

Inland Waterways News

Going Grand: equipping a cruiser

Brian J Goggin

What do you need to fit out a cruiser to tackle the canals? The Guide says that you should have the boat's name or number shown on it, sufficient crew, a good stop rope (a long, strong rope), mooring ropes, fenders, a boathook and a lock key. There are a few other things that might be useful, none of them expensive and some capable of being made at home.

You will need a **permit**, which you can get from the lockkeeper at Shannon Harbour. You can get an annual permit for €126 or just pay for your journey at €12.70 per month plus €0.60 per lock, payable in advance. You'll also want a copy of the Grand Canal Guide.

It's handy to have a **lock key**, to make you independent of lockkeepers. There are two kinds: the lower one in the photo can cope with ordinary locks plus those with shrouded spindles (a security feature), so it's the one to go for. Keys are available from Waterways Ireland in Dublin (Ashtowngate, Navan Road, Dublin 15; tel 01-8680148) and Tullamore and from Mahon Marine in Banagher. Bring a sea-searcher magnet, just in case you drop the key into a lock!



Lock keys

You're likely to want to moor to the canal bank now and then, and there won't always be bollards, so you'll need **mooring pins**: preferably at least three to allow for springs.

The one at the top of the second photo is a rond anchor: very fancy. The spade handle is for emergency use only: it could damage the bank. The neat mooring-pin at the bottom is very convenient: bring a lump (coal) hammer to bang it in with. Canal-oriented chandleries like Lowtown Marine will have these, or you can make or find your own equivalents. Some people like to use spiral jobs designed for holding dogs (available from petshops and farm shops); make sure you get a strong one.

You won't always be able to lie neatly along the bank, so it's useful to bring a **gangplank**, say three metres long. A two-inch-thick plank, with thin slats nailed across it for grip, will take quite a heavy weight. Waterproof it and work out some way of holding it to the boat when in use. Alternatively, consider a lightweight ladder with a plank fixed to one side: gangplank and ladder in one, and useful for recovering a man overboard if you don't have a bathing platform.



Mooring pins and lump hammer

Bring lots of big fenders, to protect you when entering lock chambers. But you won't need your radar and VHF, and you might take down (or take off) any very tall aerials or masts. It's

very useful to have a **bargepole** (a long, strong pole) or two, ten or more feet long. Old wooden masts from sailing dinghies might do.

Bring a dinghy only if you think you could reach your propellor from it (to clear it of obstructions, if necessary). Otherwise leave the dinghy at home until you're ready to explore the Barrow: it will only get in the way.

Opinions are divided on the use of weed-cutters or rope-cutters fitted to the prop shaft. Weed growth is low early in the season, and plastic bags are not the menace they were, so careful driving can avoid entanglement.

A **sharp axe** (or a very strong knife) is essential in case a rope gets jammed when you're descending in a lock. Don't forget **lifejackets** (essential at locks), waterproofs (you'll be getting on and off the boat more than on the lakes) and boat shoes or boots with a very good grip: you'll need that grip when standing on the footboards of locks.

Canal convoy: Spring 2003

The majority opinion seemed to be to make the trip from Shannon Harbour to Lowtown at Easter 2003, starting on Friday 18 April and reaching Lowtown on Monday 21 April. That gives people two weekends in April to get their boats to Shannon Harbour. If that causes anyone a problem, please contact me (061-377057, bjg@jwai.ie). Also, if anyone else wants to join the merry throng, please let me know.

The outline plan is to make for Pollagh on the Friday, possibly spending the night in the middle of nowhere (the pubs will be closed, as it's Good Friday), enjoying the peace and quiet. Then to Tullamore on Saturday, the biggest town west of Dublin, Rhode or Edenderry on the Sunday (a long day) and Lowtown by Monday.

Diesel is available at Tullamore and Lowtown; if you think you're likely to run out in between times, bring an extra can.

