

EXPLORING THE RIVERS OF CHESHIRE

THE 31ST BRITISH ROWING TOUR

Some 80 rowers from 18 different clubs ranging from Maidstone to Bath to Tynemouth and with local representation from Royal Chester RC, discovered two new touring routes last weekend (29th – 31st August), rowing almost the entire navigable length of the River Weaver and a 7 km section of the River Dee. Though shorter than previous tours on the rivers Thames, Severn, Trent and Great Ouse, there was plenty of delightful scenery and places of interest.

The tour started on Friday at the “Winsford Bottom Flash” – a shallow lake formed as a result of subsidence following extensive salt mining in the area – the slag heaps from this can still be seen along the bank. Unfortunately, due to the prolonged dry weather, the water was so shallow that crews were unable to go very far into the lake and in one case the rowers had to get out of the boat to push it off a sandbank! The flotilla then headed off downriver to Vale Royal Lock, where another obstacle presented itself. One of the lock gates was stuck so crews had to cautiously squeeze round the narrow opening left by the other gate into the lock. Despite this hold-up, all the boats arrived at Northwich Rowing Club in time to enjoy a magnificent BBQ lunch prepared by club volunteers. Northwich is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year and the chairman commented “it was lovely to see the River Weaver come to life as we welcomed 16 recreational quads to the club. Many thanks to members who looked after the crews during lunch and came to see them off too!”

After lunch, the rowers went by coach to the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port where they had a fascinating guided tour and learned about the history of the area. People commented that it was much more interesting and fun than they had expected! Most of the exhibits – historic boats in various stages of reconstruction – are outside on the canals, so we were grateful that the sun shone, as indeed it did for almost the whole weekend.

On Saturday the tour carried on downstream through Hunts Lock (again, with one broken gate), to Saltersford Lock, where some of the boats ended up behind the historic steamer Daniel Adamson (The “Danny”) which carries passengers up and down the Weaver. Although we were pleased to have a chance to see it, it meant we were late arriving at the Grange School, Acton Bridge, where we stopped for lunch. After hauling most of the boats onto the bank, we refuelled at the Leigh Arms, who laid on a huge buffet lunch of sandwiches, pork pies, quiche and the best chips we had ever tasted! Somewhat bloated, we carried on through the last lock, Dutton, to Runcorn RC, the end of our Weaver experience.

Despite being unfamiliar with rowing boats – which the Canal and River Trust were initially reluctant to allow through the locks – the lock-keepers were extremely friendly and helpful, clearing weed away from the lock gates and ensuring our safe passage. They really entered

into the spirit of the tour, taking loads of photographs and even complimenting some of us on our rowing skills! So a big thank you is due to them.

On Saturday evening we had our gala dinner with guest of honour Rachel Hooper, British Rowing Learning, Education and Development Manager, who started her rowing career at Northwich Rowing Club and was head of rowing at the Grange School for a while. Rachel commented.....

The final day, Sunday, was a morning outing on the River Dee from Chester Sailing and Canoe Club upstream to Aldford Iron Bridge near Eaton Hall, the country home of the Duke of Westminster. After trailer loading and a picnic lunch, it was time to go home. We all enjoyed meeting up with old friends and making new ones; for about a dozen of the group it was their first tour. A typical comment on the WhatsApp group read "Thank you to everyone for a fab weekend. To the organisers, trailer drivers, boat helpers, every one of you is much appreciated. Without you all it wouldn't happen."

