

# Inland Waterways News

## One day in July

*We thought it would be interesting to assemble several different accounts of what was happening on one ordinary summer's day, to give a picture of typical activity on our waterways. We had volunteers from home and abroad — but the day chosen, 14 July, turned out to be most untypical: the sun shone. Ed.*



Shannonbridge (Stefan Kupner)

## Graham Homan on the Erne

The crew of **Albatross** awoke at Devenish Island to a grey, overcast sky. This is a monastery ruin, like Clonmacnoise, except on an island. We were cruising for the weekend from Belturbet to the Enniskillen area and back. Having been based at Banagher on the Shannon for some years, we are enjoying exploring new waters and moorings.

After cooking a full Irish breakfast, we set off for Enniskillen where we had a quiet walk around the town. As we cast off, the sun came out and a hot day began.

The cruise from Enniskillen is lovely, passing holiday chalets and the hotel on your left and then the famous Moorings restaurant at Bellanaleck on the right. Then we went left through Carrybridge, which was alive with boating and activity on this beautiful day.



**The Seven Horseshoes (Geoff Hooton)**

We pulled in for lunch at the fixed wooden jetty at Naan Island, one of the many small wooded islands that make up the Erne lakes. Then we passed Reihill's island restaurant and the Share activity centre before heading for Crom Castle for the night. This is a real gem, with the old castle ruins at the water's edge and the new castle overlooking the estate which is managed by the National Trust, who have an information centre beside the moorings. We were lucky to find space as several boats were already tied up. Like many others, we lit the barbecue and a lovely evening was had by all. A pleasant surprise for me was to bump into an old pal, Terry Frew (see p33): we had passed each other on the lake, but as we had both changed our cruisers since we last met, neither of us recognised the other!

For those who have not yet visited the Erne, you have missed a lovely and very different system. Where else can you pull in and have a sauna, grocery shop or explore castle ruins and all at the water's edge? There are many good moorings, but very few places to buy provisions, so stock up and plan your trip well or you will end up relying on fishing for your dinner! The Shannon-Erne Waterway can be pleasantly cruised in two days, but again it is worth spending extra time exploring the villages and towns along the way and not just using the waterway as a link to the Erne.

## **Ewan Duffy along the Ulster Canal**

Setting out from Maynooth, I headed for Castleblayney, to follow the route of the Castleblayney Keady and Armagh Railway before going to Charlemont. The railway section of my journey was a bigger success than that of following the Ulster Canal!

At Charlemont, I was unable to locate the start of the canal and subsequently picked up the route at the site of Teagues and Tullykevan Bridges, of which no trace remains. I am grateful to the occupant of the lockhouse at Blackwaterstown (2nd lock) for allowing me to invade their garden to take a photograph. West of this (towards Clones and Wattlebridge), a road overbridge provided a useful photo opportunity.

Three bridges — Mullyleggan (filled in on one side), Atkinsons and Tullymore — were easy to find, being marked on the OSNI 1:50000 series maps. Then my luck ran out. The map doesn't show the exact route from here to Benburb so I made my way to the Blackwater River Park, just east of Benburb, where I figured the canal came back in before commencing its run parallel to the River Blackwater. This I duly found adjacent to a new golf course.

Under Maydown bridge, two men digging for worms suggested that I head further along the path (which appears to be the canalbed) to photograph the weir on the river. I returned to find two or three people standing around my unlocked car, wondering what it was doing there.

One of them, Frank aged 90, walked with me along the towpath from Maydown to Milltown, about a mile distant. We went back past the weirs while Frank discussed everything from the canal itself to Government on both sides of the border, the development of cameras, various local people and the story of the Heritage Centre in Milltown, restored at substantial cost but closed for lack of tourists.

I did manage to take a photograph and GPS reading at one of the 7 locks located within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile; as I was unable to do a detailed search, I don't know how many others remain. Eventually we reached Milltown and spent about 15 minutes wandering around the outside of the heritage centre.

Back at Maydown, Frank told me about some of the industrial heritage remains. At 6.00pm, I decided to call it a day and leave the section from Milltown to Foyduff for another day.

## Jim Murray on the Corrib

9.00am: wake up in a tent in Cornamona. The crew of the **Miss Sue** — Rosemary and Martin Rowan, Denis McDwyer and Derek Woodhouse from the Belturbet Navy and this token Dub — are accommodated in two tents and the boat. It had been an early night (about 2.00am): Joe Mac's pub had provided an excellent dinner to about 60 ralliers, followed by a Fancy-Dress and a lively two-piece band.

10.00am: Mass as Gaeilge in the adjacent church, along with Éamon Ó Cuiv TD, Minister for the Waterways, and his family, who live locally.

11.00am: the second of three kingsized Full Irish Breakfasts is prepared and consumed alfresco in the unrecognisably summery conditions. This Belturbet crowd have been doing the Corrib Rally for so long that they've taken the rough out of Roughing It. The only things missing are cloth napkins.

Noon: Commodore George Ryder casts off down the Dooghta River, leading 16 boats, from 42-footers down to RIBs. The scenery is stunning, but the Admiralty chart shows many shallows. It is well marked but we slavishly follow the course taken by the local experts.

1.30pm: after an idyllic cruise we anchor near Glann, Liam Madden's beautiful private harbour. Kay and Christy Deacy have invited all the visitors — the Navy, the Walls and the O'Siochains — to lunch aboard their yacht, **Miss Claire**.

3.00pm: the sound of a three-piece band wafts across the lake. We are ferried in by RIB. The bandleader has a happy lived-in Willie Nelson look and refuses to play anything later than 1976, which suits most of us.

4.30pm: the Dublin –v- Kildare Leinster GAA Final — and no TV within twenty miles. I ask the band's roadie can I turn on his van radio. Those interested gather around, until we triumph in a nailbiting finish.

6.30pm: we move off for our overnight stop at fabulous Inchagoill, second only to Lusty Beg on the Erne. Us open boat merchants set up, happily in benign conditions. As on Shannon, Corrib teenagers declare independence by tenting away from the parents' boats.

8.30pm: the Commodore's Cheese & Wine is no such thing: corks pop for Buck's Fizz, which washes down an array of intriguing western delicacies. There follows a Bacchanalian barbecue in the natural amphitheatre carved out of the forest, with music, rí-rá agus ruaille buaille, till 14 July is only ... yesterday.

## Geoff Hooton on the Shannon–Erne Waterway

My wife (Lynne) and I live in Glasgow and we have a share on a narrowboat in England within the OwnerShips scheme ([www.ownerships.co.uk](http://www.ownerships.co.uk)). OwnerShips have a luxury Dutch-style barge, **Derrineel** (48' X 11' with two ensuite double cabins), based at Riversdale Barges near Ballinamore, Co Leitrim. Free weeks are made available to other owners; we were lucky enough to get **Derrineel** from 12 to 19 July and were joined by our friend Jeanne Marshall.

On Sunday we awoke to a lovely morning in Ballyconnell, topped up the water tank and set off

about 10.30am, safely negotiating the low bridge. At Ballyconnell lock Lynne did the steering while I pushed the buttons: a smart card is much easier to wield than a windlass!

At Corraquill lock I had a very pleasant chat with the Waterways Ireland ranger, a lovely, genial man. Then a wonderful cruise along the Woodford river as the weather got better and better, pausing for lunch (wholemeal soda bread sandwiches, cheese and biscuits, fresh fruit and wine) at Aghalane.

We continued at a leisurely pace until at 3.00pm we tied up in Belturbet opposite Emerald Star. There were lots of folk sitting on the grass or enjoying a Sunday afternoon stroll along the pontoons.



Derrineel (Geoff Hooton)

Belturbet is a lovely place. Walking along the main street with the sun high in the sky, it could easily have been the south of France! We bought a few provisions and strolled back to the boat for a shady rest.

About 5.00pm I decided to do a bit more exploring. In the Seven Horseshoes I ordered a pint of Guinness. They would be serving food from 6.00pm to 9.00pm and the menu looked very good. The Guinness was also very good and as the football was starting to get exciting I ordered another pint ....

We all went back to the Seven Horseshoes later. The restaurant upstairs was busy (always a good sign) and the food was excellent (steaks and duck) and the staff so friendly and helpful.

Later, as I sat in the wheelhouse with a glass of wine, a young couple stopped and said they thought **Derrineel** was a lovely boat: lots of people said that to us. And they were quite right.

Just as I was going to bed it started to rain. I didn't care; it had been a great day.

## Gerry Burke on the Shannon

After the Derg Rally we were moving to Drumshanbo for the traditional music festival and HBA barbeque in Spencer Harbour. We reached Portumna on the Saturday: we planned to get through Sunday's first bridge opening at 11.00 and through Meelick before lunch. Our friends Joe and Mary arrived as we let **31B** (Mike & Mai Devlin) and **41M** (Les Saunders) off. Andy & Cathy Roche were heading for Croke Park so Joe was going to be the throttle man on **35M**.

**68M** and **35M** headed upriver, lashed side by side, as the morning fog turned into mist. **34B** (Gerry & Geraldine Gavin) and **31M** got through Meelick on a lock before us but we all got through before lunch.

Below Shannon Grove Les called on VHF: his engine temperature was going up. I held the two barges in a straight line while **41M** came alongside and tied up. We used the three engines through the flow at the narrows. Then Les stopped his engine, checked his weed filter and determined that his impeller was gone. We held off just short of the narrows below Banagher; Les went the last stretch literally under his own steam to tie below the bridge.

Above Banagher our engines gave out that little extra smoke as the heavy flow came against us. The sun had come out and I was alone in the wheelhouse. Twice a pair of speedboats



acting the Mick just above Shannon Harbour buzzed us. Then we passed **31B** who had dropped anchor to enjoy lunch and a swim.

Just below Shannonbridge power station a large Broom passed us in displacement mode with a jetski running up and down across his wake. Initially I took this as inexperience on the skipper's behalf, thinking that throttling back reduces the wash; I also innocently assumed that the jetski wasn't with him. But less than a quarter of a mile upstream we met the boats together. They were just playing; do they realise how goddamn irresponsibly and dangerously they were acting? Subsequently I heard that they were still play-acting half an hour later.

At the Shannonbridge cut **34B** was already tied up and Gerry helped us in. We enjoyed a swim in the cold, fast-flowing water. After some car shuttling, we headed to Shannon Harbour to look at **4E** before finishing off a perfect day with dinner in the Vine House.

## Martin Ludgate in committee

I didn't spend 14 July boating. More unusually for me, I didn't spend it working on restoring derelict waterways either: I spent it at the committee meeting of the Waterway Recovery Group (WRG), the volunteer labour branch of the (British) Inland Waterways Association. We organise weekend work parties and week-long Canal Camps, restoring derelict canals all over England, Scotland and Wales. A few years ago we did some preliminary work on the Ulster Canal.

We do several thousand person-days work a year, which needs a fair amount of co-ordination to ensure that volunteers, machinery, tools and other equipment are in the right place at the right time. Hence the need for six committee meetings a year.

I edit our magazine **Navvies**, which provides information, reports and comment on volunteer work and canal restoration. We started the meeting with my regular moan about contributions for the magazine arriving late.

The meeting was right in the middle of the main summer programme. We reviewed what had happened so far and discussed what was to come. One Camp had to be cancelled when buzzards nested in a tree which was to be felled. Another, scheduled for the Droitwich Canal, had problems with accommodation, so half the week was spent on the Grand Western Canal and the rest on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal. And the following week's Camp — which I was to lead — had suddenly found itself with no accommodation. (We did find somewhere to stay, and had an enjoyable week working at Ham Mill Lock near Stroud on the Cotswold Canals.) Happily, almost all other Camps went according to plan and did plenty of useful work.

We had run a very successful training weekend (with British Waterways): training volunteers in machinery operation (eg dumpers and excavators), manual skills (eg stonework and bricklaying) and First Aid. So we discussed plans for another one next year.

We reviewed arrangements for attracting new volunteers: our publicity display, website, publications and so on. We discussed the impact of new safety regulations on our machinery and talked about replacing one of our tool trailers and one of our minibuses. We planned some future events, in particular November's Bonfire Bash, a major working party and reunion, and ended by discussing next year's Canal Camps.

Now I'm off to join a week's Camp clearing silt from lock-chambers on the Grantham Canal.

## Pam Scruton on the Shannon

Sunday 14 July was our first full day aboard **Canterbury Bell** (a Waveline cruiser). It was raining at 7.00am but Pam, Geoff (husband) and Mark (18 — son's friend) had breakfast whilst topping up the water tank. We left the marina at 8.30 and, with three of the crew still dormant, headed towards Athlone.

We managed to get into the lock without making ourselves look totally foolish. Once out, Mark was ecstatic at his first ever opportunity to take the helm of a boat! The great crested grebe and heron seemed quite unfazed by the boats. At 10.30 daughter Victoria and her friend Emma (both 13) emerged from their cabin. Still no sign of Gordon (19 — son) however.



Crew Scruton

Shannonbridge was really busy and we continued on to Shannon Harbour where we tried to get into a small space but, to the enormous amusement of all other boaters present, we made a right pig's ear of the attempt before beating an undignified retreat.

After lunch (toasties), we agreed that we'd done enough cruising for one day and decided to stay at Banagher. The on-shore toilets were basic but clean and functional and we were happy to use them.

The boys managed to cast themselves off in the dinghy before starting the outboard. When they sorted themselves out they took the girls boating (wearing the despised lifejackets) while Geoff and Pam explored Banagher and bought more provisions and a bottle of Mateus Rosé. The weather had cleared up nicely as we sat on deck watching boats coming under the bridge (including a breasted pair).

At 6.30pm we started thinking about an evening meal. The agreement had been for risotto but the eventual order to the galley slave was for three risotto, two jam toasties, two tomato soup. Mateus Rosé goes with anything.

As the evening cooled the prospect of a walk became more inviting. The local pubs were full of customers wearing maroon shirts so we guessed that there had been a local victory (hurling perhaps?).

By 9.30pm we had returned to **Canterbury Bell**. The ladies' toilets were now in a disgusting condition: loos blocked and flooded, a bag of household refuse in the doorway spilling out its contents. Nevertheless, as we closed up for the night it was turning into the best holiday we've ever had, and Mark would not exchange one minute on the Shannon for a whole week in Ibiza!