

# Briefing note regarding WRG at “small” festivals

WRG regularly gets requests from both IWA and Canal Societies for assistance in setting up and running the smaller festivals, such as the National Trail-boat & Campaign Rallies, etc.

Because many festival committees either have not run this sort of thing before, or the event has changed significantly since the last time, they often try and recruit WRG because they are not sure what problems they are going to encounter. It is reassuring to think that, whatever happens, you will have some experienced, eager people around. From our side of things we enjoy and appreciate festivals, both large and small.

However, there is often confusion concerning what we can offer, how to go about securing our help and what is involved in us making a contribution to an event.

This note therefore has two purposes:

- 1) To explain what we can do and how you should go about getting us to do it.
- 2) To explain the consequences of us doing it (and in particular the costs)

**Because it is important that, if we are going to contribute to your event, we both feel it was worth it.**

Firstly, what can we do ? Well pretty much anything - we have contributed to many, many festivals large and small over the years and have got experience of just about every problem and opportunity that can present itself on a rally site. We have some very skilled volunteers who can sort out such issues as plumbing, electrics, site safety. We also have enthusiastic volunteers who are willing to spend all day at a remote slipway waiting for “Dunreigning” to arrive after it’s mishap on the motorway.

The crew you do get will not be first timers (it wouldn’t be fair to expect them to pick up on the intricacies of a festival straightaway). They will have all done WRG events before, though it may be their first festival.

Generally we will find a leader who will liaise with a member of your committee (usually the site/services manager). They will probably know your waterway/project well and may well be known to you. Once we are sure that WRG should send a team to help we will advertise the event in our magazine navvies and use word of mouth/ mailing lists to recruit some volunteers. Don’t expect a horde of thousands - our experience shows that, if the rally has any degree of local support, then half a dozen WRG volunteers will be able to mop up the surplus jobs.

**So that all sounds wonderful, what are the issues that WRG are concerned about?**

Firstly, will there be enough work? Our experience shows that rally committees always overestimate the amount of work to be done. Especially at the initial stages it is felt that a contribution from WRG is essential. However, as the planning progresses and more solutions are found, more people are recruited and more jobs are handed out the available work diminishes. Our volunteers will probably have travelled many miles to help and at the back of their mind they will be thinking about the lock they could have been restoring (or kitchen shelves that need putting up) instead of being one of eight

people micro-managing your car-park. Please bear this in mind as your event gets close – we won't really mind being told we are superfluous!

The same point applies to our equipment and vans – it may seem reassuring to have a WRG van and a trailer full of every tool possible but it will take some effort to get them from their current location, and may well be costly (more on that subject later). Can the necessary tools and equipment be sourced locally?

A less obvious point is that the more you rely on our "previous experience" the more likely your festival is just going to resemble a generic festival and not something truly representative of your unique waterway. It really should be WRG supplementing a good local team.

Finally there is the important question of expenses and costs. Whilst WRG are all volunteers there will be costs and expenses incurred. Most significant in this equation is that, unless we can find enough local WRG volunteers, our navvies will need accommodation. Whilst it won't need to be up to the standard of a Canal Camp you may still be shocked at just how much putting up six navvies can cost. Additionally, if it is agreed that we need to bring vans or trailers and equipment, then that can be a very significant cost (a tank of fuel for a van is currently the wrong side of £100 !). While we can be quite creative regarding what we consider to be acceptable accommodation and equipment it is best to assume that there will be costs and to put these in at a realistic figure.

WRG certainly don't want to be in the situation whereby the cost of our involvement takes your event from a successful festival to a disappointing loss-maker.

Hopefully, this has not put you off approaching WRG regarding your event. But it has helped you make a sensible judgement regarding whether you need us and, if the answer is yes, then you and your committee will be better informed about what is involved in having WRG at your festival.

If the answer is still yes then, in the first instance, talk to Jenny Black at WRG Head Office, Island House, Moor Road, Chesham, HP5 1WA. 01494 783453  
[enquiries@wrg.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wrg.org.uk)

Mike Palmer  
WRG Chairman  
March 2011

PS – you may also be after the WRG publicity stand for your event. The stand operation is dealt with by a different team of volunteers. Please contact Jenny Black (as above) who can put you onto the chaps who run the stand.

PPS – WRG also has fairly autonomous regional groups – if they are based close to your project then they may be able to offer support without the accommodation costs. Again, contact Jenny for details.