

EXTRACTS FROM THE AUGUST 2004 EDITION OF THE LOG

It all takes time...

Doesn't time fly when you're having fun?

Here we are halfway through the year and we haven't even begun to scratch the surface in meeting the planned objectives we set in decorating our new home, finding out what remains in those interminable packing cases, seeing people and visiting places of interest that we promised ourselves when retirement finally arrived.

We were told, by others who had gone before, that life in Norfolk would be far too hectic to keep to a sensible routine, which of course we laughed off as nonsense. But I am beginning to suspect that there are, in fact, less days in the week in this part of the country!

Boating activities in Norfolk come thick and fast at this time of the year along with our own local events, so our members have a busy time racing from venue to venue in order not to miss out on the fun! These events are interspersed with boat shows around the country and organisation of the VWBA National Rally at Beccles becomes more pressing as the date advances.

Depressingly, because it focuses one's mind on the year end, we have to begin making arrangements for the AGM to be held in October, the date and venue is to be set at the next committee meeting and will, I hope, be published in this issue of The Log.

So, if you begin to wonder where the time has gone, check that you are getting your fair share of days in the week and hours in the day in order to enjoy your boating.

Wherever and however, take care.

John Bailey

Three French Locks



'Turtle Dove' leaving St. Georges

July 7th 1997, the day we were booked on the Dover-Calais ferry, dawned bright and sunny, by which time I and my helpers, Christine and Michael, were on our way from base camp in darkest Romford.

The channel was, of course, flat calm and far narrower than 'Turtle Doves's' best day's run, but I was taking the advice of all my well-wishers.

Michael has been enlisted partly on account of his Public Service Vehicle expertise, but as the ferry doors opened it transpired that he'd never exercised his skills in France. Nevertheless we were soon up the A16 and down the slip road towards Gravelines. A minute or two more brought us to Rue de L'Ancien Pont in the village of St. Georges sur Aa. 'Old Bridge Street' with its row of cottages beside the river Aa has a concrete pad beside the low river bank. This, I had discovered some years earlier, was home to rows of washing and derelict washing machines. Mercifully the latter had now disappeared. The locals watched with polite amusement as we slid 'Turtle Dove' under the washing lines and into the malodorous waters of the river. When she was loaded with all the gear and stores for the next three weeks we retreated to the café on the street corner for a farewell drink. Finally I phoned the local waterways office to say that I would be at the lock upstream "a quatre heures".

Once under the railway bridge the scenery soon became rural. Our only encounter was with a fleet of happy youngsters learning to row – we must have looked something else! Why have I never encountered such a scene on English rivers? The little lock into the Canal de Bourbourg at Le Guindal was reached by 4pm and I moored by the steps and waited – and waited – and waited and finally decided that I was there for the night. I found a little inn nearby and ordered an evening meal but fortunately (for me) a girl ran across the road not long after to say this would not be possible as the cook had "un maladie!" I had also found a man mowing his lawn outside the old lock-keeper's cottage, who, after doing something mysterious under his desk with a screwdriver, let me use his phone to send another message to the Voies Navigables de France. Just before 6pm, four hours after my original call at 2pm the girl from the café appeared on the bridge to show a little child the strange boat and suddenly exclaimed "l'eclusier est arrive!" A little white VNF van swept onto the lockside and five minutes later we were through into the canal.

Alright you francophiles, so he must have thought I'd said "after four hours." I must remember the continental 24 hour clock! The first thing I saw as I rowed away along the quiet little canal was the village phone box! Then an hour's gentle row in the evening sunlight saw us passing between the old houses of Bourbourg, high above us, to find a new halte fluviale in the side basin. There we moored opposite a large flock of pedal-ducks – Bourbourg's sole maritime might! This quite little town wasn't that quiet so I was up bright and early and ready to go as previously arranged. On the dot of 8am the white van reappeared alongside and the lady driver bustled off round the corner to prepare the lock, only to return minutes later to announce that the peniche in there wouldn't finish unloading its cargo of fertiliser until noon; as the skipper said "work before pleasure". Fair enough and a blessing in disguise. I wandered off to the big market square, bought a pair of espadrilles from the shoe stall – and a very hot shower and continental breakfast with enormous bowls of steaming coffee from the young couple running the little hotel across the square.

Fortunately I was back with 'Turtle Dove' by 11 o'clock when the lock lady told me the barge

was just ready to leave. It came up to the basin to turn and I followed it into the lock and was soon off in its wake to Dunkerque. The canal wound past the next village, Brouckerque, where it widens on being joined by the connecting canal from the Canal de la Haute Colme. This did not contribute much more traffic so I was able to cross over for lunch in a quiet basin. The lady lock-keeper descended from her tall brick eyrie to say that a barge was coming. This turned out to be the same one I had encountered at Bourbourg. Once we were in the lock the skipper started filling his water tank and leaned over the rail for a chat. Once out of the lock and turning to starboard into the Canal de Furnes we passed a cheery American charter crew, the only such craft I met. Soon I was looking for the Halte Fluviale discovered on my original reconnaissance but now only its anchorages remained in the canal bank! However across the canal a large notice invited visiting yachts to lie at the high old quay. I moored 'Turtle Dove' athwart the one iron ladder, put the tent up and climbed ashore in search of a meal, leaving her burgee just showing above the quayside.

Another noisy night gave me plenty of time to worry about what lay ahead – L'Ecluse Quatre Canaux – the automatic lock named for what once was a waterways crossroads; now it just takes you on your way to Belgium but unfortunately I had come across an article in a motorboating magazine which made much of its idiosyncrasies and I was still nervous despite a reassuring phone call to the Voies Navigables de France before I left home. However, come the morning, I made a dash for it spurred on by the efforts of some small boys on a bridge high above – no, they didn't throw stones, they had a better idea! Round the next bend the high steel lock gates appeared, green and rusty. Back at Wolverstone Marina the harbourmaster had told me that when he'd crewed on the little wooden sprittie 'Cygnet' on her voyage to the Med. They had found that brandishing the ship's iron frying pan at sensors did the trick. 'Turtle Dove's' pan is aluminium but I had a little rond anchor aboard and duly resting on my oars I waved this to and fro opposite the evil eyes in the bank. Would it work? Yes! After a pause there was a gurgling at the base of the gates which slowly swung open. I rowed cautiously forward feeling a bit like Dr. Who entering the Time Lord's portals. Inside the controls hung down on a long cord – black button to continue the operation, red for emergency. With the lower gates closed behind me and the whole area surrounded by a high steel security fence, no doubt to save the VNF having to fish out the aforementioned urchins, I felt very isolated as I pressed the black button. 'Turtle Dove' rose about a metre and the way ahead was slowly revealed.

So was another feat of French civil, or uncivil, engineering. The canal stank far worse than the Aa; down its banks from several gardens hose pipes entered the water, probably in defiance of an EU regulation. The pong increased my stroke rate to around 40 per minute but with the last of the houses the fragrant countryside over the high banks began to welcome us and we came to a little quay in time for a coffee break. Next a stop to pick pears from an overhanging tree, more use as ballast than for food. Eventually we reached Adinkerke which is right on the border. Its staple trade seemed to be monetary exchange (this was pre-euro) and selling duty free tobacco but I confined myself to a celebratory beer and rowed on into Belgium.

To be continued.

Paul Garton

Book Review

'The Unlikely Voyage of Jack de Crow' by A J Mackinnon.

Publishers – Seafarer Books

Price £12.95

For unlikely read incredible, impossible and full of improbable adventures – but it all happened – a Mirror dinghy's voyage from Shropshire to the Black Sea! Hilariously written, it just goes to show what can be achieved by disarming nonchalance and an apparent complete lack of planning – work out for yourself why he got lost in the English Channel! (At least his warning to others justified my own chickening out.)

This is as re-readable as 'Three Men in a Boat' : put it in the ship's library immediately but don't read it at mealtimes – you could choke with mirth!

Paul Garton

More Weather Forecasting

Fishing by sail can be dangerous, so to check the suitability of the weather conditions for setting to sea you would open the lantern cover and put the lantern out of the window.

If the flame went out it was too windy to put to sea. If it stayed alight there wasn't enough wind to sail. My kind of weather forecasting.

Come all ye fishermen bold, you'll live to grow old
If you open the frame and pop out the flame and see how the wind d'blow
My Grandpa said to me 'Joe, you'll be wise before you go,
If you open the frame and pop out the flame and see how the wind d'blow.'
Then the wind comes from the East, it's no good to man nor beast,
So I open the frame and pop out the flame and see how the wind d'blow.
When the wind comes from the North, it's daft to venture forth,
So I open the frame and pop out the flame and see how the wind d'blow.
When the wind is in the South, there are times when I'm in doubt,
So I open the frame and pop out the flame and see how the wind d'blow.
When the wind comes from the West, I must decide what's best,
So I open the frame and pop out the flame and see how the wind d'blow.
When the wind comes past my door, I think there's trouble in store,
So I open the frame and pop out the flame and see how the wind d'blow.
So come all ye fishermen bold, you'll live 'til you grow old,
If you open the frame and pop out the flame and see how the wind d'blow.

Sent in by Jeff Stamps

The Quicksilver Project

There is an attempt to bring the World Water Speed Record back to Britain early in 2005 on Lake Coniston; currently standing at 317.60 mph, it has been held by Australian Ken Warby since 1978.

At East Midlands Airport construction of the hull is in hand, with its space frame of square steel tubes designed by Glynne Bowsher, who undertook the structural and mechanical design of Richard Nobles' Thrust SSC supersonic land speed record breaker. With four points in the water, Quicksilver will be powered by a Rolls Royce MK101 turbofan Spey engine, to be transferred from a Buccaneer strike aircraft purchased by the team for that purpose and currently being kept and run at Bournemouth airport.

Quicksilver Team Leader and Driver is Nigel McKnight, who lives not far from me and we drink at the same pub from time to time. Since the death of Donald Campbell in January 1967 he has carried a dream to bring this record back to Britain and his recent years have been totally dedicated to the project. There has been very significant commercial, military and academic support through finance and practical help, but for small companies and individuals who wish to be involved and offer help in a more limited way, a Quicksilver Corporate Club has been established for a maximum of one hundred members.

The once-only membership fee is £395, in return for which members and their guests are invited to a very professional presentation of progress every six weeks or so. This is personally led by Nigel and covers history, design, state of the work and next steps, often introducing specialists from within his team to speak about their own participation. Members also receive a signed and framed certificate of their involvement, news/information packs, discounts on Quicksilver logo merchandise and an opportunity to have their name on the craft during the record attempt.

Presentations are normally made at East Midlands Airport where progress on the hull can be seen, and may occasionally be at Bournemouth Airport. There is no 'hard sell', a good buffet lunch and normally a fascinating few hours. If any VWBA members might be interested in membership of the Quicksilver Corporate Club and would like to attend one of these presentations, I would recommend the website – www.quicksilver-wsr.com.

Tim Measures

The views expressed in The Log are not necessarily those of the Editor or other officers of the VWBA.

The Log is published quarterly, on the 1st February, May, August and November.