



Ms. V. Hawkins
Sustainable Committee,
Welsh Assembly
CF99 1NA

Dear Ms Hawkins,

Freshwater canoeing

I am an angler of some 60 years experience on the River Rheidol as a member of the Aberystwyth Angling Association (AAA) and have limited experience on the R Ystwyth. I also have considerable knowledge of Welsh agriculture from my pre-retirement occupation as an advisory scientist in what was MAFF.

I am deeply concerned about the demands for free access by paddlers to inland waters and their flagrant disrespect to the law and the property of others in Wales. Also that their action and mannerism appear to be supported by public funded bodies that should be aware of the present laws referring to our inland waters. This law has worked well in the past and there is no need for change but respect for the law would be appreciated.

In a letter I received from the WAG last April I was informed that "our overall aim is to improve public access to Wales' superb water resources (rivers, lakes, reservoirs and canals) for healthy recreation and benefit of all recreational users". I take this to mean what it says and unless the WAG intends to treat the Discrimination Laws in the same manner as indicated above all and sundry will have the right to free access to surface waters in all of Wales. In some European countries where this is the law the public have the right of access through anyone's property—even gardens— to gain access to a river. The water flows in the River Rheidol are controlled by the hydro-electric (HE) company sited on it. When the HE plant was built (c1960) it was to provide power during the peak demand periods (10—4pm) of that era. Today there is no such peak demand and the HE now generates when instructed by its HQ with complete disregard to other river users, the time of day and the duration of very high flows. After generating they revert to "compensation" flow rates that often mean hardly any flow at all. The view gained by the AAA members is that to the company any water that does not pass through the generators is money lost. All discussions with the AAA and aspects of H&S are ignored. The anglers are aware of the hazard and it is highlighted in the club rules. To open this river to all would be madness. The HE will not even erect signs to warn the public that may camp or picnic nearby. The company refuses to let anglers know their generating practice as "it's commercial in confidence". The flow rates can vary from about 2cumecs to over 22cumecs within the hour, but in practice the warning is much shorter as one does not notice the change in flow until it becomes obvious—and often too late to respond.

The Rheidol has some 6 SSSIs and has much valued wild life. Anglers walk the banks quietly with least disturbance to wild life and often retrace their tracks. Canoes on the other hand burst on the scene and cannot go backwards.

During their migration salmon and sewin have long rest periods. However any shadow passing over them during this period will cause an immediate panic and I have observed on many occasions. For this to happen during the spawning season would be disastrous.

The club occasionally allow Scout Troops access to certain pools. Unfortunately locals and other campers seem free to do the same afterwards but without any supervision. It's not unusual to find small inflatables lodged in riverside trees. A year or so ago the local weekly paper extolled the virtues of a local school boy for rescuing his friend who got into difficulties canoeing on the Rheidol. It did not report that he was canoeing without permission.

The present change in animal preference from sheep back to cattle as the result of adjustments after Foot and Mouth, Bovine TB and purple tongue will be an increase in riverside fields carrying cattle and there will be a need for fences to be erected across the smaller rivers to prevent animals from straying as cattle, unlike sheep, are not afraid of water. God help the paddlers!!

I beg the you will examine carefully all aspects of river management, its wild-life and the health and safety of potential users and as in all walks of life some of them will be occasionally silly.

Yours faithfully


C. Evans