



ITEM 4.1

The Exmoor National Park Local Access Forum – Wednesday 7th September 2005

Advance information

The British Canoe Union (BCU) is the UK Governing body, recognised by the Sports Councils, for the sport and recreation of canoeing. It represents some 57,000 canoeists both as individual members and through over 600 affiliated clubs. Overall, some 2 million people go canoeing each year.

Government sponsored research has confirmed the BCU long held view that there is public access to less than 4% of rivers in England and Wales. Some of the most beautiful stretches of waterways do not have agreed access and a person could be committing a trespass by so much as wading in it, let alone canoeing on it.

The BCU through the federal divisions of Canoe England and the Welsh Canoe Association are campaigning on behalf of their members and others in the community who seek to secure greater access to the rivers in England and Wales.

Government Sponsored Research

DEFRA commissioned the University of Brighton to produce the research "Water-based sport and recreation: the facts (2001)". A BCU Briefing Note with an extract from the research detailing the linear river resource and rivers with public navigation rights is appended.

Water-based sport and recreation: the facts can be obtained from DEFRA, Countryside Division, Zone 1/03, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6EB

A summary of the research can be obtained from

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/resprog/findings/2001dec.htm>

This research was followed by a second study by the University of Brighton, "Improving Access for Canoeing on Inland Waterways - A Study of the Feasibility of Access Agreements"; and completed in May 2004. The study reported difficulties for negotiating access agreements. However, the study recommended a further study to seek access agreements on four rivers and this work commenced in January 2005.

The study and a summary, Research Notes CRN 79 are available from www.countryside.gov.uk.

Background to the BCU Campaign and actions

Access to and along water has been an issue for the BCU and increasingly so over the past 50 years, mirroring the problems encountered by climbers, walkers and ramblers.

- 1999 - The Countryside and Rights of Way Bill was seen as an opportunity to improve access to water. The BCU unsuccessfully lobbied for the inclusion of water in the CROW Bill and caused the initiation of the campaign "Access to water".
- March 2000 - Secretary of State, Environment, Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP and Minister Chris Mullins MP accept there is a case for improved access to water.
 - Cont'd
- October 2000 - Department of the Environment commission the University of Brighton to undertake the study, "Water based Sport and Recreation: the facts" for England and Wales. The findings published in 2001 confirm the restricted public access to rivers and overall situation familiar to the BCU.
- January 2002 – BCU officers, members and affiliated groups commence lobby of MP's and ministers.
- An Early Day Motion signed by 72 MPs recognises the need to open more inland water for sport and recreation and public access.
- October 2002 – the Government actions further research into access to water.
- March 2003 - University of Brighton are appointed as consultants to undertake research for - "Improving Access for Canoeing on Inland Waters: A study on the Feasibility of Access Agreements". Four rivers are selected: Rivers Waveney, Mersey, Teme and Wear.
- May 2004 - the study is published and reports difficulty in gaining the co-operation and instances of outright opposition from other river interests for negotiating access.
- The Countryside Agency Board issue a paper recommending it was possible to provide additional access by voluntary agreements. This position is contrary to the facts drawn out by the study.
- The BCU maintains that voluntary access agreements do not offer a solution to the large-scale problems of access to and along water.
- September 2004 - Rt Hon Alun Michael MP writes to Local Access Forums to request they extend their remit to other recreation and access issues, to include water.
- October 2004 - BCU meets with the minister and he indicates a further study to achieve access agreements on the four rivers will be undertaken with the Environment Agency as lead. BCU maintain the only positive way forward is primary legislation, but will co-operate with the EA in any further studies.
- January 2005 – The EA commences work to seek access agreements for the Rivers Waveney and Mersey and this continues to-date. Work on the Rivers Teme and Wear is planned later in 2005.
- April 2005 - DEFRA and DCMS ministers jointly write to LAF's to request they work in conjunction with Regional Sports Boards.
- April 2005 – Surrey LAF agree to the need for primary legislation for access to water.

British Canoe Union Briefing Note - Water Based Sport & Recreation: the facts

The following extract from the University of Brighton study “Water Based Sport and Recreation: the facts (2001)” commissioned by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs identifies: the linear water resource in England and Wales represented by major and minor rivers totals

68310km.
2179km have public rights of navigation/access

Less than 4%* of the linear river resource in England and Wales has any public access or rights of navigation.

***2% if watercourses less than 3 metres in width are taken into account**

WATER-BASED SPORT AND RECREATION: THE FACTS

4 The water sport and recreation resource

4.1 The inland water resource - canals and rivers

4.1.1 This chapter assesses the scale, location and nature of the inland water resource in England and Wales. The main source of data used in the chapter is the GDSS. Analysis generated by the GDSS is also supplemented by information from stakeholder interviews, expert panels and the findings of previous studies. Section 1.7 Table 1.1 defines the different types of inland waters.

4.1.2 Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1 indicate the lengths of inland canals, major and minor rivers in England and Wales. The GDSS analysis focused on the 17 705km major rivers and 2 361km canals, which together constitute 30% of the inland linear water resource in England and Wales.

Table 4.1 Inland water resource: rivers and canal lengths (km)

	Major rivers	Canals	Minor rivers	Total
England	14 862	2 307	42 740	59 909
Wales	2 843	54	7865	10 762
England and Wales	17 705	2 361	50 605	70 671

Source: GDSS

4.1.3 Table 4.2 shows the lengths of rivers with public navigation rights and canals available for navigation in England and Wales. This mirrors the finding of ‘Waterways of Tomorrow’ (DETR 2000) which estimated there are about 4 700 km fully navigable non-tidal inland waterways. Canals account for a little over half of the available public navigations in England and Wales, which are shown in total in Figure 4.2. The footnote to Table 4.2 indicates that three river sections available for public navigation are excluded mainly because navigation is only possible by small craft such as canoes. These three river sections with navigations total 138km (see Section 1.7, Table 1.1 for a further discussion).

Table 4.2 Inland water resource: rivers with public navigation rights and canals (km)

	Canals	Rivers with public * navigation rights	Total
England	2307	2001	4 308
Wales	54	178	232
<u>England and Wales</u>	<u>2361</u>	<u>2179</u>	<u>4540</u>

Source: GDSS *excludes 138km of navigation on the upper Wye, Lugg and upper Severn navigable only by small craft

A summary of the research can be obtained from <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/resprog/findings/2001dec.htm>