

Europe 2016

France - Canal du Midi

Day 0

After an uneventful but long flight from Medford to Paris, we waited to meet up with Sally and John, our travel companions. We had a long layover, but due to repeated schedule updates, their connection was razor thin, especially given all the walking required to weave one's way through immigration, customs, and multiple security portals. As our flight to Montpellier was called for boarding, Sally and John rushed up, huffing and puffing. They had checked no bags, so even their luggage made the connection!

Boating on the Canal du Midi

One of the questions I couldn't answer before our trip was whether to expect having to make meals on board. As you can moor practically anywhere along the canal, you could chose to eat on board anytime. There is enough shore civilization that you could eat all meals ashore without a struggle.



Shore of the Mediterranean

A quick two hour flight to Montpellier left us at the rental car counter by 3pm local time. Car pickup went pretty smoothly, and we headed out on the 60 minute drive to our first night in France. After getting lost a few times despite the included GPS, we arrived in Portiragnes, and after an extra pass by the hotel, due to one way streets, we parked in front of Hotel Le Mirador. Discovering the door to the hotel was locked, with no obvious reason why, the waitress at the restaurant informed us that they didn't open until 5pm, so we sat down for a late lunch of pizza and house wine.

By the time we finished our meal, the office had opened, and we were able to check into our nice rooms overlooking the Mediterranean. We met back downstairs and took a walk up the sand beach, and explored a few sea front curiosities.

Day 1

After a nice breakfast in the

hotel, we checked out and headed to Port Cassafie;res to scope out the boat before heading out to provision. The Le Boat agent let us know what to expect when we returned in a few hours, so we headed to Béziers to hunt and gather. We drove up into the old town and walked around the old Cathedral Nazarene at the core of the

town, had a lunch in the plaza, then headed back to the market we had passed on the way. After getting lost, we found an equally large supermarket, and proceeded to get provisions for our first few days.

We got back to Le Boat about 3pm, boarded our Corvette, stowed our gear, and LeBoat staff joined us to take us out for a very brief sea trial. My competency test consisted of piloting up the canal a few hundred meters, making a U-turn, then returning to the base, demonstrating that I could back the boat back into a stern tie. We moved the car to secure parking, and immediately departed in order to get through the first canal lock before the lock keeper closed for the evening.



Cathedral of the Nazarene

We arrived in Portiragnes (this time by boat, instead of car) and had our first lock experience, which

went pretty smoothly despite never having seen the procedure. My crew figured it out quickly. We exited the lock with two other boats, then cruised another hour upstream to just below the lock at Villeneuve-lès-Béziers.

Also by this time, Big John had bashed his head at least five times, and continued to do it for the rest of the trip on a regular basis.

The Canal du Midi in this area is fairly consistent in



Portiragnes Lock

appearance, with grass banks often covered with Iris and "plane" trees planted at regular intervals. These glorious trees are suffering from a canker that was supposedly imported from America during WW2 in ammo boxes, and had led to hundred of trees being felled. Work is restricted to winter months to prevent disruption of the busy tourist trade.

A trip to the Canal du Midi in April is a weather gamble, but



we had great luck and found warm sunny weather for the entire week. We did have some strong Westerlies in the afternoons, but it was quite comfortable all week.

I should point out that these boats are governed to top out at 2000 rpm, which corresponds to a speed of about 8 km/hr (about 5 mph).



Unusual April Weather!

Plane Trees

After a brief walk-about, we returned for a home cooked white fish dinner with veggies and a couple of bottles of red wine.

Day 2

The next morning, we strolled into town to a bakery discovered the day before, bought some breakfast pastries, including very buttery croissants, crusty alsmon twists, heavenly cinnamon raisen twists, and croissants du chovolate, eclairs, and a few bagettes. We then returned to the boat to move ourselves into the on-deck circle for the lock's 9am opening. After passing through the lock, we headed to Béziers, passing many of the landmarks we had seen by car, to pass through three more locks before tackling to Fonséranes Staircase Lock. At one of these locks, we ran into our first giant barge that wasn't simply tied on shore. There are all freight carriers that have been converted into private homes or floating hotels. They are carefully designed to just barely fit through the locks and canals.

One of the mind
boggling facts about



Tight Fit!

the Canal du Midi is that most of it was built in the late 1600's. The excavation and the locks are unbelievable given the technology of the times. The Fonsérannes Staircase lock is even more unbelievable, made up of ten consecutive gates comprising nine locks. The lock only operates one way for three hour



Waiting for the lock to open

intervals, to allow simultaneous use of all the chambers by many boats.

Before getting to the Staircase, we motored across the aqueduct over the Orb River. It's pretty strange driving a boat over a bridge that's high above the countryside - another engineering marvel in its day.

We arrived at the staircase locks just as another boat was entering, so we were able to tail-gate him into the first chamber to begin our ascent of about 24 meters. It went surprisingly smoothly, taking less than 30 minutes for the whole process.



Aqueduct across the Orb River



Fonséranes Staircase

Leaving Béziers, we headed to Colombiers where we moored on the bank, and walked over to town for lunch. The entire town seemed to be under construction with tall gantry cranes everywhere - I guess the economy is picking up! Anyway, we eventually found a route to a water front cafe where we had our meal, which of course included some wine and desserts.

Back aboard, and on to the Malpas Tunnel, a 161m tunnel through a small hillside. Passing through without incident, we



Exiting the Malpas Tunnel

headed for
Capestang, our
destination for the
night.

After mooring short
of the first bridge,
we reconnoitered
the town, admiring
the Cathedral and
touring the Chateau.
We had a nice
dinner at the Grille
in the Plaza in front
of the Church
(every town had a
similar
arrangement).



Fonséranes Staircase

Day 3

The next morning, we returned to town and had a nice breakfast of assorted pastries in the plaza, along with coffees from the Grille. We then toured the Cathedral and headed back to the boat for our next segment.

Since we had booked a round trip route rather than one way, today was our last day of progress before reversing course. Our trip was slightly constrained by the May 1 national holiday, upon which all the locks are closed. Since that was the day of our return, we had to be beyond the last lock in order to make it to the base for our exit.



As we contemplated
how far we should
try to go, we
furiously read the
guides, looking for

John Overthrows the Captain

a nice spot. We stopped in Paraza to go wine tasting, not certain whether this would be our final stop or not. After a good hike up the steep town, we arrived at the



Chateau de Paraza Winery

Somail the day before to get water, so we stopped again, this time for lunch at one of several waterfront restaurants.

SCRIPT>pic("DSCF0410-400.jpg","Lunch in Le Somail)



On the Elevated Canal

winery, sampled a few very nice wines, bought a few bottles for the boat, and asked for restaurant advice from the fellow pouring the samples. He let us know there was only one restaurant, and called for reservations for us. We headed back down the hill stowed the wines on board, then headed over to the Cafe du Port for a very nice dinner in a very intimate setting. Probably the best meal so far!

Day 4

We started the new day with a nice walk along the canal east of Para.

On the water again, we started retracing our steps back towards our starting point. We had stopped in Le



Morning walk near Paraza

After a relaxed meal, we headed on to Capestang. Although we had already spent one night there, we knew exactly where the bakery was, which made it appealing for another visit. We first visited the old graveyard (of which every town has) then strolled over to a patio cafe for a liter of house wine.

Day 5

Priority one was walking up to the

bakery to buy breakfast, which we ate in the plaza while sipping coffees from the Village Grille.



Pastries in Capestang

After a leisurely stroll back to the boat, we started by going under the Capestang Bridge, which is the smallest passage on this section of the Midi.

crowded the Canal must get in the middle of the summer. There are boats parked everywhere near the towns, and all the charter fleets are idle in their home bases on April. Made me glad we gambled on a little cool weather to avoid the crowds.

Passing through Capestang and later Colombiers, you realize how

The Canal du Midi between Paraza and Béziers is elevated above the surrounding countryside, allowing expansive views of the vineyards and field,



Graveyard in Capestang



Capestang Bridge

in addition to the small villages, castles, and livestock.



Dense Traffic

Re-approaching the Alphas Tunnel, we decided to follow the guidebook and visit the Oppidum d'Enserune, a pre-Roman Gaul fortification. Knowing that the site would close for lunch (like everything French), we trekked up a pretty steep hill to arrive at the village. Much to our disappointment, "Closed 12:30pm to 2:00pm for Lunch"



Poppy Fields

translates as "no one can enter after 12 Noon". Sally took this rather personally and griped about it for days afterwards.

Despite being denied entry, we could see some ruins, and had an excellent view of the E'tang de Montady, which is an ancient lake that was drained longed ago through a clever irrigation scheme, resulting is a pattern visible from space.

Continuing on, we re-crossed the Aqueduct over the River Orb, passed through the Fonsérans Staircase, then two more locks in Béziers before taking a sharp right turn and pulling into the Canal Rouge, an unused connector between the Midi and the River Orb.



Gaul Ruins



E'tang du Montady



The main area of Béziers is not near the canal. Walking across a rail yard and freeway, we started looking for a dinner spot, only to be denied repeatedly due to not having reservations. We ended up hiking quite a ways up the hill upon which the city is built, before finding a place that would take us. Luckily, their food was excellent (and beautiful).

Day 6

The downside of having a nice mooring in a secluded tree canopy is that we spent the rest of the trip sweeping leaves and flowers all around the boat. Upon leaving Béziers, we had one more lock to navigate in Portiragnes before the May 1 holiday. Passing the Le Boat base (where we started) we

Canal Rouge

Round Lock is the last lock on the Canal, which passes you through to the Hérault River, which opens to the Mediterranean.



Agde Round Lock

continued east through the town of Vias, arriving in Agde. Agde's

We explored the ancient city of Agde, eventually settling on a restaurant on a floating barge on the Hérault River. A little after-dinner exploration of the River and old buildings ended with returning to the boat for the evening.

Day 7

We went back to Agde for some breakfast pastries and further exploration, then cast off to head back to the barn. We had an uneventful arrival at the Le Boat base, backing into the last open slot along the quay. We ate lunch at the



l'Autremont Restaurant

base restaurant, and returned to the boat to begin packing our gear and spend a last night aboard. Finding the base restaurant closed for dinner, we drove to Portragnes and drove around in confused circles until we found the won center, and while on foot, we managed to have dinner at a pleasant place that opened a few minutes early when the owner saw us peering though the fence gate.

The near tragedy of the entire trip occurred while eating appetizers of olives, cheeses, and bread before dinner, Kathy fat-fingered her camera and deleted all her photos. Luckily, when we got back to the boat, Jim was able to download a deleted files recovery program, which saved the day(s).

Day 8

Disembarking at am, we hopped into the rental car and headed to Carcassonne, and our flight to Dublin. Arriving in Carcassonne in late morning, we found a parking place in the narrow streets of the Old City, convinced ourselves we would be able to find the car again, and hiked up the hill to the Castle. After stumbling briefly trying to find the entrance, we toured the nicely restored castle, including a nice lunch within the castle.

After getting our fill of French castle, we returned to the car and headed for the Hotel Montsegur. Once we found it, we decided to do some laundry, which mean a couple of missed turns and finally spotting the location, where we had the typical laundromat experience - slow and painful. Once we got everything dry, we re-discovered our Hotel, checked it, and convened in the dining room to share a bottle of our wine.



The proprietor recommended a restaurant, and called for reservations for us, so we eventually found our way to an interesting restaurant L'ecurie which is in a very old paddock. Each table is in its own stall, and memorabilia of an era past were all around the table.



Carcassonne Castle

Day 9

After breakfast in the hotel, we headed to the Carcassonne

Laundry Day

Airport for our flight to Dublin. Our experience with RyanAir was totally contrary to our expectations. Maybe because we had already printed our boarding passes and reserved luggage checking, we had no surprise fees as warned on all the Internet blogs. The "extra legroom" seats were very comfortable, and the overall experience was A-One.



Ireland - Phase One by Car

Because our two boat *L'ecurie Restaurant* adventures had a five day spread, we decided to spend the intervening time touring Ireland. Having been there twenty years earlier, Jim wanted to see new spots, but include beautiful Clare and



Convolutd Drive

Kerry counties. Googling "best bubs" and "recommended B&Bs" led to a whirlwind tour of the countryside. Next trip, we'll probably spend more time in fewer places.

Our first day in Ireland was a bad day for several reasons. After taking the shuttle bus to the rental lot, we got a rental car, and immediately found that my Garmin Nuvi's newly updated map data was defective - you couldn't search for addresses or POIs, which made it pretty much useless. After a frustrating 30 minutes fiddling with the Nuvi, we gave up and headed to Clonakilty, our first overnight of this part of the trip. Between being a little frustrated and not being used to the right-side driving thing, I sideswiped the gate at the rental yard, putting a giant scratch on both left side doors. As we found out a few minutes later, I also punctured the front tire, which was pointed out to us as we sped down the M6, shredding the tire. Fifteen minutes to upload the trunk, change to the spare tire, and get underway once again. Of course I worried about the car damage consequences for the remainder of the trip, since I had declined the CDW per my credit card company's advice.

We found our way to Kilkenny Castle, but by the time we found a parking spot and walked back to the Castle, it was closing for the day. We did get to walk around the outside a bit, but missed the meat of the exhibit. Our next goal was Cahir Castle, which was another race to reach before closing (that we lost). Time to take a deep breath and start over!

We stumbled on to our first night's lodging, the Glendine Irish Home B&B, which was a pleasant walk away from Clonakilty. After chatting with the proprietor, we headed for town for, hopefully, our first live music. Although my planning had indicated that music often starts about 9pm, the truth was more like 10:30pm or worse. Not convenient for folks used to an early bedtime.

We walked around Clonakilty for awhile before settling on the Copper Pot for dinner. After dinner, we went to De Barre which is the place for session music, but there was not a trace of life. We walked to several other pubs to find that there just isn't any



music on a Tuesday night in a small town. Frustrated, we hiked back to the B&B, where I was able to take advantage of the great Internet connectivity (that we found everywhere in Ireland) to download a better map for my Nuvi.

Day 10

Our hosts, Mick and Mary were very friendly and full of information as they fed us a great country breakfast.

We headed out for our next highlight, which was the



Kilkenny Castle

somewhat overstated TempleBryan. This collection of standing stones is in a private farm field, and there's no parking or even a pullout. We parked in an intersection and walked down the narrow lane and climbed the stone fence to access a very modest collection of stones.

Semi-Irish Breakfast - no Blood Pudding

Another 20 minutes down the road, we came to Drombeg Circle, a much more impressive collection of stones and alters. Not in the same league as Stonehenge, but way better than Squirrel Henge in Selma!



We continued with a very scenic route around the Ring of Kerry which included a high mountain pass (high, for Ireland's standards) and passed through

TempleBryan

would have a view worth the long, stressful drive. Unfortunately, we were completely socked in by drizzle and fog, so the view was mostly green grass and rocks, along with the occasional sheep.

Healy Pass which Mick promised



Before tackling the winding switchbacks of Healy Pass, we saw a lunch spot named Ouvane Falls Inn overlooking Bantry Bay. The highlight was the waitress was a Romanian citizen, so John and she hit it off great, talking favorite foods, desserts, and booze.

Drombeg Circle



We arrived at Druid Cottage B&B, checked in, and

Drombeg Circle

after a brief nap, we headed out to Kenmare for the evening's activities. A short hike brought us into downtown, where we started seeking music and dinner. Our B&B hostess had made some recommendations, and we eventually ended up at for dinner and music at the Coachmans Hotel. We ate dinner right next to three musicians, although one of them was reluctant to play his penny whistle, since he didn't seem to know any of the tunes the others were playing. The fiddle and accordion players hadn't played together but could play many traditional pieces perfectly well. The music was good, and simple, and the hours were much better than anything else we suffered for the rest of the trip!



After the session ended and the food was gone, we

Druid Cottage



headed down the road to O'Donnabhain's Pub, where an acoustic guitar player, Cormac O'Mahoney, performed many familiar drinking songs and sea shanties. We stayed until the bitter end, and although both musical treats were enjoyed that day, I felt I hadn't delivered the real Irish experience to John & Sally yet.

Day 11

After another very nice breakfast, we headed off for Killarney National Park where we made a few stops to enjoy the scenery and one longer walk along the edge of Muckross Lake to a small bridge where the tourist boats head upstram to the Upper Lake. Lots of birds, interesting plants, and lake views.

At the edge of Killarney NP is found Ross Castle, which is a pretty



Then on to the big city of Limerick, where we took multiple wrong turns trying to find the entrance to the

Ross Castle

Hotel Absolute. After checking in, we headed out to find dinner and more music. While strolling down the Shannon River, John chatted up an old codger, and he offered lots of info. He thought the musician at our target Pub (Curragower) was not any good, and he recommended Squire Mcguire's Pub for the real thing. He walked us to the bar, then continued to escort us to a restaurant that he thought was one of the best.

O'Donnabhain's Pub

good example of a circa 1500 tower fortress. They're dandied up the site with horse drawn carriages, boat rides out onto the lake, and what not. As with most Irish castles, Ross has had its ups and downs over the years, from pillaging to mis-guided remodels. It was a guided tour, so we got to see every detail and hear tales about the early residents and their lifestyles



Limerick on the Shannon River

After dinner, we walked a short block to Squire McQuire's Pub, walking in a grabbing seats right next to the area reserved for musicians. Over the next hour the pub filled with older folks, all dressed to the nines, and who all seemed to know each other. Eventually, four older musicians strolled in, sat down, and started



Squire Mcguire's Pub

playing. Although they did play some traditional music, the crowd seemed to be there to hear them sing ballads and love songs, which they each did in turn. One particularly well dressed woman seemed to have quite the crush on John. Definitely a different take on music - not quite what we'd sought, but very entertaining.

About midnight we threw in the towel and headed back to the hotel. The Hotel Absolute was quite impressive, especially for being the same price as your typical B&B. Very new, modern construction, with complicated appliances, and enabled lights which took us awhile to figure out.

Day 12

After a buffet breakfast at the hotel, we walked to The Hunt Museum to take a guided tour through the extension collection of early Irish artifacts. We had planned to tour King John's Castle, but we had to hustle back to the hotel to make check-out time. Having seen the the castle wasn't that impressive, we instead left Limerick heading for Galway. We saw an exit for Bunratty Castle, and to make up for skipping King John's Castle, we pulled off the highway.

Buratty Castle and Folk Park is a



The Hunt Museum

somewhat pricey but expansive site. The Castle itself is a fully restored example of a Tower House initially built in the 1400s. It is fully furnished with period furniture, and offers an excellent glimpse into life in those times. The surrounding Folk Park is an authentic village of the time, with examples of dwellings of all the social classes, merchant shops, and



Bunratty Castle

of course many of the shops were in operation, including a pub and restaurant.



Bunratty Castle

One interesting tidbit gleaned from the tour was that the residents hung their clothing in the "bathroom" to allow the ammonia wafting up the chute to kill the lice in their clothes. They also offer authentic medieval dinners and gatherings that must be very entertaining.

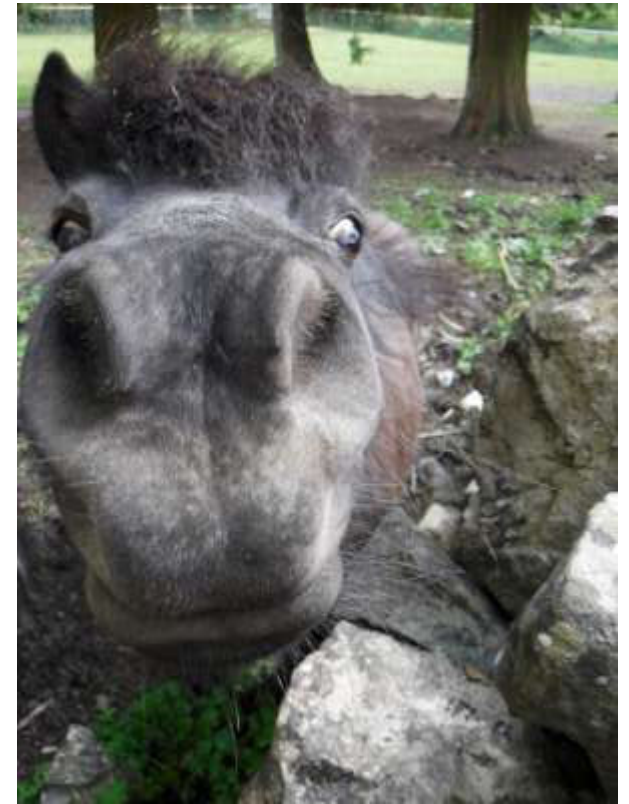
The exhibits included typical gardens, pasture, chickens running loose, and all the other things familiar to the period. There were docents in authentic dress in many of the buildings baking, weaving, and the like.

We had a nice lunch at Durty Nellie's which was next to the

Bunratty site.



Lunch



Folk Park

The next stop on our perhaps overly organized itinerary was the Poul nabroune Dolmen, which is one of many standing stones in County Clare. It was really just a simple horizontal slab standing on a few stone legs, but it was well documented to have served as a worship and burial site at various times.

Retracing much of drive we then headed to Burren Nature Sanctuary, which was nothing like I expected. We got there just at closing, but they allowed us in, and we had to let ourselves out when we were done. Much friendlier than the Oppidum on France!

A privately run non-profit, the Sanctuary consisted of a long trail through plant





Burren Nature Sanctuary

and animal displays, *Poulnabroune Dolmen* past tidal ponds (curious objects on their own, since we were nowhere near any tides), and past displays that were carefully designed to have appeal to both children and adults.

For example, each display had either lots of scientific information, or alternately included an interactive object such as a small elf house which contained a question to be answered along the upcoming trail.



Burren Nature Sanctuary

We continued on to the Prague House B&B in Galway City. Galway is a fairly small town with an emphasis on entertainment. Not only was every other building a pub or restaurant, but the streets were overflowing with mostly drunken young Irish and tourists. Our proprietress had made a few recommendations for dinner and music.

After a good dinner at one of the few places that was not overflowing with customers, probably because you had to fetch your own beer from the pub downstairs, we settled into a seat right next to the "reserved for musicians" booth at Tig Coili, a highly rated music place on the 'net. It was elbow to elbow with drunk young footballers, and when the musicians eventually walked in, seeing the seething masses occupying their booth, they turned around and walked right out. It turns out they went around to the back door and eventually started playing at the other end of the Pub. There was no way work through the crowd, so we stood outside the back door for a few minutes before the cold drove us to seek out the second recommended spot, The Crane Bar where there was a folk duo. We lasted through the set, then headed to bed.

Day 13

After another nice breakfast supplied by Prague House, we headed to Carrick-on-Shannon to board our next boat.



Burren Nature Sanctuary

Ireland - Phase Two by Boat

We arrived at the Emerald Star base as they were leaving for lunch, so we headed to Kelly's Market to get provisions. Returning to the dock we boarded our home for the next week. During our car tour, I had received an email from LeBoat saying we had gotten a free upgrade to a larger boat (43ft instead of 37ft), so our temporary home was somewhat more luxurious than we expected. Although it might have been less friendly to big and tall John it did have an inverter aboard that allowed use of his CPAP machine, which made everyone sleep better.

The first thing noticed is how different our two cruises were. The Shannon is an actual river, with the inherent shallow and convoluted shoreline, which means unlike the Canal du Midi, you can only moor where it is intended, not just anywhere you can pull over. Since anchoring is forbidden, that means you moor at quays provided by towns and villages. One of the consequences of this is that is practically

impossible to moor somewhere that there isn't a nearby restaurant (and of course, being Ireland, pubs).

Also being a real river, there are many fewer locks to go through. Unlike France, where there are paid lock keepers and there is no fee, the Irish lock keepers charge 1,50€ and don't mind tips.



Jamestown Canal

space for about ten cruisers at the public wharf.

Most mooring is free unless you choose to use power which is dispensed from little attached machines that take smartcards and/or coins. We never found ourselves in need of power, so we never had to figure it out. Water is generally non-potable (possibly due to the Shannon's extreme Spring flooding) and was free sometimes and a few coins at some places.

Another important difference between our two cruising adventures is how sewage is dealt with. In France, everything goes overboard into the canal while on the Shannon, everything goes into a holding tank, which needs to be emptied occasionally by the user. This is free unless you want someone to do the dirty work for you.

One temporary difference between the cruises is that it was now overcast and drizzly. We had a couple of days of dreary mornings, followed by highly unusual sunny days. Getting sun-burned in Ireland is a pretty special treat!



The Shannon

About 45 minutes downstream from Carrick-on-Shannon, we entered the Jamestown Canal which ends in the Albert Lock. This route short-cuts an area of the river that includes some shallows and rapids that would be otherwise impassible. As in France, the lock keepers live at the lock. Albert lock's keepers are a friendly couple, and we met the husband today and the wife on the way home.

Another hour brought us to the village of Dromod where there is



Part of the Cox Empire

We strolled into the quaint little village, and found that almost every food and/or drinking establishment was named Cox's. Luckily the food and drink were good! After thoroughly exploring the village, we returned to Cox's Restaurant for dinner. Afterwards, once we discovered there was no music to be had without a car or long taxi ride, we walked back towards the boat with a diversion on a public nature walk slicing through the center of town.

There was an upcoming auction of the old Garda Station - we fantasized about buying it and moving here if the 2016 election went the way it seemed headed.

There were Mute Swans everywhere we went. Breeding season was just getting underway, so we saw a lot of competition between males for mates, some intriguing mating



Dromod





Nesting Mute Swan

dances, and lots of *Where's my Checkbook?* nesting birds. On our last day on the water, we actually spotted newly hatched chicks, so the timing of the various events seemed to be pretty broad.

We headed out from Dromod, back into the main river channel, heading downstream to the drawbridge/lock combination at Roosky. The Roosky Bridge is a little higher than others, so we didn't need to have it

raised to squeeze under, and continued on to the lock. The same person typically runs both the bridge and the lock when they are within a few hundred yards, so the wait for the lock sometimes involves waiting for the keeper to bicycle from one task to the next. Another few kilometers down the river brought us to Tarmonberry where we found ourselves stymied by the drawbridge until it re-opened after lunch.



Roosky Bridge

So we cleverly had lunch ourselves while waiting for the bridge and lock combination at Keenan's, where their presentation was stupendous.



Tarmonberry Bridge



Tarmonberry Lock

with the bridge issue on our way upstream in a few days.

The quay in Lanesborough includes a newly developed playground that has several giant musical instruments, that will no doubt drive everyone along the quay crazy once the children start using it!

After exiting the lock, we pressed on to Lanesborough, our target for overnight mooring. We pulled into a spot along the quay, and promptly stumbled on a sign stating that the Lanesborough Bridge was being renovated and would be closed from 6am to 6pm on weekdays.



Keenan's

Being Sunday, we decided to cast off and move to the downstream side of the bridge where there was a newly minted public marina, with more modern floating docks. I immediately went into brain overdrive while I tried to figure out how to change our itinerary to deal

Knowing that music starts late, we killed some time touring an old church and poking through the graveyard, before getting serious about food and music.



Old Church and Graveyard

At this point we suffered from a little mis-information. There was a sign on the quay pointing to An Crios TaarThala which the Internet confirmed was a great music venue. Also, a passerby indicated there would be music in the Pub "right there" and good food was available. So we went into the Lifeboat Pub and ordered beers, only to find they had no food nor music, and never ever had either.



Lanesborough Quay

After bottoms up, we walked next door to a very fancy restaurant that seemed terribly inconvenienced that we had failed to make reservation, but they did eventually seat us, and served what might have been the most artful dinners of our entire trip.

Unfortunately, the actual advertised pub was being remodeled and we later found out it had closed three years ago and nothing had been done to re-open. It had recently been sold to a new owner, who had still done no work on the project. We asked around and learned that we just wouldn't find any music tonight.



Nothing to see here...



The Lifeboat Bar

Day 14

We left Lanesborough to tackle Loche Ree, which is a large lake on the Shannon, almost ten miles in length and half that width. The guidebooks warn that sizeable waves could develop and recommended making the crossing in the morning. We spent three hours of confusing navigation to find our way across the loche. There are shoals all over, and the navigation markers were apart by about the visibility, so you were constantly going "straight ahead" until you saw the next marker. By 11am when we completed the transit, there were one foot wind waves, which made a slightly lumpy ride. We eventually found ourselves in Athlone, which is an ancient city that was fought over repeatedly over the centuries since it was a critical crossing point on the Shannon.

We pulled in at an open spot on the quay, and lo and behold, about fifty





Oldest Bar in Ireland - 900 A.D.

Trails, which walked up river for about a mile, then into town and back towards the boat away from the river. There were lots of very elegant signs describing flowers and animals, as we found in much of Ireland - they were well prepared for tourists.

We then went to My Melody Restaurant for a nice dinner, returned to the boat for a short nap, then headed to Sean's Bar for music.

feet away was *Loche Ree*
Sean's Bar.

Although much of the building is newer, one wall was still standing since 900 AD. Although my original plan was to only have lunch in Athlone, the appeal of guaranteed music made us give up our goal of Shannonbridge for the evening. We still had many hours before the music scene cranked up, so we started out with a nice lunch at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

After our late lunch, we headed for Athlone Castle for a tour. They were closing early, so we lived with just seeing the portions of the Castle that were open air. We then hiked the Green and Brown



Athlone Castle

The music at Sean's was more folk than traditional, but still quite good. We stayed to the end, and stumbled back the fifty feet to the boat for a sound sleep.

Day 15

Although we had given up on getting to Shannonbridge, we decided to head downstream a little farther before making our turn to head back to Carrick-on-Shannon. In hindsight, a one-way charter might have been a better way to see more areas, but even retracing our steps, we saw new things that we would have missed on a one-way passage.



About two hours down river led us to Closnacnois, an ancient seat of early Christianity. Lots of derelict buildings and old graves, in addition to a nice visitors center with dioramas and displays, along with a nice restaurant for lunch.



Sean's Bar

Closnacnois



There were many fisherman scattered on the Shannon during the trip, and most of them were hoping for Pike. Although the eating isn't easy due to the bones, the fight they put up is legendary. At this point we had to head home, so we reversed course and returned to Athlone, which gave an opportunity to see the interior portion of the Athlone Castle.

Constrained by the Lanesborough bridge closure, we departed Athlone to set up an early crossing of Loche Ree the next morning, First stop was Quigley's Marina for diesel and a holding tank pump out. Unfortunately, they were closed for the day by then so we proceeded to Glasson which is another 45 minutes past Quigley's. It was a little confusing approaching Glasson, so we ended up at what was signed as "Visitor Parking" but we think it was actually parking for visitors to a private marina. Nonetheless, we stayed put, and hiked about one mile into the village of Glasson.

Shannon Pike



Grogan's in Glasson

We selected among the few dinner spots available, and again found no music. We finished dessert just in time to walk the mile back down the narrow lane at dusk, using a headlamp to ward off speeding cars. When we got to the boat, we found we had to climb over a gate for access, which given our state of inebriation and light conditions, was a challenge, to say the least.

Day 16

After breakfast on the boat by Chef Kathy, we headed back to Quigley's to buy fuel and pump the holding tank. Leaving Quigley's at 10am we

began our AM attack on Loche Ree with fewer navigation issues than on our first crossing, mainly because visibility was better. Getting back to Lanesborough, we went out to Sister's Bistro (?) for lunch, then returned to the boat, napping until we noticed the bridge had re-opened for the evening. We moved the boat from the marina to a small enclosed quay upstream from the bridge.



Ferocious Viking Warrior

A talk with the bridge workers informed us that Wednesday nights were a music "drop in" night at Clark's across the river, so after re-visiting the ruin of an old tower house to do a publicity shot of the donkeys for SFI, we scurried over to Clark's to confirm the rumor. Then after John talked to the proprietor of Bridie's Tackle Shop about fishing and fisherman things, we hiked a very nice nature trail along the river. Working up an appetite, we ordered take-out at Ping's Chinese and took the food to Clark's Pub to eat. At about 9:30 the Pub filled with drunken Germans, and following them, about ten musicians.



Lanesborough Commons



SFI plug

We met a young married couple that had rented from LeBoat and had run aground in Lough Ree. They had been stranded for half a day, so were anxious to get an early start to get the boat back to Carrick-on-Shannon in time, so they left after only a little music.

At about the expected time, the musicians started playing some genuine Irish trad, with reels, jigs, and drinking songs. It was a mixture of some fine musicians and some beginners, at least one of which was painful. The Germans were making lots of requests for things they could sing to, and it was obvious the leader of the musicians would have rather ignored them. Eventually, he packed it in, and the whole group dissolved.



Clark's on a Wednesday

Day 17

After breakfast in Lanesborough, we headed upstream. We took the sharp right turn off the Shannon, heading for Clondra. Between the Shannon and the Clondra Lock, it looks very similar to the Canal du Midi. Shortly after passing through the lock, we entered the Camlin River, and then turned right again for Richmond Harbor. We took a last (and marginal)



Clondra Canal

mooring just below the Richmond Lock, and walked the short distance to the Harbor, which was chock full, grabbing a nice lunch at the Richmond Inn.

Continuing on, we made the rest of the loop, setting a little closer to the wildlife and stock that on the Shannon, since the waterway was so much narrower.



More Swans



While waiting for the Roosky Lock, the proprietor of the Black Pig Gift and Tackle Shop recommended Grange or Kilglass, where there were "modern" docks for a more relaxed experience. He didn't think would find music anywhere, so we walked up to the market and bought some fish to make for dinner, and continued upstream.

Once in Loche Bofin, we took the left turn towards Grange and after another hour, arrived at Kilglass. Did I mention how nice the weather had

Lots of lambs

been since the first drizzly day?



KilGlass did have modern docks (e.g. floating) but other than one house and a field full of cattle, there was nothing there but a parking lot and boat launch. We finally had an outdoor meal in the bright sunshine, although the BBQ on the boat was pretty weird, and the fish wasn't memorable.



Sunburn in Ireland!

Dinner on the veranda

Day 18

After a breakfast on the boat and a leg stretch up the hill and back, we returned to the Shannon, passed through the Albert Canal again, and arrived in Carrick-on-Shannon in time for lunch at Cryan's Restaurant. We returned to the boat to do some quick laundry, but between the tiny washers and vague operating instructions, it turned into an ordeal that took all afternoon. At some point, asking about music, we got a strong recommendation to head to Anderson's Thatch Pub, which was a few kilometers out of town. We went to the Oarsman Inn for dinner, then hopped into a taxi for a short but exciting ride to the Thatch. Although my driving earlier in the trip had frightened Kathy to hysterics, the taxi driver gave her a whole new perspective, and I didn't get any more complaints.



The Thatch was an interesting pub, where the owner

Carrick-on-Shannon



was the principal musician (his mother was the music teacher and his father owned the bar), and he was joined by a stream of his friends. Between our party of four and a group of young women having a bridal shower, although it was more like a stag party, we were treated like royalty, and the musicians spent all their off time conversing with us about all manner of things.

They were still going strong at 1am, but we were flagging, so the owner called a taxi for us, which provided further reinforcement of what a careful driver I had been.

Day 19

After our 9am boat exit, we headed to Newgrange. Newgrange is a highly developed

Newgrange is one of the mound attractions, and it includes a tunnel into its interior that passes sunlight only at sunrise on the Winter Solstice. Knowth, another similar construction only passes sunlight on the Spring and Fall equinoxes. Both mounds were constructed about 2500 B.C., and were used as tombs for important citizens of the time. They took several generations to build, which was a huge investment for such a primitive culture.

After finishing our tours and looking at the Visitor Center displays a bit more, we headed to Dublin for our last evening in

The Thatch

tourist attraction, where you must park at a visitor center and sign up for tours or the two principal attractions, which include a shuttle bus each. Upon arrival, the next available tour gave us a chance to wander around the Visitor Center, and then have lunch in the cafeteria.



Newgrange



Newgrange

thoroughly lost, but eventually found O'Sheas's B&B in downtown Dublin. It took several passes to find a spot to pull over, and Kathy ran in to find out where to park, which took a few more passes to find the parking garage entrance. We then hauled our luggage two blocks to O'shea's and checked in. The area around the B&B was nothing but solid B&B's although they were really mostly slightly rundown hotels. O'shea's is working on renovating, but isn't there yet.

After a brief nap, we met in the lobby to discuss dinner, and the O'shea's Restaurant menu looked perfect, so we took the easy route and ate right there. While discussing music plans, John detected that our waitress was another Romanian, and she informed us that the group playing in the hotel bar were excellent, so we didn't have far to go to find the music either. A trio named Quarter Mile included a guitar, a bodhran (small drum) and fiddle. All were tremendous musicians, and they put on by far the best display of traditional music we had seen the whole trip. It was an excellent way to finish our adventure.

Europe. After managing to input the wrong target into our GPS, we got



Solstice tunnel

Day 20

Skipping breakfast due to our 7am departure, we headed back to the parking garage only to find it closed until 9am. Luckily, there was a security guard that answered the phone and while watching us on security cameras, directed us into a back door and eventually opened the garage door to let us out. A quick drive to the airport, a little confusion finding the rental car return, and we faced the rental car reckoning. Although the repair estimate was pretty outrageous, the company apparently deals with a lot of damages, and it is all straight out of menu for various parts. My credit card company will hopefully cover the more than \$3000 cost.

We took the shuttle to departures, then split up as we got into different lines, never to meet back up. Our flight was uneventful, but took over 24 hours in travel time, including long layovers in JFK and Seattle. Add another 9 hours of time zones, and needless to say, it took a few days to recover.



Reckoning