

Following taken from National Access Forum.

Part of contribution NAFW 62

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Campaigns and Events

British Canoeing, our counterpart in England, launched on 28 November at a reception in Parliament its *Clear Access, Clear Waters* campaign, supported by a new Access and Environment Charter. This campaign calls on the UK Government to give greater public access to waters in England along the lines of Scotland or the proposals made by the Welsh Government in 2017.

The campaign was launched with strong support from Pauline Latham MP and John Grogan MP and included a video which explains simply and effectively why the present access situation is unacceptable: <https://youtu.be/LYWKGf6L-5k>

Although the British Canoeing Charter strictly applies only to England, Canoe Wales has been fully engaged in its development and shares its core pledges:

In support of the 3 pledges British Canoeing makes within the Charter, Canoe Wales will commit to...

1. Champion the case for fair, shared, sustainable open access on and along inland waters to be confirmed in law

- Canoe Wales will continue to press the Welsh Government to implement, sooner rather than later, the proposals for access reform that it set out in 2017. We met with the Minister for Environment Hannah Blythyn on 1 October. She listened attentively but reiterated that “now is not the right time for substantive reform” (because the Government is busy preparing for Brexit) and stated that she would be setting out her intentions more fully by the end of this year. However, she did encourage us to suggest ideas for how land managers might be incentivised to encourage more recreational access, so...
- Canoe Wales submitted a response to the Welsh Government’s “Brexit and our Land” consultation, calling for access to inland waterways to be recognised as a “public good” and for land managers to receive Government support to improve it.

2. Act to protect and improve the health of our rivers; working to protect, preserve and enhance the natural environment

- British Canoeing joined ‘Surfers Against Sewage’ in its Autumn Beach & River Clean during October half-term. While Canoe Wales does not currently have the resources to coordinate and actively promote similar large-scale activity, we hope to join them in next year’s events. In the meantime, we fully support the great work being done by the ‘Paddlers against Pollution’ Facebook group to highlight and encourage volunteer effort in Wales (and beyond) and our Clubs and Members will continue to contribute to environmental clean-up and monitoring initiatives whenever and wherever they can.

3. Commit to inspire more people to be active outdoors; connecting people with their environment and promoting the benefits on our mental and physical well-being

- A key element of the new strategy is summed up by the statement in the Charter that, although “access on our waterways is a matter which has been contested for more than 60 years, we now believe that there is already a strong case to demonstrate an existing Public Right of Navigation (PRN) on all navigable rivers. Until such time as the law is clarified, either in a court or through new legislation being enacted, we will support the right of paddlers to use our inland waters and promote opportunities for everyone to participate responsibly and actively protect and enhance the places we paddle; [and] we will no longer enter into or renew restrictive agreements based on an assumption of the need for permission to navigate. However, we will remain open to genuine agreements and environmental measures to protect wildlife, guided by the principle of taking the least restrictive option.”
- This means we will no longer shy away from advertising where people go paddling and we intend to publish in due course...
 - a) an exciting new online ‘places to paddle’ resource which will provide reliable information to paddlers about access arrangements and a wealth of other paddling-related material across the UK; and
 - b) ‘green guides’ to some of our key rivers, providing access and environmental information to complement existing river guidebooks and online guides.

General Interest

River Wye Glasbury-Hay

Powys County Council has recently announced its intention to consult on proposals for managing commercial canoeing operating from the Council-owned launch site at Glas-y-Bont Common, Glasbury, in response to concerns expressed by fishery owners that too many boats are using the river on peak summer weekends. Canoe Wales expects to play an active role in this consultation exercise, alongside the South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group (SWOAPG) and the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC).

One fishery owner is pursuing a claim for a ‘toll’ of £2000 against one local canoe hire company for craft passing through his property. We are confident that the fishery owner does not have the right to levy this ‘toll’ and are supporting the company with

advice and evidence to counter his claim. Whatever the outcome, this case could establish a significant precedent for future recreational access to rivers in Wales.

Paddler Behaviour at Wye & Usk Access Points

With the winter white-water season upon us, the volume of paddlers using our rivers at weekends has increased recently. While we of course welcome the opportunity for paddlers to get out and use the rivers, we have been disappointed by reports of inconsiderate behaviour at Wye and Usk access points by some individuals (e.g. blocking access to a school car park, urinating publicly and dragging boats over a cropped field). We will do our best to continue to encourage paddlers to act responsibly and 'earn a welcome' – e.g. by liaising with landowners and posting messages on social media and notices on site. We are acutely aware that the inconsiderate actions of a few can have significant consequences for the majority of paddlers (who do appreciate the importance of building and maintaining good relations with landowners and local communities).

River Dee, Horseshoe Falls Llangollen

We met recently with Canal and Rivers Trust staff on-site at Horseshoe Falls (near Llangollen) to consider improvements to canoe launching arrangements (with a view to providing safe and easy launching facilities below the weir, to reduce the temptation for canoeists to launch above and paddle over this dangerous weir). We agreed a plan for some canoe launching steps which would supplement the existing kayak seal-launch and we look forward to these being constructed in due course.

Staffing

We are slowly gathering a network of volunteers across Wales who will be able to support our work on access nationwide. We are encouraging our members to put themselves forward as members of Local Access Forums and now have paddlers represented on Brecon Beacons, Ceredigion and Powys LAFs (and a volunteer for the Pembrokeshire LAF).