

RESTORATIONS NEED HELPERS

RE: DR Bannister's canal verses railway letter, SA August 11.

Let's put things in perspective. The Wilts and Berks Canal ran from Semington on the Kennet and Avon Canal to the Thames at Abingdon.

North Wilts Canal ran from what is now the corner of Debenhams to Latton basin on the Thames and Severn Canal. (The T&S and the Stroudwater Canal, now come under the banner of the Cotswold Canals).

Locally, the Cricklade Country Way project was mooted in the early 1990s. It has yet to come to fruition, but is backed by many partners.

A successful outcome depends on the results of a funding application, the outcome of which should be known later this year.

Mr Bannister implies that because canals were filled in, they are harder to restore, this argument holds no water with me!

Railway lines have been taken up and track ballast has been removed. Both forms of transport suffer from developments, housing, industrial and roads, blocking the original line.

Railway restoration relies almost totally on volunteers with little help from the rail industry, be it train operators or infrastructure providers and there appears to be little opportunity for restored lines to join in to the national rail network due to both operation and health and safety considerations.

Canal restoration is different. Admittedly, most canal restoration projects rely on volunteers to get them off the ground in the first place but depending on progress, funding and timing, canal restoration has far more backing than rail restoration.



EVERYBODY LOVES A CANAL Relaxing on the Wilts and Berks Canal at Swindon
Picture: GARY MASON

This is due to the operational canal network in this country coming largely under the arm of British Waterways.

Canals when restored become part of the national canal network and anybody can cruise them, with the appropriate licence/licences.

Thirty canal restoration societies around the country have never been busier. Add to this the national restoration organisation, wrg (sic) Waterways Restoration Group and other waterways groups that back canal restoration, and canal restoration is in a healthy state.

Canals provide something for everybody. Boaters - narrowboats and broadbeam boats, down to canoes, even coracles - walkers, cyclists, horse riders, bird watchers and nature lovers, not forgetting tourists.

A canal through Swindon, linked to the national network would attract many more tourists.

The feasibility survey for the restoration of the Wilts and Berks

Canal reporting in 1997 said so and surveys carried out by British Waterways say so.

I am not knocking railways. I would like to see the whole of what was the Midland and South Western Junction Railway (now truncated to Swindon and Cricklade Railway) restored, other rail restorations extended and dismantled railways restored.

Finally, it is not an either/or situation, both canal and rail restorations will continue with fervour by their supporters.

The best advice I can offer to Mr Bannister is to join the Swindon and Cricklade Railway Society and help make it happen.

Find out more at www.wbct.org.uk; www.cotswoldcanals.com and www.swindon-cricklade-railway.com.

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