

Horse drawn barge picture pulls in the votes



Philip Brind, Sarah Williams, Tiverton Mayor Cllr Neal Davey and Cllr Des Hannon with the winning photo. Photograph by Martin Disney & Chris Dorrington

An iconic image of the West Country's last horse drawn barge has been voted the nation's favourite image in this year's BBC Countryfile Photographic Competition. The photo, taken near Tidcombe Bridge, will take pride of place on the front cover of the charity calendar for 2012, sold in aid of Children in Need. Last year the calendar sold 268,000 across the country, and raised 1.19m for the charity.

If you would like to have a look at the finished calendar or wish to make an order in time for Christmas please visit www.hcscalendar.co.uk. The competition, themed 'Best in Show' received over 55,000 entrants over 12 different classes and was judged by John Craven, Chris Packham and Janet Street-Porter. The photographer, Sarah Williams was taken on a champagne trip organised by the Tiverton Canal Company to celebrate her success and thank her for the positive attention she has drawn to the Canal with her winning entry.

Mid Devon District Council member for Cranmore and the new Chairman of the Canal's Joint Advisory Committee, Councillor Kevin Wilson said: "I am delighted at the choice of 'pulling power' taken by Sarah Williams enjoyed the opportunity to thank her during her Champagne cruise on behalf of all canal users and businesses including the stars of the show 'Taffy and the Tivertonian.' This is, I believe just the first step in the emergence of the Canal as one of the leading tourist attractions in the South West. Work will commence shortly on the new visitor interpretation centre. Hopefully these two accomplishments will encourage even more visitors to enjoy what we are lucky enough to have on our doorsteps."

Following on from this success the horsedrawn barge is also set to feature in BBC Southwest's coverage of **Children in Need** on **Friday 18th November 2011!**

Low water levels

This summer, Canal water levels have been at their lowest for over a decade. The Canal Ranger Service has searched thoroughly for leaks and although they have found and sealed a couple of small leaks near Rock Bridge, these alone could not be responsible for the lack of water in the Canal.



The most likely explanation for the low water levels is that there are leaks in the bed of the Canal which have probably been there for some time, where the water is flowing directly down to the water table, without any indication of where they are. This kind of leak is almost impossible to find. Usually water supply from the springs in the bed of the Canal, which provide almost all of the Canal's water, is enough to keep up with these leaks. However, this year following the very dry weather in the Winter, Spring and early Summer, supply from these springs is less than usual and cannot keep up with the leaks, and so water levels have continued to drop.

In order to enable the horsedrawn barge to keep running, stopboards were installed at Tiverton Road Bridge to dam off the first three miles of the Canal from Tiverton. Water was pumped over the dam for a few hours every week or two in order to keep levels high enough to float the barge. Stopboards were also temporarily installed at Fossend Bridge and Greenway Bridge to see if levels dropped on either side. These experiments showed that the Canal is still receiving some water supply from the springs at the northern end, and that there are no significant leaks on the Swan's Neck.

The stopboards at Tiverton Road Bridge will remain in place until at least early December to maintain levels at the Tiverton end for the last horsedrawn barge trips and for a couple of angling matches being held near Tidcombe Bridge. When the stopboards are removed, levels at the Tiverton end will drop by 10 - 15 cm and will rise along the rest of the Canal by around 5cm. Heavy rain in late October has boosted levels by 10cm and it is likely that levels will continue to rise through the Autumn. Canal levels will be maintained as high as possible during the winter in case of another dry spring next year.

New Visitor Centre Update



In early September, tenders were received back for the construction of the new centre. The quotes received were higher than the quantity surveyor had anticipated or had been budgeted for. Following discussion with the architect, quantity surveyor and senior DCC officers, savings have been found and permission has been granted to proceed with construction, which will be undertaken by Devon-based firm, Skinner Construction.

However, the funding which had been earmarked for kitting out the interior with information displays has now been allocated to the construction and so this will now have to be made up through local fund-raising and applications to external funders. Over £10k of new funding for the interior kit-out has already been pledged, but much more will need to be raised to ensure that this wonderful new building has the right displays inside to engage and inspire Canal visitors.

Work on the foundation pilings is due to commence in mid November with construction work above ground following in the New Year. The building is due for completion by Mid April but is unlikely to be opened until the Summer to allow time for the interior to be kitted out.

