

‘ Keep Our Canals Alive ! ’

WHITE PAPER ON THE CANALS IN BURGUNDY



“

Since their creation, the Burgundian canals have known several eras.

Created for freight, then given over to pleasure, Now they are welcoming cycle tourism in force.



Today, considered at the same time a fresh water reserve, a rich heritage and corridor of touristic development, the canals are having difficulty, in the absence of sufficient touristic flow, to find a perennial function. In the current organisation they are under exploited and are thus threatened by neglect.

While other regions are persevering, with considerable effort, to reopen their canals which were closed around 1950, Burgundians are not stepping up to the chance they have to be the premier waterway region in France, the number 1 region amongst the great world tourism destinations.

At a time when the Burgundy Regional Council is drawing up a strategy for the development of the Burgundy Canals, we, local organisations motivated by high ambitions for our canals, wish to present our thoughts.

We are hopeful that these thoughts will contribute to the creation of a great project, and great results.

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CONTENTS

Page

The Current Situation

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| • Travelling on the Waterways | 3 |
| • Freight | 3 |
| • Water Supplies: “No water, no leisure!” | 3 |
| • Heritage | 3 |
| • The “Democratisation of the Canals” | 4 |
| • Statistics and Usage | 4 |
| • Usage by Boats and Bikes | 4 |
| • Service Providers: Lodgings, bars, restaurants, tourist sites | 6 |
| • Taxi services | 7 |
| • Hire boat services | 7 |
| • Bike rental services | 7 |
| • Tourist offices | 8 |
| • Lock Keepers | 8 |
| • Career Training | 9 |
| • Consulting firms | 9 |
| • Tourist development institutions | 9 |
| • Associations for the Promotion and Protection of Canals | 9 |

Plans of Action

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------|----|
| • “Scenarios” for the Burgundy Canal | 12 |
| • The re-adoption of the canal by the Burgundians | 12 |
| • Memory Bank/Resources Centre | 13 |
| • Development of the access points | 13 |
| • Signage | 13 |
| • Development of the lock-keeper cottages | 14 |
| • Proposal for the organisation of lock-keepers | 14 |
| • Cycle routes and surfaces | 16 |
| • Development structure | 17 |
| • Development of tourism and the economy | 18 |

An ambitious project for the canal?

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|----|
| • Our Reputation | 19 |
| • Events & activities on the Burgundy canals | 20 |
| • A daring vision | 23 |

THE CURRENT SITUATION

- **Travelling on the Waterways**

This new type of holiday affects all forms of leisure (camper van, hiking, biking ...) and fits all pockets. It mirrors an accelerated way of life and a greater wish for mobility. Nowadays no-one wants to stay in the same place for three weeks, tourists want to keep on the move, to zap around, to stay mobile, depending on the weather, on the kids' mood, on the latest novel attraction.

In parallel with the appearance of new tools for mobility and their invasion of our lives, this new trend is an opportunity for our regions to exploit their many riches and the variety of their countrysides. Our canals provide an ideal base for wanderers on foot, by bike, by boat or camper van (or a mix of all of these).

It is up to the regions now to encourage this leisure activity by adapting what is on offer: accessibility, mobility, accommodation, restaurants, information ...

- **Freight**

Though the idea seems attractive, and ignoring the problems of trans-shipment and the need for upkeep of ports and quays, we should not forget that the transport of goods has multiplied fifty times over since the golden age of waterway transport. Even if the system were put back into use, it would be enormously under-sized.

The upshot is that transport by water can indeed find its place and compete with road and rail traffic, albeit for specific forms of freight (for example the hook-lift system) or for certain large gauge waterway sections.

- **Water Supplies: "No water, no leisure!"**

What about the combined effect of the lowering of dikes (European Framework Directive) and the maintenance of water-sports at reservoirs, on water supplies for the Canal de Bourgogne (which already leave room for improvement...)?

What about the ecological pressures for ameliorating the effects of dam projects and for returning rivers to their natural water-courses?

What will come of boating when faced with the choice between water supplies to the canal and the drinking water needs of the populace in 30 years? NB: water seepage from the canal is a part of groundwater supply management.

- **Heritage**

Built in the 18th and 19th centuries, the canal forms part of our heritage in all its facets: its structures, its lock gates, its lock cottages. Just a small door handle, a balustrade, it's all of a kind, it's all tinged by history, by craftsmanship.

All very interesting – but does that mean we have to put it under a protective wrap? Of course not, that would be both unrealistic and stifling.

Much better to allow evolution to have its way, to select sites of interest in order to preserve them (from the ravages of time, from the blind application of regulations) and to bring out the best in them.

- **The “Democratisation” of the Canals**

Historically, boaters rarely mixed with ‘landlubbers’. From an early age waterside residents were scolded by their mothers if they went too near the canal and did not steer clear of the boatmen. In later times different things separated these 2 worlds: the language barrier between boaters and Burgundians, the hippy image of hotel boats, the passing but recurrent friction between anglers and boaters, the belief in the need for a driver’s licence.

Today, if you read in the press about the democratisation of pleasure boating, this only applies to coastal waters (90% of pleasure boating). Burgundian hire boat companies consulted see this as rumour and claim the opposite.

Environmental regulations mean that boats are becoming more and more sophisticated, and pleasure boat customers expect ever more luxury. Prices are running away and are forcing the whole market upwards, even for second hand boats (when you can find them).

On the other hand, tax rules do not encourage tourist companies to address low-margin market segments (something not unique to the waterways). And hirers complain of the discriminatory rate of VAT.

Constructor-hirers of simple and affordable boats do not themselves attempt to enter the retail sales market for this type of boat.

Democratisation is not working. In the current state of affairs, the ‘canal for all’ will not be realised on the water.

- **Statistics and Usage**

*“I believe only in those statistics that I have doctored myself”
(Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill)*

Every [governmental] organisation which provides its statistics also provides the criteria for their evaluation and so can put at risk its sources of financing; their coolness towards the subject is understandable. The best thing they can do is to announce data with only a marginal increase on the preceding year. Too strong a drop in usage, and they will be suspected of a weak performance and are likely to be punished by a funding reduction; too strong a rise might be seen as an indicator that funds allocated were too high, meaning they can be reduced, or that the objectives can be set higher for the next year.

At a higher, global level, whether they relate to the waterways or their immediate environment, the reported statistics are not satisfactory. Having often been ‘filtered’, these are communication tools rather than aids to decision-making, particularly when they arrive with a 2 season time-lag.

As regards the boats themselves, the information is relatively accurate. Each time a boat passes through a lock, the lock-keeper registers the name of the boat, the nationality of the crew, etc.

Thus one can see a slight downturn in waterway usage since the nineties.

- **Usage by Boats and Bikes:**

Even as one reads the Tour de Bourgogne à Vélo (TBV) [“Tour of Burgundy by Bike”] sign “A million users registered each year”, one equally hears tourists commenting “We were all alone.” Some people appreciate the peace and quiet, others display a little anxiety on our behalf, a little pity?

Even if it is true to say that our visitors choose Burgundy as a means of avoiding mass destinations, this still does not reassure them of their holiday choice, nor does it make for good publicity for the region. People attract people.

Traffic counting devices exist for managed sections. They provide reliable data and are normally able to measure the patterns of usage (which is more relevant than the raw totals). However, they are still too few to enable us to analyse people's movements or to identify their habits (schedules, days, periods, entry and exit points...).

If we compare lock passages with bike traffic-metering points at for example Chevroches on the Canal du Nivernais:

Cyclists: 28,000 passages in 2011 of which a large part are locals who spend nothing and the rest tourists (estimated at 6,500) who spend on average €75/day.

Boats: 1900/year x 4 persons per boat = 7,600 persons who spend on average €20/day (excluding boat hire, where relevant).

There is a definite economic impact which is by no means negligible (TBV: €100,000/year). But it is diffuse throughout the region and it is difficult to make sense of the figures. Service providers remain sceptical, even those who "do well from the canal", such is the disparity.

- **Drop in Usage:**

As for all new trends, there are several phases: novelty, take-up, maturity and decline. Cycle routes cannot escape this pattern. New developments attract streams of explorers: True seekers of 'voies vertes' (bike routes), they are vociferous and, once back home, immediately publish their opinions and comments via photos, blogs and specialist forums. If the quality meets the mark, they are good ambassadors and can bring in further numbers of people who are perhaps less fervent, but more numerous. Most of these visitors come only once. Novelty must be kept up to maintain attractiveness and keep these people coming back.

Luckily, locals are more reliable. Residents who cycle frequently first shun these new routes, then end up including them in their own regular bike routes; while for occasional cyclists from the locality it is an opportunity to discover the pleasures of cycling and to rediscover their own region.

Even if the trend to active holidays and environmental consciousness takes hold long term, the need to hold people's interest will continue, and also to keep up with the competition, as all regions now have their own schemes for developing cycle routes.

Example: the Givry – Cluny Cycle Route

Initiated in 1997 by a far-sighted local mayor, the project started out in stages between Givry and Cluny. It quickly became a success story and served as a pilot project for many others; today it is a bike route almost 80 km long between Mâcon and Châlon, interconnecting with the TBV and a whole network of cycle routes. With about 800,000 metered trips, activity has reached its peak and usage is stagnating. It gets a boost every time a new stretch is added to the network. Usage is spread throughout the year: 2,000 trips in December and more than 10,000 per month from April to September. Users from the locality and from the surrounding area make up approximately 80%. Individual loops do not have meters and there is no feedback from their users.

La Loire au Vélo (The Loire by Bike):

In 2009 The Loire by Bike generated more than €5M worth of return visitors (source: Regional Tourism Committee) on sections already open and more than 300,000 cyclists used routes in the Central Region.

- **Service Providers: lodgings, bars, restaurants, tourist sites**

Few providers work solely for the tourist industry. Often enough, tourist customers are no more than a little extra income for them. So one can understand a certain reluctance on their part, or at least only a vague interest in taking on tourism's problems. And some assert that pleasure boating has declined over the last 15 years and so no longer regard it as an area for development.

For those who do wish to grow their share of tourism, the short season and the lack of visibility of any local policy do not instill them with confidence, and approaches to their local or regional authorities rarely lead anywhere. A lack of understanding at various levels, with different occupations and different interests, the image of the authorities rarely emerges enhanced from the entreaties of the providers: "The Region won't help us."

Others won't get involved due to the risky returns or, more exactly, the certainty of no return. The short season and insufficient usage all mean that they struggle to meet their budgets at all; it just doesn't happen. Many restaurants who resolutely chose to settle at waterside locations in order to attract tourists have ended up serving 80% local people.

Hotels:

In the main, family-run hotels have a very local view of their market and regard themselves as being in competition with each other. For them, the canal is just 10km: 5 km upstream + 5 km downstream. They are not aware of the phenomenon 'canal = travel', or do not believe in it, with some exceptions. They welcome people who ring at their door but are not pro-active (except, for example, the Hotel Ecu in Montbard.)

The *Logis de France* network of inns is the most active but is not dense enough to have any dynamic effect on the region. Other labels are meaningless (TBV, SNCF hirer ...). This is often just a sticker on the door and an entry in yet another website on the internet, not an active promotion of the network.

With problems in the transfer to successive generations, plus the coming introduction of mobility and safety regulations, the future of our canal hotels is anything but rosy. And the day-to-day problems of recruiting staff (cooks, waiters ...) do not encourage them any further. In some sectors, there are rare cases of abuse of dominant position and of bad service, at prohibitive prices – bad publicity for the whole region.

Guest Houses:

Of limited capacity, and often without board, these do not provide a solid enough base to form a permanent supply of accommodation, even if they do work well among themselves and, in particular, bring in business to local shops. For those who run them it is a time-consuming, wearing task with small returns, and which survives only as an extra income to some other source of revenue. These are often the only possible form of accommodation in the countryside.

Gîtes: limited offering, to be developed

"Gîtes" (self-catering holiday homes), which similarly offer only modest returns, are often municipal and are maintained on a voluntary basis by the authorities whose aim is to create a pool of

accommodation in order to revitalise their region. They are often taken over by groups or by family reunions or weddings at weekends throughout the year, which ensures a certain level of occupancy.

Camp Sites:

Supply is limited and disparate. There is not sufficient density to cater for family holidays while travelling. HLL accommodation (mobile home, etc.) might offer an interesting option, in sync with the natural surroundings of our canals. To be developed further...

Taxis:

Much of the activity of rural taxis is for medical transport, school runs and 'on spec requests', and they are not really suitable for tourist use (timing, vehicle size): no way to transport shopping, no way to load bikes, no way to get home after a dinner...

In certain remote areas, some taxis abuse their uncontested position and charge prohibitive rates. Again, bad publicity for the region.

Hire Boat Companies:

With a significant need for capital (price of a boat: 200,000 €) boat hire companies are often a part of a large group with fleets spread over tens of bases. They generate significant amounts of traffic on our canals and bring to the ports in which they work a galaxy of services around their trade. And sometimes they build the facilities themselves.

Their global commercial strategies can sometimes lead them to move their boats from one season to another. They are always on the lookout for new development potential.

One of the measures of the attractiveness of a hire base is customer loyalty. This should stand at at least 30% (30% of customers who already hired a boat from that base.) If the figure is lower the hirers will begin to suspect poor navigation conditions (water conditions, poor service from VNF) or a lack of services generally in the region. A number of companies have already left over the last 10 years (Montbard, Saint Florentin and Tonerre.)

"There should be many contented spirits on board, for such a life is both to travel and to stay at home "
[actual quote, An Inland Voyage Chapter 2]
Robert Louis Stevenson

Hirers will be attracted by better infrastructure and by a standardisation of available technical facilities (water and electricity connections, emptying ...) as in Germany; they would be good partners for developing the canals by contributing an increase in the flow (without the need for rooms) and by increasing the accommodation capacity of the region.

NB: One of the problems encountered by some pleasure boaters is that they have not spent up their budget due to lack of opportunity. Not enough access to restaurants, could not find a taxi to take them to off-the-track locations, or to bring back their shopping (wine; craft-ware.)

Bicycle Hire Companies:

There are about 1,000 bikes for hire in Burgundy. These bicycles are spread across service providers for whom renting out bikes is not their principal activity – specialised travel agencies, tourist offices, cycle shops, boat hirers, hotels, camp sites, guest houses ... renting out bikes generates little revenue, but helps to widen the provider's scope of services.

Bicycles are mostly rented out on an 'out and back' basis. Very few hirers offer the opportunity to drop off the bike at a different place to where it was hired.

Thanks to energetic support by a network of tourist offices, the “*VeliBourgogne*” (‘Burgundy-Bike’) scheme is able to offer this service on the Burgundy Canal).

Cycle outlets are shops which deal with a large range of bikes, mainly for the local populace. They are generally excellent bicycle technicians, however, their mode of operation is not always geared up to the demands of tourists (loan of materials, emergency service, opening hours / days...) and they often take their well-deserved holidays in August.

In the vast majority of cases (85%) TBV users own their own bikes. For foreigners, France does not have a good reputation regarding the quality of available products. The tourists often come from countries where cycling is very widespread and are used to materials of a very high standard. There still persists the image of the amateur hirer in the manner of 1970s campsites.

Electrically assisted Bicycles

While useful on bumpy paths, or in town with frequent starts, an electric bike is not well suited to the canal, which is flat and where a motor adds nothing except another ten kilos of weight. And, perhaps, here an electric bike also loses its image of freedom, its easy-going attraction, being more ‘technical’, and due to its weight, its dependence on electricity sockets, and the permanent fear that the engine might be pinched (average value 1600 €).

• Tourist Offices [“TO”]

Battered by the organization change to ‘EPIC’ [system of public sector entities], by the transfer of responsibility for tourism from towns to joint district councils, by local authority reform, by the change [in the hotel industry] from ‘stars’ to ‘categories’, some TOs are struggling.

With the rapid development of the level of expectation of visitors (and of service providers), with the arrival of Web 2.0, with reduced numbers of personnel compared to the broadening range of services offered, TOs are finding their role challenged, while the “TO of the future” is being widely deliberated.

Tourists no longer just want a list of available accommodation, they want genuine and personalised advice for their stay.

TOs will have a key role to play towards the canals, both for Burgundians and for tourists. There will be much to do in the form of training, and in their understanding of the canals. They should become local centres for the exchange of information and services, and ambassadors to the people of Burgundy.

• Lock Keepers

Having already had their fingers burnt by a series of reforms, suffering under a string of changes in the command structure, with little or no support from their top brass, most lock keepers have become wary of new projects and have developed an inflexible, wait-and-see attitude.

“Tomorrow’s luxury is to travel slowly, in silence”

With a real knowledge of the canal, in the eyes of tourists they are the foundation of canal life (they make it come alive) and form a real link to the region. Nevertheless, and despite themselves, they frequently confine themselves to “turning the crank handles”.

Archaic corporate attitudes and an understandable ‘trade union’ mentality often combine to hamper any initiative. There is a clear need to develop the lock keeper’s trade better, in order to satisfy current demands.

Escorted Locks

With the decline in traffic there was no longer any need to have one lock keeper for every lock. Depending on the sector, different working methods have been employed, and for flights of locks the preferred method is often to escort boats through. While this method suits people in transit (or in convoy), it is not at all convenient for pleasure boaters who have not come to ‘guzzle’ locks but, quite the opposite, would prefer to spend a little more time in these havens of peace, to explore the technical marvels, to gaze at the countryside, or just do nothing. But once through the escorted sector, the boater is forced to moor up temporarily somewhere, while waiting for the next lock keeper to come and follow along.

To accommodate the schedules of locks and commercial boats, the availability of lock keepers and the speed of navigation, the pleasure boater’s cruise is often turned into a race against the clock.

- **Career Training:**

Caught up in the career ladder between 2 posts “on the way”, their stay on the canal is often only short-lived. They do not stay long enough to become attached to the canals and to initiate projects which might help shape their development. Those who do try quickly throw in the towel when faced with opposition, the best thing for their career being not to make waves.

Thus we find ourselves in a situation 25 years in the making and with a canal 25 years behind the times.

- **Consulting Firms:**

To provide some breadth, some detachment to the deliberations, recourse is often had to consulting firms: strategy, communication ...

While they perhaps bring some fresh air each time they come along, each one just seems to undo what others have done before. The means becomes more important than the end, the overall results are disappointing, and the problems remain the same after 25 years. Backed by countless reports, in 2011 we are asking ourselves exactly the same questions as in 1985, and studies pile up in the drawers. Were the diagnoses wrong? Were the recommendations applicable? Applied?

- **Tourist Development Institutions:**

Still part of the of Burgundy Region, but often straddling two departments and several areas, our canals are dependent upon several organisations, each sometimes obeying its own different logic, whether this be in the planning, maintenance, promotion, development – and as likely as not, in competition with each other! Apart from being greedy with resources, this system works contrary to the development of Burgundy as a tourist destination.

- **Associations for the Promotion and Protection of Canals:**

“Les Amis du Canal Nivernais”
[“ACN” or ‘Friends of the Nivernais Canal’]
and “Autour du Canal de Bourgogne”
[Along the Burgundy Canal]

These associations are often a very rich source due to the diverse backgrounds and wide experience of their members. Whether retired or not, they sacrifice numerous hours of their own time for the canals. They take part in numerous meetings and travel frequently, often without even receiving expenses. Thanks to the passion which drives them, generally speaking they put in a great deal of hard work and, with their well-filled address books, achieve real feats. Their work, though never billed, is not

always acknowledged. Their commitment, working alongside the development agencies, who are doing their job (and getting paid for it), is by no means easy, as these organisations do not always have a clear position vis-à-vis the associations (for example, Halles en eaux 2011 [festival in Decize in 2011]).

We do not know what role may fall to (be left open for?) associations in the future organisation of the canals. What is sure is that if they wish to make themselves count, to be effective and to have a permanent presence, they will have to think about employing people full time. In the current state of affairs, their mere motivation as volunteers will not be enough.

The aim of these associations is the protection and viability of the canals. Even if the ACN have achieved a number of grand coups (Vincennes Rally 2009; *Des Racines et des Ailes* 2010; *Échappées Belles* 2011), these activities are generally of short duration and are very local in their impact. To go up a notch and to work on their image, the canals need a professional structure capable of setting in motion an ambitious and well-structured promotional campaign.

The “Canal du Centre Association”, whose role is basically the promotion of tourism, has a budget of approximately €150,000.

ANPEI: Official partner for decentralisation:

With a national presence, the ANPEI represents pleasure boaters who own their own boat; its main emphasis is to address the problems of boats under 12m in length, making up about 15-20% of boats using the Burgundy canals.

ANPEI believes unshakably in a return to a significant level of inland navigation in the name of route continuity.

L'Entente des canaux du Centre France: [Friends of the Canals of Central France]

As the top association at the head of a network of associations for the promotion and protection of each of the canals in the VNF “*Centre France*” [“Central France”] region, the Entente allows all associations to use their actions and knowledge and make common cause, and allows each individual association to step back and reflect over its particular canal.

Equally, ENTENTE has a more far-reaching role than just the “canal problem” allowing it to intervene at other levels, such as for example with large industrial groups who might be thinking of returning to waterways transport. It also takes the time to meet other waterway players, the problems of the FFAM, EAF and other FNPPR often being similar to those encountered on the canals and their water reserves; problems which are in fact often generated by the local application (by water-body regulatory agencies) of the European Framework Directive.

DBA: The Barge Association

The DBA’s objectives are to encourage boaters to navigate home and foreign waters and, being highly preoccupied with the state of small canals, to form relationships with other associations and groups working for the good of boating and/or the maintenance of the canal system. To this end it works in partnership with ENTENTE.

The DBA represents the interests of its members to the extent necessary; it is very active in the United Kingdom, where it acts as consultant to various navigational organisations and groups dedicated to navigating inland waterways. It has a seat on the Inland Water Transport Working Party of the Inland Transport Committee and is part of the European Boating Association (“EBA.”) These activities allow it to play a part in influencing European Community legislation concerning boating, boats and the waterways.

It considers a European presence to be vital, recognising that large numbers of its members do their boating in Europe or whose boats overwinter there.



SOME ACTION PLANS

- **'Scenarios' for the CB:**

Over a route of 242 km, there is an opportunity to divide the length of the route into stages in order to:

- Provide meaning and context
- Describe each area in welcoming terms
- Give travellers some landmarks
- Slice up the journey (so as to give small mouthfuls on the way to eating the whole cake)

For example, on the Compostella pilgrim route, the pilgrims identify for themselves the stages (Reims, Vezelay, Le Puy, Roncevaux) in order to give themselves intermediate milestones.

Another example, the Nivernais Canal with its five 'geo-political' themes (confluence of the waterways, vineyards, nature, villages and life afloat).

On the Bourgogne one can imagine a number of themes:

The plain/Dijon/Valley of the Ouche/the summit/the large 'pound'/ the ladders/ industries/the rock formations/the Renaissance chateaux/the confluence of the waters

A study of the countryside, like the one led by Claire Helene DELOUVEE on the Nivernais could provide another classification.

Let's identify our three themes, which will encourage the boating enthusiasts to discover each one:

- **The markers:**

Restore the historic canal markers (attractive milestones every 5kms)

- In order to identify locations as mentioned above,
- to conserve and value our established heritage
- while protecting against thieves and collectors

- **The re-adoption of the canal by the Burgundians:**

In a number of instances, the local residents have forgotten the canal, although they live alongside it, because they see only pleasure boaters and fishermen. It is as though it is a world which is not their own. They have even begun to believe that the canal has always been there and have not been conscious of its artificiality and fragility.

The re-adoption of the canals by the Burgundians is a major challenge but they could be customers, protectors, ambassadors, advisers, financiers and activists. However, they are not dealing with a normal tourist clientele. It is a clientele which is hard to pin down – the grass can always be greener elsewhere.

We need to consider increasing initiatives and setting targets. For example:

- Schoolchildren: involve the children for the future and involve their parents now
- Produce a series of portraits and memorabilia of the old days on the canal to keep memories alive

'The attractiveness of waterways is tied to the structure of the countryside'

Jean Viard, sociologist

- Organise events for the locals: The Challenge of the Nivernais, visits to places of interest,
- Constantly keep everybody well-informed and in touch with the our visitors
- ...

- **Memory Bank/Resources Centre:**

We already have Cap Canal at Pouilly, the Toueur interpretive centre at St Leger and some significant private collections. The history of the canal is well covered (even if the archives could perhaps be better cared for).

However there is nothing, as far as we know, relating to present times. We are asked for photos, illustrations and information and cannot always respond. The photographic gallery of Bourgogne and Tourism or ADT are not in a good state and are out of date.

It would be appropriate perhaps to establish a resources centre in order to help everyone to learn and to have access to quality materials.

The life of the canal continues yet is, at the present time, in the process of entering a moment of truth. Perhaps we will be pleased, in twenty years, to look back on the origins of this initiative.

- **Development of the access points:**

Within the scope of the development of travel and tourism, it makes sense to identify the access points to the canals so as to concentrate on their development and to establish them as 'hubs.' In this regard certain locations could play an essential role, acting as interfaces and supporting and sharing services designed for the various categories of users.

Parking, tourist information, shopping, WCs, stations, water supply points, rubbish bins, bicycles ... for many of these the boat charter companies are the efficient interface that creates activity at the port. These companies can also carry out other activities (caretaking, maintenance, etc)

The large organisations associated with the water and its related services (Veolia and the like) have well understood this strategic role and are involved at the VNF marina concessions. The costs of these concessions are rising and the local communities can no longer support them.

- **Signage**

- Uniformity of signage:**

The process of uniformity with regard to signage, which is often widely advocated, sometimes holds up progress. Does one wait for one's neighbour to finish in order to make the same mistakes that he has made? Why is there a need for conformity? There are as many tourists as there are opinions. One cannot please everyone and there is no perfect solution. Each sign is a compromise for a particular area and perhaps has no relevance for another area 20km away. The needs, constraints and nature of the areas – urban, forest, wine-growing – are not the same.

The tourists, being strangers to our local customs, are often impervious to our approaches and our practices. They appreciate having basic (and reliable) information about the region they are crossing. Let's display our treasures and the specifics of our areas without forgetting to remove obsolete or faded signs.

- Tourist information signs on the canal:**

In addition to providing regular marks along the length of the canal we can also provide suggestions for places to visit; a simple system of signs could identify the principal sites, the town centres and their services.

The Loops:

In place in order to invite tourists to leave the main route (and satisfy the service providers who are not on it), they do not have, for the most part, a theme. They have little utility value and are rarely frequented (less than 3%). In addition they lack links with town centres (Semur, Courbigny) or with sites such as Maulnes. The link with Fontenay Abbey is an example which works.

- **Development of the lock-keeper cottages:**

These small houses are true emblems of the canal and have a delightful charm. They fire the imagination. Who does not have a dream of spending a night in one, or living there? Some of them form part of a dispersed hotel chain. They were constructed to the standards of the 19th century; they are not very comfortable and are very small. The lock-keepers who live in them have often carried out significant improvements and extensions.

Even so, some of them lend themselves well to be a provider of services to the users of the canal (cf. the study by Anne-Claire Grassler) on the condition that there are means of access other than the towpath (which is forbidden to cars) and that they do not interfere with the servicing of the canal (eg. operation of the shift system).

Minor commercial activities could be installed. Where there are restaurants established (La Charme..) additional space has to be created and the house serves only as a kitchen and stock room. Other possible uses include temporary lodgings for artists such as painters where the house is located in an exceptional location.

There are many requests by individuals, associations and communities to carry out such projects. The majority remain as potential projects whose instigators find themselves quickly discouraged by the difficulties of finding a suitable intermediary, by the burdens of getting started and, for the most persevering, by unattractive contracts that are proposed to them.

There is an urgent need to improve the facilities **and to remove the obstacles** by proposing, for example, a type of 'legal kit' to aid the administrative process. Something that would go further than a 'Welcome booklet for Project Managers' which would risk being of little use.

Why not propose a 'materials kit' (tables, chairs, fridge, etc...) to present a coherent picture and to guard against excessive amateurism.

- **Proposal for the organisation of lock-keepers:**

Two basic principles:

1. Operation of the lock is carried out by boat crews (thanks to mechanised locks)
2. The lock-keeper is at the centre of the operation, not as a 'mobile crank handler', but in a role as 'guardian' of the locks.

That is to say that he would return to carrying out the several traditional roles:

- Control of water to the pounds
- Presence at, and stewardship of, the lock
- Providing a welcome into 'his' territory
- Maintenance craftsman (mechanics, lock environment, green spaces and general fixer)
- Guarantor of the safety of the lock

If it is utopian to have one lock-keeper for each lock, it is perhaps a mistake to concentrate on a single role while neglecting the other four, which would happen with a 'moped support' model.

The solution proposed for 'Le Bourgogne': one lock-keeper for a sector of three locks (except in the case of chains of locks). The sector is identified with an individual (direct accountability for the work)

The effective organisation is a team of two lock-keepers for 6 locks.

The role of the lock-keeper for his three locks and three pounds :

- Regulate the supply flow (rigorous management of water resource) for his three downstream pounds
- Be visible in his sector and responsible for controlling vandalism, security and inspection, etc.
- Maintain the canal banks of his sector and make the locks attractive
- Be available to provide information to all his 'guests' or to provide assistance to those with mobility difficulties (the aged, etc.)
- Facilitate the locks to be 'self-service' through a mechanical system which is complete and safe*

**A good example is the 6 locks between Lezinnes and Ancy la Franc, where this approach has been tested for three seasons without difficulty, and with a sense of freedom which was appreciated by the boating community. The lock-keeper remains contactable for each lock by telephone and can be available to help manoeuvres on demand (for the aged, for hotel barges, etc.) with a wait of no more than 15 minutes.*

- **Comments:**

- The time available outside moped journeys can be spent on making the lock area attractive
- Rest periods are simplified considerably: only one of the two lock-keepers is on his/her rest period at a time and assistance is provided in response to calls for the six locks
- Lock-keepers will be able to acquire real competence in maintenance work (during the winter period) and thus can be mobilised throughout the year for rapid response when incidents occur
- Genuine training will take place

Advantages:

- Reliability along the route
- Staff who are visible, available and competent
- Attractive canal banks
- Originality in the running of the operation (unique in France)
- Increased standing of the staff
- Optimisation of maintenance costs
- Reduction of waiting time experienced at locks
- **The lock-keepers become the ambassadors of tourism**

‘Allo canal’

A unique number “allo canal” to contact the lock-keepers when help is needed, for safety, for advice of malfunctions, for the boaters, for the cyclists; the same as ‘112’ (multi-lingual system, localised as a function of the call area, of the time of the call, of the nationality, etc.)

- **Cycle routes and surfaces:**

In the history of cycle routes, as in the history of roads, needs have evolved in line with usage. Unpaved roads were satisfactory so long as cars were not fast-moving. The jolts caused by uneven stones were acceptable. Subsequently the dust, raised by the speed of the cars, became annoying, and towards 1910, asphalt became widespread. And even if there was a cohort of right-thinking people who were against it, there is nobody today who wishes to drive other than on bitumen.

So, although we could be satisfied with 10 years of basic improvements to re-establish the towpaths deserted by horses fifty years previously, the needs and expectations of our customers have continued to evolve. Today the quality of the surfaces is an important criterion of choice which puts us in competition with other cycling destinations in France. It is going to become indispensable to provide them with a smooth-quality surface in order that we do not make the touring cyclist shun us.

Adherents know that cycling is an outdoor activity and that they are dependant on the fickleness of the weather. They accept that they can get wet, but are less accepting of getting muddy. When they return to their campsite or their 4-star hotel, or if they visit a place of interest, it is definitely a cause of discontent, and a cause of premature wear to their equipment and their belongings (sand in their saddlebags ...)

For the Burgundians a surface of quality allows usage over a longer period, even during the winter. This would also allow children from the towns and neighbouring villages to use the towpaths on bikes or skates, for mothers to walk their pushchairs, for the handicapped to have accessible areas and for older people to head there without fear of the mud and for all to become enthusiastic proponents. For everyone the appeal of pedalling grows, as does the appeal of the Bourgogne.

All the major cycling locations: Givry-Cluny, Ré Island, the Loire, the Danube ... have good quality surfaces.

It is an essential element to make activity take off; it lengthens the season and brings new users. Based on a number of experiences, usage can be increased by a factor of 10 following the completion of an upgrade to the surface. The financial benefits will inevitably follow. It has been said that the income each year is equal to the total investment.

Increase the usage of facilities; lengthen the season; allow service providers longer access to tourists; put in place new services; increase the profitability of activities; permit Burgundians (who are also in the area during the low season) to profit from the canals and to become their leading ambassadors – these are many arguments which ought not to leave anybody indifferent.

It will remain to improve parking at the points of access, anticipate transport needs and to resolve conflicts arising from usage... the price of success.

The quality of this route is known to all: the existence of first class places of interest, and incomparable countryside. The potential is enormous.

- **Sharing the space:**

In order to maintain a good level of usage on the canals, for the enjoyment of all of their users, it is important to encourage different approaches. Cyclists love to see boats, pleasure boaters give

friendly greetings to cyclists, fishermen (even if they grouch at first) are proud to show their catches, etc.

This also allows, if all are agreed, the sharing of facilities (WCs, water supply points, picnic tables ...)

But it is not possible to make everybody live together along the length of the canal, we need to be realistic. The space is not limitless, not all the activities are compatible and the necessary improvements are not necessarily the same.

At Cluny, an experiment was tried to allow horses (from the national stud) on a grass trail next to the footpath. Because of uneven ground and the proximity of horses and bicycles, it was recognised very quickly that a second route had to be created a few dozen metres from the original path.

The fishermen, who have a right to their share of the canal, must be able to have access as close as possible with their car and need space for their rods. The bank opposite the towpath is not always accessible.

It is therefore necessary to work together to achieve the desired objectives. Multiple usage does have its limits.

- **Development structure:**

A public service or a tourist service? This question of 'ideological' positioning is fundamental. Are we talking of a Kesako 'canal contract'? It is, for us at least, an unknown.

There has been talk of a development structure for the canal on the model of SMET58 on the Nivernais.

Is that a good model? Paraphrasing Churchill's image of democracy ("Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time" [actual quote]), is there a better organisation than a multiplicity of tourist development associations? Each intermediate entity adds stages of investigation, validation, extra delays and consumes yet more energy to be put in place (time and money)

Is the 'success' of the Nivernais due to the SMET58? To Randonievre? Or perhaps to the absence of other tourist opportunities in Nievre? Or simply to an early start? Has the association from Yonne proved its relevance?

On the other hand, the merging of two associations, Yonne and Nievre, had difficulties getting going. We come up against the reality of the collision of frontiers. It was difficult to put in place a single management structure. The lengths of the canals (176km for the Nivernais, 242 km for the Bourgogne) are real obstacles for the organisation and implementation of these tourist destinations. Even if one wants to snap one's fingers at the frontiers of a canal, at a local council, at the subdivisions of VNF, as soon as one tries to do something one collides rapidly with these realities.

For local development, the appropriate level seems to be the district communities. But that does not work for general direction or the overall coherence of the tourist destination, nor for the achievement of certain projects nor for the resolution of conflicts concerning the use of the water supply.

- **Development of tourism and the economy:**

These developments should have a magical dimension. They involve a tourist resort, not a task at which we have to slave away.

Current visitors are all enchanted by their stay on the Burgundy canals. Even if they are not perfect, the canals provide delightful surprises for the clients. Let's keep these points in mind, they can define our advantage.

The majority of the deficiencies is not specific to the canal (overall numbers, access to medical aid, public transport, availability of general services...) but they relate to the management of the area. The deficiencies have been identified and understood for a long time, and nobody has found a solution to resolve them.

To be held back by such handicaps, despite recurrent promises, demotivates the enthusiasts in the area. Moving on to something else, let's communicate our strong points, let's increase our momentum, and solutions will come with persistence. The common cause of all our shortcomings is a low level of perseverance, which inhibits the continuity of activities.

If all the ills of the world (global warming, water and energy supply...) come from the over-population of the world, those of our rural world come from under-population, and under-use. We should get the town-dwellers into the countryside!*

The essentially rural nature of our canals, which we often see as a weakness, is in fact a strength, through the quality of the open space which it provides. When one walks along the canals of Northern France, another region with a rich waterways heritage, one is in a countryside which is harder, more urban and more industrial. Let's not forget that the main motivation of the Belgians, the Dutch, etc. who visit us is to find unspoilt areas which they cannot find at home.

**NB The tourist attractions allow discovery of an area. Tourists enjoy themselves there, they come back, they want to live there, to make themselves at home there, to bring new energy, to fill the schools, empty the shelves of shops, create new activities and bring the area alive. It is a classic strategy for revitalisation.*

OUR REPUTATION

Burgundy and the Burgundy Cycling Trail have a brilliant reputation – let’s not allow our precious assets to go to waste, but rather let’s look after them.

- **The Road Network**

The Burgundy Canal is fortunate in being close to a number of key transport links (the A6, the A38, the railway and the N5). The A6 runs alongside the Burgundy Canal for over 30 km, from Eguilly to Pont d’Ouche, so millions of tourists on the ‘Autoroute du Soleil’ whizz past within a few metres of the Canal. They spend about 20 minutes of their holiday journey alongside the Burgundy Canal without even realising it is there. On a route like this we might perhaps consider – without prejudice to road safety – placing graphic signboards at the roadside and at rest stations.

The same could be done on the A38 at La Voûte junction near Pouilly. Millions of motorists pass over the Canal without knowing it is even there. There is not a single sign to mark this unique crossing.

“Every time I have passengers in the car, fare-paying or not, I feel compelled to give them a little talk about this unique place, and every time they are amazed and intrigued”

- **“The White Way” – Paris to Geneva**

The old RN5 road, which was reclassified as the D905 in 1978, runs beside the Burgundy Canal for a long stretch, from St Florentin to Vitteaux. Today’s nostalgia for these classic road routes bears witness to the interest which they arouse and generates ideas of how to capitalise on them, such as themed conferences and publications. Could the Burgundy Canal profit from a similar passion?

- **Cycle Route 6 (North)**

Cycle Route 6, otherwise known as the ‘Nantes to Budapest’, passes through South Burgundy along the Central Canal and the Loire Lateral Canal.

There might be interest in designing a North Burgundy variation, by way of Dijon, the River Yonne and the Loing and Orléans Canals.

This route would present an alternative for touring cyclists who have already travelled the Southern route, or who would prefer to cut down on the monotony of the long stretches beside the Loire (550km from Nevers to St Nazaire). It would increase awareness of other cycling routes in Burgundy as well as visitor volumes.

- **Other areas to study**

- **Odyssea:**

The Odyssea project is a Council of Europe programme aimed at developing heritages shared across regional and national boundaries. Its work includes the identification of waterway and coastal routes in order to build up a cultural itinerary across different countries.

- **Waterways Forward**

The European Waterways Forward programme was created to share the experiences of 14 different countries with the aim of creating a common toolkit for the analysis of economic effects in order to support lobbying approaches to European Commission to protect the smaller waterways.

The Sambre Way

The objective of 'The Sambre Way' is to empower the local people who are the heart of the community to act as its ambassadors and directors, to emphasise the precious asset which the Sambre is as a destination for walking and tourism development. A project is therefore under way led by local groups and people to build a network of places of interest at local, departmental and regional level. The Sambre Way project has one Belgian and four French partners. It has budget of 1.3 million euros, of which 350,000 are for public relations.

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES ON THE BURGUNDY CANALS

There is no formal body with responsibility for organising any programmes of activities on our canals and their neighbouring areas, and so no such programme exists.

There are however already a number of local festivals which are apposite – water-sport days, port festivals, festivals afloat and angling competitions, organised by local councils and a range of other groups.

The 'European Heritage Days' in September and the 'Mills and Countryside Heritage Days' in mid-June do not get a lot of support on our canals, even though the theme was launched by the Regional Council of Burgundy. By contrast, the 'Fantastic Picnic' event promoted by the Burgundy tourist board to mark UNESCO's recognition of French gastronomy as part of the 'Aesthetic Heritage of Mankind', has been a successful initiative.

- **Proposed 4 phase action plan:**

- The opening of the canals
- The Cycling Festival
- The Heritage Festival
- The end of the season

- **The Opening of the Canals:**

Most people don't know about the winter shut-down, which is sometimes characterised negatively in the media – extended maintenance works, re-opening put back, complaints from boat-hirers....

The re-opening of the network, coupled with re-opening of the tourism and Chambers of Commerce offices, could be the signal for the start of the official tourist season. It would be an additional means of placing 'tourism along the canals' at the heart of the tourism offer in each area.

Perhaps the occasion could be marked by other events, such as the launching of a new boat, or cycle route, the four corners of Burgundy, or to promote new initiatives or work that has been carried out over the winter.

Every year the opening of the trout-fishing season is marked in all the press for several days and over several pages, despite the fact that it is relevant only to a minority.

- **The Festival of Cycling:**

This national festival which is marketed by the Cycling Promotion Board is held over two or three days at the end of May or beginning of June each year and it is the focus of a lot of attention nationally. It is supported by the majority of local clubs in the various related federations who use it to

generate events for club supporters, usually the families of the competitive members and sometimes also as a membership recruitment tool.

We believe that this presents a great opportunity for an event on our cycle routes and at the same time to draw a new audience towards our canals, the cycling routes being well suited to this purpose.

All that would be needed would be to coordinate the existing disparate events and encourage new ones – or else perhaps to create relay rally between cycling clubs on the line of the canals.

- **The Festival of Heritage:**

Over nearly 30 years, the European Heritage Days have become an established occasion. For many French people they have become associated with opportunities to visit places which are not normally accessible.

Built in the 18th and 19th centuries, our canals are living witnesses to the great achievements of earlier times. They demonstrate the innumerable skills and depths of understanding as well as the boldness of the key players of the industrial revolution and they tell the story of a hundred years of transport history. They have a significant part to play in the celebration of our heritage.

At the same time, we must remember that the canals are not a natural feature. A lot of their human neighbours seem to think they have always been there and scarcely distinguish between them and a nearby river or millpond. It has to be said that to some extent the management has best been performed by Mother Nature.

So, just as much as an abbey or a castle, we need to stand up and tell the story of our canals, so that Burgundians appreciate the full breadth of their heritage.

Using local resources such as the tourist offices, guidebooks and scientific associations, we need to construct a list of attractions and guided tours in each town and each village along the canals.

Besides introducing visitors to the world of the canals, putting on these visits will have the effect of preserving these scarce resources – where it is not already too late – and make those who host the tours into ambassadors for our canals.

- **The Season's End:**

Just as it is traditional among wine-makers and farmers to hold harvest celebrations, it seems to us that a festival to mark the winter closure of the canals would be well received. It is expected of the growers that they should bring together their families and their workers to celebrate the end of their season and a job well done and to dispel any tensions which may have arisen under the pressures of the harvest.

Without wishing to overly idealise the relationships among those involved in waterways tourism who operate independently of each other, or even in competition, perhaps such an event would serve to improve communications among the different players to the benefit of the network as a whole.

With this 4 phase action plan, we would cover the whole length of the waterways season, bringing together all the parties involved.

We would seek the maximum participation by members of the public in these events.

All the canals in the Region could adapt this programme to implement it at the local level, yet the programme would allow a consistent regional branding without undermining pre-existing event programmes such as the port festivals, Fantastic Picnic and so on.

- **Local Events:**

The lock staircases at Pouillenay and at Marigny are thought of as black spots on the Burgundy Canal. Think about it – 40 locks in just 14 kilometres, what a lot of work for boaters, what a maintenance task for the canal management.

Why not turn this apparent disadvantage into a positive?

Local people call it ‘the valley’. It’s not actually a valley at all, on the contrary, it is the link between two valleys, the Brenne and the Armançon. It is a place of special charm and one could easily imagine an event there, whether sporting, cultural or gastronomic – perhaps a ‘Marathon of the Locks’. Other places like Sardy or the valley of the Ouche, could easily put on local events. They are places where one could also think about ‘geocaching’, a way of exploring through a mix of traditional rallying, by bike or on foot, with orienteering.

Still on the subject of events, one could come up with ideas which have cultural, social and economic aspects at the same time, whether on a barge or at a lock-keeper’s cottage – travelling art shows, painting and music workshops, markets on a barge, a travelling library with a lecture room, travelling cinema, conferences, swap-sales, and so on.

LET'S GO MAD. LET'S DARE THE IMPOSSIBLE!

Let's imagine at the level of our staircases of Pouillenay and Marigny, an extraordinary "lock", like the Falkirk Wheel in Scotland, which could replace the 40 at a stroke.

Or better still; let's invent a totally new technical concept capable of attracting European finance, initially, and then tourists from the whole world. Most would come attracted by the technological prowess and would pursue tourism in the region afterwards.



Audacity!

“We need to dream very high, in order that we do not accomplish too little” Alfred Capus

France remains one of the foremost tourism destinations with Paris, Lourdes, Mont Saint Michel ... and Burgundy. Tourists rightfully appreciate in Burgundy: the diversity of our countryside, the vast preserved spaces and the gastronomy. Because of our strong image, even if they come for cycling or boating, they come here also in search of a bit of Burgundy.

With a formidable network of under exploited canals, a strong image, the fashion for natural, active and useful holidays, we have a favourable convergence for coherently developing a great touristic destination.

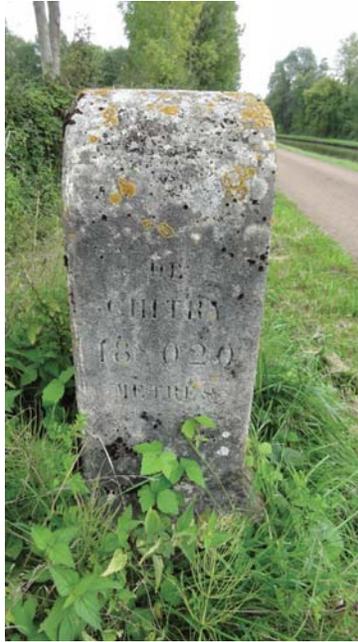
Let's have the audacity that the builders of our canal had! We have capable people, let's give them the organisational means, and let's not bridle them with castrating structures. Finances are getting scarce. It's a chance to be more inventive, more astute. The builders of our canals did not have the technical means; they had to use finesse, audacity and perseverance to complete their plan. It is this spirit which today makes the charm of the canals that they have bestowed upon us.

Let's remember this today, to build tomorrow.



Glossary

- TBV Tour of Burgundy by bike.
- DCE European Framework Directive. This concerns the (compulsory) instructions given to member states for each one to legislate subsequently to implement the Directive.
- PMR People with reduced mobility.
- HLL Light holiday accommodation (mobile home, bungalow, prefab,....)
- FFAM French Federation of Associations for the protection of mills.
- EAF Organisation of Independent Electricity Producers.
- FNPP National Federation of Private Rural Property
- CRB Regional Council of Burgundy
- VNF Navigable Waterways of France
- CN Nivernais Canal
- CB Burgundy Canal
- ANPEI National Association of Inland Waters Pleasure Boaters
- FFAM French Federation of Associations for the protection of Mills
- EAF Organisation of Independent Electricity Producers
- FNPPR National Federation of Private Rural Property



Canals and navigable rivers are primarily intended for navigation (commercial and touristic) but also for many leisure activities : fishing, all types of hiking, walking, swimming, model boating, without forgetting water supply or irrigation. This public place of freedom gives priority to calm and tranquillity in favour of the beauty of the country and works of art.

A shared space for a navigated canal.

