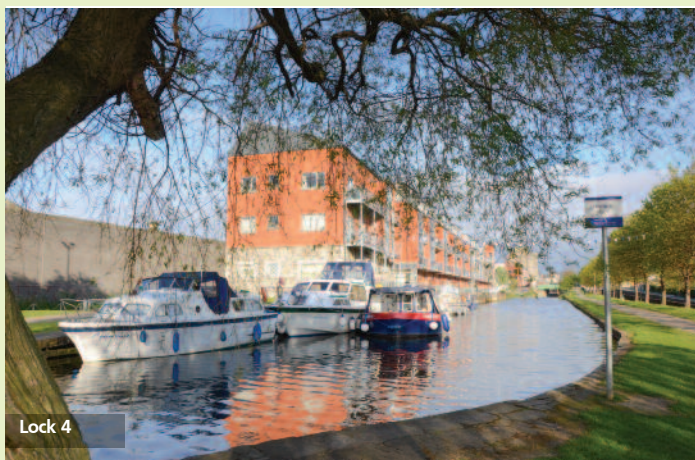


# GREEN & SILVER 2013 - PART 1

by Nora Sleator



Lock 4



Walkabout crossing the M50

It was a cold April morning when *Walkabout* left Portaneena in the Inner Lakes and headed north up Lough Ree, on what was to become a nearly three month voyage, following the *Green and Silver* route. 21 days of travelling, some very short, some long, brought her and her crew back to Athlone at the end of June.

The plan to complete the journey originated when the skipper, Louis Sleator, stood in the dry bed of the Royal Canal swinging a slash hook just east of Cloondra, back about thirty years ago. Many of us thought it would never be possible. Along the journey we thought frequently of the men and women, including Eddie Slane, Sean Fitzsimons, Dermot O'Brien and Reggie Redmond who dreamed of accomplishing this journey.

While the skipper remained the same, the crew varied according to time available. It included myself, Nora Sleator, our daughter Niamh, Robert Maitland and our logistic officer Mary Gallagher, ie the sister, who kindly drove all over the country dropping us off and collecting us.

Louis and Niamh made the start going to Cloondra on Tues 2 April, the only thing worthy of note being the weather - freezing cold, but not as cold as the following day, when Louis continued to Abbeysrule, nearly getting frostbite on the way after losing a glove. Fortunately his brother lives there and was able on arrival to provide heat and sustenance.

By the weekend of the 13th, the First Mate, myself, had arrived home from warmer climes and we progressed as far as Coolnahay and then Mullingar. The Sunday proved to be one of the most stressful days of the entire trip. Just short of Mullingar we ground to a halt with what turned out to be a tyre wrapped around the prop. Despite assistance from WI we had no option but to send for a sub-aqua diver, eventually contacted with the help of Damien Delaney. The wind had strengthened dramatically

while this was in train, and so the Skipper, despite plans to proceed on to Mary Lynch's, in fact decided it would be foolhardy and so stopped in Mullingar for the night. Our WI friend locked him in to the harbour, but I was still less than happy to have to leave him there alone and travel home to Dublin for work the following day.

Monday 15th - Louis continued with the help of WI to Thomastown, and was duly collected by Mary. As the date for the opening of the Effin Bridge was approaching faster than he would like, he returned on Wed 17th and spent a very wild, windy night there before moving on to Jackson's bridge, just short of Maynooth, and finishing the journey to there the following day. At this stage we had caught up with the HBA barges also heading in for the Dublin Rally.

As a former bargee, Louis reckoned we would be well advised to travel ahead of the barges, and so having been delivered by car, I joined him and we made a very early start on the Saturday morning 20 April en route to Castleknock. Having travelled the N4 for so many years alongside the canal it was a somewhat weird experience to make the journey by water. While passing through one lock we met a lady home on holidays from England who had never seen the lock being worked before. I think it was one of the highlights of her holiday.

The Deep Sinking lived up to its reputation as a very special part of the canal. While John Dolan on *Float No. 1* very kindly let us

go ahead of him, in retrospect it may have been better to wait behind, as he removed an obstruction or two along the way. On arrival in Castleknock we moored near the lock on the northern bank, tucked in behind *Lone Ranger* and Graham Liddy.

We waited there until the May Bank Holiday when boats had assembled to make the journey into Dublin for the Dublin Rally. At skippers briefing on Friday 3 May we met old and new friends also Dublin bound. *Aquarius*, with its motley crew from Carrick Boat Club, was to be our travelling companion for much of the way. By now we had been joined by Robert Maitland from Whitehead who was to help crew for the journey in. On Saturday morning we were in the second lock leaving at 07.20. As *Walkabout* headed out across the aqueduct over the M50, I was scrambling up the bank to the roundabout above in order to get some photographs of this amazing junction.

The locks on the way were manned by volunteers from the Dublin Branch and Waterways Ireland personnel. This obviously made our journey considerably easier. From Castleknock to Ashtown one could almost have been out in the middle of the country, so removed was it from the city which we knew was close by. After that, as we got closer to our first stopping point at Shandon Gardens Phibsborough, the city encroached more and more. On reaching our destination at 10.30 we tied up and waited for the rest of the Rally boats to catch up.

The Rally had linked in with Phizzfest and there were many activities on during the afternoon including water polo on the stretch ahead of us. It was an opportunity to have some friends aboard and we were delighted to be joined for a short while by Tish Enright, Maeve Kelly and Fiona Hoey. Word went around that we were to move ahead when the festivities were over and spread out between the locks heading down towards 'Brendan' at Lock No.2. This would help in getting us through the 'Effin Bridge'



Grand Canal Dock

Louis & Nora on the Liffey



the following day with the least delay. Having been joined by our niece Sinead for the trip, we progressed down to Lock No 4 and tied up in the shadow of Mountjoy jail for the night.

Another early start on Sunday morning saw us moving ever closer to the Liffey. The weather was proving very kind to us and continued so for the day. As all who have made the journey into Dublin by either canal will probably agree, it is at times a

somewhat surreal experience to be passing through very familiar territory by a completely different route. Passing under Croke Park, the lock under the North Strand and then the 'Effin Bridge', the latter being supervised by six or so men in Hi Vis jackets, leaning on a car, brought us into the first part of Spencer Dock. The water level when we arrived did not permit us to pass under Sherrif St bridge and so commenced our longest wait.

Boat after boat passed us by, until some hours later the level was eventually lowered enough to allow us through. A quick passage through the sea lock brought us out onto the Liffey. At last a bit of open water! The skipper was happy to be able to blow a few cobwebs out of the engine. Although eager to explore the new waters he was somewhat hampered by the First Mate, me, whose dislike of tidal waters brought his enthusiasm to an abrupt halt and we headed for the sea-lock into Ringsend. A queue had built up due to problems at the lock and so we had another wait, time for a cuppa, while attached to shore by a line hanging on a hook on the quay wall far above.

Once again WI assisted by IWA1 members helped us through the lock and into the basin. So different from our previous visit in 2000. While passing through the sea-locks we had been given navigation directions, and our mooring instructions and so we made our way to our berth for the next three weeks in the inner basin. The sense of accomplishment was huge. Not an easy journey at times, but one that we greatly enjoyed overall.

**Photos: Nora Sleator**

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