

Why clear the Wye?

A few years ago the River Wye was voted the country's favourite river (2010). It rises high up on the slopes of Plynlimon, flows down through the moors, over falls, through stunning gorges, gentle sheep country (picking up equally beautiful tributaries) out of the Welsh stone into the lush pasture and plough land of Herefordshire to cut through the rock again at Symonds Yat to deliver to the tide of the Bristol Channel. Over 1000 miles of river and stream bank brimming with wildlife from end.....you would think.



But the river suffers. The things we can't see - the abstraction, the chemicals, the fertilizers, the pesticides and the sewage are all killing that river by a thousand cuts. The things we can see are sinuously wrapped around the roots and stones, hanging from the tree branches over the water, scattered along the high water mark of the last flood or tipped in lorry loads down the banks. The birds die, the fish are killed, green algae oozes, and sharp objects penetrate the canoes, the waders and those little paddling feet.

We had to do something about it. The Wye and Usk Foundation with help from Keep Wales Tidy and the River Wye Preservation Trust have taken 10 years to clear just over half of it. In the first few years small teams, often with diggers, would clear particularly bad areas - bad fly tips, the worst dumps, piles of cars etc.. Over the last 3 years a more concentrated effort has been made to clear 100 miles of river and stream a year. We must work with the weather and the seasons - February to the end of April gives us a window that is after most of the winter floods but before the undergrowth grows up and birds start nesting. It gets too dangerous when the rivers are in flood or the roads blocked by snow.

So far, over 500 volunteers have cleared well over 600 miles of riverbank of 2,200 odd bags/items of rubbish. They all have a passion for the river.

Helping us along the way have been various canoe groups and clubs. The canoes are great at getting at the rubbish from the water where the banks are too steep/overgrown/built up or dangerous for the land based teams to work. So far the Hereford and the



Canoeists helping to clear the upper Wye near Rhayader in 2012

Brecon Canoe clubs have been a great help as well as little groups that have contacted us over the years. It is astonishing how much rubbish comes out of the river with the usual plastic, tyres and shopping trolleys being supplemented by the occasional paddle or case of beer.

As we work down the river (We have reached Hay on Wye so far) it becomes more and more difficult for land-based teams to do the work - the river is just too big.

So, this is our request for help:

Next year (February to end of April 2014) WUF plan to clear the River Wye from Hay on Wye to Luggsmouth (just below Hereford).

We would like groups of paddling volunteers to clear lengths of river with us. Ideally, these would be organised groups from canoe clubs that are self-sufficient for transport, equipment, H&S, food and drink. We can organise the provision of bags, litter pickers, a land based support team and disposal of the rubbish.

If you can't manage 2014 then there is always 2015 when the Wye and Usk Foundation moves on down to clear from Luggsmouth to Chepstow.

Please see <http://www.wyeuskfoundation.org/projects/litterclearups.php>

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