

Inland Waterways News

Round trip Shannon to Dublin Heritage Boat Association Launch

Joe Treacy, **4E**

The plan was for a convoy of canal boats to travel to Dublin for a high-profile launch of the Heritage Boat Association. I first sampled the canal in 1973 in a Joy Line cruiser and had a couple of boats on the system before going metal. **4E** was converted at the 13th Lock and had been on a Dublin Rally in 1983. In 1987 I brought her to Killaloe; apart from Shannon Harbour rallies, our only canal trip since had been to Tullamore and back in 1996.



The improper channels

We set out on 13 April 2001 and, apart from a free weekend in Dublin, were on the move until 17 June. We left in the middle of the foot and mouth crisis and the threat of a waterway system closure. At Church Bay, Whitegate, we joined Gerry Burkes's **68M**; Andy Roche's **35M** joined us through Portumna Bridge. Meelick Quay was our overnight and a request for a time in the morning was answered by calls of "Quarter past" and "Twenty past," a habit which was to remain for the trip, and of course we had the "shifting cars" factor.

4E's youngest crewmember was fixated with being first and the fleet would become dictated to by this four-year-old. Saturday noon saw us through Shannon Harbour to overnight near Ferbane. We had a rule of a pint in every pub. Ferbane was a great night but males dancing together didn't go down too well.



What the prop collected

Sunday we faced the dreaded Pollagh stretch with one of our crews needing a tractor; we became a foursome with the Baylys on **Dabu** catching up from Richmond Harbour. Overnight at the Thatch; next morning at "twenty past" we set out for Tullamore. We had been asked to walk the boats through a gap in scaffolding under the Railway Bridge but as no one could walk on water it was down to luck and skill.

The following weekend saw us move along to Edenderry with all fires lit at the Daingean over-

night. Next weekend was very cold, with hail lying like snow on decks. On Saturday, **4E** and **68M** carried on, leaving **Dabu** and **35M** in Sean Reilly's

care at Edenderry. Overnight was Robertstown and, as we were now deeply in canal-boatman country, we socialised, returning to Lowtown on Sunday.

The Saturday of May bank holiday weekend was spent touching up **4E**'s paint even though I had preached at the other skippers that the canal was hard on boats. **Dabu** and **35M** caught up and we spent the night in Robertstown. Sunday we travelled on to Sallins, where we watched Clare take a beating at Tipperary's hands. Monday saw us move along to Hazelhatch, the

springboard into Dublin. While negotiating Devonshire bridge, **35M** decided to leave her wheelhouse behind and go convertible. Crews joined in and **35M** was tidied up; Bayly, Bayly and Roche rebuilt **35M**'s wheelhouse in the following week.

Saturday 12 May saw Dublin Rally boats move into town while some of us crewed for **54M (Aiseiri)**, which was sailing from Athy to do the Dublin Pilgrimage.

Sunday 13 May was probably the hardest day I have experienced on boats and crews. We were on the move from 5.30am and battled until 11.00pm. The fleet was swelled by John Thompson on **36M, Snark** with John Treacy at the helm and **Neptune** with Roger and Stephanie Lorenz. Metal channels inside bridge walls, limescale on lock-chambers, low pipes, debris in the canal, stone-throwing youths etc etc made this a trip to remember. Tired, full of rubbish, battered and bruised we limped into Dublin. The HBA launch was in jeopardy because of our disgust at the condition of the canal and the largest fleet of canal-boats into Dublin since the 1950s. Common sense prevailed and on Wednesday 16 May, in a torrential downpour, Sile DeValera raised the HBA burgee on **4E** and we were launched. The party went on all night.

The turnaround point was probably the final night of the World Canal Conference. Everyone had a ball, Gerry Burke and myself sang "Clare to here" and the reason for the trip was complete; the only thing left was to return home. Waterways Ireland put in a huge effort in de-scaling the locks and their staff put in a long day on 26 May, getting us safely to Hazelhatch. **4E** was on the casualty list as a "seep" became a major leak. Quick-drying cement and an all-night vigil got us through.

The June bank holiday weekend saw the four boats leave Hazelhatch to overnight in Sallins (Ireland 1, Portugal 0). Sunday we journeyed on to Robertstown (Clare again on the receiving end) and Monday we were back in Sean Reilly's care at Edenderry. The following Friday Sean gave a lovely barbecue for the fleet, which turned into a great night with the locals. Saturday saw us overnight in Ballycommon, where a delegation of Kilbeggan Branch restoration people presented a bottle of whiskey to be carried on **35M** and presented to the President of IWAI.

Sunday we travelled to Tullamore. Above 25th lock **4E**'s long-suffering drive-plate just collapsed; heartfelt thanks to Heather Thomas and the hard-working Owen who made it possible for **4E** to journey on.

Friday 15 June Offaly Branch put on a fabulous barbecue for the crews: we now felt like returning heroes rather than weary warriors. Saturday saw us overnight in Ferbane: no dancing this time, just a quiet early night. Sunday we sailed line astern into Shannon Harbour: the epic was over.

The journey was something we will always remember. The four crews worked as a close team and shared something special. An annual re-union is definitely a must: Dublin again would take a bit of thinking about, but I'm sure we will all stay in touch with the canal. The many who helped us on our journey and looked after the fleet between weekends will not be forgotten. The old-timers who constantly appeared along the system to tell tales of the canal-boat times found as much joy at seeing us as we got by again working the system. My thanks to Gerry Burke for his unforgettable log of the trip. There is definitely a book by someone on the escapade — and yes, it was a long way from Clare to here.