

RTS UT branch explores the riverbed at Brentford September 2023

Some stretches of river bed that get exposed at low tide are commonly used by the curious public. The UT branch walk was not to one of those usual places, although starting at the familiar foreshore by the Bull's Head at Strand on the Green. However, moving upriver, instead of exiting at Kew Bridge, we went further upstream, negotiating with some difficulty the sticky mud between the houseboats at Victoria Steps and the site of the proposed Watermans Park Marina. From there we thought it wisest not to attempt to get onto Brentford Ait but went up and around Lots Ait, before leaving on steps by the bridge to the island.

The experience was fun but muddy, especially for those that failed to stay upright. We included among us several with special knowledge, so heard of the local history, had the historic buildings and vistas pointed out, identified the environmental monitoring barge and various points of sewage discharge, and saw the drying out grid. We found on the foreshore the expected remnants of clay pipes, pottery and hand-made nails, but fewer shells than seen further upriver. There was an abundance of tiny snails, but we did not have the expertise to see if they really were the German Hairy ones for which this is their special UK habitat. We noted the continuing tyres and other debris at the old squatting site alongside Watermans Park, amongst the start made of a 'marina' for residential boats, way behind its formal schedule. Near the wreck of the Trilby (1896 ex-sailing barge) the remains of the Cherokee (submarine chaser 1915) were identified in the mud, including an odd porthole and the speaking tube.

An unique experience. We rather disgraced ourselves in a local hostelry afterwards for bringing in too much mud on our boots.

Photo 1. The advance party looking upstream under Kew railway bridge

Photo 2. Scott looking at the port side of Cherokee flat on the river bed, with speaking tube to the left

Photo 3. Debris with multiple small snails.



