

Walking the GRAND UNION

Canals & Waterways Study Group  
LEICS. ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

LEICESTERSHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

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" WALKING THE GRAND UNION " a feasibility study

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## **PART I INTRODUCTION**

### **1.00 OBJECTS OF THE STUDY**

1.01 The Canals and Waterways Study Group has examined the feasibility of walking the towing path of the Grand Union Canal in the East Midlands, and this Report offers a very brief summary of the findings. The long term objective is to achieve improvements to the towing path for walkers, and in the associated waterway corridor.

1.02 The Group consists of interested bodies drawn together by the Leicestershire Environmental Forum, including Civic societies of Loughborough and Leicester, the Old Union Canals Society, the Inland Waterways Association, the CPRE, several Rambling Clubs, and others, whose purpose is the enhancement of all aspects of the waterways in the county.

### **2.00 TOWING PATHS AS FOOTPATHS**

2.01 The Grand Union towing path is commonly used by walkers, and though not all of it carries a public right of way, British Waterways Board normally offer no objection. Nevertheless, questions of access, liability, safety and degree of maintenance arise. There is also a demand for facilities and a need to educate and inform users.

2.02 It is the policy of BWB to negotiate with Local Authorities for the public to be given access to all towing paths. The Board took over the nationalised canals in 1963, and under the Transport Act 1968, the Grand Union from Redhill southwards was classified as a 'cruiseway', principally available for cruising, fishing, and other recreational purposes. The Board's duties did not extend to the towing path, but this Act gave LA power to give financial or other assistance to any individual or organisation in order to improve, or improve and maintain, any waterway for amenity or recreational purposes.

2.03 Leicestershire CC confirmed a long standing policy by proposing in "A Strategy for the Countryside" 1971, action to include public path agreements with BWB for the canal towpaths and to maintain them as footpaths, and also proposed a detailed study of the river and canal system to include Picnic Sites and the integration of towpaths into the County footpath network, while in 1974 Leicester City began a 3 year programme of improvements along the riverside, including resurfacing the towpath.

2.04 In Northamptonshire, the CPO's Report, "Canals in Northamptonshire" 1972 and subsequent studies, admitted the value of the towing paths as footpaths, but as so small a proportion was a public right of way, it seemed practicable to develop at selected points only for the present.

2.05 An enormous boost had been given to walking by the designation of Long Distance Footpaths, and greater access to the countryside, under the Acts of 1949 and 1968. In addition, several Counties promoted long routes. Later, the East Midlands Sports Council's Countryside Pursuits Panel began to look at the regional network of footpaths, including towing paths, and also formed a study group on rights of way.

2.06 In September 1976, the Countryside Commission published a new footpath policy, giving emphasis to well publicised and way-marked routes providing walks of varying length and circular walks, served by public transport, car parks and picnic sites and other areas used for recreation, as part of a major recreation strategy, particularly around major towns, in popular walking areas, and areas poorly provided for. Grants would be made available to LA and voluntary bodies. No new LDFs would be designated for the time being.

## PART II WALKS IN LEICESTERSHIRE

### 3.00 GRAND UNION WALKS IN LEICESTERSHIRE

3.01 In Leics the Grand Union forms an important waterway spine very easily accessible to the majority of the population. It passes through Loughborough and Leicester, while numerous villages and bus routes lie alongside. Access to adjacent reservoirs and lagoons is limited though increasing. The only other major water resource in the County is Rutland Water away to the east.

3.02 Short stretches of the river and canal are walked constantly by family groups on summer evenings and at weekends, and by ramblers as part of more extensive routes. Some young people walk much longer stretches in an exploratory manner. In Leicester the waterside walks form an extension to public open space.

3.03 Access is generally good. At almost every road bridge there is a path down to the towing path, though occasionally approaches are steep, or there are steps, or a double rail metal barrier causing some inconvenience. Where gates are fitted, these are more suitable for the less agile.

### 4.00 LOCAL WALKS (including part Notts)

4.01 Trent lock and N bank of river Trent - lots of boating activity, pub and riverside garden.

4.02 Ratcliffe Cut - lock and weir, Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station.

4.03 Kegworth, Bridge Fields to the Old Cut - locks, weir, backwaters.

4.04 Zouch Mills, N to Zouch lock, and S to Normanton ferry - locks, weir, mill race, and pubs.

4.05 Loughborough Basin to Swingbridge - pub, lock.

4.06 Barrow Bridge to Pilling's lock - picnic field, river, willows, weir.

4.07 Barrow Deep lock to Barrow Mills - old water mill site, weir, pub.

4.08 Mountsorrel lock, N to mineral railway bridge, S to Sileby Mill - single span brick bridge over 90', boatyards, old loading hoppers, pub, mill.

4.09 Thurmaston lock N along canal and or river to Wanlip - gravel pits, wildlife, sailing school, pub.

4.10 Birstall lock N to Thurmaston lock - locks, mills, boatyard.

4.11 Leicester - all the towing path in the city is walked, particularly Belgrave, the Straight, and the canal and river reaches at Aylestone. The walks feature bridges, large weirs, marina, canal wharves, factories and works, and the historic core of the city, with large areas of watermeadows and parks.

4.12 Blaby/Glen Parva/Wigston - these local walks link up with one another and cannot be subdivided from Whetstone Bridge to Crow Mills bridge. Marina, County Arms on site of Blaby wharf, locks, railway bridges, mills.

4.13 Newton Harcourt - very localised between locks and bridges, woods.

4.14 Foxton Top lock to Swivel bridge - picnic site, lock staircase, remains of inclined plane, shop, boatyard, pub.

4.15 Market Harborough - basin, boatyard.

## 5.00 PICNIC SITES / CAR PARKS

5.01 While it is possible to picnic almost anywhere along the canal, this has caused problems where there are a good many visitors, and the establishment of picnic sites in popular spots is the current policy in both Leics and Northants. The recently opened Foxton picnic area includes parking, toilets, and a new footbridge over the canal. Several other new sites have been proposed, and the study revealed the following:--

5.02 Trent lock, Notts. An extremely popular spot on the N bank of the Trent, with extensive car park, pub, riverside gardens, and walks, approached from Sawley or Long Eaton, the only approach to the Soar is by Ferry.

5.03 Red Hill, Notts. At the first lock on the Soar, planning permission has been given for a Marina and Clubhouse with car parking, beer and tea gardens. Accessible from Nottingham and Loughborough.

5.04 Zouch/Normanton/Bishops Meadow. Picnicking and car parking facilities are lacking in these areas north of Loughborough, although they are frequently visited. Formerly there were punts at Zouch Mill, at Normanton the field with holiday chalets by the ferry was used by picnickers. Bishops Meadow, once a race course then an aerodrome, is now an industrial estate and playing fields. Access from the A6 is limited.

5.05 Tucker's Pit. On the S edge of Loughborough, a disused clay pit currently being developed for recreation. The parking/picnic facilities could also be related to the canal if access were improved, e.g. by a new public right of way between Tucker's Pit and Miller's Bridge.

5.06 Barrow-on-Soar. A privately owned field is opened for car parking/picnics on most summer weekends. It borders an attractive river section and is very popular.

5.07 Wanlip Water Park. Programmed conversion of former gravel pits as working ceases. Currently under development for recreation, and future provision is expected to include a Picnic Site and Nature Trail.

5.08 Belgrave, Leicester. Current development of a landscaped area along the waterside. Could include picnic facilities linked to the new Museum of Technology or Ross' Walk. Parking facilities in the vicinity of Belgrave Hall are limited, but the grounds are being opened up to the river.

5.09 Abbey Park, Leicester. Large park between the river and canal, although with few direct links to the towing path. Popular for picnic teas on Sunday afternoons and in the school holidays. Parking and access for cars.

5.10 West Bridge, Leicester. The delightful Castle Gardens giving a fine view of the Mile Straight, and the Augustinian Friary site when it is developed, provide small sites in the historic heart of the city, with a multi-storey car park on St. Nicholas' Circle, and bus stops close by.

5.11 Aylestone, Leicester. The canal and river reaches south of the old Packhorse Bridge offer scope for a picnic site, although access is limited.

5.12 Glen Parva. Outline planning permission was given in 1973 for a Leisure Centre, including a marina, caravan site, riding club, etc., and if this kind of facility were to be developed here, the possibility of an adjacent picnic area could be considered.

5.13 Kilby Bridge. South of Leicester, within easy reach of Wigston, and well used by local people. Oadby/Wigston District have investigated, but a link from the A50 presents a difficulty.

5.14 Foxton locks. Opened in 1975, a Picnic Site to accommodate the large numbers visiting Foxton Locks and Inclined Plane. The pressures were perhaps as much due to the lack of public open space at this end of the county as to the undoubted attractions of Foxton.

5.15 South Kilworth. A possible Picnic Site suggested by Leics CC as part of a strategy to increase recreational facilities in this area, when the present gravel extraction is completed.

5.16 Welford. The Welford Arm, re-opened in 1969, offers scope for development at Welford Canal Wharf. Planning permission has been granted for a marina and chandlery and if these facilities materialised, a Picnic Site would be an added attraction, accessible from the A50.

## 6.00 CASUAL CAR PARKING

6.01 Casual car parking in the vicinity of the canal, other than at Picnic Sites, presents some problems. Anglers and others frequently leave their cars near a road bridge where there is access to the river or canal, but such cars even when on a grass verge are likely to obstruct a road user's view, especially where the conditions include a narrow road, a bend, and a hump backed bridge. This creates a hazard for the towpath walker where the towing-path swings from one bank to the other.

6.02 At Smeeton Westerby where the bridge was rebuilt in 1971, a gate was provided, and a parking site away from the bridge. At Barrow, the parking of vehicles near Mill Lane by visitors to the Navigation PH and the waterways beyond, has caused trouble, and the brewery together with BWB are to make every effort to provide a carpark in the area. Normanton is another village where street parking creates a hazard.

6.03 In many villages and built-up areas, free parking areas are provided for visitors, shoppers, etc., and these are acceptable for instance on a circular walk or where the distance from the waterway is not too great.

## 7.00 CIRCULAR WALKS IN THE SOAR VALLEY

7.01 In addition to the local walks along the waterside, a great number of circular walks are available on public footpaths, taking in the surrounding countryside as well as the canal. These fall into an easy category of 2 to 3 miles, and rather longer walks of 5 miles or more, and all have very interesting features.

7.02 Ratcliffe/Sutton Bonnington/Kegworth. The most frequented routes in this area are currently being examined.

7.03 Loughborough/Zouch. From near the Midland Station follow the FP N to Stanford-on-Soar, then the FP in a NW direction, passing Fox Hill to Normanton-on-Soar. Cross the ferry and return to Loughborough along the towpath. For a longer walk, pick up the footpath at Normanton to Zouch Mill, cross the river and return to Loughborough by the waterside. 7 miles.

7.04 Loughborough/Quorn. Loughborough Great Central station to Moor Lane bridge, S along canal to Barrow, across the park of Quorndon Hall and through Quorn to the A6. Follow Meeting Street and Chaveney Road, and the bridle path along Buddon Lane to the Gt. Central line. Return by train. (See "Main Line Steam Trail" - Bob Middleton 15p.).

7.05 Mountsorrel/Swithland Reservoir/Barrow. From Mountsorrel lock follow the canal N to the railway bridge, then retrace your steps over the canal and A6, via Broad Hill, Kinchley Lane and turn N by the reservoir. Turn SW across the dam at the waterworks, then N by the railway line, and to Chaveney

Road. Continue across the A6 and Quorn Park, cross Barrow Bridge and follow the towpath to Mill Lane, then take the field path back to Mountsorrel. Note that the diversion is necessary as two footbridges over the canal are missing. 6 miles.

7.06 Cossington/Sileby Mill. From Cossington Church take the FP S to Cossington Mill, follow the river N as far as Sileby Mill. Turn S and follow the field path back to Cossington, or for a longer walk turn E to Sileby and continue to College Farm, turn SW along Blackberry Lane back to Cossington. 5 miles.

7.07 Thurmaston/Cossington Mill. From Canal Street Thurmaston, cross the river and follow the FP NW to Wanlip (the earlier stages of this FP have been diverted due to quarrying). At Wanlip turn left and right to the cross roads, turn right along the main road, and just before the Hope & Anchor turn S along the towpath back to Thurmaston.  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles. For a longer walk continue N past the sewage works at Wanlip, then E to the Soar and N to Cossington Mill. Return via the towpath to Thurmaston. 5 miles.

#### 8.00 OLD UNION CIRCULAR WALKS

8.01 South Wigston, Crow Mill bridge E along the canal to Knights bridge, then SW by the sewage works to Countesthorpe, E to Foston, NW back to the sewage works, then turn NE and back to the canal. 5 miles.

8.02 Wigston Magna, Welford Road SE to Norwood House. Coole's Lane, Clifton's bridge E along the towpath to Newton Harcourt, N to the "Old Mere", W across Glen Golf Course to Mere's Walk, Wigston Magna.

8.03 Newton Harcourt railway bridge, then E along the towpath, SE to Wistow Church, W and then N along the lanes back to Newton.  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles. For a longer walk start at Wistow church, walk N to the canal, E along the towing path to Crane's lock, SW to Fleckney, NW to Fox Covert, NE by Kilby Lodge and Wistow village. 5 miles.

8.04 Fleckney, NE to the canal, SE along the towpath, over Saddington tunnel and as far as Bridge 71. Follow the FP to Saddington Reservoir, turn NW to Saddington and return by Fleckney Lodge to Fleckney. 5 miles.

8.05 Smeeton Westerby. From centre of village take track SE to bridge No. 66. Turn W and follow the towing-path for a further two bridges. Turn N along the FP back to the village.  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles. For a longer walk, continue along the canal as far as bridge No. 71 and then turn NE along FP to the Gumley Road, turn right into village. 4 miles.

8.06 Foxton. Take the FP nearly opposite the church W to Foxton locks, go N down the locks, past Harborough Arm junction, W at bridge No. 63 to Gumley. Turn N past Gumley Wood, NE to Debdale Wharf, then S along the canal, and across the fields back to Foxton.  $4\frac{1}{4}$  miles. Or back by canal,  $4\frac{3}{4}$  miles.

8.07 Foxton locks. W via FP to Laughton, S on farm track to Laughton Hills and the canal, and NE along the canal towpath back to Foxton locks. 6 miles.

8.08 Mowsley Church, E to Laughton, SW by Kicklewel Spinney to the canal, SW along the towpath to Husbands Bosworth, N by Glebe Farm to Mowsley Hills Farm, W to Mowsley Lodge, then NE back to Mowsley. 6 miles.

8.09 Welford. From the village take the track and FP leading NW past Sybolds Spinney to the canal. Cross the bridge and follow the towpath N to The Welford Arm. Continue SE on the towpath back to Welford Wharf. 5 miles.

## 9.00 TOWN TRAILS

9.01 Town trails which include the waterway and nearby buildings offer shorter walks with places to visit, and a microcosm of the town's history.

9.02 Loughborough. From the Basin, Bridge Street, walk N to the junction of the Leicester Navigation, turn E and follow the towpath past the Boat Inn as far as Nottingham Road. Turn right across the bridge, and right to Meadow Lane, then past the Parish Church, right into Steeple Row and left back to the Basin.

9.03 Belgrave. From Limekiln lock follow the towpath N and along Ross' Walk to Belgrave House. Cross over the old Thurcaston Road bridge and turn S along the riverside to the Old Pumping Station (Museum of Technology), then past Swan's Nest weir and back to Abbey Park.

9.04 Abbey Park. From Limekiln lock, follow the towpath S past Memory Lane Wharf to Friday Street bridge. Walk N across the Park to the river Soar, turn right and cross the river by the weir. Turn right to the Abbey ruins, and then back across the Park to Limekiln lock.

9.05 West Bridge to Frog Island. From West Bridge follow the towpath N past the weirs as far as North Bridge Inn. Turn right along North Gate Street to All Saints Church, right and then left past the old Great Central Street station to St. Nicholas' Church and the Jewry Wall Museum.

9.06 West Bridge to the Newark. From West Bridge walk the towpath S along the Mile Straight opposite the Castle Gardens to the second bridge. Then follow Mill Lane, Gateway Street, Richmond Street, through the quadrangle (Polytechnic). Cross the Newarkes, through Prince Rupert's Gateway, round by St. Mary de Castro to St. Nicholas' Circle.

9.07 Aylestone. A route through old Aylestone village, and taking in the canal between Aylestone Mill lock and King's lock is possible. It could include a section of the disused LNER railway embankment if this were made accessible, to give a fine view of the flood plain.



### **PART III A REGIONAL ROUTE**

#### **10.00 A REGIONAL ROUTE IN THE EAST MIDLANDS**

**10.01** Existing and proposed major routes for walking in the East Midlands can be categorised as those relating to the Derbyshire hills (including the start of the Pennine Way), the Sherwood Forest route in Notts, the Viking Way and the Jurassic Way following the limestone band NE to the Humber and linking with Knightley Way and Grafton Way in the south of the region, and most recently the Charnwood Forest route. The Lincolnshire coastal path and the Lincoln/Boston route feature fen country, and major water routes are proposed along the Trent valley (including the Grantham Canal) and the Nene valley. Finally, there is the great north-south route based on canals, the Erewash and the Grand Union, cutting across the grain of the country and taking in valleys and hills, towns and countryside, with all the historic interest of the Canal Age.

**10.02** Many of these routes are along part existing footpaths, some are totally in operation. The Regional Sports Council's Countryside Pursuits Panel is currently initiating discussions with interested bodies, to further the establishment of a regional network of major routes.

**10.03** The Grand Union route from the Trent to the Great Ouse links with the Trent Valley, the Jurassic Way, and the Nene Valley. It is easily accessible by road to the towns of Nottingham, Loughborough, Leicester, Market Harborough, Rugby, Northampton, and Milton Keynes, and to innumerable villages. The A6 accompanies the navigation for a good deal of the way, as does the A5, and the railway follows the same transport route. There are quite close links with the M1 at Kegworth and Watford. On foot, however, the river Trent forms a barrier from Long Eaton and the Erewash, and a ferry over the river is the only solution.

**10.04** It is possible at the moment to walk almost the whole length of the Grand Union from the Trent to the Great Ouse, some 80 miles, apart from a few spots needing repair, and with one diversion at Barrow-Mountsorrel and another at Crick. The exception is the Soar valley when flooding occurs in the winter months and in extremely wet weather. A certain amount of way marking is required at essential diversions and over tunnels, together with the publication of maps and guides. The many public footpaths allow of voluntary diversions to neighbouring points of interest.

#### **11.00 TRENT TO AVON**

**11.01** North of Zouch the towing-path is partly in Notts, all the rest in this section is in Leics, and so largely ties in with Leics. policies.

**11.02** Starting at the busy Trent, and almost in the shadow of Ratcliffe-on-Soar Power station, the route winds upstream along the Soar valley past water meadows, gravel beds, and waterside villages. Locks and weirs are frequent as small sections of cut bypass the river's meanders. The granite outcrops of Charnwood Forest rise to the west, and to the east the rounded clay wolds. At Loughborough is the basin of the earliest navigation completed in 1779, the end of the first 9 miles. The next cut, made to Leicester in 1794, reveals early textile factories sited by the waterway. At Mountsorrel can still be seen the installations where granite was loaded into boats, and at Wanlip gravel is being carried by boat today, while the lagoons have a fascinating fauna and flora. Waterside pubs occur at regular intervals.

**11.03** Leicester is attractively approached through wide washlands, and the old Abbey Pumping station has become a museum of Technology. Even where the wharves and industry begin, Abbey Park lies opposite. Some large old

factory buildings, then the historic core of the city is reached, sited where the Fosse crosses the Soar, and Roman and Mediaeval Leicester are at hand. The West Bridge marks the end of the Leicester Navigation, 25 miles from the Trent.

11.04 Above West Bridge, the tree-lined Mile Straight is the result of flood prevention measures undertaken by the Leicester Corporation in 1881, but once past the flood plain at Aylestone, the waterway swings eastwards away from the river. This is the Old Union Canal which reached Market Harborough in 1809, cutting its way as a true canal through the clays of east Leics. The villages are further away, each on its gravel island, waterside pubs are fewer, but the numerous humpbacked bridges continue. From Kilby Bridge to Foxton, the canal is outstanding for its aquatic fauna, while Saddington tunnel, the first on the route, is inhabited by bats.

11.05 At Foxton, 18 miles from West Bridge, the famous staircase of 10 locks lifts the waterway by 75 feet. The views from the top are very fine. This stretch is an extension of the Grand Junction Canal which, making its way northwards from Norton, was completed in 1814. From Foxton to the Welford Arm,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles, is a quiet remote section of canal beside the wooded Laughton Hills, with no locks but another tunnel at Husbands Bosworth, 1166 yards long. The Welford Arm, a 'remainder' waterway re-opened in 1969, is only  $1\frac{3}{4}$  miles long and follows the Avon valley at the southern boundary of Leics.

## 12.00 AVON TO NORTON JUNCTION

12.01 This section of a further  $15\frac{1}{2}$  miles is in Northants, and takes the route to the end of the 'Leicester line' of the Grand Union to its junction at Norton with the 'Main line' from London to Birmingham. The level course continues its quiet journey over the Northampton Uplands, between woods and hills, tunnelling again at Crick for 1528 yards. The brownstone villages are a contrast to the soft red brick of old Leics villages. The 22 mile lockless journey from Foxton comes to an abrupt end at Watford where the M1 roars past, and the canal descends 56 feet at Watford staircase, soon to reach Norton Junction at 357.65 feet above sea level.

## 13.00 NORTON JUNCTION TO THE GREAT OUSE

13.01 Still in Northants, but now following the Grand Union Main line which was built as the Grand Junction around 1800, the descent continues down the Buckby and Whilton locks, with the A5 Roman road, the railway, and the M1 all squeezing through the same narrow gap in the Jurassic ridge. Villages are still distant, except Weedon which the canal passes on an embankment with an aqueduct over the Nene, and we are at an end of the hunting country of the shires.

13.02 The Northampton Arm is passed, dropping down to the east, then the canal enters the wooded cuttings at Blisworth Hill through which passes the longest operative canal tunnel in Britain, over 3000 yards, and which post-dated the Grand Junction by 5 years. Blisworth and Stoke Bruerne are attractive canal villages in the local brownstone, the latter now housing the unique Waterways Museum.

13.03 South of Stoke Bruerne, another descent of 50 feet or so brings the route down to the Tove valley, with more tiny stone villages. Just past Cosgrove is the disused Buckingham Arm, now a Nature Trail, and worked out gravel pits which have been developed as a major Water Sports Centre. The canal crosses the Ouse on an aqueduct to pass out of the Midlands into Bucks and so to London.

#### 14.00 OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATION

14.01 For those on a long walk or even spending a couple of days by the waterway, overnight accommodation is required, most often of a simple, inexpensive farmhouse or hostel type, together with camping sites for tents. It is considered that overnight stops ought to be available at distances of no more than 5 miles, to give flexibility to the distance walked each day and time to explore the locality. There would often be an additional distance of up to a mile from the towing-path if the accommodation were in a nearby village for instance.

14.02 A survey was carried out based on published information for 1976, covering situation, type of accommodation, price range, number of beds, seasonal availability, areas of greatest demand, probable increase of provision with increase in demand, and areas of shortfall.

14.03 Existing Youth Hostels were found to be too distant to serve the Grand Union. The three nearest were at Copt Oak, Leics, and Badby and Green's Norton, Northants. This type of accommodation is normal on Long Distance Footpaths, for example, the Pennine Way, also the north coast of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path where there is a strong tourist attraction. In Leics and Northants it might be possible to combine hostel facilities with camp-sites in conjunction with some other attraction in the vicinity of the canal.

14.04 Camp-sites were more plentiful, with five privately owned ones in Leics at Kegworth, Barrow-on-Soar, Market Harborough, Lubenham, and North Kilworth, all open all the year round. The shortfall appeared to be in the vicinity of Loughborough and Leicester, and other sites where camping facilities might be considered are Trent lock/Redhill, Wanlip, Glen Parva, and Foxton. The 1972 report 'Canals in Northamptonshire' stated that overnight camp-sites would be desirable for canoeists, and the suggested policy dealt with sites at Yelvertoft, Norton, Gayton, and Stoke Bruerne, which could be used for picnicking and which could include camping where appropriate - the provision of such facilities being most suitably accomplished by the County Council. Camping and caravanning facilities were available at Cosgrove Park.

14.05 Bed and Breakfast prices, as published by the Information and Publicity Officer, Leicester City Council, 1976, ranged from £2.00 to £3.00 per person per night for the smaller Hotels and Guest Houses. Upwards of 100 beds were available in the Soar valley sufficiently close to the canal, about half this number in single rooms. Some 20 beds were listed in the Gumley, Kibworth, Market Harborough area. No information was obtained for the city of Leicester itself.

14.06 This information may reflect the tourist attractions of Charnwood, and it seems probable that Bed and Breakfast facilities could be found in pubs, farms, and villages along the Grand Union if a demand were manifested. Quite a number of canalside pubs provide meals. Accommodation was readily available along Hadrian's Wall in 1975, bed and breakfast at £1.25 to £1.75 per person at farms, etc., and £4.00 to £5.00 at good Hotels.

14.07 No information on Hotels and Guest Houses was collected for Northants.

## 15.00 FOOD

15.01 Meals and snacks along the waterway are most readily obtainable at canalside and nearby pubs during opening hours. Most villages have a shop where food can be bought, except for half day closing and Sundays, and at popular spots there is almost always ice-cream to be found in the summer. Afternoon teas are a thing of the past, but interestingly the East Midlands Tourist Board are trying to revive this trade. The supply of fish and chips and Chinese take-away meals is erratic, and more dependable in towns and the larger villages, less likely in small villages.

15.02 The survey showed that canalside pubs are frequent in the Soar valley between Kegworth and Birstall. Many have gardens at the waterside and are very attractive or capable of being made so, while the Plough Inn at Normanton and Cossington Mill are up-market. Cotes Mill on the Soar at Loughborough is to be developed as a restaurant.

15.03 The North Bridge Inn, Leicester, is the only canalside pub in the city, but access points are plentiful. However, it would be a great boon to holiday makers if discreet signs indicated shopping and refreshment areas.

15.04 South of the city, the County Arms at Blaby (which replaced the Union Inn), the Manor House at Glen Parva with a high class restaurant, and the Navigation Inn at Kilby Bridge, represent the only canalside provision. There is the possibility of a Tea Garden at Kings lock, Aylestone. Beyond Kilby Bridge it is necessary to leave the canal to find shops at Newton Harcourt, and pubs at Saddington, Fleckney, Smeeton Westerby, and Gumley, up to  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile distant. At Foxton Bottom lock there is a shop, and an application has been made for further facilities. There is good provision in Foxton village, and also in Market Harborough.

15.05 Between Foxton and the Welford Arm (some  $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles), there is again no canalside provision. There are pubs in Husbands Bosworth and North Kilworth, both  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from the canal. The Wharf House at Welford Wharf has food, and there are shops, etc. in Welford.

15.06 South of the junction of the Welford Arm, the next 11 miles are very lonely and quiet. The closest villages are Yelvertoft and Crick, both about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile away, but in fact it is necessary to make a detour to Crick village as the original route for the boat horses over Crick tunnel has been lost. At the bottom of the Watford staircase is the Stag's Head, though not on the towpath side, and the Watford Gap service station for the M1 is in the area.

15.07 From Norton Junction southwards, no detailed survey was carried out, but between here and Cosgrove villages are frequent and close to the canal. This is a popular boating stretch, and provisions for refreshment are good.

## 16.00 INTERPRETIVE CENTRES

16.01 Interpretive and Information Centres have a two-way function in adding to the users' enjoyment of a recreation facility and in preserving its amenity. Where a full scale Centre cannot be maintained, even a book-stall is useful. Tourist Information offices in Loughborough, Leicester and Market Harborough are at some distance from the waterway.

16.02 Trent. This is an important waterway junction. The chandlery at Sawley Marina has canal literature and equipment for boatmen, and is also visited by the public. A canalside Cafe/shop/information centre would be ideal for walkers.

16.03 Wanlip. When the Water Park is fully developed, any Interpretive Centre there could also carry canal literature.

16.04 Leicester. The Jewry Wall museum has a bookstall, and is conveniently near the canal. A canalside Cafe/shop, of which there is a lack in the city, could also carry a bookstall.

16.05 Foxton. Facilities at Foxton are increasing, and there is a shop with canal literature, at the locks. This would seem a good site for a major Centre.

16.06 Stoke Bruerne. BWB Waterways Museum with extensive displays, also a shop selling canal literature and souvenirs, cafe, etc. Stoke Bruerne is a highlight on the Grand Union.

#### 17.00 PLACES TO VISIT/EVENTS

17.01 Along the route there are many places open to the public which are well worth visiting, adding to the variety and interest of the walks.

17.02 In the Soar Valley, Ratcliffe-on-Soar Power Station has a guided tour and film for parties; Sutton Bonnington School of Agriculture has an Open Day. Thrumpton Hall takes parties of visitors by arrangement, and Whatton Gardens are open on Sunday afternoons in the summer. Local archaeological material can be seen in the Old Rectory museum in Loughborough on Thursday afternoons and some Saturdays, while at the Great Central station the Main Line Steam Trust has a museum and there are train trips at the weekends. The canalside installations of the former Mountsorrel Granite company can be seen in situ - there are no facilities for the public, though this would seem an interesting site for an industrial museum relating to the local granite industry.

17.03 Leicester is very rich in museums and parks alongside the canal. Abbey Park, Castle Gardens, and the Jewry Wall site have early remains. Belgrave Hall, the Abbey Pumping station, Jewry Wall museum, Wyggeston's House, the Guildhall, and the Newarke Houses all have fine collections and are open to the public on weekdays and Sunday afternoons.

17.04 Relics of the Battle of Naseby can be found in Naseby village, Rothwell Church, and in the library at Market Harborough. Stanford Hall, dating from 1690, has a very varied collection including cars and motorbikes, and is open three afternoons a week during the summer.

17.05 The Waterways Museum maintained by BWB at Stoke Bruerne is a highlight on the Grand Union, showing the history of over 200 years of canals, traditional narrow boat, boat weighing scales, a reconstructed butty boat cabin, steam and diesel engines, and extensive displays of clothing, cabinware, brasses, signs, models, paintings, photographs, souvenirs and other ephemera. It is open daily, except Xmas, Boxing day, and winter Mondays. The gardens at Stoke Park can be visited on Saturdays and Sundays in July and August, and Cosgrove Lodge Park is a major Water Centre with sailing, motor boating, water skiing, subaqua, angling, canoeing, rowing boats, hotel restaurant and bars, caravanning and camping.

17.06 In addition there are various special events, such as the Kegworth Carnival and Steam Rally, the City of Leicester Show at Abbey Park in August, IWA Boat Rallies, Regattas, etc. Boat trips are offered in the summer at Foxton and Stoke Bruerne, and for private parties at Cosgrove.

#### 18.00 SPECIAL INTERESTS

18.01 For the specialist and amateur alike, the Grand Union Canal offers a great deal of interest. All aspects of its intricate history have been covered, notably by Charles Hadfield in his many books and by P.A. Stevens in "The Leicester Line". The walker can see locks, weirs, and water mills on the Soar Navigation; lock staircases at Foxton and Watford; four long tunnels; aqueducts over the Nene and Ouse; old brick bridges interspersed with sandstone, granite, cast iron, and ironstone; wharves and old canal buildings in Loughborough, Leicester, Foxton, Stoke Bruerne and many other places; 18th century lockhouses and inns along the route; and waterside industries both past and present.

18.02 Contemporary history which shows an increasing use of the waterway for recreation is visible in the Boat Clubs, boatyards and hire firms, new buildings and landscaping along the waterfront, and facilities for visitors.

18.03 In summer the canal banks are a mass of wild flowers, and water birds and their young are a common sight. Even in the towns and the tunnels, wildlife is evident. The Natural History section of the Leics Museums Service has data for the greater part of the County. The Loughborough section is Class 2, remnants of osier beds survive near Pilling's lock, Class 1, and the gravel workings at Wanlip are of interest. In the city of Leicester the river shallows carry collections of water plants, Class 2, while Aylestone Meadows has a rich aquatic and marsh flora, Class 1.

18.04 The length from Kilby Bridge to Foxton locks is Class 1, and designated a SSSI for the richness of its aquatic fauna, while Saddington tunnel is the haunt of bats. The Market Harborough Arm is also Class 1. From Foxton locks to the S boundary of Leics, also the Welford Arm, are known to be of interest although not well documented.

18.05 Almost all the villages along the route are attractive and interesting, many with Conservation Areas. The vernacular buildings are chiefly redbrick in Leics and brownstone in Northants, there are many excellent 13th and 14th century churches, and 18th century farmhouses. For buildings, see for instance N. Pevsner's "The Buildings of England" and for the environment the work of W. G. Hoskins.

18.06 A survey of buildings of note made by the Leics and Rutland Society of Architects in 1976 showed that the city of Leicester was outstanding, with for example, Belgrave Hall, the Guildhall, the churches of St. Margaret, St. Nicholas, and St. Mary de Castro, Vaughan College and the Polytechnic buildings, the Abbey Pumping station and factories of Pecks, Frisby Jarvis, and Lowe & Carr; and many other buildings of interest close to the canal.

## PART IV FEASIBILITY

### 19.00 RIGHT OF WAY

19.01 Most of the towing-path is owned by BWB, although there are sections where the Board themselves only have a right of way. In Leics much of the towing-path has already been made a public right of way, and it is the County Council's declared strategy to make public path agreements with BWB for the entire system of towing-paths in the County, and to maintain them as footpaths. However, at the present time the Council understandably hesitates to add to the financial burden, a difficulty being not only maintenance of the towing-path, but of the waterway wall also. The alternative is to enter into access agreements, as has been done at Foxton, but this carries many conditions with it, burdensome to the local authority. It is understood that BWB are looking at their 'standard agreement' regarding access with a view to easing the problem of public use, together with maintenance.

19.02 At the same time public access is almost unrestricted. BWB do not normally sue for trespass. Indeed, they issue a permit for walkers to follow the navigation, at 25p per annum. While long distance walkers and ramblers can be advised to obtain such permits, it is unlikely that people out for a local stroll will feel it necessary to do so.

19.03 The sections in Leics which do not appear to be public footpaths are at Barrow-on-Soar from Barrow Deep lock to Mill lane, and southwards from Turnover Bridge near Kilby to the river Avon, apart from short distances at Newton Harcourt, just S of Debdale Wharf, and Foxton locks.

19.04 In Northants, only 11 miles of towing-path along the Grand Union carry a public right of way, with 38 miles not officially open to unlicensed walkers. The County Council's policy is to encourage access and development at selected points only, mainly because of the onerous nature of the agreements suggested by BWB. There are also many fishing interests, and certain 'sensitive areas' due to the quality of the environment.

19.05 At Saddington, Husbands Bosworth, Crick, and Blisworth tunnels, the path for boathorses went over the top, and the survival of a footpath has been more uncertain, notably at Crick where a considerable diversion is necessary.

19.06 Riding a bicycle or taking a vehicle on to the towing-path is not allowed by BWB without a permit. It must be noted, however, that an application for a permit for walking will produce a permit to walk or cycle the Board's towing-paths.

19.07 Horse riding is not encouraged on a towing path, unless it is designated a Bridle Way, and no sections come into this category. BWB are not issuing new licenses for horse-drawn boats.

### 20.00 OTHER TOWPATH USERS

20.01 Authorised users of the towpaths include BWB and their servants, farmers with waterside pastures, riparian industries, statutory undertakers where there are services, licensed commercial craft, cruisers, canoes, anglers, walkers and cyclists, also the general public where there is a public right of way. Some lockhouses, pubs, and even industries are only approachable via the towpath. At certain times and at certain points a conflict of interests could arise.

20.02 Fishing rights are usually rented from BWB by Angling Clubs, the anglers paying quite high rents, and taking a proprietary interest in 'their' stretch of the towing path. Large club notices deter the casual walker. The close season is in the main from 15th March to 15th June, thus the anglers are out in full force from mid-June onwards. Fishing matches take place on Saturdays and Sundays. Generally the fisherman sits well down the bank, fairly clear of the towpath. Naturally he does not welcome disturbance.

20.03. At the time of the survey some 12 Boat Clubs were based on the Grand Union predominantly in the Soar valley, and almost 30 firms between the Trent and the Ouse concerned with boat building, servicing, and hire. The main boating season lasts from the end of May to September, with peak cruising period in July and August. Weekend boat traffic is swelled by the private owner, and Saturday afternoons feature the novice boatman on his first day of hire. Boat Clubs, boatyards, marinas, holiday chalets, etc. are usually found on the opposite bank to the towpath, which minimises conflict with towpath users. Moorings, water points, refuse and sewage disposal points, etc. are generally on the towpath side, and there seems no reason why licensed walkers should not use such of these facilities as are appropriate.

20.04 For walkers, Saturday is the popular day for school parties out on a field trip, and Sunday afternoons and evenings see people out for a local stroll, or visiting the picnic sites, especially in fine summer weather.

20.05 Unauthorised cyclists and motorcyclists are met with on the hard surfaced towpath in Leicester. At Cosgrove the towpath is used by people going to work. Walkers do not favour the use of towpaths for either cycling or for horseriding.

## 21.00 CONDITION OF THE TOWING-PATH

21.01 The condition of the towing-path was surveyed by the Canals and Waterways Study Group in 1975 and 1976 in Leics, and the information for the Northampton section was taken from the local authority's survey of 1972. While the towpath is generally unmetalled, hard surfaces are met with by wharves, bridges, locks, etc. and in some built-up areas. The original stone edgings have largely fallen away, and there has been some replacement by new piling.

21.02 River Trent to Swingbridge, Loughborough. Largely riverside with meadows to the water's edge, and towing-path on the short sections of canal only, as far as Zouch. North of Kegworth scrub impedes the route. Rough going on remoter stretches and N of Swingbridge.

21.03 Swingbridge to Chainbridge, Loughborough. Hard surface of chippings, fairly good but some potholes. Used by vehicles to Bishop Meadow lockhouse, the Albion Inn, the old tollhouse, and a scrapyard.

21.04 Chainbridge to Basin, Loughborough. Tarmac road, no footpath, used by vehicles to workshops.

21.05 Chainbridge, Loughborough, to Pillings lock, Barrow. Rough going, and noticeably wet even in dry weather, some marshy patches. Not level between Chainbridge and Meadow Lane, and a 50m. diversion where the bank has slipped between the Railway Bridge and Little Moor Lane, also a 40 yd section N of Top Bridge quite badly undermined by voles.

21.06 Pillings Lock to Barrow Bridge. Granite chippings and setts overlaid with silt on a river section. Marshy in places, and some severe erosion near Barrow bridge.



21.07 Barrow Bridge to Waterside Inn, Mountsorrel. No footbridge over the rebuilt weir at Barrow Mill site, but an alternative footpath across the fields from Mill Lane. Footbridge missing N of Mountsorrel and the only alternative is through the village on the A6 trunk road. Wet and rough under the mineral line railway bridge at Mountsorrel.

21.08 Mountsorrel to Birstall Lock. Encroachment of hedge N of Sileby Mill, and N of Wanlip Road where the towpath is narrow. Thurmaston lock has steep approaches. To the N of Birstall the towpath is in a bad condition for a short stretch, but an alternative path cuts off the bend. Holes between the footbridge and Birstall lock.

21.09 Birstall lock to Thurcaston Old Bridge, Leicester. A 20 ft length of footpath removed during work on the weir. Towpath in a poor condition between the Waterworks and the start of the shale footpath which runs from Metal Box factory to Thurcaston Road bridge. The access from Thurcaston Road bridge very muddy after rain.

21.10 Thurcaston Road bridge to Aylestone, Leicester. New surface of rolled, crushed limestone, recently put down and maintained by Leicester City Council. Generally good, but adheres to footwear when wet.

21.11 Aylestone to the County boundary at the River Avon. Rough going but the condition is generally good. The effective width of the path varies, and occasionally there is a slope from the fence down to the water. A stretch of about 50 yds at the S end of Saddington tunnel, left in a very poor condition after maintenance work on the embankment. Some new surfacing recently carried out at Foxton near the Picnic site.

21.12 Market Harborough Arm. Generally walkable though narrow and overgrown in parts. The pervasive smell from the Glue Works at Gallow Hill is a deterrent.

21.13 Welford Arm. Fairly overgrown. Near the turning point a stretch of about 20 yds is almost permanently water-logged.

21.14 River Avon to Crick tunnel. Towpath passable but often rough, overgrown, and eroded. Deep cutting on the N approach to Crick tunnel very overgrown. The original boathorse path over the tunnel has been disturbed by the sale of land, and it is necessary to diverge through the village of Crick.

21.15 Crick tunnel to Norton Junction. The path leading down from the Watford to Crick road to the S entrance of Crick tunnel is little used and overgrown. Towpath passable but rough going.

21.16 Norton Junction to Blisworth tunnel. A thick hedge on the towpath side obscures views in the Flore area. From Gayton S the towpath is mostly in a reasonable condition, except for two places very overgrown. From the N end of Blisworth tunnel the path climbs to the top of the cutting through a thicket.

21.17 Blisworth tunnel to the Ouse Aqueduct. From the top of Blisworth tunnel the path slopes steeply down to the S entrance, but from here to Stoke Bottom Lock the towpath is very good and well used by visitors to Stoke Bruerne and the Museum. From Stoke Bottom lock to Castlethorpe Wharf the towpath is difficult due to overgrown grass and hedges, and bank erosion in places. From Cosgrove to the Ouse Aqueduct, the towpath is wide and well used by local people and visitors.

## 22.00 FLOODING

22.01 While there is often a water shortage on the Old Union, and insufficient depth in Leicester, flooding is a regular feature of the Soar valley, particularly from November to February and also following excessively wet conditions such as July 1968. The river sections overflow on low lying ground which makes the towpath and the approach roads impassable. During the summer months generally and in dry periods, however, the problem disappears.

22.02 The Soar flows north to the Trent, and the confluence of its tributaries together with silting south of St. Mary's Mills has always resulted in flooding at Aylestone, where the consistently bad stretches are beneath the railway bridge of the former Gt. Central line, and by Canal St. bridge. Also the flooding river spills across the towpath but does not drain away from adjacent land, but lies in stagnant pools which are particularly obnoxious to the towpath walker. North of the city the most affected area is between Abbey Meadows and Holden St. footbridge in Belgrave, also Thurcaston Road bridge. Because Leicester is relatively close to the watershed, it is invariably still raining at peak flood times, but this can be followed by a period of a few days of good walking weather when the path is still obstructed by water.

22.03 Other areas prone to flooding along the route are at the confluence of the river Wreake, Cossington, Sileby, Barrow, Quorn, Hathern, Zouch, Kegworth, Kingston and Ratcliffe. The Severn/Trent Water Authority has announced a £1,000,000 scheme for land drainage and flood relief for the Soar Division. Due to start in 1978 and to take 5 years to complete, the scheme includes work at Thurmaston, Rothley Brook and the River Wreake, as well as smaller projects.

22.04 The last event in the construction of the Grand Union was the straightening and widening of the section between West Bridge and St. Mary's Mill, Leicester, to relieve flooding and this was completed in 1890 by Leicester Corporation. More recently, work on the waterway in the city has been hampered by lack of money, and also by the division of responsibility between the various bodies which are now represented by Leicester Corporation, the British Waterways Board, and the Severn/Trent Water Authority.

## 23.00 MAINTENANCE OF THE TOWPATH

23.01 The Grand Union is classified as a 'cruising' waterway from Redhill lock southwards, that is one principally available for cruising, fishing, and other recreational purposes. The Board's duty is to maintain such cruising waterways in a suitable condition for cruising craft, their duties do not extend to the towpath. In some cases, however, the towing path itself serves the function of retaining the canal bank, with the result that maintenance costs are met by BWB as part of the engineering safety requirements.

23.02 The 1968 Transport Act enabled Local Authorities to give financial and other assistance to any individual or organisation to improve any waterway (natural or artificial) for amenity or recreational purposes. Where a Local Authority has adopted a towpath as a public right of way or made an access agreement with BWB, then the LA has taken on the responsibility for maintenance of the towpath as footpath. In most other areas maintenance of the towpath is at a minimum, and frequently the problem is the maintenance of the waterway wall.

23.03 Improvements along the route can be undertaken as appropriate by private owners, BWB, Water Authorities, Local Authorities, including Parish Councils,

and the voluntary bodies. Since the towing-path is subject to varying intensities of use, different levels of maintenance are acceptable in different sections.

23.04 Picnic Sites generate an intensive use of short sections of towpath concentrated at peak times. Near Foxton picnic site, a topping of chippings has been used to combat likely erosion of the surface.

23.05 Local walks along about a mile or so of towpath adjacent to villages are particularly favoured for regular local walks, and are subject to erosion at the points of entry in particular. Normally unsurfaced, a topping of local material is usually found at junctions with roads, bridges, and at stiles. A gate as at Smeeton Westerby is more satisfactory for the less agile than a fixed barrier, and steep slopes need special treatment. Such walks require annual attention to prevent large holes forming along the route, or hedges encroaching too far across the path.

23.06 Lengths of towing-path forming part of recognised circular walks are acceptable as rough going. Regular inspections, however, are necessary, with repairs to ensure the safety of users undertaken without delay.

23.07 Remote sections, where use is confined to the enthusiast or long distance walker, require maintenance sufficient only to ensure that the paths are negotiable and not positively dangerous.

23.08 Where continuous hard surfaces are absolutely necessary because of very heavy usage, a well maintained finish to the towpath surface in keeping with the total built environment is the most satisfactory, as at Stoke Bruerne Waterway Museum. For environmental details, see BHB's "Waterway Environmental Handbook".

#### 24.00 GRANTS FOR FOOTPATHS ETC.

24.01 A large number of sources of grants exist, ranging through Govt. agencies, local authorities, charitable trusts, and, occasionally, industry. Money for recreational, environmental, and conservation projects can be made available to local authorities, organisations, and individuals.

24.02 "Footpaths for Recreation", a policy statement published by the Countryside Commission in 1976, sets out the grant aid now available in appropriate circumstances for approved recreation footpaths. This covers a footpath project officer (limited to two years); the essential costs of direct labour and materials for bringing particular footpaths up to a suitable standard, including essential bridging, surface improvement, better drainage, the provision of gates and stiles, waymarking and removal of obstacles (normally schemes involving initial expenditure of £1,000 or more); assistance for maintenance and management, including the initial costs of leaflets, guides and maps if not self-financing; assistance for the restoration of footpaths eroded as a result of heavy use; costs of creating new public footpaths forming part of an intensive route or extensive network; costs to voluntary bodies of tools, etc. (see para. 2.06).

24.03 Grants for the improvement of waterways for recreation have been mentioned in 23.02. Countryside Commission grants are made to the relevant authorities, or to persons other than public bodies, for projects which are considered will further the purposes of the 1949 and 1968 Countryside Acts; the intention being to improve existing facilities in National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Beauty, and the countryside generally; to encourage the establishment of Country Parks, Picnic Sites, Long Distance Footpaths, etc.; and to aid

the provision of other new facilities for open air recreation and the enjoyment of the countryside. Under the Local Government Act, 1974, local authorities were empowered to make grants to individuals carrying out projects which would further the objects of the Countryside Commission.

## 25.00 THE WATERWAY ENVIRONMENT

25.01 The waterway is principally a commercial commodity, a large part of BWB's income arises from the sale of water. For commercial craft, as at Pontylue Sand & Ballast Co., the waterway is a working environment. Farmers have access to the water for cattle, particularly in the Soar Valley, and stockproof boundaries are required to the towpath and between fields. Land-owners should not be subject to trespass, and similarly canalside firms are private property. The towpath walker needs to understand and respect this situation.

25.02 The natural environment can be safeguarded in a number of ways. For instance, by keeping development away from sensitive areas such as the Kilby to Foxton SSSI, by the establishment of Nature Reserves as near Pillings Lock, by education generally, and by conservation work often by volunteers. Grants are available from the Nature Conservancy Council. Pollution and vandalism are possibilities, but unlikely among people walking the towpath for pleasure. Wild flowers grow very thickly along the waterside and quickly re-colonise; the heron, little grebe, and coot nest early, though the reed bunting, moorhen, and swallow have late broods. More frequent trimming of hedges could affect wildlife.

25.03 BWB property, including bridges, receives a fairly low degree of up-keep as the Board must maintain 2000 miles of waterway on a small budget. Improvements are continually made, however, often with the assistance of volunteers as with the re-opening of the Welford Arm, and clearance at Foxton Inclined Plane.

25.04 The built environment generally deteriorates through decay and neglect. Buildings of particular interest can be protected by listing or inclusion in Conservation Areas, which are well represented in the villages and built-up areas along the route. Grants are available from the Historic Buildings Council or County and District Councils, for both buildings and their environment. Housing Improvement grants are made by District Councils. Many buildings in the waterway envelope fall outside these categories, e.g. old industrial buildings, and will depend on private enterprise or voluntary action for improvement.

25.05 Grants for landscaping schemes may be available from the Countryside Commission, or the County Planning authority. Details of treatment must be in keeping with the environment, as at Limekiln Lock. Pubs, yards, gardens, industrial premises, etc. fronting the canal all respond to treatment.

25.06 Prevention of damage is difficult where the environment is poor, or buildings are empty. Good maintenance is a deterrent to vandalism. Unauthorised use of the towing-path can be controlled to some extent by Patrol Officers or Wardens, this problem is an urban one and opening up the towing path to view can be useful. Fines for litter are £25 for rubbish in the water and £100 for rubbish on the towpath - almost an invitation to foul the waterway. The removal of litter is frequently the job of volunteers. Eyesores, for instance the used car dump S of Loughborough, can be controlled by local authorities, though in many cases improvement must depend on the occupier or a voluntary society.

25.07 Recreation uses can have an adverse effect on the environment,

especially through over-use. Separation of activities in space and time is sometimes possible (see 20.00). Erosion of the towpath at points of access will be lessened by the large number of access points in use. Regular repair on the sections of maximum use is also necessary.

## **26.00 WORK BY VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS**

**26.01** Enhancement of the waterway environment in Leics has been achieved by voluntary organisations, in some cases by pressure groups affecting policy, in others by the supply of specific recreation facilities, and not least by the provision of voluntary labour.

**26.02** Voluntary labour is welcomed cautiously by BWB, there are problems of skill, demarcation, liability and so on. Work most easily carried out is confined to clearance, and this needs to be done on a steady annual basis, of course with permission from BWB or appropriate landowner and suitable insurance cover. Voluntary labour is available from the following organisations:- Old Union Canal Society, Inland Waterways Association, local branch, Leicester Civic Society, CPRE, Leics branch, East Midlands Conservation Corps, Volunteer Bureaux, Loughborough and Leicester.

**26.03** Voluntary projects in Leics have included:-  
Restoration of the Welford Arm (re-opened in 1969) by the Old Union Canal Society and BWB.  
Clearance at the Foxton Inclined Plane by CPRE and others.  
Clearance at Aylestone lockhouse by the Old Union Canals Society.  
Continuous clearance of the watercourse in Leicester City by the Leicester Civic Society.  
Clearance of land at EMCAS and Abbey Meadows organised by the Manpower Services Commission.

## **27.00 PRACTICAL PROJECTS**

**27.01** Some suggested practical projects in Leics where volunteers could help by supplying labour, publicity, funds, and pressure are listed below:-

**27.02** Clearance, repair, and reinstatement of the towing path at specific points.  
Provision of trees at specific points, also a small number of benches.  
Publication of leaflets and booklets on the Circular Walks and Urban Trails based on the canal.  
Waymarking of the Circular Walks described in the publications.  
Creation of a new public right of way to link Tucker's Pit, Loughborough, with Miller's Bridge, to improve access to the canal.  
Provision of waterside refreshments in Leicester.  
Urban renewal alongside the canal in Leicester.  
Improvements at the old Mill site at Barrow-on-Soar.  
Improvements at Aylestone Mill lockhouse and Kings Mill lockhouse.  
Improvement at Zouch Mill, badly converted into flats.  
Development of an industrial museum for the Leics granite industry at Mountsorrel, where waterside installations, the manager's house, and the mineral railway line bridge survive from Mountsorrel Granite Co. now absorbed by Redland Roadstone.  
Provision of camping facilities (tents) suitable for long distance walkers in the vicinity of Trent lock/Redhill, Wanlip, Glen Parva, and Foxton.  
Provision of guides to the waterway wherever required.

27.03 A pilot practical project for enhancing the waterside walk at Barrow-on-Soar was got under way in 1977, promoted by the Canals & Waterways Study Group.

## 28.00 SAFETY OF WALKERS

28.01 A lone walker, especially if wearing heavy boots and a rucksack, would have a slim chance of survival if he or she fell into an isolated lock. Locks occur roughly every mile on the Grand Union, and the average lock has a 6 ft depth of water when 'empty' and a 12 ft depth when 'full', with vertical slippery sides. When the lock is 'empty', it is possible to get out by means of the ladder recessed in the lock wall at the mid-point of the lock, or to climb up the nearest lock gate. The deepest locks are Kegworth Deep, Bishop Meadow, Barrow Deep, and Buckby, Whilton, Stoke Bruerne, and there are staircases of locks and side ponds at Foxton and Watford. Many locks, especially north of Leicester, have ground paddles fitted, which when opened draw water via an underground tunnel into the top end of a lock, causing strong suction. Everyone should stand well clear, especially children. Great care is needed in wet conditions, and when attention is focussed on activities at the lock, as trip hazards occur in the form of footholds, mooring posts, and rebated lock sides to take the gates when open, also there is the temptation to cross the lock by means of the beams. Lifebelts are provided at popular locks, maintained by the Council in some cases, and in others by BWB, and their loss should always be reported.

28.02 Although locks are the most dangerous spots where drowning might occur, hazards along the towing path include potholes, tree roots, sometimes mooring ropes or posts, and possibly overhanging branches.

28.03 Traffic hazards occur where the canal bank is used for vehicular access as between the Basin and Swingbridge at Loughborough, and at all points where the towpath swings from one bank to the other at a road bridge, for instance Barrow-on-Soar. At such points, visibility can be limited by a hump backed bridge, sharp bends in the road and parked cars. Extreme care is necessary.

28.04 Where fences are necessary to warn or delineate, open barriers affording a view of the waterway give greater safety than solid ones. The presence of walkers could help to minimise occurrences such as vandalism, accidental drownings, young children in difficulties, suicides, and the drowning of animals.

28.05 Activities contrary to the Bye-laws constitute a hazard to walkers such as - especially just south of Leicester - cyclists, motorcyclists, and youths with air rifles. Anglers can be belligerent if provoked.

28.06 Floods are common in the Soar Valley, and walkers should not attempt the towing-paths, especially near weirs, in very wet weather.

28.07 Statistics on water oriented accidents can be obtained from the Severn/Trent Water Authority, Meadow Lane, Nottingham.

## 29.00 A CANAL CODE

29.01 New canal byelaws were confirmed in May 1977, the maximum penalty for offences being increased to £100. A notice appearing beside many of the Board's waterways contains ten prohibitions. A country code for waterway users appearing in earlier editions of Nicholson's Guide to the Waterways, BWB, stresses the safeguarding of adjoining property. Conditions listed on

a Permit for walking canal towpaths are concerned with the Board's liability.

29.02 A comprehensive Canal Code, with positive injunctions, would be welcomed by towpath walkers.

### 30.00 PUBLICITY

30.01 The Canals & Waterways Study Group are interested in the publication of leaflets and/or booklets on the Circular Walks, which would include something of the history of the canal and its environment. The following have appeared in 1977, produced by individual members of the Group:-

"Main Line Steam Trail", Bob Middleton, published by the Information Centre, Charnwood Community Council, John Storer House, Loughborough, 15p; a canal walk from Loughborough to Rothley, returning by steam train.

"Canal Walks in Leicestershire" by John Anderson, published by the author, 29 The Fairway, Blaby, at 70p, and largely featuring circular walks based on the Old Union.

30.02 Town trails in Loughborough and Leicester, taking in the town and its waterway, might be published as separate leaflets by the Group. Alternatively, in Leicester, conducted walks organised by the City Council, some of which have taken in the canal and riverside, might be published.

30.03 Information on the regional route might more readily be published by the East Midlands Tourist Board.

30.04 Outlets for such leaflets and booklets are plentiful. At canal venues, there is a ready sale for all canal literature and ephemera, both in its own locality and beyond. Canal societies are always ready to sell material which increases public awareness. Local and Tourist Information Centres also provide outlets, as do waterside shops and museums.

30.05 Arrangements can always be made by waterway enthusiasts to give guided walks, or boat trips, or illustrated lectures to interested groups. It is proposed to stage a major exhibition of the Grand Union in Leicester in 1978.

30.06 For a booklet on towpath walks generally, and waterways maps, write to the Sales Department, Inland Waterways Association, 114 Regents Park Road, London; also see British Waterways Board publications.

\* \* \* \* \*





# LEICESTERSHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

## Canals & Waterways Study Group

### "Walking the Grand Union" Report of the Feasibility Study

#### Checklist of corrections:

- Page 1. 2.02 .. the Board took over the nationalized canals in 1963
- " 2 3.03 .. double rail metal barrier..
- " 3 5.06 A privately owned field..  
5.10 ... and bus stops close by.  
5.11 ... river reaches...  
5.13 Oadby/Wigston District have...
- " 4 5.16 (NOT Welford Arms ! )  
6.02 1971  
... where street parking creates a hazard.
- " 5 7.06 .. follow the field path...  
8.05 From centre of village...  
8.06 4 1/4 miles. Or back by canal, 4 3/4 miles.  
8.09 ... back to Welford Wharf.
- " 6 9.01 .. microcosm
- " 7 10.01 .. ~~by the~~ major water routes..  
11.02 ... the earliest navigation..  
11.03 .. Abbey Park..
- " 8 11.04 ... the tree-lined Mile Straight..  
11.05 .. making its way northwards..
- " 9 14.01 .. a mile from the towing path..  
14.02 .. type of accommodation..  
14.04 (add at end of para) Camping and caravanning facilities were available at Cosgrove Park.
- " 10 15.01 .. villages have a shop..  
15.06 ... service station for the M1 is in the area.
- " 11/12 17.05 (this para is continued on page 12 - it would be better not to split para in this way)
- " 12 17.06 .. IWA Boat Rallies, Regattas, etc.  
18.01 P.A. Stevens
- " 13 19.01 ... public path agreements with BWB for the entire system of ...  
19.07 ... come into this category.
- " 14 20.05 (insert) At Cosgrove the towpath is used by people going to work.  
(before walkers do not favour.... or for horseriding)
- " 14 21.01 ... local authority's survey..  
(add) The original stone edgings have largely fallen away, and there has been some replacement by new piling.
- " 14 21.04 ... Tarmac road
- " 15 21.17 (~~the rest of this para is on the back of this page. Omit the words contained in brackets.~~) (This para is complete, on the back of page 15)
- " 16 23.01 ... as a 'cruising' waterway..  
... their duties do not extend...

8.01 (Foston is correct - not an error for Foxton!)

- Page 16.
- 23.03 ... private owners, BWSB, Water Authorities, local Authorities including Parish Councils, and the voluntary bodies.
- " 17 23.08 ... very heavy usage, a well maintained finish...
- 24.01 ... through Govt. agencies,
- 24.02 (add) See para. 2.06
- " 18 25.01 ... a commercial commodity ..
- 25.02 ... the Kilby to Foxton SSSI  
(insert) Grants are available from the Nature Conservancy Council. (after .. by volunteers. and before .. Pollution and vandalism ... could affect wildlife.)
- 25.05 ... all respond to treatment.
- 25.06 ... to some extent by Patrol Officers or Wardens.  
- almost an invitation ...
- " 19 26.01 ... of the waterway environment...
- 26.02 (do not indent the list of organisations)
- 27.02 (do not indent the list of practical projects)  
... Circular Walks and Urban Trails
- 27.03 A pilot practical project
- " 20 28.01 ... and side ponds at Foxton and Watford.
- 28.05 ... constitute a hazard..
- 29.01 New Canal byelaws
- 29.02 .. injunctions..
- " 21 30.01 (insert) ... a canal walk from Loughborough to Rothley, returning by steam train. (before "Canal Walks in Leicestershire", John Anderson, published by the author, at 70p, and largely featuring circular walks based on the Old Union: members of "Walks in the Soar Valley" is in preparation by the Group.)
- " 21 30.04 ... for all canal literature
- 30.06 (add) also see British Waterways Board publications.
- 

Queries: please phone Mrs. J. Bates, Loughborough 67065.

K.G. ~~Hilton~~ Hilton

Ashby Canal Society

F.W.G. James

Leics. Hist. & Phil. ?

Rodney Offley

Rothley Parish Council

Rothley

Sr. J. Stimson

Leics. & Rutland Society of Architects

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Atherstone House  
Wards End, Loughborough

Asst. Chief Planning Officer  
Charnwood

David Wrightman  
Planning Dept  
County Hall  
Glenfield, Leicester

Countryside Officer

John Matthias  
Museum & Art Gallery  
New Walk  
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Biology Section

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Leicester

Leicester & District Amalgamated  
Society of Anglers

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Group

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c/o. 133 Loughboro Road  
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CPRE, Leics Rural Community Officer

Deek Burdett

Leics. Footpath Assoc.

Don Gordon

Leics Footpaths Assoc.

## Walks in the Soar Valley

J. Bates	L'boro Civic Trust
P. Ramsey	L.W.A
D. Gordon	Leics Footpaths
B. Middleton	CPRE/Rural Community Council
G.F. Silvester	L'boro Civic Trust
B.C.J. Williams	L'boro Archaeol. Society
A. Beryl	Rural Community Council

The Leics Environmental Forum is a group <sup>formed of</sup> representatives of <sup>voluntary</sup> Amenity Societies and public Authorities, concerned to improve the environment in Leicestershire.

The Canals & Waterways Study Group consists of certain members who have a special interest in this subject, and includes:  
(as over)

Advice has also been given from time to time by, among others

- John Holmes - Asst. Chief Planning Officer, Charnwood
  - David Anthill - Leics Libraries & Info. Service
  - Les Hales - Soar Boat Club
  - R. Green - Leicesters & District A.S. of Anglers
  - British Waterways Board
  - L.A. and voluntary societies of Northants
- Rosab.

Malcolm BOWER  
Wendy ANDERSON

Old Union Canals Society

John BURROWS

Leicester Civic Society

Peter RAMSEY  
Tony WRIGHT

Inland Waterways Assoc.

Joan BATES

Loughboro & District Civic Trust

G.E. CASTEL

Soil Association

Mick  
Malcolm MADDIMER

East Midlands Conservation ~~Group~~ Corp

Dr. Bob MIDDLETON  
(Andy BERLYN)

Council for the Preservation of Rural England  
Rural Community Assoc.

Doek BURDETT

Leics. Footpaths Association

Don GORDON  
Ken HILTON

K.G. HILLER

Ashby Canal Society (see below)

F.  
W.G. JAMES  
Dr. McNALL (later)

Leicester Literary & Philosophic Society

Rodney OFFLEY

Rothley Parish Council

St. John STIMSON

Leics & Rutland Society of Architects  
Environmental Group

John MATTHIAS

Leicester Museum, Biology Section

David WIGHTMAN

Countryside Officer, Leics Planning Dept.  
Charnwood

John HOLMES

Asst. Chief Planning Officer, ~~West~~ Leics Planning Dept.

R. GREEN

Leics <sup>center</sup> & District Amalgamated Society of Anglers

X Peter LANCASTER

Leics. Environmental Forum - chairman

\* D. ANTHILL

Leics. Libraries & Info-Service?

ASTBURY

?

First met on  
6 Feb. 1975

COXON

Ramblers ? Rambling Assoc?

Mrs. SWAN

Ramblers ?

\* Les HALES

Sear Boat Club

Ken HILTON

? ~~as above~~ ?

Michael DUNK

?

D. TEW

Council for the Pres. of R. England.