

Captain Slog

Friday 27th June 2008

Arrived Great Haywood at 20:40, about 3.5 hours from Hexham. Much easier journey which could have been quicker still but for the inevitable Friday night delays on the M6. Slowly decamped from the car to the boat and stayed overnight at the Marina – what an improvement over STLM.

Saturday 28th June 2008

13 miles and 12 locks – Gt Haywood to Barlaston. Lunch at Weston (The Woolpack). Easy mooring but relatively long stretch in the afternoon in glorious evening sunshine up through Meaford Locks (you would be hard pushed to find the original staircase). Stone looked pleasant enough but seemed over populated with hairy bikers, at least around Star Lock. Agree to Andy's suggestion for £5 donation/float for the gas bottle. I would appreciate a meter as well. I am no good at estimating what is left and may have been guilty of leaving a near empty bottle in past. I enquired about gas bottle meters at the marina – “we don't have any but you will soon know when it is empty” – very astute.

Assuming the crew (Pam) is up to it, tomorrow we head for the Macclesfield and the Cheshire Ring.

Sunday 29th June 2008

Shopping at Londis Bridge 103, hence late start. Cemetery above lock 37 and a monsoon arrived so moored early for lunch. Afternoon race to Harecastle which we just failed to reach in time. In a queue of four for an early start at 08:00 tomorrow. Another very fine and warm evening moored up at the tunnel entrance. Highlights – excellent buildings at Etruscan Bone and Flint Mill and Etruria Junction – much improved since I last passed this way in 1977. Lowlights – Stoke FC Britannia Stadium co-located with an incinerator and Sainsbury's Distribution Centre, several times the size of Stoke FC. Look out for the Dolphin Yard – Tacle (sic), Bait, airguns, rifle range and Americal line dancing – all at once?

Monday 30th June 2008

Up at 07:00 to catch the 08:00 convoy through the Harecastle. Thanks to the acoustics we enjoyed a fine sing-along amongst the front three boats. Pam gave a solo performance of *The Blaydon Races* followed by an extract of *When the Boat Comes In*.

Moored above the Dane aqueduct for lunch then headed down the disused railway and up the fields from the Mill to Bosley and the Queens Arms. Remember the beautifully constructed footbridge over a stream beneath the vicarage – this is actually the canal feeder from Bosley Reservoir. Local knowledge – I used to live three doors from the pub at Raven Cottage – local knowledge did not extend to knowing it is now closed Monday lunch time. Made do with the grim Harrington Arms further up the road. Edible pub food but not to be recommended. A Robinsons pub – probably the worst beer in the world.

A couple of hours up the Bosley flight and overnight at the Fool's Nook, Oak Grove where we dined around 8pm – hearty portions! Much fun with the Swing Bridge –

designed and documented by the same outfit that concocted the TV/DVD/Satellite on Beestie and RTFM does not help.

Tuesday 1st July 2008

Very, very fine sunny morning – slow cruise to Macclesfield and beyond. Tried about six times to moor near Bollington but couldn't get close to the bank. Eventually managed just north of Bridge 25 where BW have dredged a pound for the NCC.

And so to Marple, the High Peak and Buxsworth (né Bugsworth) and the splendidly renovated basin. I watched for years as the renovation made no progress at all but it was worth the wait (I lived in Whaley Bridge from 1987 – 1993).

Wonderful weather all day and then we moored in a tropical rainstorm – battened down the hatches and stayed in all evening, not even venturing to Pat Phoenix's old pub, the Navigation.

Wednesday 2nd July 2008

Rediscovered Buxsworth Basin on foot, it really is magnificent and well worth the visit. Walked to Tesco to stock up on provisions – very convenient. Afternoon return to Marple, down the 16 and on to Portland Basin for overnight. Not a good idea, at least mooring on the towpath side – woke up next morning adrift on the other side of the canal minus the lifebuoy. Everything else tucked away safely but not that. Our fault, we pay. Not a very attractive basin and certainly not as recommended in Nicholsons.

Thursday 3rd July 2008

A very long and hard day down the Ashton 18 and Rochdale 9 all in one go. We timed the run down the Ashton to ensure the kids were in school – the trouble is that the ones that aren't are the ones to avoid. In reality there were no problems, just lots of odd characters – why do dark passages under bridge holes attract the cast of Thriller.

The real problems were:

1. Pneumatic paddles on the Ashton and only one key to operate them – very slow;
2. Too much water coming down the Rochdale which made opening the back gates near impossible – particularly with the idiots in front leaving the bottom paddles open!

We did it though but not to be recommended with a mixed crew of just two. Moored at Castle Street – the sun shone most of the day – just as well.

Friday 4th July 2008

Lazy start and lazy day compared with the previous. A long lock free stretch on a deep wide canal was a welcome change, something I am not normally keen on. A fine, fine day which even made Stretford look attractive. We passed through Sale where crowds of office workers were enjoying a lunch time drink on POETS day.

Moored at Oldfield Quay for lunch – after tying up, the only boat for miles, a chap arrived on his bike announcing that “you can’t moor there, I fish from there, have done for 20 years”. We compromised – he changed the habit of a life time.

Lymm for the evening and an Italian at Baci – a grand end to the day.

Saturday 5th July 2008

Very heavy rain when we woke – sounded like we were lying underneath a corrugated tin roof. Cleared quite quickly to leave a changeable day, bright sunshine one minute, monsoon the next.

Took on water at Stockton Heath (charge of £1) and replaced the stolen lifebuoy. Same colour but it has now acquired some fancy white ropes. A fairly uneventful trip down to Anderton but some hire boat types obviously have difficulty telling the time i.e. entry times into Preston Brook tunnel which led to some lengthy reversing exercises.

Evening meal at the Stanley Arms – very popular local with a good atmosphere and good food.

What a disappointment Anderton Lift has become now that it is completely fenced off. You only get an impression of it’s scale from below and now you can only get there by boat (hire or expensive trip) – that’s progress for you. I would prefer abandoned, magnificent and accessible to a restored, painted visitor experience.

Sunday 6th July 2008

Anderton to Wheelock with a brief stop for lunch at Middlewich to collect extra crew (middle son, Matthew). A busy trip to lock 72 when most hire boats headed for Chester and it became civilised again. Uneventful cruise for the rest of the day eventually losing the canalside road and finding attractive countryside again. Evening meal at the Cheshire Cheese – much better than the tired interior promised.

Went to sleep to the sound of pounding rain again. Another day of sunshine and cloudbursts – this is not climate change, Cheshire weather was always like this.

Monday 7th July 2008

Pedalled back to the water point as there seems to be a distinct shortage on Heartbreak Hill. Lunch at Cafe/Restaurant 57 (previously Brindley’s Lockside Restaurant), very attractive building and recommended although very quiet i.e. just us.

Long slog towards Kidsgrove mooring between Locks 47 and 46 leaving just six locks before Harecastle in the morning. Some interesting boat names seen on the T&M:

Madasa Soles

Sir T Fiable

Tuesday 8th July 2008

Sunshine and showers – completed the Ring at 11:30.

Only half an hour wait to get through the Harecastle which provided the opportunity to have another entertaining conversation with Ivor the tunnel keeper (he changed ends during the week). He repeated his party piece – the story of the kids mooning at the trains from the canal bridge.

Uneventful trip back to Barlaston.

Wednesday 9th July 2008

What a thoroughly awful day – more or less constant rain. Also heading south back to base so more reasons to be less than cheerful. Filled up with diesel at Sone. Moored at Weston (with some difficulty) for dinner at the Saracen's Head.

Drip, drip, drip and back to bed.

Thursday 10th July 2008

Back to base for 11:30. Sunny morning but some heavy showers when cleaning the boat. Cleaned the brass, scrubbed top deck, shampooed and rinsed all over. Two pump outs and filled diesel again. Unloaded and headed reluctantly north.

This was to be our last trip on the Beestie for no other reason than we were unable to book consecutive weeks in 2009 – no fun if you live in the far north