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Catamaran Cruising Association

Formally Bobcat & Catalac Cruising Association

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Disclaimer

Neither the CCA nor Committee will accept any liability for personal injury arising out of participating in any event, rally or race organized by or through the CCA whether sustained by members, guests, or visitors, or caused by the said members, guests or visitors whether or not such damage or injury could have been attributed to or was occasioned by the neglect, default or negligence of any of the officers, committees or servants of the CCA.

Boat Owners Third Party Insurance

It is the responsibility of all boat owners to have adequate third party insurance in respect of him/herself, vessel, his/her crew for the time being & his/her visitors.

July - August 2008

July-- The Festival of Sea at Brest on 11 July - 17 July MOCRA will also be there, and after The Festival of Sea they will be joining a local French Club to continue with a cruise to La Rochelle. All C.C.A. members are invited to join with them.

I hope you can make either the Festival or cruise to La Rochelle. I would be grateful if members could contact Mike Millerchip of Mocra to confirm a meeting place and for those wishing to sail in company from the UK. To discuss their departure with him. Many thanks, Peter Gimson.

September—Friday 5th. To Sunday 7th. Meet up at Poole-Bramblebush/Browsea depending on direction of wind. We will be organizing a lunch on Sunday at the RNLI Poole and require numbers for those wishing to eat. Please text to Peter Gimson on 07971 808777. This is a popular event and is enjoyable to both young and old.

Southampton Boat Show 'Meet & Eat' will be held on the first Saturday at 6.30pm. for 7pm eat, at The Duke of Wellington, Bugle St. Southampton. Numbers required, please text to Peter Gimson on 07971 808777 or email to peter.Gimson@sky.com

We continue with the crew of 'PIPERS DREAM' on their travels through France.

We nipped up to the travel agents in the town & spoke to a very helpful lady called Julie. The result from this conversation was that we hired a car & booked the ferry. We'd already decided to take Jake with us but would find a holiday home for Harvey & Bruce; this is where Patrick the captainiere really helped. He phoned one of the local catteries & arranged for us to visit them; he then took us in his car to have a look; everything seemed very nice so we went ahead & booked them in. Jake was taken up to the vets for his flea & tick inoculations

required by the UK authorities for entry into the country. Afterwards Toni & I journeyed by train to Lille to collect the car. Arriving at the station there was a long queue for tickets, so I braved it & used the machines. Magic. We started to walk towards the platform when a lady stopped us & showed us how to validate our tickets. The train arrived right on schedule & to our delight found that it was a double decker. Naturally we sat up stairs.

Lille station is vast but we soon found the Avis desk. Paperwork complete & Maccy Dee eaten we set off to the car park for our chariot. The journey back was okay I only had to remind Toni a couple of times which side of the road he was supposed to be on.

Toni spoke to Tina & Andrew whom we had met at Armentières, they were almost at St. Quentin & were thinking of spending a few days in Paris.

Everything was fine & dandy when we received a text that told us the court case had been adjourned till the following year. But as all was in place we continued with our plans.

we were up early on the day so we could drop the cats off at their holiday home. But it was too early, we arrived in Calais 4 hours before our ferry was due to leave! Luckily we were able to catch an earlier one for only 8 € more.

All went well at the hospital but I will require a follow up appointment sometime in September took the car back, very traumatic journey. You see we knew WHERE we were & we knew where we WANTED to be, we just couldn't get them at the same time! Eventually we found a friendly policeman & asked him. From then on it was simplicity itself. We picked up our emails from a little internet café just outside Lille station; one of which was a reply from Roanne re winter berth; the answer was no they had no room for us. So onto plan B, or it would have been if we'd had a plan B.

Day 11 Armentières – Deûlemont: purchased a French simcard whilst at Armentières. Left at about 1400 & headed in the direction of Belgium. Only one lock, & tied up for the night at Deûlemont, where there are no facilities except a rather nice picnic area.

Day 12 Deûlemont-Belgium-Quesnoy-sur-Deûle the lock at Comines is large, about 95 feet. Got to the fuel barge with minutes to spare & filled up. Cost us 118.10 € for 148 litres. After paying we went to pull off at exactly the same time as the fuel chappie. Toni managed to avoid a collision & we continued back to the huge lock. We tried to find a berth for the night at the old lock, but no luck. But found a great one at Quesnoy-sur-Deûle. Infact we ended up staying there for a while as our Navicarte books were on their way, Nina having sent them on for us.

Met a really nice chap off the boat behind us, Moz (boat name GARFIELD), he told us that it had been a childhood dream of his to one day live on a boat. So when the police were selling their old launch, he snapped it up, mind you he had a lot work to do to make it habitable.

Day 13 Quesnoy-sur-Deûle-Canal de Lens: finally left kessie & continued on down. Stopped at a Halte in the Canal de Lens. Quaint.

Day 14 Canal de Lens-Bassin Rond: only 3 locks done today. We stopped in an old disused lock for lunch, we'd tried two other places that were marked on the Navicarte but both were blocked, one with large gates in the entrance, the other with fender to fender boats. We carried on after lunch to the Halte in Bassin Rond & covered 26 miles. Just before mooring up for the night Toni had noticed some white smoke coming from the STBD engine. He removed the water filter cover & discovered not only a shortage of water but a small fish happily swimming around in it.

1 2 3 4 5, Toni caught a fish alive, Where did he catch this fish?, In the engine filter dish!!!!!!!

Well he hadn't caught one any other way, had he!

Day 15 Bassin Rond – Cambrai: On leaving the Bassin Rond, we discovered that the locks along this stretch are unmanned. At the first one we managed with the aid of a passer-by to call the lock-keeper; when he arrived he gave us the 'doofer' to operate the rest of the locks. We had the company of another boat the whole way to Cambrai. We only travelled 7 miles but it took all day. Finally arrived, but the only places available were full of people fishing from the bank; they moved, but with bad grace. Once moored the couple we had travelled with invited us on for a drink. They were from Holland, liked France but not the French!

Cambrai: We stayed quite a while in Cambrai as we had seen a poster advertising the carnival in which a pipe band would be playing.

We spent a lot of time wandering around the town which is interesting, lots of real old buildings & places of historical interest such as; the birth place of Louis Bleriot; a number of original 'Porte' or city gates, some of



which are quite ornate. There is also a magnificent band stand in one of the two pretty gardens in the town. One, the public, is really pretty, the flower beds are well looked after & beautifully planted. One of the beds was planted in the shape of a huge butterfly. The other garden, the Grotto, is laid to lawn with some stunning specimen trees.

A real disappointment was the Citadel, most of it has gone only the Porte Royal & a few other buildings are left. But most of these are falling to bits, such a shame.

We also experienced another first; we used a French launderette, the biggest difference is that the money is put into a central control panel, not into the individual machine.

We also had a fatality, Jakes Frisbee rolled into the canal never to be seen again.

Up till now we had enjoyed some lovely weather but suddenly it all changed & we had horrendous rain accompanied by thunder & lightning.

Met two other boats whilst at Cambrai; Richard & Joyce on MISSY MOUSE & Syd & Gwenda on the GWENDA D. Syd & Gwenda were quite new to boating & going through the canals; infact they admitted that they spent over 2 hours at the first one as they hadn't realized they had to move the lever up to operate it!

We were now getting ready to go down the St.Quentin canal & through the tunnels, the first of which is operated by tug which pulls you through.

Day 16 Cambrai-lock 17 St.Quentin canal: *in company with GWENDA D we left Cambrai after topping up with water & paying for the 8 days mooring; the first few locks gave us few problems, up to lock 9 we used the doofer but also came across one that had a rod strung across the river – our first. There were no ladders in the lock so Toni dropped me off at the side or the landing stage & I scrambled up through spiders & slime. Toni at times had difficulty in getting in close enough to allow me to just step off, so occasionally I had to make a leap of faith. Syd meanwhile had real difficulties in dropping Gwenda off. The design of his boat didn't help but at his own admission he wasn't that experienced in boat handling.*

16 locks later we were just getting the hang of it when we had to call it a day as lock 17 was closing.

Day 17 St.Quentin tunnel-St.Quentin marina: *The following day we were through the lock at 0855 & a bit concerned that we were going to miss the first convoy due through at 0930. Our fears were groundless though as when we arrived at the tunnel there was one boat waiting for the tug, so we followed suit & moored up behind him. The tug arrived & we prepared to hitch up. Your place in the convoy is determined by the size of your vessel; today there was only the three of us & the order was; MOONGLOW, us & bringing up the rear, GWENDA D. We'd been advised to cross our lines at the front & I'm glad we did. We were all tied up & ready to go when a gust of wind blew up & shoved all of us into the side. MOONGLOW managed to get off but we were not so lucky. The tug started to pull us, but we were still stuck on the side, Toni as per the instructions, gave some blasts on the horn for them to stop; but they kept going & dragged us along the wooden rail. We discovered later that this had caused some gouges, discolouration & scratches along the hull. We eventually got off the bank & into the tunnel.*

By trial & error we discovered the best way to control the boat inside the tunnel is to use two lines at the front; either by pulling in or letting out depending on which way the boat goes.

Once out of the tunnel we complained about the tug operators behaviour prior to entering the tunnel; but our complaints fell on deaf ears, the tug chaps denied hearing the horns even though MOONGLOW had: they listened, wrote it down & took some photos of the damage, but it was lunch time after all. We wrote to the VNF, but never heard anything.

After arriving in the marina, Syd & Gwenda invited us on for a drink, during which they told us that as Gwenda hates boats, it took him 3 months to tell her that he'd bought one! 3 bottles of wine later Toni & I returned to PIPERS DREAM, Toni was really the worse for wear & was ill all night. So we thought it best to stay put the following day. Toni managed to contact H2O & we now had a berth for the winter.

Gwenda received some spectacular bruises when she fell between the pontoon & her boat, but Toni, my hero, saved her! She also had spectacular orange feet as the dye from her shoes had run during her ducking.

Day 18 St. Quentin-Chauny-Choisy au Bac: we left St Quentin at about 10am; 9km to the first lock & then another 9 to the next. Immediately after that we said cheerio to Gwenda & Syd. We stayed one night in Chauny, then moved on and continued down & reached Janville; a really pleasant little postcard town. There is a great view of the town to be had prior to the lock emptying, you can see the houses along the canal front & those perched up in amongst the wooded hills.

A little way passed Janville; we took a detour & went along the River Aisne. Although we scoured the bank we were unable to locate the mooring indicated on the Navicarte book which lies just at the entrance to the river. But further up the river we found a delightful spot at the small village of Choisy au Bac.

History lesson coming up; not far from this wee place is the carriage in which the 1918 Armistice was signed, but we didn't manage to get to see it. All around that area, scars of the Great War can be seen; reading through the Navicarte it informs you that this Ville or that Ville suffered heavy bombardment or, in some cases, was totally destroyed. Since entering the canals at Gravelines, the numbers of war graveyards to be seen are a stark reminder of the sacrifice that so many people made, but that those sacrifices enable me to enjoy the life I have. I will never forget the rows of white crosses.

We decided to stay in Choisy au Bac for a while; the three boys were able to get off for a stroll. Yes I did say three boys, as Bruce chose this spot to venture away from the boat onto dry land for the first time. He followed where Harvey led, which meant they got into an argument with a French resident; ending, thankfully, in a stalemate.

Day 19 Choisy Au Bac – Creil: reluctantly left Choisy & headed off towards Compiègne for some shopping, but found the marina full to bursting with permanently moored boats, no room for us at all. So we pressed onto the next marina at Jaux. But once again there was no room. We continued on – saw a lovely kingfisher. We ended up mooring at Creil, we'd only gone through 3 locks but as they were so slow it had taken all day. Creil, somewhat to our surprise, is a good place to stop; plenty of shops & two internet cafes, one of which is in a laverie so do your washing & the net is free!

The mooring is in the city centre alongside the quay which is okay but you will get rocked around by the peniche.

Day 20 Creil – Cergy: We'd been told by a few people that Cergy is worth considering for winter; all facilities & 100 berths. Someone somewhere was having a laugh.

We poked our nose in; space was so limited that turning round to come back out was a bit difficult. With another boat rafted up to us we tied up outside on the waiting pontoon; needless to say we left early the following morning. The journey down to Cergy had been uneventful with only 4 locks to go through. Uneventful that is until the final lock; the peniche which had passed us earlier was already in the lock, behind him was a small plaisance that had overtaken us in a terrific hurry; across the other side of the lock was a barge type boat & then us who poodled in last. A little while later we all had to poodle out as the gates wouldn't close & scuttle into the adjoining lock!

Day 21 Cergy – Andresy: *this was a great journey, very enjoyable – no locks! We tried the marina at Conflans & once again found that there was only just enough room to swing our cat & get out.*

Another Halte just a couple of minutes away down a small cutting off the Seine was we found absolutely delightful & perfect. It has a small pontoon with electric & water, but also has a long quay with plenty of room. The small village, Andresy, is very up along, down along (built on a hill) & is quite picturesque. There's no R & R (rock & roll) from the peniche as they pass the other side of the small island.

Internet access is available at the library & like the electric & water it's free.

We met Gary & Raewyn from New Zealand who made us quite jealous as they had a fabulous light weight clothes mangle --- I want one.

Day 22 Andresy – Halte at Chatou: *journey really nice, but surprised that it wasn't as busy as we thought it would be. Looking at the charts which we had copied from Gary, we decided to moor at one of the two haltes in the Bras de Marly. As we approached the entrance at the Bougival lock, it appeared that it wasn't operational; so we continued down the Seine, then doubled back to enter it from the other end. I'm so glad we did as we saw another kingfisher & a little while later a huge rat like creature. It was about 5 or 6 times the size of a rat, just sitting behind a rock cleaning itself.*

We discovered that both the haltes were useless; the first was extremely dangerous as it was broken in half. The other had permanent occupiers. We eventually managed to find another place near Chatou.

A bike ride away we found a huge Leclerc, after a wee bit of shopping we were on our way back when Toni noticed that the strop for my front mudguard had come loose, something easily fixed upon our return to PIPERS DREAM. To make things easier & to get at the strop, Toni turned my bike upside down ----- on the pontoon. On the wibbly, wobbly pontoon. The inevitable happened; as Toni moved to get some tools, my bike toppled over & seemed to be heading in the same direction as our outboard engine at Totnes! Luckily the 240V cable was in the way & hung on to my bike & saved it from a watery ending.

Day 23 Chatou – Paris Arsenal: *we entered Paris on Friday afternoon, Toni was very surprised to see the Eiffel Tower so soon. He was as excited as a kid at Christmas. Both cameras were in constant use as we made our way to the Arsenal. Passing the Isle de la Cite, we hit quite a swell, so turned round & went round it the other way – no swell & a great sight seeing tour! We also had our photo taken by the tourists as we passed under the bridges.*

Paris, *we had a great time in Paris doing the usual tourist bits. We bought a two day pass on the open top tours (28€per person) this is a great way to see Paris; there are 4 routes all with commentary & you hop on & hop off when & where you like.*

Saturday ---- *we did the Arc de Triomphe & the Eiffel Tower, & although I've seen them before the difference this time is I've seen them with Toni. He was amazed at everything, specially the size, scale & detail of the sculptures & reliefs, but I think it was the Eiffel Tower that really 'blew him away'. We went up to the second stage & were not disappointed in the view, it is breathtaking. We had contemplated going all the way to the*

top, but there was a two hour wait for the lift so decided against it. The journey back takes you through into the courtyard of the Louvre, but only just! The arches are very narrow & don't leave much room for any errors.

That evening after dinner we went over to the Left Bank, Toni totally unprepared for the experience. All along the embankment the Parisians gather for an evening of music, dance & conversation. No rehearsal, just turn up & join in. Toni was enchanted.

Sunday ----- we went up to the market held just behind the Place de la Bastille, quite large & bustling. Then it was onto the bus once more with Monmatre & Le Sacre Coeur as our destination. I Was a little disappointing as the reality failed to rekindle the magic & mystery that I'd felt on previous visits; perhaps because on those occasions I'd viewed it all with the eyes of a child when you are more susceptible to moods & atmosphere. Now all I saw were the tatty souvenirs & the immigrants plying their con tricks on the foolish & naïve tourists.

Before I knew it, it was Monday morning & we were leaving Paris behind & continuing along the Seine. Our stay in the Arsenal had cost us just 87€, but the memories we had were priceless.

Day 24 Paris Arsenal – just passed Coudray L'ecluse. Left the mooring at 1100 & stopped at the Captainiere in order to get some of the blue carpet for the cockpit, which we'd seen at one of the shops. So we actually left at 1130. The river to the east of the city is completely different from that of the west. It is very industrialised & bland, with very few places to stop (even for lunch). Eventually found a night stop just passed the lock at Coudray, even managed to let the boys off for a recce.

Day 25 Coudray Ecluse – St.Mammas, canal de loing. The Seine once more changed its clothing, becoming more rural with lush green woods covered in Mistletoe. In the Canal de Loing, just before the first ecluse is a little Halte where we pitched camp for a couple of days. It was here that we met RUPTURE & her crew. The captain had brought her from Quebec Canada to Portugal; up to L'Havre into Paris. He'd then left the ship & they had brought her out of Paris & were continuing down through the canals into the Med. Haven't seen them since.

Day 26 Canal de Loing – ecluse 11 at Villeperrot (Yonne): the Yonne we discovered has quite a few slopey sided locks, not nice; they also close for business at 6pm sharp! The slopey locks are very hard work. They are also extremely mucky, slimy & smelly.

Day 27 ecluse 11 Yonne – Villeneuve: raining all day & we were soaked to the skin in & out doing the locks. But at least Villeneuve went a long way to compensate for our drenching. We discovered that the blue carpet we'd bought in Paris and laid in the cockpit really holds the water and doesn't drain at all. Our solution was to lay it over the original matting which allows some drainage.

The town is very olde, worlde with some of the original stone gate houses still intact and in use. We spent two days here, most of the time just exploring the town.

Day 28 Villeneuve – Cézy. First lock we had a bit of a wait as the keeper had gone to see to another lock. He eventually pitched up and we went in and tied up to the floaty pontoon (slopey sided again). We were almost

upto the top of the lock when Toni spotted a snake. It wasn't very big but very prettily coloured. I dashed in and grabbed the camera and managed to get some shots of it before it vanished into its hole.

The next lock had straight sides and no snake.

The mooring when we got there was vacant and ab-fab! Later on going into the town we passed through the medieaval gate and found most of the houses also date from that period. Most are well cared for, but a few are in desperate need of TLC. But the town is quaint, peaceful and serene, almost as though it is untouched by modern day.

Day 29 Cézy – Laroche de Cydroine. *this day will go down in history. At 1733 on the river Yonne at Laroche de Cydroine, Toni caught his first fish! And we have the photographic evidence to prove it. We had a good Halte at Laroche, water & electric both available at no extra charge.*

Day 30 Laroche de Cydroine – St.Florentin *we stopped for lunch & fuel at the boat hire place in Migennes – very nice people, friendly & helpful.*

As we had a wee while to wait for the fuel, we had a quick looksee at some of the hire boats as we had considered one of these if we ever gave up the sea in favour of the rivers. They would be okay but a lot of work to make them liveaboard.

Day 31 St.Florentin – Tonnerre, *delayed leaving St.Florentin due to fog, but when it cleared it was a beautiful, sunny, warm day. Tonnerre is a good place to stop, the mooring, water & electric all free; just over the bridge we found a large Leclerc supermarket & fuel. There is also a launderette in the town but it's a bit of a hike to get to it.*

Day 32 Tonnerre – Tanlay *as we approached one of the locks, we spied some tourists on bikes who were obviously not as good company as they thought they were judging by the pained expression on the lock keepers face. But he soon recovered his happy disposition as we made our way into the lock ---- they turned their attention to us & we became their next bored to death victims.*

In the small locks, the force of the water as they fill tends to push PIPERS DREAM in towards the wall; but as we'd now been through quite a few of them, Toni & I had perfected the art of removing her nose to prevent it grinding against the stone. But the two lady tourists decided to 'help' us. We weren't too keen on this assistance, as it may have ended with one or both of them suffering the same fate as certain ladies of the Middle Ages were subjected to! Mind you, in this instance.....But our attention was diverted from the delight of seeing one of these bores floundering in the water by a question from the men in their party; 'I see you're flying the flag of Japan, when were you there?' Toni looked up at the mast, what on earth are they on about, we haven't got a Japanese flag, he thought. The guy repeated his question & pointed excitedly at our 'Japanese' flag. Toni could barely contain his mirth, the Japanese flag was infact our Cruising Association pennant.

To be continued next month.

We tried in vain to escape them but just a couple of locks down, there they were again. This time they were attempting to have a bog inside but as PIPERS DREAMS' windows are slightly tinted nothing could be seen. This time we made good our escape.

Tanlay very pleasant, we were able to let the boys off. Facilities all free again. Toni opened up his sea food bar again, in other words he was attempting to fish but actually only feeds them. I asked him to show me what to do ----- & I caught a fish!

Day 33 Tanlay – Lock 80 pleasant trip, friendly lock keepers.

Day 34 Lock 80 – Montbard fairly uneventful, managed 15 locks & 15 miles. We tried a different method at the locks. Toni drops me off just before the lock, he then continues in, throws the lines up to me; this allows me to have better control which makes it easier for me.

Day 35 Montbard – Venerly Les Laumes Toni caught another fish today. Also informed that we will have a keeper with us all the way tomorrow, until we either stop or the locks close.

Day 36 Venerly les Laumes – Lock 27

we did 29 locks today with Toni on the helm & me on the bike going from lock to lock opening & closing them with the VNF chappie, who utters not one word! Very happy bunny _____NOT.

Saw a newt today ---- sober!

Day 37 Lock 27 – Pouilly

26 locks done today with laughing boy, I was so emotional when we parted that I couldn't bring myself to speak not even to whisper cheerio to him, or to give him a tip.....miserable sod that he was.

Pouilly very nice. Went up to the office to book our passage through the tunnel, they gave us handheld radio & operational directions & instructions for going through. They also checked our emergency equipment, torch, lifejackets etc.

Day 38 Pouilly – Pont D'Ouche (lock 20)

only 19 locks(all down hill) & 1 tunnel.

Going through the tunnel was a magical experience, it's very picturesque & straight; it also helps that you can clearly see the light at the other end!

Our nights mooring at Pont D'Ouche cost us the grand sum of 1 €; its run by a jolly English lady who has set up a great book swap section up stairs from the office.

It was here that Toni & I caught 4 fish between us, one of which was about 15 inches long. Also saw a deer & a woodpecker.

Met AVASOL here, we also met up with them again in St.Jean de Losne.

Day 39 Pont D'Ouche – Plombierres Les Dijon

30 locks done this day. Stopped for the night at the now unused boat hire centre, no facilities.

When entering one of the locks we were unaware that the engines were still in reverse, result? Damage to the stern LHS.

The town of Plombierres is delightful. Very old & crissed crossed with streams, some of which disappear underground only to reappear further along.

Day 40 Plombierres Les Dijon - Dijon

found out in the morning that the usual lock keeper was on holiday & there was no replacement. This meant that one guy had to cover quite a few locks on his own. We would have to wait to take our turn. In the end we finally left at 1500hrs in the company of RADISH, narrow boat, with whom we met up with again at the steps in St.Jean de Losne.

Day 41 Dijon – Longecourt lock 69

15 locks done today, very slow, very frustrating, so much so that Toni was swearing-----& that's not like him!?

Day 42 Longecourt – H20 St Jean de Losne (SJJ)

last 7 locks to our winter berth & once again it was very slow going & very wet.

But we at last managed to find out what it is that the locals are picking up from along the side of the canals --- walnuts. One mystery solved.

We stayed one night on pontoon A, then moved to pontoon B, right next to the bank & quite sheltered. We'd made it & settled down for the winter.

SJJ

looking back on our time in St.Jean de Losne, it was a quite a bit different to what we had been led to expect. There were not as many stay- a- boards for the winter; too cold they said & left to fly back to the UK. As it turned out though, we only had about a metre of snow which lasted a few days, & the lowest temperature was -12, which again only lasted one night! Locals said it was the mildest winter they'd had for years.

The town itself is pleasant; two supermarkets, bakers etc on the doorstep. The train station was a bit of a hike to get to if you wanted to go further afield. A car or long bike ride away is a big Brico; we bought a satellite dish from here & so had all the Brit TV (apart from Channels 4 & 5) & radio. Not a bad price for it either.

Marina wise, it's okay, has all the facilities although when cold weather expected, the water to the pontoons is shut off as it tends to freeze. There is also a radio net on channel 77 every morning (if enough people are forthcoming in taking turns as broadcaster), items for sale/wanted; lifts; assistance required; weather reports & social events are announced. It also informs you of who is & isn't about.

We didn't go to the Christmas dinner, but as New Years Eve usually passed with everyone staying in their own space we thought it a good idea to get them all together and organised a New Years Party. Looking for a venue for this was a bit of a headache, till I remembered that someone had told me of the small museum that sometimes allowed social events to be held there. Toni & David (from LEA CREST) approached the lady in charge; found out later that she's actually the Deputy Mayor. She agreed, on condition. Earlier, Toni had attended the local Armistice Day Parade suitably attired in kilt; the Chief of Police spotted the Pipers Badge & asked if he would play for them the following year. Toni had to decline this honour as we wouldn't be around in the canals then. But the fact that Toni was a piper had been remembered & the condition for the use of the museum was attached, ----- Toni had to play at their local St.Nicolas Parade, held at the beginning of December. Toni of course was delighted to accept.

Unknown to me Toni & son Ian had devised a cunning plan, which resulted in said son arriving back with husband, who had gone to UK for a few days, to stay with us for the weekend of the St.Nicolas Parade. The first I knew of this was when I took Jake up the wooden hill for a pee, & heard someone who sounded just like Ian calling him!!!!!!! We had a great time, as Ian borrowed Toni's other kilt so he could also join in the parade. Toni was interviewed by the French TV & also had his picture in the local paper!

It was a relaxing time in H2O, but towards the end we both began to get itchy as we wanted to get on our way.

Day 43 H2O St.Jean de Losne – campsite pontoon Säone River

finally left the marina. We had assistance from Neil (ODIN) to walk PIPERS DREAM round the boat next door as his rudder stuck out quite a distance. Couldn't find anywhere to moor alongside the river, so had to go to the campsite pontoon. But we heard a Cuckoo!

Day 44 campsite pontoon Säone River – Dole

turned off the River Säone into the Canal Rhone & Rhin. 9 locks to Dole, you get a doofer at the first one as all locks are operated by yourself. As we entered the second one I had to hook a bamboo chair out of the way! It's a lovely canal to poodle down.

Saw HERITAGE again, seems that they may have a buyer. Also saw Dillykim they moored further up from us.

Took lots of photos as Dole has some photogenic areas.

Day 45 Dole – steps St.Jean de Losne

very hot today 36deg in the shade! So the inverter was put on along with the fan. Arrived back at the steps at 5pm, just as the VNF office was closing, so Toni hurtled up there to pay for the water etc only to find payment is made at the café!

Day 46 steps St.Jean de Losne – Gergy/Chalon

few more clouds around but was still hot & clammy. Quite tired, so decided to stop at the floating pontoon at Gergy. Soon changed our minds though & continued on to Chalon. It appears that the pontoon is the meeting place for all the local teenagers in Gergy, they were very noisy. Arrived Chalon 1830, but got a good result cos as we arrived late & were leaving early, we weren't charged for the mooring!

Also had a bit of a laugh on the way. Coming round a bend I saw a chappie & his wife fishing from the bank but I had to look twice then have a bog through the binoculars just to confirm what I was seeing. Both of them were completely starkers.

Day 47 Chalon – Macon

we had intended to stop way before Macon, but the old lock we'd seen in the chart book was full of permanent boats, the quay at Tournus was too high for us so we had no alternative but to continue on to Macon. We were a bit dubious at first as the mooring at Macon is of the Mediterranean variety – fore & aft. But we managed it without any probs.

Day 48 Macon – Creches sur Säone

bit disconcerting at the Creches pontoon, for although the campsite wasn't open therefore we couldn't pay, the tariff was still in Francs!

Very popular place with locals.

Creches sur Säone

We got ourselves ready to cycle up to the phone box to call Nina as she was due to go into hospital for her hip op, when the heavens opened with a terrific thunderstorm. It lasted about 5 hours with some torrential rain.

Another boat joined us on the pontoon, think it was Swiss, but it was the name which tickled us ----- SKUM.

Richard text us Nina's' op went okay, she is fine but very tired.

Also found internet café at small office supplies outlet near the Carrefour.

Day 49 Creches sur Säone – Jassons Roitier

only 1 lock on this sector. No captainiere here, just a phone number to ring. So we did & the local bobby pitched up. They charge only for electric & water at 4 € per day, we paid for 4 days.

Looking again at the charts we decide it would be great if we could stay there whilst I returned to the UK (another hospital appointment) as there was a train station at Villefranche just across the river. But we couldn't get hold of anyone on the phone to find out. As the office opened on Saturday morning, we cycled up there & spoke to the same bobby who said no problem. We actually stayed there till the beginning of June & it cost us 36 €.

Day 50 Jassons Roitier – Quay on Rhone at 0 kp just passed Lyon

we hadn't wanted to actually stop in Lyon itself, so carried on through then turned to go upstream on the Rhone a wee way where we thought there was a staging. We eventually found somewhere to stop just passed the Pasteur Bridge.

Day 51 Quay on Rhone – Les Roches de Condrieu

left 0940 & headed for the fist of the big locks. We had just gone past the point where the Säone meets the Rhone, when Toni saw we were in convoy with another catamaran. We realised upon hearing them contact the lock that it was BLUE MOON, which had been moored on the same pontoon as us in St.Jean de Losne over the winter.

We stayed with them for two locks & moored for the night in Les Roches de Condrieu marina ----- expensive place, cost us 15€ for one night. We were not only stung by the price, I received a very painful insect 'kiss' on my thumb as we came alongside!

We'd had a bit of a fright approaching the second of the two locks, the stbd engine overheated. But as we exited the same lock, the port engine did the same! On inspection we found that the two tea strainers were doing their job ----- they had collected quite a lot of muck.

The river was running very fast, at one point we were being pushed along at over 9kn.

Saw a large bird of prey hovering & circling round above us.

We also heard two bits of news from the UK, the Cutty Sark caught fire & Tony Blair announced he was leaving the office of leader of the Labour Party & also Prime Minister. Which means that Gordon Brown will take over both vacancies, poor old Britain; won't be much Great about it now!

Day 52 Les Roches de Condrieu – La Roche de Glun

BLUE MOON left before us, so we had the river to ourselves. Very nice journey with only two locks, one 16m drop & the other only 12m. We had the video running as we rolled into the first lock, so it's all on record.

Very few places to stop on this stretch. We had a look at Tournon but decided against it as it was next to a really busy road. We thought therefore we'd try the pontoon indicated in the chart book located in the old disused part of the river. Disused 'cos they've built a detour round it.

We are so pleased we did, it was delightful – one large pontoon which could take three boats & three finger pontoons, & all free. But there are no facilities. The peniche as they go passed the entrance have little effect on any boats moored there.

The best bit about this place is the wildlife which swims passed the pontoons every night at 9pm. At first we thought they were a couple of Coyppu, but they're actually Beavers! You can see their paddle tails quite clearly as they swim close to your boat.

We stayed for a while in Glun, it was quiet & peaceful until that is the thunderstorms struck. Luckily though most of them rumbled over Lyon behind the hills, away from us.

Internet access can be found at the Mayors office again free of charge.

On a wander one night we stood & watched the antics of the some of the local kids practising 'La Joute'. This was in preparation for their jousting tournament to be held soon. But this isn't jousting as we know it; this is jousting on a boat on a lake!

The person with the stick (pole) is on a platform at the back of the boat; others in the boat are there to assist in the stability of the boat, but mostly to help the poor unfortunate who ends up in the water.

The idea we think is to get as low as you can with the stick held in a holder worn under the trousers & the cup of your hand. The boats are then driven by outboard, very slowly towards each other. The engines are then cut & the momentum carries them forward, gliding towards battle. The jousters lower their poles & aim them at the wooden blocks worn over the left shoulder. These blocks have indentations in them to accept the tip of the pole. The jousters, when contact is made, then push as hard as they can until either they or their opponent is in the water. The part which amazed us in the whole spectacle was that in order to get as low as possible these men are actually doing the splits!

Another strange phenomenon we encountered here was the time we were out for a cycle ride. There we were legs & wheels going round when I realised that we should actually have been free wheeling as I could see the road went downhill. So why did it feel that we were going up hill? We turned round and started going back the other way. This time we could see the road going uphill & we were now free wheeling! Very weird.

Day 53 La Roche de Glun - Valence

rained off & on , mostly on. The lock at Bourg Les Valence took two hours & twenty minutes to get through. Although the scenery here outside the marina is lovely, (there is a ruined castle up on the hill), it does not justify the cost of one nights mooring --- 20.30€!!!! I must admit though the nearby bridge looks stunning when lit, almost as though it's made of glass.

Met Dutch boat by name of KOBOL crewed by Rob & Fini.

Day 54 Valence – Viviers

in convoy with KOBOLD & no problems.

Viviers mooring a bit strange as the pontoons & quay are very high up.

We met another couple who are doing something similar to us but on the road in a campervan.

Day 55 Viviers - Avignon

we went through the large lock which has a drop of 23 metres! The other two were only 10 metres each. The pontoons indicated in the chart book are missing, as they were washed away nearly three years ago & have not been replaced. This meant we had to moor alongside the quay, right next to the busy road.

Our first impression of Avignon was not good; the city itself is behind a huge wall & access is through a few 'gates', which are just gaps every so often in this wall. I think we must have picked the cheaper end of the city - --- it seemed very dirty with lots of posters & graffiti everywhere. The following day we saw a different side, the side the tourists see. The difference was very marked, clean & quite pretty.

We had a ride round the town in the street train, only cost 7€ each.

Day 56 Avignon – Bank on the Canal de Rhone au Sete

we'd intended to leave early but due to heavy rain, thunder & lightening we stayed where we were.

Toni sent a text to his sister to wish her a happy birthday, also to Ray & Mags, (boat name SALLY BETH) the couple Toni had met in Jassons Roitier, to advise them we would be delayed in arriving in Beaucaire where they were waiting for us.

Eventually left at nearly 1130 in beautiful weather; bit scary on the river as there were big peniche causing us all sorts of problems due to their wash. At one point the mast was moving & we were in dread of losing it!

So we were relieved when we turned off the Rhone onto the Petit Rhone as there were no peniche, or so we thought.

The Petit Rhone has to be treated with care as there are massive branches poking into the channel, which isn't that wide anyway. It was along one particular narrow part that we met the peniche. It didn't really cause too much problem as he was having to go quite slowly any way, but it did give us a bit of a heart flutter when we first saw him.

St Gilles lock is very easy to negotiate, it only has a variable of about a metre.

The Canal de Rhone au Sete is one of my favourites. Beautiful wooded sides with bamboo growing quite thickly along the banks, which cut down the amount of noise & wind. We couldn't make Beaucaire as the lock just before it closes at 7pm. So we pulled alongside the bank.

KOBOL carried on towards Beaucaire.



The spot we chose was lovely & allowed the boys to get off to explore, play in the grass & chase bugs of which there were plenty.

Day 57 Canal de Rhone au Sete - Beaucaire

we saw a purple heron on the way, up till now all we'd seen were the more common grey ones.

The lock is all automatic, but you have to start the process by pushing a button. This meant that Toni dropped me off, I then walked up to the lock & applied my digit to the said button.

We poodled along at about 2 knots. We'd already contacted the marina to organise a time for the bridge lift to allow us into the inner marina.

After tying up I met Ray & Mags & liked them immediately.

Toni & I went for a wander later & met John, moored on the other side, he has an 8m Catalac. He invited us on for a beer & a natter.

We'd gone into Beaucaire to allow me to go back to the UK for yet another hospital appointment.

Day 58 Beaucaire – Our spot on canal

we paid just 120€ for 21 days at Beaucaire. Saw another purple heron & a spotted woodpecker.

Day 59 our spot on canal – Aigues Mortes

nice journey, saw lots of wildlife; kingfishers, egrets, purple heron, huge mallard duck and miniature red hot poker

Day 60 Aigues Mortes – Port Camargue

this was our first attempt to leave to go to Port Camargue, but we couldn't make it as there was a huge swell at the entrance, so had to turn back & return to Aigues Mortes. Very frustrating as the journey over to Port Camargue only takes about 15 minutes. But we couldn't risk it, as at the harbour entrance we saw some very



large white horses.

On the way back there was a loud bang from the port engine, all the alarms screamed at us. We'd either hit something or something was caught around the prop.

We phoned Port Camargue to re arrange our lift out, made arrangements to have the mast re stepped at Aigues Mortes & proceeded to find out what was wrong with the engine.

Toni leant over with the boat hook to try to determine

what had happened & came up with a lump of plastic attached to the hook. By strapping a knife to the other end of the hook, Toni managed to slice through the plastic & with me gently tugging on it we soon had it removed. It had been a large plastic sheet, now in ribbons.

As the weather seemed to be bad for the next few days & we were loath to part with any cash, we moved PIPERS DREAM alongside the canal again.

The spot we picked this time was almost perfect; nearby were the Camargue bulls & horses, both of which posed politely for my camera; but, & there's almost always a but, the peniche going by were a real pain in the butt!

That's why we moved back up to our spot where there were no peniche.

Just before we left, Toni decided to wash the decks down a bit as they were a bit grubby. One minute he was leaning over & the next he'd slid down a hole with one foot in the canal; he managed to prevent himself from going under completely by grabbing hold of the guardrail, which now has a gentle curve as he bent it. I don't know.....a gay guardrail, what next?

Day 61 canal bank – Aigues Mortes

moved back down to the marina as mast being done following day. It means we then have to stay in the marina as France will more or less close for the weekend due to Bastille Day.

Aigues Mortes

mast up with no probs, 'cept I was stung yet again when we moved the solar panel.

We sat up on deck to watch the firework displays that were going on all around us. We put the foresail up as well on the Friday & the main on the Saturday.

With the dinghy pumped up & once more in commission, Toni used it to go to the supermarket & get some shopping!

Day 62 Aigues Mortes – Grau Roi

moved down today as it would be easier then for the trip to Port Camargue.

Saw lots of flamingos & yes they really are pink. We went through the first bridge & stopped for the night alongside a pontoon. We had a wander through the town & came to the conclusion that it's just a Mediterranean version of Southend on Sea.....minus the Kiss Me Quick Hats!

Day 63 Grau Roi – Port Camargue

at 1157hrs we left the canals & once more put to sea. We had a little sail around simply because we couldn't resist it.

we had booked our lift out for 1500, we were actually lifted out at 1600.

END OF CANAL JOURNEY, GPS TRIP 1075nm.

A CATALAC COMES HOME

By

MARTIN MINTER-KEMP

ECHO sat in the RAF marina in Akrotiri, basking in the hot sunshine looking very much the weekend sailer. She also looked very small. Nine tons lighter than our last boat, was she up to the passage to UK? Five countries, 27 islands, three canals and lots of lock later we know that she was. What we had thought might be a fun boat for the grandchildren turns out to be a very comfortable and seaworthy second home afloat.

Our first optimistic plan was to sail west from Cyprus, around the toe of Italy and enter the Canal du Midi via Gar du Roi. The winds thought otherwise and we ended up on the Turkish coast in Finike Marina. So kind were the staff and so reasonable the rates that we left “Catnick” there for the winter, returning in the spring to continue homewards.

The Turkish coastline is truly enchanting with tiny villages, (all selling carpets at rock-bottom prices) and really friendly people. Turkish food is delicious and the water of the pure spring variety. Skirting Greek islands, which appear improbably close to the Turkish mainland, we finally took our leave of Turkey south of Bodrum and entered Greece (and the EEC) at Kos. Here we met officialdom in all its bureaucratic splendour! Customs, Immigration and Police, the latter demanding £36 to enter Greece from a country outside the Common Market, even though the boat had originated inside it! From then on, however, no official came near us during our meandering course across the Aegean, Patmos, Livitha, Amorgos, Thira, Skhinousa, Paros, Kithnos, Cape Saunion, Poros, Vathi, Epidavros and Corinth. Our most lasting impressions were the sunken volcano of Thira, still steaming and emitting noxious fumes, and the amphitheatre near Epidavros, so acoustically perfect that a speaker standing on a marked spot on the stage can be heard by all of the 9000 audience.

We arrived at the eastern end of the Corinth canal to be reassured that “*little boats pay little money*” and that 8.9m was “*very little*”. Our top speed of four knots however meant sailing at the back of the west-going convoy which suited us fine. The canal really is a wonder of the ancient world even though a motorway now crosses it. A slight delay was due to the floating bridge at the western end getting stuck, due we were told to lack of maintenance, due to lack of traffic, a downward spiral we suspected.

After a supermarket victual ling stop at Corinth we sailed at dawn with an easterly wind, which blew us up the Gulf of Corinth, gusting to f.6. Suddenly we felt that we had left the eastern Mediterranean and were back, almost, in European waters. We moored in Novato’s and climbed the hill to view the tiny harbour from the ramparts of the castle whose walls encompassed both town and harbour. The following day we sailed through the straits where what looked like a new bridge foundation was being laid across the mouth of the Gulf. Turning north we followed the coast, with the mountains giving way to low hills and marshes. Our destination was Corfu but the islands en route made it hard to hurry. Small wonder that Onassis bought one of them for his own personal use, (*with the one next door for his dairy herd*).

Reluctantly leaving the calm of the Inland Sea we entered the Lefkas Canal after waiting for the swing bridge to open. Now we were in the Adriatic proper and the wind obliged, allowing us a close reach towards Corfu. We worked up the east coast, keeping a wary eye open for the almost continuous stream of ferries that criss-cross from Italy, Greece and the islands. Our goal was a tiny bay on the north east tip of Corfu, with Albania less than a mile across the strait. Dropping anchor in the bay was like entering a land of milk and honey; a cable off the beach lined with tavernas, pure water to flop into and far too much ouzo on tap.

Moored on the beach, we made friends with another 9m Catalac and her artist owner, who walked ashore down his gangway straight into his local taverna. This we decided is what catamarans are all about and followed suit, filling our water tanks at the same time. While parts of Corfu have turned into concrete costas, the North and interior of the island remain unspoilt and we hired a car to explore. Looking across to Albania, remote and mysterious, it was not difficult to believe the stories of desperate crossings of the strait on inner tubes, only to be repatriated if caught, by the Greek Border Guard boats.

The only excitement on the boating front was the loss of our CQR due to a failed swivel. I had seen a Bruce 7.5 kg anchor in town and found it cost under £25. So far it has not dragged, once in all sorts of weather and conditions, and is easier to handle and stow than the CQR, highly recommended!

After an *alcoholic* farewell evening ashore we sailed for the Straits of Messina with *fuzzy heads*, but remembered the advice to keep well to the Greek rather than Albanian side of the channel north. Murphy’s Law gave head winds after motoring across the shoals of Othoni and Mathraki islands, (thank heavens for our shoal draft), and we finished up on the heel, rather than the toe, of Italy. Marina di Leuca is a fishing port boasting an enormous marble staircase ordered by Mussolini, as a welcome symbol to Italy. It also has a useful lighthouse, since we arrived in the small hours. After a few hours’ rest, we proceeded under power, again towards Messina Strait, only to be blown out of it by the local and violent wind. Anchoring off the beach we had the bonus of a clear view of Mount Etna above the mists and the bells of a church in the village nearby. The harbour on the chart had silted up but next morning a flat calm allowed us to follow the coast to Reggio di Calabria for fuel and water. The marina was crowded and expensive, the Italian navy appears to control it, and we elected to leave on the northerly tidal stream and a fair wind.

The Isole Lipari lie 20 miles north of Sicily and advertise their volcanic origins by the fumes which wreath the islands. They are high peaks dropping straight into the sea with villages clinging to the edges. The natives however were as friendly as most islanders tend to be and sold us wonderful fresh fruit, eggs and milk. We motored away in a flat calm looking for win which, when it arrived, was once again on the nose. Electing for a port tack, we ran into a 7 km. fish net at two in the morning. Such nets are meant to be lit by lights at either end – not much help if you arrive in the middle. Once more blessing our shallow draught we used our bread knife to cut away the net from the screws and fled NE, raising Isola di Ponza the following day. This is a delightful island with colour co-ordinated homes around a sheltered harbour

with good anchorages and no marina. It is a favourite weekend destination for Neapolitans and the ferries to and from Naples were frequent.

Taking advantage of a NE breeze, we next headed NW only to suffer a flooded crankcase due to a water-pump failure. Anzio was to starboard and we limped in to find a berth and mechanic. This was our first real experience of an Italian town and its inhabitants and we liked both. Italians seem to fizz, the women are immaculately dressed and all the cars appeared to be new. Scooters use road and pavements with equal abandon while the police admire their profiles in their driving mirrors! Re-provisioned and with both engines pulling, (*or should it be pushing?*) we slipped for Elba.

Needless to say, the wind backed to the NW and pushed “Echo” relentlessly towards the shore. The river Tiber offered an overnight possibility and we thankfully sailed two miles upstream to a berth alongside a yacht club on the riverbank. Here we saw cantilevered fishing nets similar to those on the Garonne, lining the banks for miles. It was strange to think that we were just downstream from Rome on a river with so much history. An early morning start took advantage of a strong ebb and swept us back to sea where the wind allowed a course to be set for Elba. This was not to be however and we motor-sailed to the remarkable peninsula of Monte Argentario, arriving in the old port at dusk. Here was another delightful circular harbour fringed with pastel-coloured houses and restaurants. Once again we appeared to be invisible to the locals due, possibly, to our small size and discreet livery!

Sailing at dawn next day, with a calm sea and hot sun, the islands along the coast shimmered in the heat haze. Sadly mirror-like seas show up the plastic flotsam all too clearly – roll on biodegradable plastic bags. By late afternoon we were off Porto on the west coast of Elba and made for the anchorage at the head of the forest-fringed bay. While deep-keeled yachts jostled for space, we smugly sailed on until we could see the bottom and anchored in splendid isolation.

Elba is a beautiful island, it has been said that Napoleon was truly happy here, albeit under enforced circumstances, and would have been content to take up permanent residence. We promised ourselves a return visit. Our next leg was to be aimed in the general direction of the French Riviera and the tiny island of Capraia stood in the way and, with evening approaching, we anchored off the small harbour and rowed ashore. The island was, and in parts still a penal settlement with convict cell-blocks dotted around the northern mountainous slopes. We reckoned that life for the inmates could not have been too bad.

The cafes around the port were full of the “beautiful people” from French resorts aboard their beautiful yachts. One such yacht, thinking that we were anchored in deep water, made the mistake of anchoring alongside us and went firmly aground. With very little tide the ensuing pantomime made amusing viewing!

An 18-hour passage with a light following wind raised Cap d’Antibes in the early morning. The brown haze over the water turned out to be smog from the numerous gin palaces and high-speed motor launches tearing from A to B and back again, (or simply in circles). Having our tanks filled by a blonde in a micro-bikini was also a new experience, but being invited to pay double fees as a multihull in the marina made us opt for island anchorages, as we moved west past the well-known resorts, St. Raphael, St. Tropez, Iles d’Hyeres, Toulon and Marseilles. Surprisingly the coast offers numerous anchorages in between the ports and marinas, often with one or two yachts anchored in a sheltered bay.

Our last stop before crossing the mouth of the Rhone was at Cap Couronne and after a memorable fish dinner, we sailed at dusk to arrive at Grau du Roi in the early morning. The presence of the Rhone made itself felt five miles to seaward with the current pushing “*Echo*” south in no uncertain way. Visibility then closed in and we had genuine fog for the first time since Cyprus. Thanks for the GPS the entrance to Grau du Roi appeared out of the mist exactly where it should and entered the canal-like harbour, (which is what it is), and tied up below the swing bridge among the fishing boats. The latter sell their catch direct to the restaurants that line the quays on both sides with tourists already much in evidence.

The bridge opens every four hours and we passed through it and up to a second lifting bridge carrying the new bypass. Thereafter the canal continues north for six miles to the impressive fortified walls of Aigues Mortes where masts have to be lowered. This we did without any dramas, thanks to explicit

instructions and applause from the inevitable boat watchers. Due to a family wedding, “*Echo*” was moored on a quiet canal reach, the keys given to a friendly French live aboard and a flight home from Nimes via Ryanair was simplicity itself.

Two months later we returned to find all well and the grape harvest in full swing. After suitable liquid farewells, we set off along the Canal due Rhone a Sete which has been widened and deepened in attempt to lure back commercial traffic – with little apparent success to date. We passed Sete, pausing to watch maritime jousting on boats fitted with cantilevered platforms from which young braves attempt to dislodge their opponents with lance and shield, encouraged by partisan crowds on the quays. Lots of noise and everyone seems to end up in the water. Sete is the beginning of the Etang de Thau, an inland sea complete with flamingos in large numbers. The start of the canal du Midi lies at the western end 17 kms. from Sete and marked by a lighthouse. Entering the Midi the countryside enfolded us and the Mediterranean suddenly seemed totally remote.

Up until now the waterways had been lock-free and our first one on the Midi reminded us of what was to come. It was still early in the season but we shared the locks with two or more yachts or holiday mini-peniches. As we travelled in company towards Agde, a camaraderie evolved between boats with mooring lines being taken for each other and fenders strategically positioned. Agde was reached at dusk and the locks and their keepers were most definitely not working – it being Saturday night. Sunday morning however produced a keeper for the famous circular lock and we passed through, waving to the numerous British boats, which form a little colony along the canal bank. “Why bother to move when it is so pleasant here” seems to be a very sensible philosophy much in vogue along the canal.

This account has so far made little mention of “*Echo*” and her virtues (and vices). Our previous transit of the French canals with a 13 ton motor-sailer was sheer hard work, especially in the locks. A Catalac at four tons displacement however is a joy both to handle and cope with the locks – especially going uphill. “*Echo*” remained docile and unflustered by the torrents of water thrown at her, while other deeper draught yachts in the lock were straining their warps, and crews, sometimes severely. She could nestle up to canal banks, allowing crew to step ashore with dignity and without a gangplank. On the debit side, entering the hulls tended to cause headaches until one remembered to duck – but did provide a little gentle exercise.

Progress west continued with Carcassonne as our destination where my wife Bunny would fly out to rejoin “*Echo*”. We went up the eight lock ladder at Beziers and through the oldest(?) canal tunnel ever at Malpas. The canal twisted and turned around the hill contours, climbing ever higher with glimpses of the Pyrenees away to the South. Much canal-side planting is being carried out since the Canal due Midi is now a World Heritage Monument with funding to match. We stopped counting after the 1000th!

The ancient city of Carcassonne finally appeared. South of the canal looking as awesome as it did in films like “*The Gun*”. We moored where we could see the floodlit ramparts at night before moving into the Port de Plaisance in front of the convenient but noisy Gare. (French trains, even the goods variety, seem to go at break-neck speed, day and night – but then they are always on time) The next five days were spent spring-cleaning and polishing before Bunny’s arrival. The intricacies of the lavateria were mastered and everything washable was –put through it. All this activity was observed with amusement by bachelor/grass widower skippers along the canal bank with no such deadlines to meet. Finally all was ready and Ryanair deposited Bunny at the airport with no formalities at all. A celebration dinner in the Old City and the crew was once more complete. The temptation to linger in Carcassonne and savour life on the Midi in slow motion was almost overwhelming. However, we knew that the Bay of Biscay and the English Channel with its inevitable equinoctial gales were waiting for us at the Atlantic end of the Gironde and we needed to get a move on. It actually took us seventeen days and although we didn’t hang around we still managed to do a decent run each day and also find time to explore our surroundings in the evenings, even occasionally stopping for a leisurely lunch at some irresistible spot.

Knowing that we might not stop again in a large town with shops and a market handy, we victualled the boat with what we thought were enough stores and fresh fruit and vegetables to last at least a week. To

wander around a French open air market sampling fruit, cheeses, cuts of saussicon and smoked meats on a warm sunny autumn morning, is to sample a small slice of Heaven. Even with our rusty French and limited knowledge of the produce on sale we were made to feel that each of our small purchases was of the utmost importance to the stallholder. It is wonderful how goodwill and a handshake cuts through language barriers and makes one feel valued and at home.

Working the uphill locks is totally different from dealing with locks on the downhill stretch. On entering the lock one is faced with a towering metal gate with water pouring and spouting out of every crack, flowing powerfully through the lower sluices. The walls of the lock chamber appear to be impressively high damp cliffs, sometimes almost shutting out the daylight. The Midi locks are oval shaped – built that way for strength – and sometimes makes it tricky to come alongside neatly. With these uphill locks it is necessary to put a crewmember ashore before entering the lock so that there is someone up on the lock to take warps. The poor skipper, if he is left alone onboard, has to be nifty about positioning his vessel and then throwing lines up fore and aft and to his crew, before the incoming waters force the boat backwards. The Midi locks aren't big and three boats of average size – say 30/40 ft.- are all it can accommodate. The trick is not to go too far forward because when the lock keeper opens the main sluices the water pours in at an alarming rate. A little distance between your boat and the lock gate ahead is vital if you are not to be swamped or battered by the incoming torrent. We managed between 15 and 20 locks most days without any problems and enjoyed the challenge enormously.

The joy of travelling across France in late autumn is that we travelled alone most of the time. We went for days sometimes without seeing another boat and where the locks were automatic, without seeing a person. We would stop when we had had enough and just tie up to a tree or its roots to hold us into the bank. Having such a shallow draft and two hulls meant that we could nudge into the bank easily and still keep one hull in deeper water which helped when we came to push off again. It never felt lonely and we just revelled in the peace of the green tranquillity that had become our world. Some mornings we would get underway before it was fully light. The mists rising from the canal and the moisture dripping from the trees lining the banks, which almost met overhead, created a mysterious, timeless atmosphere. We would chug slowly along in the half-light occasionally disturbing herons that were feeding on the edges of the canal and small fish that skipped and flapped through the water at our approach. Once we annoyed a coypu, which swam across in front of the boat. It looked like a large otter. It turned its head as we passed and glared hard at us for disturbing his patch of water.

Most days by lunchtime the sun overhead was really hot and we would look for a shady tree to shelter under for a lunch break. The lock-keepers, rather like the rest of France, lunched any time from midday till 2.00 pm and we had to fit in with their schedule. We found everyone helpful and friendly. At one lock we asked if by any chance there was a mechanic who was familiar with Renault engines in the little town ahead. No-one around knew but later we found out that a phone call to the lock-keeper down the line asked the question and when we arrived the answer and the engineer were waiting. We had no idea all this was going on. Everyone is just concerned to be of help. Throughout the whole journey through France everyone we met was friendly and if needs be, most helpful. We did wonder if we would have had the same treatment in the UK, if the boat were on the other foot.

Within three days of leaving Carcassone we arrived at the “top” near le Segala. This is the highest point of the watershed between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, 90 metres above sea level. It was here, in the mid 17th century that Paul Ricquet, chief architect of the Midi, set about channelling the waters which flow from the mountains to the north to create what we know today as the Canal du Midi and the Canal Lateral a la Garonne – one flowing east into the Mediterranean and the other west into the Atlantic. At this point we tied “Echo” onto a tree stump by the towpath and walked up to the Ricquet obelisk to pay our respects to the man and his vision. Afterwards we entered our first downhill lock aptly named Ecluse de l’Ocean with a gentle drop of 2.60 m. What a difference – gone were the rushing waters pouring in on us from above. That first lock was a gem of peace and quiet with the shade from trees over 200 years old almost covering it. Before entering the lock we had to slow down and wait on a deep green pool of clear water that cannot have changed much since its creation except that the trees have matured and now cast an even deeper shade over the still waters of the canal. A short while later we

turned out of the canal and into the Port de Plaisance at Lauragais. After being on our own for the last few days we found ourselves suddenly surrounded by buildings and boats and lots of people. The port consists of two huge man-made lakes and some impressive buildings cantilevered out over the water which housed restaurants, shops and an interesting museum dedicated to Ricquet and his works. The rest is immaculate parkland mown to perfection with little grassy hummocks, rose beds and banks of flowering shrubs. Apart from not seeing any rabbits, we had the distinct feeling we had arrived in *Teletubby land*. We had managed to foul one of our props on a tree root earlier in the day and needed to fix the problem as we looked around for a suitable place to moor up and be able to get at the stern of the boat easily, we found ourselves taken in hand by a couple of splendid characters –a bargee and a man walking his dog and obviously bored. With lots of instructions in a marvellous mixture of French and English, the offending tree root was removed. The barge owner then insisted that we tied up alongside him so that we shouldn't get into any further trouble. Little did he know what we were capable of!

The next day we decided to bite the bullet and position ourselves at Port Sud in order to tackle Toulouse the following morning. We reckoned that, as it would be Sunday the water traffic through the city might not be too bad. We had managed 45 locks since Carcassone without a mishap but knew that we were coming up to automatic locks and until we reached them, didn't know how they worked. The build up was slow. Most of the city seemed asleep till around 8.00 am but then it seemed that every able-bodied man, woman and child was either jogging, roller-blading, running, walking or cycling along the tow paths. To our relief they weren't on the water. We had a busy morning and once we had worked out the automatic system, made good progress. Before we knew it we were through the city and into the Canal Lateral a la Garonne. Yet again, we had the canal to ourselves and began to feel guilty about the huge amounts of water we were moving in and out, each time we went through a lock. We had left the oval locks of the Midi behind and were now working with the oblong shaped variety, much easier to negotiate. The country around us was some of the loveliest that we had yet seen. In some parts nothing appeared to have been cut back along the banks in a decade or so. It was wild and beautiful. One of our overnight stops was in the Port de Plaisance at Castelsarrasin where we met a splendid Dane who had built himself a garage on the stern of his boat and, with the help of a small hydraulic lift, could drive his car on and off with ease. One learns not to be surprised by anything on French canals.

Progress is such that the French canals are now official tourist areas which attract European funding. The lock keepers are paid officials; boats need papers and have to pay dues. The picturesque houses with their enchanting cottage gardens are being sold out of the system and becoming holiday homes. For us, the dramatic entrance across the Tarn Aquaduct at Moissac is now far less spectacular since at the far end, the loveliest of all the lock houses has changed. We have fond memories of how, when we passed through ten years ago, the lock house and the garden were smothered in masses of bright flowers and climbers and everything was painted and cared for with great love and pride. The old couple who lived there allowed us to tie up in the lock overnight, so that we could enjoy the amazing view of the river and wander in their garden. Next morning they smothered us with fresh fruit and vegetables and wouldn't take a franc. So what, we wonder, is progress? Moissac is a favourite place of ours and so we allowed ourselves some time there. We revisited the magnificent basilica of St. Peter with its vast intricately carved stone entrance and enormous interior walls, hand painted in ochre, blue and pink. We stopped in the square for a table d'hote lunch which consisted of three courses of excellent food and a large jug of superb local wine, all for under £5 each. That lunch combined with the warm sunshine, forced us to make a late afternoon start. Still sleepy we set off again. Our first obstacle was a swing bridge. Luckily the Madame in charge saw us weaving our way towards her and opened the bridge for us. Our klaxon, which we were feverishly trying to use, wouldn't work. We found out later that it was completely clogged with a spider's web. That spider must have been there since Turkey, the last time we had to use it.

October 1st found us nearing the end of the Canal Lateral. After a breakfast of fresh croissant and coffee we set off from Buzet aiming for the village of Mas d'Agenais where we planned to visit the local church and see for ourselves the Rembrandt picture we had been told about. The church was large, empty and quiet. In the subdued light, hanging on a plain rough stone wall, we found this beautiful, agonisingly sad painting of the Crucifixion. It is not protected or secured in any way that we could see but to look up into the face of the Christ figure is to know that it is indeed the masterpiece it claims to be. We came out into the bright sunlight in the little town square both awed and humbled by such beauty in so simple a setting.

The Garonne and the canal are, at this point, now beginning to run parallel. Every so often, through gaps in the trees bordering the canal, there were glimpses of a very wide, rather muddy expanse of water flowing ever seawards. We began to think we could smell the Atlantic.

It is important to coincide ones arrival at Castets en Dorthe and the last lock down into the Garonne with the top of the tide. This allows a favourable current all the way to Bordeaux. This was important because there was no way “Echo” could have moved against a foul tide. We also needed daylight for this part of the journey, so had to get it right. In the event, we arrived at the top lock around mid-day and were told to wait for an hour and then enter at 1.00 pm exactly. We did as we were told. This last lock is in two stages and both are very deep. We were one of three boats marshalled by a very efficient lock-keeper who told us exactly what to do and when, even more important, what to expect. Down we went and we were suddenly out in the Garonne – sort of spat out. One minute you are in a quiet canal and the next you are in a fast flowing river heading rather alarmingly for the middle span of a large bridge across the river.

It took us exactly four hours to get to Bordeaux. It is very exciting to arrive in a big city by water. We had had a huge tide under us all the way and at times were doing 7 knots, which up till then was unheard of and undreamed of by us in “Echo”. It was an exhilarating run but with good charts and a non-panicking crew picking out the landmarks and shouting warnings about submerged tree-trunks, branches and plastic flotsam, we arrived tired but unscathed. Once in Bordeaux we had to find somewhere to tie up and quickly, before the tide changed and swept us upstream again. Our small engines were no match for the river’s awesome strength. We should have realised then that that was to be the pattern from now on – with 350 miles still to go. We found an ancient laid-up iron barge and tied on but had our doubts as to whether it would lift with the tide. By then it was too late change our minds, the tide had turned.

Once again we had good reason to be grateful we were on a Catalac. All the tree trunks, branches and rubbish that had gone down with us earlier, was on its way upstream again and doing its best to ram us. We would rush on deck whenever we felt a big bump only to see whatever it was hitting us disappearing between the hulls and out again.

In the late afternoon light the water looked a very evil murky brown and the sight of it swirling and racing past made one giddy and determined not to get any closer to it. We were glad to leave next morning and be out once again in the current heading for Pauillac, where we hoped to put up the mast. That trip took another four hours. It was a fascinating journey down the wide and often shallow Gironde – the city of Bordeaux and its outskirts on one side and mile after mile of docks and large industrial works on the other. There was also a lot of shipping on the move and we had to keep a good look out behind, sideways and in front. Yet again we arrived at our destination with no tide to spare.

A friend had joined us at Buzet and now in the quiet water of the marina at Pauillac, he and Martin raised “Echo’s” mast without any problems. Sadly Simon’s time with us was up and he caught a bus back to Bordeaux the next morning and we were on our own again. Taking advantage of the tide, we set out to motor-sail across and up to Royan, about 45 miles away on the north side of the entrance to the Gironde. The tide beat us this time and we only just made it into Port Bloc on the south-west side of the estuary. It had taken about 7 hours to do only 30 miles. The tide turned against us making the last mile a real slog with the light also fading. We finally crept in to find the port full. There was no room to raft up because it is a busy ferry port with little turning space. Here again being a Catalac and therefore not very wide and not needing much water to float, we found a small slot of space and pushed and squeezed until we fitted in rather snugly. We tied up, closed down our faithful engines, had a tot and relaxed. We were the only people, apart from the Pilot crew, aboard in the whole port. After the day we were very grateful for the peace.

With a forecast of strong north-westerlies there was no way we could get out of the estuary and work our way around Oleron and across to La Rochelle. So we relaxed and enjoyed ourselves in Port Bloc, which turned out to be a delightful place. Gone now was the peace and tranquillity of the canals. We were now back once more in the environment our little boat was designed for. We were keen to know how she would behave in Atlantic waters. From now on we would have to move whenever the tides and winds allowed, to try to work our way north west exactly where the winds always seemed to be blowing from. We had always known it would be a gamble to be wandering around Biscay and the west coast of France in late autumn but there we were and we had no choice. Several times along the way, when it seemed we were going to be weather-bound for a long while, we researched the possibility of leaving “Echo” and returning later when the weather improved. When it came to it, we could never bear to leave her again and it became a matter of honour to get her and us home together, to our mooring on the river Fowey. So we sailed on when we were able and ran for shelter when the conditions became too foul to

be at sea. The big tides in that part of the world were also a huge factor, without them in our favour we could get nowhere. We moved mostly in daylight hours rather than at night, unless we really had to, due to the very real danger of becoming entangled in one of the hundreds of unlit fishing buoys that seem to litter the French coastal waters. We had a couple of nasty experiences with these floats when Martin had to go over the side with the breadknife at night in rough water to free a snared propeller. We were grateful that "Echo's" propellers are so close to the surface. Having two of them also meant that we could limp into port using only one engine, if we had to – rope cutters are now high on our priority list!

Our average day's run was only around 30 miles. This meant that we found shelter in all sorts of out of the way wonderful places. Places we should never have dreamt of visiting if we had been able to get a move on. We went from mainland to Atlantic island and then back to the mainland, zigzagging our way up and around the coast of western France. Usually we were the only visitors in port and we were either totally ignored and allowed to please ourselves as to whether we stayed or left, or else we were almost smothered in goodwill and made some wonderful friends, which was very heart-warming. Without doubt every single place we visited we promised to return to one day – but preferably in gentle, warm summer weather.

When we were in Carcassonne planning the last 600 miles of "Echo's" odyssey from Cyprus, we felt as if we were on the home straight. Martin did mutter something about the possibility of there being a "sting in the tail". How right his prophecy was. As far as his crew was concerned the last 100 miles was a sting and a half. We were sheltering in L'Aber Wrac'h river when the shipping forecast gave us what we hoped was our weather window for a run across to Fowey. We set out in a blustery west wind and a big swell. That was all fine till about half way across. Then the wind increased alarmingly. The expected f 6/7 became 8/9. The big seas were too much for the self-steering and I didn't have the strength to hold "Echo" against some of the huge waves that were pushing us along. Martin had to hand steer having first taken in the jib and then the main. We surfed up and down the seas for hours on end and finally, seventeen hours after leaving France, almost flew into Fowey harbour entrance at three o'clock in the morning, under bare poles and doing just over 6 knots. It had been a terrifying yet exhilarating passage. Later that morning, with great pride, we introduced "Echo" to our welcoming and relieved family. Throughout "Echo" had behaved like a true ocean sailor and did everything we had asked of her with style and courage. We were all three home again, having shared a great adventure.

The Cyprus to UK statistics may be of interest. Five seas, one channel, one ocean, 25 islands and a lot of locks! Total mileage 285.5 nm by GPS. "Echo" behaved impeccably throughout and my wife fine-tuned on the distaff side as to what makes a boat a home, is definitely converted from mono to multihull. "Echo" is now almost literally parked at the bottom of our garden, taking her ease in a mud berth across the river Fowey, while we pipe-dream all the improvements we hope to make, but that is another story.

"Echo" has had several mods since coming back from Cyprus and is moored at Golant, up river from the pretty Cornish town of Fowey in company of another 9m. Catalac.

Golant is an ideal stop for the night with easy landing on both sides of the river it has the added advantage of being just past the limit that the dreaded highwayman tends to call for mooring fees. ED.

Dagnall And Cathy Clutterbuck were busy last winter.

This has been a very strange winter for Cathy and I, as we managed to get to two boat shows within two weeks of each other. No, not Earls Court and Excel, but Excel and "The Florida Boat Show" in Orlando!. The reason for this happy circumstance was that my work took me to Orlando for a week, and I was able to take Cathy for a winter break after the work finished. It was Cathy, who surfing the web for things to do whilst I was working found the "largest boat show in Florida".... Well, we just had to see what Excel might be up against!, and I thought it might make an interesting "filler" for the magazine, so made sure I took some photos.

The event was easy enough to find, the location was vast, which looked like good news, but actually, the boat show only filled the "north" hall of the center. The car park was the first thing

that showed the difference from the London Events: Quite apart from the sunshine, there was hardly anyone in the car park, and it was VAST.

We paid our \$8 admission, and entered the hall. Second difference from London, - Virtually no chandlery stands, no big name electronics, and no SAILS!. It was all powerboats, and all petrol engines. Anyway, having got in we decided to at least see what was there, and found that all the stand helpers were exceptionally friendly. We were able to look in detail at even the most expensive boats on show, and had some great chats. It turned out that this was the third day (Monday) of a normally two day event, and most Floridians had attended on the earlier days. There were probably only about 200 visitors whilst we were there and the staff were glad of any attention!. – But were still happy to let us wander over their boats without “hovering”. I’m afraid that at this point I must admit that did nearly get seduced away from the true CATALAC path, by some amazing interiors:

This was a 30 ft power boat, brand new and about £100,000. It had three air conditioning units, (with their own silent generator), as well as the obligatory massive petrol engines to actually power the beast. I think that there were two TV’s, a Microwave, cooker fridge etc... all electric and run from the generator. One difference that was very noticeable was that the “Cookers” on all the boats were single ring Electric units, often set in beautiful solid “corian” work surfaces like the one in the photo. We talked to the guys on the stand about this and it seems that in the USA, if a

boat has “cooking” facilities, then it is classed as a second home, and you can claim the interest back against tax!!! - But eating out is so inexpensive that most boat owners never cook on their boats and eat out in restaurants... Hence the single electric hob!



We did actually find a lot of catamarans at the show, they were these “pontoon” boats.

These are effectively Aluminium tubes with a solid deck, sun shade, motor and lots of seats.

They looked great for the sun and fishing, but I could not imagine what a slight sea chop would do to them!. Nevertheless, some were able to do up to 50mph, by having massive motors and planing surfaces on the bottom of the tubes: Which brings me to my final picture....

I wonder what I would need to do to put these on the back of SCUBACAT?

All the best,

Dagnall and Cathy.

I think if you had those on the back of SCUACAT with all that power the standard props would work ok. However you may need to beg your boss not to let you have so much time off work and ask him to let you do longer hours, as having recently spoken to an owner of a 30ft. cabin cruiser

with a single diesel engine who is very pleased with the fuel consumption of his present boat, he continued to tell me that he gets 2.5 miles to the gallon. (he is pleased with 2.5 mpg little wonder most gin palaces don't venture to far from their home port)

I think you would be lucky if those two engines on the rear of SCUBACAT did one mile per gallon and with petrol still a lot dearer to buy than marine diesel, you will need very deep pockets. ED.

AIS (Automatic Identification System) on the Cheap.

This article has been written for those of you who want to save a bit of cash and also see how useful this might be to your navigation, especially across busy shipping lanes.

AIS is a VHF radio transmission.

To see this transmission you need a VHF Radio With a **Discriminator** output.

An **Audio Cable** between the Radio and Computer.

A **computer**, preferably a laptop With a Pentium

type hard drive with a reasonable Amount of

memory and a compatible sound card.

Don't despair please read on !

All can be found from the following web site,

www.coaa.co.uk/shipplotter.htm

From here you can download your software on temporary basis or you can spend a few pounds to buy a more permanent version.

You can also look at the site www.discriminator.nl/index-en.html this site has all the information about finding and / or converting a radio or scanner to one you can use.

I purchased a very nice scanner on EBAY for about £10 which will also scan aircraft, police, amateur radio bands and loads of other things that you can listen in to. It is best in FM mode as the AIS signal is quite broad band and you may not receive all the message if not receiving in FM.

The two frequencies used are channel 87. 161.975 MHz and channel 88. 162.025 MHz.

The information sent every 2 to 10 seconds is the ships MMSI Number, Navigation Status,(Anchor or Underway). Speed. Rate of Turn ? Position. Course and Time.

And every 6 minutes it transmits MMSI Number.

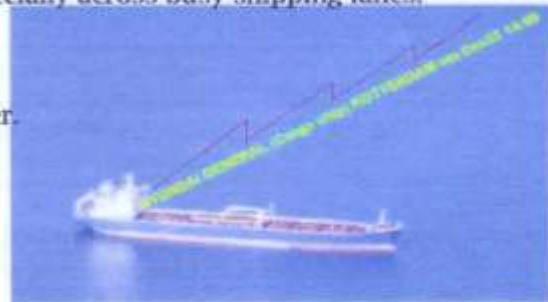
Call Sign. Ships Name. Type of Ship or Cargo.

Draught. Destination and ETA.

It may look something similar to the info on the right.

Having downloaded the software you will also want to look at the Charts available, these can vary a bit and I would not bother to much with them to start with.

First of all get your system together and up and running.



Mobile Geographics is worth looking at to start with As you can select your area and size chart to get you Started this is on

www.sailwx.info/maps/shipplotter.phtml

Putting in Lat.49.5 Long.-1 and a radius of 100 nm Will give you most of the English Channel, then you Can start reducing down to your own area.

I have only just started playing with this myself

But please feel free to contact me if you need any help.

bobatlongleaze@aol.com

Bob Freeman.

The questions members have asked about this month are too numerous to be dealt with in this month's newsletter, they include rubbing strake replacement, Davits, Cockpit covers and

Should any member have advice or pictures of cockpit covers, or davits please e.mail them to me so we can share your experiences and please give us an idea of the costs that you incurred.

It was agreed that a rally should be held at Bembridge commencing on 22 May (HW 13.55 hrs) to 25 May. Those who wished could stay on over the Bank Holiday.

It was agreed that there should be a rally at Poole from Friday, 5 September to Sunday, 7 September with a lunch party at the RNLi College.

Peter Gimson advised the meeting of a MOCRA rally at Brest to which we had been invited. A local French Club had also invited us to join their cruise from Brest exploring some of the Islands further down Biscay. The details of which he would provide in due course via The Newsletter.

Rush update from Marilyn who is fortunate to be enjoying better weather than us Europeans as she continues her adventure of a lifetime that most of us can only dream about.

whether it be after work on Friday evening for a week-end cruise or the annual sailing holiday on and off with all the usual must have provisions