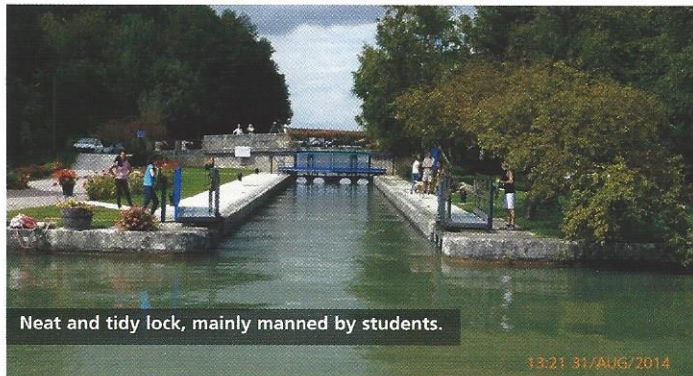


LOUGH ERNE NEWS

FROM MERVYN ROLLS



Neat and tidy lock, mainly manned by students.

13:21 31/AUG/2014

VISIT TO NIVERNAIS/BOURGOGNE CANALS

Six years ago the branch made a visit to the Canal du Midi in Southern France organised by committee member Frank Woods. Apart from a few hiccups and a lot of awful weather, everybody had an enjoyable and memorable experience.

This year, as branch secretary, Frank undertook the organisation of a trip to a different part of France. An information notice to all members resulted in 31 of us committing to the trip. It was then a matter of booking flights, hotels, coaches, and most of all boats.

The major hire companies, Le Boat and Locaboat, could not offer the boats we required, so Frank found that an English operator, France Afloat, could. One of their areas of operation is the Nivernais/Bourgogne region, and having had personal recommendation this was our chosen destination. Eventually we opted for two 'Euroclassic 139' steel barges, each taking 6 persons, and 6 Linssens of various sizes, 3 taking 4 persons, 1 taking 3, and 2 taking 2.

While the barges gave us adequate interior space, with each of the four bedrooms having full en suite facilities, and



Interesting lock mechanisms

a large rear sun deck, they were awkward to handle with what seemed like delayed action steering and throttle response. Because of their width, they just squeezed into several of the locks and it was almost impossible to make a clean entry and exit. It did not help that the bow thrusters did not work.

The Linssens did not have these problems though some found them tight for interior space and short of equipment, such as ovens.

We were blessed with lovely weather, not a drop of rain, clear skies, and although some mornings it was quite cool, it was not long before the sun gave us some very warm days, even hot. Sun cream was much in evidence.

Many of us had opted to fly from Aldergrove to Charles de Gaulle airport near Paris, and stay overnight in an Ibis Budget hotel. The following morning, 30 August, we boarded our coach, picked up some members flying in that morning and proceeded to our start point at Vermenton. After a prearranged lunch in a small hotel, we headed for the supermarket. We know from previous experience, that French shops can shut at inappropriate times, and we needed to be prepared.

We collected our boats with the minimum of formality, and found them to be well equipped with information and maps. Although it was nearing day's end some crews opted to leave straight away with others waiting until next morning.

Cruising the canals under bright sunshine was very pleasant, and at all the locks the keepers were friendly and helpful. It was interesting to note the mechanisms employed to work the locks: no balance beams, just levers, wheels, pulleys, and racks. Waiting jetties at locks were mainly non-existent, so steel rods knocked into the banks had to be used. Traffic levels were low, but finding suitable moorings in the larger towns was always difficult, due to the number of tied up boats.

We passed many quiet small villages and the larger towns were particularly attractive, Auxere and Joigny for instance.

Eventually we reached the France Afloat base at Tonnerre, where we handed back the boats and an arranged coach took us to Charles De Gaulle Airport. The journey was interesting, with rich agricultural land and many vineyards, but the journey around Paris was somewhat depressing and the airport chaotic and overcrowded, with no clear manner in which to proceed. Some of our members had opted to stay on for a few days, but our party of eight had to fly to Belfast via Manchester. Then the Belfast plane was delayed for three hours, which meant by the time we got home, we had a long day.

But altogether we had a most enjoyable time, and our huge thanks go to Frank and Marilyn Woods for all their work and efficiency for making it so.

ANNUAL DINNER DANCE

Much discussion has taken place in and out of committee over the years as to the most suitable venue for this event. With the much improved premises of the Carrybridge Hotel it was decided that this would be a most



Our fleet at rest near St Florentin

suitable venue, and that was where the 2014 event was held on 4 October.

It has a very convenient jetty for boats to tie up, with shore power and other facilities, and no doubt many IWAI members have used them quite regularly.

Organisation for the dinner-dance was mainly in the capable hands of our secretary, Frank Woods, and thanks are due to him for carrying out the task with his usual efficiency.

We were very pleased that among those in attendance as guests were: WI CEO Dawn Livingstone and IWAI President Carmel Meegan, with their respective spouses, and Colin Beattie and Gerald & Doreen Mackarel from Belturbet Branch. We know that some of our guests, as with our members, had to travel some considerable distances to the Carrybridge Hotel, which made their attendance all the more welcome.

Prior to the excellent dinner, smoothly and pleasantly served, speeches were given by Dawn Livingstone and Carmel Meegan after the introductions by our chairman, Ken Bell.

Unfortunately the acoustics in the room were not good so it was difficult to hear them, something we will need to attend to in committee.

After the meal, suitably washed down with the usual liquids, those who wished enjoyed some lively dancing to a live group, which made a welcome change to disco type music.

Altogether a very successful evening.

Photos: Mervyn Rolls