

Wye Valley Cycleway September 2020 Workcamp No 2

In last year's camp advance safety works were carried out. These comprised repping the Heath Robinson arrangement at Bishton Bridge to allow passage under, fencing work above the retaining walls north of the tunnel and along fields south of it and reprinting wing walls. This enabled our specialist contractor to remove track from the tunnel and south of it. Clearance north of the tunnel, cut through the landslip and work on track formation continues.



Track removed from tunnel last year

There followed many months of uncertainty over Planning Permission....mostly about the bats.. Provisional dates were set for this year and volunteers, contractors and materials lined up for action with an enormous amount of detail prepared by John and Caroline for the work to be carried out.

At the last minute it was finally approved and the licence obtained. Because of other activity at the Diving Centre we could not start till the Sunday and so on a wing and a prayer we were off, albeit two days short. The wigwam accommodation, provided by the Diving Centre, made life more civilised than camping but we were still up by 7am in the mornings and tucked in by 9.30pm after our evening meal and a glass or two of beer.

Chris and Clare Grimshaw again provided the camp restaurant with the usual high standard of meals including breakfast, lunch and dinner plus coffee and cake breaks that make the workcamp both memorable and enjoyable.

John is in his element again



Wigwam luxury....



Restaurant Chris and Clare

We had the usual backbone of around 12 experienced volunteers plus around 10 visitors each day who together did a brilliant job on the very technical assembly work required, with the general site work and cleanup carried out by the contractors.



Some of our northern regulars....safe distancing

Clearing north of the tunnel

This was an unusual timeline in that the tunnel works had to be complete by the end of September due to the bats and other works completed by contractors by the end of November because of a grant deadline.



Blacktop being laid in tunnel.



Lights control box in tunnel

The tunnel was prepared and the blacktop laid in the week before the workcamp, and very nice it looked.

A major task was to manufacture and assemble the 132 light fittings and bend the Corten hoods from perforated sheet.



Lighting units assembled and checked.

Trench for cables excavated in tunnel

The armoured cables comprised one the whole length of the tunnel end to end for the gates (1080m) and two lengths each comprising four sections of 276m to connect the lights. These were located on alternate cables. Junctions for the lights were located at around 9m intervals which required stripping the outer armoured cable and lengths of the inner three wires to accommodate junction couplings and spacers.



Production line stripping armoured cable for light junctions



Junction moulds being adjusted for wiring.



Cables being transported to tunnel

The eight cables were laid out along the track up to the tunnel south side, the lamp cables connected to the main cables and the junction filled with resin. We then hauled the assembly into the tunnel, fixed the lights and the hoods to the tunnel wall and buried the cables. . The threaded bars to support each light cover (three per light) had to be installed in the tunnel wall first and where there were recesses in the wall concrete block piers erected to take the lamps. Fortunately the weather was dry and the cables could be prepared, rolled up on drums, taken to the tunnel, lamps connected and then hauled into the tunnel one at a time by 17 people carrying each length at a time. The distance we carried the cables extended with each pair of cables as we approached the far end.

The mains cable to the tunnel was connected at the Diving Centre buildings half way along the track and buried alongside the path. Our electrician checked every joint that connected the lights to the main cables before resin was poured into the mounds. It was a truly amazing production line and it worked like clockwork.



Resin poured into every junction box.



Cables with lights being hauled into tunnel

Other tunnel works included the hanging of a shield under the air vent to protect the route from any falling stones, concrete block walls at 7 alcoves to form shelters for the bats and some edge sleepers on some sections to keep the path clear.



Air shaft shield erected, hung on chains.

Bat Walls and light pillars constructed at alcoves

All the while our contractors continue shaping up the track, removing rail and sleepers and clearing the route north of the tunnel.

At the end of the workcamp those still on site walked through and were photographed on the north side landslip cut through.



Volunteers returned for a few days for finishing work and a big cleanup before the bat deadline for tunnel closure at the end of the month. Work continues on the track construction and it is planned to open the route in April next year.

It was truly magical when the lights were switched on and the tunnel revealed in all its splendour.



David Judd
September 2020