

## Questions for the access to inland waterways inquiry

### What is your interest in the issue of access to inland waterways

I am a recreational user and also a canoeist. As well as using inland waterways for pleasure I also run a small hobby business for which I sometimes use local waterways

### Are you a member of an organisation related to your use of water?

I am a member of Canoe Wales, the British Canoe Union, Surfers Against Sewage and the Crickhowell and Black Mountains Tourism Alliance

### Which stretches of water do you use?

River Usk	River Dee	River Ewenny
River Wye	River Tryweryn	Afon Sychryd
River Clydach	River Severn	Afon Hepste
River Ogwen	River Mawddach	Afon Mellte
River Seiont	River Banwy	Afon Tywi
River Llugwy	River Glaslyn	River Cleddau (East & West)
River Lougher	Afon Rheidol	Afon Teifi
River Taff	Afon Alwen	
River Tawe	Afon Arddu	I would use a variety of reservoirs and lakes if there was fair and equal access to them
Afon Gwryne	Afon Ceirw	
Afon Honddu	River Conwy	
River Ogmore	Afon Dwyfor	

## Legal rights

- Are you happy that your legal rights are clear and well defined? No –This is a grey area and I certainly don't feel protected by the law in this situation.
- Can you briefly outline your understanding of your legal rights over the stretch of water/s that you own/use/manage I believe that I have the right to use Public Access points, and that using rivers without Rights of Navigation incurs only the civil offence of Trespass.
- Would you like to see any changes to your legal rights? Yes Clarity of the legal situation, fair and equal access. I cannot see why different water users (such as canoeists and anglers) can cooperate and interact so positively on some rivers (such as the Wye) and yet there is such conflict between the same groups on other rivers (such as the Usk).
- If yes, what changes would you like to see? Clarity of the legal situation, fair and equal access by all water users, increased promotion and use of water (as with the Blue Gym initiative) and shared responsibility for the shared environment. I cannot see why different water users (such as canoeists and anglers) can cooperate and interact so positively on some rivers (such as the Wye) and yet there is such conflict between the same groups on other rivers (such as the Usk).
- Are you aware of any legislation that exists in other countries that could be used in Wales? Yes, in almost every other country on the planet. We are one of the only countries in the world where this segregation in access ... and where such limited

access to waterways exists. Scotland seems to hold the view that pathways are open access for walkers and river / canal etcetera are the equivalent for water users.

## **Voluntary agreements**

- Do you have any experience of voluntary agreements for access to the stretch of water/s you own/use/manage. I have always striven to find out the details of any local access agreements before paddling in an area and have adhered to those agreements to the best of my abilities. This has not prevented conflict and has not made my access to the waterways any easier. The agreement that I have most involvement with is on the River Usk through the Brecon Beacons – this is also an example of the terrible mess that access to the rivers is now in. The voluntary access agreement has collapsed and has been replaced by two stances 1. Canoe Wales has informed its members that there is now no recognised canoe season and that people should use the waterways as they see fit 2. a new agreement has been created through the Wye and Usk foundation in partnership with the Countryside Council for Wales – this agreement makes provision for canoeists (from October to March) but exists with no involvement from the Canoeing Governing Body.
- If yes, please briefly outline the agreements that exist and your experience of how they operate. Please see above.
- Would you like to see any changes to the voluntary agreements? Yes
- If yes, what changes would you like to see? A removal of the need for localised agreements ... replaced with a national legal right to navigation along all inland waterways and reservoirs
- Are you aware of any voluntary arrangements in other countries that could be used in Wales? I am not personally aware of any such agreements

## **Please can you briefly outline what you think are the key issues for recreational access to inland water in Wales and how you would like to see them addressed**

The first, and most significant point for me is that this is not an Anglers verses Canoeists debate. Indeed I am particularly disheartened by the continued stirring of opposition, conflict and aggression that is so prevalent within this situation. A prime example of this may be seen through the following link to a fly-fishing Internet forum (<http://www.flyforums.co.uk/showthread.php?t=43858>).

Modern living (together with diet, time, availability of disposable income and family commitments) has resulted in our current social situation wherein obesity, heart conditions and other health issues are spiralling out of control with personal fitness (and the associated health and well-being) at an apparently all-time low. In light of these problems there are a number of initiatives being launched by local authorities, national government and other independent organisations – these include councils promoting leisure facilities and the increase in physical activity within their areas of influence; government initiatives such as the Blue Gym and the ‘Be Active, Be Healthy’ run by the Department of Health; and other projects such as the Blue Mile Project (encouraging people to become more active through use of the coastal area in South West England). These initiatives are evidently significant to the health and well-being of society and, through projected consequences, to the financial penalties of increasing health disorders within society because of a decline in physical

activity. Not all people can afford gym membership, personal trainers, bicycles or indoor fitness equipment, however, every person should have free access to use the natural resources that our local environment is so rich with.

There should be free and equal access for all water-users to the rivers and reservoirs of this country (and for every country for that matter). Every tax-payer in the UK contributes to the maintenance and monitoring of rivers and reservoirs (through tax contributions and water service costs) – it is true that anglers pay to fish a stretch of water however they, unlike canoeists, take something from the water. Theirs is not simply the use of the water, but involves the ongoing stocking, monitoring and control of designated river stretches. There is quite clearly a difference between paying for a service or ‘product’ that must be provided and maintained and having the unfettered right to access inland waterways. The benefits of this increased use are significant and far-reaching, ranging from the health and well-being of water-users to increases in local economies as more people start to use the beautiful natural environment within Wales and as Tourism increases in these areas too (this is already the case with land-based activity ‘Honey-Pot’ areas such as the Brecon Beacons and the Lake District, for example).

There are also major environmental benefits to the increased use of inland waterways through free and open access. Organisations such as Surfers Against Sewage and the Marine Conservation Society have shown that there is significant support for environmental and conservation projects as the links between issues such as littering and pollution become obvious to water-users. As people see the effect that they are having by littering, using damaging chemicals (such as detergents) and by flushing non-bodily waste down toilets and into the natural water systems they are more easily galvanised into action. The same principle holds true for combating industrial waste and climate change to name but two issues.

How can legally enforceable open and free access to inland waterways (in-line with the CRoW Act and access to coastal / tidal water) be a bad thing – for anglers, canoeists, wild swimmers, families, education groups and indeed every member of our local or global society visiting this great country?