Tarddle / Source - 20 January to 7 February, Hay Castle

Hay Castle will be holding screenings of writer Tom Bullough's two-hour film about the Wye most days, each morning and afternoon from this Monday until the 7 February. Bullough travelled up the river, from Hay-on-Wye to the source at Pumlumon Fawr, talking to scores of people as he went, including farmers, conservationists, tourists, anglers, a rally driver and a spirit medium. They discussed their relationship with the river but also their lives, hopes and concerns, and subjects as varied as wind farms, peat bogs, Welsh identity and the nature of the soul. The result is Tarddle/ Source: a film about the Wye Valley – passionate, reflective and celebratory – a portrait of a changing community bound together by a love of its place.

We'll certainly be going along to watch. It's free to view and you can just pop into the Clore Learning Space within Hay Castle to catch it at show times. There will be screenings at 10.30am and 1.30pm on most days, but check details on Hay Castle's website.

Artist Lucy Burden also has an exhibition of her Wye paintings in the Castle Cafe from now until the 30 March. Our determination to protect the Wye stems from our love of this place, so let's be re-inspired.



Pollution Incident

Sadly, just after Christmas there was a pollution incident on the River Wye, with oil spotted on the surface of the river at Rotherwas, Hereford, and then flowing further downstream to Fownhope and beyond.

The pollution was reportedly thought to be engine oil coming from a location within the Rotherwas Industrial Estate.

We asked the Environment Agency for an update on their investigation and they only told us that they'd identified 'a site of interest where the spill may have originated from' and that they are now gathering further information and

evidence before deciding next steps.

Political News Round-Up

We're getting some very mixed messages from government at the moment.

On the positive side, the Minister for Water, Emma Hardy, held a meeting about the Wye in mid-December, which brought together political representatives from England and Wales. Given the fact that our river is cross-border, you'd think this would be common practice, but it hasn't been. The last Conservative government's River Wye Action Plan didn't cover Wales, despite the fact that the majority of the river flows through Welsh land. The new government is promising a joined-up plan covering both nations, which feels like progress. However, no plan is yet evident and they've withdrawn previously-promised money, which is a step back.

We were dismayed to hear Environment Secretary Steve Reed tell the Oxford Farming Conference: "Planning rules have got in the way for too long. We will speed up the system so you can grow and diversify your business. Like chicken producers who want a larger shed to boost the amount of food they produce."

With over 20 million chickens in the Wye catchment - we don't need it to be any easier to expand factory farming here. Already our nutrient imbalance is driven by a huge excess of livestock which imports high quantities of feed and produces more manure than the land can absorb.

We urgently need the government to get serious about tackling agricultural pollution, which is actually the leading polluter of our rivers. We're all (rightly) scandalised by the sewage map. We need the muck map to take on the same importance, showing the concentration of poo created by intensive animal farming hotspots.

We asked the River Wye Nutrient Management Board if they would send a response to Reed, and our question prompted the Board to resolve to communicate the situation on the Wye back to Defra.

On Wednesday, MP Catherine Fookes (Monmouth) secured a parliamentary debate on Water Quality and pushed for action for the Wye. The transcript is

here. Fookes explained that over 80% of the phosphates in the Wye come from diffuse agricultural sources and said, "I know that will be a hard conversation with farmers, but we need to start having it. We need to incentivise the right fertiliser applications and the right stocking rates in our river catchments on both sides of the border in order to ensure we remove the annual accrual and legacy surplus of excess phosphates and restore our rivers back to full health. Business as usual will not work." She also recognised the need for better enforcement of environmental regulations.

We were glad to see fellow Wye MPs David Chadwick, Ellie Chowns and Jesse Norman contribute to the debate.

Chowns, having set up an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Water Pollution, made some excellent points, saying, "We need a plan and proper funding for the Wye catchment plan. We need proper funding for nature-friendly farming, because farmers have the solutions to this issue at their fingertips, but they need the Government's support. We need the Environment Agency to have the funding and teeth it requires, including to level on-the-spot fines. Fundamentally, we need Government to grasp the nettle and to tackle agricultural pollution as seriously as sewage pollution."

This is precisely what we're calling for in our People's Plan for the Wye.

Vote for Soil Association's Film

Earlier this year the Soil Association produced a short film about the Wye as part of their Stop Killing Our Rivers campaign, which featured two of our members. It's been nominated for a charity film award. If you found it as powerful as we did, please vote for it here.

Finally, huge thanks to our citizen scientists monitoring water quality throughout these winter months.

If you're on Facebook, please follow our new Friends of the River Wye page.

Best wishes,

Friends of the River Wye

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