Torfaen and Newport and finishing at Cwmcarn supporting Visit Wales 2018 'Routes to the Sea'

6. Pontymoile

A short stop was made at Pontymoile where the Monmouthshire canal was joined to the Brecknock and Abergavenny canal at the Tollhouse in 1812. The Tollhouse still stands and in the past has been a canal museum and holiday cottage. A small tea room can be visited, part of a development plan to make the basin more attractive as a site which would be home to many leisure activities such as canoeing, cycling, walking, healthy living linked to the Cwmcarn Mountain Cycle Centre.

7. Sebastapol

A visit was made to the new housing development at Edlogan Wharf. This is a large development through which the canal runs. The development is presently in its early stages but will eventually become a Visitor Hub and will include a mooring area in the canal together with some shops and a pub. The developers have agreed to dredge the canal where it runs through the development. The existing concrete bridge will be reconstructed to a more traditional design.

8. Five Locks

This part of the canal is the present end of navigation.

A bid for £6m had been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund to rebuild the bridge to navigational standard, reconstruct the 5 locks, dredge and reline the canal to Mt Pleasant with moorings and turning area at Pontnewydd Park. Although the bid had been turned down it had been re-submitted. If forthcoming these monies would be used to either install 2 locks or a deep (double) lock so that the canal can pass under the nearby road to re-connect with the waters on the other side. It would also be dredged and re-lined.

9. Crindau

Newport's previous LDP 2011 to 2026 had included an allocation of 10 hectares for regeneration to include housing, office, commercial and leisure use, a mooring for canal boats and also a mooring for sea-going vessels as this would be the terminus of the canal, giving access to the River Usk.

As no developer was currently on board the Planning Inspector considered that the scheme could not be delivered in the present plan period and it was therefore removed from the LDP, a decision which could affect the future plans to restore the remaining abandoned section of the canal to create a complete waterway from Brecon to Newport and Cwmcarn with a link to other inland and coastal destinations in England.

Enhanced flood defences are currently being installed to protect existing housing stock in the area.

10. 14 Locks

MBACT has now taken up the running of the 14 Locks Visitor Centre. The centre includes a meeting room, café, facilities and also a small exhibition room. Items in the gift shop include works by local artisans and the centre also hosts art exhibitions and craft fairs. The centre is proving extremely popular with many visitors including groups of schoolchildren.

The flight is protected as an Ancient Monument by CADW although the Top Lock outside of the protected area was restored in 2003 by a combination of contractors and volunteers and two pairs of locks were restored in 2012 with Heritage Lottery funds

The canal towpath is part of the national cycle route 46 and regular guided walks depart from the centre.