

## Return to Paris and Beyond

Our local boat club Weybridge Mariners had no formal down river cruise planned for this year. Now I have wanted to take Alouette back to Paris and down to Lyon for some time. I mentioned this to see if anyone else fancied a trip through France. Several people expressed interest. The result was that preparations were made for four or five boats to join us with a proposed departure in May. I prepared a Route Plan as far as Calais and identified some requirements related to the trip including the distances from Calais to Lyon via Paris. However, personal circumstances made this a no go for Su and me.

Thus a trip later in the year was discussed. This time there were to be three other boats but for different reasons two of these were unable to make it. This left only Wisecrack (another Broom 30) and us.



Wisecrack and Alouette

Wisecrack so named as a tribute to Ernie Wise who first had her, is now owned by Andrew and Celia Cotter. Andrew is the Thames Region Co-ordinator for the Broom Owners' Club and both he and Celia were keen to take their boat to Paris. A second Route Plan to meet our SOLAS commitment was made providing details of waypoints and courses. Detailed planning for an inland route through France was carried out by Celia who checked for the best places to stop en route using predominantly the "Carte Guides de Navigation Fluvial". The overall time set for our holiday was to be about two months.

The earliest that Su and I could get away was the 6<sup>th</sup> July. Not the ideal time as this would mean a high probability that it would get hot as we moved south. Irrespective, this was the date we set off. We made for Chiswick Pier for a first stop to enable us to do an early morning run down to St Katherine's Dock by Tower Bridge before the tourist RIB's were in full action.

We had a pleasant trip down Saturday morning into London and went into St Kats marina without having to tie up outside. Andrew had spent a lot of time working in London so after getting sorted out we all went ashore visiting some of his old haunts many of which served alcoholic refreshment. We did, however, manage to squeeze in a visit to the oldest church in the City of London, All Hallows by the Tower which survived the Great Fire of London. The local lady church guide was very informative on the church history and the many famous people associated with its past. We returned later in the evening to enjoy an 'Evening at the Opera', which they hosted.

The next day, Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup> July we all decided on a river-bus trip to Greenwich where we visited the Market and did some general sight seeing. We were not in any rush as all the time we were monitoring the weather. Our single engine boats (Alouette 35 HP) are slow and have displacement hulls which means that we do not like to go out with wind over tide or sea conditions of more than Force 3 or occasional 4

Monday morning we left St Kat's and moved down to Limehouse where we planned to get the latest weather updates via the Cruising Association. After spending time on their computer (courtesy of Jeremy Batch), we looked at what else was on in London. As we were unable to get theatre tickets for any of the shows that we fancied, we opted for a meal at the Grapes on Narrow Street which is part owned by the actor Sir Ian McKellen. This pub which survived the bombing of London is reported to be about 500 years old and along with the Prospect of Whitby and the Town of Ramsgate is one of our favourites.

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> July was the day the RAF were celebrating 100 years with a Commemorative Flypast over Buckingham Palace. The four of us took a bus and then walked up to the Mall where we watched the whole show. It started with the helicopters followed by a Lancaster, Spitfires and Hurricanes all in formation. Plenty of jets flew over including Tornados, the new F35 Lightnings and an impressive show of Typhoons flying in formation to spell out "100". The finale was the red, white and blue trails from the Red Arrows as they followed down the Mall and over the Palace where the royals were watching. It was a truly wonderful spectacle that must have taken a considerable amount of organising.

Our final day in London was taken on a visit to Borough Market. Again, we travelled up by bus and after a morning wandering round the market we had lunch upstairs at the Market Porter. The afternoon was spent strolling along the South Bank before returning to the Limehouse Marina.

We left the marina just after midday the next day Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> July. The weather forecast was favourable. However, our mooring in Limehouse was badly affected by duckweed coming in from the Canal. At times most of the basin looked like a well mown lawn. I asked if we could stop on the pontoon outside the lock gate to clear our filters. We were given permission and then with clean filters we set off down to Queenborough. We passed through the Barrier as directed and had a pleasant run down on the tide. This is still a long trip for us but coming from Limehouse was some two hours shorter than if we had gone straight from Teddington. We tied up at Queenborough at 1930 just in time to get up to the Flying Dutchman for drinks and a meal.

We left Q'boro on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> July. The forecast was variable 3 with smooth seas which was favourable for a route across the Kentish Flats. After Spile we used the S Cardinal as a waypoint. This is positioned by the rock berms protecting where the London Array and the Kentish Flats Offshore wind farm cables cross. We made for Copperas and the Gore Channel. It was then S E Margate, Longnose, N. Foreland and into Ramsgate where we tied up at 1845.

The next day we spent in Ramsgate where Su and I caught up with my sister, her family and some old friends. My nephew even managed to get a tin of Plumber's Mait to reseal my depth sounder transducer which had come loose, as I was unable to locate anywhere locally that sold it. Su and I finished the day meeting up with everyone for a meal at the Delphi Greek restaurant overlooking the harbour. It was a great evening with some of us being invited by our hostess/waitress to join in with a party downstairs where there was Greek Dancing

On Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July after refuelling we left the harbour to take the tide down to SW Goodwin where we turned on a 135 degree course to cross the shipping lanes. Half way across we spotted a very fast vessel coming up behind. Fearing it would turn us over I made a hard turn to port to try and avoid the effect of its wake. Wisecrack followed my action. We then saw that it was a lifeboat and was actually making for us. It transpired that after sending my passage TR to Dover Coastguard when I returned to Ch 16 my transmitter stayed on in the transmit mode and I was jamming the Emergency Channel. Although the Press-To-Talk button appeared OK there was clearly a serious problem. I immediately turned the VHF off and apologised.



Taken by Andrew aboard Wisecrack

After confirming that I had a back up VHF system and knew our commitment for crossing the Traffic Separation scheme they left us to continue on our way.

On reaching Calais C8 Starboard buoy we called up Port Control informing them of our desired destination into the Canal System. We were told to enter the port quickly. We then had a problem trying to contact the Carnot Lock and eventually called Calais Port Control again. We were told to wait by the gate but after moving across we were told by shore personnel that we could not stay there. Another call to Calais Port Control resulted in us being told that we could not go through to Carnot until 15 minutes before 2 o'clock in the morning. We wondered whether the World Cup Final (France v Croatia) had anything to do with the delay? It was a long wait all evening with plenty of hooting noise from fans in all the passing cars and general cheering of the French victory. We eventually went through in the dark which was not an easy passage. Calais Port Control confirmed that we could continue through to Batellerie where we tied up.

Monday morning we made our way to the VNF Office. Unfortunately it was not open and it seemed we had to get our licences from Bethune. Thus we left Calais and went into the canal system at 1100 bound for Watten. The run involved 4 bridges which had to be lifted by the lock-keeper who travelled by car to each one in turn.

We have been to Watten several times before but found that it was no longer possible to get a drink or refreshments on site. This was not a big problem as we were able to eat in the village which is only a short walk. Later we returned to the boats where we retired for the night.

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> July. After clearing the weed filters and checking fuel and oil we left Watten to continue our journey. Lunch was taken at Arques where I met up again with Pierre and Yannick DesBas. Pierre is the Port Captain I first met on Alouette nearly 20 years ago. We got a big welcome as he remembered our boat from previous visits. It transpired that the marina has been taken over by a big consortium and that Pierre no longer provides restaurant facilities. However, he was able to do a take away service so we all opted for his speciality - spare ribs.





We brought plates and cutlery from the boat and sat outside on one of his tables. As expected the spare ribs got top marks. Pierre told us that he was giving up at the end of the season and that they were moving away. He has a small aircraft which he will be keeping in the grounds of where they will be living.

As we needed to make progress we moved off after eating but told them that we would call in and stay over on the way back from Paris. So at just after 1415 we set off out of the marina behind a tug with a very large tow which we had to stay behind for a considerable distance. Our destination was Aire sur Lys where we stayed overnight before moving on to Bethune. Now Celia and Andrew are canasta fans. As Su and I used to play many years ago, the four of us would often play when tied up for overnight stops. It was always husbands versus wives and served as a pleasant way to end the day when we stayed on board.

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> we set off early in the morning. After passing under 15 or so bridges we tied up near Bethune. We eventually found the VNF Office where we purchased our vignettes (licences) for a month at a cost of 104 euros for each boat.

The next morning we let go at 0650. It was an early start. Just after 0735 we passed Beuvry where there is a marina on the starboard side under the bridge which may have been a better stopping place. A little after 1000, we tied up at Pont a Vendin for a rest. There was a garage just across the road which we hoped might have diesel. Unfortunately it was closed. Unbelievably, a car came along and stopped alongside. It was driven by the owner of the garage. His name is Rodolphe Ringeval. He insisted on taking us in his car to fill up at the nearest garage that had diesel. Andrew and I both carried a spare 5 gallon can as emergency back up which we put into the back of Rodolphe's car. His help was most fortuitous, as operating the fuel pump using our cards was not straightforward. Again, Rodolphe came to our assistance. He then ran us back to the boats where we all had a beer aboard Wisecrack and talked about our plans. Rodolphe told us about his father coming from Algeria and starting the garage business many years earlier. We thanked Rodolphe for all his help before setting off again.

Our next stop was the Port Fluvial at Courcelles Les Lens. Here, we were both helped tie up by a young guy working with a lady resident aboard a large blue motor cruiser which was alongside. The lady introduced herself as Lou. She not only told us about her time there but also took Su and Celia to the local supermarket in her car. She was so friendly that we all agreed that we would call in and see her when we returned on our way back home from our holiday.

We left the Port Fluvial early Friday 20<sup>th</sup> July on the Canal de la Deule and continued down towards Douai passing possibly a hundred laid up peniches. We continued through the locks at Douai and Courchelettes and on into the Canal de Sensee. The Canal du Nord which was on our planned route to Paris comes off the Sensee near Arleux. We got there just before 1100. Both boats were tied up sharing a single ring on the bank at the junction. The shared ring, taking the main strain, enabled us to use our mooring stakes without undue concern that they might be pulled out by the wash of passing peniches using the Canal du Nord.

The Canal du Nord has 3 sections. The first runs from Arleux to Peronne and has 12 locks and a 4,350 metre tunnel at the summit. The tunnel has a double width passing stretch in the middle so that vessels can transit from both directions at the same time as controlled by a traffic light system.

Saturday morning we went into the first lock at 0710. Often we were in the locks with big peniches. We exited the 4<sup>th</sup> Lock at 1005 when Andrew informed me that there was white steam coming from my exhaust. Although my water temperature seemed normal I pulled over. The filter was not badly clogged but I rodded thru' the water intake pipe and checked the engine coolant level before we set off again. It was another three hours covering three more locks before we reached the tunnel. We both took down our biminis although this was not actually necessary.

The locks on the Canal du Nord are not quite like those on the non-tidal Thames. Unfortunately Wisecrack got into difficulties at one of the locks after the tunnel. A line got caught up and they pulled a cleat on the boat. The result was that Andrew hurt his back helping Celia. In spite of this they managed to continue and we both finished with engines alongside at Peronne at 1840.

In the morning, Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July, Andrew's back was worse. We decided to stay another night to see how he progressed.

This area of the Somme attracts many visitors to the World War 1 cemeteries and memorials. Peronne is an attractive town which includes a world famous war museum that provided a tremendous amount of historical information.



WW 1 Museum

In the afternoon I was able to re-fix the centre cleat on Wisecrack as it was clearly a job that Andrew could no longer tackle. Celia and Andrew decided to stay in Peronne. The marina had a small swimming pool and not only catered for boaters but also holiday makers. It was an ideal place for Andrew to rest.

After much discussion the decision was made that Su and I would continue on. We would remain in touch via mobiles.

Thus on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> July Su and I moved off early in the morning. The second leg of the Canal du Nord runs down to Rouy-le-Grand some five miles on from Lock 14 using the Canal de la Somme. After doing locks 13 and 14 we reached the start of the summit at lock 15 and entered behind a peniche at 0925. We were out

7 minutes later. This is the third leg of the Canal du Nord. We passed through the second tunnel which is 1100 metres long and again controlled by traffic lights. At lock 16, which is at the end of the summit level, we had no bollard to put a line on. There was a peniche in the lock and a large barge ahead of us would not move up towards it. It was a bit unnerving as we were close to the rear gates and I had to just use the engine and wheel to stay in position.

We went through another three locks before reaching Pont-L’Eveque at the junction with the Canal Lateral a la Oise. From here we continued on through a further two locks at Bellerive and Janville finishing up at the Port Plaisance in Compeigne. The marina was very full but we got help to moor up in a corner from a New Zealander called Graham. He briefed us on where the Port Captain could be located and helped me take my power line to plug into the shore power which was not directly available where I was. The berthing fees were 10 Euros per night.

As we had had a long day we were not long setting off to get something to eat. After some quick shopping locally, we started looking for a restaurant. We passed several that were closed but then were told that there was a place open further on. This turned out to be the Bistro des Arts (Tel: 03 44 20 10 10) which we highly recommend.

On our return to the marina we were invited for drinks aboard Fiori owned by Graham.



Graham aboard Fiori

He and Michelle had spent a considerable time doing the French Canals. Talking about New Zealand I mentioned that an old classmate Russ Brown from school who was one of my best friends had lived in Tauranga. Sadly he died in a tragic accident falling 50 feet down a ravine whilst tramping in the mountains near Opotiki. Russ was a very experienced tramper and had led many tramps. Michelle not only remembered the accident but said that her sister was in the same group when it happened. A small world !

Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> we went back into the town. Compiegne is an attractive town with a fabulous 16<sup>th</sup> century Town Hall. Su and I visited the nearby Museum de Figurines. Here they had model soldiers set up to depict the many French battles of the past. It was a very impressive display. Overall, Compiegne has much to offer but I was concerned that if we were to make Paris and get back to meet up with Andrew and Celia, we needed to press on. So, we returned to the boat after having a light lunch.



We pulled out of the marina just after 1500. I had 21 gallons of fuel. Luckily, I was able to top up at the Compiegne fuel barge just outside. This part of our route to Paris was along the River Oise. We passed through a further three locks before tying up at Pont-Ste-Maxence at 1910.

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> July. Onwards again. It was a long day with four more locks. We were delayed for over an hour at Pontoise as the lock-keeper told us that there was a big tree in the water and that they were trying to clear it. We were eventually let pass and told to keep a good lookout and to be very careful. At 1630 we arrived at the beautiful marina at Cergy.

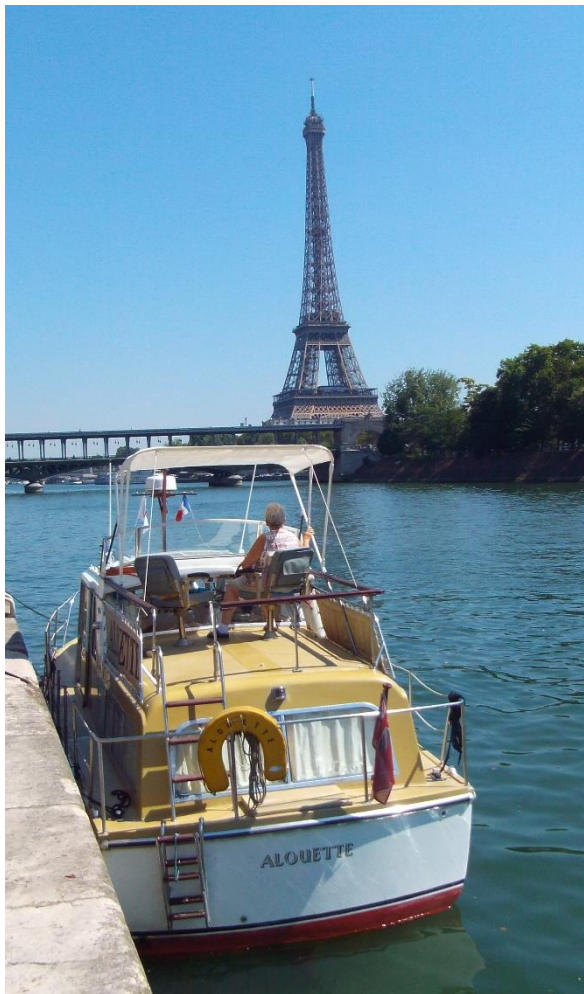


An evening shot at Port-Cergy

Here it cost 18 Euros for berthing including water and electricity. A brochure supplied at the Capitainerie Office had a list of local shops, bars and restaurants. By the time we got ashore there was little open other than the local bars that were very busy. After a couple of drinks we returned to the boat.

We were about 50 miles from Paris. Andrew’s back was improving and he and Celia were enjoying themselves but they would not be trying to catch up with us. I decided on an early start for the morning as I did not want to be travelling through Paris at dusk with all the big tourist boats.

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> July we let go and left the marina at 0630. We were soon at Conflans-Ste-Honorine where we turned into the Seine. It was mid afternoon when we first sighted the Eiffel Tower.



Short stop for photo shot

An hour later we were passing under the bridges of Paris viewing all the magnificent buildings. Soon, after passing Notre Dame, we arrived outside the Paris Arsenal Marina. I called up requesting whether we could enter and was told to wait 15 seconds! A small boat came out and we were in.



We tied up initially outside the Capitainerie Office to find which berth we could use. It transpired that Bruno, who was there when I last visited 16 years ago with Alouette, had retired 5 years earlier. They told me that he had been the longest serving employee at the Arsenal. We were allocated a berth close to the showers and washing facilities. The cost was 30.22 Euros per night. After moving to our berth and using the showers Su called Ana our daughter-in-law’s sister who lives in Paris with her husband and children. Arrangements were made to meet up. News from Andrew and Celia was that they had moved on to Pont l’Eveque and were going to continue to Compiegne.

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> July. Manuel, Ana’s husband arrived on board just before 0800. We all went off for breakfast where he told us that the family were all well and that Ana and the children would be with us the next day. Manuel, who had served in the French Foreign Legion, was keen for us to visit a particular Maritime Military Museum. He would be getting tickets. As he had to be at work, he left soon after. Su and I then spent the day wandering around taking in the Parisian atmosphere. It was very, very hot which led to frequent sitting down outside cafes and bars.

Ana arrived the next morning with her children Caroline and Christof. Manlio had been unable to get the museum tickets as it was closed for some reason. Ana took us all off to St Paul’s for breakfast. Su had seen an antique fair advertised but we were unable to find it. Instead we were given a guided tour of the locale by Ana and the children. It was still very hot but it was nice catching up on family news. At the end of the day we all said goodbye and Su and I returned to the marina.

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July. After visiting Notre Dame, Su and I decided to go to Montmartre. Although we were told that the best way was using a 67 bus and we waited at the right stop it did not turn up. It transpired that part of this service had been cancelled due to the finish of the Tour de France cycle race. Instead, we bought one day tickets at the Metro station to go to Stalingrad and thence to Anvers for Montmartre. These cost 7.5 euros each and covered use of the Funicular up to the Sacre Coeur at the top of Montmartre. The views of Paris from here are quite spectacular.

	
Street entertainment	Montmartre with Sacre Coeur in background

However, Su was a little disappointed to find that much of the area is now occupied more by large open air commercial restaurants rather than artists who were the main attraction she remembered from the past.

It was still very hot in Paris but we enjoyed sitting outside a small bistro sipping wine and eating crepes. Opposite there was a street singer entertaining the passers by. Whilst there, we called Celia and Andrew. They had good news. Andrew’s back was better and they had reached Compiegne. It was a shame that they were not with us as I’ve no doubt we would have all ended up at the Moulin Rouge which is only a few minutes away. Instead we went back to St Paul’s where we found the Antique Fair that we had been unable to find with Ana.

	
A pair of chairs that we both liked	This is what Su wanted - an antique fair

We left the Paris Arsenal marina just before 10.00 on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> July to continue going south. I was keen to revisit the Chateau de Fontainebleau which I first went to when cycling through to Switzerland via Lyon as a schoolboy.



Initially we went through an extensive the industrial area. Although not a pretty site many of the plant buildings are built on a much bigger scale than we have in England. The Seine allows loading and discharging via broad-beam peniches that could not be accommodated on our smaller rivers and canal network.

After passing through the lock at Ablon-sur-Seine the scenery changed to a wooded area which continued for much of the rest of the day. We finally pulled into a small marina at Port Roi just above Pt de Ste-Assise which cost 13.20 euros including electricity and water. We had passed through 4 locks and covered another 31 miles. Although we were moving south the weather was at last starting to get a little cooler.

The next day, Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> July, we set off again. Instead of staying cooler, it was soon very hot. Thank goodness I had fitted a bimini similar to the one Andrew had on Wisecrack ! After passing Melun we tied up at the visitors' moorings just above the lock at Chartrettes.

It was not long before we were off the boat . We walked back towards the lock and then up the hill, across the railway crossing, up a further hill then left into the village where we ate in the only place open. It was a small bistro. The waiter brought the menu. Su ordered lasagne. No lasagne ! She settled for salmon salad. She then asked for café au lait. No milk ! She settled for black coffee. Desert - Crème brule. No crème brule ! Instead she ordered a banana split. What she got was a chocolate brownie with ice cream. Yes, we have no bananas ! Fortunately I was not hungry in the heat and after a couple of beers only ordered profiteroles. What I got was a macaroon filled with ice-cream and covered with chocolate sauce! It was a proper Fawlty Towers experience. Su pointed out that the waiter was so attentive. We did laugh!

We walked back to the port fluvial. There were several motor cruisers there. It appeared to be a popular water ski location. As there was not much else that we had seen in the village we decided to move on to St Mammes. It was 1545 when we set off. We had found that early morning and late afternoon were the more pleasant times to travel rather than when the sun was at its peak. There are many large properties on this part of the Seine – a bit like a spaced out Maidenhead waterfront but with forests in the background.

We arrived at St Mammes just before 1900. The Port Fluvial pontoon was occupied by another vessel but there was a lot of heavy weed in the water. We moved a little further up river looking for somewhere better and ended up mooring in front of a small vessel. It was very shallow and there was quite a bit of weed. I was able to get close enough in to make fast using our own mooring stakes. As Su was unable to get off I walked back to the pontoon to look again. Altho' there was room, both of the access gates were locked. I returned to the boat and tried to make a walkway using floorboards from over the engine but Su didn't feel safe so we abandoned the idea and just stayed on board.

Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> August. In the morning we found that we were aground but were soon off using the engine and a boat hook to push us away from the bank. We refuelled at the BP station just opposite and then moved back to the Canal de Loing to find a better mooring. My 'French Waterways' book was quite dated and the moorings that were recommended were no longer available. We did, however, have some luck. I queried whether we could tie up for a few hours in the only space we could find. It turned out to be a private mooring but we were told that the owner was away on his boat and wouldn't be back for a week. I was helped get into the space by a young guy working on his boat on the next mooring. His name was Cerial and he spoke very good English. Once we got talking I found that he had spent time in Japan. Since I had been there many times in the 1960's when in the MN, it was very interesting listening to how things have changed there. His knowledge of the Japanese language was clearly far greater than the smattering of 'shopping Japanese' that I once had.

I explained that we had come south to visit Fontainebleau. Cerial gave us all the directions and said that there would be no problem leaving our boat there and that we could stay overnight if we wished. So after thanking him, Su and I set off for the station. It was a short trip on the train to Avon the Fontainebleau station. The carriage was very plush compared with UK trains. Once there we walked from the station to the Chateau. Through the gates it was a pleasant stroll across the Chateau parkland in the shade of the tree lined walkway.



The Chateau at Fontainebleau



After visiting this fabulous Chateau we spent some time in the town where we went into the English Bookshop run by a lady from Hampshire who was a keen yachtswoman. Su bought one or two things there but later found that she had left them on the train on our return to the boat.

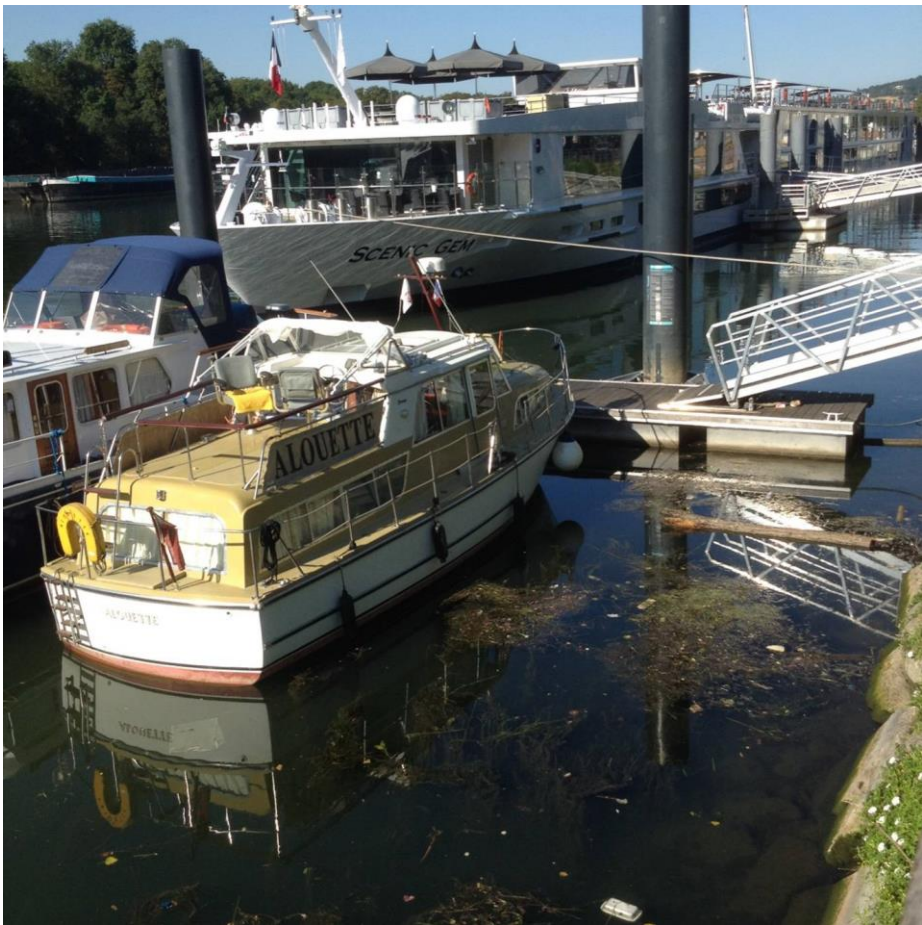
Rather than stay overnight on the Canal de Loing we decided to start back to join up with Celia and Andrew. We thanked Cerial for his help and then it was back to Chartrettes where we moored over night.

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> August. We left in the morning and had a leisurely cruise back to moor just up river from the lock at Evry 8 which we reached just after 1730. There was a large Belgium motor cruiser in front of us and I asked if they were going through and if so where they were going to moor? They confirmed that they were going thru’ and would just tie up when they found a suitable tree. As Su liked the mooring where we were, I called up the Lock-Keeper on Ch 18 and asked if it was safe for us to stay there? He said yes, we were fine but what about the boat behind us ? I replied that we were the boat behind and that the larger vessel was going thru’. A little late we saw a huge peniche called Magnum enter the lock. After that there was no more traffic and we had a quiet evening and peaceful night.

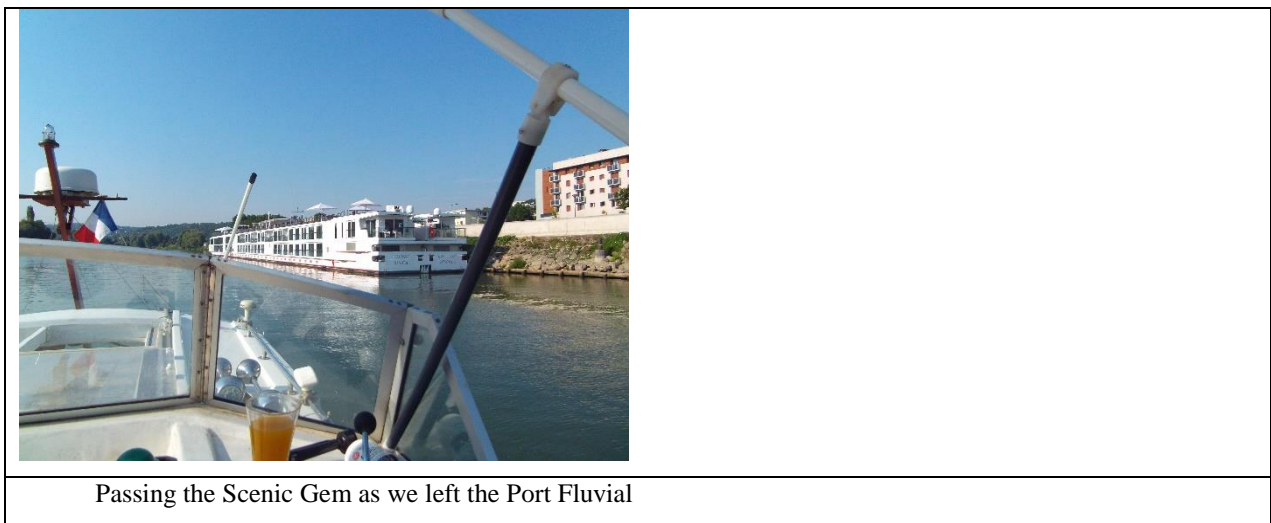
Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> August. We let go at 0710 in the morning and went into the lock following a peniche, which had just arrived. It was a very easy lock and 8 minutes later we were on our way making 5.8 kts on the GPS at 1700 RPM. Our early start, which we hoped would give us a good day’s run, was soon thwarted. The right hand lock at Ablon was closed for two hours. We moved across to the left lock but still had to wait for an hour and a half. So much for the early morning start ! However, as the weather was cooler we pressed on back thru’ Paris under all the bridges passing Notre Dame and the Eiffel Tower down to Suresnes and Conflans-Ste-Honorine where we tied up at the Haute Fluvial. It was a small marina and we found the only spare berth right inside on a pontoon by the bank. We ate in the Bijou Bar just across the road. It was busy, relatively expensive and the service was slow but we had had a long day and it was nice to just relax and talk to the locals.

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> August. Su heard a vessel arrive at 3 or 4 in the morning. It was the Scenic Gem a 5 star luxury passenger vessel. She carries 128 guests in 64 cabins with a crew of 44 and has a length of 110 metres. What Su heard was one of the crew taking a line ashore to a bollard just above us.

When we got up in the morning we walked into the local town for coffee and croissants. As we strolled back picking up some shopping we passed the passengers coming ashore from the Scenic Gem. They were mostly elderly Americans.



Our new neighbour that Su heard arrive





We left the marina at 1015 and an hour later we were passing Cergy as we cruised back along the Oise. Our speed was 4.5 kts at 1600 RPM which I logged after leaving Lock 7 at Pontoise. We tied up at 2000 above Lock 3 de Sarron Pontpoint. We had passed through 5 locks and covered 73 Km (45 Miles) since leaving Conflans. Checking our fuel showed 15 gallons of diesel used since filling up at the BP station by the Canal de Loing.

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> August. It was an early start. We let go at 0700 and eventually got back to Celia and Andrew again at Chauny after a stop at Pont l'Eveque where we picked up a remote lock control unit at Sempigny lock. We moored a couple of berths along from Wisecrack and after tying up joined them on the shore-side where they were having drinks with other boaters who were moored there.

Whilst we were in Chauny we were able to get more fuel courtesy another English couple (Ken and Ruth) who had transport and additional fuel containers. I then had 30 gallons in my tank plus 5 in my reserve container. Later, yet another English couple, Paul and Dawn arrived aboard their 45 foot barge Casey May Too. They both spoke good French and had great amount of knowledge of the French waterways. Celia and Andrew had met them earlier in Peronne. Paul and Dawn were also making for the Saint Quentin tunnel.

We pulled out of Chauny at 0905 Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> August following Wisecrack with Celia doing the navigation. At Tergnier we turned off to port on the Canal de St Quentin. After some 10 miles and 10 locks (No's 35 to 26) we stopped for lunch at Jussy.

Later, we moved off and at the next junction we went to starboard into lock 25 de Pont-Tugny. We finished the day making an almost a 180 degree turn to starboard back for the Haulte Fluvial at Seraucourt-le Grand. Unfortunately there were no spare moorings. We tied up instead fifty yards back on the bank and walked along to restaurant at the marina. We were only able to get a beer as they had no cook on duty.

The weather suddenly changed. It became windy and we had thunder and lightning followed by a mild rain storm. Although this camp site catered for boats, like many of the Haulte Fluvials, they also catered for motor caravans. This one also benefited by providing an attractive fishing venue. It was certainly a good stop especially as we had heard that the marina at St Quentin was badly affected by weed.

The next day Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> July Paul and Dawn arrived aboard Casey May Too. Luckily the moorings at the Haulte Fluvial were vacated early in the morning so both Andrew and I let go and moved back to moor with Paul where we all had electricity and water at a cost of 12 euros a night. The rest of our day was organised by Paul who telephoned for the local bus to take us to St Quentin. After walking round sightseeing Andrew, Celia, Su and I had lunch in the town square which had a seaside beach scene set up complete with the sounds of the waves and seagulls played over a loudspeaker system.



The 'beach' at St Quentin

We met up again with Paul and Dawn in the Tourist Bureau and later all of us returned on the bus to the marina where we all ate aboard Casey May Too.

We stayed another day and visited the local war cemetery. In the evening we all shared food and again ate aboard Casey May Too.

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> August. We all let go at 0800 in the morning to make for the St. Quentin tunnel. This stretch has 6 locks (23 to 18). Alouette and Wisecrack kept together as we could both lock through these small locks at the same time. We reached the tunnel at 1405 but found that we had to wait until the next day for passage. Our three boats moored just before the start of the tunnel where we later roped ourselves up ready for the morning tow.





Casey May Too, Wisecrack and Alouette

Whilst there, Paul took us all up to the Tunnel Museum (Office Tourism Bellicourt). Entrance was 4 euros each where in addition to viewing all the exhibits we had a short lecture and film about the construction and use of the tunnel which was initiated by Napoleon. The tunnel has no exhaust ventilation. Vessels are towed through by an electric barge operating with a chain pick up. In the past up to 30 peniches would have been linked together and towed through together, since for safety reasons, they could not use their engines. The opening of the Canal du Nord led to a big reduction in the use of the tunnel.

Our day ended back aboard Casey May Too where we had snacks and drinks with Paul and Dawn. The extra space aboard her easily accommodated the six of us.



The first tunnel tug preserved outside of the Museum.

Saturday 11th August. All three vessels entered the tunnel. Casey May Too fore line was attached to the stern of the electric powered chain tow tug (Toueur) with Wisecrack tied behind. Alouette was tied to Wisecrack using single 20 metre line tied to a yoke across her stern cleats. We went through the tunnel at about 2 knots which took just under two hours. The cost was 22 euros which was billed to us long after we returned to England.

Wisecrack and Alouette carried on together as before, going through six locks (17 to 12) together before tying up for lunch. 10 minutes later Casey May Too passed us. Later we set off again to stop after the next lock at Rues des Vignes with Paul and Dawn.

The six of us spent the afternoon at the local Archaeological site where a reconstruction project has been developed using past relics and representative buildings.

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August. Alouette had 25 gallons plus the 5 gallon reserve can. We left at 0910 and covered a further 10 locks (10 to 1) with the others before we tied up at Cambrai at 1510.

<p>Pictures show Lock number 7 which is</p>	<p>Approaching these locks from a distance downstream they</p>



typical for this stretch of the canal	look like weirs
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This city suffered badly in the First World War. After an initial trip ashore we decided to spend some time here to explore more. We ate that evening in the Italian Restaurant over the bridge and up the hill where there was an enormous funfair in full operation. Many of the side streets were taken over by the fairground stalls. This was part of the annual celebrations as a prelude to the parade of the giants which was scheduled for the 15<sup>th</sup> August.



The 2 Brooms in Cambrai

Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> August. We made use of the local laundrette in the morning before joining the others for further site seeing.. Our evening was spent at the Moroccan Restaurant just across the bridge where the six of us had dinner.

The 15<sup>th</sup> was the big day. There was a religious procession in the morning followed by a carnival parade of the giants in the afternoon. The streets were packed with onlookers.



Parade of the Giants

All kinds of floats and groups went past each accompanied by music. Everyone was taking pictures or videos.

It was 1030 on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> August when we left Cambrai after filling with water. Initially we had a problem as our lock controller didn’t appear to be working. Luckily another boat owner realised our plight and called the lock-keeper on his mobile. It was half an hour before anything happened and we were able to get through. Three locks later, at 1215, we had a call from Paul who had left ahead of us. He told us to take our time as Lock 5 d’Iwuy was broken. 20 minutes later Paul called again to tell us to use the manual switch at the lock. When we got there, we tried, without success. We got through eventually with the aid of the lock-keeper who arrived after we called via the intercom system at the lockside.

From here on our two little Brooms were on our own again as Paul and Dawn left us to make their own way back to their continental home moorings. We agreed to meet up again when we were all back in England.

At 1305 we turned into the Canal Sensee which took us back to the junction with the Canal du Nord at Arleux where we both tied up on the same ring that we had used on our way south a month earlier. Su wanted to do some shopping so the two of us walked back into the village. Arleux is world famous for smoked garlic. After shopping, Su and I could not resist an offer to see the workings at Le Petit Ferme which we passed on our way back.



Our guide on smoked garlic at Le Petit Ferme

We spent the evening aboard Wisecrack playing canasta. The ladies won and Su would not let us forget that she made over 7000 points! We had thunder, lightning and heavy rain overnight. I wondered if the female gods were celebrating the ladies win ?

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> August. It was a bright sunny day. Where we were moored, much of the early morning peniche traffic coming from the Canal du Nord, was turning into the Canal de Sensee which was why we were glad to have lines on the big mooring ring.

We let go at 0945 passing through locks at Courchelettes and Douai before entering the Haulte Fluvial at Courcelles les Lens where we met Lou on the way south. This time there was no one around in the morning and the bar was closed. We used the time for boat checks and topping up our water tanks. In the afternoon a young guy turned up to work on Lou's boat. He was very helpful and made a mobile call to Lou so that we could talk to her. She was back in Brittany. It was nice to hear her and wish her well. Otherwise, there was not a lot to do at the marina. We all ate in the area set out for motor caravan visitors and watched the local dog walkers. Su, being an ardent dog lover wanted to know all the dog's names.

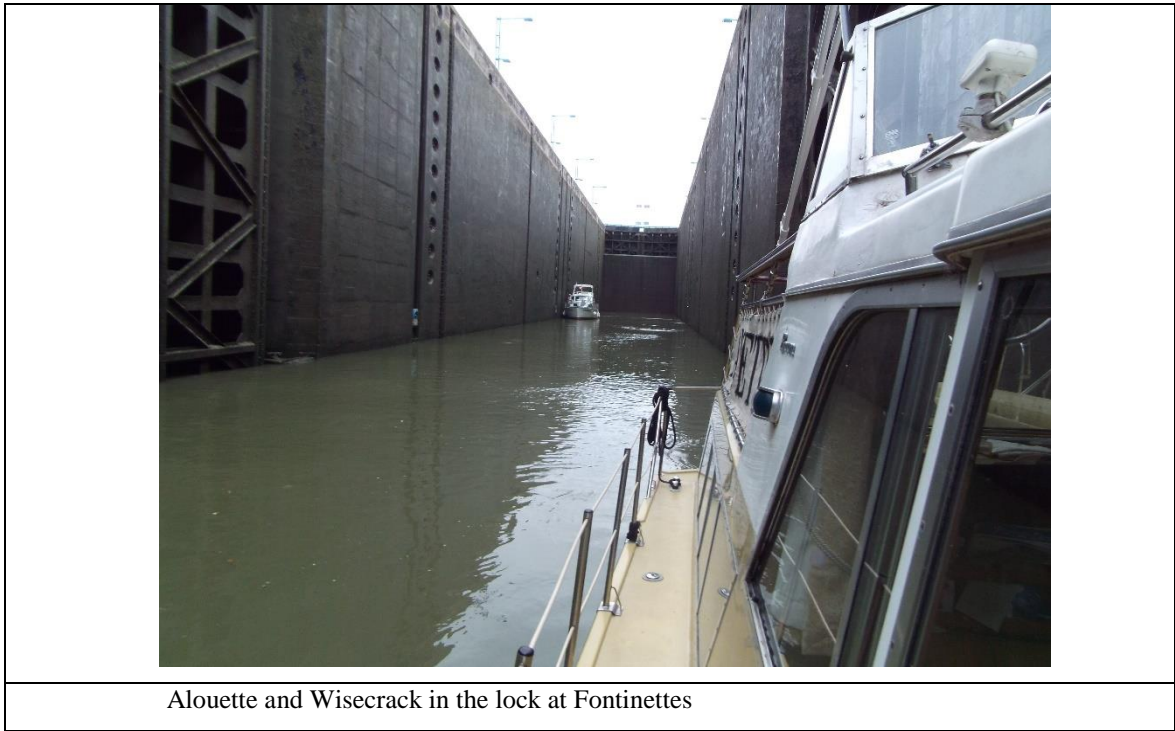
We left at 0905 on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> August. The weather was cloudy as we continued north. We passed the Canal de Lens at 1005 and 35 minutes later reached Pont a Vendin where we tied up again opposite Rodolfe's Garage. Unfortunately he was not there. We tried contacting him by mobile without success so Andrew left a message. We then all walked over the bridge into the village for some shopping before returning to the boats and setting off again.

Our next stop was Beuvry where we tied up on the visitor moorings alongside at 1440. Most of the other vessels moored up were on private moorings.

Beuvry is an old coal mining village that is no longer working resulting in no passing peniche traffic. We did, however, have a British vessel 'Adante' reverse up the canal past all the other boats onto a private mooring.

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August. We left at 0900. The weather was overcast. Although we passed Bethune we did not stop as we assumed the VNF office would be closed. Midday we were back at the junction with la Lys where we stopped at Aire. We all walked into town where we looked around St Peter's Church. We then had coffee and phoned Pierre at Arques before returning to our boats. We continued at 1415 and had one more lock before Arques. This was Fontinettes where to my surprise I was called by Pierre who was aboard a small tourist vessel as we approached the lock. He shouted that Yannick was waiting for us and would give us berthing directions on arrival. As promised Yannick was there on the shoreside and directed both vessels to adjacent berths. Again we settled for spare ribs washed down with liquid refreshment. We went through their visitor books and added our own comments. Pierre presented us with a glass decanter for each boat. Afterwards he and Yannick wished us 'bon voyage' for the trip home as they would not be there in the morning. We wondered what the future would be for visiting boaters from the UK ?





Monday 20<sup>th</sup> August. After filling with water we moved out of the marina and made for Watten where we moored overnight.

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August. Unbelievably, I twisted my knee 20 yards from the boat coming back from dropping off our refuse just before leaving. Andrew helped me back on board. We were then on our way back to Calais via the 4 lifting bridges. We entered Batellerie at 1500 but as it was difficult for Su and now me as well to get off. Both boats moored instead on the pontoon under the canal bridge where we stayed overnight.

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> August. The weather was deteriorating. Our prospects for crossing the channel were not looking good. We moved into the main marina. After a day in Calais we decided to leave the boats, hire a car and visit Honfleur where stayed for a couple of nights. This is a beautiful boaters’ paradise which made up for the fact that we were unable to get back across the channel.



Honfleur

We returned to Calais 3 days later stopping at St Valerie on the way back for lunch. The weather was still poor and we did not get away until midday on the 28<sup>th</sup> August. Again, it was spring tides which resulted in us staying east of the Goodwins after crossing the separation zone as we had been pushed too far northeast for taking the inside route via SW Goodwin. As we tied up in Ramsgate Harbour at 1745 who should come along to greet us but Linda Varney our BOC Membership Secretary and Bob Smith who we knew from our Weybridge Mariners’ Club. We all sat on Wisecrack where we partook of the contents of a magnum of cheap champagne. Not a bad run for two 40 plus year old little Brooms!



Both vessels back in Ramsgate Harbour (see centre of picture)

We left Ramsgate on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> August after refuelling and got to Q'boro 7 hours later where we returned to the Flying Dutchman for dinner. The next day we were back to Teddington where we couldn't understand what Ruis II, which had overtaken us, was doing going back and forth across the lock entrance. Ruis II is one of the Dunkirk Little Ships and was scheduled to be visiting our WMC on Sunday the 2<sup>nd</sup> September. She was to be one of the host boats for the annual Veteran's Cruise to our clubhouse carrying some of the vets for lunch and entertainment. What had happened was that she had picked up a line round one of her props and ended up going into the lock astern.

After staying overnight at Teddington, Andrew and Celia went on ahead, as we decided to stop at Hampton Court for Su to visit some of her favourite shops. It was whilst we were there that we had a call from Andrew. They were in Molesey lock and smoke was pouring out of their boat. It transpired that the top deck engine stop switch had jammed resulting in burning out both the solenoid and the control plunger. We hurried back aboard Alouette and caught up with them. Andrew had cut free some of the burnt cables from the battery. We decoupled the control rod and escorted them back to our home mooring. We jury rigged a mechanical stop control using a wire fed through to the steering control cupboard in the fore cabin. What a misfortune after having spent all that time in France with no problem!

It was a quite an experience for us all. Even Su enjoyed it albeit she is not the boat nut that I am.

It must have been the her 7000 points in canasta !

#### Distances and fuel consumption

Alouette had covered 425 miles through to St Mammes via Calais and the Canal du Nord and 451 miles coming back via the St Quentin. We passed through 44 locks on the way excluding those in the UK and 60 on the return to Calais. Overall we used 124 gallons of fuel and about half a pint of oil.

I have always maintained that the Broom 30 was the best boat of its kind ever built. These little boats are renowned for their reliability which is supported by the mileages we covered without problem (the single failure on Wisecrack was of a non Broom modification failure related to a suspect component). Not bad for well over 40 year old boats ?

Chris Knight