



## Fit For Work - *Python*



WRG works with local volunteers on the Chesterfield Canal

Jan Warsop (Chesterfield Canal Trust) writes:

Just a year after *Python* returned to our canal following the major works on her hull she has returned to working life. *Python's* crew are now working in partnership with Canal & River Trust to help maintain the Chesterfield Canal. The results of this new initiative are really beneficial for all parties and it has brought a new influx of volunteers who are highly motivated to get her restoration complete so that she can get on with the much needed work along the canal.

Early in November the Waterways Recovery Group came to clear scrub around the entrance to the Norwood Tunnel and, as access to the offside is very difficult, *Python* was asked to help out. Her crew took her from Clayworth up to the head of navigation trimming overhanging vegetation along the route through the course of three days. We also collected litter at the locks along the way. Once at Kiveton Park, *Python* collected a pontoon that had been made available by CRT for the works and delivered it to the tunnel portal where we introduced the WRG to *Python*. Over the weekend *Python* was used to ferry bags of vegetation and logs that had been chopped into manageable size pieces across to the towpath side where they were hauled up the bank by the WRG and taken to the bonfire. She also became a working platform and a ferry for WRG volunteers to get from one side of the canal to the other.

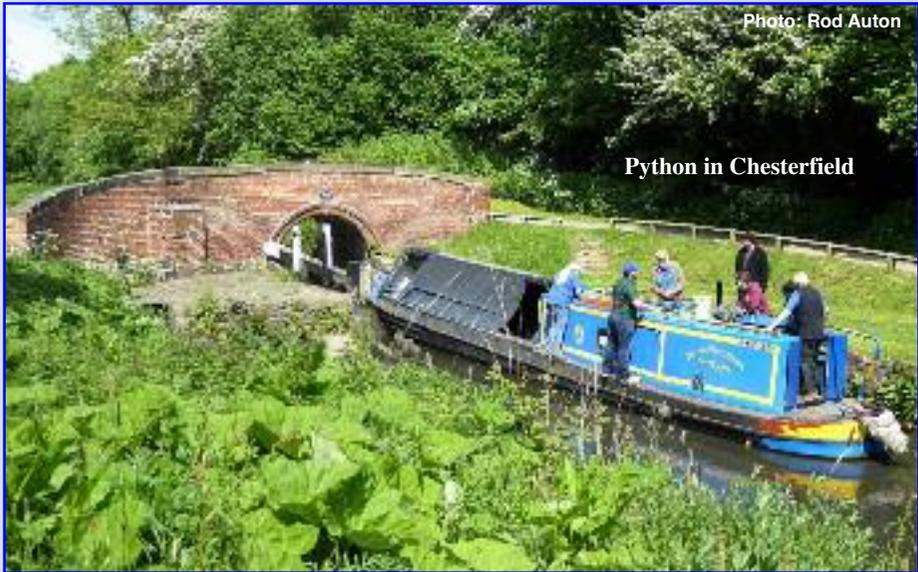
During this initial foray into using *Python* as a workboat we have learned a great deal about how we can use *Python* safely and effectively. CRT have been very supportive, supplying us all the equipment and Personal Protective Equipment that we asked for and facilitating the removal of the vegetation we cut. They will also pay for the diesel that *Python* uses while carrying out maintenance. *Python* has allowed volunteers to remove 24 tonne bags of overgrown vegetation from along the canal. We have collected 10 bags of litter and during her trip this autumn her volunteers have covered 100 miles and 106 locks on The Chesterfield Canal.

The maintenance trips have multiple benefits; trimming back overgrown vegetation maintains the width of the channel and stops damage to boats or injury to passengers by overhanging branches. We have safely removed fishing hooks hanging in offside bushes, a



danger to wildlife and boaters alike. **Python**, being so deep drafted, opens up a channel making it easier for other boats to move and just the process of moving any boat along the canal helps reduce the weed problem as it is chopped up by the boats propeller and as the silt that is moved clouds the water it reduces the light which the weed needs to grow. Removing litter and marking dog mess is a benefit to all canal users. We have also identified and reported some infrastructure issues that require CRT input – an extra set of eyes for them out and about on the canal. We are also able to engage with other canal users as we go on our way spreading the word about the canal and CCT's plans for its complete restoration.

In November we continued cutting vegetation down to West Stockwith and **Python** posed for a photo in the lock to record a special achievement: During 2016 **Python** has successfully travelled every navigable part of The Chesterfield Canal between the flood lock at Chesterfield right through to West Stockwith. She is the ONLY one of the CCT fleet to have achieved this feat, (although trip boats have done it in previous years, Staveley Town Lock has been opened since



the last one did it.) She is the only vessel on the National Register of Historic Ships to have achieved it and thought to be the oldest motor boat to have done it (If you know otherwise please let me know) This feat was made possible when Brook Garden Centre sponsored **Python's** move to the unconnected end of the canal for The Trailboat Festival in May. **Python** is now proving she is a viable working boat again due to the support she has received from the IWA, National Historic Ships, CRT and Paul Barber, Boatbuilder.

We still have to finish **Python's** restoration, her fit out is still a work in progress and she will need her cabin painting in the spring but there has recently been a new influx of highly motivated volunteers bringing their skills to help with **Python**. Much of that is due to the very valuable support she has received from Retford & Worksop Boat Club over recent months. The focus for the next couple of months is to progress with her restoration so that by the spring we will have on board welfare facilities for her crew and we can prepare her for the many engagements she has planned for 2017. If you would like to get involved, either with maintenance trips or with **Python's** restoration then please get in touch. If you would like to donate to her cabin fitout that would be a big help too as with on board welfare for the crew we can do so much more.