

Inland Waterways News

Where the time stands still

Kalevi Lehtonen

We come from Finland, a member state of the EU. Our native language is Finnish and our currency is Euro. Approximately 5.2 million people are living in Finland and our area is 338000 sq km.

Our home is situated on the bank of Kokemäki river, 200km from Helsinki (the capital). Our river has only little motor boats and rowing boats because of power station dam which limits traffic. In Finland we have traffic mostly in lakes: we have thousands of lakes and also huge amount of rivers with power station dams. Canals connect lakes to each other: the biggest is Saimaa Canal, which connects our commercial waterways to Russia. You can get good information from Finland in website <http://www.finland.fi>.



Mist; the boat (Katrina and Kalevi Lehtonen)

I hope that when you are reading this, my English is good enough.

Seven years ago we had dream to steer our own barge, to operate 200-year-old locks, navigate under beautiful stone bridges, stopping off in a town for supplies and overnight and have a friendly chat with the locals and enjoy a pint of Guinness and relaxing in this tranquillity we like. We got very good information from Irish state tourist office in Finland. It took after this contact almost 2 years until we had our first canal cruising in Ireland.

Cruising as beginners

When taxi turned in to boat rental base it was very exciting to see canal boats mooring side by side. After reception and tuition we were alone onboard our barge. Tiller steering and heavy boat were not familiar for us. Boat was not going always like we wanted but after driving carefully and getting experience, boat is your friend.

I remember especially expression: "If you have hurry, canal boat is not for you, you must take car." I have been always interested in technics of boats: diesel engine and all systems are fascinating. Our family on board has been always good crew and almost from the beginning my son has worked as best captain.

Freedom to come and go has pleased us from the beginning. I hate fixed schedules during holiday. Canal cruising is best to see flora and fauna and farms along canal banks; different sheeps and cows and horses are also good atmosphere for us.

Service from boat owner is all the time very important and chat with them is also part of your holiday because they have good ideas where you can go and where are good pubs and restaurants. A pint of Guinness or hot whiskey is in the evening part of your unforgettable holiday.

Barrow adventures

When we got information about the River Barrow, we were at once interested to go there, but we were thinking very accurately and evaluating our experience before we asked from boat owner: "Can we go to Barrow?" It was our second summer when we reached Goresbridge.

My personal problem has sometimes been lime works turbine before Goresbridge. And one time Waterway Service had moved stones by excavator near Rathvindon lock so that our boat got strong touch on these rocks although we were going according to navigation map and instructions. We had luck that no damage happened. Near Rathellin lock happened so that pool got through the window and we repaired it by wide plastic tape. As we were doing repairing a pyjamas of our friend fallen into canal for ever.

One summer, weir after Bagenalstown lock was broken and Waterway Service helped us as follows. In the evening we made agreement that after lock we stop and when their boss gives sign, we drive with full throttle through very strong current until weir canal is behind us. I succeeded: boat was cruising about one minute like car on ice, but everything was going okay and workers of Waterway Service clapped their hands. When we were returning to Bagenalstown the point near weir was not deep enough and current was very strong and weir was not finished yet. I increased throttle, but boat stopped on rock. We gave rope to Waterway Service boss, but he fallen into water and boat was moving again. That man is our good friend and I hope to see him again.

Strong current in the river Barrow has been sometimes exciting experience but engine has worked okay: no technical problems because maintenance service has always been perfect.

Locks

White and black lock constructions and especially double locks have always been very attractive — and in the beginning also frightening — stops. Now when we are over 50 years old we are cruising just the two of us; we have more activity getting through locks. Last autumn I wrote to IWAI mailing list by asking about some locks (maintenance and if they are at this time tight) and I told that my wife opens the locks if there is no lockkeeper. One friendly member of list wrote "It is not illegal in Ireland that you operate locks and your wife is steering the boat."

I want to send special thanks to lockkeepers Peter and Joe Moore from Monasterevin because we have had very much chats with them and they have helped us in many things. We remember also one friendly old man from old 19th lock (Old Barrow Line) and lockkeeper from 20th lock on Main Line, Ticknevin. He asked us to give sign by horn when we are approaching the lock and he wanted to give also his cat to us because it was looking food inside our boat. I hope also that one special lockkeeper in the River Barrow understands that we want to be also his friends.

Summary

In this article I have tried to express our feelings and experiences and to tell that we like Ireland, Irish peoples, inland waterways and want to come again. We have many good friends in Ireland and we have lost our heart there. We try in our own ways to promote canal and river cruising in Ireland. We hope also that maintenance budget for waterways big enough and that EU is also helping this heritage.

