

## Inland Waterways News

### Rowing on the Shannon

Joerg Dickerbertel, Oldenburger Ruderverein

*Nini Stevenson, Secretary of Lough Ree Rowing Club, sent me a copy of an article written by Joerg Dickerbertel of the Oldenburg Rowing Club in Germany, about a rowing trip in 2001. The article was published in **Deutsche Rudersport**, the German rowing magazine, and Joerg permitted its publication here. It has been very slightly shortened. Ed.*

The handicap for German rowers [on Irish waterways] is the lack of the traditional European rowing clubhouse, youth hostel or riverside camping ground. The situation is further complicated by the risk of vandalism to the boats if unattended. Finding suitable accommodation requires time-consuming car trips.

Among information sent to me by Rene Reibetanz, the local DRV-Boot rep in Carrick-on-Shannon, was the brochure for the hotel-ship **Bona Spes**. This was the solution. The all-round package offered by Captain Liam Finnegan and his crew was apparent immediately upon arrival at Knock Airport. As it was still early in the day and the party not complete, the driver squashed in a short tour of a monastery en route to the ship and proved to be a fund of knowledge.



Meanwhile Liam had berthed his ship conveniently near Carrick-on-Shannon Rowing Club. The **Bona Spes** is a converted Dutch flat-bottomed ship with a large dining room and four small double cabins, each with a tiny shower and WC. On deck is a large common room, a bar and sun terrace. Two young women and a particularly competent cook combine with Captain Liam to cater for the comfort of the guests. A three-course welcoming meal on the first evening set a high standard that did not falter. Liam proved a tireless and resourceful cellar-master with a selection of international wines at reasonable prices.

Our first day of rowing was in an area of small lakes north of Carrick. As the **Bona Spes** was unable to accompany us, Liam borrowed a car from a friend and provided us on arrival with a generous picnic lunch.

The following morning we began our five-day tour from Carrick to Clonmacnoise. Each day Liam gave us advice as to wind and weather, hove anchor and putted toward our evening destination little faster than we were. There proved to be a number of advantages to having an accompanying ship: we could jump the queues at the locks, telephoning through as a working ship, and in the locks could lie alongside and attend to personal requirements (a Guinness here, a Guinness there). The ability to lie alongside proved invaluable with mooring facilities scarce and inclement weather always possible, though only on the last day did we really get caught with the Irish weather.

The afternoons developed into a torture: while the non-rowing wives and resting rowers sunned themselves on deck, we in the rowing boat were reminded with each forward movement of the fullness of our midday meal. The food was too good for leftovers. Regretfully we had to ask for



reduced portions at lunch: this initially offended, but we were both forgiven and sated.

The following evening we moored in a village comprising three pubs, on this particular night with live music. Liam proved continually to be well informed as to the pub scene.

The third day brought with it the crossing of Lough Ree. Stony shores means normally having to stay in the boat midday. The drifting **Bona Spes** again proved her value, allowing us to moor alongside in the middle of the lake.

Eventually we reached our turning point at Clonmacnoise. We toured the monastery and returned north, consoled only by a following wind strong enough to throw up white horses. Unexpectedly, on the following morning the lake proved calm. Liam accompanied us, as on all lake passages within eye contact. Later in the day as the weather worsened we were pleased to sight Lanesborough at the end of the open water.

Again our captain had concocted something special for us. We were accompanied by the racing eight of the newly-founded Lough Ree Rowing Club and treated to a small welcome. The club comprises 65 mostly youthful members and an honorary female trainer.



Rowing in style (not Joerg's group)

The last rowing day led us back to Carrick over the many small lakes linked by the Shannon. We handed back our boat to Rene Reibetanz without a blemish after six days and 250km. We were rewarded onboard with a meal that outshone all previous meals.

We had had a perfect and unusually luxurious rowing expedition with our accompanying ship. It was not particularly cheap, but the extra cost had to be measured against the comfort, security, safety, flexibility and convenience of the **Bona Spes**. We found later, however, one disadvantage: one of our party proved, upon returning home, to have gained weight ....

*The Chairman of the Lough Ree Rowing Club is Ciaran Mullooly.*