

**Progress Report** (October 2022 to February 2023 inclusive)

**1. Tilting weir control system**

The principal water control mechanism for the Canal is a 3m x 1m tilting weir located near Burlescombe.



In addition to manual operation, The Canal Ranger Service are able to control it remotely, avoiding the need for continual visits to Burlescombe to fine tune water levels, or emergency visits during heavy storms in the middle of the night (as was required prior to its installation). The system had worked very well since its installation in 2014, but unfortunately the Dutch company that provided the 'Greenbox' control system and

website portal for controlling the weir ceased operating last year.

Fortunately, an alternative company were able to provide an equivalent system (although this one is based on sending the control box text messages, rather than logging into to a website portal). However, the entire control box (circled red in the photo) including motor, gears, and solar panel, had to be replaced at notable cost.

The new control system was installed in January. Following a number of technical teething problems with the SIM card and calibration of the weir, the system is now working well.

**2. Community Safety Accreditation Scheme**

The Canal Ranger Service staff are all now accredited under the CSAS scheme and have received their ID cards and badges.

The Community Patrol Boat Crew are still waiting for their police vetting to be completed, before they are able to become Accredited Police Volunteers.

Following further training and scenario-based roleplay exercises, the accreditations will be publicised in the Spring.



### 3. New noticeboards and A2 information panels

Last year, the Canal Manager was successful in applying to the Westcountry Branch of the Inland Waterway Association for funding towards two new noticeboards and the design and production of a series of 11 new A2 panels to replace the very dated ones currently found in the noticeboards.

The two noticeboards have been delivered and installed at Sampford Peverell picnic site and Greenway Bridge.



The Canal Manager has provided designers with the text and images for eight of the 11 panels so far and will provide the remaining content by the end of February so that the

panels can be completed by the end of March. The panel for the Canal Basin is almost complete. A scan of the latest draft is shown below:

## Canal Basin, Tiverton

### Historic wharf

The Canal Basin was once a hive of industrial activity with banks of smoking limekilns and barges being loaded along the wharf. The panel mounted on the rock to your left and the displays in the visitor centre (the timber building to your right) provide more information and artist's impressions of the Canal in its heyday during the mid-1800s.



The horse-drawn barge, Tivertonian (photo: Christian Schotter)

### Sea Cadets

The Canal Basin is also home to the Tiverton Sea Cadet Corps (based in the building in the car park below). Formed 1943, this waterside Unit was commissioned and named T.S. Hermes by Lady Amory in September 1953 accompanied by Sir John Amory, Mr. Derrick Amory and Admiral Sir Maurice Mansergh RN.

The Unit became affiliated to H.M.S. Hermes when it was launched in February 1953 and a strong bond developed over the years and continues with the H.M.S. Hermes Association.

Tiverton Town formally adopted H.M.S. Hermes in 1967 and the Freedom of the Borough was conferred on the Ship in 1973. H.M.S. Hermes was decommissioned in 1984 and the SCC Unit is now affiliated to H.M.S. Enterprise.



T.S. Hermes in 1953



### Horse-drawn Barge

Nowadays the Canal Basin is a pleasant picnic site and home to the much-loved horse-drawn barge Tivertonian. This living heritage attraction is operated by the Tiverton Canal Co and has been taking passengers for trips since 1974. A barge trip offers the opportunity to step back in time and enjoy the tranquillity of the Country Park, whilst gliding along to the sound of birdsong and the horse's hooves steadily clapping along the towpath.

The barge operates to a timetable between 1st April and 31st October. Further information is provided at the gift shop and ticket office to your right, and on the company's website: [www.tivertoncanal.co.uk](http://www.tivertoncanal.co.uk)



Sea cadets practicing boat handling

**The Grand Western Canal**  
Country Park & Local Nature Reserve

The Moorings, Canal Hill, Tiverton, Devon EX16 4HX  
Telephone: 01884 254072 Email: [gwcanal@devon.gov.uk](mailto:gwcanal@devon.gov.uk)  
[www.devon.gov.uk/grandwesterncanal](http://www.devon.gov.uk/grandwesterncanal)





The Canal is owned and managed by Devon County Council, in partnership with Mid Devon District Council.  
This information panel has been generously funded by the Inland Waterways Association

The Canal Manager made another application to the same IWA fund before Christmas for funding for a further three noticeboards and was informed in February that the bid had been approved by the funding panel. These noticeboards should be delivered and installed in the early summer.

#### **4. Mowing and raking wildflower meadows**

In recent years three wildflower meadows have been created on land beside the canal (at Bamfylde Close, Tiverton; the Community Orchard, Sampford Peverell and near Ebear Bridge, Westleigh). These meadows flourish in low-nutrient soils and so the best form of management is to cut and remove the vegetation in the late summer / early autumn once it has set seed. This ensures that the nutrients held within the plants are not returned to the soil through decomposition. The process of cutting and removing the vegetation shakes out lots of seed and also ensures the lighter conditions needed for seed germination and for seedling establishment.

Last autumn the Canal Rangers hired a power-scythe for a day to see if this made a better job of cutting the meadows than their trimmers or ride-on mower had managed previously. They were pleased with the results and as the reciprocating blade makes such a clean and regular cut at ground level, raking up was much easier and more thorough as a result.

Volunteers helped the Canal Rangers to rake up the cuttings and at each site the cut material was composted in one or two big piles, providing a welcome refuge for grass snakes and slowworms.



#### **5. Dipping ponds and paths at The Moorings**

Many local primary schools take advantage of the opportunity to discover more about the aquatic life found in the canal during Ranger-led visits.

Pond-dipping takes place in the three ponds located in the garden of the Canal Ranger Service offices at The Moorings

One of the ponds is connected to the canal but has always been a tricky one for children to dip in as the level they stood on was much higher than the



water level. To make it easier and safer, we engaged an excavator contractor to dig down the standing level by 30cm. The Canal Rangers and volunteers then edged the paths, built new steps and used crushed stone to re-surface all around, including the main path through the garden which had been becoming increasingly puddy.



## 6. Warnicombe Bridge 'bypass'

The towpath under Warnicombe Bridge is one of the narrowest points along the canal. It is also a very busy location, being close to Tiverton and within the horse-drawn barge operating zone. Of all the bridges the horse passes under, this is the one that causes the most concern to the Tiverton Canal Co. with near misses with cyclists passing under the bridge not uncommon.

Fortunately there is the opportunity at this bridge to enable cyclists (and pedestrians if they wish) to bypass the bridge hole and pass to the side. In order to facilitate this, the gates have been locked open and an excavator contractor scraped out the soil along the line of the path.

The Canal Ranger Service then brought in several tonnes of crushed stone to dress the path ensuring it is the same standard as the towpath. Finally the signage was changed to indicate the new route for cyclists to follow. The Tiverton Canal Co. are pleased with the improvement and believe it will significantly improve safety for all users.



## 7. Badgers in Battens embankment

A badger sett in the embankment below the towpath near Battens Bridge has been destroyed under licence from Natural England. An ecologist was engaged to establish that the colony had alternative setts in the vicinity, to submit the licence application, and once this was secured, to conduct a closure of the sett using one-way doors. Once the 21-day period on non-occupation by badgers had been reached, the sett entrances were buried by an excavator contractor. In order to prevent any possible future reoccupation of the remnants of the sett complex, the embankment will be lined with wire mesh in March. Vegetation will grow through the mesh hiding it within a few months.

## 8. Towpath and car park sweeping

Each autumn the Canal Rangers spend a lot of time using a leaf blower to clear leaves off car parks and wooded sections of the towpath. This is a time-consuming job and after 20 minutes or so, the weight of the blower and the vibration start to get uncomfortable. It is a necessary task as mud will start to form wherever leaves are left in any significant quantity.

In order to make leaf-clearing a quicker and easier task, the Canal Ranger Service has purchased a powered brush attachment for their ride-on mower.



As well as making quick work of fallen leaves, the brush has also proved very useful in sweeping aside loose stones in sections of towpath that have been recently resurfaced, such as in Burlescombe, as shown above.

## 9. Fenacre water transfer system

As agreed at the JAC meeting in October 2022, the Chairman, Cllr Slade, wrote to Devon County Council's Chief Planner pointing out the despite the Country Park's best efforts to encourage and support Aggregate Industries in their Section 106 agreement requirements relating to an improved water transfer system, very little progress has been made. He asked what actions DCC could take as a planning authority to ensure Aggregate Industries meets its legal requirements as intended through the S106 agreement.

At the time of writing a formal response has not been received. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting on March 7<sup>th</sup>.

## 10. Hedge laying

Three of the seasonal Volunteer Days (held on the second Sunday of each month from October to March) have focussed on creating a hedge by laying a line of small Hazel, Hawthorn and Holly trees growing along the waters edge beside the boat moorings between East Manley Bridge and the Aqueduct.



The aims of this works are to improve security for the boats (with the hedge making it difficult to access the landing stage from the road behind), to reduce shading and algae growth on the boats, and to create a denser habitat for birds and mammals to nest in.

## 11. Hedge planting

The January Volunteer Day was held at Burlescombe, where a new hedgerow was planted along the offside boundary of the Country Park. The weather was pretty awful but despite the rain, hail and mud, the volunteers did a fantastic job and got around 60m of new hedge planted and guarded. Students from Blundells School sixth form are due to plant a further 25m here during a Community Partnerships Field Day on March 6<sup>th</sup>.



## 12. Ash Dieback related tree works

Following a survey of ash trees within the Country Park in late summer 2022, some 36 ash trees with extensive dieback were identified for felling. Tree surgeons have spent number of days working at the canal during the autumn and winter and plan to spend a week in early March finishing off this work.

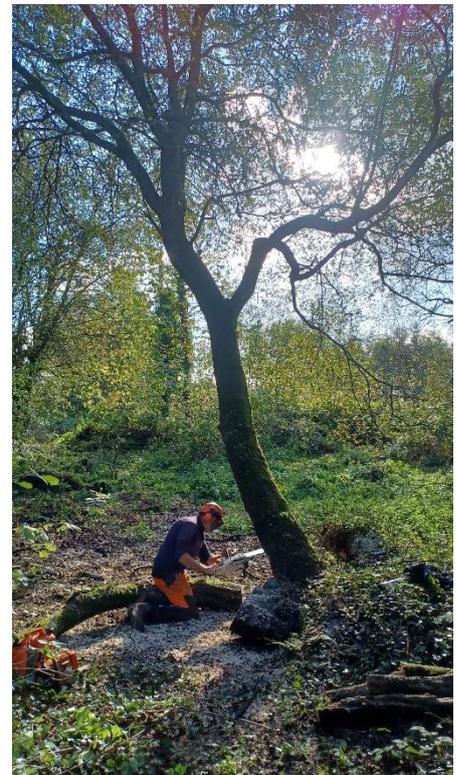
## 13. Other tree works

The Canal Rangers, assisted by volunteers and Bicton College work experience students, have been working on the maintenance barge for much of the winter, cutting back overhanging branches, coppicing bankside trees and cutting vegetation on bridge abutments. Working out from Tiverton, they have reached Sampford Peverell at the time of writing and although the works was delayed for two weeks when the canal froze, they still hope to reach Waytown Tunnel by mid to late March when bird nesting will prevent any further work of this nature.

A number of works not related to ash dieback have been and will be carried out by tree surgeons, including dead-wooding some mature trees in high use areas, re-pollarding a Poplar near Sampford Peverell Bridge and a willow near Ebear Bridge, and helping the Canal Rangers to clear some large fallen and hung-up branches.

## 14. Boehill Pond

Last autumn, the Canal Ranger Team spent a day working at Boehill Pond – a largely silted up pond on the offside bank between Boehill and Holbrook Bridges. The pond is nowadays just 30cm deep during the winter months and dries out completely during the summer. It was completely shaded by surrounding trees but over recent years some of the surrounding trees have been felled to let in more light.



Following the work last autumn, the pond is now open to sunlight from the south and east and later in the year a digger will be used to re-excavate the pond which as a result should hold water year-round and provide a much-improved habitat for a range of wildlife.

## 15. Bank and hedge trimming

All of the usual winter bank and hedge trimming was undertaken by an agricultural contractor in January. Two sections of hedge (the hedge on Swing embankment and a short section of new hedge beside the Tidcombe bridge gate) were left untopped with a view to these being laid in the next year or two.

## 16. Health and Safety Review

Every three years the Country Park is subject to an internal DCC Health and Safety (H&S) review, whereby an officer for the H&S team spends a day auditing all aspects of the Country Park's H&S processes to ensure compliance with legal requirements and DCC policies. The Country Park passed the review with 100% compliance and a special thank you is due to Canal Ranger Joanne Roberts who liaised with the H&S officer and ensured that all of the requisite documentation required for the review was up to date and to hand.

## 17. Bridge nameplates

New bridge nameplates have been installed at Tidcombe Bridge and Rock Bridge. A new nameplate is also due to be installed at Battens Bridge during March. Thanks to Halberton Parish Council who have paid for the Rock and Battens Bridge nameplates, and to Tiverton Town Council whose annual contribution to the Canal revenue budget will cover the cost of the Tidcombe Bridge nameplate (amongst other works along the canal within the parish).



## 18. Premises works

During the winter, a number of repairs and safety improvements have been undertaken at the Country Park's Canal Basin premises. These have included:

- New fire doors throughout The Moorings and in the Visitor Centre
- Repairs to vandalised door frames and locks in the gents' public toilets
- Repairs to the public toilet roof and replacement of slipped slates
- Unblocking and re-lining of the drains at The Moorings

The works at The Moorings have been funded by corporate DCC budgets, but the works at the public toilets have been paid from the Country Park revenue budget.

## 19. Raft Race

At the October 2022 JAC meeting, members were informed of a proposal to host a charity raft race on the Canal in August 2023. It has since emerged that attempts are being made to resurrect the Exe Struggle raft race later this year. With those plans seemingly more advanced, Dave Poxon, who had been leading the proposal for a canal raft race has decided to put off this idea for now as he and the Canal Manager did not want to compete with the Exe Struggle if it does happen. If it fails to materialise, then the idea of a canal-based raft race may be resumed in 2024.

## 20. Bird and Bat boxes

As part of a Countryside Stewardship (Capital Grants) agreement, the Country Park has secured funding for undertaking a range of works, including hedge laying, hedge planting, tree planting, coppicing bankside trees and putting up wildlife boxes. On a couple of wet and windy days during November and December, the Canal Rangers and volunteers kept dry in the workshops building 23 bird boxes and 12 bat boxes. These are being fixed onto suitable offside trees as the Rangers work their way along the Canal in the maintenance barge doing the annual tree maintenance work.



## 21. Tourism promotion

Whilst the Country Park revenue budget has very little funding available for tourism promotion, efforts are made to make use of any low-cost opportunities that are available. The Country Park has renewed its paid-for listing on the Visit Mid Devon website and leaflet, and has free listings on the Visit Devon and Visit South Devon websites. These latter two have been updated recently with thanks to Philip Brind for helping to facilitate the updates with staff at the two associations.

## 22. Benches

The Canal Rangers have built and installed seven new memorial benches during the winter, located near Warnicombe Bridge, Tidcombe Bridge, Rock Bridge, Swing Bridge, Battens Bridge and two at Tiverton Road car park. Five of these have replaced benches that had rotted or had been vandalised and had to be removed.



## 23. Swans

Most years the Canal Ranger Team are called out on a few occasions to rescue swans that have got stuck in gardens or behind fences, or that have become entangled or hooked by angling tackle. This winter has seen a much greater number of call outs, mainly to Burlescombe where the combination of two swan families living in close proximity and a group of cygnets that seem unwilling to depart, has led to months of ongoing battles between swans. Individuals have had to be rescued from ditches, behind fences and even from a gap between the mesh tunnel and the parapet wall of Black Bridge (the old mineral line bridge). The Canal Ranger Service are willing to spend the time to rescue these iconic and much-loved wild birds, but it does impact on time available for other tasks.

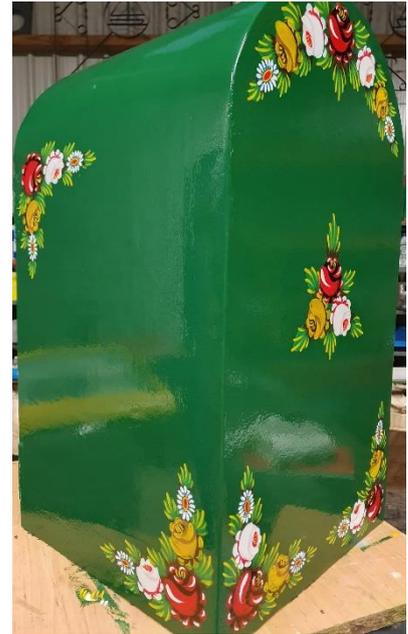
The Vale Vets in Tiverton must be thanked for their willingness to offer free assessment and initial treatment for any injured swans that the Canal Ranger team bring in, and for their help in dealing with other ill or injured wildlife (including a badly injured buzzard that had to be put down).

## 24. Ducks Ditty electricity box

The existing electricity box which serves the Ducks Ditty floating café is becoming unsafe as the hinges and fixings of the metal box have rusted and the interior wooden backboard has rotted. Philip Brind flagged this up with the Canal Manager and said he was willing to provide a new box more in keeping with the attraction.

Following a series of meetings with electricians from the National Grid and a DCC-approved electrical contractor, the Canal Manager has raised orders for a month-long shutdown on the line to enable Philip Brind to install the attractive new box (shown in the photo), and for the contractor to connect up the supply to the café.

The work should all be completed by the end of March.



## 25. Community Patrol Boat shed

The Community Patrol Boat crew were in need of a base to store equipment and the Skipper enquired if there was any space at the Canal Rangers premises in the canal basin for a shed. After relocating some materials and equipment, as space was created beside the workshops, and an electricity supply was extended to serve the new shed prior to its installation.



## 26. Outdoor First Aid

Working as part of the Canal Ranger Service brings inherent dangers, whether it be from the tools and machinery, the nature of the site and its wildlife and human visitors, or just driving to get to work sites. These risks are managed as far as possible through risk assessments and safe working practices, but there is always a chance of accidents and injuries, whether it be to staff or volunteers, or to visitors.

The Canal Ranger Service staff are all qualified first aiders, having completed the four-day St John Ambulance First Aid at Work training course many years ago and then numerous two-day requalifications every three years since. Whilst these courses are excellent and are highly recommended, they take place in warm, comfortable, well-lit classrooms and the main audience for the courses are those working in offices and factories.

Together with the Ranger team at Stover Country Park, it was decided it would be good to do a first aid course specifically designed for those working in the outdoors. Having found a

specialist trainer with huge experience in outdoor leadership and first aid, they undertook a two-day course at Stover at the start of October.

Whilst all the basics were covered, the emphasis was very much about focussing on what really matters to save lives and prevent deterioration of a patient's condition. There was a strong focus on heat-related conditions, and during outdoor role play scenarios they all got to feel just how quickly the cold can get to you if left lying directly on the ground in cold, wet conditions. Keeping patients off the ground and protected from wind and rain can make a huge difference if stuck outside for any length of time.

The course was a refreshing change from the usual first aid requalification and attendees all learnt a lot and came away with a better appreciation of what really counts in life threatening situations.

## 27. Management plan / Green Flag Award

The Canal Manager has updated the Country Park Management Plan, adding 'missing' sections relating to the national strategic context with reference to Natural England's Country Park Accreditation Scheme; and the local strategic context which summarises how the Country Park contributes to the new DCC Strategic Plan and MDDC Corporate Plan. A copy of the latest version of the plan will be emailed to JAC members for reference (but not as a formal part of the agenda pack).

Having updated the Management Plan, it was included as part of the annual application to the Green Flag Award scheme as part of the supporting documentation, in addition to a response to the judge's comments from last years judging. This year the Country Park is due to be mystery shopped by a Green Flag Award judge to ensure no obvious drop in standards.

## 28. Events

The following events have taken place since October 2022:

- **Farmwise:** Canal Ranger Jo Roberts attended the annual Farmwise schools event at the County Showground, where she ran workshops on tree identification using a selection of twigs and leaves gathered from along the canal.
- **Wild Wednesday bat box event:** During the half term week, Canal Rangers Jo and Craig ran a bat box building workshop at The Moorings, with dozens of families attending and building their own bat box to take home and put up in their gardens.

The event was fully booked with 30 children attending making bat-themed hats and decorations as well as the bat boxes.



- **Canal Canter:** Taking place on 30<sup>th</sup> October, this commercial running event was fully booked months in advance.
- **Walk and Talk:** on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, Jo led a walk and talk event between Sampford Peverell and Ayshford Bridge, with 23 people attending.
- **Christmas wreath workshops:** on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> December, Jo led four 2-hour workshop sessions with 57 people attending.



- **Wild Wednesday Christmas decorations workshop:** On Dec 21<sup>st</sup>, Jo led a Christmas decorations workshop with 35 children attending.



## 29. Volunteers

### Volunteer Days

- 9<sup>th</sup> Oct: The Moorings wildlife gardening - Jo & 9 volunteers
- 13<sup>th</sup> Nov: East Manley hedge laying - Mark & 6 volunteers
- 11<sup>th</sup> Dec: East Manley hedge laying - Craig & 6 volunteers
- 8<sup>th</sup> Jan: Burlescombe hedge planting - Mark - 7 volunteers
- 12<sup>th</sup> Feb - East Manley hedge laying - Craig & 9 volunteers

= 37 days

### Midweek volunteers

- Two volunteers and two Bicton College work experience students = 76 days
- Three Duke of Edinburgh Award participants undertaking litter-picking along the canal for one hour per week for 3 months. = 4.5 days

## 30. Talks

On 18<sup>th</sup> January, the Canal Manager gave a talk to the Wellington Tangent group about the history, management, wildlife and recreational use of the Canal.

## Future planned works

### Practical works:

- Slurry sealing Canal Basin paths (due to start March 6<sup>th</sup>, weather-permitting)
- Resurfacing 900m of towpath between Chains Road, Sampford Peverell and Battens Bridge, due to take place during March
- Ongoing tree management works
- Re-painting railings in Canal Basin and planting of hedge at Burlescombe (due to be undertaken on March 6<sup>th</sup> by Blundells School students as part of Community Partnerships Field day, weather permitting)
- Re-staining benches
- Installing new noticeboards
- Installing Battens Bridge nameplate
- Re-excavation of Boehill Pond
- Small scale resurfacing of the towpath to cover over tree root trip hazards near Waytown Tunnel.
- Repair of bank erosion at multiple locations
- Repair of collapsing bank retention wall below Buckland Bridge
- Repair of timber edging at Greenway Bridge (at bottom of picnic site)
- Repairs to East Manley landing stage
- Repairs to Holbrook landing stage
- Resurface under Ayshford Bridge
- Build / install memorial benches, as ordered
- Installation of remaining bird and bat boxes
- All usual mowing, strimming and weed-cutting work

**Management tasks** (\* = ongoing / already in progress)

- Organisation of all works listed above \*
- Supply remaining text and images and approve designs for new A2 noticeboard information panels \*
- Liaise with DCC fleet management on kitting out and delivery of new Toyota Hilux to replace Ford Ranger \*
- Liaise with Tiverton Canal Co regarding replacement of electricity box and backboard beside Ducks Ditty \*
- Update pay and display signage to reflect price changes in April 2023
- Organise repairs to workshop roof
- Organise treatment of Fringed Lily to take place mid-summer
- Organise programme of events
- Working with DCC engineers on Asset Management Plan \*
- Fenacre water transfer system \*
- Complete update of boating regulations and procedures and design/printing of new permits book \*
- Scenario-based test of Emergency Plan (once DCC Emergency Planning Team have capacity – still focussed on covid at present) \*
- Complete the update and reprint of the Canal Visitor Guide \*
- Organise update and replacement of the Ebear dragonfly panel.
- Organise repairs, improvements and updates to Visitor Centre displays \*
- Promote Community Safety Scheme Accreditation publicly
- Organise tree safety inspection and any works that are required
- Ensure ongoing compliance with all relevant H&S policies / guidelines \*