



Secretary : J Alan Dickinson, 10 Pipers Close, Heswall, Wirral (Tel 0151.342.8142)

Access to inland waters

As the Secretary of 'Hoylake Fly Fishers' I have been asked by the committee and membership (80+ members) to send this letter in response to the WCA campaign to gain free access to Welsh rivers.

Our opinion is that there should be designated areas for canoeists, and permission obtained, not a free to roam right and impact on the activities of other river users, who do these people think they are?

If anglers pay to access stretches of water why should canoeists get access for free?

1. Stretches of rivers which we have an interest in.

We have particular interests in the following stretches of river, the fishing rights of which are controlled by our associated clubs, and/or rented by ourselves from these clubs or riparian owner act.. as indicated:

Welsh Dee (Bangor on Dee Salmon Angling Association) – (Bala and District AA) – (Rhewl – Private ownership)

Trywern, Llanfar, Lliw – (Bala District AA)

Elwy, Clwyd (Rhyl + St Asaph)

Mawdach + Winion (Dolgellau AA)

2. We at HFF are happy that our current legal rights are clear and well defined on these stretches of water.

3. We do not want to see any changes to our current legal rights.

Other key issues:

(a). Allowing paddlers unlimited access to Welsh rivers is likely to be unlawful with respect to the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act (1975) which protects spawning fish and, in the case of salmon & sea trout their redds, from disturbance.

(b). Canoeists give the entirely false impression – backed up by some ludicrous statistics – that they have little or no access to running water in Wales. To start with there is a free navigation on all tidal stretches of rivers and Wales has the second highest tidal reach in the world. The tidal stretches of some Welsh rivers can easily amount to a quarter of their whole length.

(c). We object to the deceitful way in which the WCA has withdrawn from some perfectly good access agreements to try to show the Assembly that they don't have enough water, whilst still continuing to give ingress and egress points on maps in their website, so inciting trespass.

(d). The main reason why canoeists don't have more water to paddle in the upper reaches of rivers is that the WCA will not accept any restrictions to their paddling – for instance they will not accept that paddling should just take place in the six winter/early spring months when little fishing occurs. Unfortunately the WCA have pressurised local canoeing clubs to adopt the same intransigent attitude.

(e). Riparian owners and angling clubs have to endure almost constant trespass by canoeists who seem to think that they should be rewarded for their unlawful behaviour by the law being changed in their favour.

(f). Welsh anglers put a significant amount of both work and finance into Welsh rivers to improve the habitat and water quality which seems to have gone almost unnoticed. Anglers pay twice in order to fish: once to the EA (£68 per annum for a migratory fish rod licence) and again in club fees or whatever to be able to fish a certain river or stretch of river.

(g). Anglers don't pay to be able to take fish (which canoeists constantly maintain); they pay for the enjoyment of using someone else's asset. This is proved by the fact that coarse fishing clubs who return 100% of their catch still pay an annual rental to the riparian owner. Their members would think it very strange if they were given this water for free.

(h) The canoeists and now the Petitions Committee point to Scotland where the Scottish Land Reform Act (2003) gave open access to rivers and say that this would work in Wales. We believe it would not work and that it would be quite wrong to impose something similar here for the following reasons:

- Scottish rivers are on the whole much bigger than Welsh ones, so a group of maybe ten rafts going down a river say 3m wide is bound to have a much greater ecological effect than in the river is 10m wide;

- The numbers of major conurbations (Liverpool, Manchester & Birmingham) a couple of hours away from north & mid Wales is much greater than similar sized urban areas to the Scottish Highlands, so far more canoeists/kayakers/rafters/gorge walkers would access smaller rivers;

- The main game fish in Scotland, the salmon is much less wary than sewin, which are so important to Wales both economically and culturally. Anglers from England and mainland Europe will not come to Wales and support local economies if big sea trout have been distressed by canoeists above them and therefore become uncatchable.

- The amount of trouble there has been on Scottish rivers since the Land Reform Act was passed has been grossly downplayed. We hear from one correspondent that the upper Tay is "nothing but a war zone" with commercial rafting companies making angling virtually impossible.

(i). to change the law to allow unrestricted access on Welsh rivers would be a dreadful parallel to allowing the 'right to roam' on golf course. These areas were specifically excluded from the CroW Act they are commercial enterprises – but so are rivers.

(j) If the law was altered as canoeists wish, riparian owners and angling clubs would quite rightly require very large amounts in compensation from the assembly for the reduction in value of their assets and the derogation of their leases respectively.

Yours truly,

J. Alan Dickinson