



Wyre Forest Study Group

Floods in the Dowles Valley

A personal account of floods in June & July, 2007

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Whilst on holiday in Scotland, Chris and I heard of the dreadful floods in Bewdley, but nothing could have prepared us for the damage we witnessed on our return on the 30th June. As we drove through Bewdley and over Telford's bridge, all seemed much as usual. It was not until we got to the bottom of Dry Mill Lane and along the track that we began to see trees, branches and debris piled and stranded high and dry along the banks of Dowles Brook, log jams blocking the flow in places. Rubble, rocks, gravel and mud, washed down from the banks and tributaries, created mounds on the trackway making for a bumpy ride. When we reached Knowles Mill the scene of devastation took our breath away. The bridge was a mere platform, posts and rails missing, torn off by the raging waters. Across the bridge, the Mill, stood, impervious to the ravages of the deluge, but the stable, adjacent, was badly damaged, the front completely gone, the 2 feet thick stone wall toppled over like toy building bricks, as was the garden wall. Fences were flattened, the five-barred gate missing from the meadow and alder trees still standing along the brook scarred, while many other trees were ripped out by their roots. Later the five-barred gate was retrieved – 400 yards downstream in a pile of brash – undamaged!!!

I was very relieved to find that although the flood level had reached the front doorstep, it had not entered the house. Unlike downstream where Oak Cottage had 2 inches in the house, and all their fitted carpets had to be lifted and thrown away. Even worse was Town Mill with 5 feet 8 inches in the house causing devastating damage and both of their cars submerged!!! The owners have, of course, had to evacuate the premises and get B & B, returning each day to clean up and dry things out.

Upstream, Coopers Mill metal bridge (called locally Postman's Bridge) was swept away and is now resting, stranded in the brook, several yards downstream of its original position. Higher upstream, two footbridges, and the small footbridge giving access to Rudds Bridge were all swept away. At the confluence of the three brooks which form Dowles, Furnace Mill was very badly damaged.

The storm responsible brewed during the evening of the 19th June, menacing black clouds moving north up the west side of the River Severn, claps of deafening thunder and sheet lightning accompanied torrential rain which fell for several hours, culminating in a frightening deluge of water forging its way down the Dowles Valley, destroying everything in its path. Approximately 60mm (nearly 2 1/2 inches) of rain fell in that short period, the flood level was 2 inches above the previous highest water mark recorded in May 1924. There were a number of other storms during the month producing a total rainfall of approximately 210mm (nearly 8 1/2 inches) for the month of June, almost doubling the previous record of 112mm in 1993.

The June flood was unprecedented and we couldn't imagine in our wildest dreams that another momentous flood was to occur in July. However, the very wet weather of May and June continued into July, with rain, rain and more rain, day after day. During the evening of the 19th, thunderstorms gave torrential rain for several hours, the rain continuing throughout the night and on through Friday the 20th. The brook was very high and fast when Chris gave me a lift to Mick Burkes' garage near Cleobury to pick up our campervan after its M.O.T. As we drove back towards Bewdley, roadside puddles had extended well out into the road in low-lying areas. Dry Mill Lane was reminiscent of a fast, shallow riverbed. As we passed Oak Cottage the brook had already broken its banks and was creeping up the lawn, sandbags had already been placed across the doorways. As we passed the kennels (Brook House), ahead of us, instead of the forest track there was swirling water, while Town Mill had the brook approaching the front doorstep. Chris was in front and forged through the water-covered track creating a wake, so I blindly followed - it was a bit hairy, as I felt the wheels slip and skid at times. However, as the track reached higher ground it was less hazardous and we reached the Mill and parked both vehicles on the higher track. It was no longer possible to detect the banks of the brook as the high water thundered a few feet below the platform of the bridge and had overflowed into the meadows, coursing down past the mill and virtually cutting off the bridge. But we had to get across! Chris took the lead, holding on to me as we stepped into the fast flowing water, the power of the surge pushing at our legs making it difficult to keep our footing, the water spilling over the tops of our wellies. But we got across to the path which led up to the front door and heaved a sigh of relief, and not before time, as half an hour later the raging water crashed over the bridge and the meadow was a lake, a truly awesome sight!!!

By 7pm another record had been broken. It was certainly the highest flood level Chris and I had witnessed during 26 years of living at Knowles Mill and only 4 inches lower than the June flood level. This event produced a phenomenal 95.7mm (nearly 4 inches) of rain at Knowles Mill for the 24 hour period. The total for the month was 195.3mm, (nearly 8 inches), with rain recorded on 23 days.

Despite the exceptional summer rainfall, would you believe that my spring water supply had dried up by September 1st, after a very dry August, and is still dry, as I write this in early November. The brook is very low, calm and clear, providing essential water for household use.

NB. Ed. The sleeper bridge near Experimental Pool collapsed and was washed away on 20th July 2007.