



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 inventor 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

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

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.

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.



Dromod



There was an upcoming auction of 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

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.



Part of the Cox Empire



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



Keenan's

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.

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



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!

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 inconvenient 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.

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 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.



Athlone Castle

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.

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.



Sean's Bar

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.



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.





Grogan's in Glasson

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.

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



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

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.

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)



SFI plug



Clark's on a Wednesday

Clark's on a Wednesday



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

Clondra Canal



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?



Dinner on the veranda

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!

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 dimmer, 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



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.

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

