

British Waterways Scotland

Annual Meeting

on 27 September 2007

at The Hub, Edinburgh



Questions & Answers

Pat Scott User

Thank you to the staff, I found Steve's talk inspiring thank you, it sounded great. In the Caledonian Canal I'd like to thank all the staff, they are wonderful, your biggest asset. The foreign boats you are talking about are coming through and the patience of your staff is amazing but the question I want to bring up is one of freight, when you were talking about it last year there was a lot in the paper about the freight that was going to be moving through the Caledonian Canal from the Glendoe project and that's well on and we haven't seen any evidence of freight being moved. Given how difficult the roads are in that area and how good it would be to move the freight by the canal I wondered what the developments on that were.

Robin Evans

First of all on the people, I couldn't agree more. I had a wonderful holiday on the Caledonian Canal last year and one of the problems with the job I have is that you never have the chance to spend time with people and I found our people on the Caledonian just as you described them. It wasn't just because I was there, I saw them doing it with everyone else and the great thing is that's replicated throughout British Waterways, on every survey we do 95% of the customers rate our services as good or excellent with regards the service they get from the people on our canal and those people deserve a huge vote of thanks from everyone in British Waterways so I agree entirely on that. Scotland has a great opportunity for freight, we find freight south of the border very difficult to achieve and grow cause big boats require our dredging to get the water beneath them and that's very expensive. We also have to man most of our structures when we have freight traffic because bog boats are forever stopping, this adds considerably to our costs. In Scotland with the manned structures and very deep canals we have the opportunity and Steve shares that. There are particular issues on the Glendoe project I know but Steve is much abler to talk about that.

Steve Dunlop

It's an excellent example of an opportunity missed in Glendoe. For those of you who don't know, Glendoe is at the side of Loch Ness and an enormous Hydro Power Station which entails the tunnelling into the hillside for 20km up to quite a high loch and for us when we looked at it, it seemed to us that with the scale of the project and the potential for the aggregates, the digging out of those tunnels, there was the potential for 800,000 tonnes of material to be transported across that very fragile Highland network not least coming through Fort Augustus where we have a few hundred thousand visitations. We really launched ourselves into this opportunity supported by the Scottish Government. We did all that we possibly could to bring a business case and a valuable option to take whatever aggregates that had to be moved. We had a plan to do that but unfortunately it was too little too late. The negotiations would probably have had to take place 6 years in advance so by the time we got to that stage the clock had already started ticking with a very expensive contract, and every day delay would have cost many thousands of pounds so it was with deep regret that we were unable to deliver that. We have spoken to the board at SEPA, the local authority and we have made a pledge to each other that if there are any other schemes of that nature, scale and opportunity we will start at the very beginning and capture that opportunity. We lost out there but the process of engagement will mean that we are absolutely ready next time so if anybody hears of any projects of that scale please come straight to myself or David Lamont.



Hamish Taylor
Boat Owner

As someone who uses all three canals I see more and more petty regulations creeping in. You can now only spend 30 days in the north but when you get to retiring age you like to be able to go there. now there is also 24 hour moorings with £8 per night. You would think that the less petty regulations the better.

Steve Dunlop

I think there will be an issue of detail where the Canal Managers Richard and Russell can certainly deal with you but I do agree and acknowledge that Scotland is a generation behind where England is where demand overstretches what the supply is for moorings and visitations. We in the Lowlands are very much about market making and that means doing all we can to encourage people, so when you tell me stories like that that means that there are issues there and that means there may well be some barriers in place. We want to be

active in stimulating a market and therefore we have to do that sensibly. We have to make economic charges that make sense but equally our role is to stimulate growth and make sure that we reach the level of usage in England. I will ask at the breakout sessions for Richard and Russell to speak to you specifically about those issues.

Robin Evans

We have very many challenges and right up there is the challenge of keeping the unique atmosphere and the different life you have on the Canals and life is more regulated, there's no question about that, environmentally, health and safety, legally, we are all being regulated far more and we do accept that challenge to ensure that we make the canals a pleasant safe place to be for everyone. But at the same time complying with the regulations and also making sure that you enjoy them. We are aware that it is easy to put up another sign, to make another charge because that's what we're under pressure to do from the regulators. We are trying all the time to keep those canals special and when you think we are getting it wrong do tell us.

Andy Carnduff

On this occasion I'm not speaking so much for the Salt sea sailors but for the pleasure sailors including my friend there who has a boat. I wonder what position British Waterways has taken along with Her Majesty's Revenue in terms of the continued supply of fuel for boats. I would very much hope to hear that you were acting strenuously to ensure that there was access to supply of fuels and that this wouldn't cost the suppliers too much in terms of establishment of own tankage and all the rest that goes with that. Could you offer us a couple of words on your support for minimising taxation and having fuel available?

Robin Evans

The red diesel debate's been going on for a long time. We took a strategic decision two years ago that we would support British Marine Federation of which we are a member and the British Marine Federation with the grouping of Canal enthusiasts and societies has been incredibly effective at lobbying on the red diesel issue and that has been our tactic. We were concerned that if we as a public authority went head to head with Treasury this would give them a reason to silence us and therefore silence the debate so we were very keen to support the British Marine Federation. We have been supporting them perhaps not as verily as some of you would wish but if you talked to Rob Stevens of the BMF then you will know that we have absolutely been supporting their campaign, unfortunately we have not got the answer that we all wanted but there is still a lot of work going on to delay implementation so we agree anything which makes boating more expensive, creates barriers to access as Steve calls it, is something we are very much against.

Anne Street
Boat Owner

In Steve's presentation I was heartened to notice that you mentioned you were doing work on the bridges to make them boat operated on some locks, is there a timescale for this? I know there are differences of opinion on this within the boating community because some people want the BW assistance to carry on, others don't, so I think it's got to be one of those things that has an option.

Steve Dunlop

We have a very active programme. What we have been doing is trialling some of the locks with the societies so we are testing that with users. The end result will be compromised across the network, some will move to a more user operated structure than we currently have but there will be one or two that will require our assistance. There is a programme of activity which David Lamont and Phil Martin are managing.

David Lamont

There are certain locks that are more strategic; the sea locks for example are ones where there is a huge safety issue associated with. Each of the lock structures across the network aren't exactly the same so there are a number of issues just with the mechanics of how we go about that and we need to move very sensitively towards how we might have user operation. Some boaters we know are certainly capable of undertaking these operations but since I've joined British Waterways I have taken an active role of getting onto the water and understanding lock structures and understanding boats going down the canal and I can see for myself equally how there are some serious health & safety issues that might be raised when we do let people operate their own locks. What we need to do is understand what sort of training would be required, what sort of additional infrastructure should be brought in to make the locks safe to work and also understand what sections of the community we really shouldn't have operating the locks because there is a risk with people operating lock structures as I'm sure you understand. We do have lock structures being operated by users just now in the Crinan so we know it is possible, and we know from the success in England and Wales where user operations are seen as fairly standard so there is still a journey to go on. We are in a pilot phase just now in understanding what the mechanical aspects are of lock structures and what needs to be modified and when you have understood all that there is a cost and a timeline for managing the implementation so we are pretty much in the starting blocks. I would like to see in a 12 month period a pilot being concluded and that will then point the direction of travel and what the investment programme might be and how we segregate users from those that can be allowed to use them and those that we probably want to protect.

Campbell Christie

It was only at our last board meeting that we were discussing some of the health & safety issues associated with users of the canal. Very often hire boat users, inexperienced users have great difficulty as a result of their own operation of the locks. There is a balance to be struck between those who are confident and able to deal with that problem on their own and new people coming onto the canals being happy to be helped through what is quite a frightening experience for inexperienced users.

Robert Hunter
Stirling Council

Steve and Richard have spoken the past couple of years about the fairly major study that you were doing with Scottish Enterprise about moorings and I just wondered where that is. We are looking at a small boat users guide right up to Stirling, we had a meeting a couple of weeks ago in the rowing club in Stirling and anecdotally the rowing club were saying that they would frequently turn the corner heading to Stirling old harbour and find boats flying Swedish, Dutch and German flags which was something we had not been aware of but again just an indication of demand that we are not familiar with, boats coming up the river into Stirling and staying overnight and using the facilities.

Steve Dunlop

The results of that study are imminent and again we are very grateful for the funds from the Scottish Government towards that exercise because it is entirely wrapped up in how we assess demand for the whole of the west coast and how that integrates with the Forth. It really is about bringing all that information, all that data together which has informed The Helix project and indeed the Leven project. That demand study is out at the moment, it's almost complete and I think we are just assessing the impacts of that. It will become public in the very near future so we will send you a copy of that information.

Pete Simpson

Zazou

We have the flagship development, Edinburgh Quay, which is a struggling development because there are many commercial properties unlet. I'm sure that British Waterways is working to get those properties let and bring Edinburgh Quay to life. It would be useful if people who are operating businesses or doing things on the canal like our restaurant boat, the Reunion Community boat, Edinburgh Canal Society were involved more in consultation with what we can do to bring that area to life. Initiatives have been taken by British Waterways but we are not consulted about them in advance, we are not invited, and we are the people doing the stuff and we would like to operate more out of Edinburgh Quay, to be given priority, to be encouraged to have business there but we need your help, support, encouragement and involvement in that place to make it work.

Steve Dunlop

I recognise some of that and I agree with all of it, there was a festival last week and we are very clear that we need to step into a business support development phase for those businesses that have begun to take route at Edinburgh Quay. That is critical for us and our partners but there is no reason why the consultation and engagement that we have developed right at the end of the canal shouldn't extend right through the Edinburgh Canal Quarter which would include your business and Re-Union. I'm very happy to take that away, that is something that Richard and Ronnie will work on and therefore I will give you that commitment that we will include you in the plans for Edinburgh Quay as a destination as that moves forward.



Campbell Christie

I want to bring to an end the question and discussion session and maybe just say a few words in conclusion. This will be the last occasion that I will chair this meeting so I'm sad

about that but I'm sure many of you will be pretty pleased to move onto someone new who will deal with things in a different way and maybe even a better way. One of the advantages of being a Non Executive Member of BWB is that you have a longer life than the politicians who put you in place so when I was asked to do this I was just reflecting. If you go back ten years and think about those developments in ten years, you really get the satisfaction that politicians don't get because you are there at the beginning and you have a chance of being there at the end, very often the politicians and civil servants move on.

If you go back to the mid 1990s and think of where we were then and where we are now in Scotland there really has been ten years or more of absolutely unbelievable developments on the canal network in Scotland and just so that I don't miss out my thanks to people let me say I really have found it very inspiring to work with some of the people I have worked with over that period. Jim Stirling was here for a number of years, a key figure in Scotland and it really was Jim, a great delight to work with you, George Ballinger and your team.

In terms of technical solutions George was the man and I remember when he first showed us the Kelpie idea we just looked at him and said "come on George your pulling our leg" but the possibility is really inspiring so Jim thank you very much to you and your team and others who I have been very pleased to work with and following Jim, Steve to you and to your team for the work that you have done in taking forward the engineering solution to build the Millennium Link, to carry out the stabilisation of the canal and so on. All of those decisions were taken, the theme now is what you are doing to take all that forward because it is really inspiring and also can I thank your colleagues in British Waterways Scotland Group, many of them who are here today who have been a support to all of these things.

When we had devolution, when the responsibility for British Waterways Scotland was transferred to the Scottish Executive we thought that it was important to have a group that could be an interface between British Waterways and the politicians and British Waterways Board to make sure that Scottish issues were well understood in the British Waterways Board and the Ministers could feel there was a conduit in Scotland that could be helpful to ensure that Scottish issues were put before the British Waterways Board. The British Waterways Scotland Group has performed that function and I'm very pleased to have worked with so many of you over the past ten years I have been involved.

Just reflecting back my first involvement was when I was the General Secretary of the Scottish TUC and I knew about the waterways marginally and I lived within a drive and a seven iron of the Union Canal and worked on the Union Canal but didn't have much idea of what was involved and it was Jim and his colleagues who approached the STUC to be one of the supporters for the bid for the Millennium Link. That's when I first really began to give some thought to the issue and I have to say that when talking to people at that stage before I became involved, they told me what they were going to do and they were going to dig up the M8 and M80 in order to allow the Millennium Link and I thought "you must be joking" . The miracle was how well even at that stage the construction was carried out, handled in a marvellous way and that has been part of the great delight of working for British Waterways because the quality has always been at the centre of what they do. Never taking shortcuts, finding ways to move forward and doing it in a way which produced an end product of quality and that's one of the messages that I would want to pass on to Ministers, what has been achieved has been achieved because British Waterways has used what has been made available to it financially and this is to produce quality solutions. What would be unacceptable, if we don't have the funding in the future then the priority will still have to be the maintenance of the asset because that's what in perpetuity will be there for us.

The Millennium Link was a great feature of what has been achieved during the period I was involved. I was involved in early discussions about the bid when I was with Scottish Enterprise, when I think Jim managed to persuade Scottish Enterprise they should be supportive of the building of the Millennium Link. We had to find finance to put alongside the Millennium Fund in order to build the Millennium Link and I remember the debate with the Glasgow Development Agency when Crawford Beveridge from Scottish Enterprise said “you have to put your amount into the pot in order for Scottish Enterprise to make this contribution to the Millennium Link” and my colleagues and the Board said “what do we want to do that for, what’s going to be in it for Glasgow?” Fortunately there was enough common sense in the debate to say well that’s going to be positive and the funding came from Glasgow.

I’m sure the same problem existed in many other areas, all the local authorities along the Millennium Link had to find the money to provide financial support and that was achieved. Now of course, everyone claims that was a great project, but the local authorities had the same debate, was this going to be value for money. The Caledonian and the Crinan are tremendous features in Scotland but the bulk of the population in Scotland are in the central belt and what has created interest in British Waterways has been in the centre of Scotland to have this great asset that people can visit, people feel part of, it’s part of their communities, it has been a delight to have been there at the start, there at the concept, being as critical as anyone about some engineering solutions, but now seeing what a great catalyst it is for regeneration, for involving communities. It is fantastic to have been there at the beginning and as it now begins to take off and how we get value from it is really a delight.

Falkirk is competing for the title of the Canals Capital and I remember the first time Jim and others were showing us the location of the Falkirk Wheel. I’d lived in Falkirk for a number of years and Tamfourhill was never in my vista. I drove past it but there wasn’t a lot to attract you to Tamfourhill and it was a mile away from the canal but how wrong could you be. I thought this would be a great achievement, the thought of building a stretch of canal was challenging enough but I remember Jim saying “look at the vista as you look out onto this wilderness”. That was going to be The Falkirk Wheel and now when my grandchildren come up from the south the first thing they say is “I want to go to The Falkirk Wheel”. Some of them just want to play in the kids playground but it really is tremendous.

I remember as well on the Board the engineers came up with the first solution and it was just going to be a traditional lift. Our Engineers had enough ingenuity and it was Stuart who reported to the Board that we want to be looking forward, we will have something that is different. We saw designs and then to see it all coming to fruition, to be standing on the structure before the final building was completed and to see it now it has been worthwhile and now how we use that as a way forward, is magnificent. There is a picture of the Queen, those of you who were there on that day, it bucketed down. I remember meeting Lord & Lady MacFarlane who were sat in the terracing with no cover and the rain was pouring down and then the Queen arrived and the sun came out, blue sky. George Greener tells the story that they had a podium where the Queen and George went to press the button to get the wheel to revolve and it’s true to say that the button did nothing so the Queen presses the button after she made her speech and she looked at George and said “Mr Greener I don’t think its working”. Of course it wasn’t working at all, it was the operators at the foot of the Wheel, they had to press their button and get the Wheel to operate.

The Wheel of course was a catalyst that led to so many stimulating developments that we've seen since. Edinburgh Quay, it may not be 100% but it's a hell of a lot better than it was at the end of the Union Canal before and the potential that we have now to develop a real canal hub in the centre of Edinburgh is tremendous. Hopefully we will have the development of the MacTaggart & Meikle site but the real prize is the brewery site at the end of the Union Canal, which could provide a range of economic regeneration benefits.

The Opening of Port Dundas was another tremendous moment in my vista when we got Speaker Michael Martin to come along and open the development. I've known Michael for so many years but he really was very chuffed at being able to do that and to have the lock named Speakers Lock. Those of you will remember we had traffic jams on the M8 as cars were driving past thinking what was going on in Port Dundas. Probably some of them didn't recognise it as Port Dundas but it was an amazing day.

Just to finish, my favourite development on the Forth & Clyde is Auchinstarry; I mean what a wonderful development that is. Not so much that it has provided marina facilities which were badly needed and which helped generate activity on the canal but it is a wonderful location and of course just up the hill from Auchinstarry is the village of Croy and just along is the village of Kilsyth, further along there is Twechar, all mining communities devastated as the result of the loss of mining industries in the 1950s and 60s. Just to bring economic activity there is a real demonstration of how we can use the water in that positive way but the thing that delights me is the thought that we can say to people, come to Croy and Kilsyth for your holidays in order to benefit from the waterway activities in Auchinstarry. Those of you who know Croy and Kilsyth and the thought of people coming for their holidays it is just tremendous. Maybe two or three years down the line we will have the pub sorted.

Now Champions League, we just have to win the league, we might not win it this year, but next year just a possibility so maybe two or three years down the line. We're on our way anyway and that's really marvellous. Just to conclude in the future, what Steve was saying today really brings together all of what we've been about over the past ten years, in order to see waterways at the centre of a lot of economic activity in Scotland, leveraging large sums of money for very little in the way of public expenditure. Just to get the Helix project complete, what can be done to get the canal into the River Forth, how it will fit in with the development at Bo'Ness and Stirling, tremendous, let's hope we can do that.

The vision for taking the canal structure into Loch Lomond in order to release the boats in Loch Lomond onto the Clyde and into the Canal. What's happening in Clydebank, how Clydebank is being revitalised and the role the canal plays in that.

The completion of Fountainbridge project, development around Tamfourhill, Rosebank into The Helix area, it is marvellous. I won't be here in ten years time to see those coming to fruition but that really is what we can visualise from what has been achieved over the last ten years. I have been very pleased to have been a part of that, I'm very pleased to have worked with marvellous people from British Waterways who found the solutions. Every time there is a problem there is always an engineering solution and we have people who are brilliant at being able to do that. It's been great working with them and it's been great to be part of British Waterways Scotland.

Thank you.