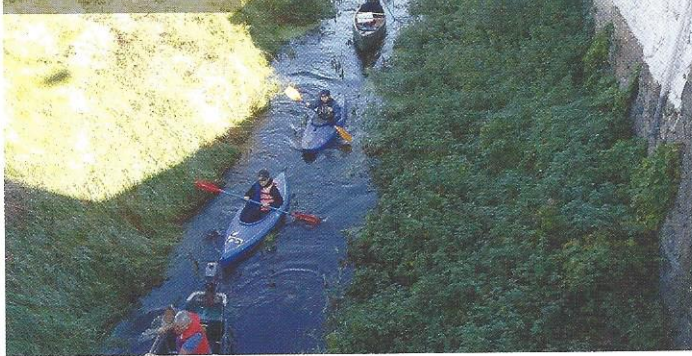


Dry canal at Scarva
Photo: Peter Maxwell



Canal in water
Photo: Peter Maxwell



TENTH ANNIVERSARY

2015 marks the tenth anniversary of the branch and it looks like we will have a lot to celebrate such as the towpath tour app to be launched in April, the opening of our heritage centre at the sluicekeeper's cottage and the reinstatement of locks 2 and 3, all projects well known to readers of this page.

NEW LOCK GATES FOR THE SUMMIT

However these achievements will be topped in 2015 as we undertake our most important project to date in re-watering the summit. As reported in the last *IWN* the branch successfully built sandbag dams in September to show that the surrounding land would not be adversely affected by re-watering the 4 mile summit, to a depth of 1 metre, in the summer. Our Chairman Peter Maxwell and Secretary Tom Johnston took the results of the damming to the four local councils' Canal Joint Development Committee meeting in November and asked for assistance in taking the

project further. Armagh and Banbridge councils, in whose area the summit lies, both agreed to contribute £2,500 each towards the cost of fabricating and installing top gates on both the summit guard locks at Poyntzpass and Scarva. The steel and timber half height gates will be made and fitted by branch members. Peter Maxwell has been liaising with the statutory bodies that control the drainage and heritage aspects of the canal and they are satisfied with the outline of the project.

All the evidence shows that local people using their waterways, even in limited ways, is a positive step towards full restoration. We have strong support from local community groups and especially Banbridge kayak and canoe club who will be the main beneficiaries. We will be enabling local watersports groups to use the canal and then they can campaign for, build or fund further development. The canal is owned by 4 local councils and in the planned amalgamation of Northern Ireland's councils in May this will drop to 2 as Armagh, Banbridge



Geology garden workparty. L - R Heather Crawford, Liz Johnston, Dr. Siobhan Power, Geraldine Foley, Peter Maxwell, Tom Johnston looking at specimens of 50 million year old rock from the Ring of Gullion. Photo: Bruce Crawford

and Craigavon merge. We have been proposing canal development as a flagship unification project. It is the only major asset owned by them all separately and could be used to promote the benefits of amalgamation. The new gates will be in place by May in time for the official merger. We hope that we can persuade the new council to appoint a single official with responsibility, within the enlarged council area, for all aspects of canal development and restoration.

EDUCATION PROGRAMME

As a child growing up in Newry, Brian Cunningham was taught very little about the canal and now, to avoid repeating the same mistake with the next generation, he is putting together a presentation for children about the canal and its place in their lives. Currently living in Portadown he is working with a local teacher on an education pack that ties the canal into many areas of the curriculum, from science to social history. He circulated more than 20 schools all along the canal with a questionnaire on how and to what degree the canal could be used as a resource. One respondent commented that they took pupils to cultural and educational attractions far away and had never thought of using the canal in the same way for a lot less expense. Branch members will visit schools to talk about the life of a navy and the educational resources will be

produced by the branch as part of our Heritage Lottery funded 'Handheld History' project.

GEOLOGY TIMELINE GARDEN

It's not often a canal project is begun and finished from one *IWN* to the next but such is the case with our Geology Timeline Rock Garden at Steenson's bridge. Some years ago we cleared ivy and trees from around the 19th century granite bridge. The small unsightly patch of wasteland beside the bridge is now a feature garden. It was funded by the 'Live Here, Love Here' environmental improvement grant scheme. Liz Johnston led the project and has designed a sustainable and easily maintained garden, highlighting samples of the six local rock types which are displayed on terraces down the side of the bridge. We worked with the Mourne Cooley Gullion Geotourism partnership and their geologist Dr. Siobhan Power made sure we got our facts right about the events that have shaped the canal landscape.

AGM

Our 2014 AGM was very well attended. All the branch officers were re-elected for 2015. Peter Maxwell gave a very thorough annual report and announced the amazing figure of 3,000 volunteer hours logged on canal projects during the year. Many of these featured in an entertaining video and slide presentation by Donal Jennings and Geraldine Foley.