

Success at the end of the HLF project, **“Why Do Canals Have Towpaths?”**

The Horse Boating Society (HBS) has been engaged in a Heritage Lottery Fund project titled “Why Do Canals Have Towpaths?” over a 3 year period from 2005. Nearing completion now, it will be time soon to consider fully whether the project has been a success or not.

At the start, horse boat Maria, the flagship of the HBS, undertook an 80 mile journey to the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) National Festival at Preston Brook. The boat is Britain’s oldest surviving wooden narrow boat, built in 1854, and she was loaded with 10 tons of limestone and horse drawn by Queenie. At the IWA Festival, the HBS was given an award for “the most enterprising and meritorious journey to the IWA National, 2005”. The HBS had requested that the chief executive of British Waterways would attend the IWA National to meet HBS members and horses, and to receive the HBS guidance document which had been prepared in consultation with BW staff during 2004/5. Robin Evans did attend, and later congratulated the HBS on the guidance document, “Horseboating, Preserving Our Waterways Heritage”. At a follow up meeting in Manchester, BW staff indicated that BW wanted its logo on the document and for it to be part of BW internal guidance.

However the BW managers had not ever been made aware of its presence until they read it in the autumn of 2007! As a result, progress to achieve goals set out in the document was slow and minimal during 2005-7. For example, 3 business units when requested by HBS to remove impassable motorbike barriers, declined to act, even if it was only one barrier. In 2007, the situation came to a head when the journey to the World Canals Conference was imminent. The HBS was being disregarded and no preparations had been made to help the horse boat on its journey. Under BW Watford direction, suddenly there was great action. All the impassable barriers were removed and trees between the towpath and the water were cut down to facilitate use of the towing line and to fulfil the Veg Pledge. By way of thanks, the HBS made one of its awards to the BW ground staff who carried out this work at the eleventh hour. To justify the work, the HBS explained how very rare it is to see a horse drawn boat nowadays, far less commonly seen than a steam train, yet it would be sad if steam trains could not pass if there was the equivalent of motorbike barriers on their routes. The canal network was merely being made available for what it was always designed for – boat horses on the towing path. After all, “Why Do Canals Have Towpaths?”

In 2008, a journey to the IWA National at Autherley Junction is planned. The iron horse boat very appropriately is called Success. Will these last months and miles of the HLF project be a success?

SUCCESS TO THE IWA NATIONAL

Boat – Success, owned by Ian Braine of Canal and River Services, Weston Wharf. Iron horse boat of Bantock firm in BCN, circa 1910. Restored in 2003.

Horse – Prince, owned by Jayne Bradley, former head horse keeper at the BCLM, Black Country Living Museum. Kindly being loaned for the journey to Sue Day. Clydesdale X, 16.3hh, age 19. Recently worked on the Delph Locks of the BCN.

Journey – to the IWA National Festival at Autherley Junction, Wolverhampton - approximately 24 miles, 14 locks. Starting from Weston Wharf, on T & M Canal.

Route - 3 miles and 2 locks on Trent and Mersey Canal to Great Haywood Junction, then 21 miles and 12 locks on Staffordshire and Worcester Canal.

Dates of journey – August 12, 13, 14 - Tuesday to Thursday inclusive

Overnight stops – provisional

August 12, between Walton on the Hill and Acton Trussell (c.9 miles, 2 or 3 locks)

August 13, near Calf Heath (c. 9 miles, 10 or 11 locks)

August 14, mooring near Autherley Junction on Staffs and Worcs, or secure marina

Person in Charge – Sue Day, founder and chairperson of the Horse Boating Society

Crew – Horse Boating Society members and maybe others, such as Midlands Heavy Horse Association members, and boat owner Ian Braine and friend/s.

Challenges – the horse Prince and driver Sue Day are unfamiliar to each other; there may be motorbike barriers along the route which may need to be unlocked or may be impassable to boat horses; the horse is taller than Sue's boat horses so low headroom such as under bridges could be a problem; horses have individual reactions to narrow spaces so narrow gaps in barriers or bridges could present difficulties. The preferred width is 5 feet minimum, most horses will pass through 4 feet if necessary, but after that it will be the horse's choice! This boat has not been horse drawn for a very long time, so it will need to be checked carefully to ensure all is in correct order for safety. If there is congestion at locks, horses can become impatient like people!

Health and Safety – Sue Day, Person In Charge, NEBOSH certificate 2004.

All crew members MUST fill in the HBS Crew Forms, available from the website, www.horseboating.org.uk

All enquiries to Sue Day, 01457-834863, 07711-121-056, or sueday_horse@yahoo.co.uk

BACKGROUND

The horses of Sue Day have towed boats to the following IWA National Festivals:

1995, 80 miles to Chester

1998, 110 miles to Salford Quays, via Manchester

1999, 200 miles to Worcester, via Birmingham

2000, 310 miles to Waltham Abbey, via Birmingham and London

HORSE BOATING SOCIETY FOUNDED JANUARY 2001

(2001, Horse boating on the newly opened Huddersfield Narrow)

2002, 180 miles to Huddersfield, via Manchester and newly opened Rochdale Canal

(2003, Horse boating with passenger boat on Rochdale Canal at Hebden Bridge)

2004, Cancelled IWA Festival journey due to Sue's broken shoulder

2005, 80 miles loaded with 10 tons of limestone to Preston Brook

2006, a horse boating demonstration only on the River Thames near Beale Park,

loaded with 12 tons of coal, for promotion of the IWA Diamond Jubilee

(2007, 100 miles to World Canals Conference, to Liverpool and return)

2008, 24 miles to Autherley Junction from Weston Wharf

Three awards have been received over these years:

2000, IWA National, Waltham Abbey

2005, IWA National, Preston Brook

Both were for "the most enterprising and meritorious journey to the IWA National".

2008, the BURA and TWT Waterway Renaissance Awards for the HLF project still in progress, as a commended finalist.

Sue's horses Billy Boy, Bonny, and Queenie took the boats to these IWA Nationals. Billy Boy is buried at Sue's home, Queenie is in retirement, and Bonny is the proud mother of her first foal so is unavailable for work. Bilbo Baggins, brother of Bonny, has been in training in 2008, but was injured in June when shot at by individuals with Ball Bearing guns. He is currently recuperating, having damaged both hind tendon sheaths. A Prince is coming to the rescue of the journey to the IWA National!

At two Nationals, the Horse Boating Society brought more than one boat.

At Huddersfield, the iron horse boat Elland, probably the world's oldest cargo carrying narrow boat built in 1840, was accompanied by Maria built in 1854.

At Preston Brook, Maria loaded with 10 tons of limestone, was joined by Gifford.

In 2008, Success will be the boat to make the HBS journey, but it is also hoped to bring in more than one boat. It is likely that Kildare will be horse drawn down the Wolverhampton Locks on Friday August 8. Another boat may come from the BCLM or return there after the IWA Festival. All are welcome to come horse boating! Contact Sue Day for any further information.