

## BIG BOOST FOR BOATERS AND RIVER WATCHERS

AVON Navigation Trust has dramatically increased its high-tech protection for boaters, and it's proving to be a big hit with nature lovers and fretful riverside dwellers too.

The innovative Trust's has doubled the number of Avon-watching webcams for its River Watch service, which has become a must see for thousands of river users who want to check conditions before setting out.

But thousands of boat watchers - and people who just enjoy the pretty views - from all over the world are also clicking on to the live videos, together with more local residents keen to check out the water levels in heavy rain.

The service, via [www.FarsonDigitalWaterCams.com](http://www.FarsonDigitalWaterCams.com), has also been boosted by additional useful information and functionality.

"River Watch is already a fundamental and crucial tool for us and for our boaters, and the new website makes it even better," says Avon Navigation Trust (ANT) General Manager Clive Matthews.

"As well as the extra cameras, it is a much more integrated product that gives you rainfall, pressure, temperatures, levels and much more... and if people sign up for the paid for version, it makes money for the Trust too."

Anyone can log onto the cameras via the website and get information for free. But signing up to the paid for portal removes the sponsored rolling adverts, offers many useful extras and ANT gets a donation for each of its spotlighted cameras.

The Trust now has webcams at Tewkesbury, Avon Lock, Strensham, Eckington, Wyre Piddle, two at Evesham, Offenham, Bidford on Avon, Welford on Avon and Stratford Upon Avon. The top watched, including Bidford and Strensham, are now averaging 100,000 unique visits a year.

ANT also provides screens streaming the action at its HQ in Wyre Piddle and at its visitor centres at Stratford and Tewkesbury.

West Country-based photographer and avid fisherman Glyn Howells, put up his first HD camera locally in 2009.

Now there's a fast growing network of 120 across the UK and Republic of Ireland, and what started out as a boon for fishermen eager to check out their favourite perches before packing the waterproofs, has become an invaluable service for everyone.

"There are cameras on most roads, but roads just carry traffic. Rivers can run through people's homes and livelihoods, so it is critical and a growing network," says Glyn, whose service logs nearly two million visits a year.

Clive and he joined forces when the ANT man put up his own camera outside his head office in 2009, and soon realised he needed a lot more, and an expert to manage them.

"Just after I joined ANT, someone called up to ask whether the river was in flood.... and we had to look out of the window and phone contact downstream to find out. That's when I thought of cameras," says Clive, whose team runs a 24/7 support hotline for boaters.

"Now we have a full picture, literally, and all the statistics we need to give advice, and we can react quickly at any time if we see problems or people in trouble."

Clive checks his camera network as soon as he gets up every morning, and regularly through the day, even when he's on holiday, and yes, he's hooked too.

"I'm addicted to River Watch, like many of the people who use or love the Avon."

