

Building the dam at Scarva.  
Photo Geraldine Foley

## THE DAMMED SUMMIT

Our project to reinstate locks 2 and 3 has come to a temporary halt while we wait for Newry & Mourne Council and Rivers Agency to decide who is responsible for dredging the section between lock 2 and Sands Mill. There is very little else that we can do in the meantime, so we have turned our attention to the summit level between Poyntzpass and Scarva as the main focus of our 2014/2015 workparty season. An extended dry spell meant that water levels were low by mid September and we were able to erect temporary sandbag dams at both guard locks. This was the culmination of many months of behind the scenes meetings and correspondence with all the waterway management bodies.

The aim was to gauge the effect, on the surrounding farmland, of re-watering the summit to a depth of one metre. Our short-term vision for the project is for

new gates on both guard locks to re-water four miles of canal for small boat use during the summer. In winter the gates would be pinned open to cope with expected increases in rainfall and drainage demands. The gates will only be one metre high so that any additional, unexpected, rise in water levels during the summer would drain away without having a detrimental effect on the surrounding land. As the canal filled up branch members patrolled the level and along with Rivers Agency we mapped out what dredging and bank raising is needed.

## PADDLING THE 'PASS'

Following a meeting with Banbridge Kayak and Canoe Club we held an informal 'regatta' at Scarva. On a bright Sunday morning we had more than a dozen craft afloat, ranging from currachs to Canadian canoes, causing quite a stir among the cyclists and

ramblers using the towpath. Everyone enjoyed the experience and we feel that the whole experiment has been a tremendous success. We are certain that re-watering the summit is a viable and practical proposition. We already have the skills and resources within the branch to fabricate and install gates on a very limited budget and we intend to move towards that goal for next summer to get the canal used on a regular basis for recreational activity. At the same time we are still following the paper trail for a grander, more expensive and permanent restoration scheme which would involve other partners and regional funding.

## THANKS

We would like to record our thanks to the Canal Joint Development Committee for their financial assistance, to Haldane Fisher for logistical support, to Rivers Agency and NIEA for guidance and advice, to Banbridge Canoe club and to Councillors Marie Hamilton (chairman Banbridge), Joy Rollston (deputy lord mayor Armagh) and Robert Turner (Armagh, Joint Development Comm. chairman) for visiting the workparty and appreciating our endeavours. Their help with the sandbags ensured we made it into the local papers.

## WINTER BERTHS

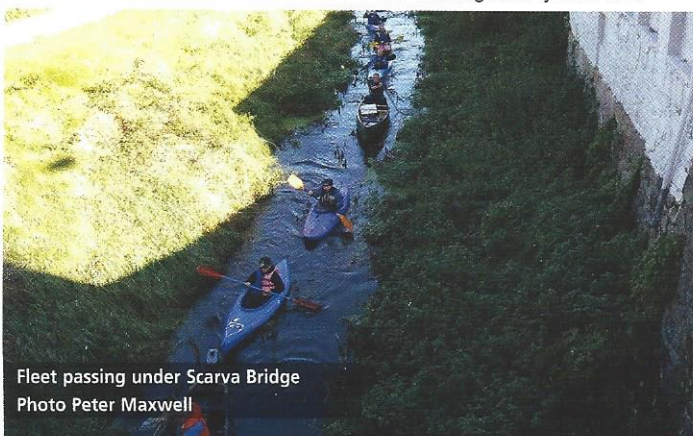
A wide variety of craft have made the Albert Basin in Newry their winter mooring this year, ranging from the ex fishing schooner *Soteria* to *Greenfinch* a 37ft narrow boat and more than 20 other local yachts, all taking

advantage of a cheap, safe berth right in the centre of town. It's hard to believe that the branch had to campaign long and hard for this asset to be opened up to public use and that in 2009 *Mithril* belonging to branch chair Peter Maxwell was the only boat berthed here. *Greenfinch* is also known as 'The Sandwich Barge' and owner Lorraine Fox is currently applying for a street trading licence from the council. Branch members acted as pilot for Lorraine's voyage from Warrenpoint to Victoria Lock and we are pleased to support her venture as the first water based trader in Newry.

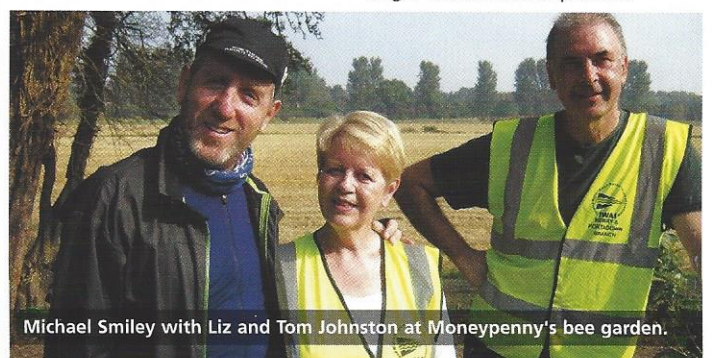
## NEW-PORT IN THE MEDIA.

Branch members have become TV stars recently with Liz and Tom Johnston showing the delights of the bee garden at Moneypenny's to comedian Michael Smiley for his cycling series *Something to Ride Home About*. We have a weekly slot on *Destination Newry* internet TV with Rowan Hand, updating the world about the canal. Heather Crawford was on Radio Ulster with Ann-Marie McAleese, describing the upgrades at Canal Wood and the Hogweed Busters were featured in a programme on invasive species eradication.

Our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/newry.porta.down.canal](http://www.facebook.com/newry.porta.down.canal) now has more than 600 fans. Social media is often maligned but I think it allows us to reach a much broader range of people and generates priceless goodwill for our restoration efforts. The IWAI nationally should think about having a larger social media profile.



Fleet passing under Scarva Bridge  
Photo Peter Maxwell



Michael Smiley with Liz and Tom Johnston at Moneypenny's bee garden.