

Byron Photography


came alarmed that the wheelhouse might hit the arch. He dropped back through the bridge and had another go on Sunday, this time successfully hauling through the second arch with his bows attached to a steel hawser and winch lorry. Having written themselves into waterways history on 9th April Frank Barton and Pat Hucket moored at Monmouth's Rowing Club for ten days and proceeded to fit their ship with a new prop the cold and hazardous way – underwater – for there are no dry docks on the fresh water Wye.

Will Pat and Frank ever reach Hereford? There are many who are telling them it cannot be done. Other voices in the Wye Valley are raised in protest. Both men are determined and resourceful and the criticism only serves to spur them on. Frank, with ten years in the SAS Boat Squadron, has done his homework and examined every inch of the non-tidal Wye, walking the banks measuring every bridge and obstruction. He is confident of his right to navigate the Wye and to make sure of his facts he has consulted documents about river use that date back to 1272.

“Nowadays nothing with a deeper draught than a canoe or a racing eight can use the river for any distance” writes Keith Kissack, a modern writer on the Wye. At times of

Frank Barton and Pat Hucket attempting to navigate the 124ft *Silver Cloud* through Wye Bridge at Monmouth on 8th April this year. A second attempt the following day was successful, assisted by a lorry, a winch, and a strong fresh current on the river.

low rainfall he is depressingly right as Pat and Frank have found out. On 16th May they were still aground on a shoal at Hadnock, just north of Monmouth, where the Doward Hill overlooks a particularly lovely stretch of the Wye. My first unbelievable sighting of the barge was here while driving along the A40 road from Ross to Monmouth.

As Pat and Frank wait for more fresh in the Wye to refloat them I am sure all waterways enthusiasts will want to wish them well on their remarkable one-off voyage. An old guide book tells me they still have 44 miles to go! The two navigators will welcome a nice wet summer in Mid Wales (that's where the Wye rises) and I can predict that there will be many in the waterways community who will be sitting up and taking notice if *Silver Cloud* – all 230 tons of her – gets past the rapids at New Weir, Symond's Yat, where excursionists on the Amsterdam style tripper *Kingfisher* will be waiting to give her a cheer. 

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### RIVER WYE Principal Dates

**1662** – Sir William Sandys secures Act to Improve the Navigation of the rivers Wye and Lugg. Some locks (possibly flash locks) were built at weirs.

**1696-97** – River survey showed five weirs ruinous or decayed. A lock at New Weir (Symond's Yat) “in fairly good repair”.

**1727** – Act to Improve Navigation resulted in boats reaching at least to Hereford and up the Lugg to Leominster. Traffic in corn, meal, bark, cider, and timber downstream. Coal from Forest of Dean (Lydbrook) upstream.

**1809** – Towing Path Company formed to build horse path from Lydbrook to Hereford and levy tolls.

**1825** – Wye Steam Boat Company formed, but operation was unsuccessful.

**1835** – Regular passenger and pleasure trips started between Ross, Monmouth and Chepstow (The Wye Tour).

**1845** – Hereford & Gloucester Canal opened to a basin in Hereford. No physical connection was ever made with the river Wye in Hereford.

**1854** – Newport Abergavenny & Hereford Railway opened to Hereford.

**1855** – Hereford Ross & Gloucester Railway opened to Hereford and Towpath Company dissolved.

**1876** – Opening of Wye Valley Railway and ending of navigation on the Wye between Llandogo and Monmouth.

**c1940** – End of shipments of stone from Lancaut Quarries on the tidal reaches of the Wye between Tintern and Chepstow.