

**I**n March of this year, my dear friends John and Victoria found that the time had come for them to give up their beekeeping hobby. Both had played their part in our local beekeeping association, hosting meetings in their apiary and helping on the committee. I do wonder if the fact that they kept their bees in Langstroth hives might have been a factor in their decision to stop.

The reality of life - manipulating these heavier than other hives, was proving a step too far. I'll throw the comment in that had they been using the much lighter WBC hives, then perhaps they might have continued a little longer?

### **The start of the journey**

Thankfully for me, I was able to take one of their three colonies to add to my apiary, but that was just the start of what was going to be an interesting experience. Anyone who knows me will tell you that I am the "WBC man". So it will come as no surprise that there was no way on this earth that I would have any other type of hive in my apiary. The challenge was to get their bees from the larger brood box and frames of the Langstroth, onto the smaller and more universally accepted National size frames. It was never going to be a simple issue of just putting their frames of bees into my brood box. And the last thing I wanted was to lose any bees, brood, eggs or stores at this crucial time of year. My own two colonies, which were doing well, had also been moved over the winter period, so I was aware that there might be issues. That said, I was happy to add new blood to my apiary. To date I have maintained a blood line from my original



*Day one - putting the Langstroth on the WBC stand.*

# **A REAL CASE OF DOWNSIZING WITH A MORAL** **Moving home** **is never easy**

By Don Honey, Newbury and District BKA



*All photographs by Don Honey*

*Friends John and Victoria (and Alpacas) at their Langstroth hive apiary.*

stock, which has proven to suit my style of beekeeping.

### **The plan**

There was none! But I was working on it, and in the ten minute drive from their home to mine, I had decided to at least put the Langstroth hive onto one of my own Long Leg WBC stands. I will point out that the ten minute journey was a 3.2 mile drive by road, but only 2.1 miles as the crow flies! Would that be a factor? One reads that you need to move bees three miles if you don't want them

to return to their original site. John had locked the bees in over the previous night, and I had kept them tucked away for the rest of that day in my garden until the back end of the following day. Victoria had told me that she had been feeding the bees with candy and the hive came complete with a super with stores, so there was never a question of the bees starving. The big question, however, would be if the bees would come out and go back from whence they came. So after approximately 30 hours cooped up it was time to open the entrance. Half of me was expecting a full scale evacuation and the loss of 10,000 bees to goodness knows where. The reality was that three bees strolled out onto my much larger WBC landing board than



*Larger landing board a bonus.*



they were used to, turned around and went back in. Over the next hour or so, before darkness set in, more bees came out and buzzed around the front of the hive, and duly went back in. I'll never know if any did venture further afield, but as the days progressed into weeks, it was clear that the bees had adjusted to their new location. My only problem now was to make their new home look as nice as their neighbours.

## Home refit

Ideally I would be able to place my WBC Lifts around the ugly Langstroth boxes, and all would be well, but the boxes were too large. This didn't come as a surprise to me, because I had done my homework, but no amount of research would explain how to get the bees from the larger frames into the Nationals without losing brood. So having left the bees to settle down for a few more day, it was time to move the plan forward. Initially I put one of my WBC brood boxes complete with a mix of drawn and new foundation frames over the Langstroth brood box with a WBC queen excluder between each. You will see from my photo below how much larger the two types of brood boxes are.

Fortunately the width was the same, but the depth left a gap to fill. I placed a strip of plywood over this gap and taped it down as a temporary measure. Then placed the Langstroth roof on the top. The ugliness doesn't stop there, as over the next few days I added a WBC super to the mix. All this time, the bees were doing what bees do, by working up the hive and settling in. I removed the queen excluder from between the two types of brood boxes and placed it between the WBC brood box and WBC super. Now it was just a case of waiting for



*WBC stand, Langstroth brood box, WBC brood box and Langstroth roof - urrrr!*

the queen to move up into her new bedroom! It took only another week for this to happen, so I was able to move the Langstroth brood box to the top of my monstrosity of a hive. This allowed the remaining brood to hatch and the bees to transfer what stores they needed to where they wanted it. I do wonder what goes through the mind of a bee when this sort of disruption happens, but they seem to get on with the job in hand.

## The finishing post?

Not content with now having the queen in her rightful place in the WBC brood box, topped with the appropriate super, I was keen to give

back as much of their stores in the original Langstroth brood frames to my new colony. I placed a crown board over the super, leaving just one of the porter escape holes clear, placed an empty WBC brood box above this to form a cavity into which I was able to place a few of the original Langstroth brood frames for the bees to clean out their hard earned pollen and nectar. As they cleaned each frame, I replaced them until all their stores were used up. This did mean that I had to



*Added WBC super!*



*Topsy turvy arrangement.*



*Starting to look normal?*





*Very tall.*

use quite a few more lifts than normal to accommodate these boxes. Normality was just around the corner, but there was just one final twist.

I am now left with an empty Langstroth hive, with all its bits and bobs, that is of no use to me whatsoever. None of the parts are interchangeable with my WBC, and I certainly

wouldn't want to use it as a bate hive, because I would be back to square one! And where would I put it? I certainly wouldn't want it on show, so if you are desperate and have a strong back and prepared to travel to West Berkshire, then do drop me a line and you can pick up a bargain before it goes on the wood burner.

### **Was it worth it?**

I'm please to say that after eight weeks, my apiary is now looking at its be-st, having relocated two of my own colonies, along with this newly acquired one to a site just yards from my studio window where I can keep a constant eye on the action. Previously I could just about see my hives from the lounge window, but as daytime TV is so dire, and I spend little time in the lounge, I rarely saw them as much as I do now as I work at my computer, writing silly stories about my bees. Don't tell my wife, but I still have two empty hives in the old veg patch, should I need to re-house a few more bees. So the moral of this story might be that before you embark on the hobby, please do give some thought to the WBC, with its good looks, along with all the other benefits to its inhabitants, and most of all your back. During this process, it became very apparent that the Langstroth hive was very heavy and probably not suited to the hobby beekeeper.

I don't suppose for one moment that many, if any, beekeepers will find themselves in the same position as me with taking on this new colony, but it did prove to be interesting, challenging in parts, but fun. What more could you ask of a hobby?

All I have to do now is to convince my new bees that they don't need a vast box to live in, and that the WBC is right for them. Down sizing is the new rock and roll. I will let you know later in the season how it turns out. In the meantime, if you have any interesting WBC stories, I would love to hear about them, just drop me a line at [bees@honeydesign.co.uk](mailto:bees@honeydesign.co.uk)

*Not all of my techniques and strategies are right or wrong, but different - that is the beauty of keeping bees. Just so long as it doesn't harm you or the bees. And remember WBC - What Bees Crave.*



*The new and enlarged apiary.*