

NO WAY

A request by the Royal Canal Amenity Group for permission to restore to navigable condition four locks near Kilcock has been refused by C.I.E. Almost £1,500 had been raised or promised for the project, including an amenity grant of £500 from Kildare County Council, when it was brought to a sudden halt. The reasons given for the C.I.E. decision are:-

1. It would be reopening to navigation a considerable portion of the Royal Canal which was closed by the Board under powers conferred on it by the Transport Act 1960.
2. Because it would seem to be pre-empting the Minister of Transport's decision on the whole future of the Royal Canal - "A decision which is awaited no less eagerly by the Board than by you".
3. To open up the canal as envisaged in the project would involve the Board in additional expense on maintenance and the Board could not see its way to incur this expenditure until the future of the canal is decided by the Minister.

In 1976, C.I.E. agreed to the Royal Canal Amenity Group restoring the 13th lock and this voluntary project is well underway. The restoration of the next four locks was an obvious extension of the 13th lock project as it would open up 37 miles of continuous waterway. The work would have been done on an entirely voluntary basis and the true value of the completed project would have been at least £10,000. Not only is the project an essential first step towards developing the full amenity potential of the Royal Canal in Counties Kildare and Meath but considerable advantages would accrue to C.I.E. in relation to water management. The present appalling condition of the canal in and near Kilcock, where rampant weed growth completely blocks the channel, makes control of water flow and levels during the summer months almost impossible.

C.I.E. has passed the buck to the Minister for Transport and Power. Quite apart from the pros and cons of this particular project, however, the time would seem to be ripe for a full appraisal of the possibility of restoring the Royal Canal as a Government sponsored Job Creation Project. Let us hope that the Minister and his colleagues in Government will give full and immediate consideration to this suggestion, which has already been put to Mr. Faulkner by the I.W.A.I., and that we shall see some positive steps being taken to reopen the canal before the end of 1977.

MULLINGAR

Great activity is reported from Mullingar. During the Summer a Legion of Mary True Devotion to the Nation team were concentrating on cleaning and tidying the canal along the Green Road and this has been followed by a Government sponsored work project to clean up the right-of-way

between the Loreto Convent and the canal. The local Youth Club, County Council, Chamber of Commerce and Mullingar Branch of the I.W.A.I. are also involved in the latter project. It is understood that the canal itself will be cleaned out, also. To do this a section of the summit level will be dammed and the water drained out through the dry dock.

WESTMEATH WORKCAMP

For three weeks during, August a party of volunteers from Germany, Denmark, England and Ireland (North and South) worked together to halt the decay of the locks in the Coolnahay flight leading down from the summit level towards Ballynacargy - and a major task it was too. Totally neglected for some sixteen years at least, many of the lock chambers more closely resembled rock gardens, sprouting as they did a great variety of plants, shrubs and trees. If left undisturbed, it was just a matter of time before the masonry would be completely destroyed but now, thanks to the work of these volunteers, the locks have been rescued from dereliction.

This most successful work camp was organised by Voluntary Service International in collaboration with the Royal Canal Amenity Group. Special thanks go to Mr. T. Shanley of the Garage, Ballynacargy, for providing valuable assistance with transport of the work party throughout the three weeks of the camp and also to Mr. J. Cosgrove, The Wagon Wheel, Ballynacargy, for help with organising some. Grants towards the cost of the work camp were made to V.S.I. by the Council of the I.W.A.I. (£100), the Athlone Branch of the I.W.A.I. (£100) and the Midland Regional Tourism Organisation (£50).

DUBLIN

Royal Canal Water Rats

Congratulations to the Royal Canal Water Rats who received the £100 award for Special Clean-up Projects in Dublin Corporation's Tidy Districts Competition. This small band of volunteers has cleaned up 1¼ miles of waterway and three locks between Cross Guns and Broombridge.

Iona Residents Association

Iona Residents Association were also recipients of a £100 award in the Tidy Districts Competition, taking first place in the "Established Areas" category. Although not especially for their work of cleaning-up the Royal Canal. this work must have undoubtedly contributed greatly toward. their gaining the award.

£120,000 for Clean-up of Dublin's Waterways.

As part of the Government's. Job Creation schemes. Dublin Corporation has received a handsome sum for various clean-up projects. It is understood that the

Community and Environment Department are open to suggestions regarding areas most in need of attention and. therefore Resident. Associations bordering the Royal Canal should submit ideas to the Corporation as soon as possible.

Plea to Restore Locks in Dublin

Iona Residents Association are leading the way in a campaign to get C.I.E., the Corporation or somebody to restore the Royal Canal locks from Ashtown eastwards. They realise that until this is done the City section of the canal can never be kept in reasonable condition. Unless maintenance boats, weed cutting boats and dredgers can move freely up and down the waterway it will be. impossible to develop its full amenity and recreational potential and the canal will remain an eyesore for years to come. The canal can never be maintained satisfactorily from the banks, especially in the City where there is very restricted bank access along many stretches.

The Iona Residents Association is getting considerable support from T.D's. and Councillors. They have also written to the Minister for Transport and Power who referred their request to C.I.E. who. in turn, have stated they can do nothing until the future of the canal is decided by the Minister for Transport and Power. An interesting situation but not one that is likely to get anyone very far very fast!

KILCOCK

In June a small team of volunteers from Kilcock Community Council and the Royal Canal Amenity Group spent a very wet Saturday afternoon patching up the breast gates of the 15th lock at The Maws. C.I.E. had previously promised that if the gates were made watertight they would fill the level above, which includes the harbour in Kilcock, and check the banks for leakage. If there was no seepage the level would then be kept full, thus adding immeasurably to the amenity value of the canal in Kilcock.

As it happened, the level was never filled and the canal remains. a disgrace. It appears that it was about this time that tunnelling contractors inadvertently breached the long level near Killucan and it became impossible to obtain sufficient water. This was a great disappointment to all concerned, especially those in Kilcock who had placed seats along the bank in anticipation of the promised water.

OPEN ALL THE WAY CANOEING THE ROYAL CANAL IN THE 1950s.

By D.M.HARTFORD

PART 1 MAYNOOTH TO HILL OF DOWN

If you have seen Douglas Heard's film of the Royal Canal, taken in 1955, you will know that it was then still navigable from Dublin to the Shannon. He made the voyage in the Hark, a converted ship's lifeboat; but what was it like for canoe? I can tell you what it was like, that is provided one went in the month of May before the weed grew thick, for we followed six weeks after Hark considerably lower on the water in a two-seater 17ft canvas canoe. The memory of Hark was still fresh in the mind of lonely canal side cottagers who had not yet got over the excitement of a passing vessel (one woman telling me it was as big as the Mail-Boat) so little was the traffic by that time on the Royal Canal.

The first day we paddled from Blanchardstown and got to Maynooth about 5 p.m., and after tea on the bank against the College wall pushed on again westwards. The rose tipped buckbean flowers still lined the edge of the water, and all the way there were marsh marigolds and, showing further out on the water the first tips of what would later be dense Marestails. We had only two more obstacles before Kilcock, the 14th lock at Jackson's Bridge and the 15th at Chamber's Bridge. At one of them a grandfather and a string of small children helped us carry our canoe and bits of luggage up the bank, across the road, and down to a grassy place to launch again on the far side of the lock. Soon after lock 15 we were glad to see the straight stretch of canal that runs beside the road into Kilcock, where we spent the first night. The next morning the canal wound prettily west of Kilcock and there were plenty of swans, and we soon found that they were frightened of the canoe and quite harmless. Paddling on after a stop at Enfield we were disappointed with the aqueduct over the River Blackwater, for we were too low on the water to see over the edge. and after the stone-flanked entrance there were only tree tops instead of hedges to show we were crossing a valley. Later on it was the same crossing the Boyne aqueduct, but between the two was a sylvan interlude. Just before Moyvalley station we passed into a long bend of beautiful trees; beeches, willows and others dropping pink and cream sepals on the water and giving dappled shade. In this shade we stopped and lay down on the bank and almost immediately a bicycle almost ran over us. We found the towpaths used quite a lot and passed an old man peddling ash-plants, several carts whose horses we alarmed, school children and men going home on bicycles, like the one in whose track we had settled.

A stiffer breeze soon pushed us along the miles after the Boyne aqueduct, and I remember that when the hump of the Hill of Down came in sight we decided we needed more sustenance and landed on a burnt and brambly sort of heath. A perishing wind we had no idea of down on the canal was blowing up there, so that we ate and drank stamping around. After this we did the last half-mile to the house at Hill of Down. There the station ones have their backs to the water on the left and the Post Office (which we sought) is set at an angle on the other side with a neat concrete-edged garden. Here we left our canoe for the night.

(To be continued)

LACK OF WATER

Every summer, with monotonous regularity, the Royal Canal suffers from lack of water, just at the time when it could be most enjoyed as an amenity. This summer was no exception and it is understood that the cause was a breach close to D'Arcy's bridge, near Killucan, which resulted from tunnelling work in connection with a drainage scheme, (not meant to drain the canal!). Last year the cause was given as drought and the year before it was blamed on bridge works. - are we ever to get full levels of water the whole year round? Even when water is plentiful the management of the water, particularly in the 10th, 11th, and 12th, levels leave much to be desired. Actual control of water is of course, out of the hands. of either the

Lack of water (Continued from overleaf)

I.W.A.I. or the R.C.A.G. and all these organisations can resort to is constant pleading with C.I.E. to keep the paddles down! It is certainly most discouraging for all the volunteers who have spent so much time over the past three years working on the canal, particularly on the Blanchardstown to Ashtown stretch where the effects of a shortage of water seem to be felt most.

As a result of this year's water shortage no trip boats operated on the Royal Canal after early July, much to the disappointment of large numbers of people who often travelled many miles to visit the canal. To all those whose journeys were in vain the Royal Canal Amenity Group offers its apologies but, 8S already stated, the matter was, and still remains, completely outside their control.

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ROYAL CANAL AMENITY GROUP NEWS

SOCIAL EVENING

SATURDAY 8th OCTOBER

A Dinner-Dance will be held in the Restaurant

ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS PHOENIX PARK DUBLIN

8 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Tickets (Price £4.50 each) available from Committee Members or by post (s.a.e. please) from Mr. E.T.Galway, 152, Navan Road, Dublin, 7.

A similar function held last year was a great success and enjoyed by all. Numbers are limited, so to avoid disappointment. BOOK EARLY!

ANUAL GENERAL MEETING MONDAY 21st NOVEMBER

The 3rd A.G.M. of the Group will be held in the Private Stand, Phoenix Park Racecourse, Castleknock, at 8.00 p.m. Members will receive full details later.

CHRISTMAS CARDS

The Group has three designs available this year and all proceeds from sales will assist the work of restoration of the canal. All cards are of high quality and complete with envelopes.

CARD A: Full colour reproduction of a photograph of the Group's passenger boat 'Royal Talbot' on an attractive stretch of the canal near Castleknock. Size 8" x 5" price £1.10 for 10, including postage.

CARD B: Black and white reproduction of a Royal Canal Fly Boat in Dublin, 1843. Size 6" x 5" Price 65p for 10, including postage.

CARD C NEW THIS YEAR Black and White reproduction of a 19th Century drawing of the Foster Aqueduct, situated near the terminus of the Royal Canal at Broadstone Harbour, Dublin, and demolished in 1951. Size 6" x 5" Price 75p for 10, including postage.

ORDERS, with remittance please, to Mr. B. Thornberry, 85, Roselawn Road, Castleknock, Co. Dublin.

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