

## **Report on Canals for 20 or 27th April 06 .**

Major repairs on Caledonian and lesser repairs on F&C and Crinnan have all been carried out over the winter and all are open for traffic.

Great news is that Malcolm Blyth in “Blyth Spitit”, draft 1.8m, mast 17m long, made a successful transit of the F&C last weekend, in his words “with relative ease, in 2 days, considering the draft is the limit for water depth. Yes, did touch bottom with lost count of rubs, but mostly only rubs ... except for 5 times when the depth did stop the yacht but a bit of rope work from the towpath, or a surge of extra water let down by the BW bank crew overcame all of these. Cannot praise the BW bank staff enough ... “. Needless to say, I have discussed these spots with BW who are determined to find and eliminate them all. It is a pity BW still rely on the customers to identify trouble spots!! Please do tell the bankies if you do have any difficulty, by email if you feel the matter less urgent, and certainly always to the crew who are taking you through. It speeds up action and encourages proper allocation of budgets.

The BW website is currently undergoing updating so do not rely only on that as a source of information, phone 01324 671217 or 01324 483034 and speak to a non-virtual BW operator! There is a new edition of the Skipper’s Guide which is a really essential and valuable source of information.

The latest major development in the Lowland system is the proposal to form a canal extension to extend the regulated water level down the Carron to just below the GYC. This will entail construction of a new canal section and of a counterbalanced caisson lift which will hoist yachts, still floating with mast up in the caisson, from the tidal water of the estuary up to the level of the Grangemouth docks, and the potential creation of a marina in the “Old Dock” just south of the original canal entrance. The lift will need a huge counterbalance which is proposed to be in the form of a giant Kelpie and will form a dramatic Eastern gateway to the waterway and to the Forth. The “Living Landmarks” initiative is very interested in supporting this plan, but will take heed of public comment. If you are so minded, you could promote this scheme, by writing or emailing to BW, [richard.millar@britishwaterways.co.uk](mailto:richard.millar@britishwaterways.co.uk) setting out whether you feel the benefits would come in enhanced safety, greater tidal access, improved marina facilities at the Forth entrance, better access to the Grangemouth town facilities, interchange opportunities for crew change etc etc. BW would certainly appreciate your support.

The proposal to improve navigation up the River Leven into Loch Lomond is still in study and preparation mode, but BW have included the scheme in their “Assets for the Future” plan.

The re-connection of Port Dundas is progressing well; the new double-locked pound is already built right beside the M8 motorway next to Spiers Warf, and opening has been scheduled in May or early summer. The development of the city-centre marina will only come along with property development which is currently progressing through Planning process, but you can already jaunt up the Glasgow Branch (if your draft is less than 1.4m) and stop, securely, outside of

the Applecross Street BW office and enjoy an evening at the theatre or a day in the Buchanan Gallery? More dredging is planned.

In the Union, the recommended maximum draft is only 1.06m. We need some more dredging here!! But you may now take your boat right into Leamington Basin at the Edinburgh Quay just off Lothian Road, to go to the Festival.

More mundanely the dredger and weedcutters have been in action already this season, and will continue to clear the main channel, along with the use of appropriate herbicides. Pontoons now allow a crew member to jump ashore to assist at every flight of locks and get aboard again afterwards. BW will continue to provide a bank crew for all transits but your manual labour will be appreciated with the gates and will speed your transit. There are more pontoons at Bowling above lock 39, and the Bowling harbour has been cleared of the wrecks, making access to the sealock much safer. The toilets and marinas are all looking and working well. Locations are marked in the Skipper's Guide. Remember to get a pass key when you buy your licence.

Transit license fees are still cheaper than trucking your yacht. The 16-day wanderer ticket is excellent if you expect to spend time cruising beyond the inland waters (as of course all FYCA skippers do) as it gives access to all 3 canals on the basis of actual days spent in the canal, and is valid for a year. Purely as an indication, I still have 5 canal nights available to use this May on my last year's ticket, having spent 3 weeks cruising through and back by F&C, Crinnan and seventeen different sea lochs between Aberdour and Balachuilish. It is good value, quick and decidedly entertaining if you enjoy the Glasgow patter.

The cranes at Grangemouth and Bowling allow effective de- and re-masting and rigging services can be arranged if you need them. Contact to Steve Kelvin at Grangemouth 01324 471535.

Lastly, remember to work the tides correctly at both Clyde and Carron, and get confirmation from the sealock keepers well in advance.

Enjoy you sailing season!!

Andy Carnduff 19ap06.