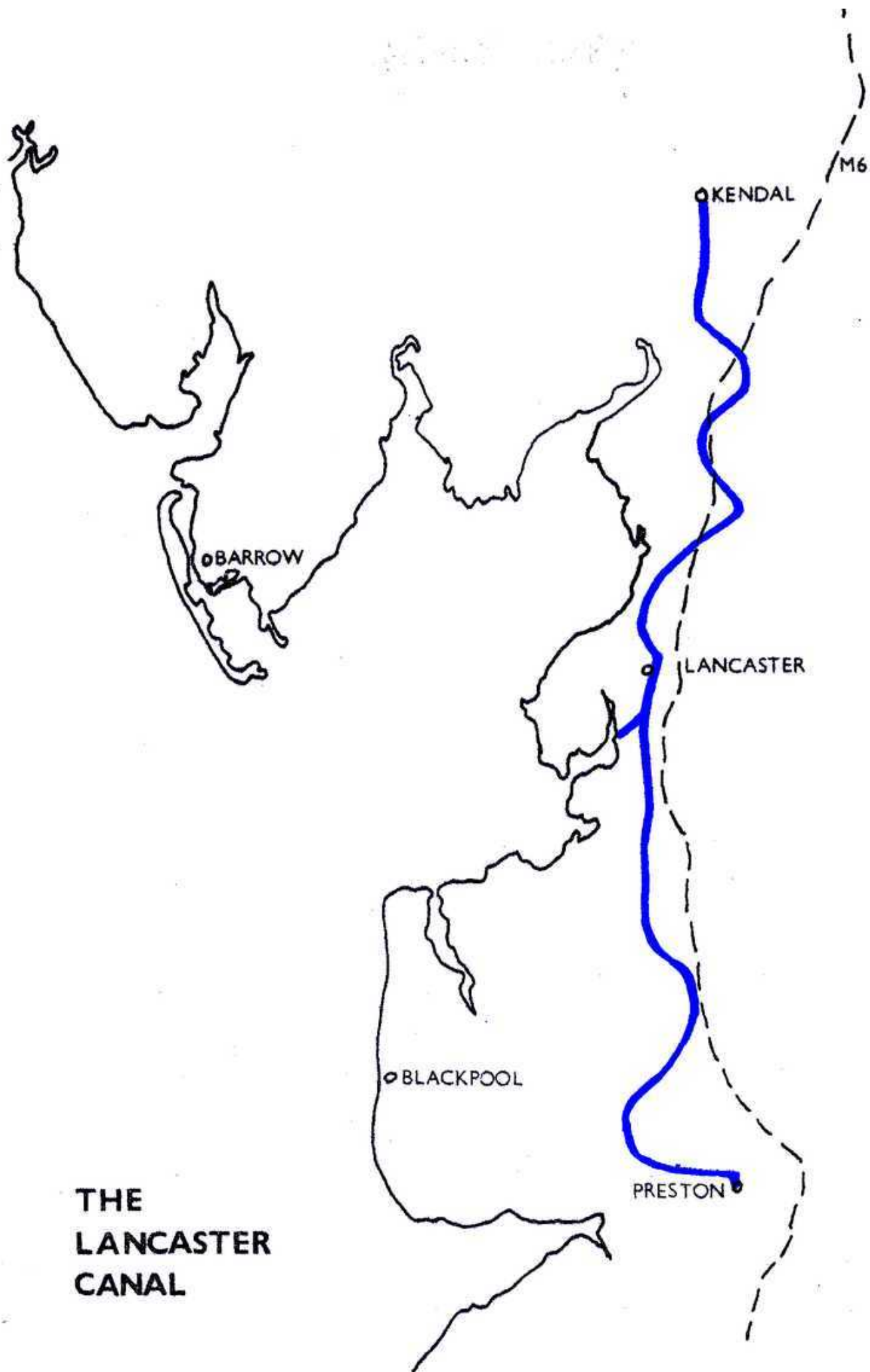




**THE
LANCASTER
CANAL**

THE LANCASTER CANAL:

for recreation and amenity.

A Report by the Lancaster Group of the
Ramblers' Association.

This report gives an account of the Lancaster Canal as it exists and could be improved as a valuable amenity to the area. Particular emphasis is put on its use for recreation and as a pleasing feature of the countryside. We hope that the report will help all users of the Canal, be they walkers, boaters, anglers, local residents or the repairers, to appreciate it more and especially to understand the requirements of each of the group with interests in the Canal.

This report is the result of a series of group discussions and other activities during the winter of 1974/75. During each of the nine evening meetings one aspect of the Canal was discussed, usually with a visiting expert to give direction and to answer questions. In addition all the towing path has been walked and notes taken of points of interest. A visit was made to the Aldcliffe Road Maintenance Depot in Lancaster.

This report follows that on the Arnsdale and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty prepared in a similar way in 1973 by the Lancaster Group of the Ramblers' Association. Naturally the contents of this report concentrate on the particular interests of the R.A.; to encourage rambling, to foster a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside and to work for the preservation of natural beauty and the protection of footpaths. With such broad aims we are perhaps in a better position to assess the overall qualities and problems of the Canal than many of the more specialist canal interests and our view is perhaps closer to that of the general public.

The Lancaster Group continues to try to be more than an organisation that is 'against' and presents the 'report

and its proposals as a constructive attempt at improving the Canal for all. In our discussions we have been impressed that there is great goodwill on all sides in the few areas in which there is a conflict of interest.

History and Present State

This is not the place to deal at length with the interesting history of the Canal. As with much local history plenty has still to be written down and much of the valuable material already existing has to be brought together. Useful references are given at the back. An outline is given since it will help to explain the route, design and present state of the Canal.

The Canal was created for the transport of heavy industrial goods and had a relatively short and unprofitable commercial life before it met serious competition from the railways also using the same favourable coastal route. A large network was contemplated but the scheme which was started was intended to link Kendal with the Leeds-Liverpool Canal. The major goods were thus coal moving northwards and limestone moving southwards. A link to the sea was provided by the Glasson Arm. One of the noticable features is the lack of locks. Of the 57 miles from Kendal to Preston there were only eight locks at Tewitfield and there are six on the Glasson Arm. If the Ribble Aquaduct had been built to create a real link to the Leeds-Liverpool Canal there would have been more locks. The tramway actually produced here was no real substitute since it necessitated off-loading.

Since this is a contour canal it tends to wind considerably through the rolling countryside. It is noticable that there are few cuttings and embankments and little attempt was made to keep the distance short. The Canal is also wider than many early canals. Killington Reservoir, or Lake, was created to maintain the water level and feeds the Canal via Peasey Beck. A few local streams, such as Stainton Beck, augment this supply.

At present the Canal is navigable as a 'Cruising Waterway' (as opposed to either 'Commercial' or 'Remainder Waterway') between Preston and Tewitfield and along the arm to Glasson Dock. North from Tewitfield the next $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles to Stainton are ponded (a 'Remainder Waterway'), the next $3\frac{3}{4}$ miles to Natland are dewatered and the last $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles into Kendal are infilled. Nearly a mile has been filled in at the Preston end and the tramway to the Leeds-Liverpool Canal no longer exists. This state has been reached because of the demand for land at Preston and the economy made when the M6, with its several crossings, was built by culverting rather than bridging. The ponded section was kept wet up to Stainton since the main water inlet is here and the transport and sale of water is a major activity of the Canal. Recently the Kendal Link Road (A590) has been built over lengths of the dry Canal on both sides of Hincaster. There is a fairly strong movement to try to reopen the ponded section to boats by moving the upper Tewitfield lock to the other side of the M6 and making a suitable tunnel. This and more ambitious projects are described in a booklet 'The Lancaster Canal Proposed Linear Park and Nature Reserve'.

Present Use

The amenity value of the Canal is difficult to assess, its worth to both residents and visitors is both complex and indirect. Little conscious thought is given to the value of such amenities until they are threatened or lost, perhaps irreversibly.

Some facts are given by the data compiled by British Waterways Board, 'Recreational Use of Inland Waterways Data 1967-74', and the topic is developed by Lett in 'Activity Patterns on some Canals in N.W. England'. Although the degree of accuracy of these surveys is questionable they give some information to support one's own observations.

Certainly the number of boats on all canals has been increasing over the last decade. Whereas the total amount of angling on canals has been steady, that on the Lancaster Canal in 1971 has shown a drop by one half over the average of the decade and to one quarter over the peak year 1970. The use by 'other users', a wide category, has kept fairly steady.

The dominant leisure activities are walking and exercise, angling, boating, nature study and play. The peak use is on Sundays with Saturdays not much different from weekdays. Most canal users live locally, probably within one mile. Less obvious uses are as a water supply feeder, as a drainage ditch, for cattle watering, as a source of employment both for its maintenance and in associated recreational activities, as a nature reserve both for animals and plants and simply as a pleasant place with beautiful manmade structures in a natural setting.

Discussion, Suggestions and Recommendations on the Canal Fabric

So far we have, we trust, described the facts. Now we progress to opinion and put down the consensus of our discussions. We must apologise for the lack of structure but the Canal has many interrelated aspects and close interaction between the users. We have divided the discussion into two sections, on the fabric and on the maintenance and use. These describe respectively the capital or long-term aspects which may require special financial outlay and the short-term repair work mainly needing manpower or organisation.

We wish to see the Lancaster Canal kept as a recreational waterway in as near its original state as possible. Given that the section between Tewitfield and Stainton is not connected with the rest of the Canal for boating but must be retained wet to ensure the continuity of the water supply, we would like to see it improved from

its 'ponded' or low-water level state so that it looks more like a canal. Even in its isolated state it could be used for light boats and canoes. In particular the piped and culverted section at Holme should be brought to as near its original state as possible.

The dry sections between Stainton and Natland which have not been disturbed by the new Kendal Link Road should be kept roughly in their present state. The path maintenance should, however, be improved. North of Sedgwick we find the grassed ditch, winding through the fields and occasionally crossed by a bridge, an interesting feature of industrial archeology. The sections between Stainton and the Kendal Link Road and between this road and Sedgwick are becoming nicely overgrown and reverting to a wild, natural state. These sections should not be used for tipping since the towing path, which is here a public right-of-way, is so close. These areas could be managed as nature reserves.

The Hincaster Tunnel, which is now isolated, has considerable potential as a small recreational area. It could be fully drained with access and picnic areas at each end. The west end could have a short length of the Canal kept as a pool if a suitable water supply could be found. The attractions would be the water and the dual links through the tunnel and over the towing path which climbs the hill all situated in a natural area surrounding a fine structure.

The filled section from Natland into Kendal is in a very bad state but could easily be made into a fine linear town park with historical associations. It would link with the Castle grounds and the riverside paths.

Glasson Dock and the Canal Basin should be made into a recreational area with no more, and preferably less, industrial development. There is scope for improvement of the Basin area with a footpath round the S.W. side and a link to Brows Bridge. The access between the Basin Bank and the towing path could be improved. The north side of the Basin should be developed as a picnic area and

car-park in conjunction with the end of the County Council linear park along the old railway line from Lancaster.

Many of the structures associated with the Canal have disappeared over the years and we feel that all of the few remaining need preserving and renovating. In particular the Aldcliffe Road Boat House in Lancaster is an interesting building on a prime site. The present maintenance depot which is adjacent could be resited to produce a site of reasonable size. The Farleton packet-boat house is in need of immediate repair to prevent further rapid deterioration. It would be suitable for an outdoor pursuits centre using the Canal for water activities and the nearby fells for other sports. It is sufficiently near the Lake District to be attractive but far enough from the boundary that it would not increase the pressure on the National Park. The condition of many of the old wharves and canal cottages could be improved.

We feel that the Canal structures are of sufficient important to warrant some statutory protection. We appreciate that British Waterways Board, as a statutory body, does not normally accept 'listing' of its historic buildings but we would like to see all the bridges and canal structures 'listed'. As a minimum we would like some definitive statement by B.W.B. about their policy toward the structures and their acceptance of planning procedures similar to those required for listed buildings.

Although all the bridges, both over and under the Canal, have merit, we note especially the Lune, Wyre, Keer, Brock and Sedgwick aquaducts, the two swing bridges, the double bridge at Ellel and the Hincaster Tunnel. It is important that their original form is kept. For example, the type of balustrade varies along the length.

The bridges are particularly valuable as distinctive features of the Canal and are under great pressure from road widening. Now that a firm hierarchy of roads has been provided in the region many of the roads crossing Canal bridges could have weight and width restrictions applied. We note that some bridges have been lost in recent new road and motorway construction. The Natlands bridge was destroyed this year and there is considerable pressure on the Kellet Road bridge at Carnforth. Extra care should

is taken in overcoming any traffic problem caused by a canal bridge. In general, suitable materials should be used and a separate new bridge built rather than changes made to the existing structure. Often an appropriate parallel footbridge is acceptable. If there is absolutely no alternative to destruction we would like to see the bridge surveyed and the stones numbered and stored. The reconstructed bridge could be a valuable feature to some museum or recreational development.

Some canal-related developments along the Canal are inevitable since it has to adjust to its relatively new role as a recreational waterway. We welcome the use of the Canal by boats but regret that many seem to be used mainly as holiday homes, like static caravans. We believe that the boats on the Canal should be active boats and thus the number is limited by the maximum use at peak holiday times and cannot be much greater than at present. We would like to see a higher proportion of boat use and would thus like to see more boat hire. The visual impact of the moored boats would be reduced by their concentration in well sited marinas and we wish to see all permanent moorings in such marinas rather than spread along the banks. Thus we see few new marina developments will be needed to accommodate new boats and those at present in bank moorings. One advantage of having a few good marinas is that each will be able to provide full facilities, chandlery, toilets, repairs etc. Since marinas are high density developments they should not be in a rural setting but associated with an existing settlement. They will then be less obstructive and can benefit from the facilities of the settlement such as shops, pubs, car-parks etc.

We note that the basin at Tewitfield is rather small for turning and that a few more facilities could be provided here although it is not suitable for any large development. There are several small basins on the off-side and these could be used for overnight stops.

Water is a great recreational attraction and we think that there is considerable scope for better facilities. We have in mind particularly 'vehicle-free' picnic sites. There are many areas, such as at Stainton and at the south end of Hest Bank where the towing path has a wider section and there is a nearby public access point. The surface could be prepared and maintained together with suitable planting and perhaps a few seats. We would prefer these areas not to have boat facilities since the presence of moored boats would detract from the scene from the bank and the boaters have their own facilities. We stress the vehicle-free nature although there might be informed parking on nearby road verges. Any canal car-park or car-associated picnic area should be linked with an existing development so that the parking area can be used also for village, marina or pub parking. If there is a rural aspect we recommend a suitable reinforced grass surface such as Grasscrete so that the site will not intrude during the winter months.

Sites adjacent to the Canal are attractive to developers for housing and caravans. While the attraction of the neighbouring canal to the development is evident; the effect of the development on the Canal and the view from the Canal should be the prime considerations. The additional, concentrated, use can be very harmful to the fabric and give extra maintenance costs. In particular we would not like any more camping or caravan sites adjacent to the Canal. Because of the attraction there is a tendency towards ribbon development and this should be resisted at least as strongly as it is along other arteries. In a truly urban setting, which occurs little along the Lancaster Canal, we favour close, dense, neighbouring development although interspersed with parks and sitting areas if a linear park is not possible. In the villages and small towns the Canal, and the view from it, is not treated with sufficient respect by planners. The backs of the houses face the Canal and they are often nearer than would be allowed if the Canal were a road. Scenic easements should be provided. Perhaps the estate road could be located between the Canal and the houses. Few

direct access points need be provided between new developments and the Canal. We also note that problems, in the form of rubbish and untidyness, seem to arise often where there are private access gates from each house.

We note that several woods, old coppices and other wild areas border the Canal. We do not know the ownership but would like, where possible, these areas to be incorporated within the Canal boundaries with the fences on the far side so that they form part of the recreational area and can be maintained with that aim in mind. For example, between bridges 50 and 51 and east of West Leigh (GR 495 314).

We note that there is one nature trail partly on the Canal on the Glasson Arm. We feel that there is scope for a few more since the Canal provides a varied habitat and is ideally suited to this activity with a firm path and the ability to illustrate sensitive features safely on the far side of a protective moat. We have already commented on the use of particular sections as nature reserves.

Discussion, Suggestions and Recommendations on the Canal Maintenance and Use

We agree with the statement in the Countryside Commission's consultative document 'New Agricultural Landscapes' ". B.W.B. should take account of landscape and wildlife considerations as well as engineering convenience and economy, in drawing up and implementing their management policies".

We have been impressed by the recent improvement in the standards of maintenance and hope that they will continue to improve.

Although shallower than the original standards the Canal seems to be adequately dredged although there is some suggestion that the fish would prefer deeper water in the centre. Any dredging should be on a continuing basis with only short sections tackled at any one time so that the vegetation and wildlife can accommodate themselves. Similarly for the benefit of nature the shallow edges should be disturbed as little as possible.

The Canal edging is in a bad state of repair in many places. This is probably one of the most contentious subjects. The Naturalist and the walker or casual observer would like natural earth banks. The erosion derives from many causes, poor towing path drainage, walkers being forced too near the edge by wet patches or overgrowth, anglers, boat launching but largely by boats either exceeding the speed limit or having a design which produces a large wash. We believe that adequate towing-path management can reduce the effect of most of the causes but unsuitable boats should not be allowed and the speed limit must be enforced. If exhortation does not reduce the problem some mechanical governor could be considered. The cost of any wood, metal or concrete edging is so high that prevention rather than cure is essential. We would like to see as little artificial edging as possible but appreciate that some may be needed near marinas and where there is heavy use of the bank.

Boat-engine noise is occasionally troublesome but this is unlikely to increase.

Naturally the state of the towing path is one of the Ramblers' Associations main concerns. We consider that the path is valuable amenity for the long-distance walker, the dog walker, as well as the rambler. It is a safe and convenient route for sponsored walks. It provides a pleasant way into a town rather than walking along estate roads. Since it is a level and easy path for all ages it is essentially a place for social walking and should thus be of sufficient width for two to walk abreast in most places and it should have a reasonably smooth surface. We feel that these objectives can be readily achieved if the hedges are kept well back, shrubby undergrowth removed and a broad section rough-mown a few times each year. With these simple procedures the normal use will keep the path in good condition. The foundation is basically good since it has withstood heavy horses but drainage necessary in some places such as Deep Cutting. Only informal materials such as cinder or stone chips should be used on the towing path surface outside the towns.

With the maintainance described the ground will dry better, and if a foot or two is kept uncut along the edge

there will be room for angles to be undisturbed and foot pressure will not break down the bank. Wildlife which is concentrated along the water edge will also flourish.

We note that the towing path in Cumbria is a public right of way but most of it in Lancashire is not. Since it is in fact used as a public right of way we would like to see it so dedicated. It would then appear as such on Ordnance Survey maps and so help the walker. The maintainance is best done by B.W.B. so that part of the dedication agreement should be a maintainance agreement by the County Council to subsidise this work.

The foot access points to the towing path are rather poorly maintained, many of the stiles and stone-steps need relaying. All access points should be restricted by stiles for pedestrians only; except for a few locked gates needed for maintainance. There should be access at every place where there is a public highway. The stiles and steps should be in local stone where possible although some wood structures may be necessary.

Where there are boundary walls these should be maintained or rebuilt. Most of the boundaries are however, hedges. We are not clear who is legally responsible for the quality of these boundaries. The 1792 Lancaster Canal Act, Clause 95 makes clear that the Canal owners must keep animals off their land but the 1971 Animals Act requires the farmer to keep his animals from straying. Nevertheless it is in everyone's interest to maintain neat, stock-proof hedges. We welcome the excellent work being done in the northern section where the hedges are now being layed. This should be the standard practice along the whole length, rather than just chopping new shoots down to the base every few years. There is evidence that regularly layed hedges are the most economical form of fencing in this part of the country. Between laying the hedges should be trimmed back occasionally to retain the walking width of the towing path. Since hedging is labour intensive and seasonal the regular canal staff may not be sufficient and we suggest that the neighbouring farmers might be encouraged

to maintain the hedges at the appropriate commercial rate.

The Canal should be maintained as much as possible as a nature reserve. Thus as with the dredging the hedging, cutting and clearing should be done in short sections at irregular intervals so that the wildlife can recolonise an area from nearby patches after it has been cleared. The time of the year for each operation should be chosen to not interfere with such natural functions as nesting. We hope that the policy of not using chemical herbicides and pesticides regularly can be maintained. The recent use of selective brushwood killer can be justified if mechanical methods only are used after this initial clearance.

The trees alongside the Canal are particularly fine and should be cared for especially where they have little effect on farming. Where appropriate we would like to see some planting, around new developments, but in general we feel that there would be sufficient natural regeneration if the maintainance is such as to encourage tree growth. Thus occasional standards should be left in the hedges during laying, trees should be allowed to grow, and be looked after, on embankments and on other wide parts of the Canal. We appreciate the problems of bank damage which might be caused by a falling tree in some places. We would like to see the off-side trees left to grow where possible. We welcome the standards left between Bolton-le-Sands and Carnforth.

As with listed buildings, Tree Preservation Orders are not welcomed by statutory bodies. We would however, like Canal trees of particularly high amenity value to be given such protection, or as a minimum identified and listed by B.W.B. with a definite internal policy on them.

We are particularly concerned about the state of the Larch planted on bridge embankments and elsewhere, north of Carnforth. These were for Canal use but are now well past maturity and are beginning to die. They form a very distinctive and pleasing feature of the countryside. We urge that a programme of care and replanting be started at once.

The quality of the fishing, and the number of anglers seem to have declined over the last few years. We note that only a small proportion of the total cost of fishing goes to fish management since the fee is small compared with other costs such as transport. We therefore suggest that a higher fee would be reasonable to finance fish management, initially with a research project on the reason for the apparent decline. We are pleased with the strict litter rules made by the Northern Anglers' Association. Likewise we are pleased with the co-operation shown by many boat operators during angling matches.

Some concern has been expressed on the deliberate draining of storm water from the M6 motorway into the Canal at several points. The presence of heavy metals, salt and oil are particularly worrying. We recommend that more research is done into this problem and if significant a peat filter be installed or main drainage introduced.

We would like to see all the bridge numbers replaced, maintained and repainted. All the Canal features should be painted in the B.W.B. recommended colour scheme.

Some of the mile and half-mile posts have been misplaced or lost. We would like them reinstated and either identified by painting ~~as~~^{on} the area around each maintained to a higher standard than elsewhere to draw attention to them.

We hope that the bye-laws on rubbish tipping, especially in settlements, will be fully enforced.

For the visitor a few interpretive signs would be useful but these should be limited to such features as village names, aquaduct names, and perhaps nearby sites of interest such as Greenhaugh Castle

Summary of Main Recommendations

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No.

- 4 We wish to see the Lancaster Canal kept as a recreational waterway in as near its original state as possible.
- 5 We would like to see the water level restored in the ponded section and piped and culverted section at Holme restored.
- 5 The isolated dry sections would make suitable nature reserves.
- 5 The Hincaster tunnel area should be considered for an intensive recreational site.
- 5 The end of the Canal into Kendal needs improving into a linear town park.
- 5 The Glasson Dock Basin is suitable for an intensive recreational area.
- 6&12 The Canal bridges, structures and many trees are worthy of the statutory protection that would probably be given if the Canal were a private operation. We would like to see them given this protection.
- 7 If roads over the Canal must be widened we would rather see a new parallel bridge than the replacement or modification of the original bridge.
- 7 We do not wish to see many more boats and would like all permanent moorings to be within a few well-sited marinas.
- 8 We would like to see some vehicle-free and boat-free picnic areas where the towing path is sufficiently wide.
- 8 Car-parks near the Canal should be near existing developments and have a multiple use.
- 8 Developments near the Canal should be planned with the appearance from the Canal in mind.
- 9 We would like to see the Canal boundaries extended to encompass adjacent woods.

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- 9 The Canal towing path is suitable for nature trails in moderation.
- 9&12 The timing and scale of the maintainance should be designed to disturb wild-life as little as possible.
- 9 The water edge should be kept as natural as possible.
- 10 The towing path should be cleared and mown to allow two to walk abreast.
- 11 The towing path in Lancashire should be dedicated a public right of way with a maintainance agreement between B.W.B. and Lancashire County Council.
- 11 Adequate foot-only access should be provided at each junction with a public right of way.
- 11 The hedges should be layed and trimmed regularly and some trees allowed to mature.
- 12 We strongly urge that the larg^{ch}es on the northern section be maintained and replanted to provide a succession.
- 13 We feel that there is a good case for a stronger fish management programme.
- 13 An investigation is needed on the effect of water run-off from the M.6.

CANAL NOTICE

The waterways are meant to be used and enjoyed by the public. The pleasure of others will be reduced if you :-

Waste water by interfering with locks and sluices.

Ride a bicycle or bring a vehicle on the towing path without a permit.

Obstruct the towing path.

Damage the Canal or towing path.

Interfere with boats.

Leave litter.

Pollute the Canal.

Fire guns or throw stones.

Ride a horse on the towing path (unless it is a designated bridle way).

Bathing in the Canal is not allowed.

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Further copies of this report may be obtained from:

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