

A recent campaign of the Club, influenced by their frequent Club trips to France, was to persuade BW, EA and other Navigation Authorities to move towards a national boat licence. The Club initiated and supports the BW/EA Gold licence and the BW Explorer licence.

Another campaign is to protect existing and promote new slipways across the waterway network.

It believes that much more could be done to encourage youngsters into boating. For example, further changes to the licensing system to facilitate boating “any time, anywhere”, would remove one of the barriers that prevent young people and many others from enjoying the waterways.

Hopefully, this may, in time, prove to be another example of the Wilderness Boat Owners Club going first where other boats can follow later.

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Spotlight on the Wilderness Boat Owners Club

The Wilderness Boat Owners Club (WBOC) is probably one of the largest boat ownership clubs in the country and our friendly looking little trail boats are seen at most canal festivals and campaign rallies throughout the year. Wherever you go on inland waters you are likely to spot one at some time during a day's cruising.



So where are they based?
Answer, - nowhere and everywhere! We have no club moorings or clubhouse and yet have a membership more widespread than most other clubs. There are or have been members in France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, USA, Ireland and New Zealand as well as on home waters.

Is this a club like those that have been formed to keep a boat-builder in touch with his aftermarket? Far from it! Although the builder of these GRP craft for over 30 years, Ian Graham, is himself a pioneer of trail boating, and great supporter of our activities, he has steadfastly kept his distance from the Wilderness Boat Owners Club. He believes that the club should be run independently by the members, for the members.





So what is it that binds this Club together when members don't ever have a chance to meet other members at a clubhouse? To answer this, you have to turn the spotlight on the members and their chosen form of boating. Many boat owners will tell you that they used to have a little GRP boat

but then moved on, having tired of boating doubled-up in cramped cabins. In this Club, you find an unusual proportion of people who simply have chosen not to move on. One reason for this is that the boats combine full headroom, sleeping space for four, and most of the essentials for living aboard for weeks at a time, in a compact, go-anywhere easy to handle craft. These features were, and still are, the big attraction for WBOC members, and explain why they hold onto their boats for so long.

Some boaters call it cheating but at the same time are perhaps a little envious of our ability to zoom along the motorways for a couple of hours, then slip the boat in, to be at a new waterway or to support a local restoration project, or to trail and cruise in another country.



The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) Restoration Committee is well aware that the presence of our boats on the water greatly enhances the public's perception of the worth of any restoration project. It is often only the trail boaters that can provide this support on isolated sections and is the 'raison d'etre' for the annual IWA National Trail Boat Festival. Who else can get on to the Monmouthshire and Brecon; Stroudwater; Grand Western; Bridgwater and Taunton; Wilts & Berks; Wey and Arun and Chesterfield canals or many other isolated waters? At less than one foot (30 cm) draught, these little boats venture into waters not yet suited to their big sisters.

The Wilderness Boat Owners Club annual subscription is minimal at just £10 (no moorings, no premises!) and most of the funds go towards the Club Newsletter, which is a past winner of Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs (AWCC) awards for best boat club magazine, and the IWA / Canal & Riverboat Tom Rolt award, and which is published twice a year. The Newsletter editor, Helen Huish, says it is essential for the Club to have a good magazine, as it is the main method of communication between members. She believes she is very fortunate in having a wide range of contributors. Past issues contain articles on the Club trips to French waterways, news from Canada, Ireland and Scotland, boating on the Zambezi, the Birmingham 24 hour Challenge and much else from isolated waterways, the main system and the sharing of experiences and practical tips.

The 'virtual clubhouse' at www.wilderness.org.uk and a closed email ring provides the other means of high quality communication within the Club. This is managed by Webmaster Bill Perry.

The Club is active in the Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs. There are obvious advantages to WBOC members in being able to use other clubs' slipways and other facilities around the system, but, because WBOC has no reciprocal facilities, such hospitality has to be repaid in other ways. Club members have in the past filled the AWCC posts of National Chairman, National Technical Officer, and regional officers as well as representing AWCC on various other National bodies.