

Selected Holidays 1986 to 2024

All main spring and summer holidays.

Version 16.02

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Llangollen 1986

Sat 1986-04-12

Kath arrived at 09:30, and start off at 10:00. Get to Nantwich at 12:20 ($\phi+1$), 12:30 (Mr Barnes) and 13:15 ($\theta+1$). Boatyard office is a garden shed, but take boat out early at 13:30. Not quite as luxurious as last year's boat, doors didn't separate cabins completely, gas fires, gas fridge, gas not auto-change and noisy 3-cylinder air-cooled Lister diesel. First day solid cruising, 9 locks and get to Wrenbury, Cotton Arms, no dogs. Weather fine but coolish. One or two bursts of sun. Rain after we stopped. Spaghetti bolognese for supper.

Sun 1986-04-13

Cold night. Started early at 08:45 and kept going, except for half-hour stop for pasties and fruit pies and water at top of staircase locks. Got to Ellesmere, chicken casserole, and in pub by 20:45. Arrived at 17:45. Rain and dull most of the day, but a few minutes of sunshine towards end of afternoon. Nice evening for walk into Ellesmere. Noticed fumes from engine bay when leaving Ellesmere tunnel, and engine stopped when set to idle just beyond tunnel at Ellesmere. Passed what on any other canal would be a lot of boats. What would this canal be like in summer?

Mon 1986-04-14

Started with shopping in Ellesmere, and visiting bank. Investigated engine: problem is leaky exhaust causing engine to consume its own fumes for cooling and air intake. Boatyard say try again, so drove with stern board off for a while to dissipate fumes. Worked. Left disappointed randy dog by canalside at nearly midday, lunch on way (hot-dogs) then on through shallower canal and into the spectacular bit. Chirk aqueduct and tunnel, then moored up just before Pontcysyllte itself, and walked out onto middle and look down, also walked underneath it. Then risotto on board and it poured down so chat for a bit, then braved trip to Aqueduct pub for few pints, leaving Kath and dog on boat. Weather fine at first, but more rain and hail later on.

Tue 1986-04-15

Woke up fairly late and set off about 09:45. Dull, but not raining. Crossed aqueduct, much better than walking across especially as driving side was towards edge. Off-side edge looked very thin, 10 mm maybe, and flange at top was broken in places. Wondered how much side thrust or knock it could take. Then on through Llangollen ditch. Very narrow and shallow and difficult to pass. Better in places where canal was completely re-made with concrete U-sections, only just over 4.3 m wide, but deep right to the edge. Elsewhere, passing was very difficult. Large sections, especially coming into Llangollen, were definitely single-track. Arrived Llangollen at midday, turned and moored, not very close, on embankment above town. Pub for lunch, then others shopped while I walked down to see Horseshoe Falls, not very impressive but the Dee valley is. Evening back to the same pub.

Wed 1986-04-16

Started very early at 07:30, probably first to leave Llangollen, so got a good run through the one-way bits. Met first boats quite near Trevor. Dull, wettish to start. Re-crossed aqueduct, but not good photo weather. Kept right on across Chirk, with disco-music echoing from boat in front in Chirk tunnel. Stopped just past new A5 roadworks for lunch in Lion Inn, this had a big sign "Food" but they only had a few jumbo sausages. We were the only ones in, but it was warm. Just before going, Super-Wal came past at speed and washed out our spikes. Started off immediately in rain and ate lunch in shifts. Mr Barnes drove most of afternoon, OK until we suddenly got a poly bag round the prop, and went careering into the bank with no control and of course just then it really peed down, after being quite warm and pleasantly sunny for part of the afternoon. Got to Ellesmere in afternoon, and went to Black Lion in evening. Marston's Pedigree for lunch and evening.

Thu 1986-04-17

A long day, 18 miles and 10 locks. Left Ellesmere after a bit of shopping and proceeded reasonably uneventfully to Marbury by 16:10. Roger bought a revolving handle windlass at last, and I waterproof gloves. Dominating

theme of weather was cold, but mainly dry. Cabin was freezing in the evening, even with both fires on. Strong wind. Lunch on move. Kath and Mr Barnes driving mostly. Evening Clive turned up, having received instructions only slightly garbled via Julia, Mum and James Burn. Drove us to a pub in Marbury, half-a-mile away, where Wem bitter was consumed, along with large ice-creams. Evening meal was Roger's Chinese night. Excellent, pity the cabin was so cold. Clive stayed the night.

Fri 1986-04-18

Started earlyish in sunshine, but still chilly. Clive rode along for about half a kilometre, then ran back home. Easy day today, breezed along. Stopped for lunch at top of Hurleston flight, then ambled down behind a pair of clowns in small narrow boat. Turned left and cruised up to Middlewich arm, where turned round and moored by the Barbridge Inn, a Boddingtons pub. Spent the afternoon in warmth doing crossword and reading, then ate fish and washed up and went for last pub evening in above pub. General end of holiday feeling, especially as the weather was much better today. No rain except in the evening and quite a bit of sunshine. Everyone drove in all conditions, except Cath had not driven into locks yet. Discussed next canal trip. Some move to have it later for better weather and Lancer Boss shut-down and put up with more crowded canals. Decided next trip should be four counties ring, Roger to organise. Four pints of Boddys. I must have been to this pub before on Clive's 4-counties trip, 5 years ago, but I couldn't remember. This trip has been good for wildlife, have seen fox swimming, a water rat or vole thing out of the water and very close, herons, kingfishers, Roger saw a stoat or weasel, and more.

Sat 1986-04-19

I got up and got boat going by myself, having stuffed my stuff into a bag, and drove home while the others sorted themselves out and cleaned up inside. Arrived at boatyard at about the right time of 09:30, and got cars loaded up quickly. The boatyard gave me back my £30 deposit in cash without even looking at the boat. All three cars not sunk in and all started first time, but mine was glued to the ground and moved with a crack. Drove home in same arrangement as going out, Cath dropped Kath. Changed back to normal temperature regime fairly quickly. Having worn T-shirt + shirt + pullover + padded pullover + anorak + waterproof most of the week, car felt warm with just the first three, and I had to remove one of the two pairs of socks in the services on the way home. By the time I was home I was considering putting on the fire as it was only 19°C. Agreed that next year's boat should have:- cabins that close off properly, decent hot water, not geyser, decent heating, preferably gas boiler to radiators and safe to leave on at night, water-cooled engine re-circulating with hull contact cooled and preferably not look as scruffy as the Simolda boat; therefore will pay more next time.

Lenk 1986

Mon 1986-08-11

Tidy up flat and put presents away in suitable places. Out to Co-op to buy suitcases, pack, and off to my parents. Eat with Mum as father at Rotary, to Royal George for a quick one, then bed early.

Tue 1986-08-12

Up at 05:35, leave at 06:25, and get to Heathrow in good time in Sierra. Long queue for check in, and the usual lots of hanging about before boarding DC-9 for Basel. It's raining in Switzerland. Coach to railway station, then short wait before getting into first train, with only a small part of the Swiss Travel party, those to the more obscure places. We are the only two to Lenk. But it's easy, just say name of station, and they point to train or indicate platform number with fingers. Two standard-gauge SBB trains, one posh IC type Basle to Spiez, then a scruffy suburban all-stations type to Zwiesimmen, then a metre-gauge EMU to Lenk (not SBB, MOB = Montreux Oberland Bernois). The last train has a request stop button, and stations are just a hut by the rail-side. Eventually arrive (16:30) at Lenk and porter pushes cases, which have arrived by themselves from the airport at Basel, up to posh 4-star Hotel Kreuz. Excellent scenery, railway going through deep mountain valley and Lenk nestles among mountains. Settle in, go for walk almost all round Lenk, quick beer, then excellent dinner. Expensive booze, 2 francs for cheap beer, 26F for bottle of wine, at 2.5F = £1, but excellent service, and receptionist and restaurant manager speak English well enough. After dinner, mostly sleep.

Wed 1986-08-13

Breakfast, then walk to Bergbahnen Lenk-Betelberg, a 2-stage cable car up from 1000 m to 2000 m, and take short walk along mountain path. Spectacular, so quiet except for a few cow-bells in the distance (and sometimes close), and fresh air. Sunny and warm. Wander around a bit, have a beer, then descend again, buy and despatch postcards, as it clouds over for the afternoon. The behaviour of clouds on the mountains is strange, with fluffy bits forming over the highest bit in the morning. Expensive still, paperback 6.30F (£2.50), map 15F (£6), yesterday's Telegraph is over a pound. Afternoon mostly in until a cold buffet dinner, a couple of beers in the bar (ask for "zwei bier stange") then read in bed. Try taking two photos of lights on mountain side at f2.8, 1s and 10s exposure.

Thu 1986-08-14

Fail to meet Swiss Travel representative, apparently he/she does not visit at the times stated, so venture out into hot sunshine at about 10:30 and hire two bicycles for the day, 22F total and no deposit. Good bikes, Swiss, German dynamo, French pump, and Sturmey-Archer 3-speed gear. Brakes are reversed side-side. Visit Zimmerfalls, then explore routes out of Lenk. Road to Iffigenfalls too steep, so head off on cycle route to Zwiesimmen, and stop at convenient shady spot for picnic. Then return to look at mountain and lake. Collapse in hotel room for an hour or so, then have a beer or two before dinner. After dinner visit Andy's Pub which has authentic London Pub lamps on brass brackets, red flock paper, and Bass and Guinness in bottles. Almost a pub atmosphere, drinking on stools at the bar, but apparently populated mostly by the local youngsters, as being more lively than the cafes, although still dull by the standard of the rest of Europe.

Fri 1986-08-15

Into Zwiesimmen on train, only 4.80F each. Bigger than Lenk, but if possible fewer tourist-type shops. Very hot. Ascend Rinderbahn, another 2-stage cable car, with tiny 2-person cars. Goes along over 5 km and up 1000 m. Excellent view from the top and inevitable cafe at the top. See Jungfrau in distance and others, almost a ring of mountains above 3000 m, against our altitude of 2000 m above sea level. At top is hot, but there is a cool breeze. Come down, have an ice-cream and decide to go back to hotel to rest from heat till later in the afternoon. Back to Lenk about 14:00, and get another 200F from the bank with Eurocheque. It's clouding over but still hot. Later shopping trip for presents but find nothing suitable. Evening clouds over and impressive thunderstorm comes up valley, completely hiding mountains. Dinner, evening in reading, apart from visit to bar.

Sat 1986-08-16

One week on. Breakfast as usual, then by bus up to Iffigenfalls, up narrow twisty mountain road. Sections are one way, alternating every 15 minutes, a fact apparently not known to a BX driver who was stopped, facing the wrong way, in one of the hairpin bends. Faced with a choice of returning in 20 min or 200 min, decide to do neither, and waste the return tickets by walking down, about 5 km, at first pretty alongside river, later precipitous

down a zig-zag mountain path, steep drop to the edge of the path, and difficult to ensure a good grip. Falls themselves pretty, but difficult to photograph with the sun just at the top. Discover that you can buy a six-pack of the 2.40F beer in the minibar for 5.40F, so buy one. The Co-op seems to be the only place selling booze for consumption elsewhere. Rest in hotel for a bit, then read by the lake until it cools off a bit. Dinner, then consume a few bottles in room.

Sun 1986-08-17

We're suffering. θ has heat blotches, itches and bites, ϕ has a bite, worn-out legs and blisters, so we decide to do nothing. Very hot again so sit and read in shade by lake for a bit, have lunch there (rolls, cheese and beer) and watch ducks, swans and jumping fish. Finally succumb to the heat and return to hotel, where I fall asleep and θ reads till dinner time. Then a drink in the bar. It was only one because we waited 15 minutes to be served, then put the cash on the table and left.

Mon 1986-08-18

Last full day. Buy very expensive presents and some lunch for today in Co-op. Go up Betelberg again, to cool off a bit, lovely at 2000 m until it clouded over about half hour later. Have a couple of beers at the cafe until it started to rain, and then descend again. This cable-car system is very elaborate, with chain-driver and wire-rope system for moving cars around stations, with complicated point systems, and a system to accelerate cars smoothly to the cable speed, so that the shock of joining the cable is not as great as some, such as the Rinderberg one. Naturally it stops raining when we've got down, so we sit near the Bahnhof for a while watching the world go by, then return to the hotel in time to witness an impressive thunderstorm, with almost continuous lightning for about 30 minutes, the mountains invisible, and wind capable of driving the rain horizontally. Meet at last the Swiss Travel rep, Jane Farrell, a Scot, in the bar. Have last dinner, and meet a party from Dunstable, of all places. Drink a whole bottle of 25F Swiss white wine with dinner.

Tue 1986-08-19

Breakfast, pack, then pay extras bill (Amex for 128.80F), then wait watching rain and reading until about 12:30, when porter takes bags to station and we register bags to London. Catch 13:09, earlier than itinerary, and wait at Zwiesimmen where the rain stopped for a while. Rolls for lunch. θ worried when Spiez train sets off the wrong way, but it's just shunting around the van it had brought up. We were supposed to have 6 minutes to change at Spiez, but in practice we got about one, the trains were cross-platform and it just waited until everyone was on, fortunately θ spotted the Basel coach as we drew in. Not as good a train as on the way out, a blue and white one, don't remember the company. More shunting back and forth at Bern, deposit on one platform, then out of the wrong end of the station while front part is removed and changed, and back in again on a different platform. Train 5 minutes late leaving Bern, the first time we haven't been on time, because a connection was late. Get to Basel via Olten, leaving mountains behind, and the country looking more normal European and not so cute. Meet rep OK at Basel, bus to airport, bags are still with us. Flight back on 737, excellent view of London on way in, Tower Bridge and Houses of Parliament etc, Clive and Julia pick us up. Call in at pub for a couple. Clive climbed from Kandestag to a peak quite near Lenk. Stay at parents house for night, they're with Braebaums.

Wed 1986-08-20

Get up, breakfast and drive to MK, home at last.

Four Counties 1987

Sat 1987-04-25

Sunny again. To bank by 07:30 by bicycle, and have to wait to use the machine. Pack, buy booze and flowers for Nell and Harry. Pick up Roger's stuff and leave about 10:40, arriving at Four Crosses by about 12:20. Mr Barnes next, then Greens by 12:45. On boat and away by 15:00 in hot sunshine, shorts and T-shirt weather. Get to Weeping Crosses bridge 98. Moor half out in stream because all the good moorings are taken by 19:00. Toby Inn The Trumpet, children outside in the garden only. Fortunately it's still warm enough. Leave after 0.6 L, and to bed early.

Sun 1987-04-26

Off at 07:45, good start except ¾ hour to remove 2 m of 12 mm plastic-covered steel hawser, barbed wire, plain wire, wire netting, an old sock, a piece of washing line, twigs and bits of rope, all held together by a partly unravelled reel of fishing line. Bright but cloudy morning. No lunchtime stop. Hot again, shorts, T-shirts and sunburn. Lots of local spectators at locks through Stone. Moor about 17:45 at Barlaston bridge 103. Still up on Clive's schedule in 1981. Aground twice on the inside of bends. Roger and Dave off for a run before dinner. Mooring right opposite a pub with a children's room. Watched by a large crowd of drinkers in the pub garden.

Mon 1987-04-27

Fog!, visibility below 50 m. All except φ and Chas go off on foot to Wedgwood factory and buy things. We meet them at bridge 104 after the fog cleared. Leave about 10:20 and run up through Stoke as the weather got gradually warmer and then hotter. Water at Etruria BWB. Roger and Marion off shopping. Under way again and manage to get to Harecastle at 14:30 the latest time for going north, and go straight through with one boat behind. Door shuts behind and fan starts up. Cold in tunnel, so warm air sucked in turns to a cold fog by the time it's got to the other end of the tunnel, producing a weird swirling effect in the headlight beam. Roger, Dave and Chas share the steering. One hour to go through. All rode through, but Marion and girls stayed steadfastly inside with the lights on. Then heavy locking down to stop at Hassall Green at about 19:00, bridge 146. Photos of aqueduct carrying Macclesfield canal over Trent and Mersey and Thurlwood steel lock. Evening to Romping Donkey. "No children's room", but that means "children can come in the lounge bar".

Tue 1987-04-28

Under way by 07:50 or so, bright right from the start, and warm by 09:00. Ten locks before breakfast, then steady locking to Middlewich, for a water stop, 30 minutes, lots of showers. Wally trying to turn right out of the Shroppie provides amusement for all. Middlewich at about 12:15. Through the first Shropshire Union lock, then all but φ go shopping until 14:20, then off down to Barbridge by 18:45. Very hot, 23°C. Red arms, burnt nose and back of steering hand despite sun lotion. Noddy-boater jumps in front of us at a lock. Evening to Barbridge Inn for Boddington's Bitter. Mooring site has changed since last year, as construction work on the Barbridge by-pass has started.

Wed 1987-04-29

Start at 07:55. Sunshine at first, but rapidly clouding over and starting to drizzle. Pass Queen Jennifer of last year at her moorings at Nantwich. Sun re-appears when arrive at Audlem locks and Shroppie Fly pub with Marston's Pedigree and Boddies. Lunch and water stop 12:00-14:30. Old mill shop, buy biography of Jessop and four-counties T-shirt. Hot and sunny again in afternoon for all the locks, moor just beyond bridge 62 in Market Drayton. So 87 locks down with 7 to go, despite the four-counties ring T-shirt that says 110 miles and 93 locks; 33 miles to go. Finish about 18:10, θ steering for 3 miles in the afternoon. We are still a half-day up on Clive's timings of 1981, not losing our advantage of an early start and not waiting for the tunnel. Evening to Talbot, "Families welcome" but no space, so sit in garden. θ, Chas and φ leave early and miss the cocktails and kissogram.

Thu 1987-04-30

Overcast but warm. Shopping in Market Drayton then leave at 10:20. Through Tyrley flight, then just 30-odd miles and one lock and one stop-lock to go. Stop 15:00-15:50 at Norbury Junction for water and two pump-outs (£10), then on again to Wheaton Aston, just after bridge 20, by 18:30. Mostly dry and the occasional glimpse of sun. The contrast between the contour canals and the Shropshire Union became even more obvious with the long level from Tyrley, which is hardly ever on a level with the surroundings, but blasts its own way with deep cuttings

and tall embankments. About 14 miles to do tomorrow. I go to sleep after dinner and miss the pub, read book instead.

Fri 1987-05-01

Rain and heavily overcast. Start about 08:10, through the last real lock and away, all in wet-weather gear for the first time. Last night discover that the crew of Celestine that's been travelling with us around the ring come from Oldbrook. Cabin temp down to 14°C. Lunch at Coven by bridge 71, arriving about 12:40. Boat passing pulls out front spike, it stays on the rope using Clive's knot. Leave about 14:15 & head straight for Gailey, arriving about 16:00. My totals by map measurer off Nicholsons are 94 locks and 109.5 miles, the standard is 110 miles. After getting back to Gailey, to satisfy a desire for Chinese, we give up our last night and go on a car hunt through Cannock to Rugeley, eventually finding an unlicensed and ordinary Chinese to enjoy it. θ drives home, arrive about 21:00.

Inverness 1987

Sat 1987-06-06

Up at 05:30 to leave at 06:15, 800 km to Inverness in elapsed time of 10.75 hours, including a stop for lunch just before Edinburgh on A701. Route M1 - M6 - A74 - A701 - M90 - A9. It rained all the way. Excellent roads all the way, A9 is only two-lane single-carriageway in most places, but is aligned like a motorway for speeds and gradient. Two lots of fuel, 6.2 and 5.5 L/100km, car going really well with its extra throttle travel. Scenery pretty spectacular when it could be seen through the mist and rain. Very rugged moorland, mountains, mountain streams. Parallel railway most of the way into the highlands, plus Beattock and Shap summits. To Glen Mohr Hotel. Excellent meal even on the Table d'Hôte, wine list extensive. Bed early and sleep well, knackered.

Sun 1987-06-07

Breakfast: fruit juice, coffee, toast, bacon, sausage, egg and tomato. I shall be 70 kg by the time we get home. It's still raining solidly. Drive around Loch Ness, anticlockwise, stopping at Fort Augustus to see the staircase locks being operated (hydraulic). It stopped raining for just for a few minutes. The south side road is pretty, going over a summit, narrow and winding. Go beyond to Avoch to look at the sea and the rain. Back to hotel, then go for a walk around the town in a longer break from rain. Lots of high-street shops open on Sunday around here, and plenty of tourists from all over, Yank, Swiss, German. Cocktail bar before dinner. Another excellent dinner, drinks afterwards and to bed early.

Mon 1987-06-08

Via Caledonian Canal sea-lock first thing and Nairn and Elgin to Glen Grant Distillery at Rothes, look around and buy some. Lunch in Elgin. Ship coming through lock, but everything on this canal seems so slow, so didn't wait for the railway swing-bridge to be swung. The locks take ages to fill. Lock is right out in the estuary on the end of an artificial spit. Distillery very swish, quick tour of preparation of mash, fermentation and distillation, malting performed elsewhere. Look into fermentation vessels and see 90 000 L of stuff bubbling away, at various stages. Usual copper pot stills. Buy bottle of the stuff. Shop discreet, you didn't end the tour in the shop, I had to ask where it was. On the way back visit Elgin, Forres (local Citroën dealer), Nairn and Inverness shops, including the new, super, and by MK standards, minute indoor shopping mall. Bought a Philips FM VHF/MF/LF radio to get real Radio 4 on 200 kHz, and not Highland Radio. Bloke is thoroughly incompetent, but manages to sell me the radio, two sets of Duracells and a spare earphone for the price of the radio. Alcoholic dinner and postprandial Glen Mohr malt with the diary writing.

Tue 1987-06-09

First thing round Inverness Museum (and Art Gallery, but closed), about average local museum. Useless exhibits such as a modern BP petrol pump with covers on and no explanation. Interesting original Telford map of the Caledonian Canal. Then drive out to Loch Ness monster exhibition near Urquhart castle on Fort William road. Reasonable show for £1.65. Followed by a drive along a minor road through the hills into an adjacent valley past a hydroplant and back into Inverness via the road alongside Beauly Firth. Buy sandwiches in M&S and books and spend latter part of afternoon reading. Post postcards. Less rain today, only a few showers, and the sun came out for several seconds at a time.

Wed 1987-06-10

Out to the railway station by 09:10 and book for excursion to Portree, total £38 for two. Buy more M&S sandwiches. Train leaves at 10:15, outward in the observation car, a converted driving trailer with loose seating on carpet with a very squeaky PA system for rather amateurish commentary. Through pretty rugged country in the middle and pretty scenery along the sea from Stromeferry to Kyle of Lochalsh. Then over to Skye on the ferry and coach across to Portree, arriving 15:05. Leave again 15:40 and retrace steps to Inverness by 19:55. Dirty class 37s and 39s running the line, single track with radio tokens. They use road-type speed limit signs. So much scenery, it's difficult to take it all in. Late dinner and into the cocktail bar again. Sunshine on Skye, and warm. Scotrail seems to have it well organised: the travel centre sells excursion tickets that work on train, ferry and bus with no fuss (all different companies) and they take credit cards.

Thu 1987-06-11

Election day. The sun shone today, at least part of the time, but it wasn't not warm. Car tour around the mountains around Lochs Ness, Oich, Garry, and more. Lunch at Fort Augustus. Lots of photos of scenery on my camera.

Fri 1987-06-12

Thatcher's in again, but with a slightly smaller majority. Alliance reduced. Sunny/showery day again. Campbeltown and Fort George after gift shopping in Inverness. Got wire through a tyre and had it patched in Inverness for £4. Fortunately the sun shone for the performance of finding the jack. Then lunch in pub and drive around mountains and lochs in the afternoon. Quite warm when the sun shone. Visit another distillery (by Muir of Ord) and buy a bottle, this one was laid-off for maintenance and malting and casking weren't shown, so we actually saw less than at the other one, except we saw the germinating barley with sprouts (dried). Photos of hotel room, Cawdor Castle, Stuart Castle, viaduct on main south-bound railway near Culloden.

Sat 1987-06-13

Last breakfast, settle bill and leave 09:15 for 640 km to Goole.

Warwickshire Ring 1988

Sat 1988-04-30

To Atherstone, in two cars. Pub for lunch (more Pedigree), along tow-path from boatyard (Valley Cruises). Under way by 15:30, deciding to go anticlockwise as part of the Grand Union is stopped and we have to go the long way via North Stratford. Have a good run till 20:00 stopping at Amington. Advertised pub closed for renovation, so end up in a crowded, noisy Ind Coope place, the Zodiac.

Sun 1988-05-01

Away at 07:50 and up onto the Birmingham and Fazeley. 21 m boat at 4 mi/hr should travel its own length in 12 s. Much rain during the night, and some this morning, gloomy and dull. Boat is quite good, but not much storage space in our double cabin. Towards lunchtime the domestic electricity supply went off (flat battery, charging fault). Get the man out to Curdworth Bridge. He fits a new alternator and regulator. Uses a very neat clamp-on ammeter. Get under way again, heading for Birmingham, but just after Spaghetti Junction, after clearing the prop of Birmingham weed and rubbish, the engine would not start. So man out again, to a remote part of the urban wasteland to fit a new connection to the starter motor. Get to Aston junction just as it gets dark, after a mad dash through Aston locks, and stay the night there.

Mon 1988-05-02

Again start early. Day of sunshine, rain and hail, all interleaved. First through the dark recesses of Birmingham on Farmers Bridge flight, then out on the Worcester and Birmingham through Gas Street basin (not very impressive). Two weed-hatch stops on this short bit (a V-belt and a branch of a tree), then onto the Stratford. One steerer scares an angler by going straight for him, misjudging a bend, the bows leave a deep impression on the bank. Finish up earlier than usual (before 19:00) 5 locks short of Kingswood Junction, near a pub. No breakdowns. Lunchtime to pub on Stratford, near bridge 3, the Horseshoe. tow-path along most of Stratford is non-existent, and where it does exist it's treacherously narrow and muddy. Some of the locks are a bit dodgy, but it is definitely pretty, with lots of overhanging foliage (and bits of it in the water). Eve to pub 5 locks up from Kingswood Junction.

Tue 1988-05-03

Later start, about 08:40. Through the locks and along the GU after clearing Kingswood Junction, up to the top of Hatton flight. Lunch in local pub, then down the 21 in just on 2 hours, mostly in rain, with sunny bits between, ending up just beyond Warwick (bridge 46) at 16:30. Eve to pub nearby, awful spit-and-sawdust Bears Inn so also to a better Whitbread pub in Leamington direction, with railway pictures and instruments around the bar.

Wed 1988-05-04

Into Warwick to look at the castle. More rain. After taking a short day yesterday and a morning off today, we're going to have to keep going for the next 2-and-a-half days. Get going at 13:25 and continue apace through several broad locks, going up (including using ropes) at 5 minutes per lock, mostly in pouring rain. After most of the locks it brightens up and the evening is very pleasant, going up the last three locks to Napton Junction and tackling the 5 miles from there to Braunston. Buy an extra hose connector at Do-it-all as the BWB taps don't all have 12 mm hose adaptors. Eve to Boatman at Braunston turn; just fitting in an hour before closing time.

Thu 1988-05-05

Start just after 08:00, chugging along the North Oxford in sunshine. The sun came and went, but by 18:15 no rain. Stop for lunch at Stag and Pheasant in Hillmorton, just after the last three real locks. Nicholsons only comment on this pub is "food". It does not do food and has not for the last 10 years. Finish in Ansty, on an embankment above some new houses. About 3 miles short of the Coventry, and 15 miles and one stop-lock from base. Eve to fairly basic but pleasant pub in Ansty (Crown). Despite Nicholsons, could find no shops in Ansty.

Also, the indication of bridges in the guide appears to be erratic, and it does not help that most bridges are unnumbered.

Fri 1988-05-06

Start 08:00 and potter along past Hawkesbury and Marston junctions and through the last 150 mm stop-lock, moor at bridge 23 in Nuneaton for 30 minutes to find it filthy, noisy and the pub Ansells and nasty-looking, so on to bridge 29 for the Anchor. Much better. Lunch in the garden, only spoilt by dust and noise from near-by quarry. Then on to bridge 36, 1 km from Mancetter, where we moor at 15:30. Clean boat and laze in sunshine that we've had practically continuously since this morning. Now only $\frac{3}{4}$ mile and no locks from the boatyard. 3-course meal on boat, using up all that is left of the food. Eve walk into Mancetter (the Plough).

Sat 1988-05-07

Start at 07:50 and tootle down in sunshine to boatyard at 08:10. Used 66 litres of diesel (40 L/100km or 7.1 mi/UKgal). Another boat, which we had to overtake yesterday because it was going so slowly, used 100 litres, the other that I saw come in used 32 litres. Only breakage was one wineglass. Boat is probably the second best we've had so far, after Applemint from Snaygill, the principal negative feature being the gas-convactor heating, which can't be run at night and provides no drying facilities. Also, it could have done with centre doors. But a 21-metre boat was no more difficult to drive than the previous longest ones we've had.

Kildwick 1988

Sat 1988-07-16

θ out shopping, pack and then leave about 11:00, arriving at Kildwick at 15:00 half-hour stop to eat lunch on M1, 180 mi. Cottage (or flat) is large and comfortable and very well furnished radio/record-player/cassette, TV, two gas fires, shower, bath, kitchen with everything. Kildwick a small, sleepy village, the rest of the building being bed and breakfast. Small parking place, just about big enough for the AX. Rain. Drive out to Bingley and look at the three- and five-rise locks, then to Anchor at Gargrave (where Applemint went aground in the night) for dinner. Later to White Lion in Kildwick.

Sun 1988-07-17

Start with walk along tow-path (in Skipton direction) , returning along road. See Mallard steaming along the railway in the distance; then in car to Buck Inn at Buckden for lunch. Afterward a 5 km walk, up, along and down to Cray (all in Wharfedale) then back along the road. Overcast but dry. Then for a drive over very scenic pass, steep enough in places to put the AX into first. Buckden - Hubberholm - Lockenthwaite (275 m) - Oughtershaw (353 m) peaking at 588 m, then descending into Hawes. Then B6255 down past Ribbleshead viaduct, Horton-in-Ribblesdale, Settle, Gargrave, Skipton, Low Bradley and home. Avoid getting wet so far, but getting cooler. Evening in.

Mon 1988-07-18

To York. first part pretty and rugged, but rest of journey marred by urban sprawl of Harrogate. Dry, but a chilly wind all day, some sunshine towards evening. First to Castle museum (modern design and costumes mostly), lunch at Pizza Hut, then a brief look at the railway museum. Cute, compact sort of place, park outside the walls and it's still £1.70 for the day. Tourists pay more for everything, despite their contribution to the city through support of the rate-paying businesses. Then a brief visit to Skipton, but find no suitable eating-place, so purchase some booze and return for salad dinner (prepared by me) and wine followed by a short walk along the tow-path, in the Keithley direction. This place may be peaceful, but the owner has a habit of using an electric saw-bench, or hammering, or hand-sawing at all times of the day or evening. The cottage looks a bit DIY, presumably the rest of the place is the same. Incidentally, the locals seem always to use manual credit-card machines in the petrol stations, haven't seen a swipe-reader in Yorkshire yet.

Tue 1988-07-19

To the lakes, Windermere in fact, and it rained all the time. Radio 1 roadshow and RAF show polluting the area, so cross the lake on cable ferry and drive around the south half of the lake. Might have been some good spots to sit and admire the scenery, if it hadn't been tipping it down. Head for home and the rain slowed and then stopped as we went east, sunshine in Kildwick. Post second film to Truprint. Eat in, θ doing OU work. Eve to pub in Kildwick.

Wed 1988-07-20

To Studley Royal (Water Gardens) and Fountains Abbey. Very pleasant, warm, some sun even. Abbey ruins being restored or made stable, must have been very impressive in its day, although the pleasantly landscaped gardens around it are much later. Typical National Trust, you pay on the way in, but that's just for the deer park. Once you're in, there's more to pay for the gardens and abbey. Good walk around, then lunch in deer park. Shopping in Ripon, then down Stump Cross caverns, limestone stalactites, lit with various spotlights. Change guilders to pounds and get some more pounds out in Ripon. Then to Linton Falls, near Grassington, and a walk along the Wharfe, over it on stepping stones and back through the churchyard. Sun still shining. Brief meander through the villages opposite Kildwick, Cononley and Eastburn, a few shops in the latter. Eat in, reading 1853 book on the state of Europe in the middle ages. By eve more than 600 miles so far.

Thu 1988-07-21

To Ilkley Moor, drive around and take a short walk up it. Wet night, but some sun causing steam to rise from the road. Lunch at Anchor at Gargrave, then a short walk along the canal tow-path here. Warm and humid by then. A look at the Dales Railway, but it runs only on Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday. Return to cottage (θ tired) to read for the rest of the afternoon. Sunny for a bit, then more rain. Now we've run out of things to do, with a full day yet to go.

Fri 1988-07-22

Shopping in Skipton for presents and sample the 5p loos, clean and music while you pee, but still a shilling to get in. Then up to Malham, a rugged spot about 400 m up, look at it for a bit, then to Buck Inn in Malham for lunch. Drive back, θ reading and working and ϕ for walk to Silsden along the tow-path 6 km there-and-back, just under an hour. It rained all the way back. Evening to local, for Tetley for the last time. Pub a bit more lively than at other times.

Sat 1988-07-23

Return. 3 hours, 290 km (2 stops), rain a lot of the way. Total distance on holiday was 1.5 Mm. Back to normal again, no boats chugging past the window, no hills to look out on, just some very long grass to cut. A good, relaxing holiday, fairly cheap as well. AX acquitted itself well, very economical, no complaints about comfort after 1.5 Mm in a week and its hill climbing and general behaviour on the steep, narrow twisting dales roads was superb. Next time we'll do the Settle and Carlisle (if it's still there) and the Dales Railway, and perhaps the lakes when it isn't raining, although they all look a bit weedy alongside Loch Ness.

Oxford to Leighton Buzzard 1989

Sat 1989-04-08

All set off for Oxford, changeover cars left in Milton Keynes. Straight onto boat and away by 14:30. Bright, warm and sunny all day. End at 19:15 at bridge 216. Have to go around this way as Thames is too high for hire craft. Part of Oxford which is River Cherwell was running fast and needed some welly to make progress. Pub, the Rock of Gibraltar, crowded and noisy (avoid if come this way again).

Sun 1989-04-09

Frosty to start, but bright and sunny later. Leave 08:00, getting to bridge 190, Aynho Wharf, at about 13:30, to find the pub had stopped serving food by then. Help to extricate a boat jammed in a lock by opening top paddles to flush it out. Kath's parents out to meet us at the pub. Leave 15:00 (both mooring spikes were out). Banbury very scruffy and a lot of people hanging around, so go on a bit and moor at 20:00 away from anything, about 1 m from the bank. Progress is very slow as canal shallow and it's windy. Eve on boat.

Mon 1989-04-10

Start 08:00, after early rain. Not cold. Water at Cropredy, lunch at Sun Rising in Claydon, 1 km walk from canal. Only customers 12:00-14:00 were us and another boat crew. Dormitory village, otherwise almost deserted. Cooling off towards the end of the afternoon, in the very windy bit of the South Oxford, between Fenny Compton and Napton. End up at bottom of Napton flight. Meal fry up, mostly prepared by me, and quite late, as arrive while almost dark, at 19:45, so no pub.

Tue 1989-04-11

A day of gales, hail, rain and sunshine. Morning dull, steady rain and strong wind, afternoon incredibly changeable with hail turning to sunshine in the time it takes to go into the boat for a pee. Start 08:00 and stop at Norton Junction at 12:30, for lunch at the New Inn, Pedigree, excellent. Take on water after pub. Leave 14:45, down through locks with another crew of three returning to Weedon today. He got his arse stuck on the sill in one lock, and we had to drop paddles and refill to save him. Worst of rain here. Stop by the Narrow Boat at bridge 26 at about 17:45. Difficult to steer in the wind. Much better progress on the broader and deeper Grand Union. Eve to Narrow Boat by canal and A5.

Wed 1989-04-12

Bright, sunny morning with little wind. Start 08:40, stop for 50 mins at Bugbrooke for supplies and to ring boatyard and TWA. Rain yesterday put boards back up on Thames, and we've still a long way to go - so decide to do an out-and-back and do lower GU and Regents next time. Sun going towards lunchtime. Potter on to Blisworth for lunch in Royal Oak. Ruddles. Food OK, but very slow. Then through the tunnel, with brand-new concrete lining through all of the central kilometre or so. Followed by a BGV (bateau a grande vitesse). Stop at Stoke Bruerne for shop, museum and water, then the heavens opened in time for the locks down off the summit. It then rained heavily for an hour or so, with thunder and lightning, just stopping before we arrived at the Navigation at Cosgrove at 18:50. Eve into the pub.

Thu 1989-04-13

Start at 09:00, pottering down to bridge 72 from where one of the crew and I walked into Milton Keynes, picked up the car and drove back to meet the boat at bridge 79, where some of the crew left us. Lunch at new pub/restaurant on Giffard Park, and replenish booze supplies at supermarket in the local centre. Strange, arriving in familiar places by an unfamiliar route. In contrast to yesterday, the pub is comfortable, well appointed and all the food arrives together and very promptly. On to Leighton Buzzard, bridge 114 by 19:15 and out for dinner at Chinese restaurant, which was very good. No rain all day and mostly weak to moderate sunshine. The strange feeling heightened walking along the tow-path around the Three Locks, where we've walked many times before, but this time with a windlass.

Fri 1989-04-14

Late start from Leighton Buzzard, shopping. Fill with water and turn the boat while this is going on. Leave 09:50 and run up to Linslade boatyard for a pair of pump-outs. Cheap, £10 for two. They say Orchard Cruisers overcharge them, so if they'd known they'd have charged us more. Also took away one of their brochures. Pump-out took 25 minutes. Then to Three Locks for lunch, mooring above at 11:50. Good lunch, they now have ABC on hand-pump. Leave 12:50 and run to Black Horse at Great Linford by 17:35. Eve friends came to meet us at the pub, and afterwards for coffee on the boat. Dry all day again.

Sat 1989-04-15

Start 08:30, drop another crew member at bridge 72 to fetch car. Bright, sunny morning. Boat meanwhile goes on to the Galleon, where we met with the car. Then some of us off in car for mid-term supplies change, repairs and so on. Galleon by 10:00. Galleon not doing food and noisy juke-box, so lunch on boat, then another crew member off home in the car. Under way again at 13:05, and get to Blisworth at 18:45. Delays at Stoke Bruerne flight and lots of onlookers at the top lock. Fine, sunny and warm all day. Passed four boats in the tunnel, inc one narrow boat towing a noddy boat. Came through Stoke top lock with a 21 m working-boat, with ancient 2-cylinder diesel, with exposed large flywheel and cams. Water at bottom of Stoke locks.

Sun 1989-04-16

Start out from Blisworth at 08:40, a dull, grey morning and a lot colder than yesterday. Lunch at The Locks a new pub at the next to bottom lock of Buckby flight. Buy Cath a new windlass here. After lunch, up the flight, water at the top and off up the Leicester arm, through Watford staircase and on through Crick tunnel, stopping at 19:00 at bridge 12 for Crick. Light, persistent rain starting towards eve. Lunchtime pub very good, food quick, accurate and good. Heavy rain eve so stay on boat. More rain during the night.

Mon 1989-04-17

Start about 08:30, take the boat up and (just) turn it at the hole just north of Crick. Then return to last night's morning and go shopping in Crick. Away again 10:10 and get to Norton junction at 12:45, for lunch at the New Inn (more Pedigree). Morning cold and slightly damp and very dull. Get to work the Watford staircase ourselves, no lock-keeper in sight. Water coming over the gates after last night's rain. Off again at 14:30, still cold, and head for Braunston, where we arrive 17:10, having taken on water just before mooring right opposite the Boatman. Pub practically deserted in eve, just a couple of parties having a drink before going into the restaurant.

Tue 1989-04-18

Bright, sunny morning, with a slight frost. Ropes so stiff they retain their shape. Start 08:45 and head for Napton, after taking a few pix of the junction bridges at Braunston. Beautiful picture, our boat breaking the water for the first time this morning, remote scenery, everything reflected clearly in the mirror-like water. Bridges seem to form a complete circle, a heron can be seen flying upside-down as clearly as the one above. This idyll broken about half-way when we passed another boat, disturbing the surface and the sun went in. Moored at bridge 113 and walked up to the windmill; admired the view from the top of the hill. Crown in Napton for lunch. Warmer than yesterday; sun peeping through again at times. Big lunch (with gateaux and treacle pudding), then start on the flight, following two other slow boats through. Clouding over and becoming miserable during the flight, and in these conditions the long, winding summit level seemed extremely boring. One of the slow boats let us in front after the flight; then sat on our tail, so we let him past. He must have been doing 6 mi/h and we couldn't do 3 without making a breaking wash. Arrive at Fenny Wharf at 19:15, after taking on water here. Change to third pair of gas bottles in the evening. Eve to George and Dragon but don't stay long, as it's packed out with young farmers.

Wed 1989-04-19

Another sunny, frosty morning. Not getting much warmer, except in direct sunshine, which got rarer around lunchtime. Moor just below Banbury lock at 13:00 (having got away at 08:00). Banbury crowded with narrow boats around the lock. Rest of crew shopping, I'm left on the boat with the dogs (a bit of peace for a couple of

hours). Actually, it was only one hour before they started returning, Banbury not providing much to attract them. So under way again at 15:55. Dull, cool afternoon, but no serious rain. Eve to the Great Western Arms again.

Thu 1989-04-20

A late start, as we've only a day's journey left and 2 days to do it in. Away at 09:55, very cold with a fierce north wind. Get to Lower Heyford, bridge 205, at 12:20. Lunch in Bell here, quite acceptable, but publican had to go and ask his wife if food was available. They can't do much from the canal at this time of year. Move up to bridge 206 for water, then away again at 1440, getting to bridge 223 in Thrupp at 18:45. River section quite fun, going down with the current. Weather changed at lunchtime, still cold, but now alternating heavy showers and sunny spells. One of those days that look lovely through glass but are not so good to stand still in for several hours. Eve to Jolly Boatman, just by the bridge.

Fri 1989-04-21

Sunny to start, but still with a very cold wind. Start at 08:40, get to Oxford, go down through Isis lock, turn round and come up and moor at the boatyard at 12:15. Clean up boat and exploring Oxford. Isis lock inhabited by drunken tramps and a similar, trying to extort money for working the lock (we didn't give any). Eve to Indian in Oxford, inevitably called the Taj Mahal.

Sat 1989-04-22

Spend most of the night listening to the trains coming and going from Oxford station, and the heavy freights going through, also a clapped-out Westminster chiming church clock, five minutes slow. Get away around 09:15 and drive home.

Corwen 1989

Sat 1989-08-05

Off to Corwen, following the A5 all the way, except for a bit where it disappears in Telford. About 240 km and 12:10-15:50. Cottage cute, whitewashed with black woodwork. Inside kitchen and bathroom under a bed-balcony at one end and a full-height sitting room at the other end. Wood-burning stove; other heating metered electricity at 7.5 p/kWh (though free as it turned out). Visit Corwen for maps, drive through Horseshoe Pass, eve to eat in Llangollen in a pub. Service deplorable, food dull, but fortunately not expensive. Journey down θ driving Nova, lots of traffic. Cottage has a bedroom window 1 m from the carriageway of the A5, it's double-glazed, but it can't do much for the trucks. Short walk down to the Dee. Warm sunshine in MK, dull by afternoon in Wales.

Sun 1989-08-06

To Snowdon. Drive to Llanberis, book on 13:00 train (1.5 hour wait), filling in mean time by visit to local ruins of castle, looking out over Dinorwig scheme (or its outward signs). Takes £10.50 each and an hour to get to the summit; bottom was warm and sunny, top was cold and in cloud. Half-hour at top, then an hour down again. Pass trains at three places on the way, sometimes one train runs as two separate parts on one ticket. Paper slips used to control single-line working. All trains one loco plus one coach, narrow-gauge rack and pinion. Ours and most others a steamer, some diesels. Steamers have high-mounted cylinders, driving tiny coupled wheels and pinion via a reducing crank. From 100 m to (summit) 1085 m (nearly) so about 950 m up in 6500 m along, ave 15%. Even allowing for variation, I doubt if any part was steeper than Plough Hill. Then over Britannia bridge (as rebuilt 1970s, now carries A5 over railway), to Beaumaris to look at sea, then home over Menai suspension bridge and A5, crawling mostly. Sunny in morning, warm and cloudy in afternoon, with a few glimpses of sun. Nova gave $6.4\text{e-}8 \text{ m}^2$ at first fill.

Mon 1989-08-07

A walking day. Started dull and slightly wet, but fine and sunny from then on. First via Llandritto Pale, Llargynog, Pen-bart-favor, Llanrhoneadr-ym-Machout to Pistyll Rhoeadr, a waterfall, and walk 4 km over the scenery, then back by road for a pint in the cafe/pub/B+B adjacent. Then back through Llanrhoneadr-y-M, via Llanarmon DC, Pandy to Ceiriog Forest, of Forestry Commission conifers, and walk 5 km around in a circle. Then over some tiny roads to Froncysyllte for a walk over the aqueduct and back (another 1 km). Overall more than 10 km. Then home for a rest. Eve to Crown in Corwen. We were two of three customers, but they called in the cook just for us. Enjoyed the meal.

Tue 1989-08-08

Seaside. Colwyn Bay (on promenade by Old Colwyn), then walked up to Rhos-on-Sea and back again (6.5 km). Bought a pair of cheap trainers to replace the uncomfortable old plimsolls. Lunch that we took with us. Then I went in the sea (warm) and θ paddled, and we watched the tide come in and watched it go out again. Not all that many people for a hot, sunny day in August. I came home very red, with glaring T-shirt and shorts lines. Bought a Welsh dictionary. Nova got $6.5\text{e-}8 \text{ m}^2$ this time, with lots of slow, low-gear climbing on steep, winding roads. Ate in, I cooked.

Wed 1989-08-09

Dominated by rain, varying from heavy to torrential. First to an Archaeological Trail at north-east of (artificial) Lake Brenig. Saw remains of 2000-4000 year-old stone huts, ring cairn and burial mounds, but driven away by high wind and rain. Decided on an inside activity, so went to Llechwedd slate caverns, north of Blaenau Ffestiniog. Short queue to pay, then an hour and a quarter queue to ride the tramway, fortunately queueing under cover. 20 minute trip on 0.6 m-gauge tramway with guide to explain activity in various caverns. Trains went outside at places, so we still got soaked. But interesting to see how slate was won before modern open-cast system became possible. Tried to book Royal Hotel in Llangollen at 10:00, as advised by the manager last Saturday, but "fully booked", so took pot-luck and went out to Goat on the A5, about 8 km west of Corwen, at a pub / restaurant. We were the only ones there at 19:00, presaging a repeat of Monday, but more arrived, the food and service were good, it was a free house, so we didn't do badly after all. θ drove. It has stopped raining by 21:00, but the forecast for the rest of the week is not good. We got our seaside trip in just in time. Today the cloud was so low that we were almost in it on the A-road passes, at no more than about 400 m, Snowdon would have been a dead loss at 1085 m.

Thu 1989-08-10

To Holyhead, to say I have now driven the full length of the A5 (also the A1, A2, A3 and A4, but not the A6 yet), looked over the harbour, then had lunch looking over South Stack, on north-west side of Holy Island; a very pretty and quiet bird sanctuary; with heather covering the cliff-tops, over a rugged coastline below. Sea quite calm today, visibility very good in the clear sunshine, ships visible out to specks in the binoculars. Surface of sea in direction of sun a beautiful display of dancing points of light (attempted to photograph this, but probably unsuccessfully). A seagull landed right in front of us on the cliff-top to beg for food. Then on, following south-west coast of Anglesey as far as possible, to Sea Zoo, on south-east of the island, facing the Menai Strait. See various sea-fish and invertebrates (especially lobsters and oysters) swimming about in tanks. Nothing really big or spectacular, and labelling and description of exhibits pretty poor. Then on again to Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgagerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch, to take pictures of the station name-plate (and θ to buy a pullover) and to buy fuel (Nova 6.3e-8m²). Then on yet again to Caernarfon, to look around the Castle. It's quite warm by that time. Then head for home, but long queues on Llanberis pass and in Betws-y-coed (caused by a policeman on point duty). Eat in, with a bottle of fizz. Weather duller towards evening.

Fri 1989-08-11

Rain morning, sun afternoon. To Bala lake railway, a 60 cm narrow-gauge line laid along a standard-gauge alignment abandoned in 1960s, about 6 km along the south coast of lake Bala. Rain held off during trip, from Bala to base at Llanwchllyn and back again. Little B saddle-tanks and a miniature main-line look-alike diesel. We had steamer Holy War. After trip, drove around lake, taking photos of next train at various points on line; it only goes at about 15 km/h, easy to pass even using single-track roads. Raining heavily then. Then home, θ sitting in while I walked by Dee and on footpaths on other side of A5 (5 km). Sun shining by then. Take-away fish and chips from Corwen.

Sat 1989-08-12

Home. Car loaded and away by 08:50. Notice was wrong, fuel and electricity were included. Home via A5, M54, M6, M1 in 2 hours 50 minutes, 50 minutes shorter than all A5 route out. I drove. Mostly sunshine.

London 1990

Sat 1990-04-14

Crew meets at the Globe, Linslade. Lunch here. Sun still shining. To boatyard and load up, but they're not ready to show us off until well after 15:00. Then they got a tyre round the prop while turning it for us and had to take it to the workshop to lift the back end. Underway going south by 16:10, stopping at Slapton, south of bridge 120, at 18:10. Rain most of the afternoon and a cold wind. Eve walk to Carpenters in Slapton, pint glasses full of whole prawns, snails, whole duck.

Sun 1990-04-15

Start 08:15 in sunshine. Day variable. Sunshine, showers (snow, hail and rain), wind, but on the whole not unpleasant. Lots of locks. Tried for water just south of Marsworth Junction, but tap had no half-inch adaptor - so took on only a little in 30 minutes. Lunch Grand Junction Arms, near bridge 133, but too crowded to eat here. Stop 12:25-13:20. Then on to Three Horseshoes at Winkwell, arriving between lock 61 and the railway bridge at 18:20. Kept up with fellow boat Coral most of the day. Eve in Three Horseshoes.

Mon 1990-04-16

Sunshine intermittently and quite warm. Start 08:20, water at Nash Mills lock, ending at lunchtime at 12:10 at Hunton Bridge (bridge 162). Lunch in Kings Head, by the canal. Resume at 14:00, lots of gongoozlers at second Cassiobury Park lock. Moor for eve just south of bridge 175, alongside a large lake, between Batchworth and Harefield. Lovely warm evening, but hail showers in the afternoon. To pub eve, more than 1 km walk south to bridge 176 then along Springwell Lane and main road to Whip and Collar. A boat passed us going north at 22:30. Eve stop at 17:40.

Tue 1990-04-17

Away at 08:30 in sunshine, going through the locks with Coral, until Cowley Lock, when we stopped 10 minutes for water (water point in lock, another boat came and disturbed us) then stop for lunch at bridge 190, for the Paddington Packet Boat in Cowley. Stop at 12:40. Then buy bread and away again for a long lock-free stretch, still in sunshine, at 13:45. Changed from part-used to full gas bottle. Stop, in a sudden downpour, at 17:20 in Harlesdon, bridge 9. Eve to Grand Junction Arms, Acton Lane, public bar.

Wed 1990-04-18

A late start, after various forays into Harlesdon for papers and things, at 09:30. Water at Little Venice (just before entering basin) then moor just beyond Cumberland Basin at 11:35. Quick lunch on board, then to London Zoo in Regents Park. Sunshine with an odd short shower. Found a pump out at Little Venice: moor by the water point, then find Dennis on board Lady Venice, by appointment only. Told him Friday. Zoo full of children and difficult to spend any time at any of the exhibits. Most animals in very small cages. Seemed to be a very limited selection outside the usual zoo animals, the big ones and the cuddly ones.

Thu 1990-04-19

A pottering day. Rain at first, then sunshine, and a torrential hail-storm with thunder in the afternoon. Moved the boat a little down the Regents, turned and came back up to the same moorings. Depart 09:00 and return 12:00. Failed to get water. There was a point at St Pancras lock, but it was 10 m from the canal and our hose would not reach. Turned at Battlebridge Basin. Wandering in Camden and book buying, some of the crew off shopping in Oxford Street. Have to register on these moorings, but free for up to 14 days, and free anyway for boats with a hire-boat licence. This stretch of canal busy with water buses between Camden lock and Little Venice, calling at London Zoo. Eve to Prince Albert.

Fri 1990-04-20

Another short day. To Little Venice for water and a sort of pump-out. Dennis turns out to be a miserable bugger and upsets half the crew. £5 for two pump-outs, but he put no chemical in. Boatyard say put some in, even Elsan stuff will do, within 3 days or they'll start to stink. Start 08:55, pump out and water 09:45-11:10. Moor for a while outside Sainsbury's at Kensall Green (just beyond Porta Bella Dock) for shopping and finally come to rest back at Harlesdon, by the Grand Junction Arms. Moor at 13:50. This will be changeover point - Harlesdon being on the Watford DC line. Some of the crew by tube to Kew Gardens for the afternoon, the rest reading, walking the dog and looking for fish and chip shop. To Grand Junction Arms (saloon bar this time).

Sat 1990-04-21

One of the crew off early by train, others sleeping in. Move boat up a few metres to make road access easier, at the end of Steele Lane. New crew arrive by car at 11:30, and all changed over and old crew away by 11:50. Now on last gas bottle. Make good speed on warm, sunny afternoon. Fail to get gas at Cowley Peachey junction (closed, despite sign saying open to 18:00), but get two 13 kg propane tanks at boatyard between bridges 187 and 186, and also chemical for toilet. Gas £18 for the two, chemical £2.95. Difficult to moor at yard, had to lug cylinders over two other boats. Moor at bridge 185 at 17:20. Eve to Crown and Sceptre in Uxbridge.

Sun 1990-04-22

Start at 08:30, in heavy rain. Day gradually improved, afternoon actually hot. Water 45 minutes at lock 84, getting soaked having to hold the hose up to the tap, 5 minutes each. Lunch 13:00-15:00 at Feathers in Batchworth (moored by bridge 173) after a long walk, failing to find a pub serving food on Sunday. Smoked salmon on the boat instead. Ended up at 19:00 at bridge 162, and to King's Head in Hunton Bridge again, only eve this time.

Mon 1990-04-23

Away at 08:40, dull but with signs of improvement. Later, by lunchtime, warm sunshine. Under the Gade viaduct again and on up the heavily-locked section towards Tring. Water at lock 68, while waiting in the lock (10 minutes, the adaptor fitted). Then on to moor for lunch at the Three Horseshoes, Winkwell, at 13:00. Bought some hose adaptors at B&Q by bridge 151 to forestall having to hold onto any more water points where the half-inch hose adaptors have been nicked. Off at 14:30, moor for shopping by Crystal Palace in Berkhamsted (16:30-17:15) (bridge 141). Fun and games at locks 55 and 54, with the boat in front of us almost draining the intervening pound by leaving the bottom paddles half-open while going up, then the one coming down so irate he only just got his boat off the sill in time. Afternoon hot. Saw only one other boat moving before lunch. End up on summit, just north of Cowroast pub, almost deserted.

Tue 1990-04-24

Leaving at 08:15, me taking it over the Tring summit while the rest had breakfast. Hot and sunny all day, except for a bit of wind now and again. Stopped for lunch at Slapton (bridge 120), Carpenters Arms for lunch. Moor at 13:30. Off again at 15:15, stopping for water at Leighton Buzzard for 20 minutes. Ended up at top of Three Locks at 19:05, and to that pub in the evening. Third gas bottle expired by 17:00, now onto the two we bought on Saturday. Most boats in dock this week, at Bridgewater in Berkhamsted and Wyvern. Canal very much quieter than last week.

Wed 1990-04-25

Off at about 07:40. Level down at first three locks, almost drained, BWB men opening paddles to get their maintenance craft off the bottom. Day partly upset by Cottonweed (Concoform Marine) who set off alongside us as we left the bottom lock and then moaned that we had not done our share of the work in the locks yesterday. Man with moustache and huge beer gut, but we couldn't get rid of him, whichever of us stopped, we seemed to meet again. Fortunately there are not too many like him. Glorious sunny day, very hot. Water 10 minutes at Fenny lock, then moor for Giffard Park at 12:00. Friends out from Milton Keynes for lunch. Start again at 13:30, mooring by the Navigation at Castlethorpe wharf at 16:15. Still barely a cloud in the sky. Eve to Navigation, Old Hooky and Museum Ale. Amusement earlier in the day, with two policemen rescuing a boat adrift across the canal.

Thu 1990-04-26

Complete change of weather, cold, windy and wet. Start at 08:45 and pootle up to bottom of Stoke flight. Turn here and moor at 10:20. Then walk up to the flight (busy) and look at museum and shop, then lunch at the Boat Inn. Very old pub, still looking much as it must always have looked. Even in April, signs on the locks announce a water shortage and single boats must wait half an hour before going through alone. Back underway south at 13:50, stopping for water at Cosgrove for 15 minutes and mooring at the Giffard Park at 17:45. Single-line working through the works for the new aqueduct, controlled by traffic lights. Eve to Giffard Park. We'd just got back onto the boat when more friends arrived, and we went back in for another round.

Fri 1990-04-27

Sunshine nearly all day, but a slightly chill wind at times. Start 09:05 and a continuous run to the Three Locks, mooring above at 13:00. Lunch here, off again at 14:20, turning at Leighton Buzzard basin and mooring there at 16:00. Moorings here guarded by a friendly mooring warden, who helped us get in close. He's observant. He told us which day we went through (Tuesday). Eve spent cleaning boat. Have seen only two other Wyvern boats out this week, Daffodil to the north and Willow to the south. Much slacker that last week. Eve to Leighton Buzzard Chinese for excellent 9-course banquet at £20/person including booze.

Sat 1990-04-28

The end. Potter back to the boatyard, arr at 08:20.

Suèvres 1990

Tue 1990-09-04

From Hemel to MK, catch the cat and transport it to the cattery, then back to MK. Eat, then to Walton-on-Thames.

Wed 1990-09-05

Up at 06:30, and away with father to Heathrow Terminal 2 at about 08:00. Flight on time at 09:30 (Airbus A300, Air France). Arrived at Charles de Gaulle, didn't even handle passports in EC channel, just waved through. Long, slow queue at "other passports". Hire car collected, lots of details required, it was a group higher than booked, a red Peugeot 309GL. Drove it 200 km to superb cottage Les Grillons at Suèvres, stopping to provision at a hypermarket outside Orléans. Got lost several times (signs for straight-on often seem to point to one side or the other). A1, Périphérique (west side) N20, N152. A few close encounters, it's difficult to keep track of all that car on the right in the narrow town streets. Cottage owner Mme Dorée. Large, high-ceilinged with exposed timbers, mezzanine for bedroom over kitchen and bathroom. Of course the sheets we brought out didn't fit the bed. High power appliances run off 380V 3-phase 4-pin plugs. Unload. Walk around very quiet country roads, a quick glimpse of the Loire, and eat excellent herb sausages, bread and meringues.

Thu 1990-09-06

To Blois first, walking around and buying maps. Dull, some rain at first. Parked in extremely clean and fairly cheap multi-storey near the château. Then home for lunch, and out through Mer (θ driving now), over the Loire and to the Électricité de France nuclear station, where the predicted view-point was not obvious. Back downstream on the *rive gauche* beyond Blois, stopping here and there to take photos along the banks. Home via forest tracks and past the château at Chambord. Stopped in Mer and collected timetables from the *gare SNCF* and bought *France Soir*, it didn't convince the shop assistant. Ate in. Day never really got warm, a little sun now and again. Took some long-exposures of the inside of the cottage and some of the outside. Peugeot had same 1360cm³ engine as the AXGT, but only 55 kW. Consuming the second bottle of our 4-pack of red wine, 30F the lot. In the scenic areas south of Loire, many foreign Dutch, German, Belgian and British registrations to be seen.

Fri 1990-09-07

Shopping at a supermarket towards Blois and petrol (using Access). Car gave 6 L/100km over first 400 km. Then to Château de Chambord. A popular tourist attraction, a very large château in white with huge grounds, most of which are not accessible. Explored the inside, just like any similar except for interesting double-helix staircase. 27F each. Postcards by château. Picnic lunch eaten in a part of the forest *espace ouvert aux publique* followed by a walk in said forest. Then θ drove on a tour of the area: la Ferté-St-Cyr - Ligny-le-Ribault - la Ferté-St-Aubin - Jouy-le-patien - Cléry-St-André - Dry - Beaugency - Mer - home. Looking for château, of which there were many, but all private. Then walked into Suèvres to post postcards and discover that the bar-hotel was closed for its annual holiday until 11th September. Two other bars in the village looked very seedy. So another evening in. French brown beer very good, 6.5% ABV. Electrics in cottage left a lot to be desired, no earths on lamps and some plugs broken so that a finger can easily touch live metal.

Sat 1990-09-08

Another driving day. Some sunshine, but not very warm. Still no sight of our neighbours with the Tipo in the facing cottage, not since we saw them go out on Thursday evening. First through Amboise to the *Pagode*, a tower. 20F each to ascend, so we didn't, as didn't many others, including a UK couple in an old sports car. Then north to where a country lane crossed the new TGV-Atlantique and took some photos of the line and new bridge. Track-top dull, suggesting not in use even by construction traffic [opened 30th September]. Then to Château-Renault and a walk on what remains of same, which was not a lot. Keep inaccessible. Other buildings used as offices. Lunch eaten in the country a little east of here, then home by a circuitous route over single-lane country roads and through several rural settlements. Then a lazy afternoon reading in a little late sunshine, then inside. Most places shut today, except a few cafés.

Sun 1990-09-09

Sleep in, not out till nearly 11:00. To Château de Cheverny, south of Blois. Smaller and a little cheaper than Chambord, just the usual tapestries, paintings and old-ish furniture. Nothing very remarkable, some fairly small rooms by château standards. Called at station in Blois to enquire cost of trains to Paris (198F return), then to eat lunch looking over the Loire west of Blois. Warm, sunny day, but a bit of a wind in the afternoon. Home and

reading in the sun, until out for a meal at L'Époque in Menars. Managed to get by in French. Excellent meal. Credit cards accepted. θ drove home, after dark, complete with yellow headlights. And they made the road in front look really yellow. Cottage had thick walls and few, low-in-the-wall windows. It stayed remarkably dull and cool, even when it was hot and sunny outside. But upstairs was reasonably snug at night.

Mon 1990-09-10

Paris day. Up early and drive to Blois, park at station at 13F for the day, and catch 08:28 to Paris Austerlitz (5 minutes late, which it made up most of by Paris). An Englishman asked me in French if this was the train for Paris. Tickets 398F for two, paid by Access, swipe-read and very quick. Tickets must be self-validated at a machine. Very smooth ride in train (Corail) complete with children's play area. At Austerlitz, bought a carnet (10 *billets*) for Métro at 32.80F and took a train on line 10 to La Motte-Picquet-Grenelle, the nearest station on that line to the Eiffel tower. The Métro does *not* smell of garlic and is quieter and smoother than London Underground. Up the tower, at cost of 47F each. Spectacular view from top, on a clear sunny day. Queues to get the lifts, but not too long. Lift smooth. French girl got her bracelet caught in my pullover on the way down, very crushed in lifts. 250 m high, half of the CN tower. From here to Place Charles de Gaulle (Étoile) with the Arc de Triomphe. Absolutely mad traffic. About 6 or 7 lanes available, cars and motorbikes every which way, going really fast and hooting. Near-miss every few seconds. A policeman jumped out into the traffic every once in a while to sort out a jam, with only a whistle as protection. Mad. Down the Champs Élysée, which was crowded with people and cars, thoroughly noisy and enough to drive anyone insane. Diverted to banks of Seine and along to Jardin de Tuileries, where we had lunch at an outdoor café. two beers and two omelettes 101F. Then to the Louvre. Saw the new glass pyramid entrance, all around in disruption for an archaeological dig. Very hot inside, 27F each, and lots of people, of all nationalities, but saw lots of old paintings, including the Mona Lisa, and Egyptian and other artefacts. Knackered by the time we finished this. A short Métro ride from Louvres to Hôtel de Ville (line 1, one of the rubber-tired lines) and walk from there to look at Notre Dame and eat very expensive (15F each) ice-creams. Then we walked slowly to gare Austerlitz for return journey, the 17:15, arriving Blois 18:45, stopping at Orléans only. Then drove home. A long and tiring day, but well worth it. Paris was visually an excellent city but the noise and confusion spoilt it. Would need a week or two to really see it I suppose. Next time buy a street map that marks the Métro stations. Amazing how close the Périphérique comes to the famous bits. The Arc de Triomphe was only about 1100 m from us as we whizzed around the Périphérique last Wednesday. Home for a few beers and a quiet dinner in. Total distance walked, from the map, was about 10.5 km, but to this must be added the slog around the Louvre. Strange concrete thing, 2 or 3 m above ground and many km long, alongside the line coming into Orléans from Paris. It stopped sharp at one end, and at a large, elevated platform at the other. Mostly over fields, but it crossed roads and went through a few woods. Could be an irrigation feed, but it also looked like a monorail track. Shops in Paris accept Amex, but everywhere else seems to be Carte Bleue, with Visa, Mastercard and Eurocard symbols underneath. Even out in the wilds, many petrol stations accept all of these.

Tue 1990-09-11

Sunny at first, a bit cloudy at times in the afternoon. To Blois, shopping, but not very successfully, just two boxes of chocolates, a newspaper (*Le Monde*) and a phone card (smart-card, with a chip on it). Then more petrol (another 420 km used 24L), on Access again. About 800 km so far. Supermarket closed for lunch so couldn't buy the wine for presents, that will now have to come from the duty-free shop. Phoned owner Mme Dorée to say we will leave at 07:00, she said leave the key in the door. Evening in, finishing up the food, beer, wine, and cleaning up and packing.

Wed 1990-09-12

Up at 06:00, breakfasted and away at 07:00, taking the toll autoroute from north of Beaugency, the A10 *L'Aquitaine*. Fast road, 120 km/h and you can do it. Take ticket to get on and only one péage, just after the merging of routes about half-way from Orléans. Toll 42F here, then free to Paris. Stopped at small service area for coffee and orange juice. Got slower on approach to Paris and a crawl by the Périphérique. Missed the Périphérique the first time and went in towards Paris, those French signs again, but turned round and found it. Went east of Paris this time. Crawl all round the Périphérique. Off onto A1 at north, towards Lille and Brussels and no problem getting off and into the hire-car return park for Terminal 2. Check in about half-hour later (journey 212 km, arrive 10:15, 3¼ hour journey) and sit around, after buying duty-free wine for Roger and Jim and perfume for θ and mother. Strange order at Charles de Gaulle: passport check before baggage check, then duty-free before security check. No facilities at all in departure lounge apart from telephones and bogs. Previous flight at same gate delayed and ours about 45 minutes late boarding, and once we were on they announced a 30

minute wait for a Heathrow landing slot. Very little info at Charles de Gaulle. We finally took off about 1 hour late at 13:30, arriving at Heathrow at 13:30 (local). Father had found out we would be late and picked us up about 14:10. To Walton for a while, Uncle David there, but we couldn't stay long. Off in Sapphire to pick up the cat and then home. Flight back another Airbus A300, but this time only half or two-thirds full. I only twice tried to change gear with the right hand after returning to right-hand drive.

Aérotrain

Notes added in 2016 relating to the odd linear feature alongside the railway line to Paris, which could still be seen 16 years later on Google Maps.

It starts on the lane between Ruan and Dambron (Rue Tenezy) about 20 km north of Orléans at a raised platform, it looks like a square U-section concrete channel on pillars the whole length. Look at N48.1155, E1.9036 for the start and N47.9576, E1.8928 for the end where Rue des Fosses Guillaume meets Rue de la Tuilerie in Orléans. Wikipedia has it: The Aérotrain was a hovertrain developed in France from 1965 to 1977. The lead engineer was Jean Bertin. The goal of the Aérotrain was similar to that of the magnetic levitation train: to suspend the train above the tracks so the only resistance is that of air resistance. Consequently, the Aérotrain could travel at very high speeds without the technical complexity and expensive tracks of magnetic levitation. This project was abandoned in 1977 due to lack of funding, the death of Jean Bertin, and the adoption of TGV by the French government as its high-speed ground-transport solution. In 1969 the third, 18 km test track was built to test Aérotrain prototype I80. This test track was in Loiret, France, north from Orléans, stretching between Saran and Ruan, a location that would enable it to be used in a future Paris-Orléans line. The track was elevated 5 m above the ground, was supported by pillars and allowed speeds of 400 km/h. A platform stood at each end of the line to reverse the train, while a hangar on the central platform at Chevilly housed the test vehicle. This line, while abandoned, became a famous landmark subject to cosmetic disputes after the end of the Aérotrain programme, and exists today, visible to the east of RN20 and the Paris-Orléans railway line.

Almost Nottingham 1991

Sat 1991-04-20

To Atherstone in two cars with two dogs. Away on Lune Valley at 14:00, sun shining. Valley Cruises 19.2 m boat, 4-cyl BMC diesel, indirectly cooled by canal-water through a heat-exchanger, primary cooling closed circuit. Not bad in presentation, but lacking in storage space, especially oddment ledges. Single circular pipe heating system, gas fired and electrically pumped. Two gas bottles, but not auto-change, and no spanner if we need to buy more. First day to just beyond bridge 68. Eve to Gate Inn, by bridge 69. Marston's Pedigree again.

Sun 1991-04-21

Away at 08:30, in damp and dismal weather. Windy, stuck on the tow-path side for half an hour before Balls bridge, eventually punted it across and held on ropes on off-side and started from there. Got caught coming out of a few bridge holes as well. Lunch at Swan at Whittington, 12:50-13:50. Won a chicken and associated vegetables in their raffle, which were locally produced and excellent. Then on in rain to Fradley junction, where water for 15 minutes, and down Trent and Mersey as far as Alrewas, just below Bagnall lock by 18:10. This boat quite difficult to steer in wind for some reason, it seems all right, then suddenly the nose does something unexpected. Today is census day, and we're caught at the evening mooring. We have to fill in a form for the boat, even though we've all done one for our homes. Eve to Navigation in Alrewas, filling in the census form between us with the boat as address; should provide some interesting statistics. Fairly decent pub but almost empty.

Mon 1991-04-22

Away at 08:15, in sunshine. Few locks, spaced well apart. Not much of Burton-on-Trent visible from the canal, and only Bass and Marston's breweries identify themselves. Sights now set a little lower than Nottingham, perhaps Long Eaton, and then take a train from there. Lunch at Green Dragon, 50 m from canal at Willington, by bridge 23, moor 13:10. Then water here and away at 14:35. Keep going well all afternoon, to Shardlow, just before bridge 2, by 19:30. Broad locks from Stenson onwards very heavy. Eve to Malt Shovel Shardlow (Marston's). Hard day.

Tue 1991-04-23

Away at 08:30 in gloom, getting to Trent Junction about 10:00. Take on water in entrance to Erewash canal, then moor pointing homeward just outside the entrance. A lot of water here on the river Trent, quite different from driving on the narrow canal. Weirs also. Crew apart from me to Nottingham, by train from Long Eaton, me looking after the dogs and reading. Away again 15:20, boat going slower upstream in the river. Up through Shardlow and back onto decent canals again, arrive Weston upon Trent, above lock, at 18:20. Short walk to Old Plough in village.

Wed 1991-04-24

Under way at 09:05, managed to unblock the forward bog. Dull, but mild. Through the broad section by 11:45, back onto real canal now. Stop at Willington, above bridge 23, at 12:30, then take on water and lunch at the Green Dragon again. Lots of good food and cheap, but vegetables boiled to oblivion. Back in motion at 14:30. Stop to remove a load of rope and a piece of steel reinforcing bar from the prop by bridge 32B (about 20 minutes, using the bread-knife), get to Branston, beyond bridge 34, at 17:45. Our least capable steerer, supposedly being supervised by a more experienced crew member, got the rope caught round the prop and tiller, couldn't steer so tried going faster, and rammed the lock hard. Rope is broken too. The supervisor just did nothing. Never trust anybody. Eve to Bridge Inn, by bridge 34, Pedigree and Owd Roger from the cask and live music.

Thu 1991-04-25

Away at 09:00. Windy and difficult to steer. I went aground on the tow-path side by the weir north of Alrewas and had problems getting it to point towards lock 12, let alone get in straight. Fun. Moored for lunch just onto the Coventry at Fradley Junct, at 13:15. Water 15 minutes below Barton lock. Lunch at Swan at junction and bought

map in adjacent shop. Afternoon ended at Hopwas, just south of Dixons bridge, between the Chequers (Courage) and the Red Lion (Ind Coope), at 18:00. Eve to Chequers, juke-box, no atmosphere, but good evening despite that.

Fri 1991-04-26

Leave Hopwas at 08:30. To Polesworth, bridge 54, at 12:00. Bully Head (M+B, but Bass available, fortunately) for lunch and visit to village. Away again 13:55. Dropped my specs into the canal just below the bottom gates of Atherstone bottom lock, so I'm now on the spare pair. Thunderstorm during the flight caught us unprotected. Called at boatyard for re-assurance on quality of winding-holes, then went on to turn just beyond bridge 34 (plenty of width but not very much depth) and moor at same spot as three years ago, just north of bridge 36, 18:15. Tomorrow just under a mile, so total for the trip is about 100 mi and 62 locks. A slack week, but going has been slow everywhere but in the river sections. Eve to Plough in Mancetter about 1 km walk from canal.

Sat 1991-04-27

To boatyard by 08:15. Eve to Dragon Inn Chinese at Leighton Buzzard with the whole boat crew. Fuel 59 L = 37 L/100km, or 7.6 mi/UKgal.

Lancaster Canal 1991

Sat 1991-08-31

Arrive 15:00 at Nu-way Acorn, Carnforth. The boat Hiawatha was a little run down and their only narrow boat, the rest were cruisers and outboard-motored day boats. But very pleasant. Aboard and underway in less than 30 minutes, with absolute minimum of instruction. Boat is minus pole and windlass, so we can't do the branch even if we want to, engine 2-cylinder Lister. Very hot, not a cloud all day. End at Heston Bank at 17:00, walk out to sea over salt flats and mud, which is fine, wet sand I think. Only 300 m from boat to shore, over level-crossing of main railway. Most boats noddly-type and carrying noddly-boat people. I moved over to let one pass and not even a glance around in recognition. They all drive very fast, of course. Heston Bank is mainly a long-term mooring, with very little space for short-term. Evening to Hest Bank Hotel, Boddingtons. Boat has non-auto taps, open tap and hold down button. Also the horn doesn't work. Engine OK though and steers very well. Also very responsive to throttle. 13.5 m (45 ft).

Sun 1991-09-01

Grumpy newsagent; papers for sale out at the back, ones for delivery stacked in the shop. Sunshine, and off by 08:00. T-shirt order by 09:00. Moor for lunch just past junction, past bridge 85, and to Plough in Galgate. Lots of moored boats, hard to find a place. Boddingtons pub. Water 10 minutes at junction. Moor at 11:20. Away again 13:00. Hardly anything moving before 10:00; after that boats everywhere, and every one a glass-fibre cruiser. Taking turns steering, with cool-off times. Stopped Garstang, before bridge 64, at 15:15. Reccy into the town, then laze in sun for afternoon. Eve Wheatsheaf, serving Matthew Brown through half-pint electric auto-pumps, not impressed. Also Farmers Arms, with Jennings Traditional Bitter. Eve completely still, just pleasant to be out.

Mon 1991-09-02

Into Garstang for a paper, then away at 08:30. Shorts and tee-shirt from the start. Still at first, with a little mist still, but a breeze later. Still not a cloud. Couldn't find anywhere to moor at Catforth, so on and moored by bridge 26 for Hand and Dagger, canalside, food. Greenalls original, good. Moor at 12:30. Start again 14:00, down to Preston basin. Nothing there, no sign of the boatyard indicated in Nicholsons; just as it says, it's in the middle of nowhere. Passed only one boat apart from Nu-way Apache at about 10:00, nothing else moving and not a lot else about on this southern reach. New water / sanitary station just west of bridge 12 on off-side, nice mooring, but weeded up, presumably from under-use. Moored for night bridge 22 at 17:00. Very difficult to get close to the bank anywhere along this bit. Eve Smith's Arms, 500 m south of bridge 22. Thwaites. Crew of Apache say they had Hiawatha last year and are finding the cruiser difficult to handle, they were wandering all over the canal and at one time holding us to idle speed.

Tue 1991-09-03

Walk around Lea Town and back via canal, no shops. Sunny again, but a breeze, so clothes on this morning. Start 09:15, a few more boats this morning, seen four moving by 11:00, including two that appeared from nowhere to go through the swing bridge and force me to run to catch up the boat. Moor 11:45 at bridge 44 outside Nell's Tavern a tacky themed pub / restaurant / hotel set, a bit like a down-market Berni with equivalent level of service. But a free house and the beer was all right: Boddingtons, but they had a lot besides. Lots of people to watch us cast off again at 13:30, 10 minutes for water at Garstang, bridge 63, then stop in the middle of nowhere, between bridges 66 and 67 at 15:30. Afternoon lazing in the sun, although a few hazy clouds did come over about 16:00-16:15. About 19:00, an hour or so before sunset, the grass already felt wet to the touch, as did the roof of the boat, though it was still warm to move about. Some photos of the boat at mooring, and later when the water had stilled after the passage of numerous noddly boats, most of which don't slow down at all on passing. Over the length of the canal, have seen only the three hire places that we found in Nicholsons, and no other narrow boat for hire bar the one we're on. A person on the tow-path said he'd had Hiawatha years ago, it's been here a long time; suspect it's 10-20 years old. Eve on boat, watching the sun set and evening start, in almost complete silence but not of the Scottish Highlands quality, can still hear distant motorcycles, tractors and aeroplanes now and again.

Wed 1991-09-04

Start 08:00, early mist just burning off. Splitting the mirror-water for the first hour at least, but then passed a narrow boat. Getting to be hot by arrival at junction for water then moor just before bridge 86 at 10:00. Spoke to widow of two months just starting out in a new boat Night Owl, a 9-10 m narrow boat. Then walk about 3 miles

down to the Glasson basin and have a quick drink at Dalton Arms, one of three pubs at Glasson by the dock, then walk back to lock 6 which has a new pub-hotel Millers Tavern, in an old mill, where we had lunch. Back to boat and underway at 14:10, recovering from the exercise. Moor in Lancaster, by the cathedral, between bridges 101 and 102. Still hot and sunny, quick forays into city for maps. Moor at 15:45. Eve to Chinese Golden Dragon near canal, pigging out on mixed hors d'oeuvres, Peking duck, scallops, sweet and sour and Tetleys. Then a quick drink in the White Cross, a canal-side gin palace.

Thu 1991-09-05

Into Lancaster for shopping and books. Visited city museum, which was remarkable for having McDonald's wrappers and Meggazines pastel tins as exhibits. Still sunny, but hazy, not so hot. Start off 11:15. Note tow-path change-over bridge is numbered 100 on the ground, 101 on all the maps. We moored between 100-101 by physical bridge numbers. Stopped at Hest Bank, before bridge 117, to eat 12:45-13:25, then on again past the boatyard, to Tewitfield, the limit of navigation. Arrived 16:20, 10 minutes for water, and moored at 16:30. Not a lot of free mooring, but then not many boats seem to come up here. Less than 20 metres from the M6. Walked up past the weired locks, canal is culverted at both ends of the flight, and crossed M6 to see it carry on towards Kendal, water level a little low, but still looking like a canal. It's still there to feed the water from the canal reservoir at Killington. This end of the canal narrow and shallow, especially north of Carnforth, can't do much more than a fast idle. Eve to Longlands Hotel, 100 metres from canal, Bass.

Fri 1991-09-06

Start at 09:30. Engine reluctant to start, lots of smoke and wouldn't idle, perhaps a little colder last night. Also, wouldn't engage gear, had to lift stern sheet and move selector manually. Both recovered after a while. Moor just before bridge 128 in Carnforth at 11:00. Have to re-pack the stern greaser, as it reached the end of its travel. Lunch on the boat, then to visit Steamtown railway museum, though not a lot of actual steam today, one LMS Pacific had a fire in it, but no sign of steam. Sir Nigel Gresley had its frame in the shop and its boiler elsewhere, supposedly to be fit again by autumn 1991, they'll have to get a move on. Ride on a narrow-gauge toy railway behind a diesel loco, up the site and back again. Really, not a lot to see and very few people there. Quick pint in Carnforth Hotel, Boddingtons, then afternoon relaxing, reading on the boat, the sun still shining. No sign of the two Nu-way cruisers up this end, only three boats passed us by the end of the afternoon. Everyone sticks to the pretty bits it seems, and rarely visits the extremes. Eve to Shovel, a bit rough, and everyone knew each other, but Boddingtons.

Sat 1991-09-07

Another bright blue sky morning, but only a short potter to arrive at boatyard 08:15.

Leeds and Liverpool 1992

Sat 1992-04-25

To Snaygill, three cars, starting from various parts of the country. Away about 15:30. They checked us at the first swing bridge and again at the first lock. Eve to the Anchor at Gargrave, now a Brewer's Fayre with all tables set for eating, not as friendly as before, avoid in future except for eating. The boat is Applemint as before, warm, autochange gas with four bottles, four big batteries, smooth, quiet 4-cyl BMC engine. Moor just above lock 32, after failing after lock 30.

Sun 1992-04-26

Wind. Sound of heavy rain on roof at 04:00, then around 06:00 a howling wind. Canal looked like the sea, waves with white frothy heads. Leisurely start, at 09:00, by which time the wind was slightly lessened, but still enough to make walking into it difficult. Lunch at Cross Keys at East Marton 11:45-13:15, where there is a new water point. A little sunshine between showers from lunchtime. Stop after bridge 147 at 16:15. To New Inn for only one round as all knackered, and it's still windy with rain. Tunnel now has traffic lights, and can start from this end at xx:00 to xx:10 only.

Mon 1992-04-27

Start at 07:50, going straight through into tunnel. Colder than yesterday, little sunshine and still wind. Through the 7 locks and moor on the Burnley embankment at 12:00. Pizzas for lunch in Burnley, followed by a brief shopping period. Away 14:20. Wind very strong at times and stuck to the side a couple of times. End at bridge 114b (just beyond) at Clayton-le-Moors at 18:00. A quick one at Narrow Boat, but tipped it down after dinner, so we stayed on the boat. Water at BWB yard in Burnley. At least the boat is warm and comfortable.

Tue 1992-04-28

Start 08:45. Have decided not to go right into Blackburn to turn, so turn 09:30 at just before bridge 113, in old junction entrance, just missing a plastic boat moored opposite. Back to Burnley, moor at Weaver's Triangle museum by bridge 130b at 12:00. To Red Lion in Burnley town, then a little shopping and visit the museum. Calm at last this morning, could see reflections in the water and feel no breeze, Even a little sunshine. Off again at 14:20. Potter along to moor at bridge 137 for Brierfield at 16:30. Into town, or at least in that direction, for Railway Tavern, complete with resident drunk. Leeds and Liverpool opposite looked really spit and sawdust. Water in Burnley yard. Applemint is 58 feet.

Wed 1992-04-29

Start 08:45. Water at top of Barrowford locks. Only a two-minute wait for the traffic lights on the tunnel (11:30 phase). Lunch stop at Salterforth 12:30-15:00, lunch at the Anchor. Afternoon, stop at East Marton, before bridge 161, at 17:15. Double-arch bridge has been widened by extensions at top. Eve to Cross Keys.

Thu 1992-04-30

Rain all day. Start 09:00, then water just other side of bridge 161. Flasby didn't want to share locks with us, but Bank Newton lock-keeper told us to wait for them, they took ages as they took on water. Lunch at Gargrave, just beyond bridge 169a, at Mason's Arms near the church. Start again 14:30, which was just when the rain really got going. Moor in Skipton, beyond bridge 177, at 16:50. Raining still, and on into the night, so we stayed on board.

Fri 1992-05-01

Start 10:30, after shopping in Skipton. Almost an hour in boatyard, for pump-out, more gas, water and a new bilge pump. Also take on handspike and anchor. Can't get Aire and Calder guide at our boatyard or the one at Silsden. Kildwick for lunch, moor before bridge 185, White Lion. Off again 14:20. moor above 5-rise at Bingley, before bridge 200 at 17:45. Eve Royal Hotel, Bingley.

Sat 1992-05-02

Start 09:00, straight through the five-rise as lock-keeper was ready. Lunch between bridge 207b and 207c, convenient for centre of Shipley, but awful town centre pub, Sun Hotel, that didn't even want to take our food order as "chef's busy with a buffet". 11:50-13:45. Water at BWB Apperley Bridge yard, and moor at bridge 216a in Rodley at 17:15. This is latest safe mooring before Leeds, according to lock-keepers and our boatyard. Bought Aire and Calder and Calder and Hebble Guide at Rodley Boatyard, at last after failing at Snaygill, Silsden and Shipley. Sometimes almost warm in the afternoon. Some swing-bridges have barriers and flashing red and amber lights, operated by a sanitary station key. Can't tell with each bridge what combination of swing-bridge key, sanitary station key or windlass it will require. Eve to Rodley Barge one of three pubs in this outskirts of Leeds, Bass. Football hooligans passing along the tow-path eve, tossed a couple of stones but no damage.

Sun 1992-05-03

Start 08:50. Sunny and hot all day. Lots of activity in Leeds, to do with parading some football cup around in an open-top bus. Lunch on the go, straight through Leeds and on to the river. Through all of the mechanised locks and Castleford junction, to moor just before Kings Road lock on the Calder and Hebble Navigation at 17:20. Water at office lock in Leeds. Eve along the footpath above the lock to Horse and Jockey at Altofts. Face suffering from sunburn after being out in it all day. On returning from the pub in the evening, the canal was reflecting the deep blue sky and looking phosphorescent.

Mon 1992-05-04

Bank holiday. Start 08:35, straight into Kings Road lock. Out of mechanised locks at Wakefield and into climbing down ladders onto the boat. Stop for 40 minutes at Wakefield to sort out where to go, then on upstream to just below Broad Cut Top Lock, turning in about mid-pound and reversing to moor at the Navigation Inn. Water above Broad Cut Bottom Lock on way up. Lunch 12:30-14:00. Return to below Kings Road Lock, at same mooring as this morning, at 16:45. Overcast and hazy but warm in the afternoon, lots of gongoozlers at the pub and around the locks. Eve to Horse and Jockey again. Used the handspike once, on a top gate paddle at Thornes lock.

Tue 1992-05-05

Start 08:00. Passed an empty set of three coal compartment tubs on the Calder, a full one and a dredger below Kippax lock, and a sand / gravel barge on the Aire and Calder canal section. Moor above office lock for water and excursion to craft shop plus a quick lunch on board, 12:30-14:30. Afternoon mooring at Rodley, as Saturday eve, at 18:40. To Owl Hotel to eat and drink, listening to a jazz band with singer. Grumpy lock-keeper at the two triples today, and they're very wet, pouring water over the front of the boat.

Wed 1992-05-06

Start 09:20, water at Apperley Bridge yard, moor in Shipley for shopping, banks, and fish and chips 13:20-15:20. Managed to do a 3-rise all by ourselves at Field Locks. Eve moor above Dowley gap two locks at 16:30. Saw one other moving boat morning and one afternoon, one private, one hired. Yesterday saw only working boats moving. Eve to Fishermans, adjacent. Bass. Moored on lock bollard, as instructed by lock-keeper. Lots of dining / trip boats through eve.

Thu 1992-05-07

Start 09:10, Through Bingley 3- and 5-rise. Water at top of 5-rise. Party of schoolchildren watching at the 5-rise. Stop for lunch 12:30-13:45 before swing bridge 197a, Stockbridge, to canal-side Marquis of Granby. afternoon in high wind to moor at Silsden, beyond bridge 191a, at 15:40. Eve to Bridge Inn at bridge 191a. Triple-locks have bottom chamber larger, so need extra water through top paddles to get interchange level correct, must be less than 30 cm below overflows else ground paddle sluices appear above the water-line, which can be dangerous. In these locks, a little *opposite* ground paddle is used first, until boat is up far enough to use the swirl from the *same* side paddle.

Fri 1992-05-08

Start 08:45, drop one crew member at boatyard (he has to get back today) 10:45-10:55, turn in Springs branch and moor in Skipton just before bridge 179a at 11:45. Lunch at Fleece Inn near the bridge, then shopping, and looking over the castle. Eve to Indian, just beyond the lunchtime pub on the other side of the road, set back in an alley. Good.

Sat 1992-05-09

Start 07:15, arrive at boatyard 08:00. Bought a swing-bridge key as a souvenir.

Cadgwith 1992

Fri 1992-09-04

Cats to cattery, then off at 10:00. Rover, ϕ to Leigh Delamere, θ to Exeter, ϕ to Cadgwith. Sunny and warm. Arrive 17:00. Only reliable parking is in pay-and-display about 400 m away at 50p/day, which was a bit of a surprise, but otherwise as expected. Tiny fishing village on a cove, now mainly providing for tourists. Cottage looks out over the sea from a small terrace and bedroom window same. Light upstairs, in all four bedrooms, but the downstairs is gloomy during the day, OK at night. Pub in village serves good food, by looks so far, and Pedigree, Flowers, Boddingtons and local brews. There's also a cafe, a gift shop and a take-away sandwich and sea-food place. Stench of seaweed. Small shingle beach covered in small boats, chains and winching gear. Short walk eve along the coastal path (ϕ only, most of the way) and later in the pub. Cottage unusual in that it's unlocked, just go in, no-one there to meet us, nor is there any requirement to meet on departure, though there is the name of the caretaker to contact if needed.

Sat 1992-09-05

Up early, to walk to car and buy today's parking ticket. Sun streaming through the window over the sea, but not forecast to last. To Lizard, 60p in National Trust car park, and walk along the coast path, past the hotel and lighthouse. Warm and pleasant to watch the sea and the wild coastline. Photos of θ and rocks on my camera. Then into Helston shopping. Lots of small shops, butchers and bakers, with fresh bread and cakes. Bought maps, eclairs, and back to the cottage for lunch as clouding over. Afternoon in reading, watching the wind and the rain. Eve to eat in the pub.

Sun 1992-09-06

To Land's End, in dreary fog, with occasional light drizzle. Saw the flashy multi-media show, with impressive storm, with wind and spray as well as thunder and lightning, and simulated helicopter with flashing reflections of rotor blades, down draft and realistic noise and stereo effect. Film and projection TV plus moving screens, animations. Good was Merlin's face projected onto a model of a head. About 30 minutes. Rest fairly conventional static exhibits, gift shops. Had lunch there. Walked on the cliff tops a little, but could barely see the sea below through the fog and it was blowing a gale as well. £5 each to get in, and busy-ish, despite the weather. Home, diverting through the centre of Penzance, again to read and watch the sea crashing outside.

Mon 1992-09-07

Warm sunshine. To Goonhilly, the satellite earth station, run by BT. Little exhibition centre and cafe to wait in, then 40-minute tour. Visit the old control tower for viewing, saw the main control room, through a glass wall, then a bus trip around the site. Competent commentary from a young girl, but no technical content. Did say what each aerial was doing, TV or telephony, and where it was pointing. Largest aerial a 30-metre dish, earliest was the one that did the first transatlantic TV in the 1960s. Then to beach again at Porthoustock, sitting in the sun watching scuba divers playing in the sea. Then into Helston again, but no books, as only a Menzies with very little to offer. From there back to cottage for lunch, then sitting out in the sun on the central spit, called the Todden, with all the tourists, until it became chilly. Fishing boats went out this morning about 07:00. They push them stern-first down the beach with a tractor, on the front of which is a frame covered with old tyres, this at around low tide. Lots of helpers to steady the boats and place and retrieve the small logs that protect the keel and help it roll. The boats went out with one man each and stood just outside the cove, going astern until clear of the cove, then turning. After four or five had been got away, the remaining men went out in an open boat with an outboard, which delivered another man to each boat making a two-man crew for each, then came back. The main boats are probably 8-10 m, with a small enclosed wheelhouse, but no deck. They returned, to be winched up the beach, about 15:00-16:00, carrying lobster pots and tea-chests full of fish, the catch just sitting in the bottom of the boat. Sitting, or rather lying, now on the bed, looking out on a sunny evening, the sea, the tide ebbing, crashing over the rocks to the left and breaking on the shingle, the day-visitors are mostly gone, the boats deserted, gulls above and on the beach, and perched along the ridges of the cliffs. A single small bank of white cloud sitting over the sea in the distance. A single gull on the chimney of the thatched cottage to the right. Later, the local gig club went out for an hour in their gig Buller, a 6-oar plus cox rowing boat. We went to the pub and finished a bottle of fizz.

Tue 1992-09-08

Sun shining and the boats going out again at dawn, though fewer this morning. Reading on the bench outside the front door, until the sun was obscured and it got a bit cool. Then into Falmouth shopping, including a good second-hand bookshop. Then to Pendennis Castle and a quick snack in the cafe there. Sun shining, alternating with very short showers. Then to Gweek and the seal sanctuary; still with sun and showers. Transport around the site in 21-seater trailers towed behind Land-Rovers. Saw seals of various sizes, in various stages of rehabilitation, tropical fish, and a nature trail. θ bought another fluffy seal. Then back to the cottage for reading. The pilot gig went out again, this time with an all female crew apart from the cox; later they all appeared at the pub, where we were dining. Pub serves mainly sea-food, exactly what depending on what they've caught that day. Helston has NatWest, Midland cash dispensers, a TSB and something that will take Visa, but no Link at all, very unusual. Falmouth had everything. Falmouth badly done, the main shops are in a narrow cobbled one-way street and cars are directed down it to get to the main shopping car park. This is difficult for the cars and the pedestrians. Also, parking is expensive in the centre (1 hour 40p, 2 hours 80p, 3 hours £1.70). Parking overlooks the harbour. Falmouth has everything, Helston is only a local centre. Clear moon this evening, directly over the bay and reflecting in the sea. Tried the local mead, not so sickly as the last lot we tried (Lindisfarne?).

Wed 1992-09-09

ϕ trying out the coastal path to the south, past the Devil's Frying Pan, a point where the sea has broken through, making a tunnel which emerges into a deep pit. The path, unfortunately, goes around the pit rather than over the bridge, which is still grassed. Pix on θ 's camera of here and further around the path. Back via the roads, leaving the coast path at the first farm track. Dull at first and signs of overnight rain, but the sun appearing around 11:00. Annoyingly, Cadgwith is exactly on the boundary between two OS sheets, so traced the coastline and major roads from one sheet onto the other. Village peaceful in the morning, only a few walkers along the path, the bulk of visitors seem to come only on sunny afternoons. Before lunch, θ and ϕ up to the headland to the north of the cove sitting there watching the village's movements for some time. Warm, despite no direct sunshine. Then after lunch, to sit on and explore the sand and boulder beach on the other bay, on the south side of the Todden, more popular with bathers and swimmers, and very warm, even though the sun shone only for an hour or so in the afternoon. There seems to be a village idiot, blonde-haired, not wearing oil-skins like the rest, who gets his own boats out and back again, whereas the others always help each other. He carries oars from one boat to another, then a few minutes later back again. And today he got one of his boats out and the engine wouldn't start, so he's gone off rowing it.

Fri 1992-09-11

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Cheshire ring 1993

Sat 1993-05-01

Start of canal holiday. Sunshine to start, hot by midday, cool, dull and windy by the time we set out. In two cars to Heritage Narrow Boats at Scholar Green, off J16 north of Stoke-on-Trent. Kinder Scout 14.6 m, two bunks at back, two in cabin amid and double / dinette up front. 2-cylinder Lister, diesel-burning hot-air heating, one bog between four. Not the most luxurious. Nearly 1 hour of waffle to get the boat out, the 12 V is 5A or 3-pin rubber in-line type, so the 2A that I put on the cellphone adaptor won't do. Get away only at 16:30, mooring between bridge 77 and the aqueduct at 18:00. Eve to Wharf, near the aqueduct. Bought Rochdale licence, £27.50. Today 3 miles and no locks (1.5 hours = 2 mi/h, which is about maximum for this canal, reckoned to be less than 1 m deep). Dire warnings about doing the Ashton and Rochdale in one day, to minimise risk from juvenile vandals.

Sun 1993-05-02

Away at 08:30, through the 12 locks in Bosley flight and moor before bridge 49 at 13:36. Followed Denstone up the flight, with one woman doing all the work, "I'm not an outdoor sort of person". Leaving paddles open for a boat with only two on behind us. Water 5 minutes at top of flight. Lunch at Fool's Nook by bridge 49. Afternoon restart 15:00, driving through automatic swing bridge, to reach Bollington, just beyond the aqueduct, by 18:00. Eve briefly to Dog and Partridge, which was full of young locals. Bollington a little stone town, with lots of steep hills and water falling. Aqueduct very high, and horseshoe-shaped rather than a simple arch. Boddies lunchtime, Robinson's eve.

Mon 1993-05-03

Mayday bank holiday. No locks or other impediments. Start 09:00, me walking along ex-railway cycle-foot-horse path from bridge 18 to bridge 15, easily beating the boat. Lunch stop 12:30 at bridge 2, eat in Ring O'Bells, Robinson's and excellent fresh salmon salad. Queue for water after lunch, then at 14:30 start down the Marple flight, warm sunshine and hosts of gongoozlers. About 2 hours for the flight, then over Marple aqueduct and on to Hyde, mooring about half-way between the M67 and bridge 4 at 18:40. Peak Forest is narrow, but, unlike the Macclesfield, seems deep to the edge, so no problem mooring. So far, everything has been picturesque, even the towns, especially the canal through Marple and Macclesfield summit. Tomorrow, the mad dash through Manchester.

Tue 1993-05-04

A very busy day. Sunshine all day, melting the overnight frost to start with, then sweltering most of the day and a pleasant evening. Started at 07:15, breakfasting on the way. Water steaming in the sunshine and cold air. Rapid progress down the remains of the lower Peak Forest. Turn onto the Ashton, the first part of which is quite pretty. Picked up the inevitable gang of children at lock 10, throwing stones and trying to ride on the boat. Lots of other boats about. Water at BW Fairfield Junction, 15 minutes. The children were down to very young age, in school uniform, male and female. Tiny tots smoking and swearing. Came out of narrow lock territory around midday and handed over our carnet to the Rochdale office, the real office, not the hut in the car park, who didn't know what to do with it. Very old-fashioned office, gold leaf on the door, staircase. Then they let us in. Vast numbers of boats coming up, from a festival at Castlefield Junction, lots as pairs tied up. We had to divert to a side channel under an office block to let some up. Here, in a dark, subterranean cavern with concrete pillars everywhere, we had to wait for perhaps 20 minutes. The boat's throttle-cable broke, so that we could only move at a crawl. The cellphone did its job. Boatyard suggested that we went down slowly and have it repaired at Castlefield Junction. Did this, sharing with Black Prince boat with people walking the Cheshire Ring. Tedious with boats coming up, but after it cleared tied ours together and they drove us down. Found the repairer at the junction and he put in a new cable in 45 minutes. Then away again 15:45 for a fast, lock-free stretch, to moor at Worsley (bridge 52) at 18:00. Quiet, just on the outskirts of the conurbation. Feature of this part the Barton swing aqueduct. Rochdale locks very heavy and doubtful if we could have worked them ourselves. Passed Marple going the other way around at Rochdale bottom lock. Mooring, found that all port side lights were not working and a fuse had blown. Suspect the repairman had shorted something. Swapped fuses so that the starboard lights were out, as these are not so

important. The Tandy multimeter came in useful, to show not shorted before I put the fuse back in. Eve to eat at Bridgewater Hotel, a find-a-table-and-remember-its-number type of place. Boddies. Today 18 narrow locks and 9 broad ones. Not a bad day really, for four of us. All knackered. Still haven't found the wherewithal to plug in the cellphone, the repair boatyard scraped and found a 2A, but I already had one of those.

Wed 1993-05-05

Another hot, sunny morning. Start at 09:00, down the Bridgewater and back onto bridge-and-bullrush territory at Leigh, the Leeds and Liverpool. Moor for lunch at bridge 4, lunch in Dover Lock Inn, 12:00-13:10. Water at Butts Bridge on the Bridgewater for 10 minutes in the morning. Assist another boat up the two arm locks, where see Polynomial, driven by a jovial scientist / mathematician, then down two locks and moor at Wigan Pier at 16:00. Shopping excursion for food, more fuses, connector for the TV 12 V to attach to the cellphone. A good job, because we had to use it again. The port side lights have fused again during the day and the man wants to come and fix it. So he came out and disconnected the shaver adaptor, which seemed to have the short, and replaced another fluorescent unit that appeared to be faulty. On scene for an hour, so we decided to stay here overnight, even though it's a bit noisy. BW man checked licence carefully at the bridge. Main town centre of Wigan unimpressive, lots of the same-everywhere shops. Wigan Pier has a pub, a shop and a nightclub. Must be more we haven't seen yet.

Thu 1993-05-06

Dull and overcast, a little cool, most of the day, except bright sunshine and hot in the late afternoon. Start 08:45. Water at lock 86 using reel-out hose attached to water point, very fast. Moor at Leigh bridge at the junction of Bridgewater with Leeds and Liverpool at 12:00. Six pubs visible from this bridge, plus post box, phone box, fast food. Eat at The Bridge, canalside. Basic, but good and cheap. Then on at 13:00. Tiller strange, jumps up and down as turn it, later try lift it back up into its socket properly. Straight run, slowing only for anglers, back over the aqueduct, through the red-water region from roughly bridge 54 to bridge 50 and on to Waters Meet Junction again, back on the ring. Moor at Bridgewater main line bridge 36, just north of Sale, by Bridge Inn, which visit later at 17:00. Right beside the railway part of the tram system. We're all sunburnt to some extent. Unruly children at eve mooring until controlled by parents, throwing stones at the boat. Rowing fours going past plus a boat and butty. Horn does not work. Could this be on same circuit as shaver socket, it's right on the control post, which the man at Castlefield dismantled to get the new throttle cable in. Cellphone successfully charged from boat.

Fri 1993-05-07

Bright and sunny from dawn to dusk, hot for most of it. Start 08:45. Water 10 minutes near Ye Olde No 3 pub and a pump-out at Wharfage Boat Co (£8) 11:17-11:37. Lunch 12:10-14:05 at Golden Fleece, Lymm Bridge, late re-start waiting for the Post Office to re-open. Afternoon long hot stretch with no locks or other bother, except a stop for gas, 13 kg propane for £9.80 at Preston Brook. Through Preston Brook tunnel and the few centimetre stop lock to get back on BW water. Moor between bridge 209 and 208 at 18:25. Eve to Horns by the swing bridge over the Weaver, 500 m from canal. Gas stop was 10 minutes. Some shopping at Lymm.

Sat 1993-05-08

Bright, dry day, but not hot. Start 08:45, through two short but crooked tunnels, to moor by the Anderton lift 10:00-10:55, water here. Lift is dismantled, the wheels and counter-weights on the ground alongside. No explanatory signs or collecting boxes, just signs saying "danger - keep out" on the fence shutting it off. Then on again for lunch at bridge 184, Broken Cross, 12:10-13:15. No food in pub, so just quick pint and sandwiches on boat. Afternoon notable only for a big jam of boats in Middlewich, mainly because we went through just as Andersen boats were turning out dozens of hire boats. Eventually out onto the Middlewich branch, now no longer heading for Barbridge, and moored in the middle of nowhere at bridge 19, at 17:55. Eve on boat.

Sun 1993-05-09

Heavy rain overnight and windy. Still warm. Start at 09:00, queues at the locks on the Middlewich branch, lots of anglers after the junction, and rendezvous with friends at bridge 104 at 12:15. To Davenport for lunch: garlic

mushrooms, roast beef, mash, roasties, carrots, cabbage, cauliflower, Yorkshire and banana split, all for £5.95, and the landlord saw me inspecting a slightly cloudy pint and sent over a replacement. Re-start, at 14:25. Crossed another boat in the staircase, he was skeptical, but it works, and water immediately after for 4 minutes on a very fast hose. Locks along this stretch, all broad, are very slow to fill, and canal is shallow so progress is slow. Nevertheless, there are plenty of boats around though very few hire boats; they seem to have gone for Llangollen or the 4-counties ring. Moor at bridge 113 at 17:55. To the Alderney Arms Hotel, or rather now the Poachers Pocket, nearby.

Mon 1993-05-10

Rain most of the day, thunder overnight and evening, but not cold. Start at 08:30 on a section of canal that's badly silted, can't go fast or get within 2 m of the bank. Water at Christleton bridge 122 for 10 minutes then through 5 locks, turn before bridge 123e and moor there in Chester at 11:50. Lunch in pub, then shopping in the town. Eve for Chinese meal right on canal.

Tue 1993-05-11

Dry, warm, but mainly windy. Sunny in the afternoon. Start 09:15. Through the locks, we're the only boat going out of Chester, but lots are coming in, passing a couple at every lock. Water at bridge 122 for 5 minutes, then on through the shallow bit towards bridge 113 and the faster bit thereafter, to moor at bridge 109 at 13:20. Pub here the Shady Oak is a Chef and Brewer, and though they served us that late, their backstage conversations made it clear that it was reluctantly. Then start 14h35, sharing the locks and staircase with another crew. On to moor on the Middlewich branch, by bridge 2, at 18:10, for eve on boat. Why is it, that when you try to moor out of the way, someone comes and moors right next to you?

Wed 1993-05-12

Windy to start, later clear and hot. Start at 09:30 and just pootle along the branch to moor after bridge 23 for lunch on the boat. Off again at 13:20 through last two locks. Roped boat back to Middlewich Narrowboats, where took on water and had a pump-out. Again £8, but they kept us waiting nearly an hour (14:35-15:30). Bought various maps and guides in the canal shop, now, out of the breeze, very hot. Then on to moor after lock 70 at 16:20. Need to go slow now, as we have two days left and only enough canal for one energetic day. Mooring here noisy, between a busy road and a salt factory. Eve to Kinderton Arms, basic but good beer.

Thu 1993-05-13

Mostly dull, but warm and dry. A fair wind as well. Start 09:00, through three locks, then moor at Wheelock, after bridge 154, at 11:20. Take on water here and wait for family visitors to arrive. Lunch in the adjacent Cheshire Cheese. Then re-start at 13:40, This stretch is mostly locks, but rapid ones, able to set most of them ahead. Also, most are duplicated. Thurlwood steel lock is gone, dismantled in 1988, so our photos were just in time, last time we were here, and very little remaining of its site, just the paired bridges on the tail side. Moor for the night just before bridge 139 at 16:55, opposite Broughton Arms, or at least that's what Nicholson's calls it, it looks like a formula eatery to me from the back, Country Fayre. Eve to the pub: Pedigree.

Fri 1993-05-14

Rain most of the night and morning, with occasional respite, dry in the afternoon with some sunshine. Start at 09:50 and stop at 11:20, after lock 44. No water today, though there was a free point here. To Red Bull for lunch. You buy a ticket at the bar, they serve up your food as you wait, then they take it away for final heating before bringing it to table. Then away again at 13:25, stopping by derelict swing-bridge 88 on the Macclesfield at 15:05. Here tidying and I walked to the boatyard to check return time. Hall Green lock was originally two stop locks back-to-back, so have to drive through one gate-less lock to get into the other. Also, this lock has a single bottom gate and paired top gates. Eve to Rising Sun, near the boatyard.

Sat 1993-05-15

Run for 10 minutes to arrive at boatyard at 08:25, away by 08:45.

Caledonian Canal 1993

Sat 1993-08-21

Start at 02:00, in Rover, θ driving to Manchester, φ to Carlisle, θ to Glasgow, φ to Blair Atholl, θ to Inverness (M1, M6, A74/M74, M73, A80, M80, M9, A9), dual carriageway from MK to north of Perth, and soon to be motorway to Glasgow. 528 miles. About 9 hours, including stop for breakfast near Glasgow. Rain at first in the dark, but sunshine after dawn and hot at times. Walk about to use up time, and go to pub, then get on boat at 14:30. Separate domestic and navigation instruction, the latter very good. Boats have Volvo diesels and steerable props, very manoeuvrable, but difficult to keep in a straight line. Go in convoy through the first lock, 14 of us, then on our own. Stopped for the night at the Clansman pub, £5 per night mooring in a little harbour. Mooring only in set places, so see lots of the same people every evening. Boat is a bit cramped, not in width, but fiddly, no draining board and cupboard doors clash with steps to aft deck. Gas has to be turned off every night and the fridge re-lit in the morning, and only a small radiant cabin heater. We do have flares, emergency signal, spotlight, anchor, drag anchor. Sitting here as it gets dark, we can feel the boat moving on the swell, and the water gurgling and lapping around. Bloke who came out with us to the first lock a bit of a rebel, smoking when the boss doesn't like it. Helped us moor alongside when there was a long wait for first lock. Eve into the Clansman for one. Fernie Castle is the boat's name.

Sun 1993-08-22

Start about 09:00, straight out of the little harbour, and south-west along the Loch. Cool, and a little rain, θ trying the strange steering. Photo of Urquhart Castle from the water. Arrive at Fort Augustus at 12:15. Locks are shut 12:00-13:00, and a long pontoon is filled with waiting boats. Lots of gongoozlers of course. Lunch in the Lock Inn, then wait for the locks, well after 15:00 when we went in, basically waiting for one to come down. All got up, about 18, in two lots, in successive chambers, we tied alongside some non-English speaking people. Usual canal private / hire divide is here cruiser / yacht, though the yachts don't seem that more competent. Mooring is limited, and we're travelling most of the way in convoy. Stop at a small jetty just beyond the lock at Cullochy, along with one of the several friendly crews from our boatyard. Eventually joined by two more boats coming along after the lock closed at 18:00. Make good progress on this waterway, except for lock queues. But locking is easy, the lock-keeper catches all the ropes, and the hydraulics does all the work. A little sunshine later in the day, and a little more rain, while we were out for a short walk. A deserted croft by the canal, the house derelict and a field alongside growing what looked like a self-set cereal. The silence is the strange thing. You can hear sounds miles away, it's a quality I've probably only experienced here and in the Swiss Alps.

Mon 1993-08-23

Main theme of the day rain: with very occasional dry spells and less frequent sunny bits. Through Loch Oich, threading our way between the red and green buoys, then some more canal, then locks, then Loch Lochy. Moored at a jetty, and to Letterfinlay Hotel for lunch. After lunch, a bit of a wind, and waves on the loch. Then through a few more locks, now with fewer boats as we get spread out, to moor for the night sharing a jetty with another boat, near Glen Loy lodge, to which we did not go. Moored at 15:45, so after a bit on Saturday and two clear days we're very nearly there, and we're going to have to arrange four slack days for the return. Probably speak to more other crews up here than on ordinary canal trip. Eve on boat. Discovered a good way to get onto jetties, holding both ropes and getting off at the stern. Water at swing-bridge at south-west end of Loch Oich, needing very little.

Tue 1993-08-24

Potter down the remaining bit of canal, to arrive at Banavie 10:00. This last bit actually looks like a canal, vegetation on the banks, narrow, bends. Walk up and down the staircase, and watch a couple of fishing boats and a yacht come up. Lunch at the Lochy, a place built like a blockhouse, concrete blocks and no windows, just a door with a wooden pub sign over it. Light from skylights only, and artificial light. On an estate; these are the outskirts of Fort William. But competent, polite and talkative behind the bar, Fay talking authoritatively to the customers about gas mixes and dispense systems, though the beer was standard gas-pressure Tartan. Food, my "king rib in a bun" was microwaved and served in a plastic bag, but only 90p. Set off back after lunch, along with some of the Friday changeovers, so we're still a day up. Saw George Stephenson chugging out of Banavie station, photo on my camera. Lots of gricers with cameras, and cars following it on its trip to Mallaig. Ben Nevis looms over the place, its head in the clouds. The pub woman reckons it can rain for 6 weeks non-stop in this area. θ bought a Nessie (mini and pewter) at the craft shop. Very cold at first, warmer later but not brighter. Stop

at the Loy aqueduct, where we were last night, only an hour or less away. Experiment with the dinghy, which was odd, rowing a completely floppy boat with no real desire to go forwards rather than sideways. Then a walk along a track through a Forestry Comm Christmas tree farm, looking over the valley to the opposite mountains, where they were chopping down the big ones. Laze the rest of the day. A little rain eve, just so we can say no day so far without rain.

Wed 1993-08-25

Along to the first lock. A wait, but well-filled when we got in. Second lock is just after, then the flotilla entered Loch Lochy. Stopped again at Letterfinlay Lodge for lunch, they had a power cut and could only serve soup and cold food, but still good. A bit of wind in the afternoon coming from north-west across the wide part of the Loch; in the mooring, where a side-valley let it in, it was making the going a bit choppy. It also made mooring difficult at Well of the Seven Heads on Loch Oich; got in eventually. Shop here for beer, whisky and staples. Short walk through forest along loch-side. Well-packed lockfull coming off Loch Lochy, mostly the know-all type, giving instructions to everyone but themselves. The attitude seems to go with plastic boats. Sunshine, especially later in the afternoon, but the obligatory spell of rain as well. Water at swing bridge before Loch Oich.

Thu 1993-08-26

Cold morning, but bright. Across the rest of Loch Oich, and through the locks into the canal section. About 8 boats in convoy by this time. Pass and photo a multi-masted sailing boat. Moor above Fort Augustus flight, just before 12:00. Wait till 13:00 to enter the top chamber, then till 14:00 for the lock-keepers to come back from lunch and start working us down. Just over an hour to go down, and down to T-shirt. Talkative lot in lock, including a private yacht owner who asked the lock-keeper if the water was *pumped* out of the chambers, not used to sailing on canals. Lunch on board before descent, then moor for the evening below the flight and spend afternoon lazing and shopping. θ bought woollens and thistle necklace. Quiet after the tourists have gone, except for the clock on the abbey alongside, chiming every quarter, and the trip-boat going past. More photos of us moored here, and of the piers for the old railway bridge over the river on φ's camera.

Fri 1993-08-27

Start off early across Loch Ness. Dead calm at first, but a breeze getting up, and at the far end, where the loch narrows, it was quite choppy. Also a mist appeared to be dropping behind us, but this lifted again and the sides were always clear. Took about 3¾ hours to get all along and into the canal section again. Though dull, not cold in the morning and later warm and sunny. I find the loch too big to consider hanging about in it, so we did not visit any of the moorings along the sides, though there aren't many of them, and there is competition for the good ones at Urquhart Bay. Moored for lunch just before the last lock, then moved on when three boats had collected. Moored at the boatyard 16:00, just right, as we were re-fuelled while they were getting out the Friday starts, then taken alongside for the night. An hour or so later, the rush started, and nearly all boats were in, with many staying overnight. We went to an Indian with family we've seen on and off all week, John, Lorraine, Graham, Ian, he a civil engineer, she presumably a teacher. Coffee on their boat afterwards.

Sat 1993-08-28

Home. Mostly hot, sunny day, 536 miles (862 km) back. Should have been shorter, lacking the diversion through Preston that we had last Saturday but I took the M90 by mistake out of Perth instead of the A9. 8 hours 50 minutes, so average speed 60.7 mi/h (98 km/h) which can't be bad. 20 minutes stop for lunch included in that time.

Leicester arm 1994

Sat 1994-04-23

Start of canal trip. To the Globe for lunch, then to boatyard. The remaining crew member will join us later if her job situation gets sorted out. Boat is Sovereign, about 19 m, 3-cylinder Lister. 240 V TV (but 5 A 12 V alongside for RF pre-amp, fortunately). Start 15:15, moor beyond Three Locks at 17:00. Eve briefly to the pub, which was packed for a jazz festival, then on the boat.

Sun 1994-04-24

Sunshine nearly all day but windy. Start 08:00, lunch 11:40-13:15 at Giffard Park, with water. End at bridge 57 at 16:20. Eve walk to White Hart in Grafton Regis. Good Old Speckled Hen, and they had Directors as well, but almost deserted. Barmaid talking to a customer about horsey things all eve, but reasonably pleasant nevertheless.

Mon 1994-04-25

Sunshine and cold to start with, later overcast but mild. Strong wind. Start 08:05, water for 10 minutes below Stoke Bruerne flight, and pause for 10:00-10:55 at the top of the flight. Shopping, coffee. Managed to get through the lock before the first gongoozlers arrived. Then through the tunnel, passing one boat, stopping for lunch 12:15-15:05 on boat at bridge 47. Short run afternoon to Weedon, by aqueduct before bridge 24 at 15:25. Afternoon mostly plodding behind three 21 m boats with lots of children on board and Pearl from our boatyard, all of which seemed liable to run aground at any bend or bridge. We finally lost Pearl when they stopped dead in front of us, in a bridge-hole, waiting for a water point.

Tue 1994-04-26

Sunny all day and hot in the afternoon. Slight breeze. Start 08:10, after buying papers, stopping 11:10 at the New Inn at Norton Junction. Up Buckby locks with Pearl, who turned round at the top. Water here during lunch. Away again 13:00, stopping at Yelvertoft, bridge 19, at 16:15. The Locks, the new pub that appeared alongside Buckby flight last time we were here, has disappeared, the building's now a carpet warehouse. Noticed that Pearl soon copied our trick of handing up the rope with the boat-hook for those who cannot throw. Eve to Knightly Arms, Bass and 6X, in the village. Plan now is to drop the parents-in-law at Buckby flight on the way back, 2 km or so from Long Buckby station, on Tuesday next week, and the two or three of us left to work the boat back from there.

Wed 1994-04-27

Morning taken non-stop as nowhere to moor in winding, shallow, overgrown section to Foxton. Even where a village could be reached, there seemed no suitable moorings. Hot and sunny again later, lots of gongoozlers at Foxton. In 3 hours between our arrival and the flight's closing we saw ourselves going down and nothing else. One had just come up as we arrived. Visited inclined-plane museum, now housed in re-constructed engine house. Stores purchased. Water at top of Foxton during lunch. Start 08:00, moor at top of Foxton at 13:15. Down the flight and moor at bottom, about 14:10-15:05. Decide to stay here the night. Eve to Bridge 61, Featherstones, excellent.

Thu 1994-04-28

Mostly sunny and hot again. Down the Leicester section, saw no other moving boat all day. Some sections low, others overflowing; BW man suspects someone tampering but we saw no locks not closed properly. Hard work, so we've decided not to go right into the city, but turn back to Foxton tomorrow. Into Blaby for papers, later again for fish and chips. The job situation is sorted, the absent crew member is able to take her holiday and is planning to join us tomorrow evening or Saturday morning. Start 08:00, stopping for lunch at the Navigation Kilby bridge 87 at 13:05. Water here, then re-start at 14:05, mooring at bridge 98 at 16:15.

Fri 1994-04-29

Hot and sunny all day, warm evening sitting outside. Shopping in Blaby, with a major re-stock at Waitrose, then turn in abandoned boatyard just beyond bridge 98 and head back. Hard work in the sun, including one 2.5 km walk from lock 29 to lock 23. My mother-in-law surprised to find that a girl walking along the tow-path in heavy boots, shorts, tiny top, tattoos, and waist-length dreadlocks, was actually "nice", her prejudices shattered. Missing crew member arrived at the evening mooring at Foxton, given a lift by her sister. Start 09:30, stop for water 11:35-11:45 at Kilby bridge 87. Lunch stop in the country between bridges 80 and 79 13:35-14:35. Moor before bridge 62 at Foxton at 17:40. After a morning of seeing no boats moving, pass three in the afternoon.

Sat 1994-04-30

Again hot and sunny all day. Water at Foxton before departure, then to Market Harborough. Shopping here including a second-hand bookshop and enquiries about trains for Tuesday. Lunch on the boat. Boatyard here now closed, or at least the hire-boat base has gone. Turned in basin. One swing-bridge, hand swung but power for jacks and operated by BWB key. Up Foxton locks after return, sneaking in when we shouldn't and having to wait at the central passing basin. Moor at the top of the flight. Start 08:15 after water, moor 10:20-13:35, moor for eve 17:05. Changed to second gas bottle. Eve back to Bridge 61.

Sun 1994-05-01

Yet again hot and sunny. Roped back for water at Foxton, then on. Stop at North Kilworth Narrow Boats bridge 45 for two pump outs (£17), then onto the Welford Arm, turn before the basin and moor. Wharf Inn, nearest, would do full lunch only, Swan, no food, the furthest, the Shoulder of Mutton, finally came up with the bar food we wanted. Spent the afternoon on the same spot, watching lots of other boats coming and going on this quiet arm. Start 08:35 after water, pump out 30 minutes, moor 12:30.

Mon 1994-05-02

Bank holiday. End of phase 2 of the canal trip, with five crew and two dogs. Sunny all day. Away early, but still waiting turns at the shallow lock on the Welford Arm. Less traffic at first going south on the main arm, but later building up. Aground three times on this narrow, shallow section, through cutting corners and giving too much ground to approaching boats. Lunch on the boat, at Yelvertoft, after a quick visit to the shop. Watford flight busy, and had been all day, according to the keeper and his girlfriend. Passed boats at every possible place on the flight. Water below the flight, before mooring just before the junction. Eve to the New Inn. Departing crew packing, ready for tomorrow. Start 08:15, bridge 19 12:10-13:20; water 15:55-16:05, moor before bridge 1 16:55.

Tue 1994-05-03

Hot again but a fairly strong wind. Dawdled round the corner for water, father-in-law off on foot to Long Buckby station, thence to Leighton Buzzard for the car. The rest of us down the flight and ambling to bridge 21 to await the car. Then kit unloaded, they departed, and the three of us left had lunch before carrying on to Blisworth, between bridges 50 and 51. Went aground at bridge 50 waiting for another boat to come through. they gave us a tow off, very effective. Rest of afternoon shopping, reading, dog walking. Start 08:15 after water, moor bridge 21 10:05-12:30, moor bridge 51 at 15:40. Eve to Royal Oak, Blisworth. Directors. Now seems to be a real pub, wasn't it a Chef and Brewer or some other silly chain last time.

Wed 1994-05-04

Straight into the tunnel, passing two boats in it this time. Moored for a while just beyond, for shopping at the museum shop, then water, stacked three-deep with two other Wyvern boats. Then down the flight with a party in a short day-boat from Blisworth Tunnel Boats. Stopped for lunch on the boat between bridges 57 and 58, finally mooring at the Navigation, bridge 64. Rained a little in the flight, hailed hard while I was steering in the afternoon; sunshine, mostly, in the intervals. Many fewer boats about now that the weather has changed and the bank holiday is over. We're pottering back, so there's plenty of time for reading. Eve to Navigation to eat, which was good. Malt to finish the evening. Pub quite well filled for a mid-week on a grotty day.

Thu 1994-05-05

Steady rain all day. Later start, water at Cosgrove, Giffard Park for lunch, and end by the back of the Plough in Simpson. Featureless day canal-wise, just one steering and the other two reading. Start 09:20, water 10 minutes, lunch 11:40-13:35, moor (bridges 91-92) 15:10. Eve, briefly, to the Plough.

Fri 1994-05-06

Starting mild and ending hot. Lunch pizzas at the Three Locks, turn at Leighton Buzzard wharf, and back onto mooring on the wrong side of the bridge. Managing OK on our first ascent of proper locks with only three of us, mostly two on boat and one ashore. Start 08:50, lunch above flight 11:20-14:00, moor 15:25. No water stop. Clean up boat as usual in the afternoon. Eve to Dragon Inn Chinese in Leighton Buzzard, for feast for three.

Sat 1994-05-07

Chug back to the boatyard 08:15-08:30.

Neustift 1994

Tue 1994-07-19

Into work as usual, θ having the afternoon off to catch the cats and take them into Stalag. Left at 16:30. Home, then to 44ER, θ driving the ZX. Lorry on fire on the M1 shoulder, on way home, with its transmission dropped down onto the road, and short, very red flames licking out of it; presumably the gearbox oil on fire. Drinks in the garden at 44ER, still hot at 22:00, watching the moon, various planets, and bats flying about. Heather-bed dug up for replacement as old ones had got out of hand.

Wed 1994-07-20

Up at 05:00, leave at 06:00, getting to Gatwick (South) at 07:00, via A-roads and Reigate as father doesn't like the M25 route. No problems, despite it being a train-strike day. My bag searched comprehensively, but no response from the walk-through. Out by Air UK Leisure charter flight LEI6129, after the usual unnecessary long wait in the departure lounge. Long walk from there to the gate. Plane away about 1 hour late at 10:00, arriving at Salzburg at 12:30 (local). Only three jets on the tarmac at Salzburg, all smaller than us. Quickly through the terminal. Lots of Inghams guides, even in the baggage reclaim area. They know we're not on the coach, so our welcome pack is at the hotel instead. Collect car easily, it's not group A (Polo 1.3) as ordered, but a B, an Astra 1.4i, white (L-7542N). Extra for two drivers. Visa. Got it out of the crowded car park, and away OK. It's a tiny airport, you can see everything, and only one loop of access road. Missed direction, headed towards Vienna at first, but easily rectified at the next junction. Driving 13:00-16:00, about 190 km. Soon cross into Germany, and on stopping at the queue for the frontier, a German Audi ran into the back of us, fortunately no damage was visible to either car, so we just ignored it. ϕ drove all the way. Passport checked at both crossings, out and back into Austria. Stopped for refreshment at service kiosk just into Austria at the second crossing, but still DM needed for machines, I changed my 20DM note to coins at the exchange counter. Heavy rain for part of the journey, generally dull. Still raining slightly when we found the hotel, easily, on the main road thro' Neustift. 50Sch toll for the last bit of autobahn. Little walk after settling into Hotel Stubai-Hof (room 107, first floor, balcony and hall, separate bedroom, WC and bathroom, wooden carved panelling, mouldings on the ceiling, lamp brackets modelled on sprays of flowers, "inspect the business" wash-across bog, decent deep bath, if a little short. Radio alarm, telephone, TV with satellite. Hotel rate is 600Sch summer and 950Sch winter, half-board. Dinner time, descend for a couple of beers (one each) then to our table for the week. Shared with Doug and Kathy, just-retired couple from Sidcup, who've been to most places and have a fund of stories (scouts, children, holidays.) Dinner: buffet, soup, barbecue, zither player. Dull and more rain, but warm. Good view of the mountains from the bedroom window, but the road is busy, so it's noisier than Lenk was. Bought a 1:50000 map of the area. Eve, clouds half-way down the mountains, rain, cars swishing past, warm enough to have all the windows open. Next to an Austrian girl on the plane, a 737, about 170 seats, 3+3 across. Basic food and service on this charter airline. Car has a sunroof and central locking with deadlocks, and an RDS radio. Lots of Inghams people around, and everything seems to have been organised efficiently. Car from Avis.

Thu 1994-07-21

Our first continental breakfast, meat, cheese, bread, rolls, unsalted creamy butter, juice, coffee. Also muesli, prunes and that sort of thing for those that like it. To an Inghams meeting at Hotel Hoferwirt, mostly fogies, the guide a young woman with very round vowels ("bowles"): Deirdre. Exchanged voucher for Venice ticket. Then up the local chair-lift (2-seaters, bar in front, optional plastic bubble cover, small foot-rest dangling below) up 11er (Elfer), 12er (Zwelfer) appears to be due south of the church, so suppose called after 12-o'clock alignment. 11er is a bit before that, presumably about 11 o'clock. 1000 m at Neustift, 1800 m at top of lift. Walk about a bit, watching the paragliders and exploring the more level paths, then down. 6 km along to go down 800 m, warm, but little sunshine. Humid at ground (valley) level, fresh at the top. Chairs stopped now and then, as fixed to rope, and stopped when supplies put onto the occasional flat (for the restaurant at the top). Blisters on the way down (ϕ , not θ). Mostly road down, accessible to 4wd vehicles, but last part diverted from the road and a scramble down a path. Afternoon in hotel, recovering and reading. Substantial dinner, after a beer, pate in chou, soup, salad, pork in beer sauce (or smoked pork with sauerkraut) vanilla cream (superb) with advocaat or such like at the bottom. Hotel tariff of 600Sch half board is consistent with what we're paying. Used Eurocheque card in local till with no problems, to get out another 2500Sch. Paragliders jumping off the local mountains, at roughly the top of the cable car, or 200 m above, and landing in the valley. Lots of them. Walk for exercise after dinner, hobbling on the blisters. Staff very efficient and friendly, even observed sniffing wine corks. We had a carafe of house, recommended bottles were around £13. Chair lift 110Sch for up only [17Sch = £1 will do]. Table to ourselves at

dinner, as Doug and Kathy to concert in Innsbruck. They were at breakfast, and we saw them going up on the lift as we were about starting to walk down. They (or at least he) has taken scouts on a canal trip with Harecastle tunnel, and they've both been on the south Oxford. At breakfast, presented with a menu and a pen, to select preference for evening. But they also ask again eve, and it's not clear if there's a compulsion to have what you've chosen. You are expected to sit at the same place every day, for breakfast and dinner. Breakfast and dinner being so substantial, there's little need for lunch. Boots OK, but dunno if the blisters are caused by going downhill for 6 km, or the boots. Started only about half-way down. No rain, but cloudy by eve. But still warm.

Fri 1994-07-22

Hot and sunny all day. Both still stiff after yesterday. In the car, up the valley (up another 800 m), then by cable-car to 2900 m on the glacier (150Sch each). People skiing on the glacier, being tugged up by a ski pull (T-bars on extending ropes). Also walking up in a long crocodile to the top (3200 m, we didn't). Sat around looking at the wild terrain at the end of the glacier. Asked to press the shutter for a German foursome. Air probably about 5°C, but feels very hot in the sun. Huge machine with crawler tracks smoothing the snow and officials on a snow-mobile. This cable car a 2-rope one, one running, one hauling, with the cars running off the rope at the terminal and middle stations. After that, out the other way, and under the Europa bridge, some photos from a lay-by. But very hot down at this level (32°C by the car's data display). Bought some drink and food at a shop, then ate it in the hotel in the cool. Later walk along to a cafe for a beer. Our table-mates there again (he once worked for Reuters) but she seemed a little off (tired) this eve, and his stammer was a little worse. After dinner to post cards, and back past a wind-band concert at the bandstand. Then liqueurs in the room (Hazelnut cream, from the supermarket). θ drove to the glacier, ϕ the rest. Saw lots of Puntos, a Cinquecento and a Twingo. Lots of Chrysler people-carriers about (Voyager). Beer in cafe is 31Sch for 500 cm³ (£1.80). Still warm and clear at 21:20, though thunderstorms were mentioned by last-night's forecast.

Sat 1994-07-23

348 km, 228Sch at 10.12Sch/litre (60p/L for 94 octane unleaded) about 22.5L gives 6.8 L/100km (41 mi/UKgal). Breakfast alone (others later) then off by car. Drive down into Innsbruck, around the west side, then up again to a car park between Norkettenbahn and Hungerbergbahn. Go down on the funicular into Innsbruck, and head off in a random direction. Find a shop, buy a map, then head for the town centre. Busy, large centre, but clean, and in one street exceptionally so, with mostly trams and trolley buses, no cars, and only a few diesel buses. Had a mineral water in a cafe on a sort of traffic island in this street. Didn't actually find the part I remembered, the tram concourse (perhaps that was a different trip, will have to check the photos) but it looked familiar. Mountains visible at both sides. Very hot and humid (up to 32°C on car's thermometer at the 500 m (Innsbruck) to 1000 m (Neustift) level), so, onto a No.1 tram (36Sch for two) to the funicular station, and back up (90Sch for 2, return, the car well-filled on the way back up). The track curves sideways in places, and the two cars pass in the middle, a symmetrical passing loop with points. Each leg of the rope has its own pulleys, which allows them to curve, and to diverge at the passing place. Pulleys slope appropriately at curves and junctions. There's a station for the zoo halfway between the base and the mid-point. Then onto the cable car up to the top (440Sch for two both ways). The first stage (of the Norkettenbahn) goes to Seegrube (860-1805 m), the second to Hafelekarr (2300 m). First stage is two cars, about 30 people per car, each on a running rope, with a hauling rope linking the two, with intermediate piers. One up, one down. Docking stations have lead-in wooden buffers, the middle part of which changes sides depending on which car is due, so that there is always a platform on both sides of the car, one for loading and one for unloading. The second stage is just a single car on a running rope, with a small counterweight running on the other end of the hauling rope, on a parallel, thinner, running rope. No piers on this one, just one stretch. Cool at the top, about 15°C, but 80% humidity. Bearable, compared to down below. Had a light lunch up here in the restaurant. Then a look from the observation balcony outside, until the dark clouds started to gather and the sun went in. So down again (with many others), a quick look round at the mid-station, and down again. Then reverse the car journey back to the hotel. Still hot, but not as hot. Later, around dinner, the thunder started, and a little rain, but light at first. Good views down onto Innsbruck from the hair-pin descent from the Brenner pass road (but the view from the mountain was better!). Later a decent storm.

Sun 1994-07-24

Hot and sunny again. Order early breakfast and lunch-pack for tomorrow. Lone breakfast again. Out in the car towards the glacier, stopping at a quiet spot, with mountain view, rocks to sit on, pine trees for shade, a little brook a-gurgling and cows clanging away at the grass and clover. And no-one else. Lie in and out of the sun, reading and lazing. One other car stopped, briefly, at the same spot. Later back to Neustift for beer and ice-cream

at a cafe. Austria appears to be changing car registrations. Old ones typically Tnnn nnn. New is A[A] nnn--, where the first letters are district (I- Innsbruck, IL- Innsbruck Lande) the rest appears to be a random alphanumeric group, often referring to something, eg the paraglider school has IL-PARA1 on its Espace. I've also seen MARYn. It's not PSV and others, as some buses have the new and (a very few) cars have the old. Most cars here are D, I or A, then NL, CH, a few F, a couple of H, 3 GBs, one S. Seen one SLO (Slovenia) and one Northern Irish. By far the biggest slice of the foreign tourist trade is D. Thunder later. Tomorrow's breakfast and lunch pack arrived in the room while we were having dinner.

Mon 1994-07-25

Venice day. Up at 05:00, breakfast in room, leave 05:45. On coach in central square by 06:20. Deirdre is there to count us away. Cool. Then coach meanders to Igls to collect another batch, and guide Linzi, an anorexic in a short skirt, dyed hair, and dozens of bangles. But able to talk all the way there. Set off down Brenner autobahn and various others (autostrada, I suppose) to Venice. One stop for a pee, then another at 200 lira. Money changed on coach at 2200 lira = £1 (£20 for two recommended) plus free 200 lira change for the second pee stop (left by last week's outing, and so on). Also take 200Sch for boat transfer ("optional", but there's not really any other way in) and 120Sch each for a gondola trip (genuinely optional). Getting hot by then. Arrive at big coach park (Trenchetto) at 12:00, get off coach, then is it hot. 35°C and blazing all day. Appreciate coach, air-conditioned, which felt just hot, bearing no relation to outside. Coach also has cruise control, 8 gears, lots of power, fridge, decent (reclining) seats, WC. Two drivers, Sep (Guiseppe) most of the way, and Hans for part of the way back. From car park, meet another 2-deck load of Inghams with another guide, and share a motor boat transfer to the main island, 35 minutes. Even hotter. There is in fact a land link, but no motor (wheeled) vehicles in Venice, and it's a long walk. Land on main frontage, even hotter and very crowded with all nationalities. Walk as a crocodile along front to St Marks Square, and then left to our own devices for 13:00-16:15. We looked at square, then headed for cool in the back streets, very narrow, crowded, but out of the sun all day. Meandered a bit, ending up at the Rialto. Most of our lira on buying cold mineral water, essential, at about 2000 lira (nearly £1) per 0.5 L. Then round by another route to St Marks, and into the park to cool off under a tree. Then stroll along the front, it's cool eating an ice-lolly under a tree there, out of the sun and in maximum breeze. Everything is damp. Put the map in my pocket, and it's puckered up as if dunked. From there to the Basilica (let in, unlike a lot of Yanks, as we were not wearing skimpy shorts), but it was oppressively hot there as well, and almost too dark to see, despite changing sun specs for clear ones. After than, we went back to the park, then a bit of shopping in the side streets for glass gondola, then congregate in the square for the gondola trip (at 16:15). 6 per boat, about a couple of dozen of them, for 30 minutes on a trip along narrow canals from S Moise church, past S Salvador, onto the Grand canal by the Rialto, then back via Rio di S Luca to starting place. A bit cooler on these narrow waterways, a bit desolate too, lots of dark, anonymous passages, closed-up buildings, a bit eerie, quiet compared to the bustle elsewhere. But lots of boats, causing a gondola-jam. A few aggressive small motor boats as well on these little ways. Rowing is strange, the oar goes back and forth, and the propulsion comes from a little flick. The back stroke is usually in the water, with the blade turned edge-on. The boat is unsymmetrical, to suit rowing on one side only. Very manoeuvrable. Our man, a joker, sang "macaroni, spaghetti". On boat with family from Bristol, father, mother, daughter and, presumably, her boyfriend. Congregate again at 17:15 to follow Linzi and her umbrella back to the boat, the coach, and the relief of air-conditioning again. Cool beers waiting on the coach as well. A quiz on the way back; gave the combined ages of the two drivers and guide as over 150. Less chat on return. Stop for meal at motorway self-service (we had pasta and salad with local Soave wine), then on in the dark. We were dropped at Shoenberg services to be taken to Neustift in a taxi and a couple of minibuses, while the coach went on to drop at Igls. Back to the hotel at 23:30, and in through the back door. Lunch eaten in coach before Venice. Prices rapidly decrease away from St Marks Square. Little restaurants with tables in the narrow streets. Streets suddenly ending in waterways and vice versa. Can't walk anywhere in a straight line. Not a car anywhere on the island, just people, a very strange experience. Saw only one Cinquecento in Italy. Very smoothly organised throughout, though it cost a minimum of about £25 each above the free trip to Venice offered, with meals and incidentals. Next time, don't do Venice in July. But cooler later in the day, as the sun was lower and more shade could be found, and there was a little more breeze. Waved through at all four customs points (A and I, out and back), but coach had to pay a tax going into Italy. Other guide less skinny and more ordinary (Helen), also younger. Loos in Venice 500 lira ("men come to the front please, no queue for men") (provided you wanted the urinals, the WCs were common, like the French). Loos in the grill coming back were free, but men's only two WCs, so a bit of a queue there. Also a long queue to get food, as both coaches in at once. For quick-service part of services in Italy, pay first, get a ticket, then collect food / drink from bar. Usually a supermarket there as well, and the only way out is right through it. Even Venetian market stall

holders have cellphones, clipped to the back of their stalls. The coach driver was using one extensively while driving in Austria.

Tue 1994-07-26

Late enough to see the others at breakfast. Up the local mountain again (but return ticket this time). Sunshine, on and off, with clouds forming over the peaks. Sit and admire the scenery from a few different vantage points for several hours, then descend, lunch (beer, pizza (φ) sausage and ice-cream (θ)) at cafe, to the M-Preis supermarket for chocolates and booze gifts (something odd and blue for Roger), then relax. Dull by then, overcast but still hot. First roll of thunder at 16:20. Doug not there at dinner, sick. Lots of rain later.

Wed 1994-07-27

Saw Doug and Kathy at breakfast, paid 590Sch hotel extras bill by Eurocheque, into car and away, φ driving. Hot already, up to 30°C by the queue for the Germany-Austria border post. Drop the car at the airport (rental car park still full) and ask advice from Inghams rep. Leave cases in left-luggage (ie just behind the heavy steel door at the end, in the baggage handling area) and take taxi into the centre of Salzburg (100Sch flat, ancient blonde in a big Merc). Look around, photograph, eat ice-cream. Hot. Taxi goes right into the centre through crowds of people. No other cars in this bit. Lots of Americans. Taxi back again (108Sch this time, on the meter) then start a long wait. Lunch in the restaurant, looking over the tarmac. Few aircraft, except four there for 19:00-19:30 flights, each arriving about 1 hour before. Other flights all little propeller things. (These four jet flights were three 737 Air UK Leisure, one Manchester, two Gatwick, and one Monarch A320 for Gatwick; 700 people all at once.) Cock-up when our exit door was used just before we boarded for a tiddly plane to Hamburg. Our 150-odd headed for the exit, and they had some difficulty finding the half-dozen for Hamburg. Took off about 30 minutes late. No-one in the green channel. There was also a blue (EC) channel, but of course we're not coming from an EC country (yet). Father there waiting, walk to car park, to 44ER by 21:45. Give him his scotch, then away home, θ driving ZX (as I'd re-sampled English beer), home around midnight. No search of my bag at Salzburg, but chain on the credit-card holder in my pocket set the walk-through off. Still hot, windows and sun-roof open on motorway home, even. It's been hot here all week.

Small Black Country Ring 1995

Sat 1995-05-27

Arrive at boatyard in Stourport just on time at 14:00; others already there. Pretty chaotic at the yard, lots of boats going out and the staff getting a bit flustered. They hadn't pumped out our main loo, and I suspect not the back loo too, but the central one was obvious and smelly. Start at 15:00, out of the basin and into the 3.7 m deep first lock onto the Staffs and Worcs. A bit of a basic boat, has BMC engine but it's a bit noisy and smoky. Only 5 or 6 can sit at the table, a small auxiliary table serves for the others. One of the crew's grip failed while winding down a paddle and θ's favourite windlass flew into the canal. Moor outside Sainsbury's, 100 m north of Kidderminster lock and bridge 16, at 18:00. Eat on boat. Walk to pedestrianised town centre and to the Swan, a noisy young pub, but it did have rugby on the TV. 13A positive on live for electrics; cellphone charging arrangement set up. Severn Serene Two, 18.3 m. By eve it was raining quite hard, but still warm.

Sun 1995-05-28

Start 08:45, running to bridge 31a by 13:30. Lunch on boat. Lots of boats, and queues for all locks after the first, mostly private, heading for an IWA rally to celebrate the opening of some bridge. Saw mayor, or at least a woman with a chain of office, and several people with ties heading towards it as well. After lunch, water above Stewponey lock (BWB key, fast) then turn into the four locks of the Stourbridge canal. Quieter up here. Turned onto the Stourbridge branch and turned in the basin at the end. A bit desolate, can get to the road for grotty pub and Chinese takeaway or a longer walk into town. Moored 17:00 just outside the basin, surrounded by dead factories.

Mon 1995-05-29

Bank holiday. Day of sunshine and showers. Start 08:40, back onto the main line and start on the 16-lock flight. Stop after four for the Stuart Crystal glass factory. Canal a lot less busy here, though we passed two camping boats in the flight, one sitting for ages in a lock holding us up. Stop again between locks 5 and 4 for Samson and Lion. Pedigree, food, sit outside by the boat, and a water point with a hose. 12:40-13:40. Then finish the flight and turn right. A short run sees the end of the Stourbridge canal, then Delph flight of 8 starting the Dudley Number 1 canal. Stop for the night above the flight, on an embankment over Merry Hill shopping complex. Find a Big Mac to supplement lunch, which had been about the worst beefburger I've ever tasted. Extensive shopping here. Moor 16:00, with one other boat. Pizzas from Pizza Hut for supper, so a complete junk food day.

Tue 1995-05-30

Start 09:10, driving up to Park Head Junction, meeting three other boats coming the other way. Water 10 minutes at the junction, after the lock. Turn onto Dudley Number 2 canal here, and meander round to Netherton tunnel. Pass one boat just after entering and one just before half way. 2768 m and can see one end from the other. High roof, tow-path on both sides, and quite dry apart from the ventilation shafts. Under the Wolverhampton level and left onto the Birmingham level, stopping for lunch by Tipton station. Pub here, but looks seedy. Re-stock booze from local Co-op and lunch on the boat, 13:00-14:25. On through Factory locks, very busy here, we the third in queue to go up and four waiting to come down. Only room for two boats to pass between each of the three locks. Then left onto the Wolverhampton level, parallel to the way we came up, back through Tipton. Drop half the crew by aqueduct over mouth of Netherton tunnel to walk to Dudley zoo. Last admission 16:30, they got there 16:50, so they got let in for half-an-hour for free. Meanwhile the rest took the boat down to Bradeshall junction, turned it and came back up to the aqueduct to moor for the night at 17:00. Eve walk into the tunnel with the children, we got only 200 m, at which point it was too spooky for them. Later to Wagon and Horses, nearby. Cheap beer here, only £1.30 for Banks's bitter, and it's metered to give a genuine pint.

Wed 1995-05-31

Start 08:20 after moving up to the water point and filling up. Lots of boats and not much room to moor at the top of the long flight, so go straight down. Industrial all the way until near the bottom of the flight. 21-flight busy, following Lord Arthur with two on and another boat, with at least two queued behind us. Emerge at bottom back

onto the Staffs and Worcs and turn for home. Moor, in nettles, for a rest and late lunch by bridge 61 14:45-16:00, then on again for a little way to stop for the night at bridge 59 at 16:55. Back on narrow canals with overgrown tow-paths, a change from the hard edges and paved paths of the Birmingham Canal Navigation system. One of the crew had put her shoes into a carrier bag, which somehow got placed near the two carrier bags with the rubbish. All three got dumped in the skip half-way down the flight. For a fairly good Chinese meal near canal and afterwards to Oddfellows Hall, a chain restaurant and pub full of young people. Gathering other Severn Valley boats as we get towards the base.

Thu 1995-06-01

Everyone slept badly. It was warmer than previous nights; one of the children made a disturbance about midnight; the shoe-loser had indigestion and read a book all night, then got up early and walked a 6.5 mi round trip to the middle of the 21-flight to retrieve her shoes. The middle loo is smelly, but not full, so I walked back to the boatyard supposedly at bridge 61. It was shut. So walk back without extra chemical; intent on finding another further south. Eventually get away at 09:15. Through the Bratch, where it rained heavily but no congestion, just one leaving as we arrived, and one following us down. Not even many gongoozlers. At bridge 44 had both loos pumped out. Man rinsed each tank three times until the water was clear and this seems to have cured the niff. He reckons the boatyard hadn't done the job properly and he charged only £10 for both toilets. He also sold us a replacement windlass, the same type as θ lost but unpainted, for £3, the last one he had. 30 minutes stop here. Stop for lunch at 13:00, bridge 43, the Wagon and Horses, which has a children's area, so the first pub lunch of the trip. Away again 14:25, into the staircase pair. Locks quite quiet today, no queues, just pass the occasional boat. Water (15:35-16:05) above Greensforge lock, on a very fast tap. Moor below Kinver lock on the last 5 day max mooring at 18:50. Half the crew has decided now to leave Friday, originally outside the basin, but now we're to arrange an earlier drop-off. Present estimate is at Sainsbury's in Kidderminster, where we moored Saturday night. Eve to Vine, sitting freezing in the garden while the children played on the swings and climbing frame.

Fri 1995-06-02

Start 09:00. No water points today. Moor at 12:05 opposite Sainsbury's at Kidderminster, to rendezvous with car. Eat pies from the supermarket. Three crew departed including the children and the remaining four of us went on at 15:20. Peace. Stop on the outskirts of Stourport, just south of the railway viaduct, by the Bird in Hand, at 17:45. Few events. Private boat gave way very reluctantly when we were obviously closest to a bridge and pointedly looked away as we passed, though a vinegar-faced daughter managed a scowl. Severn Valley boats beginning to cluster, but none on this mooring, suspect most are nearer, saw one moored back between bridges 10 and 9. Cleaned out boat, but not very enthusiastically, as it wasn't really very clean when we got it. Eve to the Bird in Hand, Pedigree guest beer, but still only £1.55. This pub had mild for £1.20/pint.

Sat 1995-06-03

Rain, continuous from about 06:00 until we got home. Start at 07:30, ϕ driving, badly, touched the outside of the bend after bridge 6. We the first Severn boat to lock down into the basin, reverse into dock, in time to be the first boat refuelled. 45 litres. Got refund of £61.50 from £75 deposit, that's about £0.30/L for fuel (that's £1.37/UKgall; some boatyards had it for not much more than half that). Moor 08:00. No charge for the cereal bowl I broke and they say they'll fix the loo, but no offer of refund for the extra pump out. This boat was a bit cheap, chosen as only four of us actually paying and me most of that, and going later the canals were busier. But generally a good trip. Could do with more distance for me and after lots of 2-week trips, a 1-week one seems a bit short.

Mon and Brec Canal 1995

Sat 1995-08-26

Up early, and start collecting bits together. Got both cats in, but Chequers in particular not at all pleased at being trapped. Warm. θ takes cats to cattery, Citroën and depart 11:00. Despite dire warnings from mother-in-law yesterday, no hold-ups at all. Stop for half-hour at Aust, and arrive boatyard at Gilwern at about 14:10. Second Severn crossing nearly complete, a couple of gaps right in the middle and work progressing on the new junctions where its access motorway branches off the existing M4. Boat ready, so we get on, but away only after their lunch. Basic going over boat, main concern being low speeds and the shallowness and narrowness of the canal. Boat has V-bottom to let it get closer to the sides than normal narrowboat, but also rolls more. Caldecot Castle, 13.7 m. Boat nice inside, but gas fire. 3-cylinder canal-water cooled diesel, steers well, but idle on the engine control is horizontal, which takes some getting used to. Start 15:45 and run until Windy Corner, just beyond bridge 109, at 16:45. Exactly 2.0 miles, there's a useful mileage chart in the back of the guide they flogged us, which beats using the map measure, although there's a lot of overlap and at 1:25000 I can scale it directly. Peaceful, lots of scenery already. Short walk before dinner, then just sit in peace and write. No Orange at all, Cellnet OK so far. 12V point is a special 2-inclined-pin thingy combined with the TV aerial socket, but can get to convenient bulkhead light with croc clips. Rain as we set off from the boatyard, otherwise warm and mostly bright.

Sun 1995-08-27

Start 09:10, much earlier than most others except the Sunday-let Castle boat that moored just above us, so had the water to ourselves for a bit. Confusion at Llangattock, where a boat was being pulled off the mud by another, while two others milled around. Stop for lunch at bridge 131 for shop in Coed-yr-yrys, for the coffee and washing-up liquid we forgot. Chepstow, another Castle came in behind us and moored to *our* spike. And tied to the top of the spike, so that it levered out of its hole. Lunch stop 12:10-13:30, then into the locks. Not too bad, though the extra 2.5 ft width of the lock makes jumping on and off a bit edgy on the wrong side. Have to leave bottom gates open to prevent leakage if no-one around; but there mostly was someone in front or behind. Crew at bottom about to tackle their first lock. Not too bad with only 2. I nearly did one on my own, while θ did the one behind, using the ladders up the sides of the chambers. Water 10 minutes just above the second lock. Tunnel as well, then eve stop at 17:00 just beyond bridge 143, on a new bit of tow-path with mooring rings. Had this to ourselves until after 19:00, when the rest arrived in convoy. Short walk along part of old Bryn Oer tramroad and back via footpath over the fields. ϕ short early morn walk as well, about 6 km total. Grounded several times. Jam at far end of tunnel as one was aground across the canal. Tunnel very low in centre, crouch down and peer along the cabin top. Dry all day, some sunshine, windy and generally not very warm. Eve to Star lots of real ales, crowded. Harlech, one of the electrics, arrived in complete darkness at gone 21:00, looking for its charging point.

Mon 1995-08-28

Bank holiday. Convenient shop and phone below the embankment. Sunshine early. One of the red Goytre Wharf boats backed out of its mooring, winded, and headed back south. Start 09:45, through the electric lift bridge and the three hydraulic ones, of which one was up, stopping at 11:15 by the Royal Oak, before bridge 154. Pub open, but no food and almost no beer, only keg Whitbread. Just a quick pint, then lunch on the boat. Good close mooring against a high bank. Harlech joins us an hour later. No facilities here except phone and post box. Post postcards here. Re-start 12:45, through the last lift bridge and continuous running through the last lock to Brecon. Limited mooring here, but enough for us arriving at 16:00. Trip boat Dragonfly operates along here, 9.5 ft using all the lock width, but difficult to pass in the narrow bit just outside Brecon. Brecon Castle here before us, and on the charge point, but no other Castles by 17:00. Short walk into the town, for booze. Lots of tourists. Dry, intermittent sunshine, an atypical bank holiday. Mooring is before bridge 166, beyond here is currently only for trip boat and turning, but there is a new stone arch bridge being constructed which will extend the canal a little further towards Brecon. Eve to Brecon Balti and Tandoori, a tiny place. Food OK, quick, not very hot. It seemed that most of those there were not speaking English or Welsh or Indian. By the time we got back, Brecon had moved to the water point, Harlech had arrived and gone on the charger, and Chepstow had disappeared. Short walk down to the river before dinner.

Tue 1995-08-29

Dull start, air feels damp. Up to the shop at 08:15, and most of the hire boats gone by then. Start 09:30, after water at bridge 166, turn and set off back. Quiet at first, then lots coming the other way, including Willow Wren hotel boats at the lock, could be congestion at Brecon tonight. Lunch stop 12:15 at Royal Oak again bridge 154.

He's got some beer in now, Brew 69 from some micro-brewery in Hereford, 5%. Two of these and ready for a snooze this afternoon. This pub closed for 18 months, and young chap trying to make it go again, with large loan to pay off. We the only ones there, though one other couple saw the no food sign and went away again. Pager worked at bridge 164, as θ's parents called us to arrange a rendezvous later in the week. Lunch on boat after pub. Start again 13:45 after lunch on boat. Bridge 149 up this time, so one less lift-bridge to do. Stop back at Talybont at 15:00. φ walk down to tunnel and listen to boat passing through and see it at ventilation shaft, though only a plastic boat. Photos of the ends of the tunnel. Warm, though dull, and hint of rain, but none fell. Eve to the Star again, but much less crowded tonight, and had Brains SA, Felinfoel Double Dragon and Freeminers Best. θ had scrumpy. Saw Raglan, a Sunday start, here at the charging point tonight, no sign of Harlech or Brecon, the Saturday start electrics.

Wed 1995-08-30

Overcast but not cold in the morning. Boat responds rapidly to the helm, but there's something odd about it. It doesn't seem to bite the water as well as a normal narrowboat, and the pivot-point is further forward, the boat doesn't move as you expect. In tunnels and narrow channels I always seem to end up on the left-hand wall and often scrape bridge holes that I thought I was well-aligned to. Hit the outside twice on the same bend yesterday, between the single lock and the Usk aqueduct. Start 09:55, into the tunnel and on to the locks. Had the first two to ourselves, passed in the third, and followed through the last two (passing again in the last one, he arrived just before we had re-filled). Stop for lunch at 13:00 just beyond the last lock. Lunch in the Coach and Horses pub-restaurant, skate with capers (φ) cod (θ). Warm and sunny at lunchtime. Start again 14:25, 10-minute water stop after bridge 131, then φ all the way to Llangattock after bridge 115 at 17:10. Four boats here for the night, including the Beacon boat Hobby we've been shadowing most of the time. Passed two of the Sunday boats now, Beaumaris and Raglan, but lost sight of the other Saturday Castle boats. Walk (φ) up the old tramroad to see the remains of stone sleepers and the first of two inclined planes, and later (φθ) to bridge 113 and beyond, where the previous course of the canal before the present cutting is visible though inaccessible, the previous loop abandoned in 1803 after a breach. Dull and overcast by eve, but still dry. Found nowhere so far, bar the tunnel, where the Cellnet has not worked.

Thu 1995-08-31

Bright sunny start. Walk into Llangattock, but shop opens only at 08:15. Start 08:10, slipping away quietly, though most of the others are awake at least. Brecon on charge at the boatyard, boatyard owner also on board it, so perhaps something's wrong, or they've gone early. Excellent views from the bit just south of Gilwern. Arrive at Govilon at 10:30, still sunny on and off, and warm. Moor just beyond bridge 98, φ for walk along dismantled railway, red dots on map; permissive route. Parents-in-law and dog arrived around 12:00, then for lunch to Bridgend Inn as the Lion was shut. Good lunch, though the service for bar and food, all by the landlord, a little unenthusiastic. At least one other boat crew here as well. Push boat across for water, then parents depart and we set off again 15:00. This less-used stretch is very shallow, and only one boat wide in places. The steering is very unreliable, if you get over a shallow bit the boat just goes straight for the bank, whatever you do with the tiller. There's also nearly nowhere safe to come in to the bank along this bit, so we're really forced to go on and turn at Goytre Wharf, though even here there's little, and we end up backing up a little after turning in the short arm and mooring a good half-metre out from the tow-path. This at 19:10. Still warm and glimpses of sun right into the evening. φ walk eve past Soran Chapel. Peace, our second night away from civilisation (though there's a house with a light on at least 200 m away).

Fri 1995-09-01

Dull morning. Over the whole country, the hot summer is coming to an end, though it's only about the third hottest and fifth sunniest August on record. The hot phase was almost continuous from 1995-06-18 to 1995-08-22, with a couple of 1 or 2-day intermissions. Short walk out to about bridge 77.5. Then set off 09:05, back homewards. Pass a Red Line boat almost immediately, setting off to explore the lone reaches, apart from this quiet for a couple of hours, until we passed Harlech having a quick look south of base. Brief lunch stop on boat 11:40-12:25, at the scenic spot just after bridge 93, looking out over the valley, over Abergavenny to the mountains behind. After lunch, boats in profusion, Red Line Saturdays turning back, their Sundays idling, Beacon Friday boats with enthusiastic new hirers chasing south, Beacon Hobby now with a new crew. Stop at 14:30 at Gilwern, a little before bridge 103. A bit of boat cleaning and packing, and a procession of boats passing us. A short walk here, and later to the Navigation Inn, which served us a pretty average steak-in-ale pie and chips. The Pedigree was better. Chepstow must have gone south of Goytre, but it was back here tonight and in the same pub. Harlech is

back on charge at base. Brecon was only out 4 days this week with a Dutch crew on a short let. Back to the boat after dinner to finish off the booze. Perhaps on this trip we should count groundings and poling off corners rather than locks. Some souvenirs from gift shop near the canal. Starting to get out of boat mode back to normal. Next year provisionally planned as a French canal trip in the spring and a river trip, possibly in a cruiser, later in the year. I've lost the vital tap adaptor, possibly left on the tap at Govilon yesterday. Dull all day, never any direct sun, but still warm, shirtsleeve weather. So far, waterproofs out only on the first afternoon, and then hardly needed.

Sat 1995-09-02

But it rained overnight. But missed it on the way back to the boatyard, a quick potter 08:10 to 08:20. Open, and ready to receive us. Chepstow arrived just after us. They got down to Birdpool bridge, a little south of Goytre. Away before 09:00. Given a card to complain to BW about the shallowness of the southern reaches. The electric charging points are all owned by Castle boats, and are for their own use, they pay for the power. BW was if anything obstructive to the use of electric boats, asking a site rental for the cabinets. Heavy rain on the M4 on the way home (θ to Oxford, then ϕ) ϕ collects cats, £56. Total walked over the holiday 43 km (27 miles, less, just, than the length of the part of the canal we cruised). Average speed not allowing for locks was 1.7 mi/h; allowing 10 minutes per lock and nothing for lift bridges gives average cruising speed of 1.8 mi/h.

Canal de Bourgogne 1996

Sat 1996-05-04

Drove in two cars via tunnel to the boatyard in Migennes. Lunch at services near Reims; petrol and diesel here. Arrive Migennes 16:30. Boatyard runs in English. Extensive run over the boat and some driving tuition. Boat is 12.3 m * 3.92 m, certainly wide inside; all driving today from outside driving position. Hard to steer straight. Pass one hydraulic lock and moor about 5 km later at Esnon, no bar or cafe here. Drank the first of the two complimentary bottles of local wine and eat on boat. Cycle ride to investigate surroundings. Bike has back-pedal brake and is very awkward to start off. Lock keepers are friendly, fishermen are hostile. Bike hire and parking the car in their compound are extra. 95 octane unleaded is 6.50FF/L, diesel is 4.50FF/L. Weather dry, bright at times, some wind and generally not very warm. Boat has two fridges, diesel space heating, Peugeot engine transverse with hydraulic drive. Start 18:00. End 19:00.

Sun 1996-05-05

Start 09:15. Sunny, hot in sun. Stop at 12:00 just before lock 108, which was closed for lunch. Lunch on boat, then investigate the town. It's deserted at Sunday lunchtime, only a few bars and one convenience shop open. Common to see handwritten signs on shops "closed until May 13th", one-man businesses. Re-start 14:20, ending up just short of lock 101, the first of the two at Flogny-la-Chapelle. Would have made it to the port, but for a big Dutch barge run by a party of Americans, that went aground, then stalled in a lock, and stopped us getting to the locks before shutting time at 18:00, less 15 minutes for last entry time. Very hot by eve. Moor on off-side; struggle to get the bike back on after lock-wheeling the last few locks. Moor at 18:00. Walk, before dinner on board. Apart from lock-keepers and slightly odd lock gear, the only give-away that we are not in England is the odd-looking concrete power poles alongside the canal. Locks vary a lot in depth, from about 2 m to 4 m. Lock-keepers vary from young girls in leggings to old men in cords, cap and pipe. Eggs, cider, wine, beer, T-shirts, honey offered for sale. Boat's toilets discharge straight into the canal and flush with hand-pumped canal water.

Mon 1996-05-06

Start 09:30, through the two Flogny locks, ten minutes water at the port above the upper lock. Sun is still shining. Picked up the Dutch barge behind us at the port. Huge amounts of mistletoe on the trees alongside the canal; spherical darker green blobs up to a metre across on the branches. Stop for lunch below lock 97 at Dannemoine. Cycle into town, not a lot there. Away again when lock opens at 13:00, with a sister boat from same yard. Stop at port at Tonnerre, where visit the Le Clerk supermarche next to the canal. Then on again, stopping at port at Tanlay, above lock 90. Port here has lots of water points, but most of the mooring is taken up by a huge restaurant barge. That and three cruisers fills the space. Lock-keepers today of the taciturn bent, but I still worked most of the gates on our side, all done by a crank lever, no balance beams. Some paddle gear conventional, but some have auto-ratchet, they latch on the way up, but latch is released by turning the handle backwards. Neat. Barbecue outside the boat tonight, followed by a walk through the town. Tanlay has an avenue with double-line of trees leading up to a château, a superb Marie in the square and streets that can't have changed much in two hundred years. Very hot and sunny all day, still pleasant outside at 21:00.

Tue 1996-05-07

Clear, sunny morning, duller after lunch with an insignificant amount of rain. Top up with water at mooring, then leave at 09:00. Stop for lunch at Lezinnes port after lock 85. Cycled several stretches of tow-path and into Lezinnes. Afternoon running down to Ancy-le-Franc port at 15:00. Several mechanised locks on this stretch, but one, by a cement works, is fully automatic. Radar detects boat's arrival about 200 m out, more detectors at top and bottom gates. Approach, gates open, lights change, go in, tie up, press button, sequence goes through complete, gates close afterwards. Busy port, lots of boats pulling in for water and rubbish disposal. Dane on adjacent boat, we tried to start in French, discovered neither of us spoke it well, he had been to Gibraltar and was spending a year or more exploring canals in Europe; his batteries being charged on the free electric point. Small boat, but ocean-going and batteries won't charge enough at canal revs. Visit the château at Ancy-le-Franc. Remarkd that we haven't seen: any accommodation bridges; any maintenance boats; any small privately-owned

boats. We turn here, though turning is not so significant a thing with a short, fat boat on a wide canal. The summit is still 80 locks away, but already the character of the canal has changed. It looks more like ours, with a normal tow-path not a road and overgrown off side with no path. There are wooded hills visible now and the problem of getting over the summit becomes clear. One other Connoisseur boat is here, but none of the others that we have been travelling with from the yard at Joiny. Strong winds this afternoon making steering fun. Steering gets easier with practice, but hydraulic coupling makes centre position creep, even over the fairly short term.

Wed 1996-05-08

Sunny to start, later in afternoon most in shorts. Then distant thunder and light rain, then a real thunderstorm with continuous heavy rain for 4-5 hours, soaking us and the lock-keepers at the last few locks. Part of the afternoon steered from inside. Start 08:50, after water by mooring and potter through the mostly mechanised locks. Stopping for lunch on boat just above lock 86 at Ancy-le-Libre. Had to wait for lock-keeper to appear at lock 90, asleep in the house he didn't appear until the dog barked. This is about when the rain started. End at Tonnerre, at the port, at 18:00. Last few locks followed by a German crew, who seemed to be tipping all of the lock-keepers.

Thu 1996-05-09

Dull, cold wind, but dry. Brightening a little by eve. Into town first, some to the old town for maps and papers, others to supermarket for food. Superb old town. Small shops, old courtyards, narrow streets with slightly faded houses. Big impressive church. Off at 11:00 after watering at mooring, stopping for lunch on board before lock 97. Eve moor in port at St Florentin, stern-on to jetty. Lots of moorings here, but they seem to be mostly taken up with un-rented Rive de France hire boats. Mooring at 18:10. Lock-keeper at lock 105 describing how the telegraph warns him of boats at adjacent locks, but how the pulse of water gives him a time warning, it arrives 5 minutes before the boat appears.

Fri 1996-05-10

Bright and occasionally sunny. Run back to Migennes, easy day. Start 09:10, meeting a couple with a Guernsey Yacht Club boat. They've been here lots of times, including when it was about to be abandoned ten or five years ago. They said it was mainly English people who fought to keep it open and that the French as yet show little interest. Stop for lunch at Brienon sur Armacon. Walk into town for a few odds, and lunch on boat with extra beer from local supermarket. Afternoon just potter to the port at Migennes. Held up at one lock this morning by the lock-keeper going off in his car to fetch a case of wine for the boat in front. He just left the boat in the lock with one paddle open a crack. Cycled most of the morning distance, lock 109 to Brienon, about 9 km. Moored at 14:50. Boat cleaned.

Sat 1996-05-11

Blue sky again, with a swirling mist on the canal. Move boat 100 m down port to Connoisseur part, unload. Yard was manned from 08:00, but office open at 08:30. Had to pay for about 60 L of diesel at more than 300FF, same as or greater than road fuel. Two fenders punctured, but we didn't have to pay. 3000FF deposit returned. Boat was called Number 23 a 1230FB (flying bridge). Drive back to UK.

Nene 1996

Fri 1996-08-02

To Stoke Bruerne, to find that they have only the Nene guide that we already have. θ took cats to cattery and shopping. ZX to boatyard, arriving 14:30. Simple run through boat, and away 15:25. Gayton Marina, Alvechurch Boats, White Stork, 16.5 m. It has 24V for lighting, 12V for engine and cellphone charging plus 240V via inverter for microwave, fridge, coffee maker, hair drier, toaster. Water heated by either engine or gas boiler, which also can heat the cabin via radiators. Nice fittings, little wall lights and ceiling fluorescents, clock and barometer, TV and radio-cassette. Adequate cupboard space, as there should be for two on a 4-berth boat. From front, day room, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom. BMC engine, stopped by keyswitch, a bit noisy. Ended at SP723587, between locks 14 and 15, moored to an overgrown bank. Saw two other boats moving and one moored. Stopped at 18:25. Locks a bit arduous with 2, but good ladders so I could get off and help, and also closed the far-side bottom gate with the boat-hook to save θ walking round. Dull, but still shirt-sleeve weather. Short walk after dinner.

Sat 1996-08-03

Start 08:40 in sunshine, θ steering. Through the three remaining Grand Union locks, φ walking 15 to 16, and onto the Nene, wide and heavy locks! Stop for lunch at Britannia Inn (SP779595) 11:40-13:30, large, trendy pub with food. Then φ steering in afternoon, stopping before Cogenhoe lock (SP830613) at 15:45. Many boats here, especially later, by a caravan park and the first lock we visited by car recently. Locks are very heavy, paddles taking 70-80 turns, though so far the guillotines have been electric. From here, they're manual and about 100 turns. My shoulder and back muscles suffering already. Eve walk up the hill to Royal Oak pub, Pedigree, they also do food, but we'd eaten already. Their menu had all plurals in 's form, and potatoes as "potatoe's", even "Brussel sprout's", omitting one 's'. Typical scene of today is endless caravans and tents or scruffy boat clubs and private moorings. Haven't seen much money yet on this river. Orange excellent everywhere today. Party of 6 in pub clearly have been everywhere on the canals and most foreign ones as well. Facilities on the river were sparse, no water point spotted up to here though there was meant to be one at Northampton and none listed till Wellingborough. There was a tap here, but not for hoses, only for containers.

Sun 1996-08-04

Sunny and very hot all day, little wind, except for a single, isolated gale-force gust that blew spray off the river and carried away my 16-year old VIA baseball cap, from Canada. Start 10:15, slightly aground, liaising with Roger by phone and meeting at Doddington lock but no mooring there, so on to Wollaston lock, where moor above at 13:35. Then Roger, Jim and us in Roger's car to Stags Head in Great Doddington, where we just missed the 14:00 end of ordering lunch. So just beer instead. They looked at boat afterwards, but didn't stay, as Roger had to get back before M&S closed. So we had sandwiches on board, before setting off again at 16:15, to arrive at moorings in Wellingborough at 17:15, watering after arrival. Wellingborough is SP902667, lunchtime was SP888644. Mooring at Wellingborough by a public park, busy during the day, fishers and lovers as it gets darker. Fishing party suddenly broken up by a young girl with them falling on a slide and bashing her head. Ambulance called on my Orange phone, there in less than 5 mins, almost as soon as the call finished. The one lock that I counted, Barton, took 92 turns to raise or lower the guillotine. Another lock had about 70 for the paddles. Passed about 6 or 8 boats today, but none here in Wellingborough with us, and suspect many today were local and out for the sunny weekend.

Mon 1996-08-05

Sunny and very hot all day. To Tesco for odds and more booze and mineral water. Checking oil, discovered that the dipstick hole had disappeared; this took me a while to believe, in fact the dipstick tube had come away with the dipstick. While finding out where it was supposed to go, I discovered the cause of yesterday afternoon's failure to start until the third turn of the key, the lead to the solenoid had a crimp corroded through and now it had broken off. So a man came out, the same one that did the handover, in a Montego 2.0Si, and fixed both the dipstick and the starter. Start 11:15, after more water as I had a shower which used an incredible amount, it shot out, and control was only off, cold or hot, no flow control. Another, private, boat watering here as well, keeping track with us and mooring close evening. Leisurely run, θ steering mostly, to moor at new 48-hour moorings being constructed at SP958711 upstream of Irthlingborough lock. Here 13:45-15:00, having lunch and watching a man putting up the posts for a sign. Ditchford lock is very deep, has a radial gate rather than guillotine and is very heavy. Fisherman here said he'd been there since 06:00 and seen only us. Altogether today we saw four boats

moving and passed none. Shared Lower Ringstead lock with a small nobby boat. We expected to be able to moor downstream of lock at Lower Ringstead, but no way, so a great panic to find a mooring. Thrapston Marina uncontactable despite directory enquiries, but we found a moorable spot just upstream of Denford lock, at 18:30. Cock Inn at Denford nearby, but no food Monday evening, so London Pride and Bass only and then eat on boat. Also, θ's camera has just stopped working. Battery is less than 5.4 V instead of 6, but it was very sudden for a failed battery. Final mooring SP991669.

Tue 1996-08-06

A little rain during the night, and a few spots while cruising, rest of the day dull but warm, with sunny spells, and hot and humid in the afternoon. Thunderstorm, not overhead, after mooring. Brief walk into village, then leave 09:45. Not possible to moor for Thrapston, except one place at the pay-for linear marina, so we didn't. Met London Pride, a short narrow boat with two men and a boy, with whom we did all of the remaining locks. Lunch at Kings Head, Wadenhoe (TL010834). Awkward, shallow mooring, but beautiful pub and garden, basic food and good beer, young people starting a business, presumably had been closed or run-down before. Stop 12:30-13:40. Restart, London Pride had been waiting on mooring upstream. Take on water at landing stage above Upper Barnwell lock. Turn into the marina, but no overnight mooring, so we end up just above Lower Barnwell lock at 16:05 (TL041873), upsetting London Pride as they saw us coming and assumed we were going up. Walk across field into Oundle, look around, buy a new battery for θ's camera so it now works again and have coffee in a tea-shop. Last boat through was a narrowboat whose crew watched the level stay down as they raised the paddles as they'd stopped the guillotine about a half-metre up, then left the guillotine down and got themselves across the canal. Saw a couple going down who lived on a Dutch barge moored further upstream, excusing in a nobby boat. Lots of photos on SLR of the lock, lock mechanism, and sky dark with thunderstorm. One on θ's as well.

Wed 1996-08-07

Pottering day. Started cold and very windy, at one point I nearly lost the boat, pulling as hard as I could with feet braced against a bollard. Start out at 09:10, turning the boat above Lower Barnwell lock, tying the bow to a mooring post and just swinging the stern in the width, then θ driving to lunchtime stop, again at the Kings Head, Wadenhoe, 11:30-13:00. Only one other boat here this time, and the room we and others were served food in yesterday was "we don't do food in there", so we ate at a table in the restaurant. Pate (θ) and Stilton (φ) ploughmans were good, but less promising as a pub this time. A large dog was wandering in and out of the dining room and kitchen, and a "fire door keep shut" was propped open. Afternoon warmer, less wind, some sunshine later. Moor at Sailing Club 48-hour moorings, at SP993794, and (φ) walk into Thrapston. Moor at 14:45. Town dead or dying, lots of boarded shops, charity shops, estate agents. Not clear if killed by bypass or otherwise, but a great contrast to Oundle, which had lots of small real shops. Rest of afternoon lazing. Saw about 6 boats today, two also mooring here, but moved off, alone here at 17:30. Water at Upper Barnwell lock while finishing lock when another boat arrived. Evening walk into Thrapston to post cards.

Thu 1996-08-08

Again a dullish morning, brighter and warm in the afternoon, when out of the wind. Start 09:35, pass a boat at the first lock, second on our own, and the next four with a private boat from Wigan. More boats than before, at one lock we, two boats, followed one up, passed two narrowboats going down, and there was one waiting behind us. θ steering except Thrapston bridge, φ lock working. Stop at the new moorings by the football club by Irthlingborough at 14:00 and stop there for the rest of the day. φ walk into the town which was dull and scramble across fields back to the lock, and back via the Nene Way. Evening on boat, watching it get dark and the lights coming on, seeing the floodlit church spire in Irthlingborough and Stanwick. Some photos on APS here of lock mechanism and in the dark. Test match on radio and reading in the aft. Nine more manual guillotine and one radial to go. Noted that height of superstructure and distance gate is raised is independent of fall of lock, it's always raised by (depth of water downstream) + (headroom), which is constant. What changes is the relation between bottom of gate in up position and top of lock chamber, above on shallow locks and below on deep ones. After we moored, only two cruisers and a narrowboat passed in 6 hours of daylight plus some canoes from the outward bound children's centre below Irthlingborough lock.

Fri 1996-08-09

Our tenth wedding anniv. φ to θ crystal butterfly on leaf, θ to φ 16-year old malt, good beer guide. Start 09:15, after some rain last night and this morning, and a little during the day. Always warm and a little sunshine in the afternoon. Pass at one or two locks, stopping on embankment at Wellingborough at 11:50. Water here, and shop

at Tesco, as does Royal Tern, though they're due back on Sunday. Depart 13:45 and moor above Wollaston lock at 15:00. Then broke out the first bottle of fizz, and watched the world go by, or two narrowboats and a hotel pair at least. Also listened to the cricket. Later, second bottle of fizz taken with spaghetti bolognese on board. Lunchtime SP902667, eve SP888645.

Sat 1996-08-10

Dull to start, with one heavy shower falling on us after several in the night, brightening to a mostly sunny and warm afternoon. Start off at 08:45, through the last few manual guillotine locks, helped by crossing at one or two. Enforced stop below Whiston lock when the engine temperature gauge went up above 100°C and the clouds of steam in the exhaust increased. Cooled and added water, engine was boiling off coolant. The boat with the funny Welsh name came alongside and offered to go behind to rescue us if it happened again, but slowly we made it to Cogenhoe without going over 85°C. Repair stop was 10:40-11:30, arrived above Cogenhoe at 12:15. Lunch here. Several calls to boatyard in this. Discovered at Cogenhoe that the filter was clear, but the tube from filter to pump was being sucked almost flat when the engine ran. Further investigation found that the cooling intake in the mud box was underneath a load of grey-black ooze. Groping inside at full stretch I got most of this out, and now cooling water is more copious and the gauge stays down below 80°C. Start again at 13:20, now hot, and proceed through the three electric guillotines and the three conventional river locks, and onto the canals again, mooring at SP735596, between bridges 14 and 13, at 17:30. Canal feels slow and constricting after the river; the power turns in the deep wide river were very satisfying. Though even here on the canal mooring was difficult, needed the plank tonight.

Sun 1996-08-11

Rain overnight, then dull, building to hot and sunny during the flight. Remaining so until after mooring, when rain with distant thunder. Dry for walk to pub later. Start 09:45. We did the first lock on our own, but at the next the unpronounceable Welsh-named boat caught up and they helped us by closing behind, as they had two on the bank. Centre couple of lock pounds very short of water. Hot work. Got to boatyard at 12:45, for water and pump-out, leaving 13:10, then mooring for lunch just round the corner at bridge 47, SP716555 at 13:30. On again at 14:30, and moor at SP669575 just beyond bridge 35 at 16:00. What a contrast from the river; boats everywhere. After we moored, a couple of dozen must have passed, most so fast that the spikes needed attention. A failed attempt at mooring after bridge 36, had us holding on while a convoy of six went past. Evening to Old Wharf Inn a new and fairly horrible pub by bridge 36. Bass not too bad. Canals good: tow-path, moor anywhere, lots of pubs, no current, no panics; bad: too many boats, ergo less friendly to each other. The Welsh boat turned south at Gayton Junction, so we won't see them again; might we see London Pride going the other way? There are still boats going past here at 21:00. Called Charles (on Orange from the pub, four bars) to discover that we can't turn on the Leicester Arm before Watford flight.

Mon 1996-08-12

Lots of rain overnight, but dry during the day. Overcast, but warm, mostly, with the occasional sunny spell. ϕ walk into Bugbrooke for paper, then start at 10:45, heading slowly north. Two boats roared past us, unable to keep to our pace, which was not much less than 4 mi/h, if at all, away from moored boats and anglers. Stop after bridge 26 (SP638590) for lunch at the Narrowboat, which was good, 11:55-13:00. Then on, through lock with Rosedale, private boat, not very communicative, but not unfriendly. Locks heavy, some bottom gates that I could not move unaided. Arrived at Norton junction at 16:50, took on water, then moored at 17:00, on the 48-hour moorings. The boat behind us, three males, had one on a bike, rushing up and down the flight, helping not at all. He put his bike down at the best mooring at the top, but we ignored this, boats being better at bagging moorings than bikes, and moored there. Another boat then came and took his next choice and finally he got into the last possible mooring, not quite on the water point. Saw them later in the pub, he still with his shop carrier bag. Evening watch an engine being lifted in through the roof of a trad-style narrowboat here on the 48-hour moorings by a mobile crane. Moored next to a couple who'd been out since Easter, trying to decide if they could retire to the boat and sell their house. Evening to New Inn, which was just as ever, good beer, and looked good food, but we'd eaten first, good atmosphere. Pedigree. Evening mooring SP605657. Fancy mooring using three lines on rings to hold boat close-up to boats in front and behind, as mooring space was at a premium.

Tue 1996-08-13

Dry all day. Cool and overcast to start, then working up to a warm and sunny afternoon and a warm evening. Late rise, then ϕ walk to Watford flight for photos, calling on the way at Watford Gap motorway services for paper. This walk 1.5 hours and 8 km. Then lunch at the New Inn, before starting at 13:05, turning in the junction, and going

down the flight. Went down with Tumbling Water, grandfather, wife, son and granddaughter. Talkative, all of them, especially eldest to me and youngest to θ . Originally in a marina, at nearly £1000 a year, now down to £350 a year at a shared side-by-side linear mooring at Blisworth. Boat cost £12k but after his improvements more like £14k. He had broken down in the middle of Blisworth tunnel which cost him £1500 for an engine rebuild, after he got a tow out. Stopped below flight 14:40-15:05 to buy θ another revolving-handle windlass, not blue this time, but shiny metal, then on to moor near bridge 26 again evening at 16:30. Sit here until 18:30 when went to Narrowboat Inn and their Cantonese restaurant. Excellent, though quantity a bit much for us.

Wed 1996-08-14

The first day, as I recall, that the sun never appeared, though dry and still and warm. Walk towards Flore (ϕ 3 km) to see River Nene and mill (SP644597) and back via Nene Way path through a wheat field and over the river again. Lunch on boat, then to water point 200 m or so away at bridge 26. Start 13:20 and stop at Bugbrooke between bridges 34 and 35, at virtually the same spot as Sunday evening, at 14:30. Run the engine on a little to make 2 hours total running. Re-clean intake, as flow decreasing, inlet pipe more pinched and a little steam starting to appear in exhaust. Aft reading and exploring a little, watching one man combining a field, just does one circuit, drives up to the tractor and trailer and discharges by an arm that comes out by itself, then drives off again. Dinner on boat. Evening to Five Bells, Pedigree, London Pride, 6X. Public bar, very pleasant.

Thu 1996-08-15

Overcast to start, then the sun broke through so most of the day hot and sunny, then overcast and hot from late afternoon. Walk (ϕ) into Bugbrooke for paper, then start 09:45, going to accommodation bridge by footpath to Gayton (bridge 46, SP709555) at 11:00. (ϕ) walk along footpath to village, and a quick pint of shandy at the Queen Victoria Inn, before coming back via the roads (3.6 km). Then a lazy day reading in the sun and cleaning the boat. Engine run 1 hour before starting and again in evening to keep 24V system charged and to get hot water tomorrow morning. Evening on boat. While sitting on the boat in the afternoon sunshine, no wind to speak of, there was a turmoil in the water that at first I thought was an animal swimming, but it suddenly moved rapidly across the canal, clearly spinning violently and throwing off spray, a sort of micro whirlwind.

Fri 1996-08-16

Up at 6:30, watching a heron fishing for its breakfast in the early mist, just starting to lift in the watery sunshine. Sheep and cows in the fields, nothing else moving, nothing else audible between the trains. What a contrast to the latter part of the day. Start about 07:55, to arrive at the boatyard 8:20 and unload straight away. A bit of a delay waiting for reception, as another boat was ringing in with a breakdown, but away at about 08:50, home, bath, then to work by 10:30. θ has day off, collecting cats.

Ashby Canal 1997

Sat 1997-04-05

To Ashby Boat Co at Stoke Golding, three cars meeting there. Our boat, with five crew, pointing the wrong way, so we're allowed to take it up a couple of bridges and turn it before the hand-over. This is Charnwood, 20.7 m. At the turning point, another boat turned then backed to the next bridge. We turned and followed it, and another Ashby boat was coming the other way. Confusion. The other boat, Ashby, 18 m, has the remaining three crew and the dog. That boat has already been turned round. Cars squashed into a fairly small area and keys must be left. Away only at 16:30, after a long-winded hand-over. Stop at Battle moorings, just after bridge 35, at 18:15. It rained most of the afternoon. Moorings are special for the battle site, on the off side. Some of the crew not eating, they ate at lunch time, so six to eat on our boat. Then one had to have the chilli without chilli. Some crew from the second boat on ours to avoid the TV. We sent our TV off, preferring the extra space.

Sun 1997-04-06

Dull but dry. Walk around the Bosworth battle site then off at 08:45. Very slow, as shallow and narrow. Stop just before the tunnel at 12:35, then most of us to the Globe Inn for lunch. Then on at 14:30 and turn. Finished turning and watering Charn at 15:35. A couple of sudden stops, meeting a boat at a blind bridge hole and another boat swinging in front of us as it went aground at the stern. Stop at Bosworth Wharf at 18:30, then walk into the town, which has a very olde-worlde look. We're going quite a lot slower than we expected to, less than 2 mi/h despite no locks. One of the crew complaining that he can't sleep for the sound of snoring and of the central heating pump, so we're to try the heating off tonight. Both boats are 4-cylinder Listers, water-cooled with hull tanks and contact cooled. Charn has hot water from gas and engine, heating by gas and radiators. Ash has hot water from engine and diesel space heating. Both have electric fridges, separate oven, grill and hobs.

Mon 1997-04-07

Dry, sunny, with a pleasantly cool breeze. Start 09:00, after watering Ash. Trying our new crew members steering. It is much easier driving the smaller boat, especially in the narrow and shallow bits and the tight bends. Pass boatyard at 11:45, then moor by bridge 16 at 13:20. Ash leading the way this morning, and going pretty slowly. The Wharf Inn is shut lunchtime Monday to Wednesday, so to the Lime Kilns Inn, which did us food, Pedigree and desserts. This by bridge 15, but we walked from bridge 16. Re-start at 15:15. Junction at 17:20, and moor at bridge 19 on Coventry at 18:15. Walk into centre of Nuneaton, a mostly car-free, reasonable-looking centre. Eve on boat. Our sensitive crew member still kept awake by the heater pump, and waking us up at 03:00 this morning to ask how to turn it off and *then* not doing it, so he's to try the front cabin tonight, with the fold-out bed. There's a pub here according to Nicholsons, but it seems to have become a new housing estate.

Tue 1997-04-08

Sunny all day again. Start 08:45. Stop for water at Hartshill yard, bridge 31-32, about 10 minutes; we didn't wait for Ash. Lunch at the top of Atherstone flight by bridge 41, 11:20-14:00. Bridge and Barge by canal was very basic, no food, had a pint there. Maid of the Mill closed. Into town and into a pub with pop videos, the White Lion, for another pint and food. Afternoon into the flight. Lots coming up, so it took a time, and Ash got held up. Paused 16:00-16:40 at the bottom to get back together again. Stop at Polesworth, bridge 52, at 17:40. Walk into the town, and later again to get ice-cream and other bits.

Wed 1997-04-09

Start 09:05, and another sunny day, hot in the afternoon. Water above Glascote locks, by the Reliant works, smelling of fibreglass resin, getting together again below the flight at 11:15. Then to Tame Otter at Hopwas, eating a large salad in the garden. Moor between bridges Dixons and Lichfield Road, 12:30-14:30. After lunch, failed to turn at the hole by Tamhorn Farm bridge, as not quite long enough for Charn, so on to turn at Huddlesford Junction, at 16:30. This put an unexpected couple of hours on the trip, which was compounded by Ash being so slow, we had to stop a couple of times to wait for them to catch up. Finally moor at Fazeley, just

before the junction, at 19:15. Still just on schedule, it took us 2 days to here from passing the boatyard just before lunch on Monday, and we've 2 days to get back.

Thu 1997-04-10

Hot and sunny all day. Out for a paper, then onto the two water points. Off after water at 08:50. After locks at Tamworth at 10:45, then straight to Atherstone locks, arrive at 12:05. Lunch on boat above the locks, away again at 13:00. Charn leading; a tiny outboard-powered narrowboat with two women on board came between us for the last 5. The women later turned round, saying that they'd miscalculated and the route they'd originally chosen would mean one of them having to do 50 locks on her own. At the other end of locks Charn arrived 15:30, waiting for Ash till 16:00. Then on to the Anchor at Hartshill bridge 29 at 17:00. To the Anchor for lots of food eve.

Fri 1997-04-11

Change of weather, dull with a cold wind. Start 08:30. Onto the Ashby again at 10:30, and stop for lunch on the boat at bridge 8-9 for 11:50-13:05. Then on, in the worst of the wind, to stop just before bridge 22 at 15:15. Glad to stop, as pretty chilly. Little bit of boat cleaning and packing. Walk toward the MIRA proving track. Then dinner on boat.

Sat 1997-04-12

A frost on the boat, though the sun's out and rapidly melting it by the time we set off at 08:00. Moor at yard at 08:15. Both boats fuelled. 42 L in Charn, 92 L in Ash. Ash has diesel space heating. Charn also used 26 to 29 kg of propane, say 30 to 40 L, so maybe they're not too dissimilar. All the cars out after some jiggling of the other cars. 10 mi/UKgal for Charn.

Nottingham by canal 1997

Sat 1997-09-20

Bright, some sunshine. To Shobnall Marina, θ driving 323, and to Jannel Cruisers. Second last to arrive, but first away, on Mohawk, about 10 m long, with 3-cylinder water-cooled Isuzu diesel, gas central heating, electric fridge. Compact but nicely done. Bed fixed at rear, front cabin with two very low chairs; bath in the middle. 2A type 12V positive on live soon rigged to charge phones. Start at SK234233, underway by 15:20. Moor for night at Willington at 17:30 (SK294287). Lock was left for us by a boat emerging and worked by boat waiting. Eve to Green Dragon, with Young's Dirty Dick 4.1% guest beer. Has changed since we were last here. Photos of boat and canal in dark on S-100 with tripod, and inside boat on tripod with all four cameras.

Sun 1997-09-21

Sunny all day and a lovely clear evening. Start 09:10 after water at mooring, φ morning, θ afternoon. Share Stenson lock with a working boat with 6 tonnes of antique bricks en route to a museum in Bristol. Driver in boiler suit telling everyone what to do, in an amiable way, including his rookie assistant. Went in convoy to next lock, but let him ahead with another boat while I took photos. Lunch stop 12:30-13:30 between bridges 10 and 9 at SK400274, on boat. Moor for night at Shardlow at 15:30 (SK444305) between bridges 3 and 2. Lots of boats here during the day but few overnight. To Malt Shovel which seems the centre of life here; Pedigree. Took photos of the boat during the evening and night, later ones on tripod, trying to capture the superb evening light, and the reflection of the sun on the canal rippling on the back of the boat. Boat's front deck is too small, and entry at the rear is awkward, but otherwise OK. The Isuzu engine does not seem to have a lot of power.

Mon 1997-09-22

Sunny all day, and very warm when not underway. Short walk before start for matches and postcards, "Ta! M'duck!", and photo of mist rising from the water. Start 09:00, and keep going on the river section to get to Beeston at 12:00, then on to Nottingham just below Castle lock, at 13:30. Very brief water stop above Sawley locks. Push-button operation at Sawley, manual elsewhere, though keeper-operated at Cranfleet. Into Nottingham to see centre and visit preserved sandstone caves under the Broadmead shopping centre, man-made centuries old, but added to as cellars, then all joined together in WWII as air-raid shelters. Then back up through Castle lock and moor by new Sainsbury's and Castle Marina 15:30-16:00. Turning just beyond mooring opposite Magistrates Court. Final mooring SK561392. Eve to Boathouse Beefeater nearby, waitress Thea. River sections very different, wide and rural. Coming into Beeston lock took it too wide and it took some wellie to get in across the weir flow. θ had walked over the canal bridge in central Nottingham between station and town many times and never noticed the canal below.

Tue 1997-09-23

Mostly sunny and warm or hot all day. To Sainsbury's first thing, they seem to open early as I got in at 07:58, and buy a few things in empty, spacious, hassle-free supermarket. Start at 08:55, θ driving all day. Onto river at 10:15 arriving at Cranfleet lock at 11:30, so about 75 minutes against the current against 60 minutes with the current. Carry on non-stop to moor at Shardlow again at 13:45. Had four boats in Derwent Mouth lock, two narrow boats one behind the other and two cruisers alongside. Eve to Tandoori Nights in Shardlow. Varied primary-coloured seats and arty coloured glass decorations. Only one other boat on visitor moorings overnight, another hire boat. Water at Sawley locks, but only a minute or two. Photos of the Trent above Shardlow, which is a cul-de-sac leading to a big marina, above which it rapidly looks like a non-navigable river.

Wed 1997-09-24

Medium fog for the first hour and a half, then hot sunshine, then a more overcast late afternoon. Start 09:10, φ driving. Locks to ourselves. At Weston lock, observed that the gauges were wild, temp=max, volts=min and tachometer dancing. Met Ian from the boatyard who found an earth fault. I had theorised this, as earth fault on voltage-regulator for temperature would cause high reading, and other gauges on same earth would behave as seen. This took 12:15 to 12:35 at Cuttle Bridge, bridge 13. Then shared Swarkestone lock, with a man from the Soar, and stop for lunch just above the lock 13:10-14:00. θ has a cold, and weather getting gloomy, so decide to stop at Willington at 16:15. Eve on boat, rather defeating the point of stopping here, but we might just still make Fradley Junction tomorrow.

Thu 1997-09-25

Dull, overcast but warm day. Start 08:15 after taking on water, pass the boatyard after about 2 hours, and on non-stop to moor just below keepers lock at 15:15. Then from 17:00 to 17:15 potter through junction lock and moor right at Fradley junction on the 24-hour mooring. Fast early, but later the locks were more busy and progress was a little slower. Mostly ϕ steering and θ on locks. Fibre-optic cables being laid in the tow-path along this section. Eve eat in the Swan at the junction, an excellent steak with Pedigree to accompany.

Fri 1997-09-26

Dull, a few glimpses of sun, windy early. θ steering all day, including turning at Fradley. Start at 08:45, nose-to-tail through the closely spaced locks, but spreading out later. Stop for lunch at Barton Turns pub, just below Barton lock, 11:45-13:15. Basic local but good food and Pedigree. Moor for eve on a good mooring with rings right by a big building site but otherwise lonely at 14:45 (SK226225) a little beyond the pipe bridge after the A38 bridge, and almost alongside MP 17 miles from Shardlow. Eve on boat, cheese and biscuits and champagne. A little bit of boat cleaning, but it's not really dirty at all, just a bit dusty on the roof. So far, no rain at all. The boat's bilge is bone dry.

Sat 1997-09-27

Last day. Dull but warm. Potter back to boatyard 08:15-08:30. Moor outside the entrance, as instructed, and wait for them to turn up at 09:00. They drive it in, backing through entrance arch. We and Apache the only boats returning today. Two went out yesterday on weekend trips, one with some newly-weds. Off and away by 09:25. ϕ to collect cats (£60). Short 10-metre boat this year was very easy to handle, especially with its centre rope, but a bit tight inside even for two and had very unsatisfactory seating, two very low chairs. Heating was noisy but worked, though we used it only briefly on three evenings and this morning.

Birmingham Canals 1998

Sat 1998-05-09

To Fradley Junction, arrive at Swan Line about 14:40, away at 16:05. People in the shop / office a bit surly, engineer OK. They've fallen out with the landlord, the owner of the Swan pub, and can no longer park cars nearby, so they're parked on a farm about 2 km away, with lift back in the company van, £5 per car. Boat is White Swan, fittings seem OK. Hot and sunny all day. Stop by bridge 83 of the Coventry at 17:30. Boat about 15 m. Eve to Plough, right by canal and sit out in garden.

Sun 1998-05-10

Engine is VW, 4-cylinder OHC, water-cooled through the hull. Walked into Whittington for a paper. A little light rain at first. Start 08:05. Lunch below the third Curdworth Lock, at the Dog and Doublet. Sitting outside because of the dog. Light rain as we ate our, very late, lunch. Lunch stop 12:25-14:10. After lunch a clap of thunder and very heavy rain for 10 minutes or so. Followed a working boat which just stopped in a lock entrance during the rain, and then got itself wedged in a lock. BWB tug and skip floating loose between two locks. Stop at 16:35 at Wiggins Hill Bridge, by a new Beefeater, the Kingsley Arms. Stop 5 minutes for water at Fazeley Junction. Eve on boat.

Mon 1998-05-11

Heavy rain overnight, then steady and persistent rain, and uniform grey cloud cover. A day of disasters. Got beyond Salford Junction OK, but in the second lock of the Tame Valley had the weed hatch up, and the engine wouldn't start. Boatyard out eventually and fitted a new starter battery. I'm still suspicious because the voltmeter does not budge when the engine starts, even though the charging light does go out. Then we can't go up Perry Bar flight, because it's de-watered for emergency repair to a paddle. They re-fill it, but then are called away to the Aston flight, lock-keeper Mark and his father, who worked horse boats in Brum. We start up, but get stuck at the next lock, the bottom gates won't close. Crew almost frantic by this time, it's getting dark and there's lots of dubious children hanging around. But we call out BW again, and they pull out a mattress. Two locks further up the gate won't open, and we meet more BW people, who pull out a couple of bricks. Then up the rest of the flight with all five BW men helping and then moor at the top. Times: start 08:30, breakdown 11:30-14:15, wait for flight to be re-filled 14:30-18:45, moor 21:30. It's quite dark when we stop. Dull all day, but mostly dry after early morning. Just time for a pint eve, as we need to start early tomorrow and get a good run on the lock-free bit next. Total actual running time 6 hours out of 13 hours. Gave the BW men a generous tip. One of them was off to a flood in Walsall after he'd dealt with us. One other boat with us at the top lock, waiting all day for the chance to go down.

Tue 1998-05-12

An early start, and misty. Water first and clean the prop, then off at 07:45. Lots of miles with no locks, the mist lifting a bit but still overcast and cool. At least one weed-hatch stop, all big poly bags. Along the rest of the Tame Valley, then onto the Walsall, meandering up to Walsall Junction, where lunch at 12:05. The Walsall around Tame Valley Junction has been done up, with a new water point. After lunch, up the Walsall flight of 8. One pound was very low and we assisted the boat with a little from the pound above. The second to top pound was almost empty, but we waited for it to fill from the overflow weir from the pound above. about a 30 minute wait, so top of flight at 14:20. Milk purchased at a shop by the top lock during the wait. There are moored boats at the top lock, the first boater-friendly sign since the country parts of the Birmingham and Fazeley. Passed a moving boat just after Sneddy Junction, the first except for the one that was moored at the top of the flight yesterday since Salford Junction. A gongoozler at Walsall said he'd never seen a boat in the locks there. Moor about 1 mile or so out of Wolverhampton, beyond Rookery Bridge, in Wednesfield, at 16:55.

Wed 1998-05-13

Misty again this morning. Short walk to shops for a paper. Our stern rope is hanging loose, though the spike is still secure, so we suppose someone lifted it off last night, but the boat moved only about 1 m along the bank.

Start 08:15. Start down the 21 flight at 09:00. All done in 2 hours 10 minutes, then up the Staffs and Worcs to moor by bridge 71 at 12:10. Eat on boat. Go to start again at 13:15, and again a whistle and no cranking. The boatyard are coming out again, though this time we get to wait in a nice rural spot in hazy sunshine, rather than the middle of a seedy bit of Brum. The engineer this time actually measured a few things before just changing the battery. He found loose connections on the starter and the battery isolation switch, and then it started quite happily on the same battery. Start again 15:20, now with no chance of getting to Gailey in time for a pump-out. Water at Gailey for 10 minutes, then moor midway between Brick Kiln Lock and Boggs Lock at 17:45. Eve a barbecue in the sunshine, in total contrast to the industrial surroundings of yesterday.

Thu 1998-05-14

Day starts warm and bright, though a bit hazy. Start 08:40. Pass an old man on his own, working with tiller roped to straight ahead, a long telescopic boat hook for picking up the rope, and a custom-made dual-radius windlass. He's out 8 months of the year. Later the brightness went, and near lunchtime it started to rain. Fewer boats than yesterday. Pump-out 10 minutes at Teddesley Boat Co (£12). An old couple appear to live in the cottage at Deptmore Lock, he a bit bent, and to fetch their shopping in a short, open flat with an outboard. Teddesley report most of their boats in this week, Gailey had 6 or 8 in dock, and Swan Line had few out as well. Lunch 12:55-14:50 at bridge 98 at Radford Bank, a chain eatery, replacing the Trumpet pub as listed in the guide. It was almost empty, and the food was OK, but not hot enough. Afternoon still light rain, drying later. Moor at Great Haywood Junction at 16:45. Mood now completely changed from possible abandonment of the ring on Monday, to restful enjoyment of the rural bit, with the ring well up to schedule. Walk to ancient bridge over Trent, below its junction with Sow, only about 1 m wide walkway with low parapet. Also to Shugborough park, and then to the Clifford Arms in the village.

Fri 1998-05-15

Misty early, then by 08:30 bright sunshine. For a walk along the tow-path, along the Trent, and around the grounds of Shugborough Hall. Start 08:55 in hot sunshine. Water 10 minutes at a new point by bridge 62. Kath's cross-stitch went into the canal and had to be rescued with the boathook. Stop at 11:55 at the Plum Pudding Inn, to eat outside canalside. Afternoon in shorts for the final run back to Fradley, 13:45-16:00. Moorings too shallow or blocked by BWB flats above locks, so squash in actually on the junction. Eve for blow-out at the Swan. Later taking long exposure shots of the floodlit pub and canal scene; met another bloke off another boat doing exactly the same thing.

Sat 1998-05-16

Clear, warm morning. Take the boat across alongside Duke of Rutland, then fetch cars. Had an old Volvo this time, so need only two trips for four drivers.

Normandy 1998

Sat 1998-08-29

To gîte near Truttemer-le-Grand in France. The MX-5 was packed to the limit, with bags and food. θ drove to the tunnel (07:40-10:00), queue to pay, then have to go to terminal and wait for 'U' to be called. On the booked train at 11:12, and out onto the A16 at 13:00 French time. φ drove in France, via Abbeville, Rouen, Caen, Vire, to gîte right out in the country at about N48/48/43 W0/49/42, arrived about 17:15. Just one stop for packed lunch and another for fuel. After unpacking, for a short walk, found nothing accessible on foot, and a drive impressing the locals with an MX-5 with the top down. Route all motorway or dual-carriageway except for the last bit around Vire, which has *priorité a droit* roundabouts. Tolls £1 on Dartford bridge, 40FF to Rouen, 24FF and 15FF to Caen. With the fall of the franc relative to the pound, French petrol is about the same price as ours.

Sun 1998-08-30

To Vire, more petrol, then walk about the town, looking at the old remains of the castle and walls, buy bread and get maps. Then to Lac de la Dathée, to eat lunch sitting in the shade, then a short walk by the lake and a look at the dam that keeps it there. By then it was very hot, so back to the gîte to read outside in the shade. Cash from Eurocheque card OK. Vire a pleasant town, and quite a few shops open on Sunday morning, especially confectioners, bakers, butchers, fishmongers and the like. Shops on several streets radiating from a central star. Food we brought out lasted, and we located the supermarket for tomorrow. Shop with a sticker along the top of the window: "We welcome our liberators", with the flags of the Allies. A French picnic lunch in the woods by the lake, with about twenty of them at a long table, surrounded by an army of cool boxes. There is a red telephone box with France Telecom phone and a red GR post box in Vire, a present from twin town Totnes.

Mon 1998-08-31

First to the supermarket on the Vire by-pass for food, wine, beer and the local cider, and back to the cottage to unload. Then out to Bayeux, to see the tapestry. Bigger than I imagined it, about 70 m long, but otherwise just like the pictures, except less colourful; it has probably faded over the past 1000 years or so. Then on to the coast, by now getting hot, though the sun was often hazy. Followed the coast road from Arromanches to Graye-sur-Mare, by the Juno beach memorial. This, just west of the town, was where Dad came ashore; where we were standing was N49/20/07 W0/28/16. Phone had a good signal here, and called Dad from the spot. θ paddled, then lunch on the dunes watching the tide come in. After lunch, on a tour of some of the towns and villages mentioned in the Battery memoir: Douvres-la-Délivrande, Fontaine-Henry and le Fresne-Camilly. Douvres is a small town, with a nice church: pictures of this and of the main street. Could see very little of Fontaine-Henry, but took some pictures of the church in le Fresne-Camilly. Cross-country home from there, and evening in. A little rain later. A high proportion of cars here are GB, a few NL; I've seen only one D.

Tue 1998-09-01

A cat set the car alarm off during the night. To the zoo at Jurques. We were the first to arrive, and had the place to ourselves for a couple of hours. Set out as a 3 km rambling walk, showing the animals in varied settings. Some good, but others not, such as chimpanzees looked very restricted. Then followed signs for a viaduct over the valley of the Souleuvre, which turned out to be five stone piers remaining from a very high railway viaduct, no deck. On the far side, a small causeway had been built out to the second pier, then a cantilever platform out over the river for bungee jumping. Lunch here. I walked down to the bottom of the valley. Then a little drive around, post cards in Truttemer, and afternoon reading, though the sun then came out again.

Wed 1998-09-02

Rain overnight and during the day. To St Pierre sur Dives, where there was a cheese museum. This was small and static, but only 15FF each. The town itself was more interesting, with an old market hall, and big market place with an open urinal that just hides the parts that matter. Bought an APS film here, in a camera shop, but it seems to be generally available. Also bread and apple tarts bought here. Then back to a very pretty little bridge town, Pont-d'Ouilly. Quick walk around and photos here, then lunch in a restaurant (55FF fixed, the cheapest menu, and very good). On the way out, bought petrol here at a garage cum bicycle shop. Then back in the gloom to the gîte to watch the rain. *Mercredi soir*, so put out the rubbish. Thunderstorm.

Thu 1998-09-03

Rain overnight, today wind, sun, rain, but never cold. To Mont St Michel, walking from the car park up to the entrance to the Abbey, then around the ramparts. θ balked at all the steps up into the Abbey. A wide mix of nationalities here, popular, despite being out of season. You drive up along the causeway, then walk the last bit up to the walls, then a long, narrow ramp up with shops and cafés crammed in on both sides. The buildings are built up seemingly at random, and all different shapes and textures, so that every turn of the walkways reveals a new picture. Took lots of photos here. It was sunny but very windy on the causeway, but mostly hot and sunny out of the wind on the island. At low tide, the whole huge bay of Mont St Michel is sandy, over an area about 20 km wide by 6 km; at high tide the sea comes rushing in. Signs indicate whether the car park will be flooded then, today they said cars will be safe all day. From there, drove along the coast of the Cherbourg peninsular, stopping at a roadside viewpoint near Champeaux for a picnic lunch, with bread from Truttemer-le-Grand today, from where Mont St Michel could be seen across the bay, though not clearly as the air was hazy. Then to the port of Granville, a fishing port, and also where the Channel Island ferries dock. Look around here, then home. Rang the local rep for the booking agency, as we had not seen the real owner yet and wanted to warn them that we will leave early on Saturday. The rep had a respectable English accent. Lots of photos on the single-use Fuji on the drive home. After the rain last night, the car's driver's seat was quite damp this morning, but a day top-down soon dried it out.

Fri 1998-09-04

Rain to start. To the supermarket, for remaining food and some more beer, and wine and cider to take home. Petrol at the supermarket, just over 6FF per litre, not the cheapest we've seen, but cheap for 98 super unleaded. Standard 95 *sans plomb* has been down to 5.80FF. *Gazole* is about 4.60FF. The supermarket petrol station was tiny and you paid through a hatch, not on the same scale as at our supermarkets. Then to Vire, much more crowded of course than on Sunday, but it was still raining, so home before lunch. Today, the driver's seat was dry, but the passenger's side was wet. Despite the rain, it's still warm; locals could be seen in shorts and waterproofs. Going out for a walk, met the landlord, who was outside waiting for a delivery. He was "on 'oliday on a cruise around Spain", and "it was 'ot". Leave "*la clef dans la porte*". Then ϕ for a longer walk, dodging the rain. The farm buildings were old, crumbling and irregular, stone built and much patched with corrugated iron, though the houses were well kept. Fields were often tiny, and it wasn't not clear whether these are real commercial farms.

Sat 1998-09-05

Return. Up at 6:00, in the dark, with the air damp and a wind. Pack, and start off about 06:45, by which time it was starting to rain. It struggled to get light, we were picking our way with the white lines almost invisible in the wet, and our headlamps emasculated. After it got light, the rain got intermittently much worse, torrential at times. ϕ drove to about 140 km short of the tunnel, and θ from there. At the tunnel we were offered an earlier crossing, 'F', but then that disappeared from the screens; leaving the terminal at the appointed time for that crossing we actually got on the earlier one, 'E', at 11:42, right at the back in a high vehicle wagon. Lunch while in the train. Got home about 13:30 (BST), just under 8 hours, about 560 km round trip for 360 km crow route. θ collected the cats; later, when we came back with the photos, they were waiting together on the front step.

Kennet and Avon 1999

Sat 1999-05-08

All packed into the Synergie, including the folding bike, and to Aldermaston Wharf and onto Caen Hill. Met the rest of the crew there. Start off at 15:45, stop just beyond Woolhampton lock at 17:30. Shared the locks with another Reading Marine boat, with a man with a cigar, his wife who fell in, and a rather reluctant-looking daughter. Curry on boat, then a visit to the Row Barge by the lock. Boat is around maximum length for the canal, about 21 m. I drove, touching the side coming into Woolhampton lock with the current from the river joining. Boat's engine is BMC type, hull cooled. Gas boiler to radiators, engine water heating. From front: two bunks, bog, double, double, bog, kitchen, seating converting to double. Electric fridge. Cellphone 12 V point. Comfortable enough, but not the best turned out boat.

Sun 1999-05-09

Warm all day, with quite a bit of sunshine. Start 09:30, after a walk back along the tow-path with the dog. Morning me cycling on the bank the whole time, tow-path is a bit rough in parts for cycling. Stop at White House pub for lunch, own mooring on off side, useful as there's very little good mooring. Pub is by bridge 29, and stop 13:00 to 14:30. Roast lunch. Afternoon through locks, until moor 17:00 before lock 81, in a suitable place to meet the other crew members tomorrow. Very few other boats, and none passed after we moored. Followed a small nobby boat with a youngish couple, she with very long hair and nose rings, who had just bought it and said it was now their home, though they had little experience so far. The boat's supposed to make hot water from the engine, but it doesn't seem to work. Locks are quite variable, one turf-sided today, some scallop-sided, and several had only gate paddles at the top which require great care with our long boat. One bridge so low that we've moved the bike down from the roof, and put it, folded, on the front deck.

Mon 1999-05-10

Sunshine and heavy showers. Walk first, measuring the delay from start of audible warning to train arriving at the level crossing: 2 minutes 45 seconds. The last two crew members and the second dog arrive about 09:30 after hitting lots of traffic. I went back to the boatyard with one of them in her car, left it there, back in a taxi. Underway at 11:00, stopping at Kintbury above the lock at 13:00. Water here for 15 minutes, then to Dundas Arms for lunch. Re-start 14:45, and potter on to Hungerford, by town bridge, nice mooring on off side very close to town. Moor at 16:45. Walk into town, which seemed quite small. One dog installed at one end of the boat, and one at the other. Boatyard recommends that we fix the hot water problem by using the gas boiler with the radiators switched off, the man says it's too cold for the engine to get up to temperature. We think it's a failed thermostat in the engine.

Tue 1999-05-11

Sunshine and wind. Bike excursion first thing, then a walk in the nature reserve. Call out the boatyard to fix the hot water. There was *no* engine thermostat, there is now a 72°C thermostat, and we have hot water. Start 10:00, stop 13:40 at Great Bedwyn, eating on boat. Re-start 15:00, and moor at Wootton Rivers above lock 51 at 18:50. Eve to Royal Oak in the village.

Wed 1999-05-12

Canal at Wootton Rivers being done up, with new water points, not working yet, turfed banks, and a pumping station to back pump around the four locks back to the summit. Started at 08:10, through the lock, then turning between bridges 111 and 112, at 08:50, while the others breakfasted. Arrived at Crofton pumping station at 12:30, after 15 minutes watering above the last lock, number 59. Lunch on boat, then to visit the beam engines, not in steam today, but big and impressive. Lots of wooden stages around so you got close to all of the bits. Re-start 14:30, stopping between locks 68 and 69 at 17:00. Good sheet-piled mooring, but we realised afterwards that it's a winding point. But so few boats about, and very few 20.7 m like ours, so I doubt it'll matter. Weather warm, some sunshine, some showers, some wind.

Thu 1999-05-13

Awake to find we're on a slope, the pound has dropped 10 cm at least overnight. Lengthened lines and pushed it afloat again, though later a BW man was around and brought the level up again. Bike into Froxfield before start at 09:00. Little glimpses of sun and some heavy rain. At one of the locks, a film crew was making an advert for a Danish beer, with lights, a camera on a boom, and the lock decorated with extra foliage and the bridge with false cracks. When we arrived the sun went in, so they let us through. They had smoke generators as well. At one point, the director asked for more white on the beer; they were mixing the head in a pan and adding it to whatever represented the beer. Lunch at the Dundas Arms again, mooring at 12:30 above lock 41. Food here excellent both times, simple but well done; today it was boiled ham hock in a mustard sauce, it melted in the mouth. An elderly pair at the next table talking loudly in county accents about going to Venice gave us a giggle. Horse-drawn boat outing left from here at lunchtime, filled by an East Kent coach outing. The skipper was looking out when we arrived, and asked us to take the bike off the roof as it might catch the towrope as he handed over the line of moored boats. Water first, then re-start at 14:30, mostly in rain, to moor at Newbury above bridge 32 at 17:30. Back in the river section there's quite a current with the rain, and we need to develop stern-first landings when going with the current. Last few locks today with a short boat from the same yard with a couple and a dog. Eve to the Lock, Stock and Barrel, canalside Fullers pub; still raining.

Fri 1999-05-14

Lots more rain overnight. Trip into Newbury aborted because of the rain, except me in waterproofs for some more bread. Spikes stayed put against the current and boat still alongside, to my relief this morning. Start 09:30, me steering on the rivy bits through Newbury, and on to the bridge after the turf-sided lock. Moor 12:15. Lunch in the Swan hotel, just across the railway. The level-crossing was closed, and we got rained on again. Under way again at 13:45, At lock 93 we met another Reading Marine boat, with a man from the boatyard and a crew of three being trained for a safety certificate; the pound below this lock had been very, very low, and he was draining our pound into this one to turn his boat. Went down together to lock 94, where he and his crew did the swing-bridge, so we could get through the side stream where the river comes back in without having to stop. 15 minutes delay here while he finished refilling the level; later a BW man appeared and set off to fix the level above lock 93. Also did the last lock together, then had to wait 30 minutes for the big swing-bridge which was barred 16:30 to 17:30. The two boats roped together and turned as a unit before the bridge, then backed through the bridge and finally moored at the boatyard at 18:00. Passed another Reading Marine boat stuck with a rope round the prop. Eve on boat.

Sat 1999-05-15

All loaded up and away at 09:00. Holiday recedes into memory. A good one. It's always interesting to bring people together to see what happens, and this time there were no explosions. Six out of seven could be trusted with basic boating, all worked, all joined in. The canal was interesting, scenic, in a safe and pleasant environment, and provided plenty of interest and activity. Perhaps a bit more variety in working might have been better, with barely a mile stretch without a lock or a swing-bridge there was not much time for ancillary activities such as photography or reading. Also, this crew had far too little enthusiasm for ethanol, and its procurement in pubs.

Stratford by Canal 1999

Mon 1999-09-06

I take cats to cattery, θ shopping, then off to Alvechurch in 323. Quick handover onto Green Woodpecker, and away at 15:15. Hot and sunny. They advise not to stop anywhere near Kings Norton, so make good progress to Stratford bridge 8, and the Drawbridge pub, a new chain pub, and eat there. Arrive here 18:50. No sign of any problems at Kings Norton, except for a crowd of children after tips at the first Stratford swing bridge. Boat has 3-cylinder Lister / Petter, water-cooled through hull, and moderate fitting out. Canal fairly scummy between the tunnels. Wast Hill tunnel 2500 m long, and can't see exit until a good way through.

Tue 1999-09-07

Rain for an hour or so in the morning, then dull for a few hours, then mostly sunshine. Short walk before breakfast, then θ driving most of the day except for a little while after lunch. Start 09:05, lunch at Wharf Tavern, by bridge 25, 11:45 to 12:45. Then loads of locks, with φ on bank, stopping for a break for 20 minutes between locks 14 and 15, and for 5 minutes for water by lock 19. Flight busy, passing in lots of locks, and waiting turns at some. Stop at 19:15 above lock 30, and to the Fleur de Lys between here and lock 31. Boat manual is missing, but we've got the emergency numbers from the boatyard. On the clear run before the locks today, the boat would keep slowing down, and needed a burst of reverse to unclog the prop. For a while we pottered behind another Alvechurch boat that was crawling along emitting black smoke, but suddenly the smoke abated and he shot ahead. By the pedometer. I've walked about 12.5 km today, roughly twice as far as the boat moved.

Wed 1999-09-08

Dull with bright bits in the morning, dull and windy later. Start 09:20, φ driving through the locks, not really any queues today. Pause for lunch below lock 39, 13:15 to 14:10, on boat. Then a short potter to bridge 59 at 15:00. Boat passed at lunch so fast that it bent our spike. Afternoon take some photos of Mary Arden's house, and an owl tied to a perch in the grounds. Also a walk on a country footpath. Eat on the boat, simple fare after two pub meals yesterday. Short walk eve, as the gloom deepened with sunset.

Thu 1999-09-09

Mostly hot and sunny. Start 08:00, and make good progress until started to meet other boats about 5 locks out of Stratford. θ steering. Water 5 minutes by bridge 63. Lock 53, near Stratford, has a bottom gate that won't open properly, and we, like all boats, had to use full throttle and push the gate hard to get through. Also, just above this lock, was a hire boat only just fixed after breaking down yesterday. Got to the basin at 12:15, and onto a useable but less than perfect mooring. Walk around town, and lunch in a pub. Back to the boat, and moved to a better mooring. Then walks and watching all the tourists. Eve to the RSC theatre for Antony and Cleopatra.

Fri 1999-09-10

Hot and sunny. Start 08:05, φ driving. Single U-turn in the basin, with lots of room to spare. Easily through the third lock, charging in at full throttle and hardly sticking at all, but above this lock the pound is right down, and together with a boat coming down we let some water through from the long pound above. One of the Wilmcote locks was broken yesterday, and there was a big hold up, which we missed. Lots of Stratford Court boats coming down these locks, widely ignorant of the rules, one even closing gates and about to reverse a lock in the face of boats waiting to come up, and another believing that boats coming down have priority over those going up. Stop for lunch above bridge 59 12:45 to 13:45. Afternoon, θ driving, on to the Fleur de Lys, mooring between bridges 41 and 40 at 18:10. Another lock on the Preston Bagot flight had a tight gate, which we had to reverse out of with some difficulty, and waggle the gate and try again. At the eve mooring there is an open steam launch, with pot boiler and 2-cylinder compound engine, with condenser, which was made by an associate of Richard Branson who had died in an accident. It now appears to be owned by two brothers. Eve eat at Fleur de Lys. We're a bit up on schedule. Boat appears to have a dodgy thermostat, as sometimes temp is rock steady at 80°C, and sometimes it's 40°C.

Sat 1999-09-11

Dull-bright day, but hot and close. Start 08:40, θ steering through the locks, up to the rest gap between locks 14 and 15, where lunch 11:45 to 12:45. The rest of the locks shared driving, until moor at the Blue Bell cider house at 16:10. Water 10 minutes between locks 23 and 22. Note that the lock numbering in Nicholson's is wrong between 19 and 25, it omits 24, in fact 20 is omitted as it is the one on the branch to the Grand Union. Much

quieter today with most hire boats on their turn-around, just saw a few Alvechurch boats towards afternoon, presumably the Fridays. Pub has its own jetty. Eve eat on boat, then to pub for a couple, then back to boat for last night of the Proms.

Sun 1999-09-12

Cooler day, though often bright. Potter down to the Drawbridge again, beyond bridge 8, 09:05 to 10:25, ☐. Lunch there. Then 0 for the rest of the day, 12:50 to 16:30, stopping by bridge 61 for Alvechurch, Crown Inn. Swing bridge 2 was again operated by children, though this time there was no explicit request for money. Missed mooring before bridge 61 as it was infested with anglers, and had to carry out an interesting reverse manoeuvre through the bridge hole to get back to it. Bloke with a rubber dinghy dropped his outboard in the bridge hole, which a passing boat crew got out using its boat hook and arms. My mega-magnet couldn't get any purchase on it. Eve eat on boat, then to Crown Inn for a couple of Youngs Specials. More staff than customers in this pub, including 19-year-old barmaid Sarah being chatted up by a 28-year-old customer. She was expecting to get a custom-made 4x4 from her father for her birthday.

Mon 1999-09-13

Another bright morning. Potter down to the boatyard 08:25 to 08:40. Moor alongside another boat, rather than have to reverse into the boat's real home. Unload and away by 09:10. Home via A-roads rather than M40, through Stratford, which took 35 minutes by car from boatyard to basin. Total boat distance by map mile marks was 62.5 miles, 106 locks and 8 bridges.

Four Counties Ring 2000

Fri 2000-05-12

Away 15:30. Sunny and warm. Stavanger Fjord, 21 m, water-cooled Lister, nicely fitted, very quiet. End at Wheelock at 19:10 before bridge 154. Eve to Cheshire Cheese by canal. Andersen boats.

Sat 2000-05-13

Very hot and sunny all day. Start 08:30, then water at Wheelock yard, about 15 minutes, so can't have been full when we started. Stop 12:00-13:30 at Rode Heath for the Broughton Arms, then on to wait for Harecastle tunnel 16:25-16:55. Moor after tunnel by bridge 130 at 17:40. Eve on boat, knackered, but enjoying the cool eve. Tunnel no longer works to a timetable, just batched as appropriate at each end. There are no visible remains of Thurlwood steel lock, not even a sign.

Sun 2000-05-14

Me steering while the others get up and eat, starting 07:25. Misty, but promising to be another hot one. Stop at Wedgwood factory 11:00 bridge 104, by which time hot. Restart 13:15, lunch on boat on the move. Onwards in the heat to stop at bridge 80, Weston upon Trent, for the Saracen's Head. Most of us have red bits. Passed at a few locks, but canal really quite clear, given the sunny weekend. We think we're about on schedule, with more than half the locks done and nearly a third of the distance.

Mon 2000-05-15

Another hot and sunny one, but a few clouds and a bit of a breeze made it a bit less oppressive, and some of the afternoon steering a bit interesting. Start 07:30, working a lock before breakfast. Lunch 12:45 to 14:30 at Staffs and Worcs bridge 92 at Moat Hotel. Rather expensive. Afternoon a long slog with most of the Staffs and Worcs locks, and speed limited by bends and later a crawler in front. Stop at bridge 71 Cross Green near Coven, and the Anchor late eve. The second pub today with no real beer, though both had hand pumps not being used. About two-thirds of the locks and nearly half of the miles at about half time. I suspect that most of us had forgotten how much work there is in this ring. Gailey Marine name seems to have gone, boats have only the Viking Afloat logo. Boats queuing for water at Great Haywood, so we got ours at a private tap provided by a farm shop past bridge 105; BWB key, but requested to use the shop. We bought some pop.

Tue 2000-05-16

Cloudier. Start 08:05, turn for home at Autherley jn 09:10, and stop near Shroppie bridge 25 for lunch on boat at 12:30. Restart 13:45. Water 10 minute at Norbury yard. Stop bridge 55 at 17:45, by which time chilly. Eve briefly to Wharf Tavern, a rather unwelcoming pub-restaurant. A little rain eve.

Wed 2000-05-17

Engine is water-cooled Lister 4-cylinder 36 bhp at 2600 n/min. Engine bay is sparkling clean and everything seems to be properly fitted and routed. The engine starts easily first time after a short pre-heat, runs smoothly and is very quiet; at the front you can't hear the engine at low speeds. Started off at 08:05. A little rain with the sun, and cool. Passed in most of the Tyrley locks. Lots of embankments, which I had remembered, and narrow, often steep-sided cuttings, which I had forgotten. Pause for 15 minutes by bridge 62 for water, while I nipped into the Netto in Market Drayton for bog rolls which we'd run out of. Lunch on boat after bridge 74 12:30 to 13:30. Afternoon through the Audlem flight, which was busy; we following down a couple returning their three-year-old boat to Nantwich for an engine overhaul, their boat had bow thrusters. Stop at Audlem wharf for the shop and a drink at the Shroppie Fly 16:00 to 17:00, then down the last three locks and moor at the bottom of the flight at 17:35. Eve back to the Shroppie Fly to eat, we had mostly curry, which was good. It was raining fairly steadily by then. Pub full of boaters, and a completely different atmosphere from last night, the barman even remembered our order between afternoon and evening.

Thu 2000-05-18

Rain overnight, and more this morning, including getting soaked walking the short distance to the pub at lunchtime. Afternoon better, with some sun. Windy all day. Start 08:10, stop at 11:10, cold and wet, opposite the Barbridge Inn just after bridge 100. For the last few miles we had been following hire boat Snowdrop, so slowly that I could barely steer in the wind, Snowdrop was a lot shorter than us. Rang the pub from the boat to check opening time so that we had to make only one trip in the rain. Lunch in pub. Restart at 13:15, onto the Middlewich arm at 13:20, back at Middlewich junction at 17:00, and moor at the boatyard at 17:30. Did my back in again at a ground paddle on the second lock on the branch. No force, just twisting again.

Fri 2000-05-19

The boat's loos have a silly flush: the water does not operate with the dump pedal, it has to be turned on with a separate valve, and if left on it fills the tank in no time. I woke at 00:00 this morning to hear the water pump going every 10 minutes or so, to find the valve in the forward loo open a crack, and the bowl nearly full. Rain overnight and this morning. Unloaded and away by 09:30.

Schwangau 2000

Sat 2000-09-02

Off to Schwangau. Taxi arr 09:00, from the company that Ingram uses. Jim talked all the way, mostly Ingram gossip. Peugeot 806. To Heathrow Terminal 2 in 1 hour. Pint at Wetherspoons before Lufthansa LH4955 to Munich, Airbus A320-200, full. Hire car from National Alamo is a Ford Ka (1339 km, W-IG-5122), a cute little black thing. Have to fold the rear seats to get the luggage in, and seats right back for leg room, but otherwise OK, and it has A/C but radio is VHF only. About 2 hours to get to Schwangau, a mixture of autobahn and other roads (A92-A99-A8-471-A96-17). Hotel Rübezahl is as expected, alpine, flowery. Can see Schloss Hohenschwangau from the balcony, and might, if lean out, see Neuschwanstein as well. Arrive at hotel 18:00, quick wash and change and to dinner, which is 18:00-20:00 for included half board. Huge and rich meal. Reserved table with our name on. On same table another couple from Edinburgh, the Meiklejohns, who have driven over; there's a GB N-reg Omega V6 in the car park. Short walk after dinner in the gathering dark, looking at the castles lit up against the mountains. Sort of one-sided, mountains on one side, but Schwangau seems to be flat, and flat away to the other side. θ drove today. Room nice, shower only, but all other facilities and hotel seems friendly. Briefly to bar after the walk; only us there. Room 15. Bright sunny day for the drive, rain later. Meiklejohns also found the hotel on the web, though they booked by phone and fax rather than e-mail. Hotel is at UTM 32T 0629532 5270328.

Sun 2000-09-03

Rain most of the day. Start with a drive around Forggensee, which is artificial, clockwise, with stops for photos at various points, then for a walk by the See, by the road just north of Schwangau at Brunnen. On from there back anti-clockwise, with more stops for photos of scenery and at a hydro-electric plant at the north end of the lake. Lunch in a small family cafe in Roßhaupten, mine an Asia chicken stir-fry with rice. A little sunshine during lunch. Then more exploring in the rain by car, and failed to stop in Füssen, as still wet. Back to hotel. Later it stopped, and ϕ for walk to far end of Schwangau and back. Found after this that I'd mislaid the car keys, so out for most of the way again looking for them till θ found them in the car door. Eve another excellent too-large dinner. Salad; leek soup with dumpling; guinea-hen; vanilla parfait with advocaat sauce and cake.

Mon 2000-09-04

Rain most of the day. First, to the Spar supermarket in Schwangau, for beer, water, fruit, cheese and two umbrellas. Petrol here as well. Put in the wrong stuff, 91 octane unleaded instead of 95 super (equivalent of our lowest grade), 21.55 L, approx 68p/L. Credit cards seem reasonably widely accepted for fuel. Then drive around in the car, around the hydro plant two lakes up near Urspring and several times through Bernbeuren to get to Auerberg (1055 m), a steep road up to a small mountain with a church, a cafe and a good view of clouds with the odd bright patch flitting over the landscape. Very alpine in style of houses and country, but smaller mountains here. Then to Füssen and a walk round, partly in rain. Parked in underground multi-layer park for 1DEM. θ bought a warm jacket in Woolworths and ϕ bought a map, 1:50000, but not government. Then back to hotel. Rain lessened a bit, then ϕ walk back to Füssen on paths, over the dam that feeds water into Forggensee, which was a busy route despite the rain, with locals shopping as well as tourists. Bought an analogue DCF-77 clock in Woolworth's for only 30DEM about £10 and walk back. Later θ and ϕ walk to lake from hotel and back via paths. With a light lunch and lots of walking, dinner was easier tonight. Even plastic bottles of mineral water have a deposit on them over here. More UK cars tonight: a Fiesta with Cymru stickers and a T-reg Merc. An American voice heard in the restaurant as well. The bar seems always to be deserted, though you can get served there, so a supermarket beer in the room after dinner and reading. It's raining again this eve. Cows clanging out to pasture from the farm next door at 08:00, clanging back at 17:30.

Tue 2000-09-05

Hotel is at 800 m. Only intermittent rain today, with very occasional sunshine. To the Schlosses. To see Neuschwanstein you have to at least pay for both. Queue for ticket, 26DEM each, then short wait for horse carriage up to Hohenschwangau, another 6DEM each. Wait here for our tour number to appear on the LEDs, then go and queue in the lane for our tour (140, 11:20). This is an English tour, also with some French people and Japanese as well as the usual run of Americans. Eventually shown around some of the rooms by a smartly-dressed guide, German with good English and idiomatic jokes. About 40 minute tour. Very small rooms, and a bit basic, but this one used mainly as a summer hunting residence. Then walk down from here and queue for a bus up to Neuschwanstein, 5DEM return. Very tight and windy road that the small buses just negotiate, rather faster than I would have gone. At the top, still a walk to the entrance, and to queue for our tour to be called (465, 13:25),

and queue again in the appropriate lane. This is a much more impressive place, though only one-third finished before Ludwig died or was murdered. Big rooms, very elaborately decorated with paintings, mosaics, carvings. The guide here a young thing in jeans (no complaint about that) but she thought she was to do a German language tour and one got the impression that her English was not as polished as the guide at Hohenschwangau. The walk back to the bus stop was steeply up after 130 steps, up and down, in the schloss itself. All in all about 5 hours from car-park to car-park, another 7DEM here, for about 1½ hours looking at the insides of the buildings. But a trip well worth it. Then drive to a scenic spot for lunch, then ø driving the Ka for the first time around villages to west of Forggensee. It's a 1.3 L, decently lively, but it's bigger than it seems when you get near a kerb. Meal in hotel a little less grand than before, I thought, though probably that was just my choice. Meiklejohns: his name, Ron I think; hers we don't know yet, as she does most of the talking, maybe Ginette.

Wed 2000-09-06

Sunshine at breakfast, and still sunny as we go into Austria and along by Plansee and the scenic route through the mountains to Linderhof. Stopped here to look at another of Ludwig's castles, this one more modest than Neuschwanstein, easier to get to, and finished. Again very ornate, though this one lived in for long periods. He was so eccentric that he had a device to send his food up on an elevating table so that the servants didn't have to see him. Guide here another young girl, quite good. Same programmed times, but much less waiting. Also saw the Venus grotto, an artificial cave constructed within a pit and covering building, build for Ludwig to imagine himself in one of Wagner's operas. Then on the rest of the circular tour, past Oberammergau. Stop for a while by the north end of Forggensee watching the weather, which by then was dull and sometimes wet. The sun lasted long enough for the spectacular scenery in Austria and the gilded fountains in the grounds of Linderhof, but no longer. Afternoon a walk most of the way to Füssen, then back to watch the cows come in, and eve to the candlelit dinner, much the same as other nights except the oil lamp became a candle, no choice on the menu, and 35DEM extra. This because the normal restaurant is closed on Wednesday. By late eve it's still raining.

Thu 2000-09-07

Lots of rain and high wind during the night. Dull this morning as well, and so all day except for one or two short bright intervals. Little rain though. First to see Lechfalls, on road out towards Austria, and then a drive in a loop partly through Austria via Pfronten. Walk on the shore of Weißensee, then ø dropped me to explore the full path from Füssen centre to hotel. Unfortunately, I had the hotel key, so ø waited in the car until I got there. Later a walk through Schwangau to post cards. As so dull, rest of afternoon in reading.

Fri 2000-09-08

Clear, sunny and hot all day. First to the Tegelbergbahn cable-car in Schwangau, but cars so crowded that we decided not to go up. On to Schongau, where spend a couple of hours looking around the old, walled town. Can't walk all round on the walls, but can round outside, and followed a trail recommended by the tourist info, around the town and walls. Then on to Rottenbuch and the amazingly ornate church, probably more breathtaking than the castles. Then a drive. Then back via the scenic route past Linderhof and through Austria and Plansee, stopping at several places to enjoy the scenery. Then on to Füssen, looked inside the ornate church there, and enjoyed some peace in the Baumgarten beyond. Then back to the hotel, a last ample dinner, and pack. Still clear and warm, which has brought out lots of flies, but then what to expect, living next to a cowshed. Bought another 1:50000 map, this one with UTM grid on WGS84 datum for use with GPS, agrees well with the Garmin. A good day, dispelling the gloom of the last few.

Sat 2000-09-09

Up at 07:00, and it's another clear day, with a hint of early mist around the mountains. Into breakfast as it starts at 08:00, and just cross with the Meiklejohns, who are staying another week. Bill paid, 1400DEM on top of the 300DEM deposit, and tip stuffed into the green piggy bank. ø drove the Ka back to Munich airport, in the reverse to the way out, in about 2 hours 20 minutes, in, by then, hot sunshine. Apart from being stuck behind a tanker at 75 km/h for about half of the 17, a good trip. Hire car just dropped off in the car park (at 2285 km, total 946 km). Estimate we used about 65 L, so 6.9 L/100km or 41 mi/UKgal. Then the problems started. Flights seemed to be getting later taking off, and sure enough ours was moved from gate to gate, and delayed in stages, until we finally got off about 90 minutes late, at 14:30. This got us to Heathrow at about 15:00 (local), and through quickly, and Jim the taxi driver was there, but then jams on the M25, and worse on the M1 from J11 to J12 where we came off to go via A5, the reports said the jams went up to J13. Home at about 17:30, when ø shot off to get the cats, just before the cattery closed at 18:00. Flight was LH4564, a Boeing 737, full. Flight delays were attributed to failure of German air traffic control radar. Taxi cost £50 each way.

London 2001

Sat 2001-05-12

Drive to Berkhamsted, arr 14:20. Boatyard very quiet, senior man in electric cart or on a crutch and a young boy doing the work. Boat is Growltiger, 15 m, BMC engined. Heating by gas, including hot water. Turned by owner and away at 14:45. Didn't follow us to first lock, as we appeared to know what we're doing. Then one of us fell into canal after the second lock, trying to jump on, rope not having been passed. Didn't go under and boat didn't crush. Very hot and sunny. Moor just before the swing-bridge at 16:30. To the Three Horseshoes before dinner. Eve on boat, with more ethanol and pizza. Lots of people out on the tow-path in summer clothes. Eve back to the Three Horseshoes for a few more.

Sun 2001-05-13

Bed made up in dining area has separate cushions that slide apart, awoke at one point lying on the wood. Other defects of this boat: only one loo, so will need pump-out, awkward on this route; hot water is from central heating only, so takes extra gas and wastes engine heat. Start 08:30. Morning mostly sunny and hot, mid-afternoon a thunderstorm with torrential rain, rest of afternoon and eve pleasantly mild without direct sun. Lunch 12:40-13:50 after bridge 162 for the King's Head, Hunton Bridge. Eat here. Didn't have second round as busy and service was slow. Stop for eve after bridge 177; to Coy Carp, which is what the Fisheries Inn has recently become. Eat on boat. Eve moor at 19:00. At Watford lock lots of gongoozlers; two small boys jumped into the canal from the bridge, just in front of the moving boat. Otherwise, so far a peaceful trip. Few other boats and I think we may have seen one other hire boat. One boat we passed coming out of London reported very poor business on tourist things, like the water buses. Water lock 68.

Mon 2001-05-14

Start 09:00, through the last 5 locks. Lunch at the Paddington Packet Boat 12:10-13:30. Afternoon moor briefly at Sainsbury's, between bridges 11 and 12 on the Paddington Arm, 17:15-18:10, then on to moor for the night right against the railings opposite the Grand Junction Arms, at bridge 9. We had tried the Pleasure Boat at bridge 11, but a bit rough, and not a nice area, so we decided to go on. Eve to the Grand Junction Arms, Youngs, better, though a juke box was too loud at times. Can do 4 mi/h by GPS in the broad, clear sections of the Paddington Arm. Compared with the approaches to Birmingham and Manchester, London seems not too bad. Sitting here tonight, we the only boat on the tow-path side, 4 or 5 boats on the off side by the pub, with their engines running to power their lights and TVs. Very few other moving boats, but at Bulls Bridge Junction a sudden flurry of boats getting in the way, one being moved by punting with a long boat pole about 100 metres along the canal past the junction. Dull all day, but not cold. Crossed the new north circular aqueduct, over stationary traffic; it has two separate 4.3 m channels with a large central island. Pleasure Boat pub sounded good in Nicholsons, but very much a locals' pub. Despite area being predominantly asian and black, the pub's clientele was nevertheless almost completely white, as was the eve pub. Water lock 89.

Tue 2001-05-15

Dull start, then hot and sunny. Short walk into Harlesden for a paper, then away, me driving while the others finished breakfast, at 08:30. The batteries not charging, but a quick call to the boatyard suggests the cure, rev the engine right up to force the charging circuit to switch. Water 15 minutes at Little Venice, then moor at Camden just beyond Cumberland basin at 10:55. Then we split up, some going shopping, others pottering around locally, reading. Water bus passengers in single figures, but still a few tourists walking along the tow-path here. Eve to a Chinese restaurant built over, or maybe floating on, the Cumberland basin, looking over the basin. Heron there the whole time, fishing from a jetty attached to a pontoon house opposite. Good meal, attentive service even to the extent of them making the Peking duck pancakes up for you, rolling with chopsticks.

Wed 2001-05-16

Rain during the night and the morning run. Start 09:00, roping / driving back to the Cumberland basin and turning there. Water 5 minutes at Little Venice, stop at Black Horse bridge 15 at 12:50. Into the Black Horse for lunch and

to warm up; Fullers. Afternoon starting 14:10. Back into the land of proper herons, that fly off in front of you and are hard to photograph, in London they just sit on the bank and stare at you, too easy. Pump-out 25 minutes at Willowtree Marina, £12. Moor outside and turn the boat in the width of the canal because they wouldn't do it on the water side. They said here to Berkhamsted was 3½ days, though we'd clearly just done Berkhamsted to London in 2½. On to moor at bridge 190 at 17:40. Afternoon alternate sunshine and heavy showers. Eve to the Paddington Packet Boat for a couple. Pub eve mostly infested with football on TV and in the quiet area next to us a young pair having an emotional conversation.

Thu 2001-05-17

A day of rain, wind and cold. For a walk along the Slough arm, not being rained on, but by the start at 09:00 it's grey and raining steadily. Water, quick, at Cowley lock. Cowley Peachey junction is just a scruffy spot in the middle of rubbish tips and building sites. Rain didn't stop once before stop for lunch 12:30-13:30 north of Copper Mill lock, on board. After yesterday's rain, the canal is very high and the sections shared with the river are running very fast. This made the cross-flows at river stream entry points interesting, especially below Copper Mill lock. The boat needed lots of wellie to make progress upstream. Lots of bits of tow-path are under water today and the tail of Batchworth lock was under water. Also at Batchworth, had to wait 5 minutes for scaffolders to complete some sort of bridge over the lock with steps up each side. About mid-afternoon it dried up and the wind dropped, deciding us to go on to Hunton Bridge, rather than stop in Cassiobury park; then the rain came on again with a vengeance, but we still got to Hunton Bridge, at 18:50. Eve on boat. Boat has used oil, topped up today. Sitting here at 21:00, boat opposite has just started a noisy little generator, or rather not a boat, but a shack on a pontoon. There are lots of these around here.

Fri 2001-05-18

Dull to start, later some sunshine, but not hot. Start 09:00, stopping 13:00 for the Three Horseshoes at Winkwell, where eat. Restart 15:00, to moor below lock 55 in Berkhamsted 16:30. Notable today how unfriendly many private boats crews are, and how incompetent. Eve to Crown in Berkhamsted, a Wetherspoons, to eat.

Sat 2001-05-19

Up at 07:00, breakfast and packing, then off at 08:30 through the last two locks to the boatyard at 09:00, just on time. Quickly off, no formalities. Why were the private boaters on this trip so unfriendly, we didn't actually meet any other hirers? Because that's the way the canals are getting, or because we're in the south, worse, in suburbia? This boat could have been a problem with only one loo, but in practice everyone was OK with the cabins all being open at night.

Belgian Canals 2001

Sat 2001-09-01

To Nieuwpoort, Belgium. Leave 07:20 and get to the Tunnel by about 10:00 and on booked 11:09 train. Focus, 8 driving all the way. Food shopping at Cité Europe Carrefour hypermarket, then arrived at canal base 15:15 (local). Sunshine all the way. Boatyard is at UTM 31U 0483990 5665226. It's a fairly small affair with the office in a container module and the stores in another. Husband and wife team, Andries and Heidi, and about 12 boats. Crews going out are USA, German and Swiss plus us. Ours, number 213, is the smallest boat, single steering position inside at front, sliding top makes the front cabin open. 9 m long by 3.4 m wide, 2.25 m high and 0.9 m draught. Handover is extended, lots of detail on lock times, bridge times, bridge closures, mooring and so on plus the usual boat introduction. One bicycle taken on. Have to pay on arrival for bike, fuel deposit and insurance or deposit, we chose insurance. Pottered along just 2 km today, as getting late by the time we started and bridge keeper going home. Ate on boat, then walked along to the Rattevallebrug, a drawbridge, for a Duvel each, then 8 a strong Kasteel beer and 8 a Verboden Vrucht, and stagger back to the boat. Five Connoisseur boats moored before the bridge tonight, one crewed by Americans, one by Germans and the others undetermined. Complimentary box of chocolates from the boatyard. Boat had 12V cigarette adaptor and 220V inverter (shaving adapter) for mobile phone, they took our number. Mobile was almost essential, needed to be able to phone lock and bridge keepers as they covered several places. Channel Tunnel Rail Link work well advanced alongside the M20. Moving ramp escalators in Cité Europe were designed to grip the trollies on the slope and release them on the levels, by belt texture somehow. Pretty much everything dual-priced so far, except the boatyard. Carrefour had both on the shelves, did the bill in francs and the equivalent total in euros. Engine is a BMC, transverse in the back, with hydraulic drive which goes along under the engine; accessed through a cover in the cabin floor.

Sun 2001-09-02

Dull and some rain. Moving all day, 8 steering mostly. Progress is dominated by the lock and bridge keepers. Nominally we start at 10:00 on Sunday, but it was 10:45 before the first bridge was opened for us. One keeper covers several bridges and uses a car between them. The German crew in front had phoned at 10:00 and he said he was coming, so we didn't expect the 45-minute wait. Travelled in convoy, losing one or two later on choice of mooring. After Oudenburg we went from the Kanaal Plassendale-Nieuwpoort onto the Kanaal Gent-Oostende, which was wider and we can go flat out: 1600 rev/min or 10 km/h, which even then couldn't keep up with the Germans. Towards Bruges the bridges were controlled from a central office with cameras. We got through these in convoy, but had to wait for every one, five or six boats trying to hold station on engine and rudder, which was easier in a short plastic boat. We tried for mooring in a little arm, but it was closed for repair, got separated from the convoy and phoned for bridges, these were done quickly. Moored 16:45 in the yacht club, 375BEF for one night, including water and toilets plus 20BEF for a shower. Here we moored next to another Connoisseur boat, with Americans on board. Evening to walk around the old part of Bruges, very pretty, very touristy, lots of languages, horse-drawn tours. The horses had leather slides attached to their arses to collect the shit so that the roads didn't get messed. Later ate at a restaurant right in the middle of this, 8 having an enormous pile of mussels. Much happier now, having seen the way things go, and getting better at driving the boat with a wheel right at the bow and unable to see the stern at all. Boatyard personnel are Andries Zwaenepoel and Heidi Greven.

Mon 2001-09-03

Rain started by at least 04:00 and continued till lunchtime, then intermittently sunny. Decided not to explore Bruges further in the rain, so topped up water and away again 09:15. Phoned the control centre and all was well through the first few bridges, but nothing happened at the lock. Tried phoning several times, didn't realise at first that the lock had its own phone number as well as being in touch with control. About 30 minutes wait here, during which time two other boats caught up. Out of Bruges easily then, with bridges ready as we approached and onto open water with just one bridge in the way. Through the junction lock, open both ways, by ourselves, then moored at Oudenburg on a pontoon. Discovered that the smell of diesel was due to a weeping union on the fuel feed from the tank, accessed through a hatch behind the cabin steps. Tightened it a bit with the Leatherman pliers and for now it seems to be dry. Will the smell go away? Moored here 12:30-15:00 for lunch. Cycled back to the Plassendale lock and took lots of photos. Walked into Oudenburg for more supplies and beer. Then on a bit to moor for Leffinge just after the drawbridge at 16:20. The bridge keeper this time was a woman, following us in a car, and we said we stop here and move again about 10:00 tomorrow. Passed a couple of boats today, which is busy by comparison with the way down. Nothing passed us within an hour and a half after mooring. Biked into

Leffinge to have a look around. Evening eat at the Gasthaus by the bridge, excellent steaks, but we were the only customers there, they put the lights on for us. We seem to be finding the expensive places to eat, tonight 1895BEF, about £32.

Tue 2001-09-04

Rain and thunder overnight, rain and wind in the morning, wind and some sunshine in the afternoon. Started at 09:50, having agreed 10:00 with the bridge keeper yesterday and the first bridges into Nieuwpoort opened just right for us. Passed the boatyard and moored up by the tidal lock 11:00-12:30, waiting for a suitable tide, from 3 hours before high tide to 3 hours after, tide today is at 14:58. Locks have manual paddles and automatic gates. Gates both ways at both ends. Here six waterways come together and join the end of the harbour, though it looked as if only two of these were used for navigation and several of them had fixed sluices instead of locks. Lock was worked by a man and a woman. Down from the Plassendale canal into the harbour and down again the other side into the Veurne canal. Route over the basin was clear and the lock on the far side was ready for us. Lots of photos of this feature and the Albert memorial during the wait. Then on and moored for lunch at Wulpen on a small fixed mooring. Stayed there 13:40-14:40. Then on again to Veurne, arriving 15:30. Came in on the 24-hour jetty but the lock keeper suggested we go through the lock, which was open, and moor in the harbour; bow-on to a short projecting pontoon, so it was difficult to get the stern rope tight against the very strong wind. Short walk into town, busy, with a very pretty market square. Three big cruisers came into the harbour briefly, mooring against the walls, before heading off again towards France. All three crews appeared to be English, or English-speaking. The canals here have only recently lost their commercial traffic and they are making serious efforts to replace this with pleasure uses, improving ports, improving cycle paths and walking trails, and opening locks and bridges, to pleasure craft only, on Sundays and holidays. The downside meanwhile was having to almost file a flight plan with the lock and bridge keepers, so you felt you can't just stop when you wanted to.

Wed 2001-09-05

The wind kept up through most of the night, though getting weaker and this morning it was quiet, with a partly clear sky. We left a little earlier than expected, as the lock keeper had another boat coming from the Lo Kanaal and didn't want to work the swing-bridge twice, so away 09:10, water in the lock 10 minutes, then onto the Lo. The lock was closed this time, as the level in the Lo and Nieuwpoort pound had been lowered to assist the works at the tidal lock today. Lock keeper came out on his motorbike to work the next two bridges, then one more bridge, then there was a clear bit of 6.5 km. Lo was narrow, rural with overgrown banks; apart from the height of the banks it could be have been in England. The banks prevented views from most of the canals. The boat we passed at the first bridge was a German crew. The lock at Fintele was ready, 0.7 m rise to the river Ijzer. Sloping-sided lock with wooden jetty to moor against. Helped work the lock gates here, a big capstan at the bottom and the more usual around here geared crank on a pedestal replacing the capstan at the top. Like France, no balance beams, just a rack from the gate driven by a pinion on a vertical shaft. Onto the river at 11:45 for a short way before turning onto the Ieper canal. This was wide, especially near Ieper, but it had a shallow bit near the first bridge. Two locks, the only ones with a decent change of level so far, about 6.7 m between them. Worked by one keeper, who biked between them (about 2 km). Helped work these two and gave the lock keeper a can of English beer. Arrived at Ieper (Ypres) to moor at the yacht club moorings at 15:30. No-one appeared to take any money. Walked into Ypres, which was destroyed in the first world war and rebuilt to look the same, and to the WW1 *In Flanders Fields* museum, and for a beer. Warm day, shorts and T-shirt, and the boat's canopy back for a while. Here we were 32 km crow-fly distance from the boatyard, with we hope two easy days to go.

Thu 2001-09-06

Rain overnight and the rear window leaked onto the foot of the bed. Dull grey morning. Disposed of rubbish in an ordinary litter bin, having so far seen no sign of big bins for boat refuse, even when signposted. The German crew were here with us. The Connoisseur boats seemed to be the majority of moving boats on this little ring. Started 09:45, running behind the German boat, through the two locks together, a different lock keeper today and I worked only three gates. Together still through the last drawbridge at the river junction and on to moor at Diksmuide at 13:45. There were public moorings here, but they were full, so we were on a pay mooring. Lots of boats here, more than we'd seen all week. Warm sunshine with showers most of the day. Walked into Diksmuide for supplies from Lidl and to look at the town, which is pretty, but nothing compared to Ieper or Veurne. Bored by an English emigre with a motor home, over here to live cheaply and avoid income tax. So now just a short run along the river and the big guillotine lock to go. Eventually the man came for his 350BEF, even though the

facilities such as showers, advertised as included, are not available "*fermé, Septembre*". Evening to an excellent Chinese, with lobster soup; frog's legs; prawns, sweet-and-sour chicken, spicy pork and rice; tea.

Fri 2001-09-07

A quiet, dry night for a change, but a dull, grey morning. Walked into town and took some photos of the rather hideous war memorial tower. Dumped rubbish, as our only benefit from the mooring fee. Got off 11:00 with another same-size Connoisseur boat with two Swiss, plus the German boat. For some reason we lost the Germans straight away, but the Swiss followed us. River got bigger and bendier, until it opened out into a huge, wide area, with windsurfing and sailing boats. We got round this following the line of buoys, but they still shot in front of us and then fell off. At the end of the wide bit we turned across following the line of wooden markers into the guillotine lock. The river went on to the tidal basin where we were on Tuesday, but this was not navigable, even though there was still a lock. The guillotine lock cut across into the Nieuwpoort-Plassendale Kanaal, back to base, and went up less than a metre. The woman on the Swiss boat fell in while trying to get a line on in the lock and was got out using ropes and the lock ladder by her husband and the two lock keepers. Most boats back at the base, but we moored roughly where we moored on Saturday evening, at 14:00. ϕ cycled into Nieuwpoort for more photos of the locks and stuff. Spoke to a British crew in the Gravensluis, who'd been to Poland and were on their way home to Dover after four months out. The sea was too rough for them to cross from Zeebrugge, and still so from here, so they were going further south on the canals before trying again. Walk with θ after this. Clean up boat. Moor boat again after a sodding great barge went past and washed out our front spike and nearly the back one as well, Clive Bowman's knot saved the spike. A little rain evening and a bit breezy, but weather-wise a good day to finish. Evening to the Rattevallebrug restaurant, which was crowded and excellent, with the waiter working continuously and people waiting for tables. Steak, huge, thick, rare, superb, with salad, and an excellent cream, sorbet and fruit sweet with good beers. Much more activity on this part of the river, dredging was in progress, and we passed several large spoil barges with push tugs and a big trip boat.

Sat 2001-09-08

A windy night again, lots of bits of leaf and twig on the boat. Turned and headed back to the boatyard 08:00-08:20. Most others spent the night in the basin, but I think we may still have been the first to get away, at 09:00. Used 55 litres of diesel which cost us 1925BEF (that was 31 L/100km or 9.0 mi/UKgal). No other formalities, though they did look around inside the boat. The Germans yesterday decided to potter. θ drove back to the tunnel, straight on to the first train at 10:22 and home ϕ driving by 13:00 (BST), despite a 4 mile queue on the M25. A good trip, in retrospect, though daunting at first with all the details of telephoning lock and bridge keepers, tide tables and closed locks and bridges. Excellent food and drink. θ did nearly all the boat driving, with me jumping off. The Germans seemed impressed that two could work the boat easily.

Brittany canals 2002

Fri 2002-04-26

Rain nearly all day. In two cars via tunnel to Coquelles. Found the Kyriad hotel easily. It's fairly basic as intended but has a reasonable restaurant and some sort of bar.

Sat 2002-04-27

Reasonable breakfast, nearly all English in hotel, including several groups on a classic car rally, there's an old Porsche, an MGB V8 and an Austin Healey in the car park. Total tolls €20.80 per car including €5 for the Pont de Normandie. Away about 08:50. Sunny a bit to start, then dull, windy and sometimes wet. Lunch a snack at a service area just before Caen. Lots of new motorway including the Pont de Normandie. Stop at a Carrefour outside Avranches for food, and arrive at boatyard 16:15. Hand over about €300 on the plastic for security waiver €75, bike €27, guide €20, car parking €25 twice and hours deposit €140. Not fuel, this boat charges by the hour on the engine meter. Condor number 1, a big boat 12.8 m by 3.6 m with inside and on-top steering. Instruction including accompanying to the first lock; our request as so windy and unsure of procedure. Boat is not much narrower than the locks. Both locks worked by women with remote control box slung from shoulder. Down the two locks, then find somewhere to moor. It's dull and blowing a gale, so cold too. Start 17:15 and moor at Port de Roche at 19:00. Turn and moor upstream neatly, but we didn't get the stern rope off in time so spun round in the wind and ended up pointing downstream. Short walk, then eat on boat. Boat has engine right inboard, accessed through a hatch in the rear cabin, diesel hot-air heating, engine hot water.

Sun 2002-04-28

Rain overnight and in the morning, but little during the day; some sunshine, and quite pleasant when there was no wind, which was not often. Start 09:45. Looking for water all day; lots of moorings marked as having water in the guide but we found none. Put a bit in with buckets and trying to hold the hose onto a drinking water tap at the eve moor. Rear loo flush water has stopped working. Upper station battery warning light came on, but not the lower station one and voltage showed over 14V. Into Redon, round to the harbour, no moorings and the usual lock is closed for maintenance, so back round to the old lock which is being used pro tem. Fortunately it's open through lunch. Moor just beyond the lock, "no mooring" signs but *l'éclusier* said OK, at 13:00. Short walk in the town, then eat at a crêperie just by the mooring. On again 14:40 through the canal section of the Nantes à Brest onto the River Oust part, one lock then moor at Peillac at 17:00. Eat on boat.

Mon 2002-04-29

Mostly warm and sunny apart from the wind, which did drop now and again, especially after lunch. All locks are manned and automated so far, except for the old one at Redon, and most worked by remote control, which around here is a small, pocketable thing. Few lock cuts, mostly locks are just on short by-passes to weirs. The keepers either see you coming or respond to a blast of the horn; there are generally no mooring places at locks. Despite boatyard's assertion, you couldn't really moor anywhere except on landing stages or pontoons. Lunch stop at St-Laurent, 12:00-14:00. An 800 m walk into the village; lunch at a bar-tabac-shop-restaurant; fixed menu at €9 including wine; bread; sausage and gherkin; cous-cous with egg; stuffed something with chips; tart or commercial desert; cheese; coffee. Also bought some beer. Moor at very scenic spot at Montertelot, just above the lock, looking back at the church, the lock and the weir. Walk back to the château de Crévy. By then sunny and still, with the air still cool. Moor at 17:00. Eve eat on boat. Water 40 minutes at le Gueslin included in the travel time; the tank was clearly nowhere near full when we started. The aft bog is now not flushing at all, but can use the shower head instead. It all goes over the side anyway.

Tue 2002-04-30

Dull, windy and later wet. Start 09:10. Through most of the locks with a French crew on another Crown Blue Line boat, handing out religious tracts and unwanted advice. The locks along this stretch are all manual and assisted with the gates at some. Moor at Josselin, breasted up to a trip boat, as most of the moorings are taken by unlet

hire boats. Walk in town; lunch at le Hôtel de France, the €9 fixed menu, and stock up provisions and water. After a day's use and three hair-washings water took less than 5 minutes. Taps under green plastic covers set into the moorings. Shops not open till 15:00, and then wet and windy, so decided to stay here for the night. Enormous weir right by the lock. About 20:00, after eat on boat, the sun came out for a bit and it stopped raining. A few photos then.

Wed 2002-05-01

Bank holiday in France. Dawn clear and bright, but cold. Walk in town; some photos in morning light. Off, but there's no steering. A lock ready and we can't get into it. Steerer trying to control the boat right next to a bloody great weir and no steering. Using the engine, got it back into the side, apologised to the lock keeper, who had come out in her nightdress and a coat, and rang the boatyard. That's about 09:10. The man comes to repair it at 10:20, and it took him until 12:30. The hydraulic pump behind the lower steering had a failed seal, and his spare had to be adapted to fit. Meanwhile the sun's gone and time for the locks is disappearing. Lunch in town, galettes and omelettes with cider, then off at last 14:00, and the sun's back for a while. Most of these locks have unguarded weirs really amazingly close to the locks. At Guillac for example maybe only 3 or 4 m from the lock entrance. As this is bank holiday, most locks are being worked by two or more people, presumably the family at home for the day. Downstream max-throttle is about 10.3 km/h; we were doing 8 or 9 upstream, so quite a slow river. Finish at Malestroit, after lock and before bridge, at 17:45. Eat on boat, then a walk around the town; Malestroit has really pretty narrow streets with ancient buildings.

Thu 2002-05-02

A little rain, but mostly warm and sunny, mostly after lunch. Into the town for bread, croissants and supermarket supplies, then to the market, with lots of fresh sea-food, crabs and prawns still moving. Start 09:30. Water 11:20-11:40 at la Gueslin, then on to moor at Peillac again, 12:25-13:25, lunch on board. Warm enough for a beer on the top deck before lunch. Then afternoon through the last Oust lock and onto the Aff, a completely different river. It starts in a wide channel with path buoyed, then turns into a narrow snake through a marsh, if it weren't for the 6 km/h speed limit sign and the red and green marker posts we'd not have believed this the way. It soon leaves the marsh and turns into a pretty little rural river for 9 km to la Gacilly. Arrive 15:40 and moor back-on to a rack of pontoons, mostly empty. Passed one boat leaving as we arrived, and another Crown Blue boat has arrived since us. The navigable Aff ends here in a weir. A complete contrast to the wide Oust and wider Vilaine. Walk in the town, which is pretty, touristy, with lots of craft shops. Beer in the sun at a bar terrace. Eve to a Vietnamese restaurant in town. Chinese-like; meal served in a shallow bowl with a thick stem, on a plate, with rice in a separate bowl. Wooden chopsticks of the sort you have to split apart. Possibly the busiest place in the whole town, all of us plus three couples.

Fri 2002-05-03

A clear, cold night and a cloudless morning. Usual walk to town for bread and croissants, then away 08:45. Getting quite warm at times. Through Redon, sharing the lock with a broken-down hire boat; a tug was waiting below the lock to take it away. Onto the Vilaine, and stop for lunch at Painfaut, sharing a pontoon with another Crown Blue boat, with a French crew. There seem to be quite a lot of natives on this river, unlike the Canal de Bourgogne and the Belgian canals. Lunch 12:20-13:15 on board. Then towards home on the wide Vilaine, mostly dry, some sunshine, but one torrential downpour when I was left outside steering and the others all hid inside. Moor for eve at Guipry port, just below the lock, by then warm and sunny. Moor at 16:45. Eve to a pizza restaurant. As last night, this seems the busiest restaurant in this smallish town, including families with young children.

Sat 2002-05-04

Another clear morning, not so cold; mist rising over the weir and swirling over the river. To the local baker for our last fresh croissants. Final packing and cleaning. *L'éclusier* obviously knows what to expect, because just before 08:30 the bottom gates are left open, and we potter in just after and go up, and into the boatyard. Pay another €8 to make €148 total for the hours charge. Then the long drive back, getting home about 19:20. The 446 MHz walkie-talkies were very useful between the cars on the journey.

Switzerland 2002

Sat 2002-08-31

Taxi came at 10:45, to Luton airport. easyJet worked OK, except about 30 minutes late and no indication of this, just waiting to be called. Boeing 737-300, nearly full. Raining by Zurich. Met there by Karine and Boris (Javelle) in VW Golf; Laurance there too, but didn't find us. Back to Karine and Boris's flat, which is a few kilometres outside Zurich, and large and elegant. Laurance met us there briefly. Natter and a beer, then Laurance back with Jean-Luc and Mylise. Both have bought houses, to be signed imminently. Karine's looks very large, a recently restored farmhouse a few kilometres further out. Then out on a long trek to a restaurant Lips that they'd been recommended, the directions were not good, but the restaurant was. Mixture of French, English and Swiss German. Conversation mostly in English, except that Jean-Luc and of course Mylise spoke mostly in French. Parking underneath the flat. Karine has a Peugeot 206 Cabrio. Laurance had attempted to re-join Ingram when the job at Baxter looked a bit rocky a little while ago, but balked at working in Brussels. Jean-Luc has almost no German, and stays at home to look after the child. No moment to oneself, not sure about this, glad it's not all week. Karine and Boris are *en suite*, so we get our own bathroom. They liked the Stuart crystal glasses we brought, and Mylise her sheepdog. Drawing game in French. Mylise trying to operate my LED keyring torch at the restaurant, unable to press hard enough on the button. Bag searched at Luton, had to switch on the Neo to prove it worked. Switzerland opening up a bit to foreigners, it's easier for foreigners to work there, and live there if they have jobs. Group of neighbours having a barbecue under a covered area at the back of the garden, in the rain; and singing practice from the flat below. Very tired, all jumped on my suggestion of retiring.

Sun 2002-09-01

Very quiet, apart from the sound of the rain, until 08:15, when a church bell started. And it rained all day, which was a pity because they'd planned a nice day out. Leisurely and extensive breakfast, then hoping that the rain would cease. Laurance and Mylise came leaving Jean-Luc at home, but when the programme was finally given up on, and Boris decided to stay in and watch the football and Grand Prix, Jean-Luc came over, and just Karine, Laurance and us went out, in Jean-Luc's Audi A6. To a cheese factory with demonstration gallery and shop, where we waited an age to see the final curdling of the milk in a 6000 L vat and it being pumped into round moulds. Then to Appenzell, an old Swiss town with some very pretty decorated buildings, not raining hard, but dull and misty in the hills so that the distant mountains were not visible. Karine had to buy eggs and salad as Boris rang to say he'd used them for lunch. The eggs were OK, but the salad, or lettuce, was begged from a restaurant at a steep price. Lunch quite late at a café-confiserie; we paid, last night Boris, Karine, Laurance and Jean-Luc paid for us. Then home for dinner at the flat. Their flat is at 32T 0481921 5247422, Im Feldacher 22, Fehraltorf. Eve dinner was soufflé and natter until a little after 21:00.

Mon 2002-09-02

Up at 06:30, breakfast at 07:00, Boris and Karine left for work at 07:30, and Laurance picked us up at 08:00 as she was going to a doctor appointment in Zurich at 09:30; she dropped us just where the lake stops and the city centre begins. Dull and dry and mild all day. Walk along right bank of river, then cross to *Hauptbahnhof* for maps and info. Walk back through the old part of the town, then take a round trip on the water bus on the lake for 90 minutes, got up to 8 km away, up to 23 km/h, about 10 stops). Walk along Bahnhofstrasse which has all the posh shops, and lunch at a Pizza Hut, with beer. The museum was closed on Monday, so walk in the park to where the rivers meet. Bridges are very low, and a weir just below the city, but trip boats operate nevertheless with very low headroom, like a narrowboat, and very powerful engines. Some time watching the extensive tram system, and the way the facing points change only about a second in front of the first wheels; the trailing seem to snap across and latch driven by the leading wheels. Back into the old part, now that the shops are open. θ bought a bright green umbrella. Then onto the 16:03 S3 service from Hauptbahnhof to Fehraltorf; double-deck trains at 30 minute intervals. At the Hauptbahnhof, seemed to be about one train per 5 minutes at each platform; there were four S-bahn platforms, two for each way. Tunnel under the city, surface elsewhere. Then walk back to the house. Biscuits and scotch given to Laurance and Jean-Luc. Took another 200SF out of a cash dispenser, hoping for some smaller notes, but it gave me one 200SF note (2.2SF=£1). Eve out to a traditional Swiss restaurant, back nearer Zurich where we had four fondues, of various recipes, all sharing all. Bread and small boiled potatoes for dipping, plus one of them had salami as well. Boris insisted on a recommendation for a red wine which Karine prefers though the waitress thought that was wrong, but did bring us a light red. We paid, 150SF. High above Zurich, with a view over the city at night. Traffic lights in Zurich seem to be exclusively LED. Swiss lights have a red-amber phase.

Tue 2002-09-03

Another gloomy morning. Karine and Boris off to work around 07:45, leaving us to find our own way later and put the key in the letterbox. The euro is quite visible here, a vending machine at the airport took either, and the restaurant bills last night and lunchtime Sunday both had the total in euro equivalent, presumably accepting payment in euro. You don't buy a house outright in Switzerland, as houses are expensive and interest rates are low, maybe 2.5%; you buy a fraction, say 33%, and a bank buys the rest, and you pay interest indefinitely. Some change I didn't understand happens at retirement age. Of course, income tax is very low here, making houses a little more affordable, although mortgage interest relief did that in Britain until recently. The postal address covers only the block of apartments; the flats are not numbered, only the name determines which post box the mail goes into. Walk to station, and straight onto an S3 back to Zurich Hauptbahnhof. These are all double-deck trains, in sets with a loco at one end of one unit or central between two units. Very smooth, clean and quiet. 5.40SF each to Flughafen. Have to change to an S16 and three more stops to Flughafen. Surprised that there is a lot of graffiti in Zurich, not only on the railway, but even on old painted houses in the city. Collect hire car OK at airport, larger than booked, a black metallic VW Golf estate, VD 515971 (VD for Vaud, the canton for Lausanne). Four electric windows, air-con. θ driving to Sursee, via A1 and A2, easy except for a bit of excitement getting out of the airport and onto the autobahn. Hotel Bellevue expect us, and we're installed in room 21, with a balcony and a view over the lake to the mountains, which we can't see. It's been raining since about mid-journey and the cloud is low. Lunch in the hotel, watch the rain, then it lessened so out for a walk to the lakeside. Later it actually stopped raining, the mountains became just visible, and even a few moments of brightness, if not actually sunshine. And later, a little actual sunshine. Eve eating in the restaurant, watching the sun set behind the mountains, and darkness coming. We eat in a large conservatory, with automatic sun blinds above and automatic ventilators that buzz open and closed as they think fit. Excellent meal and attentive service, but £100 between us, with wine before and during and coffee and brandy afterwards. ϕ had *Hummerrahmsuppe*, which I had no idea what it was (actually lobster and cream soup), crevettes and vegetables in curry sauce with rice, and fruit salad with cream and Kirsch. A couple of beers in the bar beforehand, and a short walk afterwards. A good day.

Wed 2002-09-04

Some blue bits at dawn and the mountains visible, but mostly overcast. ϕ for a walk into Sursee, Altstadt and a little along the Wanderweg that seems to encircle the lake, which would be about 30-40 km around. First out to circumnavigate the lake, θ driving. This car has an awful gearbox, especially on selecting second from third. Then ϕ practising on the same circuit up to the Spar just over half-way round, where buy some lunch, water and beer. Then θ driving again, back onto the autobahn, then into the mountains, climbing along the valley to Engelberg, mountains all around. Park by the station, walk around the town, then up the *gondalbahn* to Trubsee, at about 1800 m. Excellent views, and a walk slightly down to the lake. Ice cream at the top. This is a 2-stage, single-rope system, with shuffling drive through the middle station and around at the ends. It stopped for a few minutes on the way down. After the descent, some shopping in Engelberg and ϕ drive back to Sempach, and walk in the old town there. Then back to the hotel. Some sunshine today, and not cold even up the mountain, but we decided against taking the further stages up to 3000 m, which was in cloud, mostly. Bought a German-English dictionary at last, having left mine at home. Half of the people say *merci* for thank you here, even German speakers. Victorinox belt-clip bought at the top of the mountain. By late afternoon, dull, a little rain, but still warm. Can't see the mountains from the hotel. Eve to Hotel Hirschen in Sursee, fish menu. Not exactly busy. They had a player piano with violin attachment, three violins each with one string automated, but not playing. Back to the bar afterwards. Car started at just over 2000 km, it's a 1.6.

Thu 2002-09-05

Clear skies, Morning walk, searching out Sursee railway station, and thereby seeing much of the less pretty part of Sursee. It's a long way from the hotel, and trains to Luzern are only every hour. Still sunny after breakfast, so off into the mountains again, doing two beautiful passes. θ drove to start of first pass, then ϕ all day. First via minor roads to Willisau, Wolhuse, Schupfheim, then over Glauben-buelen pass, 1611 m. Not so high, but all single-track roads with passing places, and at one point I had to reverse for a bus. Then across to Susten pass, much higher at 2224 m but 2-track road, so easier to drive. Up is pretty much second gear for 10-15 km, and down the same. Stopped several times to take in the view, take photos, and for refreshment. Sunny, in fact sunny all day, shorts at last, though a bit chilly in the breeze at 2 km up. Spectacular views. At one parking spot, could look up and see the road twice further up the sheer-looking face of the mountain, with tunnels and bridges hanging on the rock. Lots of tight hairpins of course, and lots of motorcycles taking them rather fast. Often little or no protection on the drop side of the road, just a white line and then the edge; at other times a few posts or

stones that wouldn't stop you if you lost control. Then back via the autobahn, through a 9 km tunnel at Seelisberg. Stop again at Sempach and walk up and down alongside "our" lake, still warm sunshine, though getting a little hazy.

Fri 2002-09-06

Woken several times in the night by mozzies buzzing in my ear, and awake this morning with several big bites. Walk by lake before breakfast, not wet but mostly dull. Last excellent breakfast, and set off via the little roads, 0 driving. This took less time than expected, and we didn't see any nice places to stop, so we ended up killing an hour or so at a motorway services and at the airport; it was getting hot and sunny by then. Flight on time, and picked up by Tony in his red Skoda; he works for a Luton firm, possibly passed off twice from Jim's firm that we booked with. £30.

Sat 2002-09-07

To CMK, for bite creams. Cats reclaimed, £81.

River Avon and Stratford Canal 2003

Sat 2003-05-03

Arrive at Bidford Boats 14:30, loaded and away at 15:15. Dull and light rain while cruising. Incident with a gondola at first lock, I stopped, losing steering control; they guessed the wrong side; no damage done. Lock cuts not clearly signposted, and at one point I started up a private branch by mistake, reversing out. Eve moor at Binton Bridges at a private marina, £2.20. Despite pay-for, it's a grotty mooring alongside the bank and we have to use our spikes. Eve eat on boat, and later to Four Alls pub for a couple. Boat is Swan, BMC powered, diesel powered radiator heating, hot water from central heating and engine. Quite nicely fitted.

Sun 2003-05-04

Walk into Welford village, for washing-up stuff that we forgot. Off at 08:45, after watering at the mooring. Bright start, soon warm and sunny with a fair breeze. Through the last Avon locks with Malcolm, white-bearded, giving his crew constant instructions, which they conspired together not to carry out. At one lock, we'd just come up to the landing stage but had not tied up when the lock bottom paddles were opened, which sent our bows swinging across the channel. Moor on the river opposite the theatre at 11:30, dodging the canoes, dinghies and skiffs. To eat in Stratford, the Old Thatch Inn, which did the dirty by not doing the advertised sandwiches, "Sunday, can't get the bread", persuading us to eat more than we intended. Then through the river lock onto the canal. The basin now has pontoons in it, so lots of space, at least 13 spare spaces today. On up the locks out of Stratford, always with boats in front and nothing coming the other way. The sticking lock of 1999 seems to have been fixed. Moor north of bridge 59. Eat on boat, then to Masons Arms in Wilmcote, the Mary Arden Inn being full. Today Good views looking back over Stratford as ascend the flight.

Mon 2003-05-05

Bank holiday. Sunshine to start, but a very strong wind. Start 09:00, the wind whipping up the water in the Bearley aqueduct, the boat leaning away and hugging the side of the trough. Then a succession of locks, painfully slow, not only because the locks themselves are slow, but a crew two ahead didn't know what to do. They had no map showing locks or other canal essentials. When a top gate seemed hard to open, they tried closing the top paddles to see if that helped. When another crew offered to close up after them they didn't suss that they could just get onto the boat and go. They rode on even when the next lock was in sight 200 metres away. Anyway, we got to the Fleur de Lys at Lowsonford at 14:15, mooring on a dubious pitch just right-side of a sign indicating long-term moorings and not quite blocking the water point, below lock 41. The Fleur now appears to be a Wayfarer, with its beams painted pink, and a typical chain eatery menu, a wait of nearly an hour for mediocre food, and not cheap. No longer the huge home-made pies. Onwards at 16:00, after water, still sunshine, still windy, shorts on to prove it, but long-sleeve top. Stop above lock 25 at 17:45, eat and eve on boat. Walk eve up to Kingswood Junction.

Tue 2003-05-06

Again, contrary to our expectations from the forecast, sunny and warm most of the day. We decided to have a tough day, so we went up the Lapworth flight, turned just above it and had lunch there at the Wharf Tavern, by bridge 25 in Hockley Heath. Turned in the old arm, which was OK for our 15 m, but possibly not for a full-length. 09:15-13:15. Following an old couple up the flight, but going well until we found a low pound near the top, where he went aground in mid-stream just outside the lock; got off by his wife running another lock-full from above. Pub was excellent, a real pub, excellent food served properly. Back the same way to exactly the same mooring as last night, 14:15-18:15. This time we had a crew of first-timers in front, from Alvechurch, confronting their first locks, but they learned quickly and didn't hold us up, especially as I was setting a lock in front of them when possible. Eat on boat eve. 44 locks today. Water 10 minutes by lock 19 on the way back. Lunch pub had guest beer Arundel's Hard Willie, which no-one had yet asked for by name.

Wed 2003-05-07

An excellent day. Mostly in sunshine, but not excessively hot; arms and legs visible in afternoon. Start 09:15. Held up at lock 26 where the bottom gate wouldn't open fully. Unable to clear ourselves. BW men mending the tow-path called out the lock-keeper, who pulled out a lump of rough concrete. By this time, one waiting behind us and one to come up. 30 minutes wait here. Water 5 minutes at bridge 41. Stop at 12:45 above Preston Bagot bottom lock. Lunch at the Crabmill, a bit flash in the food area, but OK for lunchtime when lighter menu available. Nicely converted mill; good service. On again 14:00. Intending to have a long day today, to get to Stratford before lunch tomorrow to meet visitors coming by bus. They were originally coming on Friday morning, but we decided we didn't want to rush the river bit Friday afternoon. This time the Wilmcote flight was deserted so we could set ahead, got down in 65 minutes, mooring at the bottom at 17:45. So the same cruising time today as Monday, but today included the 11-lock flight and the 30 minutes wait for a lock to be fixed. That's the delay for crawling behind a slow-coach. Eve eat on boat, and sitting out in the evening sunshine. Two runs of about 3 mi each today, possibly the longest clear runs on this trip, certainly if excluding the river.

Thu 2003-05-08

Walk back up the flight taking photos. Away 09:00. Water and a pump-out at Stratford Court base before lock 52, lots of rinses through and a "poo-stick" to remove a stubborn paper pyramid in the bottom. £10. Stop on a pontoon in Stratford basin at 11:00. Visitors waiting for us. Not so many gongoozlers here before lunch on a Thursday. Walk in Stratford, then lunch at the Civic Hall, cheap. Then afternoon at liberty. Walk out to Anonymous Lock taking photos. From the path can see several navigation signs not visible from the river, as trees have grown up in front of them. Sitting by the river lock, re-meet several of the crews we've seen during the week on the canal. A little sunshine today. Eve to Taming of the Shrew at the Shakespeare Theatre, along with at least three other boat crews.

Fri 2003-05-09

Another warm sunny day. Walk upstream to the Old Bathing Place. Start 09:00, through the basin lock and out onto the Avon. Signage is better going downstream. The first three locks to ourselves, then we caught up with two narrow boats, and we did the next three locks with a taciturn Brummie on a nobby boat. Stopped below Billington lock at 13:00 for lunch and boat cleaning. Walk into Bidford from here, but thought to be too far to walk for tonight, so go on to the public mooring at Bidford, opposite the boatyard, 14:45-15:00. Mooring here, as normal on this river, to sliding rings on 2-metre-high poles, to allow for floods. Later we have to juggle the moorings to fit three narrow boats and a cruiser into the limited space. Eve to local Indian, which was very good. Liqueurs on the house. Clouded over towards eve, and maybe a little dampness, framing an excellent week.

Sat 2003-05-10

Untie from the public mooring, chug a few metres downstream and turn to make a bow-first upstream mooring against Sandpiper, which was already alongside at the boatyard, at about 08:45. Our deposit returned in cash. Overall a good canal trip. Enough physical work. Food and drink were OK to good. DAB didn't work well anywhere, and not at all at some moorings.

Kennet and Avon Canal 2003

Fri 2003-08-29

To Wessex Narrowboats at Hilperton ST857599. They eventually accepted us as experienced and we didn't have to watch the video. Handover from John. Alvechurch takeover was at Easter. A little sun and wind, not cold. Start at 14:45 and end 17:30 at Dundas aqueduct. Shared the one lock with another Wessex boat, a 21 m, return tomorrow, who'd been up and down Devizes flight; they did all the work. The one swing bridge was open. Eve walk down the Somerset Coal canal a little way, but the restaurant at the end appeared to be shut, possibly open lunchtime only, and the Viaduct Inn was scruffy and casual about service, so one pint there and back to eat on the boat. Boat is Wessex Galahad, 12 m, noisy high-revving engine, little storage space, water heating from engine only, single gas fire for space heating, transverse galley, no shaver point but two 12V points. In the Limpley Stoke valley here. Boat has cruiser stern but a short cratch at the front with tarpaulin cover. Have brought the folding bike but not used yet. Dundas aqueduct is being renovated.

Sat 2003-08-30

Clear morning with mist rising from the canal and filling the river valley. Bike to Claverton pumping station and beyond, and a little way back to Hop Pole in Limpley Stoke. Start 09:00, θ driving all day, ϕ on bike for the swing bridge and to the Claverton mooring, where we stayed 09:45-10:10. Water 5 minutes at bridge 183, then stop for lunch 11:30-12:30 before bridge 186. ϕ bike down to the locks. Then on, working the locks ourselves and onto the river, mooring at the Leisure Centre at 14:30. Pay £4.90 for 24 hours here. Just got into a space alongside. Hot and sunny day. Into the town and around the Roman baths exhibition, which was extensive and well-presented. Eve into town again. Huntsman pub, a good Indian, pub again. By that time the boats are two-deep at the moorings, so we couldn't get out without moving the outboard one.

Sun 2003-08-31

Sunshine, to hot morning, cooling towards afternoon. Start 08:45. The boats moored alongside us appear to be all male and together, and maybe the source of much of the drunken noise last night. They got off with noisy power turns; we just let the bow rope go and let the current swing us, then potted off on idle. Out along this big river. Shared first lock with a local who appeared to know everything and nothing. Second and third locks shared with a day-boat. There was a pub at the third lock, Saltford, but despite the assertion of the guide, nowhere to moor, so we turn below the lock and come back up again, meeting a wide hire boat from Bristol, who were making heavy weather of mooring on the landing stage. Our hopes of resting on the landing stage were dashed by the arrival of two nobby boats below and a narrowboat above. So a beer while underway. Moor near Bath marina on BW 24-hour mooring pontoon, and to Appletons chain eatery for lunch, quick and OK, though if we'd done the carvery there would have been a long queue. Moor here 13:30-14:30. Off again through the last river lock and back onto the canal, up the 6 locks and moor just above the top lock at 17:30. The deep lock has plastic-sleeved hawsers stretched down the sides, so can tie a loop around these front and rear, which is OK except for the bits below the sleeve which tend to catch the ropes. Also lock feeds at four points in the sides and turbulence makes water level over-top the front deck drain holes, so front deck was awash. ϕ steered all day except θ for the last four locks. Eve walk into Bath for oriental buffet and afterwards again to the Huntsman pub for a couple. List of boat's shortfalls: no central heating, no shaver point, throttle won't stay at speeds more than fast idle and less than too fast, the tiller shakes violently, small cratch bangs your head, few shelves and ledges, little cupboard space, no fluorescent lights, ignition has failed in the cooker, no mooring fenders, no gauges for the engine, have to rev like mad to start charging. θ saw her first perched kingfisher and I my first ever. Passed another Wessex boat at the Bath top lock; son and parents, their first time, son probably been before, he giving them instruction by shouting. They'd broken down this morning, failed oil filter, had taken two visits to fix and 4 hours lost. Boat's engine is 3-cylinder Beta Marine. Avon so slow that could make progress in idle in the centre of the stream against the flow.

Mon 2003-09-01

Warm and sunny morning, overcast and warm aft. Bike back through Bath and 3 miles along the Bristol-Bath cycle path, which runs along the river to the first lock, then 500 metres over road, partly in a counterflow cycle lane and with a bike-priority road crossing, then an old railway to Bristol. The railway part excellent, good surface and wide; the river part OK but narrower with restrictions, and it starts from a busy road in Bath. Start 09:10, θ steering all day. Water 5 minutes at bridge 183. Overtake a very slow-moving boat after the Dundas aqueduct; stop at bridge 175 at 11:30. Used spikes for the first time, on day 4. Re-start 13:35, and stop 14:15-14:45 at

Avoncliffe aqueduct for a look round and an ice-cream. Final stop at bridge 172 for Bradford-on-Avon, at 15:20. Walk via the Tithe Barn into Bradford, another old stone town, a mini Bath. Later out to eat at the Canal Tavern, by the lock. Bradford to Bath section is lined with sad-looking live-aboards, most not showing registration number, and presumably battling the new rules on permanent mooring and continuous cruising, which require 15 lock-miles per 42 days movement, and not the same lock-miles repeated. BW do seem able to keep the visitor moorings clear of hobs.

Tue 2003-09-02

Again sunny and hot morn, clouding over late afternoon but still warm. This bit is not so pretty, and has fewer scruffy live-aboards. Start 08:50, ϕ steering, back past the boatyard and into new territory to the east. After Semington top lock, what looks like a new aqueduct being constructed over a new road. Lots of swing bridges, then more locks. Stop after two for an excellent lunch at the Barge Inn at Seend, 12:30-14:20. Then θ steering and ϕ biking partly for the remaining three locks and two swing bridges, to stop at bridge 149, Sells Green, at 15:10. ϕ bike from here up to lock 49, near the top of the Devizes locks (nearly 72 metres up). Then relax on boat, eat on boat, and to the Three Magpies for a couple, sitting in the garden, not so much from choice as for the lack of seats inside, but nevertheless pleasant and still warm. Sitting here back at the boat listening to the Proms, the boat's radio is one thing that works. θ off to bed after two pints of the local cloudy real cider. Today a bit of a potter, as we are between the wilder parts of the Avon and the Caen Hill flight, but no problem, it's pretty, there are pubs, and it's warm.

Wed 2003-09-03

Warm and close, little sunshine. Start 08:50 after water, turn and moor below lock 22, the start of the Caen Hill flight, at 09:10. Walk up the flight and into Devizes, where visit a coffee shop, stock up on milk and fizz, and visit the canal museum. Like Bradford-on-Avon and unlike Bath, Devizes seems to have a number of decent-looking pubs. Then walk back down to the Black Horse between locks 48 and 49, and have lunch watching the few boats using the flight, including a very well turned-out Dutch barge. There are quite a few wide-beamed craft around here. Complete the walk back down, and onto the boat, 14:00-15:20, stopping between locks 19 and 18 again, at Seend, for the Barge Inn. ϕ steered in the morning and biked the whole way this afternoon working bridges and locks. Eve an excellent 3-course dinner at the Barge Inn, and back to the boat for the end of tonight's Prom. Probably walked 6-7 miles today, about twice what we did in the boat.

Thu 2003-09-04

Hot sunny and almost cloudless day, above 30°C. ϕ bike first to bridge 161 and back, then set off at 09:15, θ on boat and ϕ on bike all day, working locks and swing bridges. Stop before bridge 170 at 12:45, a little altercation here with a woman on Waltzing Matilda who moored just in front of us and was tying up without moving up to make room. Lunch at the Beehive at bridge 170, to which we were able to direct a pair of cyclists, who had come right past it. Pub had two beers in barrels on the bar, and did good, basic and low-priced food, eaten in the garden. Start again 13:30, just turn at the marina entrance and back to the same mooring at 14:00. Then laze in the sunshine, read, listen to the test match, clean boat. Eve eat on boat with fizz bought yesterday, and listen to Prom.

Fri 2003-09-05

Dull overcast morning, and cold to start. Start 08:00 and potter to boatyard at 08:45, reverse into bay, unload and away by 09:10. Cats collected, £90; Bike is grey with dust from the tow-path, which was gravel throughout; good to cycle on but all the bikes get dirty very quickly; washed and chain re-greased. The low gear was excellent for tow-path use. Total bike about 35 miles. Used spikes for mooring only once in the whole week.

Llangollen and Montgomery 2004

Sat 2004-05-01

Thunder and very heavy rain. Off in one van, the rain petering out around the M6 junction, then a fine, warm day. To Maestermyn Marine, SJ354325, about 15:30. Easy handover, most emphasis on the route, navigation hazards and pubs. Start 16:30. Easy run, except one aggressive individual charging through a bridge hole hit us, even though we'd stopped. Stop eve 19:00 at bridge 21. Eat on boat, then to Bridge Inn. Boat is Countess, 18.3 m, has Honda 3-cylinder engine, lots of 240 V with two hair-driers and a microwave, 12 V lighting and fridge.

Sun 2004-05-02

Bog door has no lock; we have to have a convention that if the door's shut there's someone in there. Start 09:00. Lots of boats around and confusion at bridge holes. Arrive Llangollen at 13:20, mooring before the water point and services. There's a new off-line visitor moorings being constructed at the winding hole, boatyard said for 50 boats, due to open next month. Lunch at the Bridge End Hotel, then a walk around the town and then up to Horseshoe Falls. Girls found this a bit far and came back on the steam railway. Eve eat on boat. Warm all day, with some sunshine. Drinks at the Chainbridge Hotel on the way back from the falls. The bridge itself is decayed, unsafe and out of use.

Mon 2004-05-03

Bank holiday. Rain overnight and a little this morning, then sunny but not very warm. Start 08:15, early to get out through the narrow bit without obstruction. Reverse-in turn, to use the flow of the canal to assist turn. In the narrowest bits, about one boat width, the flow is up to 0.2 m/s. Lunch at the Bridge Inn again 12:00-13:15, with excellent but big and expensive sizzling peppered steak and Cajun chicken. After lunch back to boatyard for a free pump-out and check of gas, then on a little bit to between bridges 2 and 1, mooring at 16:30 in the open for a walk down the first four locks of the Montgomery. By the time we'd got back, another boat had come and moored right next to us. Eat on boat and lazy eve doing crosswords and reading. Llangollen very pretty but over-stocked with tourist shops.

Tue 2004-05-04

Lots of rain overnight. tow-path west of bridge 3 is barely walkable and east of the junction is closed for 1.5 miles. Potter to the first lock of the Montgomery at 09:30, when it opens (only 09:30-10:30 or 14:30-15:30). Helpful lock-keeper helps work the first staircase lock, then there's the next two and the new 20 cm lock just round the corner. Very quiet, passed one boat moving and a few moored. Engine changing speed by itself towards the end of the morning. Stop at Queens Head at 11:30, and to the pub for lunch. Then walk on past the three locks up to about bridge 77. One boat using the locks as we passed. Back on boat, turn and off at 15:00. Police helicopter and policeman on tow-path re-capturing an old man who had wandered out of somewhere. Arrive below lock 4 at 16:30. Stories of the conflict between interests on the canal. BW selling water to Cheshire not wanting to divert much down the Montgomery, setting maximum 2500 boats per year, maybe 5000; ecologists trying to establish certain habitats and discouraging boats; restoration interests promoting through boating. Mere physical restoration is comparatively easy.

Wed 2004-05-05

A day of almost continuous rain, respite only during the locks and for a couple of 15 minute periods in the afternoon Start 09:30 when the Frankton locks are ready for us. The sky darkened as if for a shower, but then it started to rain for 5 hours solid. Stop 15 minutes at Ellesmere for water then moor in the arm at 11:15. Lunch at the Black Lion, which does a wrinkly special lunch at £3.50 and was packed with them; lunch was good though and cheap even for us at £4.95 each. After lunch in the rain to look at the Mere, and find that the information centre was shut for lunch. On at 13:30 failing to find good mooring at bridge 43 for the pub, so on to about half-way to bridge 42 for dinner on boat. Moor at 17:00. Getting a bit disenchanted with this canal. Too many boats, hence not the same friendly spirit. Today we had to stop at nearly every bridge to wait for an oncoming boat.

Thu 2004-05-06

Start 09:15, to Whitchurch basin and turn there 10:30. Walk up to Grindley Brook 3-staircase and a coffee in the shop there watching a boat go down. Then walk into Whitchurch. Nicely-made path into town, and a pretty main street. Lunch at the Horse and Jockey, behind the church. Off again on the return leg at 14:00; shortly it started to rain again. Stop just after bridge 43 at an off-side mooring, at 15:45. Dry off again. Eve to Waggoners in village for a few drinks. It said outside "Food 12-2" but it was doing evening food. If we'd guessed we wouldn't have eaten on boat.

Fri 2004-05-07

Sunshine all day, though not too hot. Start 08:45. Pause 11:30-12:00 between bridges 56 and 57 for photos of Blake Mere, then on to moor in Ellesmere basin at 12:45. Back to the same pub for lunch, despite surveying the rest of the field. Afternoon 14:00-15:45, to stop at the 48-hour moorings just into the junction with the Montgomery. Nicholsons 4 (1997) has loads of errors around here: shows tow-path wrong side between bridges 3 and 6, bridge 1 on Llangollen branch it still calls bridge 70, and it doesn't show winding hole above Grindley Brook staircase.

Sat 2004-05-08

Potter back to the boatyard and off by 09:15.

Edinburgh by Canal 2004

Sat 2004-09-11

Set off about 07:30, θ driving first to Stafford, then ϕ to Tebay, then θ the rest. M6 was closed J35-J36 by an accident, so we tried J32-J36 cut-off, which took ages, so with no lunch stop and only pee and petrol at Stafford and Hamilton, we got to the Falkirk wheel (NS853802) at about 14:45. There was then a considerable period of faffing. There appear to be Black Prince, Capercaillie and Alvechurch boats here, all run from the same office. The boats are on a long linear pontoon in the eastern arm of the Forth and Clyde canal, and to get to this it's a several hundred metre hike from the disabled spaces at the wheel visitor centre. Access to the boatyard office is also through the pay point for wheel visitors. You have to find a trolley to get your stuff down to the boat in a reasonable time. Just the boss Hamish and his wife seem to be doing the run-throughs, she first on the inside and then him on the outside. We didn't get away until 17:00. BW staff open the swing bridge and get the basin lock ready, and work the lock. It's very windy, so the boatyard staff Colin, with us, and Hamish drove us from here. Last trip boat has gone so we get two boats up in the 18:00 wheel operation. It fits the 3.8 m trip boat and one narrow boat, but the locks are 3.8 m only. Wheel is fascinating, but enjoyment mixed with a lot of shouting and engine revving trying to get off the jetty and into the gondola with the cross-wind. It was supposed to be 40 mi/h at the upper level. Operation of the lift very smooth and quite quick, about 5-10 minutes for the actual rotation, and seals appear not to leak at all. It makes a half revolution every 30 minutes, with some time taken up loading and unloading and making and breaking the seals. The double end dams rotate up from the bottom and between them the seal expands hydraulically from fixed to moving; the space between the dams is evacuated by pump; the sump is dry. It's made by Butterley. The rating plate says that the maximum difference in levels in the gondolas is 75 mm; think this is done by careful control of levels in the basins above and below, but presumably could also adjust by pumping out before rotation. After the wheel is a short tunnel then a 2-staircase, also worked by BW. Moor on the pontoon above this at 18:45. Boat is Little Weaver, 14.3 m, Alvechurch, Isuzu diesel, quite quiet and smooth; diesel space heating and auxiliary hot water, main hot water from engine; has fancy vacuum and macerating bog with push-button flush, but this means can't minimise water transfer into holding tank, it says it uses 2 L per flush into the 340 L holding tank. Lots of storage space and good firm high seating in cabin. 240V all over with microwave and toaster, 12V car point for charging. Unlike England, we're told that it's OK to moor either side. All of the canal here is new. Originally the Union canal descended through 11 locks to join the Forth and Clyde near its lock 16, but this was built over. The whole of the new locks, wheel, basin, tunnel, a mile or so of channel, a couple of bridges and an aqueduct over a road are all brand new.

Sun 2004-09-12

The wind's still up, doors banging and life belt rattling on roof. Walk back to wheel, a long way round as the tow-path is gated through the tunnel. Photos of wheel in sunshine, with sun low behind me. Start 08:30, ϕ steering in alternate rain and watery sunshine, always with a chilly wind. Pass one other boat, a day-hire. Stop for lunch east of bridge 43 for Linlithgow at 12:00, lunch in the Four Marys, which was good, and the staff was appropriately all female. Lots of good beers, including London Pride. Walk around the outside of the palace, a ruin. Re-start 14:15, θ steering in the same conditions. Both other boats that came this way with us also stopped at Linlithgow. Stop at Broxburn, before bridge 26, at 17:00. Moorings here with water and electricity near reasonable houses, though we had a plastic sign and stones dropped on us from bridge 27.

Mon 2004-09-13

If it hadn't been blowing a gale it'd have been a glorious day, sunny and bright, but cold. Start 08:00, ϕ steering and continue at constant pace to Edinburgh at 12:00. Have to moor in the basin west of the Leamington lift bridge, as beyond this there is much building work and Edinburgh Quay is unavailable for boats. Walk into Edinburgh centre, lunch at the Rose and Crown pub in Rose Street, then walk around castle and Princes Street gardens. Back to the boat for a rest, then out again eve. By then, 5 boats in the basin, all hire craft. Eat at the Mussel Inn, where again it was fully booked at 18:30 but we just got one of the two tall tables in the bar area. Excellent. Went in by number 10 bus for 80p each. After meal, quick pint in the Hogshead, then back to the boat by taxi. Approach to Edinburgh is excellent by canal, though we were warned not to stop in Wester Hailles area; Canal here was culverted under new estate roads and completely rebuilt, very well done with nice bridges and lots of greenery among the high-rise flats, but CCTV everywhere. Much of the rest of the way by canal is still rural in appearance.

Tue 2004-09-14

Still sunny and no wind at all. Eventually managed to buy a loaf, after Scotmid (Co-op) had none and the Night and Day shop was closed. Start 09:15, θ steering, turn in basin, then stop to take all the weed off the propellor. Lunch at Ratho at the Bridge Inn. Food was OK, but service was rather odd, chose the bar but still seemed like a restaurant, shown to a table and so on. Table next then occupied by a three-generation party with very marked accents and pedantically fussing over ordering very little. Stop 12:00-13:15. Afternoon ϕ steering, stopped by the Almond aqueduct 13:45-14:30 for a look around. Nice spot, intended to spend the night here, but another boat there had been warned that there'd been trouble there recently with a car dumped in the canal and the fences vandalised, so we went on, mooring in the open at around bridge 22-23 at 15:00. Eat on boat, read. Can't get in close to edge, so sitting quietly about 1 metre out, needing plank to get ashore.

Wed 2004-09-15

Sunny all day, and only a light breeze most of the time. Start θ steering 08:45, water at Broxburn for 10 minutes, then stop at offside visitor mooring before bridge 31 at 10:15. Walk from here, then up to Tally-Ho Hotel at bridge 32 for lunch. Basic sausage, chips, hash browns, egg, beans, tomato but lots of it, quick, and only £4.45. Much better deal than yesterday's pretentious place. Then on, ϕ steering, at 13:15, pottering to Linlithgow at 15:45. Bit of a walk here, then laze again. Eve for a drink back to the Four Marys.

Thu 2004-09-16

Overcast but dry in the morning, for a walk around the loch, then Tesco. Lunch at the Star and Garter Hotel, then off at 13:15, sharing the steering as it got windier and then damp and then very wet. Stopped on the pontoon above the wheel locks at 16:45, by which time it was back to blowing a gale and continuous heavy rain. Booked the wheel for tomorrow 10:00, but they came out anyway in a van to check we weren't expecting to go down tonight. Falkirk tunnel is mostly bare rock inside and quite high, very interesting. It also has electric uplighters showing the rock formations and lighting the way; there is a tow-path through. It has LED traffic lights working with sensors, show red / green alternate on approach, changing to solid green at entry end and red at the other. Eat on boat, covering the sound of the weather with cheap rock CD set bought at Tesco this morning. Fast run today, wanting to get out of the rain.

Fri 2004-09-17

Rain and wind dropped overnight, sunshine for early walk. Went down the wheel early, starting 09:00 and going down at 09:30, the only boat on the wheel. Moored for the visitor centre 10:00-10:45, entrance free but not much to see there except to watch it going round from the comfort of a seat through a huge sloping glass roof. Then on again, ϕ first, then θ , to lock 16 of the Forth and Clyde, 1 mile down, turn here and moor on pontoon at 11:15. Lunch at the Union Inn, followed by a walk down the locks. Lock 11 appears to have been re-sited to get the canal under a road, with a new bridge; the original chamber still there with gates removed. Then potter back 14:45-15:00 to moor on the hire-boat pontoon at the wheel, which is actually on the offside of the Forth and Clyde, east of the swing footbridge, and watch the other boats coming in one by one. About 8 hire boats here. Sunny most of the day, but better out of the wind. Eve on boat. We suspect that Capercaillie Cruisers is Hamish's own company with two or three boats; the other boats from Alvechurch and Black Prince are recent arrivals, and are booked by their own companies, but operated by Hamish, presumably on an agency basis. All the on-board stuff was properly branded Alvechurch, even the free playing cards and kitchen stuff pack. He has exclusive use of part of the pontoon from 10:00 Friday to 18:00 Saturday, outside of which it's public. All service, fuel, pump-out, water is at one end, so he has to do a lot of reversing boats about to bring them up for service. Missing largely from this canal are "no mooring" signs, but is that Scotland or the paucity of boats using the canal so far, mostly hire boats, a few private boats mostly here and at Linlithgow and Ratho, no long strings of scruffy live-aboards. Most of the visitor moorings had electricity and water in multiple, and it wasn't clear which were moorings for water only and which overnight; in Ratho there was one berth labelled "24h" and one "overnight".

Sat 2004-09-18

Lots of rain through the night, but it spared us while we loaded up; didn't wait for a trolley, carried it all up to the car. They appreciate the awkwardness of the site as it is, and would like an office down nearer the boats; BW would like them to move to a new marina somewhere else, but they're not sure about that; they are beholden to BW, and suspect that BW doesn't realise that it gets some benefit from the hire base. At least one of their hirers has gone as far as possible in all directions. Away about 08:30, driving θ , ϕ , θ , ϕ , a few slow bits, fast around the M6 toll, got home about 15:00.

Montgomery Canal on foot 2005

Sun 2005-05-01

To Oswestry, the Wynnstay Hotel, right in the middle of the town, with adequate car park. Unload, then out to Frankton Junc and walk to aqueduct and back. Sunshine and warm. About four boats going down in the afternoon session. Still the same Colin the lock-keeper. Spent some time sitting by the Perry aqueduct, very peaceful, birds twittering, insects buzzing, the very occasional boat, engine full on, crawling along; can't they see?

Mon 2005-05-02

Bank holiday. Sunshine and showers, warm; shorts all day. Leave car in public car park at Queens Head at 09:00, then walk along past end of navigation at Maesbury then along dry bit as far as Crickheath Wharf. Some of the dry bit looking like a canal, but in other places big trees growing from the bed. Very few people about. Redwith bridge 83 in the dry section rebuilt and waiting for water; guide says navigation expected to there by 2006 but no sign of it. Lunch on the way back at the Navigation Inn at Maesbury. This a restaurant, but calls itself a bistro at lunchtime, which means like a pub but with excellent home-made food; run by two blokes. Rained on only on the way back from here to Queens Head.

Tue 2005-05-03

Morning mostly sunshine, afternoon sun and showers. To Llanymynech and park in public car park by the Dolphin Inn. Section just east of here de-watered and tow-path shut for work on restoring a wharf. Walk along the other way as far as bridge 96 site, taking in the two restored locks. Section is in water, but not open for navigation, though there was one boat tied up in the town. Now in Wales. Tow-path soggy, so back via the roads. Follow the diversion past the de-watered section to the east up to a disused and deckless railway bridge. This is past the end of the section in water, east from here, about 500 metres east of bridge 92, the bed is dry up to bridge 82 where we saw it yesterday. Over the canal bed where a pipe culvert keeps the bed-level footpath crossing dry and into the heritage area, looking into lime kilns and at a huge chimney. This got us back to bridge 92 and lunch in the Dolphin, we the only customers 12:00-13:00. Afternoon on to bridge 104, which had a small area for parking, and then walk south past restored and active locks to Bank lock just after bridge 109. This is the section that has been restored to navigation and it looks the part, except for some stretches where the surface is completely weed-covered, even with plants growing on the surface. The rain started on the way back. Did a quick dash to bridge 103 site, the limit of navigation: a culvert under the A483 with a winding hole. Later drove up to look at this spot, and also to site of bridge 102, an even gloomier culverting under the same A483,

Wed 2005-05-04

Started dull, but later some sunshine; cooler; no rain. To bridge 115 Buttington Wharf, where there is a small, muddy car park. Walk through Welshpool to Belan Lower lock at bridge 121. At bridges 117 and 120 the canal has been diverted through modern minimalist concrete box tunnels to bypass lowered original crossings. Bridge 117 has no tow-path, and the route to walk is not clear at first sight over the road junction. Welshpool quite well done, little dock with jetties, but no boats. Reverse walk back, diverting onto roads in places to avoid a rather muddy tow-path. Back in car to Welshpool and lunch at the Royal Oak Hotel, another Best Western like the Wynnstay, excellent ploughmans and sandwiches and not expensive. Walk to Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway but only runs weekends and bank holidays. Then to Powis Castle but that's closed also, can just drive through grounds and photo the outside. So further on in car to find the southern limit of the disconnected navigable section at Refail bridge 129, which is lowered. Winding hole here cut into the garden of a house. Also stops to look at Berriew aqueduct and Long Bridge 128. Back by a zig-zag route, including some of the hillside single-track roads above Belan and many of the bridges we walked under yesterday.

Thu 2005-05-05

Election day. Dull and sunny by turns, rained but not on us. To Abermule and walk to Brynderwyn lock and bridge 146. Bridge 147 has a wall between tow-path and canal, and is next to a similarly-painted but much bigger bridge

over the Severn with letters proudly saying it is the second iron bridge in the county of Montgomery, from 1852, but visible only to a few fishermen on the river, and then hard to see for the trees. Then to explore the southern end, starting at Becahn Brook aqueduct. Bridge 151 is a fixed swing bridge by lots of new housing just starting to invade this rural area. Walk south from here to find limit of water at bridge 153 and derelict lock next to it, tree-grown and fenced off, with a rotting keeper's cottage. Then dry bed to bridge 154 and another lock, also derelict, but not so tree-grown. Bed is smooth kept grass. From here the line is traceable but lost in parts alongside a foot path. Bridge 155 stands, what's left of it, in a fenced-off area. South of here just looked from the car. Lunch at Abermule Hotel, soup home-made leek and potato, and sandwiches, good, we the only customers up to 13:00 at least. Afternoon to bridge 112 and go south to bridge 115 and north to bridge 111 and Pool Quay lock, well-kept as they all seem to be on the navigable section. Total walked so far 52.5 km, on a 56 km canal, so leaving out the derelict end and with out-and-back we must have walked half of it.

Fri 2005-05-06

To Chirk Bank, and walk over aqueduct and through tunnel. Cutting a bit muddy, so back over tunnel via road into Chirk, then back on canal the other way to bridge 18. Moving boats make this canal different, plus paved and ringed mooring places near the pubs. Much cooler today, though still some sun. Frustrated in our intention of lunching at the Bridge Inn by its not opening till 18:00 in the week, so drive into Llangollen. Lunch then inevitably at the Bridge End Inn. Then a little walk up to the new marina and down to bridge 44, this span being the range of the new mooring charge: free for 4 hours before 16:00, else £5 per day. This includes water and electricity at every mooring, linear and marina.

Sat 2005-05-07

Home.

Dieulivol 2005

Sat 2005-09-03

To La Barthe, cottage at N44°0.35' E0°6.73', near Dieulivol in southern France. Up at 03:15 BST and away at 04:00, Focus, to Birmingham airport. Long term car park 2, B3 and straight onto bus to Terminal 1. Flybe, British European cheapie, BAe146 to Bergerac. Cold at Birmingham, hot at Bergerac. Bags just pushed down a line of rollers in a temporary shed, then just two customs men at the door. Then a long queue in the sun for Europcar, in a portable shed; but three of them working and decently quickly so it wasn't too long. It's a silver Renault Mégan estate 1.5 diesel, 8322VR24. θ drove us at first, via a Le Clerk supermarket, then to locate Monségur and M Dumazeau's butcher's shop, which is closed for lunch at this time. Then back to Duras for lunch in a lay-by, looking out from a height over the countryside. Then back to Monségur. Arrived at 16:00 as arranged, but there is a problem, the cottage is not ready. Back an hour later, after sitting in the shade in a little park, and he pilots us out to the village. The setting is idyllic, rural, near a cowshed but no houses, on a long track down from the road. M Dumazeau has us wait outside for 2 minutes while he prepares the first sight with lights on and music playing. It's huge. Vast kitchen, sun porch with breakfast table, sitting area with open fireplace and stone sink, utility room with washing machine, downstairs bog and storage area with two bikes. Sun area outside to the side. Upstairs two bedrooms, bathroom and bog, with mezzanine looking down over the kitchen. Upper rooms have mostly roof lights. All this for just two of us. Bottle of wine for free as well, for the confusion on times. Stable building nearby has the electricity supply with the RCD to fiddle if lights fail. €150 cash deposit paid. Phone works well even inside, with the half-metre-thick walls. Eve eat in and relax with a few beers, watching the lizards darting around the front step. It's only warm inside, but even by eve hot outside. Car was showing 37°C, but the A/C worked well. It has four electric windows, auto start with keycard, cruise control and can get 198kHz quite well for the cricket. The radio in the cottage has LW as well and you can hear the cricket but can't really listen to it. Eve many stars out, and insects chirping and buzzing everywhere.

Sun 2005-09-04

Overcast, some rain and thunder, and just pleasantly warm instead of very hot. Lazy day. ϕ biked and later walked up to Dieulivol, from the viewpoint by the church can see the farm next to the cottage, but the cottage itself is screened by trees. Also out to the River Drot (or Dropt), which is very slow flowing and green. Lunch in, then out to Monségur to walk in the local park area by the river, a decent drop below the town. Then more reading, pleasant outside; some few glimpses of the sun later. Pleasant that is in shorts and T-shirt, despite no sun. This building was previously bigger, can see evidence of old walls and sockets for rafters. Some bits are crumbling, presumably repairs are being done over time as more of it is modernised. Photos of it in its old state, dated 2001 show a great amount of dilapidation but still a bed and cooking equipment, so assume someone lived in it until quite recently in some squalor. Don't know how many of the local houses are let, but I saw at least one large dustbin labelled "bottles only" outside one of them. There are at least three lizards on the step, as that's how many we have seen at once, but they're proving difficult to photograph.

Mon 2005-09-05

Overcast again, but warm. ϕ into Monségur for bread and croissants. Then out to explore the Canal Latéral à la Garonne. Joined it at Bernès where there is a lock and walked 2.5 km north-west to the next lock, where the road changes sides. Automatic locks, operated by pulling a cord slung over the canal, with traffic lights to show the lock status. Saw one boat, a small cruiser, leaving the first lock and two others moored. Water very green. Then on to Marmande for lunch sitting outside a brasserie in the square. θ got some more euros out of a cash dispenser. Then on again, following some little roads, through Lagupie, St Géraud and back to Monségur and home. Eat in, off this morning's bread. Eve watching it getting very dark and listening to music. The car's service light lit this morning, but disappeared after the canal walk stop. Monségur has a boulangerie and a pâtisserie, both do bread, the former closes on Monday, the latter on Tuesday. Don't know if the butcher gets a day off, suppose it's Sunday, probably both bakers are open then. Most shops in Marmande close 12:00-14:00 and the car park was free for those 2 hours.

Tue 2005-09-06

Started relatively brightly, but it was not to last. To the other baker in town, only bread and croissants, no nice tarts, but a bit cheaper, €2.76 for two baguettes and two croissants *cf* €2.80. Then out to the Atlantic coast, along a bit of autoroute (toll €3.10) to Bordeaux, then down to Arcachon and across to Pyla-sur-Mer, a nice beach but it was empty, probably because it was blowing a gale and raining. Anyway, walked along the beach and θ had a

paddle. Then to la Salie nord plage, where you have to walk over a big dune to get to the sea. Fortunately there was a wooden walkway to help as it was very hard going on the soft sand. One man fishing and two surfing on the otherwise deserted beach. The restaurant was closed of course, as were nearly all of those on the coast, though the bogs were open, if lacking a little in privacy. Then via Biscarosse plage, but a long way from the road and we went on to the big lake Etang de Cazaux et de Sanguinet, but Biscarosse also seems to claim it. Had a dry baguette here and our water. Then change drivers, ϕ from here back via pretty side roads through the forest (D652, D46, D216) then back onto A63, A630, A62 and home. To the Shopi for some cakes to compensate for the disappointment in not finding somewhere convenient and scenic for lunch. Got a 1:25000 showing Dieulivol and the cottage. The map has two scales, one in UTM and the other in grads from the longitude of Paris. The service light came on for a time yesterday then disappeared. It has reappeared today and stayed on, along with a message: *niveau huile à réajuster*, and indeed the oil is at low. Europcar say just top it up at their expense. A tiring day with all the driving. Pity the weather was not better. Eve in watching the local farmers trying to round up a herd of bullocks, at first between two of them, then, failing, with three, then using a Citroën van chasing them around the field, horn blowing and lights flashing. Then they let most of them back and loaded the rest into a small truck. By then it was almost dark. Eve more MP3 from the 1G player on the cottage's 3-speaker sound system that was probably meant to work with the satellite system but which was not connected, just leaving a convenient 3.5 mm jack dangling.

Wed 2005-09-07

ϕ took the car to the Renault garage in Monségur. A nice reception area and a garage area, no parts counter; the man put the oil in for me from an all-purpose can, though he probably topped it up appropriately, added quite a bit, he had to go back and re-fill his can, and charged just over €10. Then two tartes aux fruits and two pain au chocolate from the pâtisserie. Diesel from the Shopi, €34 for about 30 L, paid with the Visa without PIN or signature. Then to Duras and the château, which was interesting with many of the rooms having exhibitions of paintings, artworks or old agricultural equipment. Lunch at a pizzeria in Duras, then home for a short trip out on the bikes to the river. Then read and sew in hot sunshine. This was not presaged, the morning was dull with some rain. M Dumazeau came by eve in a white van to collect the refuse. A small snake, maybe 5 mm in diameter and 30 cm long, darted away from the step when I approached; the lizards are everywhere. But no nasty insects so far, except pestilential flies. Some cute red bugs on the figs. Also in the garden are peaches. As we were closing the shutters, we saw a mantis, maybe 5 cm long, on the kitchen window.

Thu 2005-09-08

Both into town for croissants and to dump bottles. Then a local potter looking at villages, starting with Sauveterre-de-Guyenne, a walled town with remaining towers at the four corners. Here is a big winery, going full tilt, with a queue of tractors and trailers full of green and black grapes being tested and then dumped into big hoppers. Rows of tanks and pipes behind, and grape mush coming out into other tractors and trailers. Then looked at Cleyrac, Soussac, Cazaugitat. Tried Pellegrue for lunch but nothing suitable, so on to Ste Foy-la-Grande where we had lunch sitting on the pavement outside a crêperie; having galettes and cidre. Had rained early, but by then hot and sunny. Before lunch also St Ferme where saw the outside of the abbey. A few more twists through the local villages on the way back to the cottage. After a little while it started to rain again, and rain hard. Eve drove out to Monségur and ate in Les Colonnes restaurant, the €19 menu inc pâté-fois de canard, which was amazingly rich. Three parties of English, not quite outnumbering the French. Paid by card, the PINs seem to work seamlessly. Surprised a hare in the headlights coming back to the cottage. Saw an ancient Citroën van with yellow headlights.

Fri 2005-09-09

Into Monségur, much busier this morn, just got into a space in Place 8 Mai; it's market day. The market square is shut off for cars and stalls are all around outside and inside the covered area. Seafood, veg, meat, fruit, spices, clothes, jewellery. We bought only bread, croissants and earrings. After breakfast to the canal again at Meilhan, parking in a tight spot on a hill. One boat registered in Sheffield UK was moored by a café called Les Amis des Peniches and its crew was outside the café talking loudly in English. Another English couple in a UK-reg Daewoo also spotted. Several boats moored in the local port, one Dutch, the others probably French. Then drive to Hure a little further on. This boasts an English pub, but at least at this time of year it opens only on Thursday to Sunday evenings. Nice church though and a bridge over the canal. From there to la Réole for lunch at a pizzeria, then home to clearing up and packing, or sitting in the sun with a bottle of wine. The beer has just lasted, we bought 24 small blondes and 12 small brunes.

Sat 2005-09-10

Lovely thunderstorm overnight, heightened by the absolute darkness and the only window being in a shallow-sloping roof. Later the sun came out again, so the last day was pleasantly warm. Into town for croissants for breakfast and lunch today; had to go to the patisserie again as the baker was shut for the weekend while the girl got married. Met our butcher and confirmed that he'd come at 10:00, and dumped the last of the bottles. A little final clearing up, then he came roughly on time, declared himself well satisfied after looking at just the lounge and kitchen, and gave me back my €150. Then off. Topped up the diesel at the LeClerk at Ste Foy, where the auto pumps would not take either of my UK cards, then on to Monbazillac, a pretty château and village on a hill with nice views. Toured the château, which was not very interesting, mostly odd old stuff shoved in to try to make a show; the building itself was not stressed. Nothing about the current vinification process, but free tasting and we bought a couple of bottles of the local. Then had the croissants in the car until time to go to the airport. Car accepted despite being a bit dirty, and they refunded for the oil in cash. Easy process through the tiny airport. Only our flight was going, checked in and went to sit outside at the café over a glass of wine, then in through security, opening about one bag in two, belts off, but lots of joking. Waiting area just seats and a bog, plane comes in, you walk out to it. Bogs on the plane, another BAe 146, not working; we were advised to go at the airport, where there was only a single WC. Back in Birmingham it's cold and wet. Car park was 8 days at £7.50. Home in time to hear the Proms last night.

Brecon 2006

Sat 2006-05-06

Started sunny. Let the cats out for a run at 06:00 and despite their getting an inkling that something's going on, Sooty came in again in time to be taken to the cattery. Off about 11:00, Focus, ϕ then θ , to Brecon, following the AA recommended route of A5 - Towcester - A43 - A422 - M40 - M42 - M5 - M50 - A40 at 170 mi, arrived 14:30, by then cloudy but not cold. Castle of Brecon Hotel, old, right by the remains of the castle and with a good view from the room. Afternoon walk to canal and along a bit and back, to shops for a few guides and books, then hotel. Eve to bar, then eat in à la carte restaurant, expensive but very good, and a drink in the bar after. Hotel is SO043287. Canal is much as it was in 1995 up to bridge 166, Castle Narrowboats electric charger is still there rusting away at the base, but beyond bridge 166 is now a basin with moorings then the new bridge 167 and a new basin with theatre alongside, boats moored in both basins. All looks very nice, but still a walk through the scruffy part of town to get to the centre. Hotel restaurant offered us 18:45, 19:15 or 19:45, of which we took 19:15. Only one other table busy when we went in, and only a table of 15 after us; two other tables stayed unused.

Sun 2006-05-07

Sunny and warm all day. Weekend, so breakfast starts at 08:00. Out by 09:00, park at the south end of Ashford tunnel and walk south to the bottom of the flight, with an excursion off up into the woods by bridge 138, an arch bridge with a steel additional superstructure. A Castle boat going our way but at less than our walking pace. Locks mainly being used downwards today. Then back to car and drive up to Talybont for Star Inn, which opened a bit late at 12:10. Fish and chips and Hancock's HB here were OK but pub seemed to be run for friends and regulars, not as good as before or as presented in Nicholson's, but it did have a range of beers. After lunch drive to bottom of flight and walk further east to bridge 128, an ex-lift bridge now fixed, and sit here in the sun for a while. Leisurely afternoon as I have a blister on right little toe already. Then back to car and drive rugged upland route south on B4560, up to 516 m, and back via loop of A465 - Gilwern - A4077 - B4558 - B4560 - A40 to Brecon. Eve eat in hotel bar, good, and later, just before it rained, a walk out for cash. By afternoon it became a bit hazy and not so warm, but legs exposed nearly all day.

Mon 2006-05-08

Rain at first, then dull but warm and a little rain again late afternoon. To bridge 76 for BW wharf parking and walk in the slowing rain to Goytre wharf. Very much changed from when we were last here, an off-line marina just north of the old wharf and a Red Line hire cruiser base at the wharf. Linear moorings between bridge 75 and the marina. Back to car, just as rain petered out completely. Then further south to look at the current end of navigation in the northern outskirts of Cwmbran. New winding place, moorings and small off-line basin here, all deserted, and a small car park alongside. Walk south from here on a good path past the flight of five then about another 10 locks in various states of ruin, or buried, or turned into a water feature. Locks in the five have concrete weirs made to look very like wooden gates. We went only as far as the new retail park at about ST290955, but the line and path continues right down to the Usk north of Newport. Lunch at the Goytre Arms at Penperlleni, which was smart and the food was good, but only us and one other couple eating. Afternoon looking for an aqueduct that θ remembered, trying the one between bridges 85 and 86, accessed from bridge 87 but parking almost by accommodation bridge 86, and probably finding it between bridges 93 and 94, accessed from bridge 95 parking on steep hill opposite the cottage. θ walking more slowly today, complaining of cramp in the foot; my blister's OK taped up. Had a wander around Govilon to spot pubs then into Gilwern where car parked on wharf by bridge 104. Walked past Castle Narrowboats base out to where we probably moored on our last day. Tried the road to Llanelly then north to Pen-pedair-heol which was very rough and narrow. Home from here. ϕ out for more maps and a LW radio as DAB not available anywhere here. Eve eat in hotel bar, their only customers for food this eve, probably, and about half of their drinks orders.

Tue 2006-05-09

Many fewer in the hotel with the departure of the bowling team, breakfast back to service rather than buffet; I had kippers. Raining again. To bridge 114 where could park, but very high stone stile so walked to bridge 115 for access, then to bridge 108, so passing bridge 109 and Windy Corner where we moored the first night. Bridge 109 is I think the one illustrating my web page of the 1995 trip. Rain was abating on the way back. Very pretty, but the further hills shrouded by cloud. To Govilon by 12:00, but both pubs were closed, so tried in Abergavenny. Market

day, crowded and car parks full, so out to Waitrose on the outskirts for ingredients of a picnic, which eaten looking over the bottom lock at Llangynidr; an American crew coming up on their very first lock and doing very well. By then it was starting to brighten. Via useful public loos in Llangynidr to bridge 163 by the lonely lock at Brynich. Saw a boat through and walked round to the aqueduct, then back past lock and sitting in warm sunshine looking over the Usk, before returning to the hotel. Eve to Roberto's a tiny Italian restaurant in centre, very good food, excellent service from a sylph in black. Brecon has few ethnic restaurants, just this one and the scruffy Balti house that we tried in 1995; there are take-away Chinese and Indian as well.

Wed 2006-05-10

Fine all day, mostly sunny and hot. To bridge 145 near Talybont and walk to bridge 156, mostly in sunshine, legs and arms exposed. Return, then to the Coach and Horses at Cwn Cwannon for lunch. Very good food, efficiently served and reasonably patronised for a Wednesday lunch unlike many of the pubs we've tried, though all wrinklies apart from us. θ had mussels & φ Gloucester Old Spot sausages made locally. Several of the menu items gave the source of the ingredients by farm or small company. Then, still sunny, via Govilon and B4246 to junction at SO255115 near the Bloreng and walk along minor road as far as the car park by the radio masts. Then lounge in the sun back near the car before home via Blaenavon - B4248 - A465 - B4560, stopping again at SO157171 for a look around the quarry and a bit lower down for photo of snaking road. Very quiet and peaceful up on the top away from the B-road and a perfect day for it, except that the other peaks around were very hazy and indistinct, so views were localised. Hotel car park crowded, we got the last space on return. Some sort of medical course and test going on, lots of Asian medics. Eve eat in hotel bar, excellent again except the Hancock's HB on the hand-pump is off.

Thu 2006-05-11

Clear and sunny start. To bridge 97, where there is a BW car park. Walk west first, until tow-path is closed for roadworks from bridge 100; took the tow-path diversion for a bit across the roundabout and dualling works towards Gilwern, but it looked as if we were being taken by road all the way to Gilwern, so came back and a little to the other side of Govilon, beyond bridge 96. On the way from hotel bought lunch at Waitrose outside Abergavenny north of Llanfoist at SO293138 and off to eat this on a mountain, via loos at Llangynidr at SO155195. Again to car park at SO157171, and after lunch wander around the quarry then out a little from the road to sit in sun reading and listening to cricket, and later in the car. Back to Brecon for about 17:00 by when the sky was darkening and the 198 kHz was picking up lightning flashes. From Llangynidr for the 4 or 5 km to the car park, going up, was a good 20 mi/UKgal; ave for up and down was 35. A Mitsubishi small MPV towing a vintage German car on a trailer followed us up the hill, then asked us if we could tell them where they were. Showed them, and they set off back down again. Eve to eat at the Brecon Balti, a similar experience to 1995, service a bit odd, especially at the start before the real waiter arrived, no relishes with the popadums, drinks only when asked for. Food was OK though, except θ's coffee had old milk in it and the waiter spilled some in the saucer then tried to mop it up with a tissue, spilling some more. Only £32. After, another lager in the hotel bar, which had two other couples eating. The hotel is still full of Asian medics who seem to go out on the town or bring back take-aways to their rooms. Car park is full of Mercs and BMWs with a few Porsches and Audi TTs. A little rain while we were eating.

Fri 2006-05-12

Feature of the area, today and during the week, is low-flying military planes, both unmarked, dark, 4-engined props and very fast and very noisy jets that come, make their racket and disappear within just a few seconds. Forecast was for weather to cool today but actually sunny and hot all day, 23°C maximum seen on car. First walk from bridge 163 in a ring partly on the riverside path, regaining tow-path at around bridge 165. Shorts and T-shirt from almost the start. Then back into Brecon and buy material for lunch at Morrison's, then out to eat it by Talybont reservoir, car park with bogs at SO106209. Walk from here on access road to base of dam and waterworks building then up track to east side of road over dam. Pretty, lots of photos as walk back over dam then along road back to car park. Move on then to car park at SO099197 but cannot access much of the lake shore. Sit for a while on a rock in the sun. Starting to get a little hazy by then and to the Llangynidr flight for a final goodbye to the canal; park by bottom lock, walk up flight and sit for a while at top, sun back by then, before following a boat down. Medics were checking out this morning and by this eve back to plenty of parking and no Porches. Eve eat in the restaurant, three courses with a bottle of demi-sec fizz, all good, excellent lamb. Though the usual problem of restaurants, couple next to us using mobile phone and four behind us complaining whenever possible.

Sat 2006-05-13

Last breakfast and set off 08:30. The odd, loud couple were there at breakfast, complaining about everything, and the hotel were a little disorganised this morning, they had a big party from an autism charity breakfasting in the ballroom and there was some long whinge about the management. Came back on A40 all the way to Oxford, not as fast as the motorway route out, but not much longer and more interesting. Weather now duller. Cats collected, £100.

Winfrith Newburgh 2006

Fri 2006-09-08

θ took cats to cattery, then off at 12:00 to cottage in Winfrith Newburgh in Dorset SY805848. Sunny nearly all day. θ drove all the way, diverting from the obvious A34, M3, A31 route because of advertised long delays at M3 J11, via Salisbury and Blandford Forum, though there were long delays in Salisbury and we arrived at 15:45 with 15 minutes stop at Chieveley. Cottage was terraced with two others but reasonably secluded with parking at rear. Built 1620 with the low door frames and narrow precipitous staircase typical of the genre. Spacious downstairs though. No need to meet, the keys were in a safe in the log store, just take and go in. Entry from back to utility room with washing machine, microwave and boiler, then kitchen with bathroom off, lounge, dining area. Upstairs two bedrooms with restricted headroom. Short walk to Red Lion to check route, then eat in and listen to penultimate Prom while following cricket on Ceefax. Meadow Cottage, DT2 8JZ. Very quiet, but not isolated; there is money in this village, many large houses, many new. Log fire, at £3.50 per basket beyond what was provided inside. Gas central heating set to just hot water, but disobeying the instructions and touching the boiler controls brought the radiators on as well. Cooker was gas, including some sort of oven with no visible flame. Distance about 246 km by GPS.

Sat 2006-09-09

To Lulworth Cove, parking £2.50 for 2 hours. The tide was in, but walked on the cliffs, very windy but sunshine as well intermittently. Later, after the tide had ebbed a little, walked along the seashore. Some fruit wine bought here. Lunch at the Ship Inn in Wool, then out in Swanage direction to car park at SY964775. Walking along cliff path, mostly south, can see the cottage where θ and father used to stay, about SY955779. Sun was just right for photos from here, so lots taken. Back to cottage for a rest, light supper and last night of the Proms. Saw several well-preserved old cars, including an Austin A40, a Triumph TR6 and a Hillman Avenger.

Sun 2006-09-10

Sunny, hot, almost cloudless all day, breezy morning, still afternoon. φ a walk first thing, west from cottage along paths. Then to the Bovington tank museum, north of Wool. £10 each to get in, but lots of tanks to look at. Best bit was probably the start, with a walk-through mock-up of the stalemate that gave birth to the tank, the trenches of the first world war. From there to the Spar in Wool for materials for a picnic, then to eat it at the viewpoint SY887812, Povington Hill. Pleasant spot, right on top of a ridge with views over the shooting ranges, including down to the village of Tyneham which was evacuated when the army took over the land. A bit of sunbathing here before onward to Kimmeridge Bay, at the end of a private toll road, £3 but a good car park and bogs. Beach here was mostly stone and seaweed, with eroded cliffs behind with sloping strata. Many people here, bathing, catching crabs, boating, sunbathing. Stayed for a while, watching the tide go out and having a little paddle. More old cars: the same yellow Triumph GT6 was at Povington and Kimmeridge, plus an old Rover, an Austin 1100 and another Austin A40. Evening to Red Lion in village for excellent deep fried blue cheese and crab salad. Also local beer Stinger, which includes nettles.

Mon 2006-09-11

Clear and sunny to start. φ walk along path to the Five Marys tumuli, SY791842. Then looking for a supermarket, aimed the GPS at Sainsbury's in Poole, but found Asda instead. To the beach in Poole, parking at SZ021905 in car park and walking along sea front into shopping area. Bought some pottery and got bored by the woman minding the old lifeboat station, now a mini museum. Wetherspoons for a quick drink. Lunch was picnic bought from Asda. Sun diminishing and sky darkening, so on to Dorchester, where park at SY695906, again pay and display. Walk around the shops, buy a few books, before coming home to eat. Thunderstorm just starting as we got there and rain for a few hours in the evening.

Tue 2006-09-12

Brief walk to post cards in village. Dull, though later some warm sunshine around the middle of the day. To Studland, park in north car park SZ034835. National Trust, £4 but can move between the NT car parks all day on the one ticket. Walk along the beach north to Shell Bay and back. A few naturists around in the middle section of the beach and took advantage of this to have a nude swim in the sea and a little sunbathe in the dunes. Got sand everywhere. θ paddled in shorts but stayed resolutely dressed. Then for lunch at the Bankes Arms in Studland village, curry and a pint of mild. This from the south car park at SZ038827. Walk from here to Old Harry Rocks,

some good views and loads of schoolchildren on an outing. Then onto the south beach, not many there, cooling by this time, just watching the boats. One cruiser seemed to have got caught on a buoy, a rescue boat came out with divers to free it. This beach short, and at highish tide it seemed not possible to walk to the middle and north beaches along the sand. Back to cottage for a shower to get the sand out of the crevices. Dinner from the Chinese take-away in Wool.

Wed 2006-09-13

Dull to start, intermittent sunshine and warm out of the wind all day. φ short early walk. Then to Weymouth and Portland. First to SY669756 car park for Chesil beach. This was a 30 km bank of stones that had built up naturally, with an area of calm sea behind it. Just a little walk about here. Then right to the bottom of Portland, by the Portland Bill lighthouse and Pulpit rock, park at SY677684. A very craggy coastline and quite popular. Walk up a little way on the east side of the peninsula, then lunch at the cafe. Back via various viewpoints at Opie Cove and at SY689751 giving excellent view of the isthmus joining Portland to Weymouth. Then into Weymouth, parking in a 1 hour free space somewhere around SY680798, by the band stand amusements. Walked along the beach, θ paddled. A few in the water, mainly with children; the wrinklies staying huddled on the front in their wind shelters. One man in swimming gear sunbathing, everyone else covered up. Home via back lanes. Evening to Red Lion. Food was excellent but it was a long time coming, θ had paté and paella, lots of whole seafood, φ mushrooms and Caribbean pork. A little rain walking there and more on the way back. A good holiday so far, lots of outside activity and θ has enjoyed seeing the places she visited with her father 20 years ago.

Thu 2006-09-14

Last full day and raining steadily as we got up. To Monkey World, £18 for the two of us. Dull but dry there. Not sure about this place. It exists to save monkeys recovered from the illegal pet trade and also breeds a few itself, and presumably the monkeys have a better life here than before, but the enclosures are not large and the climate is not what they expect. Place is laid out with little imagination and is poorly signed. It started to rain again; on to Lulworth Cove. Lunch at the hotel bar, re-stocked with fruit wine, then to Swanage. Spitting but warm. Had a look at the front and watched the heavy surf shifting the sand around the groynes. Then back for packing and cleaning. φ for a walk when brightness promised, but got damp and savaged by brambles on what was signed as a footpath. Ate in, with fizz. More rain. More old cars, a Triumph Herald.

Fri 2006-09-15

Still raining. Up, breakfast, pack, away 09:15. Started well on A31, A34 route, but lots of queues from Oxford and along A40, so nearly 4 hours again. Cats collected, £100 for 8 days and three cats.

Trent and Mersey 2007

Sat 2007-05-19

Ø took cats to cattery; away just after 12:00 in the Berlingo. Had to stop at first services on M6 to fix the van's wipers which had slipped in their arms and jammed together. Arrive Andersen Boats SJ705661 at 14:30, others already there. Sunshine with showers. Onto Fjord Monarch. They accepted that three of us had experience, though they watched me giving training at the first lock and seemed satisfied. It's a 3-cylinder air-cooled Lister with gas cooker and central heating, electric fridge. Start 15:15 and proceed in sunshine and a stiff breeze with Ø steering and φ instructing at locks. No hold ups and made it to Wheelock at 18:30, beyond bridge 154. Eat on boat, Bolognese pasta, then to Cheshire Cheese. Thinning out as the non-drinkers retired. I had three of good Hydes Golden Brown, 4.4%.

Sun 2007-05-20

Sunshine nearly all day. 4 mile-walk/run. Rope back to water point. Another Andersen boat been here all night having a blown head gasket fixed; they set off just before us. Left 08:30, Novices steering for the morning. Lots of locks, bashed an aqueduct and a bridge, the latter with the back of the cabin, but not too bad in the awkward locks; no wind today. Lunch 13:00-14:20 at the Broughton Arms at Rode Heath, canalside at bridge 139. Afternoon more steering practice, very good, under Ø's supervision. Stopped after lock 42 in Kids Grove at 17:00. Light meal on boat. One crew member left in a taxi from the pub here, got dropped near the boatyard, got lost, found it eventually, got the boatyard gate opened, and got off south. Eve to the Red Bull. Robinson's Unicorn 4.2%. A little wine also, back on the boat, as some wanted more.

Mon 2007-05-21

Sunny start, and sunny intervals and warm all day. Start 07:50, breakfasting on the move after the tunnel. Got to tunnel at 08:10, one boat was waiting at our end, and allowed straight in behind it, in the tunnel 08:15-08:45. Experienced steerers today, good in the tunnel, but hitting things elsewhere. Water in Caldon canal at Etruria, reversing out afterwards, 30 minutes. Stop at bridge 106 for the Toby Carvery 13:00-14:00. Then φ pottering down to the winding hole just beyond bridge 104A, turn and moor here at 14:30 SJ883400. All except φ to the Wedgwood factory. Still warm here.

Tue 2007-05-22

Mostly sunny but a little overcast about lunchtime. Start 08:10, Another first-timer driving, very well, no zig-zag and well-prepared for bridges, bends and passing boats. Reversed into the Caldon at Etruria for water, waiting for another to finish and doing ours took 45 minutes. On from there to the tunnel, at 12:30. Told 45 minute wait, actually 35 minutes, for one plastic boat well ahead and two narrowboats to emerge. Lunch while we waited, or rather while in the tunnel. φ steered into the tunnel but a bit bouncy and let Ø do the rest of it, she stayed well clear of the walls, in tunnel 12:30-13:05. Stop at Kids Grove again before lock 42, as a couple of us want to try the food at the Red Bull. Moor 14:30. Five of us for a 4 km walk out along the Macclesfield while others read, then some to Tesco in town for a few essential items and their own requirements. Crew managing OK. One is taking lots of work calls, though can't act on them of course. Eve to Red Bull for 3-course meal. Good food and well presented, excellent for a pub, £15 each. Non-smoking pub as well. Just after we got back to the boat, a scrapyard full of old cars close to the canal caught fire, "children" seen cutting the fence, and for a while there was a big plume of black smoke and intermittent small explosions.

Wed 2007-05-23

Promised sun and 23°C, actually mostly overcast but warm. Start 08:10, then water after two locks for 15 minutes. One of us OK at steering but went into the trees once with another boat behind, let him past then helped him in a few locks as single handed. Lunch stop 12:10-14:00 at Hassall Green for the Romping Donkey. This turned out to be a pretentious pub-restaurant doing carvery for wrinklies, expensive and slow, though the food was good. Seeing the prices, two of us anguished over what to eat, whether to eat on the boat, and if so what to eat on the boat, going through the entire inventory of supplies; Ø flipped at this. We had burgers which seemed to confuse them, delay blamed on delivery of chips despite signs saying all food freshly prepared. When we complained that one of the burgers should have had cheese according to the menu, the waitress just said they didn't do it with cheese now. Poor. Afternoon φ steering lots of locks and stopping at Middlewich before Kings lock for 20 minutes, but noisy and grotty there so on through that lock and moor by Middlewich boat yard at

18:10. Eve eat on boat, then out to explore Middlewich, which wasn't much. Again indecision on whether to go into a pub, the Narrowboat being available, resolved by my going in and the rest following except one back to boat. Actually I was hoping that the others would follow her to leave just me and θ for a few moments, but no, in they all trooped, and insisted on sitting in the "garden" at the back. The boat's back bog looks full; the front is nowhere near full.

Thu 2007-05-24

Walk 4.5 miles up tow-path and through a trail park set out on an old landfill. Shorts all day, though not sunny until after lunch, then hot. Checked bogs again, the back bog had a bubble over the pipe last night, it's not full. Start 09:10. Through the three locks, then water 15 minutes at town wharf. Big lock gave an example of rope use in lock, then on to Broken Cross, for a good lunch in the Old Broken Cross, canalside. No arguments this time. Stop 12:10-14:00. θ steering afternoon, now hot, to moor just short of bridge 199 at Anderton at 15:30. To the exhibition and watch the trip boat come down and two narrowboats go up, caissons moving together. Trip boat was empty, despite a booked trip at 16:00. Only a very few watching. Cannot see anything from car park or very much without paying £2 for the exhibition and access to viewing area at low level. Eve eat on boat, omelets with chicken and goose eggs. Came over dull about then. Boat has 20HP 3-cylinder Lister, rated at 2000 n/min. Later to Stanley Arms for a few. Returning crew member arrived after 23:00, fortunately the pub was open to 24:00; by then just three of us there. Moor eve SJ649756.

Fri 2007-05-25

Walk 4 miles to far end of the second tunnel, going over the tops as no tow-paths in these tunnels. Was forecast light showers, but sunny most of the day, though not as warm as yesterday. Potter down for an easy non-contact turn in the generous winding hole just before the lift junction. Further visits to look at the lift, for the new arrival, from the top for free, then off, θ steering for the morning, at 10:00. Stop 11:30 at Broken Cross again, same pub as yesterday. A little shopping for groceries and canal souvenirs, then lunch in the pub. Busier than yesterday. Group photo outside the pub, moored right alongside. Afternoon start 13:45. Moored just above Big lock at 15:45. Dropped a couple at the lock and they walked back to boatyard then drove back to Anderton to fetch the car left there, to make tomorrow's departure easier. Eve eat on boat. No water stop. A good trip I think. Everyone seems to have enjoyed at least part of it. Some of the first-timers steered really well, others were a hoot in the pub. Helped by excellent weather, lots to do and, mostly, agreement on eating out or on board. Three of us taking beer seriously, others maybe a couple per session, some not so keen. Eve to the Big Lock, first outside, then in a separate room that we found acceptable for smoke and noise. Later a smaller group.

Sat 2007-05-26

A few minutes to get to boatyard, about 08:45, the last to arrive and furthest from the cars, but they have trollies. Away 09:15. A very little fine drizzle during breakfast being the only rain on the whole trip, then more sunshine. Cats fetched, £84. Despite the warm, dry weather all week, there was one comment that the weather could have been better. There was only one occasion when I felt obliged to put on a fleece, mostly it was jeans and zip-top, often shorts and T-shirt. Best estimate of ϕ walking is about 30 miles in the week.

French Alps 2007

Sat 2007-09-08

Up at 03:00 and away at 03:45, to Luton airport. Pink long-term car park was near full and hard to find a space, and buses were infrequent and full. But through processing OK, no attention to bag full of electronics but had to remove trainers. No liquids, but can buy water after security and carry on. Strictly only one bag per person through security, but OK after that, we had to pay an extra £10 for θ's backpack to go in hold. Flight due at 06:40, actual 07:05 but arrived near enough on time at Geneva 09:30 (local). EasyJet, not quite full 737-700. Go into Switzerland, then go through a side door at the airport into France, and there pick up hire Astra diesel 3030ZK76, a sort of boring grey. θ drove today, and I navigated badly. Leave French part of airport into Switzerland again for a bit, then back into France. Missed first turning and spent some time lost in central Geneva and saw the lake. Then missed a turning and went round a loop of A40 to get to A41, from then OK. Mostly warm and sunny. Found the cottage first, after searching several of the mountain roads, at 45.849N 6.402E a little east of where I guessed from Google. Then back to Thônes, the local market centre, and out to the Intermarché to stock up on the basics. Then some time in Thônes and then waiting in a pretty spot before Manigod before rendezvous at the cottage at 16:00. Quick show-round, then announced that she stays here tonight, upstairs we assume, and final settlement will be tomorrow morning. We haven't paid our €300 deposit yet. Then sunbathing in the garden, looking at the mountains. A couple of Pelforth Brune being consumed. Lunch was bread and cheese from the supermarket eaten in a lay-by. Owner is Mme Bocquet. She lives a long way away, normally. As expected a stressful day, but winding down well now and should be a good week. Although this is France, the scenery and buildings are typical Alpine; seems odd to see French in this context. Eve invited to wine and nibbles of local cheese, bread and cured meat with owner and son on their terrace, then still in sunlight. The son 18 and off to university possibly in Brussels. Lots of chat, mostly in English, with some attempts at French from me. Her husband is in Madagascar, coming back Saturday. She may or may not be here next Saturday, possibly coming Friday eve. She didn't want the €300 deposit but took €35 tax and bedding charge. We were offered €60 to have cleaning done, but θ said we'd do it. Got chilly quite quickly when the sun went behind the mountains. They are upstairs. Lowest floor has garage and utility with washing machine, we have next floor and owner is a floor above which appears to also have an entrance at our level. The son wants to be a physiotherapist having found no work as physical education teacher. Local cheese is rebuchon. GPS altitude for chalet is 980 m.

Sun 2007-09-09

Sunshine again this morning though it takes some time for the sun to climb over the mountains. Got up slowly, nearly 12 hours in bed. Walk up along the road to La Charmette, spectacular scenery and lots of expensive chalets. When we got back, the owners were just loading up and leaving, she's Michelle. Took the opportunity for a few naturist shots around the garden. A little rest, then out along footpath 38, along a mountain stream, up into the hills. Completely deserted and quite noisy with the stream descending rapidly on a rocky bed. A couple of photos here, sitting on a rock in the stream. Then back to the chalet for lunch: bread, pâté and cheese with wine, a €1.28 special offer. A little sunbathing then, but cloud came over so not ideal but OK. Garden has a tiny separate 2-storey plus cellar 2-room house supposedly to keep papers and valuables safe and provide a refuge if main chalet consumed by fire; it's common here they say. Property here is expensive and especially around Chamonix, people retiring, not all French; brochure showed some at more than €1.6M. Now, at about 14:00, the sun's intermittent and the tops of the mountains are hidden. Name of the settlement we're in is Lachenal. It got cool, more so inside than out. Tried a fire with the wood they left us, one log gave about 2 hours of subtle heat. Early tea, then for a walk west in sunshine again, but low. Back inside for the eve, with two fleeces for a while, then it felt warmer. By late eve the sky was clear again, with lots of bright stars, but viewing is spoiled by an adjacent street-light. Will have to go outside hamlet to get really dark. Now is a good time as around new moon.

Mon 2007-09-10

Again a clear morning. To Thônes Intermarché for light bulbs, bin bags and bog rolls; tourist info for maps, and shops for IGN maps and another small French dictionary, then to la Clusaz and around the 2-hour advertised and well-signed Tour du Village path. Lots of ups and downs with views, took the 2 hours with a half-hour lunch stop. Then back via D16 and Col de la Croix Fry, pretty fairly low pass two lanes wide throughout. More sunbathing in the garden. Sun stayed with us to sunset, so a good session today. Dinner at a table set in the sun on the lawn, then watching the sun set, suddenly over the hills opposite. The circuitous walk was described as easy but the final descent was very uneven and steep with sheer drops. Part of the loop was an "ecology path", with a steep rocky section where we had our lunch; five trail motorbikes came past us bouncing up this. Sitting here eve

writing this the silence is absolute. With the doors open you can still hear the crickets but inside pins dropping would be noisy. There are cow bells but none audible from here. Possibly one car per half-hour goes past. A few pedestrians and cyclists.

Tue 2007-09-11

My right side is covered in small bites. Sun out again. To bakery in Manigod for croissants. Cottage in UTM is 32T 0298 247 / 5080 502. To Annecy, first by the lake at Plage de la Brune, where had to pay to park and there was no accessible beach, the small scrap that there was being closed for maintenance. Then to Annecy itself, parking by the plage at the north end of the lake and walking into the centre. Walk around and lunch al fresco, 0 having moules. Back by a circuit of the lake, stopping at a much better beach at the south end near Doussard, la Nûblière with a good free car park. Sat here in the sun for a bit. Then back to chalet just as the sun disappeared. Lunchtime beer Desperados with tequila. Eve eat in, after a little reading on the balcony, with only a few fleeting rays of sunshine.

Wed 2007-09-12

Baker closed today, got one loaf from the little supermarket in Manigod, after she asked if I had reserved any. Car started at 5300 km. It's a 1.7 diesel. It's almost 3.2 km to Manigod. To the end of the road, then upwards on the track, park, then to lunch at very pretty spot (32T 0299 094 / 5077 071) which from map is about 1550 m. Superb peaceful, beautiful spot, with just a few walkers about. Later walk down for some more shopping at Thônes and a look round Manigod, which is closed on Wednesday. Mobile worked well on the mountain. Out in garden later, on a deckchair this time in case of more bites. Hot in sun but cool when it goes away. Ascent today was about 380 m. It was a good climb. *Gazole* is €1/L, petrol about €1.2/L. Chalet is at about 970 m. Later eat al fresco, timed for the sunset, when cooled and go inside.

Thu 2007-09-13

To the baker, open this time but none of the éclairs I nearly bought on Tuesday, no visible croissants either, so *pains au chocolat* instead. Tree cutting opposite started at around 07:00. To Col de la Croix Fry (32T 0298 470 / 5083 641) park and walk up to Beauregard. Several restaurants up here, with ski lifts and cabin lift, clearly a major skiing centre. A few dozen people around, most walking, a few run up for lunch in cars. Supposed to get a view of Mont Blanc from the plateau walk, but the circular walk went up and down too much for us. Saw Mont Blanc from the path down instead. Walked around at the top and had lunch at 32T 0298 229 / 5085 339. Mountains more rugged than yesterday's walk, but walking mostly on motor tracks with electric fences both sides, few places to sit down and admire the views but higher than yesterday, up to 1640 m though the car park was already 1400 m. Then a circuit around through Col des Aravis and back via Flumet, Ugine and Faverges to the D12 and back towards Thônes and home. All but a few kilometres of this on narrow, winding roads hugging the sides of the mountains, only the short section of the D1508 was wide and level in the valley. Maps show N212 and N508 here, on the ground the signs were D1212 and D1508. Gloriously sunny again all day, afternoon again soaking it up in the garden. Eve tried at the restaurant in Manigod, but offhand and not open for eating till 19:30, so on into Thônes where we had a fondue in the Hotel du Midi. Three courses, adding a starter and dessert buffet, plus bottle of water and glass of wine was €37. I drove. Odd, up the mountain roads in the gloom; would not have been keen to do it in total darkness. I have a golden colour all over, which I hope will show in the photos. And a blister on my right big toe from too much walking downhill.

Fri 2007-09-14

The French here seem to like Fiat Pandas, there are loads of the old shape 4x4s looking battered but serviceable, and the new type as well, including the diesel 4x4; have seen several in guacamole green. Got a coffee éclair this morning. To Chamonix, mostly mountain roads with a bit of fast N road at the Chamonix end, so 2 hour journey for 38 km direct distance. Up on the cable car from 1000 m to Aiguille du Midi at 3800 m. Here it's cold with ice around, but out of the wind and in the sun quite pleasant in two fleeces. Air is thin though, and feels hard work climbing stairs to the terrace. Superb views towards Mont Blanc (4808 m) and down into valley. Two stages to get up there, big cars (70 people) on running ropes with balanced hauling rope and two cars. Only 30 minutes at the top then came down to about 2400 m from which we walked out a little way to Lac Blue, which was green. GPS fix at high point was 3783 m at 32T 0336 048 / 5082 689. Then return to base station, start journey back and stop at a pretty lay-by, after St Gervais les Bains, for lunch. Chamonix was a mix of languages and types, elsewhere majority is French, even in the mountains. Stop at Col des Aravis and walk up to La Tête, some pix from there of Mont Blanc as well. Not continuous sunshine today, but mostly warm. Back home for

dinner of leftovers and cleaning up. Leaving this morn we followed a huge lorry-load of logs, with rear-steering pony truck, that barely made the corners and bridges on the road to Manigod; coming back we met one coming the other way just outside the chalet and barely passed it. The edges are often nearly sheer and there is nothing, not even a few sticks, to give sight of it when passing.

Sat 2007-09-15

Sunny and warm again. No sign of Mme Bocquet, so leave a note, €5 for the broken glass, and the key in the drawer of the table on the veranda. Dump the last of the refuse and bottles in the skips, then off to Thonon les Bains on the shore of Lac Léman. Walk along the front with fishing port, pleasure boat port, and closed plage; pretty; mostly closed of course. Lunch open air by the lake at a restaurant, then off, via Geneva following the lake, to the French part of the airport; passports not looked at on Swiss or French entry, but at least the Swiss post was manned and waved you through. Car dumped and key handed in, then auto-print boarding cards and luggage labels and drop bags in French area. Then you take hand baggage through into transfer area, which is Swiss. Just to confuse you there are ABCF departure areas, with F being French zone (which seemed to be used by French planes only); there is one lounge for A and C which we went into at first, thinking it only departure area, but our flight was from B so had to go out again and back through security for B34. Not a problem as quick, and we were at the front of it. Off pretty much on time, uneventful to Luton. Aged senior cabin woman Pat. M1 was closed north-bound at J10, lost the diversion in Luton, but found our way to the A5 and home from there, via Chinese. Geneva was pretty, but route not the easiest to follow: the French entrance being scruffy, via a tunnel under the airport to France then back in through a parallel tunnel to the French zone of the airport. There were masses of cyclists on the alpine passes, especially Col des Aravis, all in tight lycra and going very fast, even uphill. It was unusual to see any local cyclist.

Tuchan 2008

Fri 2008-05-09

Up at 04:00 and away at about 04:45, Focus, ϕ driving. Got to Edlesborough before we realised that θ didn't have her driving licence, so turn back. Start again 05:25, roads a bit busier now but not too bad. Mileage (at first start) 19230, extra was about 40 mi. Via A4146, Hemel, J8, M25, M20, only congestion was slow between M1 J8 and J6A. Got to tunnel about 07:55 and onto the booked 08:43 train. Check-in is just stick in the CC used to book and it issues the thing to hang on the mirror with the train letter. Just time for a coffee in the terminal. Then away at 10:15, getting warmer, up to about 25°C max and mostly sunny. A16, A26, A4, A26, A5, A31, A39 to Dijon, two tolls totalling €40. Arrive Novotel Dijon Sud at 16:30 (location 31T 651858 / 5238210). Satnav got us in, except for the last roundabout when it gave us the wrong side of the road. Roadangel was a useful speedo in km/h. Alternating driving. Several stops for pissing, eating and fuelling (3 fuel stops: A5(D) roundabout and two service areas). Planner said 5.5 hours and it took 6.25 hours with stops. So, without hour change, total travelling time today 10:45. Short walk before dinner, the hotel is on an industrial or strip retail road, with some housing. Eve eat on the terrace, in the hotel garden, with pool and children's play area, a pleasant patch in an ugly area. Food was good, as was service. This night was at special rate, paid in advance, and didn't need to see the card again at check-in. Of the cars I can see, mostly French, a couple of Dutch and ours.

Sat 2008-05-10

Breakfast at 07:00 and away at 07:45. Warm and sunny all day. Arrive at cottage Le Rêve at 15:00. Couple of stops along the way and speed less than 110 km/h at times south of Lyon. Fairly boring scenery really until left the autoroute to climb up to Tuchan. Then mountainous, but road wide enough to pass, with white line. Park in the square, though it's partly blocked by a road-works store. Very old village with narrow streets. Total distance reading about 920 mi, but with the extra 40 mi at the start more like 880 mi. Today's tolls about €35 plus the one I paid by CC and didn't get a receipt. Owner not present, key hidden. Some time on the roof terrace before going out to the local Spar (open 16:00-19:00 Saturday afternoons) for supplies. Eat. Owner Alan Smith came 19:00 to show us what there is. Didn't ask for the security deposit. Le Rêve is on four levels. On a very narrow street, less than 2 m wide. Entrance level has bog and locked door to cellar; first floor with two bedrooms and bathroom; second floor with kitchen and sitting area; steps to third level which is recessed into roof, can stand and see out but not overlooked by any windows or from ground level, and sheltered from any wind. Quite small in area, maybe 2 m x 4 m, taken from what would be the high end of the sloping-ceilinged kitchen. Smiths appear to have several properties in the area, including an old wine cellar. Le Rêve is 3 Rue de Châpitre, number 1 is occupied, 2 is empty, no floors, just propped across. Eve cooled off and a little rain. The area is desperate for rain, having had almost none for 6 months.

Sun 2008-05-11

Another disturbed night. Friday morning we had a hovering helicopter, on Saturday car horns and shouting outside the hotel and this morning cascading water and drips from the rain. ϕ to baker and Spar. Then climb the road out of Tuchan towards Mont Tauch. Cottage is at 31T 0477028 / 4748426. Overcast and spitting occasionally on the way up, raining on the way down. Via Spar again. Back to cottage. Lunch with fresh bread and cheese. Rain stopped, so second walk out towards ruined château Aguilar; did most of the horizontal distance, but turned back before the ascent when the rain started again. Later it cleared up and had some sun time. Dinner taken on the terrace, with no need of clothes. Eve in with crosswords. Drinking the local Fitou wine from Tuchan. Odd architecture, the kitchen end wall is false and there is a light-duct between it and the true end wall, which lights the main bedroom via glass tiles on the terrace floor.

Mon 2008-05-12

To the baker. Not even warm to start and heavily overcast. On a surveillance day to the coast. First to Leucate plage, the northern region by the naturist resorts, which are signed as such from the road. This is fairly developed with only some lengths of natural dunes at the margin. Nevertheless it looks less a concrete jungle than some other reaches. Empty car park, from where a track runs between the two nudist resorts to the beach. Only about 16°C and still cloudy, saw only one other nudist walking on beach with clothed wife and one in the water with clothed wife watching. Stripped off and went in sea, which was not especially cold. Did some walking and jogging along the sand, then with θ for longer walk south past the larger resort. Then dressed again, but now in just

shorts, track top and trainers, and on to Bocal del Tech, the north beach (north of the river), parking at the end of a narrow track into the nature reserve. Again beach almost deserted except for a few clothed walkers who I suspect were cruising. Again stripped off and into sea and a little time on the beach before walking to the river. Rain, very light, by then. Took a couple of photos on a dead-end path in the nature area. Then looking for a supermarket. Nearly all closed for the afternoon, for Pentecost. Found just one, a Carrefour at Argelès, and stocked up. Back to Tuchan via a pretty route. Pizza eaten on the terrace, sun's out a bit more now; came in after 19:00. A good day. Petrol from little local station in Tuchan, which has two sets of hoses, one 24-hour for cards; the cabin was full of cigarette smoke. The trip odometer passed 1000 mi. Both beaches were excellent soft sand with gentle slope to the sea, which wasn't too far out. The town clock strikes each hour twice, about one minute apart. The single strike for the half-hour is only once.

Tue 2008-05-13

Warm and nearly cloudless. Went up to the terrace twice during the night, once to see the stars and once to see the start of the dawn. By breakfast time could sit in the sun. Usual trip to baker. Tried the croissants *naturelle* rather than *à buerre*, OK but not as nice. Then to Leucate plage again by the nudist complexes. This time there were a few more people about, though not by any measure crowded. Mostly nudists, all much more tanned than us. Lots of sunscreen. Stayed for 3½ hours or so, lunch there. Sunbathing and time in sea. Sitting on sand waiting for the biggest waves, some hard enough to knock you backwards and the ebb pulling the sand from under you. Also quite fun standing up or squatting trying to catch the breakers just below head height. UV gauge got up to 10, at which it gave me about 25 minutes. Many single men, some couples, a few single females, one or two families with children. Then back to Tuchan, where the Place de la Fontaine where we usually park is full of crane and low-loader removing the works storage cabin. Then for a walk out to the west of Tuchan, first on path starting between Duilhac and Rouffiac that said it went to Col de la Croix Dessus, but all ways seemed to peter out in dead ends or rubbish heaps. Then back south a bit and down an unsigned single-track road to a rocky cascade. Very pretty spot. φ waded the stream to get close to the rocks, a distant shot of me on one of them, then a little quiet time together in the evening sunshine. The last of the sun on the terrace before eat inside.

Wed 2008-05-14

Promised sunny day didn't arrive, but bright and 22°C with wind at times. The baker's day off so bread from the Spar; also available from the newsagent. θ queued for 15 minutes in the post office for stamps for the postcards, not many people, just lots of talk, complicated transactions and phone calls. Kilt day, though not till after the shopping. To look at the Canal du Midi. Petrol from the local station again. Not having a guide, didn't know where the interesting features were, so we didn't find any locks, just one aqueduct. Lots of boats, many hired, some with English crews. Walked from Ventenac-en-Minervois and less from Argens; lunch a picnic in the car somewhere between. Then back via Escales and Moux, avoiding Lézignan where we got lost on the way out. To the local ruined château d'Aguilar, ancient. Climb up a long, narrow road to a car park, pay €3.50 each to scramble up rocky steps, more slopes, to get inside. Good views. Little health and safety around here, the château one example, workmen in the town this morning another, removing render from a house, on a scaffold with pneumatic hammers, air-lines over the road, no eye protection, no ear protection, debris falling into the street. Kilt got some looks, θ especially noticed as she was often a little behind me. Not sure it was as comfortable to wear as the shorts and had to be held down on occasions in the wind. Late aft back on the terrace, in some hazy sunshine.

Thu 2008-05-15

The baker is open this morning but after the closed day the selection is reduced, no éclairs for example. UHT milk from Spar; do the French ever buy fresh milk? Hot and sunny day, 23°C by the car, with a few overcast minutes and a little light rain. To the car park for Château de Quéribus and walk out along two trails from there. First towards Cucugnan was in shrubs and trees, like a garden almost, but it soon turned into a steep descent. Then the second was a motor track with good views and gentle gradient. A couple of photos on first path, walking on path and against mountains. Lots on the second, in a couple of clearings off from the track, where we had lunch. Sunburn on forehead, bought a hat at the shop in the car park. Only problem is nowhere to sit or lie, ground is all small stones and thistles. Then drive to Gorges de Galamus, a spectacular shelf down the side of a narrow gorge, single track with tight passing places, and only cars less than 2 m wide allowed; camper vans have to park at the ends. Parked here and walked back for photos. Also went down to the hermitage, a little house cut into the cliff, it seemed, but there was also a spectacular chapel cut into the rock, seating maybe a hundred. Back via the D117, an easier route, for part of the way, then via Padern to take photos of another château. Very varied flora on the mountain path, flowers, succulents, bushes, small trees. Have seen a small lizard at the hermitage

and a bigger one running across the road in front of us, a few odd insects, one large bug or beetle, but not much else unusual. Eve out to local restaurant, but it was closed for change of proprietor, I think the sign said. So to the other restaurant in town, which at nearly 19:30 was dark and deserted. So θ had to cook again.

Fri 2008-05-16

Forecast light rain but actually dry with some sunshine and up to 23°C. To Perpignan, parked in an underground car park by Place Arago, adjacent to the old part. Very tight spaces. Walk around the old bit, rambling like the smaller towns only bigger and of course a greater variety of shops and eating places, of a variety of ethnicities. Some fairly seedy parts and a lot of young Arab types hanging around. Visited the palace of the kings of Majorca, a fortified palace on a hill, not very interesting. Lunch in a restaurant on the Quai Vauban, ϕ steak, θ duck; excellent ice cream as well, the strawberry with pieces of real fruit. 2% *cidre doux*. Then, as hot and muggy, to Bocal del Tech again, but blowing a gale there. Had a quick dip in the Med. Then to Carrafour's for more wine and beer to bring back and some proper garlic. Then home, top-up with fuel for tomorrow and back to packing and cleaning. Alan came over about 18:30, realised he forgot to ask for the deposit, and took €30 for linen and taxes (€0.80 per person per night). Idea for the space behind the end wall of the kitchen was his, as well as lighting the bedroom it provides space for services. He lives in Paziols, the next town, has done up another property for sale, has just bought another place to renovate and has at least one other property to rent. This place was completely derelict and had to clear rubble out before re-building. First floor is new built above the original, which acted as shuttering but is still there. Second floor is all new and wooden. Roof is all new. Cool & threatening storm this evening, so no time on the terrace. Brief foray to the terrace late eve, cool with a very fine rain. And silent. There are some noises in this town: an announcement by loudspeaker in the late afternoon; the occasional conversation; the odd child; some motorbikes and tractors going through. But early and late there is just silence, silence such as out in the country.

Sat 2008-05-17

One last visit to the terrace to see the sun coming up between between fluffy clouds and at the same time being lightly rained on. Left at 08:30. Wind down out of the mountains for 30 minutes then hit the autoroutes. Some very heavy rain and barely 20°C by afternoon. Took the Lyon bypass A46 on the way back. It disappears into the N346 for part of the way with lots of junctions. Lunch a sandwich at an *aire*. Cigar-lighter multi adapter blew its 10 A fuse, so only the i3 until first services that had a new one, then Roadangel as well. Two half-tank fill-ups, starting and ending on full. Started out at 20592 mi. Got to Novotel Dijon Sud at 16:00, this time a room at the back, 279. Didn't ask for card again, though not prepaid this way the card was used on net. Used CC at toll stages, avoids the long queues. After joining the A9, the GPS said "continue for 393 km". Eat in hotel, had a melon and ham starter, then rabbit (on bone) with beans, then slices of pineapple with sweet spices and lime sorbet; good. Big party of wrinklies in a separate dining room and coach from West Midlands outside. Leg 403 mi = 648 km.

Sun 2008-05-18

Up at 06:30 and to breakfast. At least two coach parties are fed and ready to go for 08:00, but no delays at check out. Start at about 07:45 with odometer reading 20995. For the first hour or so we had a 3-lane motorway almost to ourselves, and traffic was very light all day. Back by the reverse of Friday, though this time quite cold with rain showers. On the last stretch of the A26 nearly every other car had UK reg. Got to the tunnel at about 13:30 and got onto the 14:20 train instead of the 16:20 we'd booked. Onto M20 at around 14:00 (local) and home at 16:05. Odometer at tunnel was 21356 (leg 361 mi = 581 km) and at home was 21488 (leg 132 mi = 212 km; total 493 mi = 793 km). Total for the return journey was 896 mi = 1441 km (in 9:20). Total for the whole trip was 2258 mi = 3633 km. Sun was shining, though only 14°C.

Venice 2008

Sat 2008-08-30

Had a little sleep, then up at 01:30. Kath arrived 02:15, taxi at 02:30. To Wolverton, where met 16-seat Transit minibus with luggage trailer, and 15 of the holiday crowd. The 16th, Stephan Kirk's friend, joined us at Gatwick. A5, J9, M25 west side route. 03:05-04:55. Onto easyJet to Venice at 06:50 nominal. Julia was re-packing her suitcase in the check-in queue and Jac was only just in time at the gate. Cast: Graham + Wayne (2), Stephan + friend (4), Germaine + Richard (6), Liz + Chris (8), us (10), Kath (11), Katie (12), Jac (13), Julia (14), Julie (15), Lesley (16). 8 of us got onto the €3 express bus to Piazzale Roma, the other 8 had to get the next one. Very hot standing in the bus station, so as all four of us for the odd apartment were there we went off and bought 48-hour rover tickets and took the water bus around to S Stae. So crowded that we failed to get off and had to go one stop back. Then walk to the apartment and meet Paolo Rosada. Showed us what's there, all in Italian. There are four gates to go through, in sequence, each with its own key, and then the front door. We have two sets of keys which is useful. Out again to local small deli for a few provisions, then out again for a pizza lunch and a beer followed by a walk through the tourist-trap shops leading up to the Rialto. We are in C de Teatro. Very old buildings of course and very well fitted inside, with rambling levels. Two double bedrooms adjacent, two bathrooms adjacent to each other, one with bath, bog, bidet and handbasin, the other with shower, bog, bidet and handbasin. Have to leave the shower open to clear the steam she says. She came back for a bit more money. Wayne gave us €724 to hand over, but she wanted €750. Then later on the water bus again to Campo Stefano, met the whole group there (Wayne had to go out to fetch Stephan's lot who had got lost) and a good meal together at a restaurant, who set a table for 16 for us. I paid by CC and got more cash, we're going to need a bit of cash. 48-hour water bus tickets were €26 each, many restaurants don't take cards. Water bus on the way back was very crowded even just before 23:00, Theme of day: very hot. Almost pleasant, but still hot, outside after 22:00.

Sun 2008-08-31

We're all covered in bites. Up quite late and out about 11:00. Walked to Rialto and across to Fondamenta Nuove where we met Lesley, Julie, Julia and Jac and, after only a little faffing, got onto the right boat for Burano, about 45 minute ride, all still on our 48-hour passes. Drink in a cafe, then wander around. Tempers are already a little high. Julia plays the part in long white skirt, white shirt and hat, and matching shopping bag, talking to anyone. Some dithered and we split up, arranging to meet at the boat stop. We (Jac, Kath, Julie, us) stopped to eat sandwiches (bought earlier) on a bit of grass by the sea, then wandered a bit more, buying a fridge magnet and a pendant. Met the others again, and 5 of us (except Lesley, Julie, Julia) had an ice-cream and a drink at a cafe; the other three had a meal at a restaurant. Took the 15:56 boat back and split up. We went straight back to the flat for a beer and a read, Kath and Katie got back a bit later, then the four of us to the same place as yesterday lunch and spent €40 each. I got rid of the €100 note Graham gave me yesterday (part of the money we handed over on arrival was a €500 note). One of the groups with a flat near the Rialto spent 2 hours getting there yesterday as seriously lost, with suitcases. It's sometimes hard to relate the map to the ground, but the instructions to get to this flat were easy without map. Some people are apparently incapable of even setting off the right way. This is only day 2 and already tensions are high.

Mon 2008-09-01

Slept well, though Kath didn't, too hot, and too many mozzies. More activity this morning, sounds of workmen from 08:00, people about. Flat is adjacent to a canal and has a water door. Have still not achieved a GPS fix at the flat, even looking over the little garden. Out individually. We went to the Rialto first, buying antihistamine and mozzie-repellent (bites are a souvenir of Venice according to the assistant). Then 3-day passes (€31 but she got it wrong and took only €52 for 2) and out to the Lido, the end of line 1. Walked to the other side of the spit to the free beach on the Adriatic. Sit for a while, then back a little for lunch at a restaurant (pizza for 0, steak for 0, and wine). While here some of our party walked by. Went back to the beach and joined Graham + Wayne, Stephan + friend, Liz + Chris, Germaine + Richard who were picnicking. Had a few soaks in a very warm sea. Had changed into costume in the restaurant bog, under the cut-offs, and came home with them still wet underneath; silly system. Saw several people, using two costumes, one for swimming and one for sunbathing. Some younger girls topless in the water. Back by the reverse route, meeting Kath and Katie on the water bus. They'd been shopping and church spotting. Eat eve in flat, pasta by Katie, while they prepared for an early departure for Rome tomorrow. Still had to choose between sweating (windows closed) or getting bitten (windows open).

Tue 2008-09-02

Kath and Katie off at 04:30 to go with the others to Rome. We have the flat to ourselves for the next two days. A little light rain at first, but then hot and sunny again. To St Mark's square on foot and round the Doge's palace and prisons. Lunch in the middle of St Bartholomew's square, then water bus to the parks on the east end of the island, where there was a little breeze and it was cool in the shade. Back then to the flat for a rest. To local shop for more wine, beer and food, then to Chinese. Eat in what was an open passageway between two buildings with one end shut off and a vine as a ceiling; there was an inside in the adjacent building but unused tonight. Busy, good, but small in quantity. My cognac served in a shot glass. Rubbish put out, it's a daily collection except Sunday. Bought an Italian plug to euro socket adapter. Italians have types of 3-pin plugs, euro pitch with central earth and bigger and wider with central earth. Most sockets take either, and therefore euro 2-pin as well. Some sockets wide only. Adapter goes into wide 3-pin and accepts euro or narrow 3-pin.

Wed 2008-09-03

To the museum of modern art by S Stae, good. Included a Rodin "The Thinker", one of about 20 in the world. Then water bus to S Marco for an ice-cream and try to find the supermarket we passed yesterday, which we did after trying various routes, at junction of Salizzada San Lio and C.d Bande. Then lunch at the same place as yesterday in S Bartholomeo, and then back to the flat to put food into fridge. Later out again, walk to Accademica through several campos, a beer in a cafe there, and water bus back via S Toma. Eat in, cold meat, cheese, olives and salad, then wait for the others to get back. They enjoyed Rome, but it was very hot; so hot that they couldn't concentrate and didn't explore very thoroughly.

Thu 2008-09-04

To Murano. Walk to Rialto, where we bought more 3-day bus tickets, this time for the correct €62, then walk to St Mark's square where met the others, the whole party except Liz and Chris. Boat 5 to Murano and a drink at the first cafe we see from Faro stop. Stephan and friend have fallen out. Glass museum, which was moderately boring, some very old glass from first century AD, but apart from that nothing exciting or well-displayed. Then we split up, but on an island this size we mostly went to the same restaurant: us (φ, θ, Kath, Katie, Jac) and (Wayne, Graham, Germaine, Richard, Stephan, friend); leaving Lesley, Julia and Julie to go somewhere together. Very hot in the sun, but the restaurant had a cool garden. Went into a glass works demo and saw a glass horse being made; we seem to have missed the proper factories. We came back by ourselves, the others were considering a gondola ride. Via supermarket for supplies for party tonight, then home for a rest. Eve to the Wayne + Graham flat for wine and nibbles, and a cake for Jac, 65 today. Julie absent worn out. At last some rain, distant thunder and lightning, then some heavy rain. On the way home, with 6 women well-wined, Lesley was showing some very dodgy women's jokes on her mobile.

Fri 2008-09-05

Just us, water bus to Salute, photo church there, then walk across to the other side of the island and take water bus 2 over to S Giorgio, where we looked into the church and had lunch at a cafe: pasta with fish sauce which was mostly baby octopuses and mussels. Then line 2 again all the way around the end, Tronchetto and P'le Roma, and back to Rialto. Some more shopping, a beer and an ice-cream, and back to the flat. Paolo visited, to offer to keep bags here as late flight, but we explained (in Italian, with great difficulty) that we had friends at one of the other flats. Kath and Katie back later and had a little sleep and then all ate together in the local square. Packed and cleaned up.

Sat 2008-09-06

A long hot day. Sun is blazing again for the last day. Up and all ready to go by 10:00, hand the keys back to Paolo. The failure of the lounge lights was that Katie turned them both off at their individual switches while the rest of us were assuming that the 2-way wall switches were still in control. Walk to the apartment near the Rialto (close to Calle de Cinque) which is not let next week and we can use today, leave luggage there. Then a day to fill. Took water bus to S Elena and spent some time reading in the shade in the park, but plagued again by biting insects, though tried several seats in different places. Lunch in the cafe there, pizzas again, this time I had blue cheese and walnuts. A little more time in various others bits of the park, then took the number 2 water bus again, going the other way round down the Grand Canal first, then round the end by Tronchetto, then via S Giorgio back to S Marco; Not very crowded and managed to get the outside seats at the back the whole way. Through the crowds again, an ice-cream and walk back to the Rialto. Had an expensive wine in one of the cafes right on the waterside by the Rialto, then to the apartment again. Several are already there. 8 of us started off relatively early

at 17:30, got a water bus straightaway, and surprisingly not too crowded so we were all able to get our luggage on together. To P Roma, and to the airport bus. We went to the direct express bus, the same one that we took out. Kath had been claiming all week that the Actv passes will work on the bus and claimed today to have checked and confirmed this, against my suspicion that as they had different ticket systems and were clearly different companies (this one ATVO) they wouldn't. And they didn't. But we were able to buy €3 tickets from the driver so no time lost. Then the bus started, the A/C came on, and for the first time in a long time it felt comfortable. Got to the airport OK, to find the flight delayed from 21:15 to 22:40, because of the heavy rain in the UK, with bad flooding in some places. So a long wait, though we could check in close to the original time less 2 hours. All a bit knackered by now, with the heat and the activity. Flight was packed. After some fruitless searching and mobile numbers not responding we made contact with the minibus driver and were picked up. Same driver as on the way out, and odd he was too. Kept looking at his eyes in the rear-view mirror, which had broken off and was lying on the dashboard to be picked up and used like a hand mirror. At one point he fiddled a wipe out of a packet, took off his glasses and wiped his eyes. Sometimes bounced in his seat as if trying to wake himself up. Inexplicable changes in speed and occasional sudden lane wanderings. We'd bought Wayne a bronze face mask, and presented that and thanks to him on the way back. Driver dropped me at A5(D)/H5 slip road, I ran back to pick up the Focus, and collected θ and Kath at the drop-off by the Agora; Kath then drove home. By then it was about 02:00. Julia was trying to find someone to take her curlers back for her as her case was too heavy. Stephan's case was 32 kg, but as in a group with ϕ , θ , Kath, and ours were around 10 kg each, he got away with it by summation for group. BBC forecasts for each day were either sunny 28°C, light showers 28°C, heavy showers 28°C or thundery showers 29°C; apart from one storm we only ever had a few sprinkles of wetness; the rest of the time it was clear blue sky and HOT. Good moment: bath in the morning, open window right alongside, clean water, cool air, and a view of the garden. Houses in Venice are numbered not by street but by district; our apartment was #2303.

Brittany 2009

Sat 2009-05-02

Up at 02:30 and away at 03:15. To tunnel at 05:15 and on train half-hour earlier than booked at 06:20. Nibble and drink in the terminal. Recognised the number plate and just two buttons to check in, one to confirm it's us and one to select earlier train at no extra charge. ϕ to tunnel, θ next, then ϕ , θ again to owner, then ϕ to mill. Got to the owner's antique shop in St Congard too early at 15:00 so asked satnav to find us a supermarket and it found one 15 km away at Questembert. Stocked up, then back to the owners (M et Mme Bougo) at 16:40. Followed her to the cottage and all done and settled in before 18:00. Mill is at N47.78985 W2.15340. Tolls mostly on CC, €7.10, €6.90, €1, €3.20, €5 for bridge. Filled up twice and just over half left on arrival, 540 mi total including the playing at the end and going to the supermarket. Electricity meter read, we get 100 kWh free, then pay €0.15/kWh out of the €150 cash deposit. Or can burn wood. €24 paid for linen. Dull and foggy to start in France, then just dull. A little sunshine and 18°C at destination. Ate in with some beer. It's overlooked a bit more than I'd hoped, but lots of opportunities and took some late sunshine this eve. A lot colder inside the mill than outside, electric convectors eat power and do little. Mill wheel is cut off, just a stub behind glass inside, does not turn and mill stream paddle is closed. Noise of water running down the weir stream. Very pretty. Long drive with locked gate, big garden though adjacent to road with thin hedge. Lots of entries in the visitors' book complaining of lack of comfortable chairs or sofas. Mill is very close to my guess from Google maps. Dartford crossing was free before 06:00 (usually £1.50).

Sun 2009-05-03

The mill is on the river Rahun. Went for a walk around the grounds 06:00 then back to bed until 10:00. Got up slowly, then a walk locally before lunch. Meter start 4487, by 18:00 today 4502. Lunch outside, still warmer than inside, then in car to la Gacilly, which looked seedier than last time with many of the craft shops empty, then Malestroit and Montertelot. The last still pretty and with many locals out for a Sunday afternoon walk. Intermittent sunshine by afternoon and warm when it wasn't windy. Some sun on the grass between the main channel and mill race before dinner. The river flows north to south and divides three ways around the mill. A small bypass stream from an overflow weir on the left goes down the side of the mill and may feed the pond in the adjacent property before branching back to join the main river below the mill, making the mill building into an island. The second branch goes under the mill wheel on the other side of the mill. The main river goes to the right under the access road in a loop around the most organised part of the garden and over two weirs before rejoining the wheel run and bypass, going over another weir, passing under the road bridge and going off towards la Gacilly. The long wooded area which is the most shielded from the road (though not the neighbouring field) is to the north of the mill between the river and the overflow channel. Really quite pleasant lying among the trees with only the sound of water running over the weirs, but really only just, or not quite, warm enough even in full sun.

Mon 2009-05-04

Sunny from the start. Explored the garden in the sun, though need sandals as the ground is cold on the feet. Had breakfast outside and had a go at scrubbing the left rear window of the Focus with a plastic scouring pad which improved it a lot, it had a deposit from being below the boiler flue at home. Then dressed and to la Gacilly, where we at last found at least one of the three supermarkets, the Casino, and bought a few more supplies. Also a shoulder bag big enough to carry all the stuff I want to carry and not be as embarrassingly big as is the one I brought. Then to Josselin. Had a look round, only one boat moored that we could see, and that on the jetty not the port where we moored. Lunch in the Hotel de France. Went on to the Insectarium at Lizio, but it was closed with a notice on the door. On to Malestroit and a walk in the sun on the tow-path. Here and at Josselin saw no boat moving, at Malestroit just the same boat as yesterday moored on the jetty. Then back to the mill and the sun's still shining. I'd just had another go at the Focus's window, driven it into the car port and got indoors when the phone rang; M Bougo is at the gate wanting to work on the garden. He was waving round the gate. If he saw me he said nothing. Then he was hanging around for ages, so I gave up and sunbathed right down the other end by the overflow weir. Later I'm lying on the stone support for the wheel bearing, still in hot sun, and later still back by the river. Have to keep moving to stay in the sun because of all the trees. Apart from the touristy ones, all shops closed today, many open Tuesday to Saturday only. Meter before heating on 4521. Petrol from Renault garage in la Gacilly.

Tue 2009-05-05

Started cool and cloudy so decided not to head for the coast, but by lunchtime warm and sunny. To canal for a walk on the deserted part south of la Gacilly where there's a several kilometre section of canal west of the junction with the Aff. Joined at D138 bridge and walked west to the flood lock. Then lunch in a pizzeria in la Gacilly; busy place and huge pizzas. Afternoon to St Martin, park by bridge, see a boat with people on, but not moving. Walk up to the lock at Guélin and beyond, saw a black and yellow salamander on the tow-path. Then back to the mill. Sunbathed in back garden, by the wheel and on the spit, as the sun went round. Opened the sluice a bit and made the wheel go round one revolution. Took the boat out and rowed it 50 m upstream, the limit of the property where navigation limited by fallen trees, and drifted back down again. Took some more photos. Mostly outside for 3 hours, in perfect peace. Meter before heating 4534.

Wed 2009-05-06

Electricity 4549. To the official naturist Plage de Kerminihy near Erdeven (N47.63382 W3.20020). Day started clear but clouding over, nevertheless it was cloudless all day at the beach and later back at the mill. On the beach at 10:00, a few others around. Later covered up for a bit before digging a hollow in the sand and sunbathing in some slight shelter. Lunch back to Erdeven for a galette and sweet crêpe, then to beach again. More there by now and several sunbathers; most of us made just one quick trip to see how cold the sea really was. A very undeveloped sandy beach with no facilities other than a good car park. Quite coarse sand and tiring to walk on. Came away quite pink. Resting in the garden later, mostly clothed to avoid adding to the UV dose.

Thu 2009-05-07

Dull start. Electricity 4567. Supermarket. To the Branféré zoo near le Guerno. Few adults, hordes of school parties. Saw display of tamed birds especially pelicans. Various monkeys, wallabies, giraffes, zebras. No big cats, elephants or other big African stuff. Well laid out with a simple route, lots of water and open space. Lunch at a simple sandwich bar on the way round for the second time. Some sunshine by then. Back to mill, only a little sun by then though not cold. Later to Vietnamese restaurant in la Gacilly, which was good. Continuous sunshine then, in time to dazzle me driving home. Spent some time throwing things into the river and observing the flow. The pool below the weir circulates and only water from the outside flows out to the river. There's a point on the bank opposite the weir where the flow divides with a stationary bit. One lot of leaves went round four times before I got fed up watching it. Petrol from supermarket automat with card, confusing as it gave spoken instructions in French.

Fri 2009-05-08

A public holiday. To a bridge over the Vilaine at Fouy where there was a parking place and a game of boules in progress by a tented bar. Took some time to find this as no junctions around here had signs, so had to map-read from the 1:125000 map. Several boats moving on this bit, unlike the canal. Walk both ways from the bridge in intermittent sunshine and a cool breeze. Then to Redon where we saw lots of closed shops, the lock we came through before and the now-back-in-use lock from the basin up to the canal. Had lunch at the other crêperie opposite the lock (θ says was the same crêperie) which was very busy and clearly the place to eat. Then back to la Gacilly where the sun shone enough to make it seven sunbathing days in a row. Cleaning and packing. Petrol at the Casino supermarket, shop closed but fuel on cards 24/24. odometer 28556 miles at start of return journey; trip at 920.9 miles. Electricity 4580 (7 short of our 100 free so with tonight we'll go just a little over).

Sat 2009-05-09

Much colder this morning, and up at 06:30. One last walk on the wooded path and drove the car out onto the front. Packed up and waiting when Mme Bougo came at 08:00. We were 9 over the allowed 100 kWh which she let us off, giving us back the €150 without looking upstairs. Got lost a couple of times before the N24, by ignoring the GPS, but then an uneventful run back getting to the tunnel at about 14:40 and getting the 15:20, earlier than booked 16:50. Home by 17:30 about 10½ hours elapsed. Ate from Chinese. Trip odometer ended at 1418 mi (started at 2 mi) and odometer went 27637 to 29053. Return started at 28556 so 497 mi. Roughly 800 km each way and 640 km while there. Dull all day until a little sun in England. 2300 km journey without a hint of a traffic jam or even a slight hold-up.

Budleigh Salterton 2009

Sat 2009-09-05

Away 11:00. Lunch bought in CMK, eaten at Leigh Delamere. Avoided huge jams on M5 south of M4/M5 junction via M32 and the centre of Bristol, in front of the Wills building and around the Triangle, over the Clifton Suspension bridge (50p). Arrived 15:45. Keys in key safe and straight in. It's a terraced house in a crowded lane, very overlooked. Nice garden, long and thin but again mostly overlooked. Well-fitted in a modern style. Walked along the front as far as the naturist beach, all pebbles and quite hard to walk on. Quite cool by then, but the rain held off. Cottage is at SY071823, naturist beach starts at SY060816.

Sun 2009-09-06

Some sunshine, strong wind off the sea. Walked on footpath to Otterton, small town, maybe 5 km. Lots walking. To still-working water mill, free to look but θ bought a pendant. Carvery lunch at the Kings Arms, booked by phone from outside at 11:30 which was worthwhile as it was quite full. Walk back and a little along the seafront to the actual mouth of the Otter river, along which we walked earlier. Then back to house for read, sleep, eat and later Messiah from Proms. Found a spot in the garden that's not too overlooked. Front door and inner door were both glazed with no curtains.

Mon 2009-09-07

A little rain overnight but brightening in the morning. Walk out along the South-West coast path to the east, good views back over the town from the top of the cliffs. Fewer walkers out here, but one of them was a woman on her own with 6 dogs and pink wellingtons, who offered us copies of the Jehovah's Witness' Watchtower. Several fit people power walking or jogging the path. Back to Budleigh in time for lunch at the Feathers, suddenly packed with a geriatric visiting bowls team; food was good and several good ales on tap, including Bass and Landlord. Then to the beach, getting more cloudy by then, and even a little fine rain at one point. Had a quick dip in the sea and photo taken by the sign. Then ice creams and back to the cottage for a doze while the rain came back.

Tue 2009-09-08

To Lyme Regis, where we met θ 's parents over from their cottage at Wool in Dorset. Was dull to start, and foggy in all places above sea-level on the journey. Their cottage was good, but right on a main road. We parked at the top of the hill for £1/day; the car park at the bottom was £1/hour, so father left mother at the bottom and took the car back to where ours was. Left girls in a cafe while father and I went for a walk along the front and in the town. Bought some plastic flip-flops for the pebble beach in Budleigh and books in a second-hand shop. Then lunch at the Royal Standard, a pub on the front. Mother had crab, father steak, θ mussels in Thai green curry, ϕ grilled sardines and Greek salad. Good. Then a little shopping, mother walking up the steep high street despite her legs. Bought a couple of small glasses as only big ones at the cottage, and a diagonal-zip neck pullover for me, both in charity shops. Then the Focus brought the women back up the hill to the top car park. Mother stayed in the car while the rest of us went a little way along the coast path. Journey back was still foggy in higher parts, though we saw a ray or two of sunshine back in Budleigh. Father claimed he'd walked more today than total of holiday so far, which started for them on Friday.

Wed 2009-09-09

Rain overnight and early morning, but cleared. Walked up the footpath west of the brook, behind the cottage, onto the road and up to the White bridge again. From there north again up to the odd little aqueduct where turned west and came back on another path alongside the railway embankment, only part of which still remains, including a bridge. Couldn't see where it ran into Budleigh Salterton though. By then the sun had come out, so back to the cottage, change clothes and pick up θ 's folding seat, and to the beach. We made it up to four when we got there. Lunch at the Feathers again, less crowded and food came quickly, good trout for me and crab salad for θ , beer today was Branscombe Vale Branoc 3.9%. Back to the beach now with maybe two dozen. Went briefly into the sea. Left when it started to get a bit cloudy which made the wind more noticeable. Ice creams and back to cottage where read in the garden for a bit, sheltered from the wind here, lawn reasonably screened from neighbours. The red sandstone cliffs impressive in the sunshine against the blue sky, especially as seen upside down lying on the pebbles. Actually not too bad, not really uncomfortable at all except when moving to a new position, and completely clean unlike sand. The naturists were probably mostly in their 50s, the rest of the town mostly 70s and 80s.

Thu 2009-09-10

Another warm and sunny day. To Killerton park and house, north of Exeter, National Trust. Small formal garden and larger park with a collection of trees including giant redwood. Little bear cottage in the grounds, built as a summerhouse, with three sections of floor in cobbles, tree slices and deer knuckle bones; three interiors again in three different materials and with some 16th-century Dutch stained glass; at one point it was used to keep a bear. House fairly boring. Had lunch in the stables cafe which was less crowded than the one by the house and gave us homity pie and salad. A good second-hand bookshop here too. Then to Exeter where we found a parking place in the street and looked at the cathedral; £5 each to go in so we didn't. Pleasant little green alongside it. Then looked at Lypstone on the Exe which had nothing of interest, and on to Exmouth where we found a pay and display space on the front. Walked along it and had an ice cream. Pleasant sandy beach with plenty of families and the usual seaside amusements. Home in time for the last of the sun in the garden, dinner, and ready for the last-but-two night of the Proms with Schubert's 9th. Had some good Proms here, Beethoven's 6th last night and Messiah and Dvorak's 9th before that.

Fri 2009-09-11

Rubbish collection day. They collect from back doors as well and empty the bins into wheeled lid-less bins that they trundle back to the cart. Full-size dustcart even in this tiny car-lined lane, on hire from a firm with a London number. First to the beach in early sunshine and cool wind, had the whole beach to ourselves. Then the coast path to the west, which was up nearly all the way to the trig point at 129 m (SY045811), from where there were excellent views over Exmouth and the Exe valley. Saw a small adder on the path, injured from having been stepped on. Down from there the same way and to the Feathers again for lunch. Different beers again this time, Otter Bright 4.3%. Then again to the beach, quite well-populated by then, with a big empty gulf between the main front and our bit. Stayed until I started to burn a bit, then via the ice cream shop back to house. Rang the owner from the front to advise of the bedroom light switch failure. A little more time reading in the garden, then more on the sofa inside in the sun. So three days of continuous sunshine. Eve to Indian in town, which was good. The landlady of the pub was in there buying a take-away. Walk back home in the dark, still warm, now still. People still fishing, and a barbecue party on the beach.

Sat 2009-09-12

Sunshine all day again. Set off 08:30, avoided M5/M4 junction, though no indication that it was still bad, from M5 J22 via A38, A4, A4174, A420, A46 to M4 J18, 5 h total with petrol and lunch stops. To collect cats, £135.

Picardy 2010

Fri 2010-04-30

Spent 2 hours looking for my part 2 driving licence which I was sure I had put into the holiday documents folder. By thinking what I might have done had I been absent-minded, I traced it to the leather wallet in which I keep my passport and foreign money.

Sat 2010-05-01

Up at 06:00 and away 07:15, to tunnel 09:30; offered the 10:09 but because of long delays through passport control got the 10:20. Bought petrol, actually 95E10 which is 10% ethanol, just after tunnel, awkward as then had to use minor roads to get back onto the A16; there is a better service *aire* 10 km after the tunnel. We stopped at the services shortly before our exit 22, a couple of hours ahead of schedule. Lunch here, then on to find cottage, which was exactly where I'd guessed from Google maps. Idle away another 1½ hours in a lay-by a little way past, and then meet M Pruvrel as arranged at 16:00. He spoke no English, so a quick handover, and he took €250 deposit. Excellent place, just like the photos, with a long drive and a view over a private lake and beyond to the River Somme. Not quite clear where the property ends on the north-west side as there is no fence, but there is woodland that can be used as well as the extensive lawn around the lake. Other side of the river is a popular public path, at least on this holiday weekend. Some sort of fete with PA system on the next property to the south-east, which is fenced. Everything is upstairs except the shower and the bog. There's even a little room with a basin off the bedroom, but no bog. Ground floor has garage too. Long gravel drive to gates but just wire fence from road apart from gate. Tonight drank the complimentary Normandy *cidre doux* with pasta. Odometer at tunnel was 36074 miles. Dull and cool mostly, though a few rays were caught on arrival, out by the lake. Geko has cottage as 50.0489N 1.9269E. Toll €7.70.

Sun 2010-05-02

Lots of rain in the night, early morning and at times during the day. Did a short tour of the area by car, locating the Hyper-U by Abbeville, which was a concrete monster with a multi-storey car park, and a Carrefour near Airaines which looked much friendlier and was open today 09:00-12:00, unlike most. Saw the local villages and walked from Cocquerel along the Somme to opposite the cottage. Lunch back at cottage. More rain later, but got a decent amount of sun on the balcony in the gaps between. Walked the grounds again afternoon, cunningly laid out so there is almost nowhere that is not visible from the river path, the road, or the occupied house to the west. The water is not mains, the notices say "private drinking water", presumably a well; it's very cloudy after boiling. Sticking to the beer and bottled water for now. Having the shower and bog downstairs is a little odd and the subject of negative comments in the visitors' book. There is a bed in the shower room, which is even more odd. An address on one of the maps suggests that the owner M Mortreux lives in Amiens; his name is on the gate, alongside *Attention au chien*. We have seen one small cruiser on the river, so it is navigable, though apart from that one we have seen only small dinghies.

Mon 2010-05-03

Bank holiday in UK. Day dawns cold and dull, with BBC forecast for showers and under 10°C. To the Carrefour to stock up, including Pelforth Brune, back to cottage to unload it, then out to Picquigny where it looked from the map that there might be a lock. Indeed there was, this river is a proper navigation, just rather devoid of boats. Drove back through more towns and villages, in which most things seemed to be closed. Had a walk around Pont-Remy, where we found another lock, with a turf-sided and timber-framed flood lock. The town itself was a little seedy. Lunch at cottage. Aft ☐ walked up the farm track / footpath behind the cottage up to 100 m altitude whence can see into the next valley, but hazy and mostly overcast; photos not good. Brighter by eve; after pizzas for a stroll in the grounds. After dark went for another walk, some way down the river path, but was finding it hard to keep on the mown part. Came back and did the woodland paths as well, working as much by feel of the ground as by the vague impression of trees and patches of water. Came back in when it got just too cold, though there was almost no air movement, just enough to make the tops of the poplars make a sound like fine rain. No sound of any animals about. Sky was mostly clear and stars visible. Brought the right 4-way block with the euro connector this time, not the Danish, but then realised that it wasn't a proper Schuko connector, it didn't have the French earth; a new re-wireable plug got from Carrefour and now it's proper multi-euro.

Tue 2010-05-04

Dawned clear and sunny, and stayed so just long enough for a few minutes outside drying off after shower. Then it clouded over and for the rest of the day was intermittently sunny with a biting wind. French number plates are changing, mostly newer cars have the new sort, which seem to be AA-NNN-AA with the *département* number on a blue flash on the right, mirroring the F and EU on the left; older ones have the *département* number as the last two digits of the number (80 around here). Many towns and villages have central 30 km/h zones. Petrol is about the same price as UK; diesel a little bit cheaper. To St Valéry sur Somme, a seaside town on the Somme estuary. There were other tourists there, mostly French, despite the bitter weather. Saw a convoy of three ancient British cars. Steam railway to le Crotoy on the other side of the estuary, 6 old coaches pulled by a 2-6-0T, seemed to be quite popular. Went to and from by different indirect D-roads. Lunch at Le Drakkar restaurant, where I had a big pile of *moules* and curry and a steak. Petrol at a Carrefour cards-only station near Valéry. There are many wind generators here (*éoliennes*), we stopped to listen to one and could just hear a once-per-blade whoomph above the noise of the wind itself. Saw an ancient 2CV with yellow bulbs in the headlamps. Alongside an automatic loo was an open urinal in the street, and the restaurant had a urinal with US saloon part-doors next to the WC and handbasin for both sexes. Cold today, lit the wood fire and kept it going for a few hours, toasty. We have a dead bat on the balcony, which arrived sometime today.

Wed 2010-05-05

Again clear blue sky from dawn until 09:00, then mostly thick grey cloud with the odd minute or two of sunshine. To chuck recyclables at Cocquerel but no kitchen waste disposal there. Back to cottage again as I forgot the road atlas and to put back the rubbish and ash. Then to Montreuil, an ancient walled town that used to be by the sea but is now more than 10 km inland. Park by market place and wander the streets before paying for the citadel at €4 each. Lots of history, from very early times to use as British communications centre during WW1, this in a series of connected underground caverns. Not much explanation, we didn't take the audio tour and there appeared to be a tour circuit that we failed to spot after the first *sens de visite*. After this to a restaurant Le Caveau which had some of the atmosphere and furnishings of an English pub. I had a "mixed grill" (which was pronounced in French) which was pork, bacon, sausage, chicken leg, steak and vegetables on a skewer with Bearnaise sauce and ratatouille, with chips, very good; I had an omelet. After lunch on to the naturist beach at Berck, north of the town, about as far as the road goes, the guide said look for Bellevue but we saw no signs for there, just *plage nature*. Car park at 50.4238N 1.5685E; the beach starts about 50.4282N 1.5664E. Back of beach strewn with old concrete fortifications, mostly at crazy angles in the sand. We headed for the leeward side of one just as short burst of sun came by, enough to strip off out of the wind for a few souvenir photos, quite pleasant for that few minutes, but then too cold. Frustrating as there was solid blue sky out over the sea, but it just wouldn't come closer in the north wind. Walked out a long way to the sea so I could paddle. Crossed a small wet bit on the way not realising that this was the sea coming in behind us; even after only a few minutes the sand we were on was an island and we had to paddle quite deep water to get back. Trainers and jeans soaked. Home then. Eat in eve, then light the fire. Toll €4 twice.

Thu 2010-05-06

Got up at 8h and went for a jog around the lake and along the river path, naked and barefoot. The grass was damp and cold and the ground uneven but it was fun. As the sun was still there after breakfast, took a few more photos in the woods, by the river, by the lake and by the house. The sun really was intermittent today, coming and going in odd minutes all day, so that it was quite warm out of the wind. Went to look at the windmill at Eaucourt-sur-Somme, just up the road, which had been spotted as being possible to photograph with modern wind generators in the same frame; it was open for a school party but not to the public. Similarly the château ruins nearby, can get close to see outside, but closed on weekdays. From this spot an interesting walk through former flax fields, and then on the river path towards Pont-Rémy, which seems to get or lose its acute accent in different places. Drove into Abbeville and found a place to park on the street. A big town, but didn't see any restaurant which looked inviting so bought some bread and came back to the cottage. There were boats moored in Abbeville and we saw a second moving boat this morning. Sun was still coming and going then, and became continuous in late afternoon; the south-facing balcony being good at separating the sun from the north wind. Much warmer eve, didn't need the fire.

Fri 2010-05-07

General election has resulted in no overall majority with Tories the largest single party, now Cameron is talking to Clegg with Brown waiting. Cold and dull day, though with less wind than lately. Out early to get warmed up in the

car, then a walk from Epagnette. Supermarket by Airaines for lunch and petrol, a drive around some villages before a little more walking around Bourdon. Back then for lunch at the cottage, heating on by early afternoon. Took the Geko outside and measured the outline of the site. It's not clear who owns the woodland between the old gate on this site and the next site along, but leaving out this bit the domesticated bit is about 130 m deep by 200 m wide. The river frontage, assuming it goes all the way to the next site as it's all mown in a piece, is about 420 m. So if the woodland's included this site's probably about 150 m * 400 m or 6 hectares. The netbook has worked well, allowing back-up of photos, better viewing of photos and direct entry of diary. Would have been better with net access. No wi-fi visible here. Eve cleaning and packing, again not needing the fire.

Sat 2010-05-08

Went outside for a last walk in the garden about 05:00, when it was just getting light and misty; later the mist burnt off leaving a sunny mild morning. Finished cleaning and packing everything into the car. M Pruvrel came a bit early 09:10 just about when we were ready. He came on his little motorbike with a trailer, which he uncoupled and left by the shed. He had a look around, pronounced all well and gave us back €200 (€250 less the €35 linen and €15 electricity). Cloudy and then rain later that lasted all the way to MK. Odometer at tunnel 36528, home 36659 mi. Got an earlier train than booked at 11:20 and home by 13:20 (local). θ shopping and φ unpacking and bath. The water there was very hard, my hair got very lank despite washing every day, kettle got very cloudy when boiled. Quite a change from 6 hectares to 0.2 but nice to have central heating; it was really quite cold at times in the cottage when the electric panels couldn't cope and the open wood fire, though very nice, needed constant attention. Sparks would fly out, which wasn't too bad with a stone floor, but one landed on top of the paper pile; and it would go out in a moment unless poked, blown or refuelled. Total trip 1152 km, 730 km in France.

Sun 2010-05-09

Collect cats, £135.

Sussex 2010

Sat 2010-08-28

Left at 12:00, allowing 3 hours for a 2¾-hour journey that actually took 3½ hours, queues on M1, on M25 for Dartford crossing, M25 again up to J5, then fairly easy to Woods Barn at TQ648265. Just find the keys, no contact with owner unless problems. Single-story cottage set in a small garden in the corner of a field; linearly from north end: kitchen, living, bed1, bed2, bathroom. Sunshine at last. Beer to settle in on arrival, listening to the cricket. Not screened, but very quiet, the rear of the house looking over the fields, screened from road on south side by hedge. Beethoven's 9th at Proms as the sun goes down and we get rural darkness.

Sun 2010-08-29

Walk around the farm, where there are some mown paths leading to scenic bits around the ponds, which are available for fishing at a price and subject to warnings about being deep. Then further walking on roads to the river Rother bridge and around the triangle of roads that we're on. To the Cherry Tree pub TQ697305 near Ticehurst for a good roast lunch (£8) and a pint of Harvey's Sussex Best 4.0%. A drive around local villages. Then back at cottage reading and sleeping while it rained hard. Later outside in sunshine.

Mon 2010-08-30

Bank holiday. Sunny and warm, hot at times. Caught morning sun as it came around the end of the cottage, and also down by the lakes. To Pashley Manor, a private stately home with a public garden, not National Trust. They had a craft fair, which was not very interesting. The gardens were good, with lots of sculptures, some with price tags. Extensive, with lake, swimming pool, lawn, island, stream with ponds and falls. Had a good lunch here, home-made pork pie and salad with a glass of wine for around £10, eaten outside; they were running an outside cafe with a wider range of food than the permanent indoor one. Many there. Then to Batemans, NT, home of Rudyard Kipling, house and garden. Simpler garden here but still extensive. An old mill at one end now restored to grind corn, as it was doing today, but previously wheel taken out to make room for a modern water turbine generator to provide the house with electric lighting. House was, to me, as boring as most of these houses are. It was just an old house. Back to cottage for some more sun.

Tue 2010-08-31

Misty morning, with the sun breaking through about 09:00, then sunny all day. To Battle, where we visited the site of the battle of Hastings and the ruins of the abbey founded there just after, which lasted until the Dissolution. This is English Heritage, and they, like NT, try to get you to pay £77 a year for free entry; they have a wider range of types of site, though we haven't visited so many. The gift shop sold replica Norman swords for £120 and a chain-mail tunic for £185. Sandwich lunch here. Then to Hastings, where we sat on a stone groyne at TQ815092 and watched the tide come in. Mixture of sand and shingle; a few dozen others there. Parked by the pier, roadside for £1.20 for 4 hours. Nothing going on. From there a diversion along the coast road to Pevensey, then to Heathfield and stock up supplies at the Co-op. More sun time on the patio. Again listening to the Proms, with the fourth clear sunset in a row. The coastal towns might look a bit seedy, but there is plenty of money around here.

Wed 2010-09-01

Again sunny all day. To Norman's Bay. Park by the level crossing at TQ697060, there was plenty of parking, then up steps to shingle and sand beach. Headed west to about TQ693058. Only a very few anywhere on the beach, and a couple in the distance that looked naked, so stripped off for a hour or so, a few blokes walking back and forth close to the sea, looking around. Very peaceful. Unofficial beach, not sure if we were on the right bit, but so few anyway and no families. Then to Pevensey, for lunch in the Royal Oak and Castle Inn; burger and mussels, both good; barmaid apologised for the delay, which was probably less than 30 minutes, saying it was the normal cook's day off and the woman covering today was not very efficient and they'd just had a row. A look around the outside of Pevensey Castle, an English Heritage ruin; it would have cost £4.50 each to get closer to the inside. Instead to Herstmonceux, avoiding the science / astronomy bit and opting for just the gardens and grounds at £6 each. We were too late for the one tour of the castle. There was an Indian wedding taking place there. Good garden and extensive grounds, we went for an hour's walk in the woods after exploring the gardens; folly, lakes, sculpture, wood henge. One large modern sundial had hours marked on an annulus that could be rotated; it was set to BST, which I would have preferred it not to have been. There were several other visitors to the gardens but we didn't see anyone in the woods. Ice cream afterwards. Back to cottage, where the sun still shone; practised

filling in crosswords left-handed to get the sun more evenly, rather than turning head to toe which seemed so much more effort. Fifth clear red sunset.

Thu 2010-09-02

The sun was still with us, but a few more clouds today. On a walk taken from a book, photocopies were in the cottage folder. This one started at Paine's Corner TQ623237 where we parked on a grassy triangle between two meeting roads. Walked south across A265 to Punnett's Town windmill TQ627208 over steep and at times badly eroded paths; at one point a bridge was falling down and we had to jump the stream. Back by a different path via TQ634208. Near there the path went through a garden and was not clearly marked, probably deliberately. Through woods and fields, and over a better bridge. We lost the way slightly here, following OS and GPS where the instructions were a bit vague, and took a slightly shorter route to the main road at TQ625232 and straight from there back to the car. Of course the windmill was on top of a hill and the river was in a valley so there was a lot of climbing. Saw one other person relaxing at lunchtime in a field near a road and one other walker. Back to cottage for lunch and rest, and a little sun as it started to cloud over. Doors in cottage are made of tongue and groove board with no framing, nailed to three cross members, screwed as well at ends, with two diagonal braces screwed on; fitted with black iron gate latches and hinges. All lighting is compact fluorescent, with some on dimmers that therefore buzz annoyingly. CRT TV with DVD player and Freeview box. Cheap radio CD. Oil fired combi boiler with no hot storage; hot stops instantly if any cold tap is opened more than a crack. Electric cooking. Wood burning stove with pay-for wood. We've not yet used either it or the central heating. Bath with shower attachment, but shower head must be hand held. We've seen the owners, presumably, among those working on the new barn between us and the house but no other contact; the house folder suggests phoning them if necessary and suggests that they think it's better not to meet. Eve eat from the Chinese take-away in Heathfield; excellent mixed starters of spring rolls, prawn toasts, seaweed, chilli beef and spare ribs and a good special curry. Watched the sixth clear sunset while listening to Proms.

Fri 2010-09-03

Again the sun appeared in the morning, warm enough for a few minutes by the barbecue where the early sun just makes it onto the patio. To the Long Man at Wilmington TQ543035 an outline of a man cut into a chalk cliff. Parked in a lumpy chalk car park and walked up the South Downs Way and along other bridle paths to get beneath it; wrong time of day for photos as the sun was above it. Walked some of this barefoot, probably about 1 km total barefoot today. To Beachy Head, which was quite popular especially with the wrinklies, and lunch in the Beachy Head pub nearby, which was also almost entirely populated by wrinklies. The sandwiches were good and were served in less time than it took to order; despite being a Cask Marque pub, they had *no bitter* of any kind. Then, via the front at Eastbourne, to Norman's Bay again for some more sun time and a quick dip in the sea. Then back for cleaning and packing. A bit more overcast by then, but an amazing six days for September. A good location, with countryside, seaside, heritage. We stayed entirely within OS 1:50000 sheet 199 and used only a half-tank of petrol.

Sat 2010-09-04

Misty start, with the distant hills gradually emerging from the mist into sunshine. Photo of me in sunflowers with this as background. Away 08:30 and home 11:15, one stop at South Mimms, a couple of short crawl sections only. By MK it's still warm but the sun has become shy.

Pembrokeshire 2011

Sat 2011-04-16

Set off 08:50 to Pembrokeshire, via Oxford, M4, A48, A40 and a few rural roads to Bay View cottage at SM995090. As advertised, with a lovely view over a tidal bay off the river. Long garden, mostly lawn, leading down to the riverside, with a steep path at the end down to the bank. Sunshine most of the day; little cover in the garden, something will have to be worked out. About 5 hours the journey, with stops, with no hold ups at all. Owner not present; keys as advised. Well appointed cottage, with two bedrooms, dining room, kitchen, sitting room, utility room and bathroom, basically on both sides of a central corridor from front door to back. Oil heating. Spent a couple of hours drinking wine and watching the tide coming up the bay, covering the mudflats. A couple of boats moved. One moored on the opposite bank disappeared under the water. Cute Belisha beacon had an orange ball, non-illuminated, with a ring of flashing LEDS around it.

Sun 2011-04-17

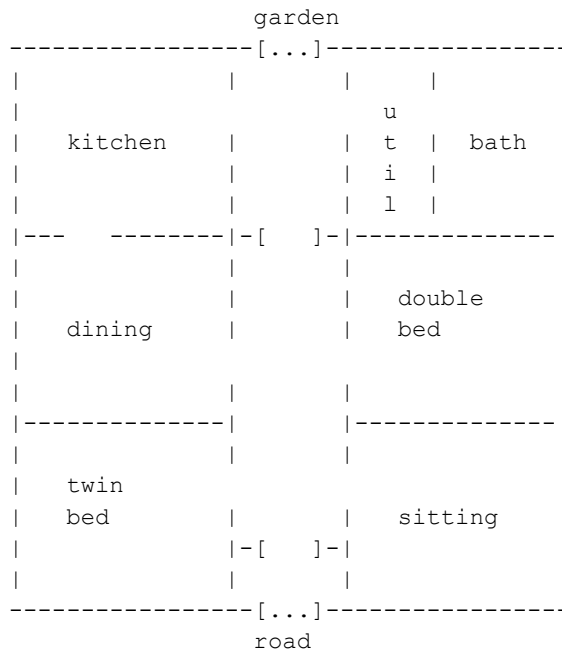
Although the name Llangwm Ferry looks Welsh, local research shows that it isn't, it's Langum, or Langholme, long street, a name with Viking origins. Pembrokeshire, or this bit of it, is described as Little England beyond Wales and there has not been much Welsh influence. Cloudless and warm all day. Started with a local walk, up into the woods, and back via various footpaths, and a private track to escape from which we had to climb a gate. Could also walk along the shore, as the tide was out. Then a little reading. I have found a spot that is out of sight of neighbours' windows and the road, but is otherwise visible to a person in the adjacent garden, and have hopes for another on the other side behind a pile of logs, if the weather holds. Into Haverfordwest to Morrisons to re-stock the wine; we somehow brought only one bottle and we drank that yesterday afternoon. Then back to the local pub, the Cottage Inn, who let us buy drinks and consult the menu, and only after taking our money told us they had a private party later and were not doing any food. So back into Haverfordwest where we had an excellent lunch in the dining room of the Mariners Hotel. Very civilised, sat in the bar until the table was ready, efficient waiter, I had soup, sea bass and cheesecake with white chocolate and Baileys. About £35 with drinks. Back for more reading and sunbathing.

Mon 2011-04-18

To Colby Woodland Garden National Trust near Amroth at SN157081. Pleasant place, helpful staff. Flat lawn-based garden in the middle and steep wooded hillside on both sides, with hair-pin paths at various heights. Rhododendrons out; bluebells only just opening here and there. View of the sea from the highest spot. Coronation chicken salad for lunch, masses of it and very good, with elderflower presse. I bought a pendant in the gallery there, their first sale today. Then along coast to Tenby or Dinbych-y-Pysgod. Parked in the multi-storey by Sainsbury's for 80p for 4 hours and climbed down to the beach; sat near a couple of caves at SN134001. Lots of clean fine sand and many people there, but the warm sunshine of the morning suddenly became hazy, though still warm. Had a walk along the beach and back through the town. Back at cottage by 16:00, still time for some sun in the garden, it was back by then; maybe it was there all day away from the coast.

Tue 2011-04-19

Out to explore the little promontory ending in the village of Angle. First to the beach at Freshwater West SM884004, a large sandy beach surrounded by dunes with rocks at the north end. Small car park at the north end and very few there when we arrived though it was busier when we drove past again later. These trips to the south cost 75p twice for the bridge at Pembroke. Sunny and hot all day again, getting up to 18°C on the car thermometer. Spent some time sunbathing on the rocks away from the few others there, who were mostly children playing or dog walkers, mostly with the tan-throughs. Later I had a paddle. Then to the Hibernia Inn in Angle for lunch, which wasn't bad. Afternoon to West Angle Bay, another sandy beach, this one with lots of children. Tide was right out when we arrived. Sat here for a bit, then for a little walk along the coast path, past Thorn Island with its old fort, a hotel according to the 1:25000 map, and Stack Island, towards the oil refinery. A quick shot from the viewing point with Thorn island in the background, a very pretty scene. Then home. The owner called briefly, now back at home just a bit further along the road. Diagram below shows pure rectangular straight corridor layout of cottage, built by the owner's grandfather, as the cottage next door was built by *his* father.



Wed 2011-04-20

High tide at 08:45, and it's right up to the bottom of the slope, can just stand at the bottom and take a photo across the mirror-smooth water, with tree reflections. At the same time a couple of workmen arrived and started cutting the lawn, without introducing themselves. Spent an hour just watching the tide receding, can see the flow out of the bay, and the water going down maybe 7 metres in 6 hours, or about 2 cm per minute. In that hour, the tiny patch at the bottom of the slope widened to a shore path that could be scrambled along. Odd fissures in the mud emitting streams of bubbles. Tiny green plants standing up as the water left them. Then to NT car park at Stackpole Quay and walk along the coast path to Barafundle Bay SR992950. Approach through a stone arch then 60 stone steps down to the beach. Popular. Again sunny and hot all day, saw 20°C on the car dial. Stayed there until lunchtime, θ had a paddle, φ just soaking up the sun in tan-throughs. Lunch then in the Stackpole Inn, which served excellent Felinfoel Bitter and proper Welsh shepherd's pie. Served at table; one young waitress, on her second day, couldn't work out how to make a blackcurrant and soda. After lunch for a walk in NT Castle Dock Wood SR980965, which we had to ourselves; took some naturist pix on footbridges here. Then to another NT beach Broad Haven SR979939, another NT car park £4 but free to members. Steps down here, and again a lovely soft sandy beach, this one with more dry sand above the high water mark. A rock just offshore called Church Rock which looked to me more like a fairytale Bavarian castle. Stayed here for a while watching the people, many more properly dressed for the beach here, playing games, children burying their parents in the sand. A good day.

Thu 2011-04-21

Another hot and sunny day; saw the car gauge up to 23°C while moving. Into Pembroke, parking by the quay. Parking is cheap here, 80p for 4 hours, they haven't reached the level of gouge in MK at over £1/h. Not much in the way of shops, though a nice enough town otherwise. Got a few provisions in the Co-op. Spent some time in the castle, which is big with lots of towers accessible though most with nothing inside, some with interesting displays. Had sandwiches from the castle cafe. Then to the Lily Ponds, a connected series of lakes feeding into the back of Broad Haven beach, where we were yesterday. This is NT again, so a third saving of £4 parking. A really nice walk around the lakes SR969949, which are beautifully set in hilly woodland, with narrow bridges across to give variety of route. Went onto the beach again, but from the other end this time. There is a narrow sandy salt-water pool behind the beach which joins onto the outflow of the lakes, though there was no flow out of the lakes today; this pool was an excellent place for children to play with no waves and warmer than the sea. Some time in the sun SR978942 then a little more exploring. Found a car-park at SM968116 which gave access to a quiet wood, but   by this time was too tired to explore; the paths were either muddy or steep. Just south of Pembroke is the corner of a 100 km grid square, so around here references are spread over SM, SN, SR and SS. Back to the cottage, to find the owner has parked a Fiat camper van half in and half out of the garden; still

plenty of room for us to park but the gate is open so reluctant to use my garden spot. In compensation, for a quick walk by myself along the shore and up the footpath through the woods to SM994078, and a couple of nice shots near the top.

Fri 2011-04-22

Good Friday. Not another stunningly hot and sunny day, just a warm day, 18°C with intermittent sunshine. Watched the tide in the morning. High tide at Swansea was 10:08 and it seemed pretty close to that here. It just came up steadily then seemed to stop, very little slowing down. It stayed at highest for maybe 15 minutes before it could be seen to be going down again. Then to Picton Castle, didn't pay the £3 for a guided tour of the castle but had an excellent £5.25 each worth of garden and woodland. Masses of it, with lots of curving paths, with bluebells, azaleas, rhododendrons, ferns and all sorts of things. A maze, a walled garden. The children were mainly in the play areas and following the Easter trail, the more remote bits were almost deserted. Good lunch outside the restaurant; θ had mussels. Tried for a walk from a remote car park but gave up as the roads were just too narrow. But we have not seen a pot hole down here yet, not even on the smallest single-track road. Back to the cottage. φ walked round to the other side of the bay to take a photo of θ at the end of the garden.

Sat 2011-04-23

Dull grey start, but got brighter and by MK it was 23°C, or more by electronic in the garden. Again no hold-ups, back via the bridge and A477 route, then A40, A48, M4, A420, A34, M40, A43, A421 route, 08:10 to 13:00.

Sun 2011-04-24

Cats fetched, £140.

Roussillon 2011

Sat 2011-09-03

Up at 02:45 and away at 03:30 to Gatwick, ϕ driving. Clear roads so got to south terminal 05:30. Walk from short-term car park. Speedy Boarding bypassed a long bag-drop queue. Breakfast at Wetherspoon. 08:00 easyJet flight to Marseille MP2 terminal in A319. Long walk from MP2 used by the budget airlines to the car rental, and a long queue at Europcar. Got a 1.4L diesel Fiesta, black, BH-331-FQ. θ drove, first to the cottage location, though we didn't identify which one, then to E Leclerk supermarket at Apt where we stocked up. Lunch was a stop on the A7, where traffic was very slow for the *péage* barrier and the *aire* was heaving. Got to cottage at 15:45 just about the right time without having to idle (5 hours from landing). Le Mazet is at N43.8952 E5.2910. Owner Gilles Garcia's house is next door and he has 5 properties to let in this road, Chemin de la Mutte. Showed us the place; didn't ask for the deposit. Pool was very clear and cool, day was overcast but hot and humid. After we arrived there was a good thunderstorm and it got a lot cooler. The storm cut off the electricity for an hour or so. Ate under the porch by the kitchen door, from there linearly the kitchen, second bed, bathroom, main bed, which led out again onto the terrace. Hire car had a message saying change oil at next service and was completely out of screenwash. Villa was on the outskirts of Roussillon, a village really, and was very rural and quiet; country was quite lumpy. North of here was the main part of the regional nature park. Grounds were not overlooked but not completely safe from anyone wandering up, such as the owner, but no problems so far; θ used the pool; it was a bit cool for me. The bed collapsed, it had a centre support beam and slats on both sides, the centre beam had its own legs and it rotated to let the slats on θ 's side fall down. A very low bed though, about 15 cm, so not completely disastrous.

Sun 2011-09-04

ϕ for a walk on path south from cottage, way-marked footpath, deserted. Back for shower and breakfast but by then overcast and damp air had become full-scale heavy rain. Missing with this place: visitor comment book, mirror you can get close to, reading lights, social area - there's only one sofa, small for two, but of all 5 properties ours was probably the only one with the pool not overlooked from the road. After lunch the rain abated and we walked into Roussillon, a charming village with many restaurants and craft shops, clearly a tourist destination though most of the tourists were French. The area is famous for ochre pigment, though the ochre trail was closed today for safety reasons, presumably relating to the heavy rain. By then the sun was out and spent some time sunbathing and in the pool. Later it clouded over again, so eating and reading inside.

Mon 2011-09-05

Walked into the village for croissants and bread, clear sunny morning, sunny and warm all day. To the Leclerk in Apt again for the things we didn't know we needed on Saturday: light bulbs, bin bags, matches, screen wash, fly spray and some more wine and beer. Out for a drive to see the local landscape, along a mountain road on the side of a ravine near Font Jouvale and an odd cliff in the middle of nowhere at Lioux; then to near Murs and a walk there looking at the mountains and cliff, before back to the villa for reading and sunbathing and a bit of pool. French number plates still a mixture of the old with the dept number, 84 here, on the end and the new sort with dept number as an optional flash on the right. Eve to village again to eat at restaurant Comptoir des Arts. Sat on the terrace, starting with the evening sunshine, then the sunset, then the lights coming on. Service was OK at first, but the main course took an hour to arrive. At the next table they waited so long for just drinks and order taking that they walked out. But food was good and ambience was good. €100 cash only, replaced from cash dispenser nearby. Walked back to the villa as it got dark. Later out to look at the stars, but tonight the moon was too late for me so didn't get the full effect that was presaged last night so anyway went out to the path for a little moonlit walk, but path too rough for that to be safe for any distance. The Fiesta had one of those fillers that only admit a diesel nozzle, had a cover and various lever bits so that a narrow nozzle wouldn't open the flap. Saw a small green lizard in the garden.

Tue 2011-09-06

ϕ out for croissants again, sunshine but cool at that stage. Then walked into Roussillon for postcards and stamps, and up to the Sentier des Ochre, the ochre trail. A long walk, with lots of ups and downs around the area where ochre was mined and which is now a heritage park. Very pretty, though little information on the interpretation boards. We didn't pay the extra for the museum. Many there, English, American and German voices among the French. Then lunch at the café nearby, €40 this time for two courses and a beer. French footpath signs are very sensible. Local paths just a yellow painted band every 100 m or so on a tree, with a

yellow X on private diverging paths and an L-shaped bar underneath the band to show changes of direction. Easy to see, cheap to renew and quite durable, better than the nailed-on signs in the UK which farmers seem to like to damage and presumably are expensive to replace. On the map, trails are marked with a red overcolour alongside paths or roads. After lunch back to villa for pool and sunbathing. The Geko no longer shows the date correctly, typically it shows one about 21.5 years ago, and in the sun / moon display the year is a symbol and it crashes if you try to edit it. The GPS 1024-week roll-around is about 19.5 years. Odd.

Wed 2011-09-07

A walk down the track from the villa south and back on the D roads, during this the weather went from overcast and cool to sunny and then warm. Quick lunch, then to Fontaine-de-Vaucluse, a cute tourist-trap town where the river Sorgue started with a spring in a steep-sided and very deep canyon. Canyon led to a cave, but the spring seemed to be a few 100 m downstream. Lots of shops, stalls and restaurants. We parked for €3.50 and walked through. Had a banana split and a pear helène at a café. Then back for more pool time, sewing and reading. Later the sun went a bit hazy and a breeze got up.

Thu 2011-09-08

φ out early for croissants and bread, getting warm even then. Market was preparing. Dumped glass in recycling in the market square. Then after breakfast with θ to look at market, which was not very exciting. One fish stall, all dead, one cheese, one jam, and lots of jewelry, hats and suchlike. Took some photos of the quiet back lanes of the village. Stocked up at the mini-Casino with water, cheese, paté and bog rolls. Lunch in the villa, then to Château Val Joanis which boasted an award-winning garden. φ driving over a 500 m pass with lots of twisting and turning on narrow roads; 50 km each way with getting lost a few times as the satnav sent us down little roads that I didn't fancy. Château was between Pertuis and Villelaure. Garden was very elaborate, lots of vegetables and trees, fancy supports, model birds but quite small and with few places to sit in the shade. This was attached to a winery which we could have toured and had a tasting for €6, the gardens were €4.50, but we decided against as there was a lot of intensive spoken French in organising it. So home to eat at villa after a little sunbathing and pool. Later the owner came over and put a crawler in the pool to clear the bottom. Sitting outside in the pleasant warmth of the evening again watching the sunset. A wind came up most days mid afternoon but by eve all was still again. Pool was about 3.5 m x 7 m. Tap water was odd, taking much shampoo to lather but soap seemed OK.

Fri 2011-09-09

Another hot sunny one. 28°C by afternoon, φ walk on the local path towards the vineyard and a couple of pix. Later φ walked to the village for croissants and water, and the thermometer used to measure the 28°C. Walk both on a circuit of the village by mostly tracks but at one place a precipitous unsurfaced footpath which was the steepest climb of the circuit. Owner came over to check departure time tomorrow, and again when the pool alarm went off for no good reason. Afternoon reading, sunbathing and θ in pool. Eve a bit of cleaning and packing, then into Roussillon to eat; they don't start until 19:00 so a beer first, then eat on terrace of Bistro des Couleurs, which was better, faster, more fun and cheaper than Monday. Place mats, lights, water glasses were all different colours. I had profiteroles of goat's cheese and an entrecôte with Rochefort sauce, veg and very pretty little croquettes. θ had duck. Still very warm at 21:00.

Sat 2011-09-10

Up at 07:00, completed packing and tidying, chucked unused food into the bins and unused beer and wine down the sink. No individual waste collection here, frequent roadside bins for general waste, card, plastic and tins, with glass in the village square. Owner came on time at 10:00, said goodbye, didn't look inside, and we set off, θ driving. Warm from the start, and hot by midday. Missed one turning early on and a 4 km queue on the approach to the A7, else a smooth run. Stopped at the only *aire* with fuel, just south of the *péage*, for lunch and diesel, and wasted an hour or so there, until it became too hot. Then on to the airport. Didn't go wrong at all going in, and the rental car return signs were very clear, the satnav saved location of the car park was useless. They looked around the car, didn't remark on the scratches, and we then had a long wait. It was fortunately cooler inside the terminal as we had about a 3-hour wait before getting on the plane. θ's bag was searched thoroughly and they found the anti-mozzie spray that she had lost; I had to haul out most of the electronics from mine before they let it through. Packed plane. In France I was sweltering in just shirt, shorts and sandals. At Gatwick it was raining and I added a fleece. Put ticket in exit barrier and it let us out, showed zero charge; ticket had the car registration and pre-payment ref number printed at entry. φ drove home; eat from Chinese. Last night of the Proms. Invoice from Europcar arrived this eve by email, says we produced 48 kg of CO₂, 446 km at 107 g/km; better than the Panda. No mention of any extra charges, beyond the second driver and insurance that we added on pick-up. That was

enough, it made the car for the week about €311 of which €214 was prepaid when I booked it. Check-in at Marseille MP2 was odd. Desk opened where boarding passes and passports were checked, hand-baggage was given an OK sticker, baggage was weighed and labelled, but from there you had to carry your own bags to a bag dump area where boarding pass and passport were checked again before you humped the bags onto a single conveyor. Woman in front of us had 24 kg and was made to transfer stuff to her shoulder bag; she was allowed to get away with 21.5 kg.

Nudefest 2012

Sun 2012-06-10

Sunshine to start, car loaded up and away at 09:15, arrived at Newperran 15:00. Started in sunshine, later heavy rain, dry on arrival. We're in Allet 14. To the pub for a quick half. Wi-fi enabled on the Wildfire in the pub. Pizza in van, then to the marquee to pair off cars and passengers; we got Mike and Sue from Cheshire who were in a camper van and not forum or e-zine readers. Got to Eden Project at 19:00, minibus to the Core where clothes could be left in a study room, then tour the Mediterranean biome, which was cool, then the rainforest biome which was the comfortable one for naturists. Masses of plants and flowers, all humid and dripping water. Back to the central link for a drink and a slice of cake, then back to the rainforest for a performance from a group of female singers. After this we were due a viola recital from Rachel in the Mediterranean biome but this was so cold by then that it was changed to the rainforest. By then we'd gone back and got dressed so we listened to a bit of the concert and then came home; the other two seemed quite happy to leave at 22:00. Quite atmospheric listening to music as it got dark in this green Eden, there were lights at walk level but they also brought in lights right up in the top of dome. To access the tall trees they use ropes or a helium balloon. Maybe 100-150 on the trip.

Mon 2012-06-11

Lazy start, then dress and out to St Austell. Main street had little of interest and lots of noisy street works going on, an unimpressive town. On to the Lost Gardens of Heligan. Weather was threatening so we had lunch first, pork and black pepper sausages, good. Still no rain so we set off around the 80+ hectares of recovered gardens as it got gradually warmer and then full sunshine. Formal and very informal sections, especially the Jungle around several artificial ponds in a valley, verdant like the rainforest of yesterday. Quite steep in places, getting to and from this Jungle. Then to have a look at Gorran Haven, the name of Uncle David's bungalow. Vault beach has an unofficial naturist section, this was accessed via a very steep and narrow road to a National Trust car park and an equally steep and narrow footpath down, which we didn't attempt, just went far enough to get a good view of the beautiful beach and headland. Then back to base, with a huge jam as the A30 had been closed because of a vehicle fire. Time for sunbathing by the caravan, then to the pub to use the wi-fi and have the first Tribute of the trip. Later a pub quiz, in which we came nowhere, our team included Sid Western who was not interested in quizzes and Devdon from Naturist-corner, who was very good. We left before the karaoke started.

Tue 2012-06-12

Early sunshine for exercise around the park, 2.11 km in 0:14:13 = 8.9 km/h. First to a presentation from Geoff on the campaign against body shame. This is a BN idea which it is hoped will become big, giving publicity to BN as well as the cause. Geoff has been talking to some people in advertising. The immediate idea is for many people to wear a small badge with a nude photo of themselves at a specific time to coincide with publicity. About 40 of us had photos taken for free badges today. Worry is that Geoff seems to have in mind a campaign against female genital mutilation, which while maybe connected is not likely to add to the main thrust against anorexia and reluctance to seek medical help for complaints of the parts whose names are not spoken. Then a rest, sunbathing by the van, until   went to a choir session in the pub. About 30 there, the women more competent than the men, a run through 4 or 5 pieces with Peter the church organist and naturist, who   said could not play in time. Then to the Blue Reef aquarium in Newquay, again giving lifts to two, Lee and one whose name I missed. A couple of hours looking at the fish, and being shown lobsters and crabs close up, and an octopus being fed and trying to hold on to the demonstrator. He used the claws of the biggest crab to crack walnuts. The cafe there was good, did us a coffee and cream scones. Then back to the pub, with music from Lazy K, country music featuring Stuart from Edison Lighthouse, and a couple of Tributes. A generally superb day. We managed lunch from the Newperran cafe, but by eve there was a problem with their gas and they were serving only chips, presumably made in an electric fryer.

Wed 2012-06-13

Warm and sunny start, run 3.0 km in 0:18:55 = 9.5 km/h, doing some parts of the site twice. Then to Cadgwith, by which time it was raining heavily with shortish dryish spells. Went up to the headland to repeat photo of the cottage we stayed in September 1992, which looked just the same apart from new doors. In fact the whole place looked just the same. Car park same place, but now  2 for a day, and the footpath and cottages along it the

same. Lunch in the cafe, crab baguette and jacket potato with crab. Came straight back, proving that it was also raining by then at Newperran. Could compare photos with the 1992 ones as we had two 32GB sticks carrying all our photos and all our music. θ to another choir session, but fewer there and no-one really competent, and not really useful. A quick pint in the pub afterwards, then fish curry back in the van and reading and watching the rain. Didn't do the Newquay zoo visit this eve, as mostly outside.

Thu 2012-06-14

Much cooler and raining, out of bed to light the fire and put on clothes. To Asda near Bodmin for a shopping top-up, then to Lanhydrock National Trust, a Victorian house and grounds. Rain on arrival, so did the house first, as did everyone else; quite crowded. Then lunch in the restaurant, good. Always amazing how hard the middle-aged women work, food arrived very quickly, though very busy. Then a walk in the grounds, heavily overcast but just slightly damp. Back to base by a circuitous route via Padstow and the coast road from there to Newquay, lots of pretty bits which we passed on as very windy and still light rain. Just as got back to the campsite the rain started in earnest and carried on. Went to the pub in a quieter bit. A couple of BN members were patrolling the site and reporting tents in distress, and helping recover, even for non-Nudefest people whose awning was about to pull their caravan over. Christine remarked that they wouldn't leave the office door open as they do this week in any other week, and moaned about textiles in general. Today's trip was to Skinner's brewery; they had arranged a coach rather than car share.

Fri 2012-06-15

More wind and rain during the night, but only wind by dawn. Even a ray of sunshine when I went out for a short run to the far side of the park, just to show willing, 834 metres in 5 minutes = 10 km/h. Only three in the official jogging party when I passed them, and two of them were dressed from head to toe. Haven't tried barefoot this year as there are too many gravel paths to cross. To Trerice NT house and garden near Newquay, lunch there. Dry, windy with bursts of sunshine by then. Back via Porth beach, just to say we've walked on sand. Even windier there, and tide coming in fast over a very long shallow-sloping sandy beach, with a river flowing out over it. φ to miBeer in the marquee, I took London Pride as good and safe, and one both local to home and one I've been drinking for 40 years; about a dozen there and enough samples to get quite pissed on. Supper in the van, then to the pub for a music quiz, set by Andy and Patti. That was excellent, with conventional questions, a pictures sheet and a cryptic sheet, but best was a final round where he spoke a lyric slowly word by word until a team guessed it, and then had to all stand and sing it. Back to the van after that as football was on, but φ back later for the first set of Edison Lighthouse, now down to just one of the originals, but a very good band. Still windy but little rain, not too bad for a quick dash from and to the caravan with no textile assistance.

Sat 2012-06-16

Another wet and windy night, but continuing to a wet and windy morning. It did get better, the wind had dropped a bit by evening, but no sunshine and not warm; wearing a fleece even for the trip to the pub; a nude walk to the marquee to buy a couple of the black polos was a bit chilly. Stayed in the van for most of the morning until the wine tasting at 14:30, which was moved from the marquee to the restaurant. This was fun, with a good presenter who seemed to know what he was talking about. We sat at a table with Barbie and Stuart from the Bedford area who knew a lot about it and thought they knew more, though she did win the prize. Tried 8 wines, four white and four red, and asked to identify new or old world, country, grape type and a special question. Almost all of them were someone's first choice. I didn't bother to score as I was only guessing, but θ was not far behind the pack. A quick supper in the van then back for the sing-along. Martin used the same sheets as last year, and brought music for two verses of Rule Britannia for θ to sing the solo. This was encored; several plaudits. θ had prepared another piece but after the sing-along there was instead a repeat of the two first-year university girls with their own compositions, first heard at Eden, and another song from a Nudefester. Then the disco, not Jim Russell this year as he was ill, which we didn't stay for. Sitting in the van tonight writing this, and not hearing the wind whipping around the flue of the gas fire, possibly for the first time since Tuesday.

Sun 2012-06-17

The morning gradually cleared to sunshine. Cleared up and loaded the car, group photo in the sunshine, then off. θ had a heavy cold, so φ drove to Leigh Delamere and θ home from there. Lunch a mediocre burger at Taunton services. Mostly sunshine. Queue for a horrible smash on M5 with an SUV upside down and cabin crushed to waist level, apparently associated with a caravan right-way-up behind, and both pointing the wrong way.

Brittany 2012

Sat 2012-08-18

Up at 02:30 and away at 03:15, to tunnel in time for a coffee and croissant before the booked crossing at 06:50. No passport inspection from either side. Got to the Bougo's antiques shop later than we predicted at 17:20. Compared with the last time in May 2009 there was a lot more traffic, queues for tolls, an accident before Caen and a long jam coming out of Rennes. One of the *aires* where we stopped for fuel was heaving, women were thronging the gents loo competing for the WCs so men had to push past for the pissers. Lunch bought at one crowded *aire* and eaten at another peaceful one. *Moulin* is just the same, a bit more growth and a lower water level for August than May. Got some initial food at a Lidl we passed near Guer, while we were heading for La Gacilly hoping to find the supermarket there. Hot day, virtually cloudless, 33°C on car thermo max, a/c on most of the way. θ in UK, ϕ first in France, then θ again, then ϕ , then θ from Lidl to Moulin. We have been asked to discourage fishermen who trespass on the property. Total journey time 13½ hours. Eve hoards of bats catching the midges over the river.

Sun 2012-08-19

Got up very late. A little rain early, then misty and warm sunshine. Day in. Grounds very much more grown up than last time so fewer good spots, but enough. Many flies. A sad, thin, lame cat wandered by, then wandered off again.

Mon 2012-08-20

To the Casino supermarket north of La Gacilly to stock up, and get some Pelforth Brune at last as Lidl on Saturday had only their own German beer. Back to the mill to put that in the fridge, then to La Gacilly proper, parking in the market square. Spaces between the trees, so every other one is taken leaving only a narrow space for the second; θ got the Focus into one of them. Had a walk around, even less open than last time, but Monday appears to be a day off for many. The area around the bridge now very pretty with many flowers, there is also a walkway over the weir with lots of flowers. An outdoor photo exhibition, spread all over the town, with many on a winding path on the other side of the river. Dull start with good sunshine later. Lunch at the pizzeria in the artisan area, θ had a huge seafood pizza, I veal with a cream and mushroom sauce. Then back to the mill to recover, read and take in the sun. The Focus's driver's side floor mats are dripping, we assume from running the air-con all Saturday as it's pure water. Bites are multiplying, taking precautions with repellent and keeping doors closed in the evening. There may not be much open in town, but the restaurant was doing good business.

Tue 2012-08-21

To Rochefort-en-Terre, a very pretty touristy town. Main street of restaurants, craft shops and one or two shops for locals, a baker and a butcher. Much more impressive than La Gacilly is now, and lots of people there, mostly French, some English, a few Dutch. Had a look around and then lunch at a Crêperie / Pizzeria, which was bustling. Had galettes Bretonne, which contained egg, cheese, mushrooms and a sausage (*andouille*) made with pig's intestines, the waitress did ask us if we knew what we were eating. Ice cream as well. Then a walk along the river / canal from St Martin towards the lock, where we saw a narrowboat go through, crewed by three Englishmen who spend a lot of time on the French waterways, Falcon it was. To La Gacilly for some stamps, when La Poste finally opened at 14:30, late as Tuesday; one *lettre verte* and two €0.10 on each for UK. Then sunshine back at the mill, at the front for me as a neighbour was strimming his land to the rear.

Wed 2012-08-22

Much cooler morning, actually warmer inside the mill than outside. Measured the site using the Geko, seems to make a sensible plan when plotted out with the drive from gate via bridge to car looking remarkably straight for a simple GPS reading. Boat is padlocked now so can only sit in it by the steps, there are still oars in the garage; it has a hole below the waterline blocked with a cork, which seeps so the inside is always wet. A day at home. It got quite warm later. ϕ walked into Carentoir to post the cards, and later we had a walk together. ϕ spent a lot of the day programming a maze generator, based on putting in as many hedge segments at random as possible until some part of the maze became cut off, then removing that segment and trying another. Seems always to make a good, simply-connected maze but not a very aesthetic one.

Thu 2012-08-23

Again sunny, though slightly cooler. To Muzillac first, which was supposed to have some touristy attractions, but it looked a pretty boring place, so to Malestroit instead. Got there in time for lunch, eating outside alongside the market which was closing down as we finished eating. Galettes, this time one with the filling on top rather than folded inside, minced steak, thick bacon and a spicy sausage, and crêpes with chocolate, banana and whipped cream, accompanied by *cidre doux*. A walk along the river before back to La Gacilly to top up shopping and then back to mill for reading in the sun. Saw white lines being repainted live with a van parked in the middle of the road at each end to slow traffic; they repaint them here before the old ones become invisible. Also I don't think we have seen a pot-hole yet; the minor roads have an excellent surface.

Fri 2012-08-24

Overcast, with rain at times. Dropped the idea of taking a day boat on the Aff and instead looked again at the craft shops in La Gacilly, at a time when more of them were open. Also saw more of the hundreds of photos exhibited outside all over the town. Lunch at the Yucca again, as it had the widest menu, not just more galettes. Then back to the mill, though by then the rain had mostly abated; still much cooler. A couple of lads yesterday and today on the adjacent property and under the road bridge; not seen them inside the mill's boundary yet. Lots of rain and some thunder later. The Vietnamese restaurant that was in La Gacilly has gone; appears to be a more conventional French restaurant there now. We didn't see the ragged cat Thursday or Friday; it was struggling to keep the flies off the last time we did see it.

Sat 2012-08-25

Mme Bougo came exactly on time at 07:00, when it was just getting light; our €150 back and away. Only about 50 kWh used, so all in the free 100. θ drove to beyond Rennes, φ to somewhere around Rouen, θ to tunnel and φ in UK; about 2 x 2 hours each; got home 17:40. No hold-ups this way, starting 1 hour earlier than last time with a 1 hour stop for lunch got us a train scheduled for 15:37 instead of booked 16:50; though it was late and left 15:50, so on the M20 at about 15:35. Dull and cool in France, with some rain; very windy and wet at Coquelles. A bit of sunshine in Kent, but thunderstorms from north of Dartford onward. As before, we bought lunch at a congested cramped *aire* and ate it at a plain rest *aire*. Still many cars with the old-style number plates with the *département* number. What to be said of going back to the same cottage? This was pretty much the same as memory, better weather for being later in the year, but against that were the mosquitoes and other biting flies. We'd done the surroundings so there was less inclination to get around and more to enjoy the tranquility. The vegetation was more mature, perhaps too much; the little lawn at the back where I sunbathed on the lounge last time was now completely shaded, so much so that the grass was dying (and the lounge had gone). There were sunbathing spots throughout the day, but needing frequent change of position. The back millstone table no longer got morning sunshine. 'Twas still good, but on balance the opportunities of a new place probably win over the possibility of a dud; after all, a previously good place could always become a dud.

Sun 2012-08-26

Pick up the cats, £140.

Terrasson-la-Villedieu 2013

Sat 2013-04-27

Away at 07:00, one stop for breakfast at the new Cobham services and to Gatwick South long term and onto waiting bus at 09:15. Only a couple of minutes wait with Speedy Boarding and no queues at security. Taxied off at set time 11:45 and arrived Bordeaux 14:20. Picked up hire car, a grey Seat Leon 1.6TD105 with Spanish registration 0934HKV. Various scratches and a big gash at the bottom of the passenger front door. Away at 15:10, round south of Bordeaux and to la Maison D'Emma near Loubignac N45.1595 E1.2852, altitude 306 m, very close to half-way between the equator and the north pole. One stop for a pee and another to shop in Terrasson at the Intermarché. Arrived pretty much exactly at the predicted 18:30. Mme François was there to greet us with little girl in tow, the villa is good and fenced off all round, but Mme seems to live in a caravan in the site beyond. It had turned cool by then and some rain after we arrived. Bedrooms have electric heaters but main room is wood burner only. Big, but not much stuff, no sound system, no place mats, though a shed by the pool has a sound system and lights, huge patio with pool.

Sun 2013-04-28

Early sun but quite cold in the breeze, later more cloud with intermittent sun but not warm. Walk along the road to the south, lunch at the cottage then sitting, reading and sewing, the warmest bit being just inside the patio doors after the sun came round. Looking more carefully at the area behind the cottage, there does appear to be a permanent house there as well as a big corrugated shed and several caravans. Saw a lizard and a rabbit came up close to the front. Dinner in. Lit the wood burner eve. Music from the Kindle Fire HD's own speakers.

Mon 2013-04-29

To Terrasson, park in the road on the far side of the river, just outside the blue spaces time disk zone, though we saw no car with a disk, maybe as Monday is the day most places close. Saw a few shops, many empty. Bought a 1:25000 map. Explored around the abbey and ramparts. Lunch by the abbey, possibly in a crypt or cellar associated with it or the walls, at La Mandragore. Had the chef's special menu, which was gorgeous, served with lots of fresh herbs and even flowers, which we were told to eat all of. They spoke a lot of French, of which we understood little. Duck pâté and lamb wrapped up for starter, fish risotto main and chocolate mousse to finish. Then top up the shopping a bit at Carrefour and back to the cottage. Warm and sunny for the morning, overcast and warm after lunch. ☐ for a walk after lunch. After that it rained all evening.

Tue 2013-04-30

To Château de Castelnaud, dating from the middle ages and recently restored. Displays of ancient armaments, armour, guns, crossbows, spears and especially trebuchets, with some full-size reconstructions in the grounds. Lunch at Les Tilleuls a restaurant near the château, which in an ancient village. It rained much of the time, with low cloud or mist on the hills. Eve in, lit the fire again, but with me laying it I had three goes at starting it before it took. two big logs and three small ones kept us warm from 17:00 to 22:00, with poking and re-arranging at least every 30 minutes. It has a fan that cools the case and possibly chimney and exhausts to grilles in the chimney breast, which is annoyingly noisy.

Wed 2013-05-01

Bank holiday in France. Started very misty and then thickly overcast. To walk by a big reservoir / lake Lac du Cousse. Passed through Larche which was packed with people, cars parked everywhere around, for some event. The road wasn't barred, we just crawled through the crowd. Many fishing and jogging at the lake. Walked 4.4 km. Gradually the sun came out. Back to the cottage, avoiding Larche, for lunch al fresco and then some sunbathing. ☐ put her legs into the pool, but at 13°C it was too cold for more. Still sunny at 18:00, not bad for a day forecast for rain.

Thu 2013-05-02

To the Intermarché, car park packed after the holiday yesterday. but not too bad inside. Back to cottage as the caves are open only 10:00-12:00 and 14:00-18:00 in April and May. Lots of rain overnight, but brighter by late morning. Cockerel somewhere about crows a lot of the time, not just dawn. The hut by the pool has little curtained-off changing areas, though they are full of the paraphernalia for running a pool. Typical French electrics, the pool filter is run through a plug-in timer sandwiched between a socket and plug, with the outer

sheathing stopping short, and just wedged into a box where a proper set-up used to be. Sunshine by lunchtime, enough to eat on the terrace. Aft to the Grotte de Tourtoirac, a spectacular cave 3 km in length of which some 200 m was made into public access with a lift and walkways. Waited an hour for the one-hour guided tour. Huge variety of shapes in the stalactites and -mites.

Fri 2013-05-03

Fuel at Carrefour and some cleaning stuff, then parked in the ample free municipal parking and went round the Jardin de l'Imaginaire, on the hillside above Terrasson, guided by Anna, who was Italian. They pitied us and gave us a written script in English to follow. Lunch at another restaurant in the ancient town, les Agapes. A walk in the park by the river, then back to cottage. Dumped a few bottles more and back for tea, tidying and packing. A little sun but cool. Mme François came over 19:00 returning the deposit and the little girl gave us a present of coasters.

Sat 2013-05-04

A dull and misty start again. Finished cleaning and away at 09:00, via the re-cycling bins, 0 driving. Stopped for a pee on the A89 and then for an early lunch at a McDonald's off junction 3 just before the Bordeaux ring road. Topped up the fuel on the ring road itself then to the airport at around 12:00. Very poor signing of rental car return, but it was basically just straight until you saw the logos. To Terminal billi, for the cheapo airlines, and a wait till 12:45 for bag drop to open, then in first with speedy boarding. More waiting for the gate, then more again for the plane. Speedy boarding were laned off by the gate. Almost at the time we were due to depart, just those few were led outside to see the plane, but not allowed to board for several minutes; no reason for delay. One passenger appeared to have a problem getting past the French border police. Then away quickly, supposedly 1:20 h flight but we came down 10 minutes later than predicted, then before actual ground contact zoomed back up again and tried again 10 minutes later at 15:40; pilot explained that a gust of wind had upset his approach. Long but fast-moving zig-zag for passport control. Long-term car park bus had only four on it. Back home 0 driving at 18:30 via Chinese. Car roughly 11.5 L of diesel for 200 km of mostly motorway driving: 5.75 L/100km. I didn't get to drive it on the motorway, but on the few bits of higher-speed driving I did get it felt lively and agile; it was a bit high-gearred for the winding, hilly D-roads; it was often easier just to leave it in third. Rearward visibility was not good, and reverse was next to first. It did eventually get to be warm and sunny in France, and it was bright and 18°C in England later.

Loch Ness 2013

Fri 2013-08-30

Up at 04:00 and away about 05:15, φ driving to N of Manchester, θ into Scotland at 10:45, φ into the highlands, θ the last bit. Sunshine to rain as we progressed. Arr at the Lock Inn at Fort Augustus 15:00 and a quick drink and sandwich there before arr at cottage Bunloit Farmhouse on time at 16:00. Looks right over Loch Ness. Long narrow steep route to it with two gates. Sheep grazing outside. 880 km. Cottage has three bedrooms, single, twin, double, with electric storage heating and wood burners at £5/basket. Electric is supplemented by wind turbines, we have seen three on the estate. NH505253, 158 m altitude from Geko. There is another cottage close by, Wester Bunloit, the couple for which knocked on our door unable to find their place; good job we arrived first. On the estate map, ours is marked Easter Bunloit. Owner has a huge house a few 100 m away with an adjacent building let as apartments. Owner Nicola came over later to check all OK and roll eyes at inability of other couple to follow directions, and their attempting to reverse on the access roads. Welcome basket had bottle of wine, home-made cake and local eggs. Sunshine for a photo on arrival, then cloud came down with more rain.

Sat 2013-08-31

Early sunshine, allowing a few photos and some time in the shelter of the cottage, wind was cold otherwise. Walk back to road but it was surprisingly cold in the wind, the cottage was part-way down the valley and though windy it didn't see the full force of the wind at the top. All day at the cottage, with some more time outside next to the ha-ha at the front, which shielded some of the wind, while θ sat on a chair in the shelter of the porch. Worker came twice to the barn behind with his trailer. Reading and listening to music. Netbook worked well for music and diary with the terabyte USB drive and Sony PC speakers. Moved the speakers to the Sky box later for the Proms, it was worthwhile bringing a phono to 3.5mm lead. Watching it get dark across the loch, which we were too tired to wait for last night. Not many lights visible on the other side.

Sun 2013-09-01

There was a fire on the opposite bank last night, couldn't see if building or nature that burnt. Mostly dull and cool day with some rain. Took the car out for a circuit of the loch, clockwise this time. Traffic scheme in Inverness wouldn't let us drive past the Glen Mhor Hotel but we did go past the rear of it. Took some photos of the cottage from the other side of the loch. Didn't see any sign of the fire of last night. Lunch at Fort Augustus at the Lock Inn, where we were recognised from Friday. The hand-pump ale was on this time, and good, though I forgot to note what it was. Watched 5 boats starting up the staircase, leaving four on the pontoon not wanting this locking, though there was room for only one more anyway. The Caley boats are all different of course, and not named after castles. Many foreign accents around. The mural on the end wall of the sitting room is signed Jess Arthur 2011, as is the painting of a stag's head on the opposite wall. The cottage has two stories over most of its length, but the sitting room which has a slightly lower roof line outside is full height and full width and very effective. Just like all hire cottages, cold. Several of the heaters appear to be disabled so we might have to resort to the wood burner at £5 per basket after the first. Found an out-of-town Tesco the other side of Inverness, coming out on the south-east side of the loch. This being Scotland, it was open 08:00-22:00 on Sunday. Later back at the cottage the clouds came down to our level over the loch. Omelet from the local eggs.

Mon 2013-09-02

Windy in the night, but still by the morning with broken sunshine. Quite late, out in the car towards Muir of Ord, where we saw the distillery but decided not to visit, and on to Dingwall. Quite a nice little town, with free parking and free bogs. Had lunch here in a basic pub. Landlord interpreted my orange and lemonade as some sort of lager; happens a lot up here. Many roads marked as single-track on our 25-year-old OS sheets are now of decent width. Back to the cottage for reading and puzzles, and some time in the sun. Quite a strong wind but not cold even with a hazy sun. Forecast rain was only a few spots. No DAB but FM tuner OK for the Proms through the Sony speakers. An odd effect we have seen more than once: a thin white line down the middle of the loch, like a very thin wake but it's not, it's uniform all along and persistent, must be something to do with the wind and the waves bouncing off the sides. Later flashing blue lights at the spot opposite where the fire was before, but probably a road accident. Hire car: Seat Leon 5DR SE 1.6 TDI CR 105, KP13ZNE.

Tue 2013-09-03

Early sunshine with only a gentle wind. For a tour in the car, turning into Glen Moriston along the A887 and then back via Loch Garry and the A87, with various stops to take photos. Then to Laggan locks, where we arrived in

light rain just in time to see one boat come down and another two start to go up. To Fort Augustus for lunch, where we waited in the car for a while for heavy rain to abate, then braved only slightly lesser rain to The Bothy for lunch, in the restaurant rather than the pub, in a conservatory. Very efficient service, they were turning the tables over rapidly, and food was good. I did get the orange and lemonade that I asked for this time. Many road signs around here are in two languages, often with the Gaelic first. Even the cash machines give out Scottish notes. Topped up supplies at the little supermarket in Fort Augustus. Had a look at Urquhart Castle, but £7.50 each and carefully screened from the car park. Back to the cottage, by then sunny. φ a short walk around the estate looking for good angles on the cottage. The wind turbines are 5 kW max each, giving out 300-400 V at 30 Hz. They change speed rapidly as the wind gusts. Some sun by the cottage; there was a better spot in the field, less wind as a little lower, but I didn't have anything to put over the spiky grass. A couple of boats heading north-east on the loch in the late afternoon; they seem to move so slowly at 1-2 km away. We have seen nothing of the people in the adjacent Wester Bunloit since they came up to this cottage on Friday.

Wed 2013-09-04

Again a bright morning with scattered cloud, and not cold outside. Have to be careful as walkers sometimes come by the front of the cottage. We were warned of shortage of water, advised to use economy programme on dishwasher but not otherwise; we have been taking showers, for me one shower takes the same water as 6 cm in the bath, washing up every other day and flushing the bog only when necessary. But the bogs fight against this, as despite a lot of flush water they don't clear the pan, leaving paper and turds floating and needing a poke or several flushes. Simple things could save more water than using a different dishwasher programme. Went looking for a forestry car park that we were both sure we saw yesterday not far before home, but despite running down to Invermoriston and back, looking carefully both times, we didn't spot it again. Must have been further south but we were both convinced it was close [it was actually just north of Fort Augustus]. To Inverness, parking in Rose Street multi-storey. Lunch in a good and well-patronised steak specialist not far from the river, where I disposed of all my foreign notes. Many of the customers were from American and German coach-parties, in fact maybe 50% of the people in the centre were tourists. Walked down to the Glen Mhor which looked much the same. Back to the cottage for a good hour in warm sunshine and little wind. Car is up to 840 mi, 550 for the trip up and 290 so far up here. It's quite nice to drive, engine has enough go, handling OK, comfort OK, enough gadgets. It has auto engine stop while waiting, USB MP3 which worked on my 32G stick, air-con but not climate control like the one we had in France, four electric windows, daylight running lights, cruise control. Reverse is up by first and fifth is very close to third. Offers a digital speedo in the info panel which I found very useful. Most afternoons a couple of very noisy jet fighters have been over; yesterday they flew below the level of the cottage along the loch, then turned and climbed rapidly over the hills on the far side.

Thu 2013-09-05

Tue I was bitten by a small black and white thing on the left hand which came up in a lump; going down now with antihistamine cream; yesterday by something I didn't see on the bum which is now coming up well. Sunny morning, for the ideal spot by the door, completely screened from the prevailing wind but only useful in the morning. All day at cottage. Sunshine nearly all day. Short walk across the fields. Cleaning and packing. Owner Nicola rang to ask if all was well; we said we'd be leaving early.

Fri 2013-09-06

Up at 05:30 and away at 06:50. Cooler this morn. φ drove to Pitlochry, where we had breakfast in a cafe and paid 80p to park and 30p each for a pee; θ to Annadale Water, where we had McDonald's for lunch; φ to Knutsford, after a slow crawl in heavy traffic, θ home. Same route as going out: A82, A86, A889, A9, M9, M80, A80, M73, M74, A74(M), M6, M1; 880 km. Home at 18:20. Also slow on M74 S of Glasgow and all the way on the lower parts of the M6. M6 Toll was running free. 10°C mostly but dropped to 3°C on the A86 in the high bits; up to 13°C in England. My second stint was mostly continuous heavy rain. Car was booked out at 9045 mi and on return home it was at 10430 mi. Overall 4.54 L/100km or 62 mi/UKgal.

Sat 2013-09-07

First to take back the hire car, then to collect the cats, £140.

Nice 2014

Sat 2014-05-03

Up at a reasonable time for a holiday departure, taxi came at 08:35, a little early, it was a clapped-out 07-reg Toyota Avensis, £32 + tip. Had a scare at the bag drop when my bag disappeared off but at 0's bag they paused and said it was showing a 5 hour delay. They phoned and checked and it wasn't true, we got off only 10 minutes late due to baggage handling, at about 12:00. Usual easyJet Airbus A319. Landed at Nice 2 14:50, then a huge wait of more than 30 minutes for the bags, even though there was nothing else going on at the airport. Walk out to the car rental, which had offices in the car park area rather than in the terminal, and quickly got the wrong car. We'd asked for a small one, we were offered a big automatic, then a VW Passat 140D, not best for the mountain roads. It's dark grey, diesel and called DE-820-KX. It has a satnav, which got us to the Carrefour Market in St Andre de la Roche using the POI. That had a free underground car park with lifts to the shop. Then a bit fiddly to the cottage, missing the way once, grinding up zig-zag mountain roads to Lou Nidou at 7 Allee Du Mas Duc, in a private estate. Car's satnav seemed to work only in DMS so used the Garmin for this bit, the cottage is at N43.7588 E7.3064. M Eric Balducci was there to meet us. Showed us round, mostly in French. He's the local butcher, his van is parked outside; left us meat and bread. It was sunny and quite warm when we arrived, right in the middle of the 17:00-18:00 we had predicted. View is superb, can see the sea and the airport from the front and mountains from the back. Owner said it's at 200 m, Geko says 413 m. Pool is out the front and private, but overlooked from opposite and the road, OK for swimming, not for sunbathing probably. There are several possible spots both at the front and in the back garden, which slopes steeply down on three shelves. There is a cat which hangs around outside. Owner went off without taking the €350 deposit and asking for keys to be left in the letter box. Big place, in style of Provence, not heated at this time of year; very few power points and fewer with earth. On one upper level for living, steps up to front door from the drive, but garage and owner's bit below. Eve a minor thunderstorm, wind and rain.

Sun 2014-05-04

Relaxing Sunday. Sunshine most of the day, though the air was not very warm. There are two sorts of ants here, big ones and bloody big ones. Lots of cats come by, owned or not unclear. Looking at the clouds coming over the mountains, as they came they disappeared, vanishing in a few seconds. The butcher's van is parked outside, linked to the mains presumably to keep the freezers going. The ground floor of the villa whirrs, presumably it also is full of freezers. Some sort of festival going on below yesterday and today, the sound of the PA wafts up occasionally.

Mon 2014-05-05

Bank holiday in UK. Another warm sunny day. To the Auchan supermarket in La Trinité, which was huge and full of price-conscious customers. Car park was nearly full and the Passat stuck out the back of the space, a metre longer than the little Peugeots each side. Stocked up on more food and a large beach towel. Brought this back to the villa and lunch, then a walk around the local roads, which just serve the properties in the hills. Got some antihistamine for the bite some bugger made in my right thigh.

Tue 2014-05-06

Awoken at 04:00 by the owner preparing his wares and stocking his van, which he had backed into the drive, under the outside lights. Slightly less sunshine but still warm, 20°C perhaps. To Nice, getting a bit lost going in following the satnav to the recommended Corvesy car park near Hotel de Ville, which was nearly full. Having found someone leaving on floor 1 and unable to get the Passat into the space we worked out the system; there was a sensor on each bay and signs to direct you to the free ones. We found space on floor -2 and it not being right at the end with a silly post in the way the Passat fitted OK. Sat on the beach for a bit, on the Quai des Etats-Unis, then into the old town for lunch. Sat outside at Eclat de Cours in the heart of the flower market. 0 mussels and prawns; 0 egg casserole, eggs poached in a shallow dish with peppers, mushrooms, flavouring, sauce, and steak. 0 drove, scary in the town and tight in the car park. After lunch a look round, failed to find the GIS 1:25000 maps anywhere; bought some postcards. Pedestrian area with fountains quite attractive but failed to find the main shopping area. Back to the cottage to find the owner's van back in the drive and he working in the depths; he moved out to let us onto the drive and came back in behind until he'd finished, putting the van back on the road. Later some more sunbathing and a lot more reading.

Wed 2014-05-07

Owner was a bit later today, didn't wake θ , I heard him 06:15. Like yesterday, didn't hear him go. There is a motorbike parked on the front this morning. Dull start, but the sun came out for a trip to Contes, a little way up into the mountains. An interesting place, an old town with a church high up in the air and a newer bit down in the valley with the road. There was a winding road up and a staircase but also a new, free, cross between a lift and a funicular, though it called itself an *ascenseur*. Worked just like a lift but running on sloping rails more vertical than horizontal, cable hauled with a counterweight running under the main rails. 8 person maximum single cabin. Two separate sections, first shorter from car park level to mid and second going right to the top in one go. We parked for free 100 m away. Upper old town very pretty with church and *marie* but nowhere to eat. Lunch at road level at Le Select, I had antipasto, salad and trout. Served with complimentary apple and lemon shots at end. θ drove. Owner back 18:30 tonight.

Thu 2014-05-08

Le 8 Mai, a holiday. The butcher was out at 08:00 and back by 12:00; this time he drove off in a white Audi that he'd left in the road. Lazy day; sunshine but slightly hazy, no wind, very pleasant. Saw a couple of lizards in the garden. Walk along another of the cul-de-sac roads. We are at the top of the local D-road loop which is signposted to Nice both ways, via la Plana or via l'Abadie, three roads branch off all full of new or newish villas, many still under construction.

Fri 2014-05-09

The sunshine still with us, 21°C by the car. Butcher preparing at 06:30 today, and again with the Audi. Some photos in the back garden, with morning light. Then to a pin in the map, St Martin du Var, on the left bank of the river Var. A more conventional French town with a town square and a few shops; topped up at the Spar. Found a restaurant serving under a canopy in the middle of the square, La Dolce Vita; basic menu, not printed, two starters and two mains, but good and cheap, charcuterie, chicken in sauce with chips. Then back through the hills, leaving the main road at le Plan du Var and winding through Duranus; Levens; Tourrette-Levens then home across on the white unclassified roads. Very pretty scenery in the mountains, one lesser pass and one higher, though a bit narrow in places ϕ driving. Back to villa for more sunbathing, possibly the warmest day so far, the pool was almost at a useable temperature. Van back at 17:00 today. Eat from what's left, cleaning, packing.

Sat 2014-05-10

Up early for a change, 07:45, breakfast, final tidying. The sunshine has gone, misty start. The butcher was in at 07:00 today, and left a little note on the table on the verandah thanking us. He has put a crawling thing in the pool to clean the bottom. Away at 09:30, keys in the letter box. Went up to the village of Gattières, another place up a windy zig-zag road, with some modern buildings and an old part of steep narrow passages. Looked around and then read in the car park for a little. To the airport at 13:00, car dropped off easily. Had to wait a little to drop bags, a little less than 2 hours before booked departure, but running 40 minutes late. Bag examined for all the electrical stuff, by a Scot. Coffee and roll in domestic departure area, then through passport check into the B area and wait for call to gate. Finally away at about 16:00 and land Luton 17:00 (local). It's cold and very windy, and has been raining. Took 10 minutes for land crew to get the terminal access sorted then quickly through terminal, text to taxi and straight out to it waiting, talkative man from Great Holm in a Toyota Prius. He also turned right into H5 from the second lane at the roundabout, £37 with extra waiting time for the late arrival. Home by 18:00. Thai delivered. Issues: There were on this trip four disappointments, if that is not too strong a word, in order of decreasing magnitude: the area; the car; the cottage and the owner. The area is very pretty but it is an industrial area, the industry being money. There is none of the gentle French agriculture, none of the open space, just masses of people, houses and roads squashed into every part of the lumpy landscape that will take them, and some more that you can't believe does. There are no quiet autoroutes, no long scenic N roads, just traffic and complicated junctions. In another place the car would be fine, a 140 HP turbo diesel Passat with automatic everything, leather seats and less than 1000 km on the clock, but it is far too big for the mountain roads and the underground car parks; it has six gears but I hardly used four going down into Nice. The cottage has beautiful views, over the sea to the front and mountains to the rear, and the front garden is excellent. But the pool is right by the road with a thin and partly-absent hedge. The rear garden would be far more promising but it has been left to go wild, no furniture apart from an old table-tennis table. The rear is only accessed from the front along the side, there is no back door, so have to lock the front door if using the back. The owner is fine, except he runs his mobile butcher business from the lower part of the house, which requires him to hang about in the afternoon and to wake us up

at 4 o'clock in the morning.

Hinton Lodge 2014

Sat 2014-08-30

Cat-flap locked at 07:30 and the promise of a fine day. Has an odd feeling for a holiday, as we don't have to leave until just before 14:00. Cats were no trouble to catch, locked in the bedroom while we were shopping; to cattery, saw the boss herself. Packed, car loaded and away before 14:00, got to Hinton Lodge ST905584 after the earliest 16:00. Key collected as instructed. Lovely place, though close to other buildings on the site. Main part of the Lodge has a circular flow, from lounge through bed 1, bathroom and dining room back to lounge; kitchen off the dining room and bedroom 2 off the lounge. Walked down into Steeple Ashton and a quick pint in the Longs Arms, before back to the Lodge for dinner. Bottle of wine to greet us, which we drank with dinner.

Sun 2014-08-31

Sunshine. To Malmesbury. Saw the centre of the town for the first time, and had lunch in Amanda's Bistro. Nice little place with very pretty garden at rear and very welcoming staff. We had lunch, outside, despite it not being quite time, ½ roast beef and ½ smoked chicken salad with avocado and strawberries. Then to Abbey House for the second-last CO day this year, sun still with us intermittently. Not packed but a good turn out. Good to see some families with children there. The long-term car park was officially shut for a fun fair that had been there most of the week but it had nearly all gone by 11:00 and everyone was ignoring the signs that it opened at 14:00. Later more sunshine in the cottage garden. Cottage visitor's book had a comment from someone who went to Abbey House on a CO day and was only mildly disappointed to see all the naked old men, at least they were not put off going in: "Malmesbury Abbey Gardens were beautiful, but it was 'clothing optional' and all those old, naked men rather ruined my photos. Still, really gorgeous site".

Mon 2014-09-01

It rained. Started OK and set off for Stourhead NT ST780340 but by the time we got there it was raining steadily, so back to Frome. While there it didn't rain, so we looked at the cute, sloping, un-rebuilt town and had lunch in the George Hotel. Even saw the street that ½ remembered from 40 years ago, the one with a stream running down it. Dry, so back to Stourhead but by then back to light drizzle. Did the house first, ground floor only, modern reconstruction after a fire but some old paintings and furniture. Then the extensive grounds, in fine drizzle some of the time, some dry phases. Big lake with follies and temples, a good grotto with tunnel, sculpture and running water. Coffee and cake then home, in heavier rain. A few patches of blue in the distance by then, but no sunshine fell on us all day.

Tue 2014-09-02

Awoke to sun streaming through the windows, and it stayed sunny and warm most of the day. First to Semington, parked by the canal bridge and walked east past the new aqueduct that was opened just before our last visit on 2004-04-09 and was being built when we came through on a boat in 2003. Looks still new from the road underneath but above it has blended in well. Then to the car park for Caen Hill flight ST987616, which was £1 for 4 hours, or £1.10 and an 0845 phone call and a text to pay by phone. Walked to the Black Horse ST995616, where we had lunch outside by the canal, then up to the top lock, which took us *just* over the line into square SU. A narrowboat called Trevor went through making rather an unusual soft sound, emitting steam and with a big funnel, supposed it was steam powered. Back down to the car park where we stopped at a picnic table to listen to the start of the repeat of the War Requiem Prom, to see how much better the soloists sounded to the mikes rather than the hall. They were better, clearer, but ½ did not rate either of the men highly, nor the way the choir was restrained in the loud bits. Postcards posted. Back in time for some sun in the garden.

Wed 2014-09-03

Misty and overcast to start, then another warm and sunny day. To Salisbury, via half-an-hour queuing for some TTL at roadworks at Stapleford. Parked in 1000-space central car park behind Sainsbury's. Pay-and-display machine passed the coins straight through, seeming to reject them, but the display registered them and it gave us a ticket for £5.50 after seeing one £2 twice, a £1 and a 50p. Walked to the Cathedral and saw the inside for a donation of £6.50 each, which included one of the original copies of the Magna Carta of 1215. This was actually abrogated by John a few months later but re-instated with fewer clauses by his son. Lunch at Côte Brasserie, 3-course set but good, we sat right by the till watching Jennie the assistant manager keeping the tables filled and the customers happy; some had to be turned away, others asked to come back in 15 minutes. Black-clad girls brought the food from the kitchen, Jennie and the blue-jacketed boys and girls actually served the food. Butternut

squash, carrot and ginger soup, seabass with mash, iced berries for me. Top-up at Sainsbury's, then back home past Stonehenge; the road to its north has gone, you pass to the south at a safe distance and have to go east down the old road, now a dead-end, to get to the ruins. Home, some more garden time. Booked meal in local pub for tomorrow eve.

Thu 2014-09-04

Gone dull again, but still warm. To Lacock National Trust ST919684, a preserved old village generally owned by the NT, with an abbey, or at least a house built over an old nunnery. Originally owned by Henry Fox Talbot and there was a museum of photography there. The exhibits ran from the earliest cameras, pre glass plate some of them, up to iPhone. They had a wooden plate camera like the one I had and a Kodak Autographic like I still have. Information boards already talked of film as a past technology, the 35mm camera that was second-last in the timeline said it "used to" have 24 or 36 exposures. There was a very early Kodak that took 100 exposures and then had to be returned to Kodak for processing, coming back with a new film loaded. The house was large and furnished in a fairly modern manner, we saw the arched window that was the subject of his first photograph. Grounds not very interesting, a few optical toys for children including a kaleidoscope working on the real scene. Lunch sausage sandwiches in the tea room before moving on to The Courts NT ST861618. This had a house, partly open today but occupied by an artist, and a very pleasant garden. Extensive formal part with beds, lawns and lily pond, a slightly less formal part with an irregular pond and winding paths, several lawns and a lower and an upper arboretum. Not many there. Apart from the upper arboretum, which was overlooked from a few houses, the rest would have been a perfect naturist setting, quiet, beautiful and secluded. Back to the cottage but no afternoon sun today. Eve walk down to Longs Arms in Steeple Ashton for dinner, which was excellent and alcoholic and £80 with tip. Warm salad with scallops and bacon; pork tenderloin with mustard and honey sauce; ice cream and sorbets; 6X and Merlot. Walk back in the dark very reminiscent of canal holidays, and no cars annoyed us on the section with no footpath.

Fri 2014-09-05

Starting overcast. To the White Horse at Westbury ST899515, car park down an unsigned by-way. It's a relatively new horse, only about 250 years, not bronze age like the one at Uffington. As the chalk was too much trouble to keep scoured it is covered in concrete painted white. Also here earthworks remaining from an ancient camp. There are good views from this hill, but not through the mist that remained while we were there. To Seend Cleeve for lunch at the Barge Inn, excellent home-made steak and ale pie, a real pie, not stew in a dish covered by a sheet of puff pastry. They had in a table of 10 being a mix of local boaters and some US visitors exploring the area by water. Back at the cottage for a read and snooze, the sun trying to break through, but not enough. Afternoon reading, eve in and listening to Proms, the original little DAB still doing well along with the Sony PC speakers.

Sat 2014-09-06

Up at 7:30, tidied, packing complete and away at 09:15. Had time to pick up the cats a day early, deciding at Bicester and going from there via A41 and Aylesbury, home 12:45.

Scotland 2015

Fri 2015-05-01

Set off at 07:00, sunshine most of the way. Clear run all the way, no real hold-ups anywhere, to Glenmorag Hotel in Dunoon by about 15:30. Lunch just into Scotland, at a McDonald's services. Took the recent M74 southern route past Glasgow which was typical urban motorway but all moving. Ferry from Gourock to Dunoon was very efficient, and £21.10 for a car and two people. Hotel is big and impressive but a bit run-down and caters mainly for coach parties. Opening meeting in the ballroom, kit off at 17:00, a quite reasonably dinner at 18:30. About 150 we guessed. We were able to order from a 4-way menu and they served what was chosen very efficiently and close to synchronisation. Hotel is barely warm enough, or not warm enough, according to taste. There is no real ale. View from our sea-view room is superb, as the hotel is quite a bit higher than the coast road and we are on the second floor. Eve was Drums and Roses, a duo for this occasion, bagpipes and drum with backing track, very high energy, followed by a disco at acceptable volume and with sufficiently old music. As usual a lot of older men here, and a few older women as well, a few younger and no families. One couple we spoke to today had booked a caravan stay at Candy Farm not knowing it was naturist and had been converted, found another site, then Suntreckers, then BN.

Sat 2015-05-02

Breakfast at 08:00 and the sun was still shining. Efficient announcements during breakfast. Heard the first half of Nick's International talk before leaving for the boat trip, getting a lift with Kev and Tracey. Drove for nearly an hour to Tighnabruaich (pronounced "Tina Brook"), then 10 of us aboard the Morag in the Kyles of Bute, two crew, one steering and one giving a commentary. Everyone well wrapped up as the sun had gone by then and there was a fierce wind. We were the second of three 1-hour trips 12:00-13:00. Very pretty and rugged, stark nature a little spoilt by the stink of diesel exhaust. Back at the hotel then walked down into Dunoon, in a cold wind nearly as fierce as the one on the boat, for a late lunch in a pub: sandwiches which took an age to arrive, but were only £10 with a bowl of chips. Pint of a good dark ale Vital Spark, the first hand-pump so far this holiday. Group photo taken with all the men in tartan bow-ties and women in tartan sashes. Then the Burns in the Buff supper, with piper for the haggis, readings and speeches. Was all very good, even the haggis and Judith's reply for the Lassies. Then Reely Jiggered for ceilidh, 0's hip preventing taking part, and bed before the disco. All drinks are £1.50 for a pint or 125 ml wine. Bookings for tonight were 121 though only 119 sat down, one ill, one gone home.

Sun 2015-05-03

Dull, windy, wet and cold outside. Breakfast with baked beans today as well as the egg, bacon, sausage, fried bread and tomato. Very good, and a sensible size. Skipped the quiz as it was held crammed into the bar area, so spent the morning reading. Lunch soup and sandwiches in the hotel, £9 for 2. More rest after lunch until out for the treasure hunt, four per car, we had Malcolm and Paddy. Looking for clues along the way, though we missed a few, and ending up at a pub by Loch Eck, where we had a drink and they gave us cakes. Back a bit late for dinner but they sped us through it. Stayed dry for the hunt, though cold and dull so no photos, at least in our car. About 28 people and 7 cars taking part. Morning also had a discussion on Northern Ireland, but unfortunately James who is the new star for BN in NI was unable to come with last minute hospital appointment. There were two from the Republic there. Eve φ to the eve entertainment, which was one of the SANER members singing to guitar then horse racing by Moss and Sandra. This had 6 horses on a sectioned track, two dice thrown, one giving which horse to move and the other by how far. I watched one race and bet £1 on numbers 1 to 5, all bets 20p, and got back 80p when number 3 won. Odds calculated to give a profit, £40 for charity.

Mon 2015-05-04

Usual breakfast and goodbye and thanks speeches, Quinn spontaneously thanked Ivan as no-one else seemed about to. Ivan was quite emotional. Good points to note: personalised card in room on arrival, flowers in room, organisation, quality of the entertainment, quality of the venue and especially the staff and the beautiful countryside. Negatives: no real ale and no outside. In previous years they had blocked up the windows but this year they were persuaded not to, apart from the end face of the dining area which was level with the access road, but even the glass front doors were clear with just a sign "private function - no vacancies". Previous two had made a loss but this one, with only two rooms not sold, would make money. The hotel was very impressive from afar but a bit tired close up, all the floors creaked. Meal times were a bit like school dinners with a queue

waiting for the doors to open then all trooping in. The temperature was between just right and a bit cool most of the time, but the ballroom last night was cosy. Off before 10:00 for a leisurely drive to Lochearnhead, in warm sunshine most of the day. Stopped at many places to take photos, a couple naturist, and for lunch at the Tyndrum Inn. A long way round to see Lochs Eck, Fyne, Awe, Dochart, Lubhair, Tay and Earn and a walk around Inveraray where I bought a decent pullover as I brought only the BN fleece and a hoodie. Lochearnhead hotel is small, we are in room 3. The hotel owner, who has lived in Bicester and has no trace of a Scottish accent, does everything apart from cook. We had a drink in the bar and an excellent £70+ dinner, whole trout for me. No real ale of course so I had Guinness which was made by pouring a can into a glass, then standing the glass in a shallow tray with water in it and zapping it, presumably with ultrasonic, to make it fizz out in a few seconds and make a head. Apart from us, four couples and a foursome at dinner.

Tue 2015-05-05

Breakfast 08:00-09:30, and no need to get there at 08:00 to hear the details of the day. Dull at dawn and started to rain before breakfast, and then all day after that. To various towns looking for OS maps and failing until we got to Perth where there was a Waterstones. Lunch in Debenhams restaurant there, then back to the hotel on a roundabout route, though not stopping much as there wasn't much to see. Dinner in the hotel, one other table plus another couple with a pair of small dogs eating in the bar; steak, mostly good but a bit tough round the edges. Rain may have slackened a bit by dusk.

Wed 2015-05-06

Still raining at breakfast, but signs of brightening. This hotel cost 17 guineas a week in times long ago or 22 guineas with private bath; less in the winter. Highest B&B in summer was 50/-, breakfast was 7/6 and dinner 17/6. Sunshine and showers, never very warm. Went around the south of Loch Earn, narrow road, took photo of hotel from far side. Then headed for Loch Lomond, very much the tourist centre. Parked at Luss for £2.60 and took a water bus out and back across to Balmaha on the other side for £19 total; there were just four of us on the boat going out and six coming back. Then back around some more lochs and Trossachs, with some very pretty roads; the lochs were Lomond, Achray, Venacher and Lubraig. Found a picturesque forest driving trail driving that we might try some other time, it was late and it cost £2. Dinner in the hotel again, we the only ones in the dining room at the time. A couple of German ladies eating soup in the bar. Later four blokes went into the dining room to eat. We had a drink in the bar afterwards, with another pair of women there. A few local drinkers come here as well; when we went down there was a man from Essex with his dog, who helped run a Herts Scouts camp here. Hotel is at NN596238. Boat trip was between NS361931 and NS415908; went at 14.5 km/h. Children on the pier at Luss jumping into the loch and climbing out, several in shirts as well as shorts; one lost his phone as it fell out of his pocket and straight through the gap between the slats into the water.

Thu 2015-05-07

Election day. Sunshine mostly, few spots now and again, cool. First for a walk in Comrie where there was a marked circular path taking in various waterfalls along the River Lednock. There were signs saying parts were closed for logging March to early April, either late or no-one bothered to take the signs down, we saw one weir and starting from the other end a small cataract Wee Caldron, not getting as far as the Deil's Caldron. Lunch in Pitlochry at the Old Mill Inn, food was good and so was service from a Croatian bloke) and they had real ale, tried Look East. Stopped for contemplation at NN778545, a very pretty spot looking over a loch towards mountains. Not that that was unusual in those parts. We had only soup for dinner at the hotel, another couple not in the hotel were eating also in the bar. The owner, Amanda with husband Robert Kerr, was not on form tonight, chatting with friends in the bar, not taking orders, giggling more than usually (pissed?), didn't take a dessert order from the other couple from Lancashire (with chihuahuas). Group of four young men working nearby on contract also staying several nights. Discovered that they do have at least bottled ales, I had Speckled Hen tonight; the husband asked the first time if I preferred from shelf or fridge, but the wife for the second just took it from the fridge. Leon refuelled at about 310 mi took about 24 L so nearly 60 mi/UKgal. Added Loch Tummel to the list.

Fri 2015-05-08

Again dry, sunny occasionally in the morn, after 4°C start; overcast aft. To Stirling, parking in the Marshes shopping car park for £4. Walked through the shops, bought a map, then up and up to the castle. Not a bad castle, but £14.50 to get in. We could have taken the car up, there were spaces at £4, but would have missed the walk up through the old town. Lunch at the cafe there. Also got to look around Argyll's Lodging on the same tickets. Back in the centre θ bought a Galaxy Tab in Argos. On the way back stopped to look at Loch Lubnaig and also went down to Rob Roy's grave, which probably wasn't there anyway, at Balquhider, a pretty church and the

remains of a stern old one, near a cute waterfall and also Lock Voil. Ate at the hotel, much busier on a Friday eve, especially towards the last starting time of 20:00. Owner forgot my wine until we were sitting in the bar afterwards. Election saw Tories back with a working majority, which had not been expected. SNP won 56 of 59 seats in Scotland, with one each for red, blue and orange, they gained 40 seats while Labour lost 30 and Lib Dems 10; Nicola Sturgeon triumphant. Labour looked very poor all over and Ed Miliband resigned, as did Nick Clegg. UKIP got 12% of the vote but only one seat, and Farage failed to get in and also resigned. A 20-year old girl got in for the SNP, Mhairi Black, she was still at university studying politics.

Sat 2015-05-09

Earliest breakfast at 08:00 and away just about 09:00. The hotel door was still on the Yale and we got ourselves locked out loading the car. Settled up. ϕ out of Scotland, θ to just before the M6 Toll, ϕ home; lunch at Burger King. No hold ups apart from the two extensive 80 km/h roadworks sections and three stops (change and fuel; lunch; change) home 16:30, 7.5 h total. Just on 400 mi and probably a little short of 1200 mi for the week. A85, A84, M9, M80, M73, M74, M6, M1.

Beauvais d'en Bas 2015

Sat 2015-09-12

Away at 08:00 and to Donnington Services for a coffee. Long Stay 1 at East Midlands was full, we squashed the Leon into the last reduced space that others had rejected in zone M. Walk to the departure area, quick bag drop and through security. θ had liquids left in her bag and they searched mine for a penknife which was actually a flip-out USB stick. 12:40 flight FR1632 to Limoges was on time and packed and landed 15 mins early they claimed. Airport is quite small, one terminal building, one baggage conveyor, two passport windows, but we were all through quickly and out to the small building with all four car-hire places with mingling queues. It wasn't too bad though and we were in the car by 16:00 (local). A VW Polo TSi Bluemotion 90C Lounge, dark grey, petrol, with sat-nav, parking sensors and a/c but no cruise control and an annoying beep at 120 km/h saying max for winter tyres, DR-941-BH from département 76, start at 7192 km by the docs. Easy exit from the airport, onto N520, A20 and D927, to find supermarket near La Châtre. Actually aiming for the Intermarché I saw on Google, but saw the bricolage but not the supermarket behind the petrol station and went into the Aldi next door instead, which was OK. Then back to the gîte getting there about 1 hour earlier than prediction, at 18:15. Weather was warm and occasionally wet in UK and much the same here, 21°C but overcast. Keys were in the keysafe, no contact with owner. Bottle of wine, glasses and corkscrew left out for us. La Belle Fermette was at N46.5786 E1.8479 by the Geko, the same as I got from Google. Eve eat in and watch last night of Proms, the cottage has Sky. This was conducted by Marin Alsop again, she was excellent as a presenter and gave another slightly political speech about female equality and governments supporting musical education. It included a medley from The Sound of Music as well as the more conventional bits.

Sun 2015-09-13

Rain in the night and morning. The cottage has open plan downstairs with kitchen, eating and sitting areas, and a bog off. Upstairs has a double bedroom with en-suite shower, and a twin bedroom with en-suite bath. There is a log burner and electric heaters at an extra €25/week in winter, they seem to work in summer too but not needed last night. The en-suites have timed towel heaters with extra fan heater. No bidet. The downstairs bog has a panel of 25 MCBs of which 13 are labelled. The microwave is hidden inside a kitchen unit above the similarly-hidden fridge. The corner units have rotating trays inside. Outside is a small secluded garden beyond a patio with garden table and chairs. Sloping windows upstairs overlook other properties but the others look out only on the property. It's a bit dark inside, no doubt cool in high summer, with main windows facing south-east and only one tiny one on the other side, the bedrooms are better. The TV has Sky but no local French channels, though it's supposed to, so no weather info. The barn opposite appears to be still almost original, it has had some electrics in the past but none working now, there's an extension lead to plug one hanging lamp to the cottage. Stalls still fitted, and more modern steps up to a hayloft; almost like exploring a cave with just a weak torch. Among the old stuff stored there was a euro plug to a UK 4-way block. Sitting in the garden, you are likely to be bombed by a ripe apple, pear or walnut. Walk before lunch around the cottage. The road from the D927 to Beauvais d'en Bas goes under an arch bridge, in very good condition, for what was a railway on an embankment; a track that may lead to a neighbouring village goes under another arch, it looks as if it was built along the railway alignment, except it's a bit steep. Went (ϕ) for a second walk over a loop measuring the junctions with the Geko, and showing that the scale on the printed Google map was out by a factor of about 2. It put the cottage at 31T 0411726 5158979. Afternoon reading. Mostly dry but warmish and dull, a couple of rays of sunshine. Saw a red squirrel climb up the vertical end wall of the barn and disappear into a hole.

Mon 2015-09-14

More rain, wind and heavy showers, but warm. To the Intermarché at La Magny, finding the right entrance this time, and buying a 3.5 mm cable to connect the netbook to the mega sound system, a much more extensive range of course than the Aldi next door, including Pelforth Brune. They had every one of the local 1:25000 maps except the one we wanted 2227 O. Back to unload, then to the recycling in Neuvy-St-Sépulchre then on to look at the town. Sleepy, even more so as it was closed on Monday, but got some cream for the dozen or more bites I picked up yesterday, some post cards and a Michelin 1:150000 map of this département (Indre, 36). Nowhere for lunch there, so on to Argenton-sur-Creuse where we found a parking space in a little *place* and had a pizza for lunch in the Café de la Place in the main square, which was doing well. θ bought stamps here. Joining the D927 first thing this morning by the railway arch, we saw an otter run along the road and into the stream.

Tue 2015-09-15

Lots more bites and θ has 2, will need to investigate whether something in clothes as most below belt line or bed as most appear in the morning. To La Châtre, found a parking space in a square by the Palais de Justice and had a walk round. Dry but cool. A rabbit-warren of a town, twice struggled to find where we'd left the car. Big bookshop, like the supermarket yesterday, had all the local IGN 1:25000 maps except 2227 ouest. Coffee in the café in the market square, then lunch at Le Duplex, galettes, with which θ had the traditional cidre, and ice cream. The waitress tried her English on us, imperfect but better than our French; she had worked at Reading. Like everywhere, this place was empty when we arrived at 12:05 but rapidly filled up and was full when we left before 13:00.

Wed 2015-09-16

Slept in clothes and bites are in a different place this morning, same side, further up at shirt waist level; θ had a few too. Found one bug about 4 mm and several 1-2 mm under the valance, all dead. To Intermarché for insecticide for crawling things and some plastic pots to put the bed feet in. Then to dump more empties at Neuvy and north towards Chateauroux and a look around its forest. Uniform open forest with deciduous trees and straight roads and paths, found a car park and had a walk along one of the tracks. Dull and warm at that stage. Found a tiny church in the forest, Bonne Dame du Chêne. Left the forest by a road that was on the 150k map but was unsurfaced despite a 60 km/h speed limit and full of holes, but it did bring us out onto a D road that took us into Chateauroux and parking in a multi-storey pay-and-display; paid €2 for 2 hours, which it added to the 12:00-14:00 free period to give us until 16:00 despite max 120 minutes stay. Lunch at Bar le Parisien a workaday brasserie, the set menu of *crudités*, beef with cous-cous, dessert. Then it started to rain heavily so we gave up on sightseeing and went back to the car, and had a drive round via the forest again, Ardentes, a châteaux near Le Magnet and Fourche, another at Lys-St-Georges and back via Neuvy. Still mostly dull then but with some glimpses of sun. The Polo does have cruise control, also auto lights, auto wipers, Bluetooth, and the parking sensors have a graphic of where the car's path will lead given the steering position and direction of travel and it jumps out of reverse if tempted. Sprayed the bed and mattress, and inspected the bedding minutely, found one dead thing maybe; tucked up the valance so that only the legs touched the floor and stood them in dilute washing-up liquid, which kills fleas and maybe is just as bad for other crawling things.

Thu 2015-09-17

No extra bites this morning, though nothing caught in the water traps. Although forecast as unremitting rain, more sunshine today than any other so far, though it did rain heavily at times when we weren't exposed to it. To St Marcel, a mediaeval village perched above Argenton, where there were old buildings and nearby a Roman excavation, partly in progress, and partly with an indicative restoration. Also an old church, open, and with a light sequencer that illuminated each part in turn. However, no restaurant apart from a basic bar tabac, so down into Argenton. First place we tried was full and so to Les Diabes au Thym, which appeared to be run by two women. 3-course set for €5.50 including wine, θ had some fish she couldn't identify but liked, I had *tête de veau* which was calf brain mostly, or at least it looked like it, some bits meaty, others rather more like jelly with lobes; entrée was salad buffet and dessert was good. Then for a drive around, taking photos of châteaux and other pretty bits via Courbat, Badecon, Gargilles-Dampierre, Cuzion, Orsennes, Cluis, Fougerolles and home. And there was even more sunshine back at the cottage, well, a few minutes.

Fri 2015-09-18

No new bites that I could see or feel this morning, and the sun shone through the windows. The bogs are all Ideal Standard and a few other bits appear to have come from the UK. The sunniest day so far, but even so it rained a few times. To La Châtre for lunch in the Fredy, opposite the place we went earlier in the week. I had egg mayonnaise, steak and chips, and chocolate brownie with custard (OK, *crème Anglais*) which was good although the steak was not melt-in-the-mouth, maybe I should have had the more expensive entrecôte. Back to the cottage to take in the sun in three bursts with rain between, until I started to burn. Wiped the worst of the mud stains off the car and shook the carpets out. So quiet here, apart from the occasional cry of the neighbour's cock, chickens and geese, a few cars a day coming and going, the apples and walnuts falling.

Sat 2015-09-19

Final clean up, put the bed back to normal, and left at 10:00. We brought back one of the walnuts from the tree. Recycling dropped in Neuvy then on to an *aire* at Bois-Mandé for lunch and fuel. At this point, 7762 km, supposed started at 7192 km, took 30.07 L, so 5.28 L/100km or nearly 54 mi/UKgal. Hung around here for a bit

reading then on to Limoges Bellegarde airport, and a little more time wasting reading in the car park there. Dropped the key back at 13:45, a short wait for the flight to start check-in, basically as soon as the previous flight had left, and through to one of the two gates. The incoming landed at 15:05, was unloaded including wheelchair cases by 15:15, loaded from about 15:25 then away at 15:50. The plane turned by the terminal so could go out under its own power though it did use the airport's steps at the back. Touchdown 16:15 (UK) and quickly through the airport and to the Leon, the car-park barrier opened as expected on pre-payment and home by 18:15; a curry ordered. We didn't see the owner on this trip, and there was no deposit asked for. Keys left back in the key safe. Other fauna seen: a couple of very large spiders, a lizard climbing the end wall of the cottage, a big, long-legged, fast centipede, probably *Scutigera coleoptrata*.

Picardy 2016

Fri 2016-05-20

Cats caught easily, though Sooty had a good go at getting to the flap which was locked but also barricaded with a heavy box and a bag of papers. Then packing, fuelled up the Leon, gave it a quick wash. Paid in advance for two Dartford tolls (they last for several months until used), £5. E-mail from M Spriet to say that there are fuel shortages in France due to labour law protesters at oil depots.

Sat 2016-05-21

Raining early, and away by 08:00. Stopped at Thurrock and squeezed in another 8 L of diesel, but then discovered that I had forgotten about Folkestone services and got another 4 L there, so we broke the rules and went on the train with a full tank; it was still showing full 100 km or so later when we got to the cottage, which was just called 31 Rue du Marechal Leclerc in Vron N50.3168 E1.7608. Stocked up at Carrefour in Rue, waited a few minutes in a lay-by and arrived pretty much as predicted at 16:30. We got an earlier train at 11:50. Indeed all the fuel outlets we saw were closed, but not sure if this was because they were all dry or a general decision to close to help dampen the panic. M Alain Spiet turns out to be a 75 year-old with a much younger wife and a 19 year-old daughter who lives in a much bigger property next door, actually number 25 but I think those in between may have been subsumed. €75 paid, €45 for central heating and €30 for cleaning. We were sent off for an inspection at the border which was poking a sensor in, asking if we had any firearms, and running a gloved finger over all of the door handles of the six of us stopped. We got a tyre warning again, on the M1, went away after re-calibration. It had an excuse this time with the new tyre. Cottage is single story, right on the road with a secluded courtyard which promises to be a sun-trap, it got the evening sun today. Nice enough in the usual style with lots of knick-knacks but not very well equipped, no beer glasses for example and a poor supply of power outlets. There was no curtain in the window which adjoins the road although there were on all of the other windows. Despite being within the town 50 km/h limit on a side road the road noise is quite obvious. Things missing: anywhere to put soap and shampoo in the shower; space to put anything, there's not much anyway and that mostly covered with ornaments; beer glasses; power points; bog-roll holder; washing-up necessities (we bought detergent but also no clothes or scouring pads). Odd things: kitchen mixer tap installed with lever under the spout so it's hard not to get sprayed; decoration a bit tatty in places; kitchen / dining is not laid out logically having the cooking one side and fridge and sink on the other side of the dining table; draining board didn't have any slope to sink; while outside in courtyard front and only door not visible though very close to road.

Sun 2016-05-22

Slept well, bed was good. It rained in the night. Morning walk from one end of the village to the other, a baker, a pharmacy, a post office, a mairie, a few other specialist businesses, some industry on the outskirts. Puzzles and sewing while it rained, lunch in. Afternoon in, dull and wet. We used the grill tonight and when that was switched off it seems the kitchen power went off, oven and grill on the same circuits as the sockets plus the fridge, and the owner came in to reset, the breakers being in a locked cupboard with the water heater. Owner had enough fuel to get him to hospital appointment in Amiens but not sure about the next one; there might be a delivery to a local Carrefour on Tuesday he thought. At this point weather expected to be wet tomorrow and get better after that. When the owner was checking the fridge he pulled the door open rather impulsively and one of our beers fell out and started to fizz out on the floor.

Mon 2016-05-23

Dull, wet threatened. Walk to dump the beer empties so far. News this morning is that 6 of 8 fuel depots are blockaded and the police have gone in to unblock one. By eve the BBC has 5 but mostly in the north, where we are, and west. No fuel at Carrefour in Rue; the Simply said *Rupture de Gazoil* but no barrier and someone in the box, nobody filling, maybe no-one wants petrol. The little station next to Carrefour had a queue outside and attended service. To Rue for a look around, and inside the ancient church and the more recent extension. It's a long, thin town as its name suggests. Bought IGN sheet 2106ET, a double-width sheet. Posted postcards. Lunch at Brasserie des Freres Caudron in Rue, salmon tartare and excellent duck leg, mushrooms and chips. Then to the supermarket and home, when the sun came out for a bit allowing reading and sewing outside. A little to eat eve after a very filling lunch.

Tue 2016-05-24

The strike situation escalating beyond fuel we ran away home. Morn to the gardens at Valloires attached to the abbey, very impressive with lawns, formal bits, woodland, themed gardens. Then lunch at cottage, packing and to Carrefour at Rue for liqueurs and off north for the 16:50 train, earlier than the 17:50 we rebooked to. Very slow-moving queue for the UK border control and we got sent straight to the train, being the last car on the upper deck with four empty coaches behind us. Long queue on the M25 up to the end of the M25 for extra traffic joining as the Blackwall Tunnel was closed so we got home nearly 20:00; Chinese from New China Garden. News by them was that all of the 8 refineries were blockaded, there had been fighting with police, and that there was talk of further disruption to transport with a general 1-day strike Thursday and more next week, and possible impact on football tournament in June. In the south truckers had been blockading supermarkets to prevent deliveries, whether of just fuel was not clear. The Dart Crossing pre-pay worked, their website showed the two crossings as paid for.

Wed 2016-05-25

Sprung the cats first, £130 for the 10 days inclusive, then to Waddesdon Manor. Dull and cool, but dry. Lunch in the Stables Cafe, custom burger and chilli beef, then tour the house, which was gloomy and full of kitschy over-decorated furniture and objects, many of them clocks, desks and pots. Grounds were good and very extensive, including an OTT aviary. Massive amounts of car parking, mostly empty on a dull mid-week spring day of course, but even so we had to wait a few minutes to get a seat in the cafe. Service was quick and efficient as usual in these places and money taken on contactless card. Had a look at the works on the A5 north of Dunstable, just north of where the Leighton Buzzard bypass comes in, for the new link to M1 at J11A. Topped up the Leon here with 28 L after estimated 519 km starting in Folkestone services, which would be 5.3 L/100km. Both tired, eat in, running down the Pelforth. One thing I hadn't realised is that all the noise is from the CGT union, a fossilised communist-sympathising lot, and even other unions are on the side of the government and its labour reforms. Nevertheless they can cause a lot of trouble and now there is the possibility of the nuclear power stations being disrupted.

Thu 2016-05-26

To Sainsbury's for the means for breakfast. In France, power station workers and some air traffic controllers are on strike today, government claims to be getting reserve fuel out. To the Admiral Nelson by the locks between Braunston Junction and the tunnel. Walk to the tunnel while waiting for them to open at 12:02 and to the junction after lunch. Food was good, θ mixed seafood pasta and ϕ pulled rabbit pasta, but it took ages to come even though we were the second to order and it was never busy, took 1½ hours. Cappuccino coffee was mostly milk. Dull but warm, lots of boats moving. Later fully sunny for a little in the garden. On Tuesday saw a Range Rover with reg R1; today saw another with 11RR. Eve to Royal Thai in Stony. Unlike the Peking recently this was busy, nearly full, on a Thursday eve, good welcome, good food, good service.

Fri 2016-05-27

Nice day with lots of sunshine later. Breakfast in the sun, then off to Hatton parking in the CaRT pay-and-display at bridge 54, £1.20 for 24 hours. Lunch at the Hatton Arms, what used to be The Waterman, which was good, service and food, ϕ mackerel on Greek salad and pork T-bone. Then walk up to top lock 46 and down to lock 33. Not many boats around, in fact we saw only three moving the whole time, quite different from yesterday. Out via Buckingham and M40; the satnav brought us back via M45 and M1, which I converted to A5 after J16, because it saw some blockage on the M40. Cut lawn before going out as it was almost long enough to hide a cat. France seems to be quieter with 7 or 8 refineries unblocked but still shortages and more disruption threatened for the football in 2 weeks. θ was persuaded by a woman on the tow-path to support CaRT, signed up on the spot using a tablet, in return for a book and a badge.

Sat 2016-05-28

To London, walk to station, £21 each for Travelcard. To Monument. Followed a City walk that θ found on the net, north to the Bank, Leadenhall market, Mansion House, Guildhall, St Paul's. Lunch here at a Pizza Express with a very efficient waitress who upsold well. Had an good dessert: *Tartufo Limoncello*, ice cream with meringue bits, which it claimed was below 230 calories though upsold to come with a shot of real limoncello which will have broken that. Then on across the Millennium bridge and along the river by The Globe. We cut short the section along to the tower and came back across London Bridge to the start at Monument. θ 's ticket was zapped by the magnetic catch on her phone but talked through all the barriers. Back on another semi-fast to get home in time

for a little sun. Total walk on the tour was 5 km but added to walking to and from the station and within the station between Bank and Monument. Warm and sometimes sunny. In the restaurant both adjacent tables were foreign as were probably most of tourists about. Eve still on the Pelforth and wine that we brought back.

Pepper Pot Lodge 2016

Fri 2016-09-09

Cat catching easy with Sooty already inside and Sweep in at 08:00, to cattery at 10:30. Away just before 12:00 to Pepper Pot Lodge in Wimborne St Giles SU031119 (A34, A303, A343, A30, A354, B3081), arrived at predicted 15:00. Had to call at Home Farm House to get the key and be shown the way around by road, owner or manager Jayne Rabone. We got a tag for the security gate as well as the cottage keys. It's tiny and octagonal with a bedroom and bathroom extension. On private large estate but we're not allowed to walk over it, just a little bit around the cottage as far as the River Allen. It rained just after we arrived. Gift of sausages and bacon which we ate tonight, excellent. There is good wi-fi but no mobile signal.

Sat 2016-09-10

Rain. To Wimborne Minster, park at SU008000, £3 for 4h, look around and lunch in the King's Head, a typical faded town centre hotel. The chief minister at the Minster was female as were all of the four assistants. A pipe band was playing, not very well, in the rain for charity. Quite a nice little town. Back via lots of villages, mostly dormitories with lots of expensive-looking houses. Surprising number of cars along the private road past the cottage to the big house. Afternoon it got a bit brighter so for a walk around Wimborne St Giles. Scare when we got an e-mail from the owner saying she thought we were booked until Wednesday, but a copy of our booking from English Country Cottages seems to have convinced her we are here till Friday, no suggestion of a double booking. Evening the last night of the Proms on the big TV on the wall of the cottage, Sakari Orimo conducting, with an excellent performance of Vaughan Williams Serenade to Music among other stuff, very good, not over until 22:45. It gets very dark and very quiet here at night. At the moment, no rain forecast until Friday. One of the finger-pointer signposts near here signs Sixpenny Handley as 6D HANDLEY, I'm surprised that means much to most people now.

Sun 2016-09-11

Sunshine, though cool out of it. Out to the New Forest, going north of Ringwood, through Linwood and under the A31. Stopped for walks soon after A31 on both sides of the road, one mostly in pine forest, one mostly on open ground with wide view, and ponies at close quarters. Then along the Bolderwood Arboretum drive, and a stop there too. Back past Burley Lodge and stop in Burley. The Leon's tyre pressure warning came on again, checking had the NSF correct at 2.0 bar and the OSF 1.8 bar, a bit low. Put it back up to 2.0 and recalibrated the system. Burley was busy. We tried the Queen's Head first, found a table OK but the queue for food was very slow and incompetently serviced so we tried the The Burley Stores instead, which oddly for its name was more of a tearoom, coffee shop, ice cream parlour and restaurant; we had scampi and chips there, very good, and despite their apology for delays probably quicker than the pub would have been to order. Parking was P&D though, at £2.20 for 3h. Back through Three Legged Cross and had a look at Gussage St Michael, cute church but nothing else, and Gussage All Saints, which had a functioning pub. Wimborne St Giles had the Bull, which had a sign outside but had a closed look about it; found on the web that it's now a hotel and pretentious restaurant only. Back to the cottage, which despite being so quiet has nowhere not overlooked, so read in the sun on the lawn; might try by the river another day. A big damselfly landed beside me on the blanket, and then on my leg. The road leading to the house has occasional vehicles, dog walkers and horses; this is technically the back way I think, the other way leads directly to the front, this way gives access to the side without having to pass the front. Lots of the old finger-pointer signposts away from the main roads have 6-figure OS references on them. Not sure when this cottage was done up but the Google Earth images show just the original octagonal part and none of the gravel parking area for this western cottage, though they are there for the now smaller eastern one opposite. Evening had the central heating on for a bit, after which the boiler was flashing a blue light and not making hot water; power-cycled it and the light went out so at least it won't disturb us during the night. The other lodge appears to be occupied by a man who works on the estate.

Mon 2016-09-12

Woke to find dozens of dopey wasps crawling around the lounge and kitchen. Investigation found a wasp nest in the space above the entrance porch and lots of old and dying wasps outside the front door, a few had found their way inside. Boiler worked fine in the morning for showers. To Studland beach, out via Poole and the chain ferry, short wait and we then just got on the next crossing, a motorbike squashed in between us and the back gate, £4.10 for a car. Asked the National Trust people which way the naturist section was. A few there, not many. It was warm when we got there, with hazy sunshine, but it got cooler so we stayed only an hour, 0 paddled. Lunch at

the NT cafe. Then to Corfe Castle, 50p for 30 minutes parking right in the town, enough to take a few photos, very pretty place. Good to see these places on a warm Monday in September, they must be heaving in August. Back to cottage the long way round, stopping at a Co-op for cash and some insecticide in case more of the *Vespula vulgaris* start coming inside. Our place on the beach was SZ037847, back at the NT car park was SZ034836, it reckoned 1.2 km or about half the walking distance for Holkham and easier going, the wet sand was much firmer. Evening they were practising at the church bells, for hours. Cottage has modern plumbing, including a high-level cistern with metal pull, big shower with high flow rate. Electric ceramic hob with touch button control, separate oven, built-in fridge-freezer, dishwasher, no microwave. Combi boiler with what looks like mains gas, genuine leaded light windows with barely functional catches and no mean of fastening slightly open, log burner, mostly filament light bulbs except for LED downlights in kitchen, big Samsung TV on wall mount, lots of cast-iron radiators, only two low metal stools with folding dining table, plenty of kitchen storage, almost none elsewhere, lots of convenient power points, excellent bed except one side access only (or one on the folding sofa bed but cottage still only intended for two people max). Eve with a £5.99 bottle of Cava from the Co-op and a Thai curry.

Tue 2016-09-13

Sunshine to start and no wasps. To Kingston Lacy NT, big house, garden and estate. Set out on the woodland walk under a gloomy sky and soon we were in the middle of a thunderstorm, making good use of the waterproofs. Like most others, went into the cafe for a while then did the house with plastic overshoes. They hadn't enough volunteers on to open the top storey. Usual old stuff. Then it was brighter so more looking around the formal gardens before lunch, sandwiches back at the cafe. Also to Badbury Rings NT nearby, remains of an Iron Age fort with big circular embankments and some good views from the top, including the top of Kingston Lacy House a few kilometres down the road. It was warm enough, but the BBC reported that southern England had its hottest September day for ages; well we didn't, and back at the cottage for the late afternoon and evening it was dull. Topped up the diesel at half-full. New plastic fivers officially out today but not expected to get into general use for a few days or weeks.

Wed 2016-09-14

Bright start, pix down by the river with low sunlight. The cottage's wi-fi has a big modem on the wall; the thick cable running from it out through the wall is fibre, measures 33 Mb/s download and 1.9 MB/s upload. To Studland again, starting under leaden sky but when we arrived it was lovely sunshine, car park filling well and lots on the beach. Bought some sandwiches in the cafe and walked up to the naturist section, which was also filling well. Chatted to the man next to us, who was a regular and knew many of the others there. Saw a man walking past with a child in a front harness, with a towel draped over its eyes. After an hour or so the wind got up and cloud came over so we went on. Failed to find vehicular access to Old Harry Rocks, checking, we walked from Studland last time in 2006, and went on to Swanage, finding a parking spot on the front at £3.40 for 2h. It was sunny again by then so had a walk and a sit watching the people, the boats and the gulls. Lots of oldies of course. The fish-and-chip restaurant that I remembered from 40 years ago was still there. Another visit to the Co-op in Corfe Mullen on the way back, failed to find a cheese grater but got another bottle of the £5.99 Cava. Both directions done the long way round avoiding the ferry, outwards designed to pass through a few villages we hadn't seen yet. We later, too late, found there was a cheese grater in the cottage.

Thu 2016-09-15

Two dead wasps this morning, which is overcast but still bright. Walk 3 km, one of the suggested routes from the cottage manual, sunny. Then for lunch to the Horton Inn which was good, with jolly new landlord, except that on the way we got a puncture on OSF and had to change to the spare in a field entrance. Tyre was not down to wear bars but metal wire was visible around the inner edge, maybe a result of running flat for a while, or maybe it was just knackered; no obvious object in it. Got a new tyre fitted in Wimborne Minster, finding the less pretty industrial area to the south-east of the cute bit. £57, a Nexen, a lot cheaper than the last one. By then very warm and humid; back to cottage. Clean up and tidy, dinner off what was left.

Fri 2016-09-16

Thunderstorm and heavy rain during the night. Saw Mr Owner to hand keys back at about 08:50. More heavy rain on the latter part of the journey home; cooler. Slightly different route back, taking in Fordingbridge, A338 (pretty) to Cholderton, A303, A34, M40, A43, A421, A422, A5; 3.5 hours with a half-hour service stop near Andover. Home 12:30. To fetch cats at 16:30, £112. Girl said they had been fine until this morning when Sooty had been spooked and made a run for it, had to be caught with a towel; perhaps because of the thunderstorms in the night.

Stone Green Oast 2017

Sat 2017-04-29

Cats walked into the trap as usual and off to the cattery when they opened at 10:00. Off at 11:00, coffee at South Mimms, lunch at Maidstone, and to Stone in Oxney and Stone Green Oast at 14:50. Everything ready and the sun is out. Owner Amanda Button there to show us the basics; their house is next door. On several levels, bedrooms and bathroom on the ground floor, spiral staircase up to kitchen and dining area, steps up to the lounge. External accesses to the main bedroom at a few steps down from the garden and up wooden steps to the dining level. The main bedroom is the old fire area, the lounge the drying area under the cowl, which still rotates. The other areas were for loading and bagging. Very nicely done, lots of wood flooring upstairs, carpets downstairs. Small kitchen but well equipped. Nice garden but fully overlooked from the main house garden and house windows. Sat out in the sunshine. Beer, cider, cheese, apple juice, milk and eggs in the fridge for us. TV, hi-fi (with DAB), bedside radio (with DAB), wi-fi, lots of games and stuff, two bikes, oil central heating. House manual tells how to adjust things. Spacious and quiet. Was once in the country but a lot of houses opposite and next. Local pub is dead (The Crown) but there's a good one 1.5 km away (Ferry Inn). Oast is at N 51.0154 E 0.7646 or TQ 94012 27651.

Sun 2017-04-30

Wi-fi worked for everything last night but this morning some will work on only one of the networks and others only on the other, it's some sort of indirect thing piggybacked on the main house wireless. Bright morning, dull and some rain later. Before lunch walk to the Royal Military Canal, which involved a lot of up past the church and down again the other side. Omelets for lunch, then out for a drive. First found the supermarket in Peasmarsh, closed today but convenient, then headed for Eythorne. Told the satnav to find the shortest route which added about 30 minutes and a lot of single-track roads, only had to reverse once. Saw 1 New Road, now no sign of shop front, main door in the side (at bottom of stairs as I remember), conservatory out from the old kitchen and scullery entrance. 6 New Road in the same terrace and the bungalow opposite not numbered (St Ives). Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Edie lived in the bungalow until after Trevor died then moved into the smaller number 6. Then to Hougham, through Dover, missed the satnav's way which turned out well as it meant we came out along the old A20 past Priory Station and could just turn up Plough Hill, which the Leon accelerated up in third. Church Farm house looks just the same, new shed where the tool shed was but the old dairy still there, with a sign saying "The Old Dairy". Went into the churchyard and found Chiz's grave easily and a few old Williams and Ingrams, but not Grandad's. Back from there quickly using fastest time on satnav, which used the A20, M20 and A2070. Confirmed Dartford charge taken yesterday from our prepayment. When the oast's cowl rotates with the wind it makes a spooky noise, which I failed to convince θ was a ghost (or goast) in the old tower above the ceiling. Lots of oasts just around here but not in the part around Eythorne. The colliery railway now a preserved line and the level-crossing in Eythorne is still active. Uncle David's old bungalow is still called Gorran Haven. The oast's main bedroom has a tie-rod through it about mid window level and 100 mm out from it, to S-shaped spreaders outside. Saw a live badger on the roadside. Gravestone of William Bromley (1803..1865), grandad's grandfather, was quite clear. We found an Ingram Bromley possibly died 1841, if so was William's brother.

Mon 2017-05-01

Bank holiday Monday, dull and wet outside. One thing this cottage gets right is temperature, so far always comfortable. There is also what looks like a cast-iron log burner but it gives the game away by being made of some sort of resin and having no flue, it's a flicker-effect fan heater. To Bodiam Castle, car park filling well by 11:00 despite the weather. Had a coffee, went round the castle, got a few photos in the dry spells, then to the pub opposite for lunch, the Castle Inn; at 12:00, just got the last free unreserved table for lunch, and very good it was too, soup and roast lamb with veg, black olives and little home-made croquettes; the meat pink and tender. Homewards I map-read rather than trust the satnav, which is showing a horrible tendency to find badly-maintained single-track roads which it thinks might save a few seconds but don't. Back at the oast it cleared a bit but still cool and windy. The NT car park for now asks members to display the car badge and get membership card scanned at reception but signs are that the machine will eventually scan cards itself and presumably ask for registration number to be entered. The Crown Inn just up the road was open as a Bistro and B&B until this time last year at least, the signs are still up, but it has since closed completely. Refuse collection on bank holiday.

Tue 2017-05-02

Dry day with some warm sunshine. To Canterbury, parked in Watling Street pay-&-display short-term (location 4750), 4 hours for £7.20 (4*£1.70 + £0.40 fee for paying by phone). To the cathedral, £12 to get into the exclusion zone around it, can't even really see the outside without paying. Scaffolding around part of it for repairs and some noise. Lots of foreign visitors, many children in big parties. Big. Odd that the main nave can't really see the altar or even the choir, mostly hearing them I expect through a big arch above the smaller arch between the two. Oldest part the crypt, which is above ground. Had a look around the rest of the exclusion zone and then for lunch to Côte Brasserie where had three excellent courses well served, with one of the waitresses just starting and doing everything under supervision. I had crab mayonnaise; asparagus gratinée; crêpe Chantilly. Then for a walk around, out along the walls and the Dane John gardens. Fascinating watching the bus station, about 20 spaces each side herringbone pattern, most in use on the public side a few on the parked side, dispatchers sending each bus to the right space, them having to back out, all tight. Some pix from the top of the Dane John mound. Back to the oast, by then dull. Again a light tea. Rain eve.

Wed 2017-05-03

Wet on and off all day. Last week's forecast of warm sunshine for the end of this week has disappeared. To New Romney. First a look at the sea at Littlestone-on-Sea, then to the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch railway to find a train to Hythe going soon, so took that one, £25.20 for two returns. Not many on the train, though many on one that came in just before with a school outing or some such. Our train arrived behind *J B Snell*, a diesel, but that was taken off and *Winston Churchill*, a 4-6-2, coupled on instead. 5 minutes late leaving but then chugged off in a cloud of smoke and steam, taking about 35 minutes to Hythe with a stop at Dymchurch. All double track but using the inland side for both directions under token control; there was a work party on the other; saw no crossover except at Dymchurch. Paused for about 20 minutes at Hythe for the engine to pull away, reverse, forwards to turntable, forwards off again, water, forwards again and back onto train. Much the same people for the ride back, one couple and baby in our carriage. Highest speed I saw on GPS was 36 km/h which felt impressive on fairly rough track, just spiked each side on wooden sleepers, saw some big gaps in places. 381 mm gauge, 13.3 km from New Romney to Hythe (average speed 23 km/h). On the way there in the rain we'd noticed that the Leon's near-side wiper was split with about 8 cm of it flapping loose, so smartphone and Google to the rescue, from New Romney to Ashford and Halfords where they had one set left for £43 fitted (of which £4 for the fitting). On, with a diesel stop, to Rye where we had a walk around in the cold (only £2 for 2 hours) before on to Peasmarsh for the "independent" (two branches, this one and Rye) Jempsons supermarket for a top-up (open 07:00 to 20:00 with "late night" 21:00 on Friday, closed Sunday). Back to the oast 15:30 in the rain for a late lunch. This house is unusual in having plain glass everywhere, even in the bog overlooking the road and houses opposite, but obscured glass in the small windows in the kitchen. The lounge area floor is polished wood around the outside to match everywhere else but under the big central mat it is just plain plywood resting on a much older rough wooden floor below, but solid, not slatted like the oast would have had originally.

Thu 2017-05-04

To Scotney Castle NT out towards Tunbridge Wells, relatively modern stone house, fully open to public only since 2007, with large grounds containing a much older house / castle, some of which was deliberately ruined to give atmosphere to the garden. Cold, windy but dry. Short walk before first timed house visit at 11:00. Betty Hussey, who died in 2007, was the last resident and it'd been left exactly as she left it, give or take making suitable public access, preservation, display material, &c. NT owned it from long before but house was private until her death. No more than usually boring. Grounds were attractive, with the old castle sitting in the middle of a small lake surrounded by lots of flowering shrubs and colourful foliage. Lunch in the tea-room here, which was doing a good trade. When we left the overflow car park was well filled. Afternoon walk down to the Ferry Inn for a couple; in the gap between lunch and dinner service, staff relaxing, chef having a few pints, a real local.

Fri 2017-05-05

Tried to walk the footpath over to the Royal Military Canal but after a clear sign, a decent set of steps and new-looking kissing gate at the start, the first gate was way-marked but padlocked and unprovided with a style. Took the car instead, looked at the disused lock where the canal joins the Rother, then went down to Rye Harbour where there was a free (well, donations asked for) car park by the Martello tower. Walked into the nature reserve towards the sea in a very bracing wind. Then back to the Ferry Inn for 12:00 and lunch, which was very good if a little expensive (£70 with drinks and coffee); I had fried pigeon breast with blueberries and beetroot puree and sea bass with noodles and veg (as the mullet I ordered was later found to be off); θ had scallops and steak. The

pigeon was surprisingly substantial, quite dark and rather like duck though a little drier. They weren't doing too badly for customers. I abstained and drove back. Yesterday there was still some hope that today would be our one sunny day but it was not to be, dry mostly though. Overheard that there is a planning application to turn the Crown ex-pub into a residence, as with so many of them. Afternoon cleaning and packing; the weather got no better.

Sat 2017-05-06

Up at 07:00, final clear round, car loaded and away at 09:00; we phoned and Amanda came out to say goodbye but didn't look inside; said if we wanted to come back to contact direct. Home by 11:45 with one stop at Maidstone. Out to collect prescription and bread for lunch from Sainsbury's. Still dull and cool. On arrival, the dining table had a little pot of bluebells; by next morning they had all wilted and keeled over; I added water to the pot and by evening they had all perked up; kept topped up and the stems stayed upright and the flowers continued to open; looked fresh right up to the last day.

Sun 2017-05-07

To fetch the cats; £126 for two cats for 9 days or part days. End of holiday and a hot sunny day.

Bunloit Farmhouse 2017

Thu 2017-08-31

The cats were both in at 07:00 so an easy catch, Sweep made a small effort to hide under the bed but Sooty allowed himself to be just picked up. Into the cattery when it opened at 10:00, both us and others not on their list but they fixed that, cage 12 was hastily got ready. Sunshine. Set off 11:30, odometer at about 31600 miles. First accident was a beer lorry on its side under the side span of a bridge and well smashed up. Changed driver with lunch at Corley then ϕ to Lancaster. Second accident was a motorcyclist lying on an exit slip and a lorry stopped just past on the main. Got to Premier Inn at M6 J44 at 17:30, to find the on-line check-in had worked, just had to sign the chit and book dinner. Room wi-fi connected but no internet access. Heavy rain a couple of times, especially coming through the Lake District. 24.3 litres to fill just before the hotel stop. Restaurant at hotel good, rather over-attentive service at times from all young staff (Kyle mostly), gin-and-tonic dessert offered but then found not available still appeared on bill. We asked on arrival for dinner at 19:00 but were offered 18:45, not so full we thought that this made sense.

Fri 2017-09-01

Good pre-paid breakfast and underway a little before 09:00. M6 now goes right up to Scottish border, J45, before turning into the A74(M). Roads quiet and spectacular scenery, one stop in morning at Hamilton services, ϕ driving to lunch stop at Clachaig Inn, a pub down a single-track road off to the right from the A82 just before Glen Coe. Sunshine for a lot of it, showing the bumps off well. Followed the satnav's second selection, the one it came up with after the services stop, which took us on the M74 urban motorway south of Glasgow then M8, M898 over the Erskine bridge and A82 all the way up to Drumnadrochit (at Carlisle it had looked to have picked a route north of Glasgow towards the same A82). Google from home picked the A9 via Inverness and back down; the A82 was probably prettier but slower and had fewer towns. With the sandwiches at lunch I had a bottle of Brew Dog Nanny State, tasty and only 0.5% ABV. Stopped for shopping at a Morrisons in the south of Fort William. Arrived at cottage at 15:50, just 10 minutes before the official time with no need to dawdle anywhere. Odometer on arrival was 32150 miles and only two blobs down on fuel. Cottage as stated was ready, unlocked and key in door. Had to switch on the hub to get wi-fi. Owner Nicola Vestey over later, remembered we'd been before; they were off on holiday further north from Sunday to Friday so we had an alternative contact number for problems. GPS320 locates cottage at NH504252 altitude 216 m.

Sat 2017-09-02

Had to call the owner over as the shower was not working, she fiddled with the breakers in the cupboard and then the shower, towel-rail and room heater all started to work. Breaker had not tripped she said, just waggled it. She left the cupboard open; and also showed the location of the bedroom heater breaker, which was off and is still. Bright morning, getting up slowly. Bulb in shaving lamp had gone too but shaver power was still on so on different circuit and not the cause, new bulb OK. Walk up to the estate entrance onto the public road, 2.3 km return. The drive appears to be the estate's own road though there is another direct road to house shown on map as not in estate. Sunny afternoon, reading outside.

Sun 2017-09-03

Bright and windy start. The shower worked this morning. Located the little Co-op in Drumnadrochit then for a circular tour. In Beauly, saw the ruined priory and had a walk by the river, then a carvery lunch at the Priory Hotel. Followed the ring through Dingwall, Cromarty and Fortrose, but stopped nowhere. Took the A9 long, low bridge over Cromarty Firth. Lots of odd tall structures in the Firth near Invergordon and Cromarty. Warm but dull most of the day. Back to cottage by 16:00.

Mon 2017-09-04

To Cawdor Castle, lunch in the cafe, look around the castle and gardens. A bit damp. The castle furnishings were rather modern, though there were some non-functional older bits including a cellar with a centuries-old dead tree stump and a recently-discovered dungeon under a trap door. Had a look at Fort David but that turned out to be an operational military base and £9 each to look at the old bits (or £7.20 for over 60s), so we went on and had a look at Culloden instead, site of battle where the Jacobite rebellion was crushed in 1746 and Bonnie Prince

Charlie kicked off back to France via Skye. Big, modern visitor centre and exhibition and lots of paths around the field. Free to get in, as it was National Trust Scotland. Later the sun came out. Confirmed that the photo of a castle in the 1987 photo collection was Cawdor, and found pretty much the spot in the gardens from where it must have been taken, though there were more trees in the way now, took another from the same spot. Increased use of cards, especially contactless, meant that we didn't get our first funny money until today. Another 26.14 litres at the Esso in Drumnadrochit. Cawdor had a maze but it was closed for maintenance.

Tue 2017-09-05

To Portree on Skye. Started 09:30 in light rain which turned heavier for much of the way there. The obvious route, the A887 from Invermoriston, was closed from today for a week, though we didn't spot the diversion signs, only a single "road closed ahead" sign among the parked vehicles at the side of the road; it took us 6 km to reach the closure, along with several others, and 6 km to get back and go round the long way via Invergarry; even without the wasted 12 km that added 18 km to the 160 km route. So we did the whole length of the A87 except for the little bit to Uig. Stopped at Kyle of Lochalsh to top up supplies at a Co-op, saw a 2-car DMU in the station. Over the new bridge (no tolls) and on up to Portree. Town was busy, no space in the free long-term car park but found a space second time around in the pay-and-display (£2 for 2 hours). Had lunch in a little upstairs cafe here. Didn't really remember much from the visit in 1987, but at least this time the place was open. There from 13:15 to 15:00, and home by 18:00. Some pix of Eilean Donan Castle on the way back, lots of people and coach parties but we decided not worth £7 each for a quick look. The sun was out for some of the time in Portree and on the way back, making the spectacular scenery more inviting. Saw several moods, from the sunshine, to heavy rain, to threatening low clouds, to sprinkly rain with rainbows. ϕ drove. Topped up on return at Fort Augustus, 21.51 litres; so far average 61 mi/UKgall.

Wed 2017-09-06

Easier day, lazing and reading. Mostly overcast but not cold when out of the wind, some sunshine.

Thu 2017-09-07

Early morning mist or low cloud blocking out the trees on this side of the loch, even the sheep barely visible, followed by rain. The cottage stairs are odd, they twist left at the bottom, go straight, then left again at the top, with the bottom four being segments at 22.5 degrees each, then four parallel, then the top three being segments at 30 degrees. To Fort Augustus for lunch at the Bothy, which was busy with coach parties and boat trippers, but quick; we were told 20 minute wait for table but actually 5 minutes; food was good too. Afterwards for a stroll up and down, watched the bridge being swung for a yacht and the locks being worked. The rain eased at times, even a couple of bright bits, but didn't go away. θ bought a couple of jumpers in the shop and then got stung by a wasp in the palm of the hand holding the bag; back via the pharmacy in Drumnadrochit for antihistamines. Three sets of temporary lights between Fort Augustus and Drumnadrochit and we had to queue at all of them. Later a mist rolled in again along with some bright rainbows; fast-moving wisps of cloud below cottage level heading towards Inverness.

Fri 2017-09-08

All tidied and away by 09:00, key left in the door as instructed. Rain early but it stopped for loading the car. θ 's hand no more swollen and less painful. ϕ drive to lunch, θ to hotel. Lunch at Bankfoot Inn between Pitlochry and Perth, a big hotel in a small town which had a few diners but didn't buzz, rather odd collection of owners and helpers, friendly enough, gathered from overhear that they were trying to sell. Food was OK, though my curry was unspicy. Top-up at Gretna services 25.39 litres. Back in England and to hotel a little before 16:00, room 31 a bit further along the corridor than last week, but the wi-fi works this time. Return route was A82 to Inverness, then A9, M9, M80, M73, M74, A74(M), M6, sat-nav added about 10 miles and a few minutes for this *cf* the route up, it was easier to drive but less scenic. Also there was an accident blocking the A82 near Glen Coe, so a lucky escape. Eve a quick one in the bar till 19:00, then eat in the restaurant, good, Kyle again and Chris. Big accident closed M6 today, should be repaired in time for us tomorrow. Pleasure of being in control of temperature again. And to have a basin tap that you can get a toothbrush under.

Sat 2017-09-09

θ felt dizzy but a little better later and able to have toast for breakfast; ϕ did the driving today. Bright start, but torrential rain for much of the later part. Few hold ups apart from the interminable 40 and 50 mi/h roadworks. Left 08:45 and home 14:05, with two leg-stretch stops (Lancaster and Knutsford I think) and a quick lunch from McDonald's at Norton Canes. M6, M6 toll, M1, A508, A5. Final odo 33145 mi, trip 1579.

Sun 2017-09-10

Cats.

Bay Tree Cottage 2018

Sat 2018-06-02

Found both cats inside ~05:00 and barricaded the cat-flap. Packed while they gradually worked out what was happening and hid behind the TV and chairs, but they were caught easily and to cattery at 10:00 as they opened. Back home, load car and away 10:45 to Norfolk. A10 route, chosen by sat nav, probably allowing for delays on A14. Stopped for diesel and sandwiches, eaten in a lay-by. Small Gulf station with shop and what looked like home-made sandwiches, coronation chicken and meatballs with cheese and salsa. Got to Bay Tree Cottage in East Runton (NR27 9PW, TG197420) a couple of minutes before the appointed 14:00 (rang owners Caroline and Robert Brownsell from Holt to warn them). Nice, comfortable modern house with wi-fi and only slightly overlooked garden, nice conservatory on the back. Warm; a bit of rain on arrival. Owners suggested googling places found on booking sites as site not only inflated price but also took percentage from owner. Free bottle of wine, chocolates, biscuits, bread, milk.

Sun 2018-06-03

Dull. Walked down to the beach, misty, couldn't see out to sea or along the beach; tide was full and just turning. Walked a little way towards West Runton and back, beach mostly stones with some sand, cliffs looking fragile with piles of rocks below, some very neatly stacked into columns and even into an elaborate wind shelter. While we were there the mist lifted a bit and could see Cromer pier. Then in car to Sheringham Park (NT); car park well filled and into the overflow; had a sandwich in the cafe. Took the waymarked blue route to the gazebo, a tall wooden platform on top of a "hill" (this is Norfolk), lots of steps up the hill and then the tower. By then the sun was shining and the sky blue, a local we met said first for a week, had been misty. Back via a few villages, saw two steam trains passing at Weybourne station, and just then the mist came back down. Back to cottage for reading. 16:00 walked down the the Fishing Boat for a couple; it was rammed, with a live band playing, good, and good service and beer. Odd, this house is clearly relatively new and is a near mirror-image of the one next door, yet built low with all upstairs rooms with dormer windows and part-sloping ceilings. Other houses opposite are full-height so presumably not planning, why add all the interior annoyance and awkward hard-to-maintain roof complexity? Also, why is the double bed not in the largest room, which is the twin (there's also a smaller single)?

Mon 2018-06-04

Morn here dull and damp, and the day stayed so. To Felbrigg Hall (NT). Had a tour of the cellars and attics which was fun, limited to 10 (there were actually 9 of us) with two guides. Saw Tudor cellars from an earlier house. Attics contained all sorts of objects mostly packed away and signs of the recent reconstruction, the place having been allowed to fall into disrepair. Lunch in the cafe then went round the main part of the house, pretty conventional, and then a 2.5 km signed walk in the woodland.

Tue 2018-06-05

Walked to Cromer along the road mostly, pavement all the way on both sides. Had a look around, not busy on a dull Tuesday in June. Went to the end of the short pier and looked in the lifeboat station, where we bought a tea-towel. The first pub we tried, next to the B&B we stayed at for the Priory Maze (the Wellington), was not doing food, tried Upstairs at No1 over the fish & chips place, but they casually said don't bother to book we won't be busy just come back at 12, it didn't look very inviting; wandering about to pass the time we spotted the King's Head which was doing food, inc a crab salad for 8. Good, and beer OK too. Then some cash out and a puzzle book at the Co-op cum Post Office and walked back mostly along the coast path, to a little beyond East Runton and to a nice spot on the cliffs looking down on West Runton. Back to cottage for a bit of conservatory sun.

Wed 2018-06-06

The sun re-appeared; warm and sunny most of the day. To Morston Quay (NT) for a boat trip to look at the seals. At least three companies ran trips from here, we had booked yesterday with Bean's Boats, pay (cash) on the day. Restricted by tides because the inlet is tidal, today trips at 11:00 and 12:00, high tide was 12:16. About 40 on boat, £12 each, and they ran more than one boat for 12:00 trip. Saw common and brown seals, about 30 of the common and half-a-dozen of the other, basking on the beach at the end of the spit, some in the water, others just looking at us as we went past two or three times. The water was a little choppy where the browns were,

elsewhere quite smooth. We decided not to get off on the spit to wait half-an-hour for the next boat and instead went straight back to the start, trip 1 hour. Lunch at the Anchor Inn in Morston, where one of the other boat companies had its base; we watched the young daughter of the family taking bookings. Pub was being run by a couple of women who appeared to be in a perpetual flap but actually were running it very well, and food was very good too (I had crab linguine and a hot chocolate fondant). Then on to Wells-next-the-sea, parked in the town and walked out to the beach, 1.6 km. Quite busy, nice walk, spent a little time on the beach. Back to the cottage and a little sun in the only completely invisible and sunny spot, before walk down to the Fishing Boat for a couple. Not so busy tonight but OK and beer good again. A superb H-reg Morris 1000 Traveller in the car-park at Morston. When we got here, the house next door had 0.5 m-high grass front and back but yesterday the front got cut and today the back was strimmed, with a petrol strimmer by a man in a van, odd.

Thu 2018-06-07

Another unforecast sunny day, cool out of the sun but nice. Set out on one of the pub-based walks in one of the books in the cottage, but we hadn't noticed it was at least 25 years old. The walk we picked started from Upper Sheringham but the pub there was now a private house. We walked it anyway, the route was still findable though changed in places. Went through Pretty Corner, a nice wood with a wooden walkway on the sloping part, several hundred metres long, and then drove to Holt to find a live pub. We chose the Kings Head which did me a good wild mushroom risotto with asparagus tempura and a crab salad. Looked at the town, cute, few chain shops and a department store all of its own, Bakers and Larners, stoutly closed on Sundays and after 17:00 every other day. Back in a circle through several villages inland and then Cromer. Still sun at cottage. After next-door's strimming yesterday heard a female voice over the fence discussing what to do; new owner? Another evening in the warmest room in the house, the conservatory; it gains heat rapidly in even slight sun and retains it well with double glazing. We haven't used the sitting room with its leather armchairs at all. Apart from bread, we've not done any food shopping.

Fri 2018-06-08

A sunny start and not cold all day but the sun was shy in the afternoon. To Blickling Estate (NT). A walk in the large garden before lunch in the cafe. Then around the house. Known for a big book collection it was hosting an art installation on books and the threat of their loss with censorship and other less worrying trends. After that more walking in the grounds and park. Of course, the two do not link, it was quite a walk from the house to the starting place for the walks in the park, the other side of the fence or ditch. Back home, and a last visit to the Fishing Boat before cleaning and packing. Cottage had a Miele Cat & Dog vacuum cleaner with amazing suction and an air-turbine brush at the business end that seemed very effective.

Sat 2018-06-09

Up at 07:00 and all loaded and away just before 08:00; sent a text to the owners to advise and thank. Back on the Norwich and A11 route, got confused by a new east-west road just north of Norwich but overall quick, to cattery by 10:45. Compromised with owner, who moaned despite our saying we were intending to pay up till tomorrow, and she split the difference, £125. Home not long after 11:00. Dull to start but brighter by lunchtime.

Grange Farm Cottage 2018

Fri 2018-08-24

Cats to the cattery for 10:00. Packed the car and away about 10:50 with the satnav showing about 320 km and arrival at 14:17. Followed its route: M1 (J15), M18, A1, A64, A169, A170 (W), Appleton-le-Moors, Spaunton, Grange Farm Cottage (near Lastingham). Stopped for lunch at Trowell for about 40 min. There was slow traffic and jams everywhere with bank holiday, local events and accidents and we arrived about 16:45, so adding nearly 2 hours delay on top of lunch stop. Just go in, key inside door, and get in touch with farm house if any problems. Very quiet and pretty. Has an oil Rayburn which does cooking (eventually), water and radiators on a timer, but also a microwave with built-in grill and convection oven, DAB radio with aux input and Bluetooth, wi-fi. Temperature down to 14°C, with change in weather and up north. Geko said 166 m elevation and SE722899. Earlier from Google and owner's directions I got N 54.2998 W 0.8913, put that in my satnav and it was pretty much bang on to the cottage. Cheese and wine for tea, while outside the blue sky darkened. The S7000 camera worked for one shot, then the sensor malfunctioned, random lines or distorted image. So far, a very unusual holiday cottage in that it was very cosy. Downside was the bedroom in the roof, you kept banging your head on the sloping ceiling.

Sat 2018-08-25

Sunshine but almost cold to start. Walk on a loop clockwise to Lastingham, 2.5 km along and quite a bit down and then up again, but superb scenery. Out in the car further into the Moors Park, stopping at the Black Horse Farm Inn at Rosedale Abbey which we happened to pass as lunch time approached. A pint and a good lunch was had, chicken with Stilton sauce and crème brûlée with a pint of Wainwright. The pub part was not busy (also a hotel) and didn't seem to be anyone else for lunch by the time we left. Then for a drive through the bleak moorland via Hartoft, Cropton, Stape, Egton up to the A171, close enough to Whitby to see the sea, then back across the moor on the A169 and home along the A170 and back up. The A169 crossed the same moor, but with higher speed, bridges instead of fords and shallower gradients it didn't give the same feel. Stopped on the smaller roads to take a few photos. Back at the cottage the sun was still out and a bit warmer. The small outdoor space around the cottage one could hardly call a garden, more a bit of wild land with a small patio, but it afforded a well-designed niche around the corner, with a wall on the road side, out of the wind and with a crunchy gravel path to warn of approach. Tried to fry some sausages on the Rayburn and it took ages. To get the hot plates to stay hot had to, as the cottage manual said, turn the downstairs radiators to full and open the windows, and move a hot knob from H to C. Even so, we had to finish them in the electric thing in grill mode.

Sun 2018-08-26

Overcast and then steady rain. To Nunnington Hall NT, quite close. House and smallish garden. Very open attitude in house, Lego hunt for the children, a piano for people to play on, signs to say don't touch the delicate old stuff but not the hushed tiptoe around that some seem to expect. One room had a vintage-appearance radio playing, but its modernity was revealed by a red LED display among the antique brass buttons, perhaps red was vintage, modern would be blue. The house route finished in the tea room, wait to be seated, service at table, at 12:15 we got one of the last free tables. Lunch and coffee efficiently served. Had a look around the gardens later in the rain. The lawn had badminton and croquet set up and deckchairs but not many takers. No non-garden grounds. Looked out for Ryedale Folk Museum on the way back, and drove past it without spotting it, but it was mainly outdoors anyway. Evening in as the rain continued, eventually turning into a damp mist.

Mon 2018-08-27

Bank holiday. We discovered the electric hotplate in the pot and pan cupboard so our cooking problems were alleviated. To Scampston Hall, or at least its walled garden and park; house open only some days in high summer. Walled garden was big and interesting. Sandwich lunch in the cafe. Followed the marked blue route around the outer grounds, a few follies, a lake, a Palladian bridge, ice-house, pump-house, a Capability Brown job. Surprisingly not busy for a fine bank holiday Monday; £8.50 each for both parts. Stopped in Pickering on the way back, bought OS sheet 100 and some more reading, θ bought us some cream cakes. Had a look at the castle from the outside but decided against £6 each to look over the ruin today. A few rays of sunshine today. Some photos from my Samsung compact were out of focus; not a good holiday for cameras, though the Fuji one worked again today. Finished the bottle of wine left by the owner (Australian Shiraz). Café sign: "Friendly food and tasty staff".

Tue 2018-08-28

To Whitby, a seaside town, less seedy than Blackpool. Parked by the harbour. Many people and all milling around rather than walking. Lunch at an efficient fish-and-chip restaurant. Climbed the 199 steps up to the ruined abbey. Had an ice-cream. Dry and mild, a bit windy with little sun. Not many on the beach but the donkey rides were still going. Back over the moor, stopping a couple of times to experience the silence, when the wind dropped.

Wed 2018-08-29

To Mount Grace Priory, north of Thirsk. Priory ruined and on site with a secular house, which before 1539 was the guest house attached to the priory and later after dissolution became a private home, developed over the years. One cell of the priory had been restored, though cell may give the wrong impression, each of the 25 cells had a bedroom, living room, upstairs workroom, latrine, covered walkways and a garden, quite a house. They were silent and only met for Sunday services and holy days, food went in through an L-shaped chamber by each front door. Apart from the one restored cell, the rest was mostly low walls and a few doorways, the church having a few complete arches. Sandwich lunch in the cafe here. There was also a good modern garden at the front. This site was NT but managed by English Heritage, and our cards got us in free. Back via Thirsk for a look around and shopping top-up. Later for a walk south from the cottage on the lane, across a footpath and back on the road, 4.5 km. Later still walked to the Blacksmith's Arms where we got a table despite not booking. Starter was a bit slow coming but then fine, food good and plenty of it, for φ minted lamb pie. Finished with coffee and liqueurs. Walked back just before it got completely dark. Inspired by all the sheep around here:

*Mary had a little lamb
Its fleece was white as snow
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go
It followed her to school one day
And joined the cook'ry course
They roasted it the English way
And ate it with mint sauce.*

Thu 2018-08-30

Early sunshine and on through the day, though windy and cool in exposed places. Set the bread-maker for this morning with their sample mix and it was good. To Scarborough. Found an NCP car park in the new town centre behind the huge Grand Hotel. Walked north past the castle towards North Bay, then back and up steps and ramps to the castle. Had a drink and a sausage roll in the café there and had a look around the ruin. Then back down the ramp and steps and back south, walked along the beach at South Bay which was well used, with a dozen or so donkeys giving rides. Paid £1 each to go back up on the funicular to have a look at the shops and an ice cream, then away. The car park was £4 for up to 4 hours. Back to cottage, by which time the sun had gone. Much bigger than Whitby and easier to get around, and still not as seedy as Blackpool.

Fri 2018-08-31

Sunshine. Up about 07:00, packed cleaned and away by 08:45, home by 13:35. Total 316 km. θ drove to Woodhall, via A64, A1 and M18 to M1, pretty much half way and with no hold-ups, not even a wait for the lights in Pickering (for the first time ever). φ drove from there with a long queue for roadworks at Nottingham and another for a diesel spill at Leicester. Cats fetched, £116; they hadn't enjoyed themselves and had messed the cage.

Muddykins Cottage 2019

Sat 2019-05-18

Leisurely start, setting off at 10:30. Stop at Oxford, lunch and swap drivers at Sedgemoor on the M5, got to Muddykins Cottage by about 15:20. Cottage is at 51.1293 N 4.0587 W by GPS. Route M4, M5, A361, A39, B3230. Cottage is on the B road, with a 2-car bay outside, and 41 steps up from road to front door, curving and irregular, some steep with no handrail. Lots of garden, almost all not overlooked. Spacious, not expensively furnished but comfortable-looking. Plenty of power and good wi-fi. Gas and electric range for cooking, gas fired heating with controls mostly locked away. I brought one blue sandal and one brown, but at least it was one left foot and one right. Keys in safe; we're to leave them there whenever we go out. Lunch from the Spar shop at the services, eaten at the free tables. This is a house of notices, at least one in every room, not all proscriptive, some helpful. The kitchen taps are weird, they look like conventional taps with a 4-bar cross top, but they only do a quarter turn, the hot goes clockwise and the cold anticlockwise, and they don't feel like ceramics.

Sun 2019-05-19

Found a tick buried in my upper left arm, removed it. Dull to start and sunshine later. To Morteheo, parked in P&D (£3.30 for 3h) and walked out on hilly path towards Rockham beach; got to the point where we could see the steep descent and final long steps down to a deserted rugged beach before retracing back to the village and the Ship Aground, where we had a good carvery (£10) and decent ale. Then on to Saunton Sands, parking at SS447377, £1.10 for 1h (pay on exit, ANPR), walked along the beach, sat and watched for a while on the soft sand of the dunes, dogs chasing balls, a man windsurfing along the beach in an on-shore wind, a group playing with a drone. Drove back from there in a big circle via Braunton, Barnstaple, just cutting into Exmoor at Blackmoor Gate and back to Muddiford via the steep descent from Whitfield Down. Good sun by then but deciding to stay on patio and chairs, not the lawn.

Mon 2019-05-20

Sun all day, enough for sun on the terrace before and after trip out. To Arlington Court NT not far to the north. Smallish house full of an eclectic collection, not labelled or particularly interesting, mostly. Also NT's carriage museum, which was a bit more like it, including the Lord Mayor of London's state coach, huge, ornate and gilded; not allowed to photograph it (order of owners and you couldn't get far enough from it to take on a normal camera anyway). All of them robust enough to be used in all weathers on the road only 100 years or so ago but now all too delicate to touch. The grounds were good, long walk (3 km) out around the lake, lawns, play areas, flower and kitchen gardens. Signing of the walk was only fair and the gardens had no labels on anything. A "nearly-94" year old was talking in the carriage museum; he had been there working many years ago. House was home of Chichesters (the same family as the yachtsman) until NT took it on in 1949. Lunch in the tea-room; the one-pot was counter-served and the jacket potato came from the kitchen which added complication but as it happened the one-pot wasn't ready anyway so they brought both out to us. Most diners sitting outside in the sun. Birds picking crumbs from the tray less than a metre away.

Tue 2019-05-21

Greeted with sunshine, watching the shadow of the house and chimney passing across the terrace, sun in front of the summerhouse before 09:00, on half of the main area by 09:30, and on into the afternoon. With the slope down to the road to the south and the only obstruction that way being the fields on the side of the valley opposite it is perfectly situated. Also with the slope to the road with two rows of trees and shrubs, a hedge to the rear, no windows in the facing side of the house to the east and the windows of the one to the west only glanced through a few gaps in the trees it gives about as much privacy as possible without being miles from anywhere or on a huge site. Nowhere is visible from the road except the first few of the curving steps up. Gravel alerts to any visitor coming round from the front door, only across the lawn and around the back would afford a silent intrusion. To Lynmouth. Stopped at Watersmeet and walked down a steep path to the garden and NT tea room at the bottom, tea taken there. Then into Lynmouth. Lunch in the Ancient Mariner, mussels and a burger; the Google Pay account was in the name of the Bath Hotel. Not busy anywhere. Car parks everywhere today awkward in needing cash, the card slots blocked (£2.20 at Watersmeet and £3.30 at Lynmouth). After lunch explored the town, and went up on the water-driven cliff funicular to Lynton. Pretty little town, but not much to do. Then on a drive over

Exmoor, first south to Simonsbath. That was no more than a village, really just a pub and some rugged footpaths, but it did have a car park and a bog. Stopped on the way there at a couple of parking spots for photos and to take in the silence of the moor, though that was shattered at one by the Leon's fan running on. Then west over a slightly less scenic road to Blackmoor Gate and back to the cottage. Topped up with diesel at three blobs down, Leon's usual frugality. Back for a bit more sun in the garden then walked down to the Muddiford Inn. The pub was closed on Monday, and on Tuesday opened at 16:00, food only from an Indian van in the car park from 17:00; other days opened all day and food. Big friendly pub with locals, beer was good. Back at cottage for superb Stony butcher sausages and beans. The NT shop at Watersmeet had tick removing cards; bought a penknife-style fold-out cutlery set. The cliff railway is steep, with two tracks close together, separating at the middle to allow cars to pass. Twin cables connect the cars. There are spouts at the top to replenish the water tanks and just before departure from the bottom you can hear water running out. There is a big brass wheel linked to a chain which I assume is the brake, which is controlled by a man on each car; it's not clear whether a controlled stop at the end requires careful use of the brake or whether there is some more automatic protection. There is a rather puny buffer ram at the bottom. A bell and traffic-light indicator and one push-button is all the signalling required. Three people needed, one on each car and one at the bottom taking money. Plenty of custom to keep it running continuously today.

Wed 2019-05-22

Found another tick on front of left shin. Sunshine even before 08:00 in front of the summerhouse. Another warm sunny day from dawn to dusk. To Barnstaple, would have been £3.30 min to park with card but I pressed the wrong button and paid £4.40 for 4h. Looked at the shops, bought tweezers, TCP, cheap but matching sandals (£20) and, in the covered market, a Unique Universal 1 slide rule for £3, slightly banana-shaped and with a bulge on the scale at one point but otherwise in excellent condition. Had a late breakfast in the Panniers Wetherspoon, two soft drinks and two traditionals at £10.89 the lot. Then to Woolacombe, £6 to park all day in the Bay Hotel car park, cheaper than the £7 in the official ones; cash taken on entry by an old man. Had some time on the beach, which was popular even mid-week in May, and θ paddled. θ bought some windmills and a hat. Walked a bit along behind the beach and had an ice-cream. Then via a Londis for some milk and back to the cottage, for more sun. Evicted a huge hornet that was perched on the inside kitchen door. Amusing that I bought new shoes and within two hours they were full of sand and soaked with seawater; they seem to be OK despite it.

Thu 2019-05-23

Again early sunshine but slightly hazy, warm all day with quite a lot of sun. To Marwood Hill Garden, 8 hectares of garden created since 1949 by a now-dead doctor, spanning a deep valley with bog garden and lakes in the bottom and a steep climb up to the hydrangeas and camellias at the top. Lots of elderly women the main customers. Had lunch in their cafe when it opened at 12:00, while waiting we had tea and cake. To Westward Ho!, the town end, had a walk and an ice-cream. Ugly building, apparently apartments, plonked right on the back of the beach with coast path running behind, and almost as ugly blocks of flats just beyond the path, not a pretty place. Sandy beach to the north with a shingle bank behind it, craggy rocks to the south, lots of amusements, some open. Lots of school outings. Parking machine refused Google Pay but accepted Visa contactless (minimum £3 for cards, but had to choose between £3 for 2h or £4 for 4h, 2h would have been £2 in coins). So far we have not been off the local 1:50000 OS sheet; conveniently we are near the middle of the sheet. Evening ate at the Muddiford Inn, good, three courses (Devon blue fritters with onion and pineapple dip; excellent lamb shank with veg, mash and cauliflower gratin; banana split). They had about 5 tables at peak. Beer was good too. No footpath on busy road for the walk to get there was really the only negative. Overcast by late aft with a few spots of rain.

Fri 2019-05-24

Morning more overcast with sun peeping hazily through gaps, still warm though; later a few bright bits. To Broomhill Sculpture Park, just down the valley from the cottage. Lots of sculpture, set in the steeply-sided valley with a river and ponds at the bottom. All sorts, figurative and abstract, spread around random paths. Lunch on the hotel terrace from their tapas bar then completed the circuit with the National Sculpture Prize section, with a selection to vote for (we didn't), but all fun. Then a driving tour that took in Blackmoor Gate, Combe Martin and Ilfracombe before heading back to the cottage for a last afternoon on the terrace, though inside by 17:00 as it cooled off. Cleaning and packing.

Sat 2019-05-25

Overcast morning at 08:00, though sun visible through cloud, still warm and completely still. Set off at 09:00 as the weather got warmer and sunnier. Lunch bought at Leigh Delamere where we changed driver and eaten in a lay-by further on. Traffic was good except slow on M40 and a crawl to come off at J10 but going the other way the M5 was rammed in several places, and even on the M4 there were some slow spots and queues to get into services. Don't try to get to the West Country on the Saturday of a bank holiday!

Guernsey 2019

Fri 2019-09-13

Sweep confined easily as usual and sulking as soon as she saw the cat-flap barred; Sooty in already and so to cattery at 10:00 opening; big cage number 32 again.

Sat 2019-09-14

Up at 05:30 and away at 07:30. Stop to buy sandwiches at Chieveley and again to eat then at Rownhams on the M27. Till then the roads were clear but it was a bit of a crawl on the A31 after it went single-carriageway. Google had 2h45m for the trip and we got to the ferry terminal at Poole at 11:15, so 3h45m with stops and delays. Latest check-in was 12:30 but there were lots there before us. Just hand over photo ID and booking confirmation to get seat tickets, windscreen barcode and mirror hanger, several different categories all in different lanes, for Guernsey or Jersey and various size vehicles or freight. Moved before 12:00 to more waiting lanes by the boat, watching tractors very expertly picking up artic trailers parked alongside and arranging them close-packed on a Brittany Ferry boat. Got on to Condor Liberation and into lounge, allocated seats, before 13:00 and we started to move before the booked 13:30, about 13:20. Nominal 3h crossing, making ~50 km/h, but we were coming in and called to the car deck (we on the upper one) around 16:00. Short drive to La Petite Maison, back in through gate and sharp turn to park in a little bay, key under mat but met Sarah Giles returning as we unloaded. Cottage is separate but adjacent to owner, has use of a field. Quite small but comfortable, little plug-top wi-fi thing that appears to connect over mains. Upstairs just bed in roof, downstairs bath / shower room and lounge / kitchen. Bedroom has a couple of wide steps between the part with bed in and the part that forms the top of the stairs, which might be fun in the night. Later ate from nearby chippy, £8.90 and much more than we could eat. Got change from English £10 as Guernsey £1 note and Guernsey 10p. Last Night of the Proms on TV. Location guessed from Google Maps was (N) 49.48633 (W) -2.54739, this put into Leon's satnav got us here OK. Surprised by the number of little islands we saw on the way here, one of them was probably Alderney but there were also tiny rocks. The boat was scheduled to depart Poole 13:30, arrive Guernsey 16:30, depart again 17:00 and arrive Jersey 18:00. Geko for cottage was: 49.48636 -2.54751 which is only a few metres from the guess. The wi-fi is a Devolo repeater, connected over mains wiring to house.

Sun 2019-09-15

First thing a walk out to Rouse Tower, one side of a big bay with sandy beach, even at that time people were swimming, then a little further along the coast and back via the roads around Les Hauts Courtils, showing that there are at least some hills here. Also via Morrisons in L'Islet for forgotten fruit juice and plastic pint glasses as the cottage has only one decent beer or cider glass. Walk out to The Pony for lunch, a big place, doing grills, pasta and pizza, as we hadn't booked we were in the family room with lots of children. Food was good and service was really fast, we'd had two courses and coffee in less than a hour, but then paying the bill took a while to work out. We were there just before 12:00 and young waiter pointed out when he bought the drinks that it was then past 12:00 and legal to drink; his mother had told him that it was once like that in England. Hot sunshine all day. Junctions have stop lines like a short, fat yellow block and a yellow warning arrow about 50 m before. Multi-way-stop junctions are called filter-in-turn and you are supposed to take turns. Max anywhere 56 km/h, lots in town 32 km/h, quiet residential often ask for 24 km/h but no-one seems to observe that. All parking is free but clock card required; cottage has a card provided. Later tried for a pub; the nearest was already closed at 18:00; back to The Pony where we had time for a hurried one before they shut at 19:00.

Mon 2019-09-16

The rubbish collection came round at 04:30. Dull but still warm. On a tour of the west coast. Stopped at the viewpoint between Baie de Grat and Baie des Pecqueries, then, via the cottage again to pick up the parking disk we forgot, to Saline Bay where we had a walk on the beach and a coffee at the cafe. Then to Vazon for a walk ending up at the cafe for lunch of pie, chips and beans. There were more public bogs in this short run of coast than in the whole of some cities. After that to Portelet Bay and Harbour and walked up towards the viewing spot. All this coast was very rocky; the tide was mid-ebbing to low during all of this time. An ice cream here. On past the airport and to the Little Chapel, a wow sight for first-timers, though it had been suffering with structural issues and had been closed for a while. Like many of the historical and touristy sites here, no charge and a place for donations. The same was true for all of the Martello towers and other fortifications we have seen around. There was a gift shop where I bought a fridge magnet and a necklace. Then back to the cottage, sitting in our first traffic queue on the island, 5 mins for a busy cross-roads. Wikipedia has Guernsey as 65 km² and population 63k; MK as 89 km² and 230k; so 27% of MK population within 73% of the area. The map has the island within a rectangular box 13 * 10 km (EW*NS). A complete circuit is about 40 km. Another cottage oddity: there is only one internal door, which is into the bathroom, it is 53 mm thick and glazed (though obscured) with a solid lock; the front door is only 44 mm with a flimsy rimlock. Registration plate trivia: saw 005 and 10. 0 or 00 in front is a special pay-for plate introduced to raise money for the government; 1 is the Bailiff's official car and his private cars have G1 and G2. Apart from the narrow roads and awkward junctions, another oddity is no advance direction signs, just little finger-pointers on the junction, and no standard format for those.

Tue 2019-09-17

Another oddity is the lack of overhead structures, not only no overbridges that we've seen yet but no overhead cables either. Registration plate trivia, today saw 9. Dull to start then sunshine, windy. Out in the car to look at the south coast. Lots of hairy driving, reversing into drives or gateways to get past; lorries and buses. First to St Martin's Point in the extreme SE, walked to viewing point, could see Herm and Sark clearly but Jersey was murky. Kiosk here for coffee. Lots of the little car parks have bogs and kiosks, keeping going despite what looked meagre trade. Then to lcart, park and a walk both ways along the coastal path. Remote beach accessed by steep descent from coastal path seen off ahead. This once was noted for Naturism, now it just hints saying it is the hardest beach to get to for a peaceful day in the sun, 218 steps and a ladder down from the coastal path. Then to Petit Bot Bay where there was a cafe and a Martello tower. Sandwiches for lunch from the cafe, then wander onto the beach to sit on a rock and watch. By then near to low tide. Very cute narrow sandy beach between cliffs. Were looking for Les Tielles next but the road to it looked so narrow that we didn't try it and went on round the head and Rocquaine Bay again. Park, ice cream then walk up towards the defence tower and an ancient burial chamber. Then tootle home via Morrisons for bagels.

Wed 2019-09-18

To St Peter Port by bus. Sunny, very windy around the harbour. Buses all cost £1 per trip, or various pre-pay cards, cash or contactless. The number 21 goes from just down the road by the M+S Food to the bus terminal in about 15 minutes, once per hour. Arrive in town before 11:00 and have a look around, not as many shops as expected, and normal, not seaside-like. Lunch in a posh restaurant on the front next to a table of suit-wearing financial types (and one girl), very nice and well presented. Then to the Castle Cornet (£10.50 ea) which was interesting, having gone from medieval through history, mostly English held (as opposed to the town in some cases) to modern times as a Nazi defence position. One graphic in the museum suggested that this may be the only British castle that has been strafed by the RAF. Very windy up on the top but beautiful views over the town and out to Herm and Sark. Saw Condor Liberation set off at pretty much low tide. Nearly 8-metre tide range here sometimes and harbour was a long way down as we were leaving around low tide. Inner private boat harbour has a bar to retain water at low tide, which presumably reduces the available times for exit and entry. Home by 16:00 though the return bus was held up in traffic along the front, taking 20 mins over that bit against 15 mins

timetabled for the whole route. Bus routes are a bit odd because some of the narrowest roads are one-way so the bus loops with different out and back stops. Neither bus was more than a quarter full. Bus had a video panel with route, time and next stop and almost inaudible voice announcements. On the narrow bits, the bus was quite happy to drive with nearside wheels on the footpath. From the info in the museum, 8000 years ago Guernsey was still joined to France, being cut off when the sea rose after the last ice age; Herm was still walkable from Guernsey within recorded history.

Thu 2019-09-19

Out to the Northern tip, to Pembroke or L'Ancrese Bay, park here and walk up to the headland with its fort and tower and around to the tiny and pretty Baie de la Jaonneuse. Sat here for ages watching the tide going out and gradually uncovering the rocks; Left side of beach steeply shelving sand, right side rocks, both with steep dry sand above. Very few there, mostly dog walkers, though it was sunny with a persistent wind. Walked back to the big bay and lunch at the Beach House, home-made burgers. Back to the little beach again to see the tide further out and a bit more peace before trying the kiosk for ice cream and back to the cottage. A bit of sun in the field and more on the little patio with the sun umbrella. A nice spot but a bit public being just inside the main gate with the owners going in and out all the time.

Fri 2019-09-20

Out to the same beaches as yesterday, arriving nearly at high tide, though a lower tide than yesterday. Walk along the coast towards the landfill site, one of the few non-picturesque scenes on the island. Again, apart from a few dog walkers and joggers, we had all of this lovely beach to ourselves. Clear blue sky all day but that persistent wind still. We found a spot among the rocks at the back of the beach that was somewhat sheltered, enough to strip off. Dipped toes in sea. Lunch at the Beach House again, then a bit more sun and back home, packing and cleaning.

Sat 2019-09-21

All tidied and away by 09:30. Owner's car was there but no answer to bell so left keys through letterbox as instructed. Went out to Ladies Bay, a long sandy beach with a good car park, bogs and a kiosk. Walked along the path and back over the sand. Had a coffee, watched the tide pass through high and ebb away, exposing rocks leading out to the big island of rocks in the middle. Had sandwiches bought at M+S on the way here. Later just idled in the car, watching the tide and the people swimming, doing puzzles, reading; the car being out of the wind. Then off to the port. Today was the day of the Hill Climb event, with roads in the south of St Peter Port closed, so we allowed for some traffic; there was none, so we continued to sit in the car and read and did puzzles until the port gate opened, by that time there were about 30 more behind us and one in front. Then check in, customs (opened boot and bonnet) and more waiting in lane, the boat was 17 mins late leaving Jersey. Could hear screaming engines, presumably from the event in town. Got on the boat not long after 16:00 for nominal 16:25 dep, actual 16:40 (it arrived at 16:02). Nearly the same parking place on upper deck near red stairs (facing backwards) but this time seats in a pair right at the back on the port side. The sea was said to be calm, "not like yesterday", still hard to walk in a straight line but OK while seated; I took her pill and put on her wrist straps and was OK. Condor Liberation again. Dark by the time we docked, the boat slowed down past Studland and into the harbour. The captain said that the Brittany Ferries boat before us had all of its cars scanned by the customs' new toy but we were just waved through. Away at 20:00, stopped at Rownhams services for a meal (well a McDonald's) and home 23:00, no traffic, A34 route. Got rid of my last Guernsey note in a charity bucket outside M+S in L'Islet, using Google Pay or cards everywhere helped the non-collection of funny money, and often if offered UK money they dumped their UK coins back on you. MSF worked fine at the cottage. The car could get Classic FM on DAB but the little personal DAB could see only one BBC mux. The Freeview radio selection was very limited. Cottage positives: location; comfortable; welcoming; the field. Cottage negatives: steps across

bedroom; reversing through narrow gate and tight parking; owner close and frequently going in and out past windows; bath outlet leaked and prevented filling.

Sun 2019-09-22

Cats sprung for about £170.

Anglesey 2020

Fri 2020-09-04

Cats were easily deceived and locked in by 07:00, to the cattery at 10:00. They have finally given up on cheques, paid by app when we got home. There were two cats in the adjacent cage to 32 but didn't see many more.

Sat 2020-09-05

Set off 11:30, fuel in Roade, lunch at Norton Canes services, then on to cottage, Ty Lawr Stable, on Anglesey (53.1614, -4.3536 from Google) by 16:30, by M1, M6 (& toll), A500, A51, A55 mostly and the Britannia bridge, approx 360 km. Owner rang while we were on the M6 to say cottage would be available at 15:00 rather than the arranged 17:00 so we didn't stop after lunch. No real hold-ups. Cottage is right by the owner's house but they say they are working during the week so make ourselves at home. Wi-fi works. Looks out over Snowdonia. Not much storage space for food. For Covid, earlier departure and later arrival times, loose washable throws on the seating, no brochures, a quarantine bin for used things that can't be cleaned (DVDs, books, &c). Some fly bit me on the ankle while enjoying a beer outside on arrival. Heating by combo boiler on timer but can override.

Sun 2020-09-06

Out for a walk after rain, out towards the sandy Warren (Llyn Rhos Ddu) and back via Newborough, even some sunshine. Geko has the road end of the drive at 53.1620 -4.3532 (SW 42775 65355). Lunch at cottage. Out in car to the viewing point on the A5 alongside the Menai Strait overlooking both the Britannia and the Menai bridges. Then to Red Wharf Bay, first to the obvious car park by the pub on the west side of the bay but packed and no parking so to the one on the south side with a small car park on the sand, walked along the beach here watching the tide recede from the bay. Lots of grassy bits below maximum tide with tide pools scattered, a small dry sandy strip above and lots of gently shelving sand below. Back to cottage across country via Llangefni and Newborough. Quite pleasant when the sun was out, not too bad when it wasn't. Cottage wi-fi is probably just attaching to the house network, useable in the lounge but not in the bedroom; the Three dongle works with orange signal level. Cottage has 2 TV's, one in bedroom, and a fancy CD/DAB/FM/ipad gadget that makes it really difficult to tune a random DAB station; had to download the manual. θ was watching a greater spotted woodpecker eating from the bird feeder.

Mon 2020-09-07

Dull and windy morning with rain threatened. Why do they make bath taps with cross tops like old-fashioned ones but actually quarter-turn ceramics with the hot and cold turning in opposite directions; and then make them so stiff that you think you might break it before working out the right way? To Plas Newydd, NT, overlooking the Menai Strait, despite the weather as we had booked a time slot. Not busy. Waterproofs and umbrellas while we looked at the garden and arboretum, then lunch in the cafe and a visit to the shop; by then the rain had stopped. The woods around the NT property are home for red squirrels. Back to cottage to dry. A short walk into Newborough to post cards and to buy cleaning cloths. The little shop there was still using cash, even insisting on it for under £5; first time we've used cash since March.

Tue 2020-09-08

Dull but not cold, windy in exposed places. To South Stack, where we came back in 1989. Looks a lot more popular now, with pay car parks and they mostly full, but the lighthouse looked the same. Bit too windy to sit on the cliff watching the sea birds today. Into Holyhead for lunch, at the Stanley Arms. No booking needed and order at bar, but queueing to a single screened order area with spacing; food was good. Lots of pay parking around here, though it might have been free according to a sticker on the machine, we paid as it appeared others had. No cards with these machines. Stopped by the causeway between Anglesey and Holy Island for a short walk then back to cottage. φ tried the other path from the roundabout, to another small car park (Pen Lôn) and access to the sandy Warren. Filled up with diesel at a little wayside garage with attended service. Followed the original A5 road for some of the way back; they make it hard to follow with all signs pointing to the new A55 North Wales Expressway.

Wed 2020-09-09

To Tesco Extra outside Bangor for top-up. Minority mask-wearing, staff and customers, little other protection than signs and sanitiser at entrance. Then over the Menai bridge, much smaller and cosier than the Britannia, and on to Beaumaris. The castle was booked timed entry only but looked at it from the outside. Parking was £4 for the day, paid to an attendant. Tried a decent-looking pub but it wasn't doing food, so had just one and then excellent sausage rolls and scotch eggs from a take-away deli eaten looking over the sea. Sunshine and warm nearly all day. On from there to Benllech beach (N53.318 W4.217), no free parking left, just got into the £3.50 for 4h. θ had a paddle, then sat on a rock watching the tide come in; a couple lying sunbathing only noticed when it reached their heads. An ice cream here. Came back across the island mostly on B roads. Owners' cars both out and sun still shining so had a bit of sun behind the end of the cottage. Then walked both down to sandy Warren area (Pen Lôn), though not far on the sandy track.

Thu 2020-09-10

Tried the footpath just behind the cottage but too muddy. To various picnic and access sites just N of Newborough, lunch at one of the benches, then walks at all three of them, through bits of the forest, along the coastal path and on the side of the estuary. All of the car parks well filled, had to try one twice to find a space. Saw a red squirrel, a feature around here.

Fri 2020-09-11

Not cold, and even bright at times, but very windy. Did the 3.5 km circuit of roads and tracks around to the west of the cottage. Later to various coastal locations. At Aberffraw watched sand blowing in the gale, swirling and keeping very close to the ground, nothing felt on the face. At Tywyn Fferam, beach with private P+D car park (£1 for 1h), could feel the face being abraded while crossing the dunes but not on the beach itself, but the waves breaking on the rocks were impressive. Back via a loop, it being more comfortable in the car, and inland. Fish and chips from the Codmother in Newborough, order and pay on-line and collect at set time, through-door service only, was good. Cottage was unusually warm for a holiday cottage. A big tank of propane, boiler set for two generous on times per day and they said if cold just use override, no time switches in locked cupboards.

Sat 2020-09-12

All packed and away by 07:50, owner was up (just). A sunny day to leave on. 4h 20m to get home, with a pit stop at McDonald's outside Whitchurch. Return the other way, A55 to Chester then A41 to M54, M6, M1, home at 12:10. Changed drivers θ->φ at Whitchurch. Just one slow bit on the M6.

Sun 2020-09-13

Back to hot sunshine. Cats sprung at 10:00, Miletree just asked whether we'd paid, hadn't even got a process working to check account and mark off those paid; maybe so few customers that it hasn't been needed yet.

Lake District 2021

Fri 2021-05-07

Off at about 10:30 to Rampsbeck Lodge near Watermillock on the shore of Ullswater, approx NY 4530 2348 (Geko) or 54.60279855, -2.84845563 from the phone. No hold-ups, though lots of speed restricted bits; all motorway except home to M1 and a few km M6 to the lodge. Stopped at Norton Canes and Lancaster services, lunch from M+S at the second. Mostly sunny, a couple of short heavy showers, especially just after Shap summit. 11C from MK until before Shap, the car's ice warning came on at the summit and 6C on arrival. The property is a small flat in the lower (down the hill) level of a big house, with a sloping path about 100 m down to the lake, with barren hills rising beyond. We had to drive past twice to find it before coming back to actually drive in over the cattle grid and down the narrow drive between hedges; the instructions said 2.2 mi from the junction, it was actually more like 1.5 km. The owner spoke to us from her balcony on the level above (we arrived at 16:00, she got home 17:30). Wi-fi took a bit to get going but then seemed to work, but an odd thing: my "Vodafone" dongle didn't appear at all on phone or tablet while in the house, but it did outside on the lawn, almost as if there were a wi-fi jammer in the house. Leon passed 80000 mi on the way up. Eve a brief walk along the footpath by the lake shore. M6 Toll was all contactless (though not Google or Apple Pay). The flat had a big bath and shower in the bedroom. A long-tailed tit repeatedly tried to fly through the huge patio doors that are the only see-through glass in the whole flat; the bedroom has no windows at all.

Sat 2021-05-08

Rain. Into Penrith for a fuel top-up (£20.26 for about 272 mi = 4.71 L/100km or 60 mi/UKgal) and to Sainsbury's for a few forgotten items. Still in rain, drive up and down the length of the lake and then stop for a walk up to Aira Force (NT) in then light rain. About 1.5 km walk on sometimes rough path with crude stone steps; falls more impressive than expected. Coffee and home-made flapjacks there, then back to apartment to dry off. Later no rain and a walk along the local footpath. There are lots of stone features around the Lodge's private jetty but all in ruins, like an ancient monument rather than just decayed or weathered, toppled columns, broken decks, and an old barbecue in a sort of grotto. Some time in the afternoon the wi-fi stopped working altogether. It was some sort of repeater from a BT hub elsewhere in the house (TP-link AV500). Lots of things about this place were just about working. We had a cupboard off the main area with two boilers, one for the flat and one for the house; the cupboard had louvred doors, which tended to shed louvres when you opened them. The flat heating was OK, but the timer did not go round so we just controlled on the thermostat. The various notices were unclear on whether there was a specific recycling collection or how to use it.

Sun 2021-05-09

Mostly dull with a little rain. A circular drive around with stops for pictures. A592 back to falls then A5091 up to the A66 and to the beginnings of Keswick, then A591 past Thirlmere. Along a steep-sided valley to Grasmere where we parked to take an uphill walk to have a look down on Rydal Water (£2 for 1 hour ANPR contactless). Then on to Ambleside, which was busy on a Sunday lunchtime and a run alongside Windermere for a bit before turning up the A592 for Kirkstone Pass. Stopped in a small lay-by here for lunch then again in a car park by the summit pub to take a few pix, but it was very cold here in the wind (£3 donation by scanning a QR code and Google Pay). Stopped again for some pix around Brothers Water. A brief look at Pooley Bridge from the car then back to base. Eve fish and chips from a van parked in the forecourt of the local caravan park, Sundays 17:00 to 19:00, as advertised by a sign on the main road. We found a spot where our wi-fi dongle would both work and could be powered as the flat's offering was still not working. We haven't seen any sign of the owner since Friday, or seen any other car on site apart from the static ones: an old Merc 300SL convertible and something small under a cover in the twin car-port by our entrance, and one of those tiny Japanese things (a Nissan Figaro) just blocking part of the turning loop outside.

Mon 2021-05-10

To Brothers Water, where the car park was empty on a Monday morning, and a nice walk alongside the lake. Then back to the local pub, the Brackenrigg Inn, which was, as was allowed this week, open for outside service (this applied from 2021-04-12 until expected 2021-05-17). Good food and beer (brewed on the premises) eaten outside under an umbrella, which was needed as it rained heavily at times, the wind was such that two positions on the picnic table stayed dry, and that was where we sat. Soup to start, then sausage and mash and ham and eggs, the ham cut really thick and tender and sweet, all good, and good service too. All four tables in the front by the road were taken and there were more at the back. Mad we may be, but this was the way of Covid-19 restrictions, our first time in (or outside) a pub I think since September. Back to flat to warm up a bit. The brewery was Brack'N'Brew, tried the Blonde and the IPA, both good, the IPA strong and slightly cloudy.

Tue 2021-05-11

Brighter with some sunshine. A circuit of Bassenthwaite Lake, anticlockwise. Stopped at Dodd Wood car park (£1.65 for 1 hour, ANPR, pay on exit) and had a bit of a walk, but it was mostly upwards, then coffee and cake in the tea shop. Parked again near Ouse Bridge at northern tip of the lake by a pretty bridge and walked alongside the lake on a rare public section, even a little beach. Ate packed lunch here. Another £3 donation by scanning QR code. The other side of the lake was the fast A66 but various lay-bys allowed stops to photo Skiddaw over on the other side, 931 m. Then into Keswick, parked in the Rugby Club (£4 actual coins required) and walked through the town to the lake side. Loo in Keswick wanted 40p but accepted Google Pay. Back via Booths supermarket for some more milk. Back at base, gardeners came in cutting and strimming the lawns, and didn't quite manage to back out and turn their truck and trailer without us moving the Leon. Today, as we passed the pub at 14:30 in fine conditions, there was no-one outside at all. Later there was the inevitable little bit of rain.

Wed 2021-05-12

To Pooley Bridge, parking just before the new bridge (£5.40 for 4 hours, Google Pay). Walk on footpath alongside river for a bit, then a little way up a steep path into the wood. Back down into the village. Bought a fridge magnet. Used their posh bog for 30p each (used Google Pay, contactless only). Then walk on footpath on east side of lake, finding a spot where we could see the house opposite, well almost, we could see the white hotel just beyond and the solitary yacht moored just off the house to the nearer side, but our house itself was behind the trees. Lunch in Granny Dowbekin's tea room and cafe which was good and doing a good trade, right by the river and the bridge and overlooking the car park where the Leon waited. The sun shone mostly while we ate, which made it almost warm. Overheard one of the (all female) staff say they have been doing quite well and wouldn't do much better from Monday when indoor seating was allowed, except when it rained. Owner called by later to see if all was OK, elderly woman, haven't seen anyone else on site, and still no normal car, one that looks not to be stored. An idiosyncratic location, but aren't they all. Excellent view of course, peaceful, no parking problems, bed and sofa very comfortable, heating and hot water OK. Oddly decayed in places, the wi-fi not being reliable, the patio doors having internal condensation, the louvred door that shed louvres when opened, the boiler timer not timing so manual control of heating, the outer grill element failed, ditto the hob ignition and the fridge light, cheap unheard-of washing-up liquid, the odd plug-in replacement for the missing mirror light, the outer curtain around the shower missing most of its rail, buttons on the pillowcases just where you might rest your head. Lots of power sockets, including by the mirror. Having the bath / shower in the bedroom was unusual, as well as no windows in the bedroom. Then there was describing what was clearly an apartment as a "cottage", the Sykes Cottages photo cropped all of the rest of the building, other web sites were more honest. The one negative about the location was the lack of safe access to anywhere on foot, just the A-road going past.

Thu 2021-05-13

Cleaning up at a leisurely rate and a walk down for a last look at the lake, and back up though the garden by the fence with all the bluebells. Quick lunch, saw the owner who was, as she suggested she would be, still in dressing gown at midday, and set off home. Sunny and warm in the morning, but several heavy showers on the way. Stop for driver change and coffee at Charnock Richard services and home by 16:30.

Cotswolds 2021

Mon 2021-08-09

Anniversary presents exchanged. Cats caught easily, they didn't even try to hide. Had a chance to comb Sooty including his leaf-infested tail. To the cattery, looked nearly full, so different from last time (cage 32, 84L). Then packing and lunch. Off at 13:15 to Wyck Hill House Hotel near Stow-on-the-Wold by 15:00. Big old house in extensive grounds, pre-booked on a special tariff. Quite a long check-in process with temperature check. Champagne ready chilled in room. Huge room 28 on first floor with a view over the lawn. Bathroom with bath and shower, two sinks, bog and bidet. Captur filled before start at Morrisons at 1979mi; 23 L of E10 (10% ethanol, just beginning to appear in UK) 299 mi since last fill = ave 59 mi/UKgall. Roger's anniversary card was a photo he took of us long ago with the subject line "Marshall McLuhan", the medium is the message, the medium being 35mm film. Walk around the grounds, which allow access to an adjacent field. Our one inclusive dinner booked for 18:30. Very good, attentive service, in the low volume high quality sector. Dining was well patronised, especially for a Monday. Hotel wi-fi was not very reliable, the Three dongle was better.

Tue 2021-08-10

The hotel bed was huge. A short blast of the fire alarm (some bell anyway) at 06:45 but we were awake already, down to breakfast for 08:00, full cooked being included. Dry and sometimes sunny. To Sudeley Castle, eventually, after encountering a blockage in Winchcombe where a lorry had hit some scaffolding, we had to reverse down a narrow street to get out. Exhibition of castle's history, a view of some of the private rooms still used by the owner, extensive gardens but no serious grounds. Lunch in the cafe there. Then back to Stow-on-the-Wold for a quick look round, parked in Tesco on the excuse of buying some water. A drive around to see some more towns: Bourton-on-the-Water was full of tourists; Burford looked cute. Evening to the bar, ordered drinks at 17:45 but when we came to order food at 18:05 we were told lounge food ended at 18:00. After a bit of fuss we did get a couple of sandwiches, which were good. The beer was OK too, bottled Pedigree. This was a quirky hotel, with some staff doing their best in difficult conditions and agency staff filling in where possible, such as the barman tonight. Some bits were well done. Location was brilliant. Oddly the spa part of the operation was hardly visible, no signs, no enthusiasm to take bookings.

Wed 2021-08-11

08:00 breakfast again. This time, by ordering fewer items, I did indeed get less food, yesterday they compensated by giving me more beans and more mushrooms. To Chedworth Roman Villa (NT), arriving when they opened, which was good as that was before the crowds both for the ruins and the cafe. Lots of well-preserved mosaic flooring, parts of walls and hypocausts of big villa from ~350 AD, the best bits contained within a building with raised walkways. Cake and a sausage roll in the cafe. On to Cirencester where we eventually found a space in a P&D but without a working pay machine, no network connection to verify cards and no cash taken; paid by phone after 10 minutes on a tedious automated system. Good look round, an ice cream, and watched a new statue being winched up onto the abbey church. Back to hotel by a scenic route. Evening to bar for a pint, then eat in restaurant. We took the recommendation of the little Irish waiter for the chicken liver parfait starter and the French upside-down pie main, both of which were excellent. I had cheese board which was good and a glass of port while   had coffee. Think about 80 staying in hotel, and there was pressure on tables in the conservatory; by booking for 18:30 we got a good table. What to say about the hotel? The Wyck Hill House Hotel & Spa is one of five owned by City & Country Hotels, with two directors with the same surname. Their most recent accounts show revenue one-tenth of normal and suggests that they assumed a going concern mostly on hope for this year and the patience of their creditors, with liabilities exceeding assets by well over a million. This company appears not to own any property itself. Ordering was clearly on a knife edge with odd things running out waiting on delivery, such as nuts and crisps, and this morning no croissants. Even within our three days we saw several new agency staff being shown the ropes, the annual report said they'd been hit hard on staffing costs by our exit of EU. Most of the staff were very pleasant, helpful and efficient. The food was very good. Facilities you would expect of a 4-star hotel such as the availability of light food in the evening were missing, staffing being inadequate. If you wanted a drink you had to ask reception to find someone to man the bar. The site and building

were excellent, the bedroom large and comfortable. Of the spa we were unsure. θ had tried to book before we went and been told they were busy, didn't have their own phone and wouldn't be able to answer the extension; they didn't. θ asked again on arrival and was told they were busy but given no other help in offering to check bookings. There were no direction signs that we saw inside the building or on the site for anything other than room numbers or annex names known to house bedrooms. One might assume that it no longer existed, but if so why pretend that it did?

Thu 2021-08-12

08:00 breakfast, a good choice of tables in the conservatory at that time. Paid £190 extras bill. Back via cattery.

River Cruise 2022

Wed 2022-05-11

Up at 03:00, taxi at 04:30, the driver spent some time looking at the route as M6 junction 1-2 closed so via Roade, M1, M45, A45 mostly; it took the predicted 1h10m. Pre-paid £109 + £10. Check-in opened 15 minutes late at 06:25 but quite quick and security was moving, the pre-paid express lane was good missing out the middle part of the queue. So our arrival at the airport 2h25m before departure got us 10 minutes in the lounge before boarding. Eurowings, A320, full. Arrived at Düsseldorf, through the aliens channel with passport stamp, Riviera rep ready, 45 minutes coach ride to the boat waiting at Cologne and into the lounge to wait for check-in to cabin from about 14:00. Light lunch with two women waiting to depart from last week. At 15:00 the Birmingham coach left, at 17:00 the one for Stansted coach. ϕ walk; sit in sun; drink beer. Wi-fi connected by reception staff. Short of staff, everyone doing everything. Dinner, four courses and wine but sensible quantities. Pina Colada and French coffee in lounge later. Eurostar contingent coach from Brussels arrived at 19:00. Someone arrived only just in time around 22:00, then the boat set off at 22:30, backing out of the side channel and then heading upstream.

Thu 2022-05-12

At around 07:00 the engine note changed indicating turning into the Moselle at Koblenz. Before breakfast ϕ on deck to watch at Koblenz lock. Breakfast, then relax in the sun watching the Moselle valley pass by. Two more locks, one during the safety and info briefing. The second of these had a descending guillotine for the top gate. Short-staffed because of visa issues, so offered free drinks with meals, anyone who'd paid for the drinks package would be refunded, the bistro at the back would not open. Lunch on the move, will be 15.5 hours from Köln to Cochem. Going into locks was steered from an external side panel, with three turning and hinging type controls, maybe for steerable thrusters. Folding board on starboard side used to signal passing on the wrong side. The wheelhouse descends on hydraulics for low bridges. Moored at Cochem onto a small jetty, ropes thrown, one using a small leading rope with a ball on the end thrown first. A lot of radio chat, waving and scratching of heads during this. Tour of the town with local guide Sylvia using radio mike sets, which many had not grasped the need for or listened to the instructions on how to use them. Ice cream and beer (Italian, bottle-conditioned and strong) then back to boat. Dipped feet into the very warm plunge pool on the back deck. Got the tablet connected to wi-fi. Evening was meet the captain and crew with a glass of prosecco and a single-sitting dinner, followed by a three-piece German music group, who were very good, accordion, clarinet and guitar, and later Gino the resident pianist. Up on deck later to look at the night view including the castle lit up, still warm. From the log in/out screen, think about 90 passengers and 35 crew, so well under the 150 or so capacity. From looking at the boat's layout (on the safety plan) and the control panel, I suspect it had twin 360-degree pods at the back and another central at the front. The plan had large circular objects at these locations and the side deck control panels had two rotate-hinge controls at the bottom and one central at the top. Should really have watched more carefully.

Fri 2022-05-13

The boat is MS Geoffrey Chaucer, 135 m long by 11.45 m beam and 1.95 m draught, built 2020, max 24 km/h, max loading 234 passengers plus 48 crew in day mode or 176 plus 48 in hotel mode, power two engines at 1065 peak (assume HP). Cast off 07:30. More sun. Moselle now narrowing with very steep vineyards on both sides. Passengers all British and mostly anti-EU, regretted moaning about having to use the alien queue. 4 m/s seen at one stage. More channel marking buoys now, red to port going upstream. We will be going as far as we can for our size. Stop 14:00 at Traben-Trarbach to drop 84 of us for coaches to Trier; θ went, ϕ stayed on board. Mooring again was a bit amateurish, they got the gangplank swinging ready on the crane and then put it down again in a hurry for the forgotten low bridge, pulled over a small tree with the mooring lines, took ages to fit the gangplank but got all off only 15 minutes late at 14:15. This next and last section we can't use the sun deck because the bridges are very low, though the river is a bit low too with severe lack of rain. Going on with only seven or so passengers, though they still gave us tea and cake. After Zeltingen lock we did a flashy power turn in the wide bit above the weir and reversed the last few kilometres into Bernkastel, going at least 2.5 km/h and apparently just as easily as going forwards. The suspension bridge needed the wheelhouse fully down and a tall person on the

front deck would have had to stoop, two crew at the back checked clearance (we were going backwards by then). All of the side rails on the back deck folded, tables lowered, even the panels around the engine exhausts. Arriving at Bernkastel we seemed to pause as if wondering where to moor. Usual long time to get moored to a small jetty, about 17:45 before all done. Hot and sunny all day. Trier party back by 18:30 in time for a beer before dinner. Photo of boat from opposite bank. Evening to bar, dinner, bar again. Bought some boat-themed baseball caps to try to prevent further sun damage to forehead.

Sat 2022-05-14

Wandering Bernkastel avoiding the organised walks. A big artic parked by the boat unloaded several pallets of food and barrels of beer; the driver took his pallet truck to the top of the gangway then all of the staff including the captain formed a human chain to get it through the restaurant into the kitchen. Wine tasting (15€ each) was good. Lunches were usually buffet style, so could skip courses to keep light. Off again downstream at 13:30 expecting to keep going to Koblenz at 07:00 tomorrow. Sunny and very hot. So far seen only two Teslas and three Zoes, though electric bikes seem very popular. Shared first lock at Zeltingen with an excursion boat, letting it go in front, it did fit with more than 5 m to spare (the larger lock was 210 m by 12.5 m). Space in the sun limited until after the very low suspension bridge, then sun loungers only, not chairs, and only on front part of the back deck. Later watching from the cool of the cabin with the sliding door open. Usual lounge first, then dinner, then lounge again. Evening there was a quiz, loosely based on alcohol; we got 18 out of 25, the winners 22. Later at 22:15 up on deck, much cooler, to watch as we passed back through Cochem. Two "captains" on board as max six hours each stint and this leg will be around 17 hours non-stop. No see-by lights used at night, just navigation lights, driven I assume via sensors and screens. When we were going backwards yesterday the driver still sat facing forwards looking at the screens with a couple of look-outs with walkie talkies on the stern.

Sun 2022-05-15

Came into Koblenz at 06:00, turned, hovered for a while then went in between the quay and another hotel boat, their water and power run across our upper deck. So we are still on the Moselle, pointing back upstream, ready to back out and head upstream on the Rhine. Early breakfast for those taking the tours, then we went out by ourselves for a couple of hours. Boat has its own sewage plant and returns purified water to the river, after a few years it has to be partly unbuilt to get the solids tank out. Before lunch the boat alongside cast off and headed downstream on the Rhine. Another big boat wanting to come alongside pushed us away at 13:15 slightly earlier than forecast. Turned upstream on the Rhine. Still warm and sunny, lots of shorts and flip-flops. 5 minutes per kilometre heading up the Rhine, yesterday was 6 min/km downstream on the lower Moselle. Trundled up to Boppard, on a longer jetty, and 30 minutes later they still hadn't got a stern line on. By then getting hazy but still hot. Walk in Boppard. Hardly a moment without some huge barge in sight, coal, scrap metal, oil or gas, containers, as well as trip boats and ferries. Most barges have at least one decent-sized car on the back and a crane to unship it. The bar's beer was Warsteiner. Railways ran on both sides of the river, very few bridges over the river, none between Cologne and Rudesheim. Dinner had a Thai curry option, was good but odd with a big pile of rice and not much curry. Decided that the French coffee with Grand Marnier was their best.

Mon 2022-05-16

Early breakfast while we set off at 08:00. Cool at first on deck for Rhine gorge then sun coming back. This is billed as the prettiest bit: Lorelei rock and lots of castles. In convoy with several barges in the narrowest bits, overtaking at times. Free local brandy coffee in the sunshine on deck, posh coffee in a paper cup with a straw. Got to Rudesheim at 12:30, sky beginning to darken, thunder, then a downpour while the crew were tying up, which we observed while starting lunch. Took the excursion via the "Noddy train" (disguised tractor pulling 3 coaches) to Siegfried's museum of mechanical music, which was interesting and well presented by two enthusiastic women, lots of demos of fairground organ, player piano, lots of other disk or roll programmed things. Then a look around, a couple of mega ice creams and a beer, then the toy train brought us back to the boat. More overcast but still hot. Quiet at the mooring here as we're out of the main stream separated by an island.

Good dinner as usual and then up to the lounge for a French coffee and Gino on the piano, skipping the outing to a local nightspot. Another hotel boat hovered for 30 minutes alongside, didn't moor and then cleared off.

Tue 2022-05-17

Started moving about 04:30 and passed Koblenz by breakfast time; 5.5 m/s downstream. Moored back in Köln by early lunch to allow the guided tours to go off by coach at 13:30. End of tour arrangements gone through, different-coloured labels for cases, bill paying and suggested tips of 8 to 12 € per passenger per day for staff, so assuming count seven days that'll be well over £100, plus another envelope for tips for the Riviera guides Daniel Tarr and George Guiaourov. The boat was run by Scylla who employed the staff apart from the two from Riviera. We were against the sheet piles on one side with another cruise boat alongside on the other so it was dark in the cabin and the public rooms. Walk along river and across the railway bridge, lots of trains with the main station just the other side next to the cathedral. Had a look inside the cathedral (donations asked for) and a drink at a pavement cafe. On the bridge, the wire screen between the people and the railway was covered in padlocks to bless relationships, probably millions of them, solid on a 1 m high fence all the way across. The boat alongside left before we started our formal dinner with free cocktail. Seven courses: Artichoke Guacamole and Cream Cheese Napoleon - Salsa Cruda | Bouillion De Queue De Boeff - Oxtail Meat - Root Vegetables | Scallop Rissoto - Dill Oil | Basil Sorbet with Limoncello | Beef Fillet Wellington Style & Gravy - Beef Tenderloin And Mushroom Duxelles - Puff Moon - Baby Greens and Chateau Potatoes (or Salmon Fillet, or Eggplant Parmigiana) | Baked Alaska - Wild Berry Sauce | Cognac - Petit Fours. The name of the good waiter was Daniel Chisu. Evening entertainment was a German classical group, piano, valveless trumpet, double bass and woman with percussion. Tip envelopes, bar bill and surveys distributed. Paid 268.50€ bar tab. Packing. Captain appealed to everyone to keep coming, as otherwise he'd be steering cargo which wasn't so much fun.

Wed 2022-05-18

A long day, not one to be repeated soon. Up early, leaving the suitcases outside the room with the right stickers on (orange for Brum) and into breakfast which started early at 07:00 (+2) for the benefit of the Edinburgh flight. Then check out of the room before 09:00 and start the 6 hour wait. It was sunny all day and latterly very hot, heading towards 30°C, and we spent the time under the shades up top or in the lounge, with a half-hour for a light lunch, shared with the earlier arrivals for next week's trip. Daniel was leaving and George was not so organised but there were at least some announcements. Our cases taken to the coach, even the captain helping, and we, the Birmingham and Manchester flights, set off just after 15:00. Traffic issues on the autobahn, so the driver diverted through the middle of Düsseldorf, along the Rhine by the Messe, and we didn't get to the airport until 16:15. The Riviera rep there at first indicated the huge check-in queue but after a short time she got us a dedicated check-in. Then a huge snaking queue for security and we arrived at the gate for the 18:45 flight with only about 15 minutes to spare before boarding, though it was 30 minutes late leaving. Bussed to a remote stand, and it wasn't a Eurowings plane but an AirBaltic standing in, an Airbus A220-300, five across, we on the two side; not full. It made a horrible screeching noise and rattled as the engines revved up but it didn't seem to bother the crew. Bit of a hard landing too. Not too much queuing on arrival and off via the transit to the railway station and on to a 350 stopper that took an hour to MKC. Taxi, home at about 21:30 (+1). A long day, and stressful with the long wait, traffic delays, and ridiculous lines at the airport. Masks on the plane, very few elsewhere. Wore the short cut-offs, T-shirt and sandals, which the German woman supervising the security queue remarked on as being right for the conditions; cool and wet in UK so supplemented with a cardigan. AirBaltic are from Latvia. Buying train tickets was hard as it tried to offer all sorts of special fares on specific trains and made it difficult to find just basic off-peak singles, it was £49.80 for two. Some names: Captain Cornelius Von Eck; Hotel Manager Marija Venus, assisted by Vaida Velickaite and receptionist Danijela Marjanovic; Head Chef Milos Todorvic; Restaurant Manager Viorel Petcu; Bar Manager Srdjan Ilic, waiters Natasha Stanojevic, Daniel Chisu. There were 33 names on the staff list they gave us, although the number of staff on the in/out status system was 22. During our week, passengers did not wear masks (though the pre-joining instructions said they were required when moving about in the public spaces) and the staff always did; as we left they changed the rules for the next week so the staff didn't have to either; everyone on the aircraft, a few in the terminals, a few in shops and churches and none on the train.

Wye Valley 2022

Sat 2022-09-17

Cats were both in at 06:30 and not even worried until the cages came out, to cattery at 09:30. Back for packing. Departed 11:30, went A421, A422, M40, A46. M5, M50, A40; it took the sat-nav an amazingly long time to come off its orig route via M40, M42, M5 and when it did, the distance came down by 40 miles and the ETA got earlier by more than 30m. Lunch at Warwick services. River Wye View cottage is at 51.84192, -2.64372 or SO558161. Later walk ϕ , going up and down, rarely level, sampled the Ye Old Ferrie Inn on the way. Cottage is a semi and adjacent to another lower cottage with an old man who greeted us (we later realised he must be the husband of the owner). No wi-fi, though we think when we booked last December it did claim it. Arrived at 15:10, just as arranged. Heating came on about 16:45, no control or thermostat accessible. Superb view, can see the river from the patio at the back. Bedrooms and bathroom upstairs with street door, lounge and kitchen below with patio door. Car parked on the other side of the access road so no chance of charging. Lots of steep, bendy, single-track roads around here. Very quiet, and dark at night. Sunny day, but cooling in the afternoon.

Sun 2022-09-18

The sun does get onto the patio before 10:00 and leaves it completely about 11:00 (BST). Finally managed to connect to BT Wi-fi from some local hotspot, probably the owner's. The Three dongle works as well. Walk, calling in to Ye Old Ferrie Inn for lunch, booked up inside but outside tables free for all and weren't all filled until after 13:00; beer was good too. Girl worked the manual wire ferry a few times, as well as clearing tables.

Mon 2022-09-19

Queen's funeral day. Over the last few days hundreds of thousands have queued for up to 24 hours to walk past the coffin, 11 km line at worst. Bank holiday and most places shut, some just for the duration of the service. Overcast. Part of the patio is not overlooked at all unless next door emerge from their back door and look left. Mostly overcast but sun on the last corner of the patio. ϕ for a walk in a steep loop, up Wye View Lane, down Drag Road and Meeks Well Lane. θ watched the pomp on the TV, then we went out to look at Monmouth, closed as expected, except for one coffee shop and a couple of pubs. Back via a scenic loop towards the Forest of Dean. Manoeuvring the car on steep, tight corners is fun, having to trust it, not having a handbrake that you can control, relying on the electrics to hold it. It's pretty much silent at the cottage, even in the daytime.

Tue 2022-09-20

Life slowly returns to normal, apart from remembering the new words for the national dirge, wondering when the stamps and money will change, and will we get letterboxes with CiiiR. The shower dripped into the lounge, maybe I didn't seal the shower half-door properly against the bath. Partly overcast dawn, later brighter. Heating is by oil combi boiler, quite noisy,

does a couple of hours in the morning and about six in the evening for heating and of course hot water on demand, though not always very hot. To Ross-on-Wye for shopping, mostly in the first-spotted Aldi, then in a Sainsbury's hidden through an arch in a court. Parked in an odd non-council car park that took £2 in coins for all day and issued no ticket just opened the gate. Bread, bog-rolls, scourer and an OS 162. Then to Chepstow where we had lunch in a Wetherspoon, the Bell Hanger, their all-day brunch, and a walk around the town; saw the outside of the castle. Called in at Tintern while passing for photos of the abbey and a fridge magnet. Bought petrol, 17.2 L. Made the cottage's LED torch much brighter by putting all of the batteries in the right way round.

Wed 2022-09-21

Overcast start, sunny and warm later. Normal service resumes in the news: inflation and Russian war. No drips this morning. To Westbury Court Garden NT, a garden without a house, in Westbury on Severn. It has had various houses over the centuries, but they've all been pulled down to sell for material or to be replaced by old-peoples' flats, and the garden was saved only by the council refusing permission to build on it and then the NT restoring it. A couple of linear water features (called "canals"), some plants, a bit of lawn, a vegetable plot, and a look-out tower. We took a picnic; they sold drinks. They lent us a map for a circular walk over fields down to the

Severn which was good. To a Lidl in Cinderford for milk, and in passing a crimping tool and a set of crimps. To Goodrich Castle which though a ruin was bigger than we expected; English Heritage so we had to pay. Bought some mead there. Passed four cars on the narrow bits coming back into Symonds Yat West and had to back-up a little bit; not good at it.

Thu 2022-09-22

Again a thin cloud cover to start, thin enough to locate the sun, thick enough to kill most of the warmth. To Beechenhurst Sculpture Trail, one option for a hike in part of the Forest of Dean controlled by Forestry England. The full circle was 7.7 km but we took a signed short cut then misunderstood the arrows and did only about 2.5 km; otherwise signage was mostly excellent. Fairly boring sculptures that we saw but some needed eyes up such as ants and hugging arms up in the trees. A few people about. Lunch in the cafe there, sausage rolls and pasties. Went on by car to Speech House car park and walked from there through the nature reserve; we discovered this was also the far end of the full-length sculpture trail so after all we did see the impressive stained glass exhibit that θ wanted to see. We also met there a couple with two little dogs who had started the trail at the same time as us, meanwhile we'd done the short loop and had our lunch. Saw the cottage owner when we got back after lunch, she is indeed in the separate cottage ("Homestead"), the other half of the semi may be another holiday let though we've seen at least two different cars there at various times and only rare signs of occupation, though a bloke greeted θ when they were both in their respective gardens this morning. Booked the pub for lunch tomorrow. It rained in the evening. The draining board doesn't, it doesn't slope.

Fri 2022-09-23

Misty start with some sunshine. Walked locally, and to Ye Old Ferrie Inn for lunch, our booked table looking over the river. Very good, table service; I had bruschetta then pigeon breast with butter bean and bacon casserole and curly kale; with Wye Pride ale and some sparkling draught mead. The mead was a bit like an alcoholic elderflower pressé. The Wye Pride appears to have been brewed by Greene King for YOFI (acronym of pub name), it's the same 3.6% ABV as IPA. The pub boss had red hair, black painted fingernails and various piercings. Walk back up, and advised owner of early departure tomorrow. Afternoon cleaning and packing. Another different car outside the other half when we got back, with a young female. A good cottage: owner next door but unobtrusive, excellent view, not cold, decent chairs, good bed, bath and shower, parking. Could be better: the access road could do with more passing places, it would be nice to get the sun after 11:00, no comments book, no wi-fi, no little gift on arrival.

Sat 2022-09-24

Breakfast, finished cleaning and tidying, everything into the car. Set off early at 07:55 arrived home 10:15, no stops, no hold-ups, almost the same route: A40, M50, M5, A46, M40, A422, A5. Cool but bright, mostly sunshine.

Mon and Brec 2023

Fri 2023-05-19

Cats trapped inside at their 07:00 feeding time and then to Ivy Lane Cattery. θ to Leighton Buzzard to go shopping with Kath.

Sat 2023-05-20

Off at 10:00, collect Kath at 10:30 and on to Gilwern for Castle Narrowboats. One stop at a McDonalds on the Evesham bypass. Just about got everything into the Captur still leaving seating for three. Very professional handover. Hot and sunny. They came with us for a couple of bridges and were happy that we knew what we were doing. Started about 15:30 and ran until 17:30, stopping after bridge 115, φ steering. Evening to the Horseshoe Inn just down into Llangattock which was busy but they found a table for us; catering run by an outside firm with interesting Caribbean theme: I had goat curry. Boat was Kidwelly Castle, flat-bottomed though the boatyard said they were swapping back to V-hulls (as we had in 1995) as better for this shallow canal. Engine-made hot water and also a diesel Webasto that could heat water and do cabin heating via radiators. 1 kW 240 V inverter. Engine had an annoying rattle at just above idle speed. Route: A4146 to Leighton Buzzard, back through town, Stoke Hammond, Newton Longville, A421, B4031, A361, Chipping Norton, A44, Evesham, A46, M5, M50, A40, A465; very pretty on the middle bit.

Sun 2023-05-21

Set off 09:15, Kath steering, got to bridge 131 at 12:00. Took on water there and lunch on boat. Off again 13:15 now θ steering through the five locks and tunnel, stopped at Talybont after bridge 143 at 16:30. Again a warm sunny day. Volunteers helping at the locks, helpful and full of advice, often conflicting between them. Evening walked down to The Star, but no evening food as no staff, as they told at least six people while we were there. Their ales were good though and the landlady very knowledgeable and efficient. Eat on boat. All working well so far, skills have not atrophied. Tunnel was awkward and we hit something protruding against the cabin roof; many bridges had awkward twists. So far mobile signal has been OK and the Three dongles have worked at moorings. Boatyard insisted we fill with water before the tunnel to keep the front down but there was lots of clearance so couldn't see that a depleted water tank would result in failing to clear the low roof in the middle; on their advice θ sat on one of the plastic chairs rather than stoop in the tunnel.

Mon 2023-05-22

Start 09:15, φ driving. Through the electric lift bridge at Talybont, stopped for water at Brynich aqueduct at 12:15, then lunch on board. Shallow and narrow, passed a boat in one of the narrowest bits. Away again Kath driving 13:15, through the last lock and moored in Brecon Theatre basin at 14:45. A walk into Brecon to have a look around and a coffee. Back into town later to eat at Chang Thai and Chinese, which was very good, especially the Gaeng Panang curry that I had, thicker than the usual Thai curry. Music using the little Bluetooth speaker and tablet.

Tue 2023-05-23

The boat's engine is a three-cylinder Barrus Shire (related to Yanmar), it vibrates horribly at just over idle speed, and makes an alarming knocking noise between idle and cruise; boatyard weren't that worried about it on Saturday. Macerating bog is good except that it seems reluctant sometimes even though fed nothing but paper and shit. We were advised to switch off the inverter when not running the engine (so as not to drain the battery) and there were no 12V points so had to remember to charge things while running. Comfortable beds. Central heating not advised overnight. We thought Brecon not worth another visit in the morning, so a lie-in and later start preferred. φ walked, found the Castle Hotel, now drab looking. A classy turn in the basin with engine and rope and then away 09:20, overcast, watery sun, θ driving. Passed five boats, a record so far, and all at bridges. Water 5 minute stop after the aqueduct. Stop at Pencelli 12:15. Left φ's old windlass behind at the aqueduct. To the Royal Oak nearby for a good lunch. Off again φ steering 14:15 now warm and to bridge 114 just in time for the closed time 15:15 to 16:15, so a 50 minute wait there. Lots of canoes with children in school groups and more

boats met at bridge holes. Stopped at Talybont 16:30. Far the busiest day for boats though we haven't seen another from our boatyard yet; lots from the very posh-looking Beacon Boats. Evening eat on boat and to The Star. ϕ walking while waiting for the bridge, a secluded herb garden off a byway up into the hills gave an opportunity for at least one sunbathing day this week,.

Wed 2023-05-24

Another hot and sunny day. Water before start. Start at 09:30, Kath steering the tunnel and the locks. Made contact with a steel plate in the tunnel, though generally kept to centre; other side of the tunnel, same corner of the boat. Had to wait to go in and two waiting when we came out; the morning part of the day was quite busy. Locks again had volunteers helping, useful as locks must be left empty with bottom gates open (to preserve the masonry). Lunch in the Coach and Horses canalside just before the last lock. Kath continued after lunch through the last lock and while ϕ tried the tiny shower on the boat. Earlier Kath had walked back from the pub mooring to try a C+RT shower which was better. Lunch stop was 12:15 to 14:15. Then our intention was to moor out in wilds for the night but nowhere could we get within a metre of the side until a formal mooring after bridge 118 almost into Llangattock, with another boat and houses overlooking, at 16:35. Eve eat lightly on boat. There was perhaps a slight lack of enthusiasm, the boat was noisy and made arms and heads ache, so we decided we would not go far south of the boatyard and just potter the last two days. General realisation that we are not as young as we used to be, though working the boat is fine, the jumping on and off is not so easy.

Thu 2023-05-25

Not so hot, but a pleasant warm day. ϕ walked early into Llangattock and back via bridge 115, then off at 09:45, θ steering. Water 15 minutes at Gilwern by bridge 104, then moored by bridge 103 at 12:15. The canalside pub was open evenings only so lunch at the Beaufort only a little further away. On again at 14:15 down through Govilon and into the winding bit, boring, apart from some very low and awkward bridges; ϕ steering. Easy power turn before Tod's bridge 95A at Llanfoist wharf. Very pretty there, looked to be mostly holiday cottages but was also a former Beacon Boats base (they now have a very flash new base a few km north). Moored after turning just beyond the nice private moorings. There do seem to be a lot more hire boat bases than there were 28 years ago but still not much competition for the visitor moorings; probably might be more in summer, all bases had boats in dock this week. ϕ climbed down the steps and tackled the steep track down to the road, where there was indeed an Indian restaurant, but it was thought not worth the effort, especially after a good lunch. This was the first time we managed to moor in a quiet place, and the first time we had to use a spike at both ends. All for a brief walk further along the towpath. Crew photo taken on back of boat. Eat on board. Again today we passed few boats but nearly all at awkward places, and again with children in canoes. So far, long trousers used only for evening pubs; coats and waterproofs remain unused.

Fri 2023-05-26

Another warm sunny day. ϕ for an explore of the foot tunnel under the canal and just a few metres of the steep 4.6 km path up to the Bloreng. Start 10:00, Kath steering, just a potter to bridge 97 to chuck rubbish and then moored in the sunshine for Govilon at bridge 98 11:05. ϕ walked into the town, which had a shop and the Bridge End pub which opened only at 16:30. Lunch on boat and a little sunbathing mostly with tan-throughs (gravel path and boat movement gave warning). On again with θ steering 13:30 again pottering. Came to a complete stop in the bridgeholes at bridges 99 and 100 and needed poles to get through. Stopped 14:30 at bridge 102, just short of the boatyard. ϕ walked on and saw seven boats in at base so maybe not a good week for them. No water today. Watched a towpath hire base putting out three boats, with cars single-file blocking the towpath, presumably then driven off to park elsewhere. There are a few like that, with sections of towpath reserved for them, usually where it would be most convenient for others to moor. Evening eat at the Beaufort again, busier than yesterday lunchtime but we found a small unreserved table and they were happy to serve us if we ordered quickly to get in before the rush; food was good again but large in size. Then tidying up and packing, the sun still shining.

Sat 2023-05-27

08:15 to 08:25 ϕ steering to boatyard, and away at 08:45. Different route back: A465, A40, A449, M4, A419,

A420, A34, A41, Waddesdon, Oving, Whitchurch, Cublington, Wing, Leighton Buzzard then home via A4146; also quite a pretty route for the last part and convenient for services (coffee at Leigh Delamere); and that was also the way the Captur's sat nav took us.

Sun 2023-05-28

To Ivy Lane cattery at 09:00 to pick up the cats.

Northumberland 2023

Fri 2023-09-01

To Hotspur Cottage in Northumberland (55.3019, -1.9238). All packed and ready to go at 09:30 but a minor car incident delayed us 15 minutes. Via M1, M18, A1(M), A1, A697 and various other B roads to Rothbury and out the other side to the cottage, one of several with a big house and other accommodation out in the countryside, a sort of mini holiday complex, in various groupings and let via various routes, or possibly private. 434 km, θ first then ϕ . 4 stops (Tibshelf, lunch at a very busy Ferrybridge, petrol at Bowburn where the loo was broken and so another brief stop). Dull, not cold, a few drops of rain. Cottage is just a key-safe to get in, looks very smart but right on top of the others, including a huge glass window in the bedroom directly overlooked by the road and Percy the adjacent cottage. Parking in a common car park at the back but with an allocated space; also outside seating areas reserved for each cottage. Running in E-save I reset the trip part way up and on arrival it was showing average 61 mi/UKgal and 70 mi/kWh. Cottage is rabbit themed: pictures, stuffed toys, mouldings, plates, cushions, mugs. Very dark and very quiet later. Because the cottage has poor radio reception it has a fully functional Alexa, although not enabled for any local controls such as heating or lights.

Sat 2023-09-02

Wi-fi not working first thing. Wondered why there was a step-ladder in the boiler cupboard, it provided access to the hub which was on top of the fridge unit, power cycling recovered the wi-fi. Was forecast to be a dull day but there was lots of warm sunshine. Tried the footpath from the back of the property but it was too much of a scramble for θ . To Rothbury, parking in the large free car park just the other side of the river. Bought some coffee in the cramped old Co-op in its last few days, it was to move down the road in a week or so. Then to Craggside NT, house and garden. Two entry lanes, one for members and one for paying, before parking. Walked up to the Visitor Centre and had a drink and a nibble, then to the gift shop. Rather than do the house we drove the Carriage Drive, a 10 km one-way road meandering through the grounds, with car parks at some of the pretty bits. Then back to the cottage, θ to sit in sun and ϕ to explore the footpath. It went north for a little way onto the golf course and then east across the course into Rothbury. Bought some toothpaste and checked that the Turks Head served decent ale. Back along the roads. People wading in the river by the bridge, fishing and just keeping cool. Rest of the afternoon enjoying the sun and completing the newsletter. θ 's Canon camera looked faulty, with a circular soft progressive darker region around the edges of most of the images, which we later discovered was because it had become set in "toy camera" mode.

Sun 2023-09-03

Still sunny and warm, but a fair breeze today. To the nearby Simonside car park for hiking in the hills, down the single-track roads from the cottage. Walked into the forest along the green waymarked path for a bit then back and along the red path in the other direction, the loops being a bit long and involving some climbing. Then a drive through the National Park on the B3641, very rugged country and the road climbing and descending mostly in straight lines. Stopped for lunch at the Otterburn Mill cafe, which was busy with loads of old MGs outside, mostly MGB and MG-F or -TF; the staff coped well though and we had excellent sandwiches in little time. Back via A696 and B6342, driving a lot easier with two lanes and a white line. Later ϕ for a walk into town, this time down via the footpath coming out at the bridge, and back across the golf course. Tomorrow is bin day, blue this week, recycling, but no glass bottles, food trays or foil; they'll refuse to collect glass in either recycling or general waste; bins all out tonight, ours lifted off its paved resting place behind the cottage, trundled up the rough rutted drive and left with all the others at the roadside. We think the adjoining cottage Percy is not let any more, and it appears to be empty this week. Dark enough to see stars easily.

Mon 2023-09-04

The sun still shines, very still, cloudless, would have been a hot day in July let alone September. A small quad thing appeared in the adjacent field and drove all of the sheep into the next field. To NT Wallington, about 20 km, a big house on a huge estate, the biggest NT has had gifted to it, 40 ha of parkland, 5500 ha of agricultural estate. Quick snack in the cafe (excellent sausage baps) then to the more formal eastern side and the walled garden. Very pretty, lots to see, many others there. A small kiosk at the far side of the garden sold ice cream. Then back to the house, which was ordinary, looking at a few rooms, just like any other large house of the day.

This one did have chairs you could actually sit on in the central hall space, which was originally an open atrium but was later roofed over. Also less usually it had one room set aside with sofas, toys, books and a radio gently playing as a rest area. Back to the central courtyard by the clock tower and into the shop for a small picture and some ginger liqueur. Cottage again by 14:30, by which time inside was 27.5°C. Rubbish men came, emptied our bin and three of the others but one (labelled just "AC") they left full with a card in the top saying "no glass". Could this be the first autumn holiday cottage where the issue has been keeping cool in the evening? I did hide the usual electric fire in the car just in case, but tonight it was 28.2°C indoors. Lovely outside near midnight, pity about the PIR light by the door which made going outside to see the stars a bit awkward.

Tue 2023-09-05

Again blue sky and sunshine. Back to NT Cragside, this time to look at the house. Famous for being the first to be lit by electricity, from hydro power using the lakes, initially with arc lamps, later early incandescents, but no sight of any ancient switchgear or panels. Lunch in the visitor centre tea room. Later into town for a few supplies at the Co-op. Realising that Percy was unoccupied, found a sunbathing spot, partly shielded from the road by the slatted fence between us, and with a towel drying on the backs of two chairs covering the drive direction; worked well. Patio surface was unusual, lots of small stones, very rounded so easy to walk on without shoes, and stuck down. Just a little cooler than yesterday evening, 25°C. Another gorgeous sunset.

Wed 2023-09-06

Just for a change, an overcast, slightly misty morning, though later the sun came back and another 25°C day. To Holy Island, or Lindisfarne, whichever, leaving about 10:10 to get to the tidal causeway just after its safe period started at 11:05. Of course, everyone else had the same idea so there was quite a queue. The huge car park was filling well, though it didn't quite fill up, it must be a real scrum on a weekend or in peak holiday period, even on a Wednesday in September the whole place was busy. Had a look around, then lunch in the Ship Inn, crab sandwiches seemed to be the thing everywhere. About then was when the sun came back, and a bit more walking and sitting around the harbour (which they call "The Ouse") and the beach on the other side of the village by St Mary's church. Set off back at 14:30, well inside the safe time which ended at 18:35; today was chosen for this visit by the convenience of the tide times. A very pretty place, probably very peaceful when it isn't full of tourists. Causeway was fun, easy to drive except for the short bit that is actually a bridge with the sea underneath which was not wide enough for cars to pass; that was an issue for those coming off as we came on this morning as our direction was queuing over it. The road was dry so no salt spray but there were pools adjacent. Watched a couple of old blokes launching a boat off the harbour which involved backing its trailer down a sandy slope into the sea, the Kia car doing the pushing ended up with the sea just below the door sills, it seemed OK. A697, B6525, B6353 route, minimising the amount of boring A1 used. Evening picked up fish and chips from the Rothbury Chippy, good, θ had a spam fritter. Order, wait, then pay when wrapped. Later sitting outside on the patio as the sun set, cooler by then.

Thu 2023-09-07

Overcast and misty morning, only about 18°C; there was a brighter but hazy spell late afternoon when we sat outside for a while. In the morning walked out west on the path alongside the river Coquet, saw a bonfire burning rather fiercely under the trees and waited until we were sure it was attended. Lots of locals out with their dogs. Back at the cottage while it rained lightly. Evening in, sautéed sausages, potatoes and onions. Cleaning and packing. ϕ walk later. Recent weather, especially in the south, broke the UK record for the number of consecutive September days reaching 30°C, with today reaching 30.2°C in Northolt, West London, with four >30°C days in a row. Our last night, no pretty sunset, just gradually getting gloomier.

Fri 2023-09-08

Mist clearing rapidly to sunshine. Car was covered in dust left by the rain yesterday. All ready and packed and away at about 09:15. Stopped at what the signs promised as Leeming Bar Rest Area, imagining an idyllic rural lay-by, French aire style. But no, we were led off the A1(M) and onto a 1 km detour to what was then labelled Leeming Bar Services, with a scummy little cramped car park, a dead McDonalds and a Costa that let us queue for ten minutes before telling us that the ice machine was dead and they had none of the cold brews that we wanted. There were toilets. Stopped again at Tibshelf for lunch, at a working McD. Home by 15:15, so 6 hours

with stops. Still hot, 30°C appeared as we got further south, building from 16°C when we started. Only real jams were on the A1(M) with roadworks and a fuel spill, around junction 53. Took the maximum M1 route via Leeds on the way back. Came off the M1 at junction 15 and were routed via the new Roade bypass, still lots going on and works traffic lights on the A508 and the new bypass had cones and a 48 km/h limit. Gave the Captur a quick wash and could see the paintwork again.

Sat 2023-09-09

Cats collected from Charlesberry Cattery.

Isle of Wight 2024

Sat 2024-05-04

Warm sunny day. Left 09:10 via Oxford, A34, M3, M27 to Portsmouth and the IoW car ferry. Stops at Peartree and a McDonalds not long after Chieveley (Tot Hill). Queues on A34 for an accident, and later from near M3 to M27 and again coming in to Portsmouth but made it to the ferry terminal by 12:40, just before the earliest check-in, using up much of our two-hour allowance. Oddly, check-in said there was no 14:00 departure, which our booking was for, but the signs by the cafe showed one and we were on it. Sat right at the front of the ferry looking out through big windows, very smooth, the only annoyance being car alarms going off: Wightlink ferry, 45 minutes to Fishbourne. To Ryde Castle Hotel by 15:00, and into room 5 with a view over the Esplanade. Down to the bar for a pint of Abbot and then a walk along the front, saw the hovercraft take off and a train (newish Vivarail adaptation for third-rail of old sub-surface Underground stock) on the Island Line. Evening ate in hotel restaurant / bar, food was good if a little late in coming, but the organisation was amiss. We'd been suggested to book a table, but then the receptionist had forgotten to write our name on one of the table boards but they found us one anyway; an adjacent table came in soon after us and ordered on the GK app only to be told food service had stopped (before 19:30, as they had a party in) and were given a refund.

Sun 2024-05-05

Our first included breakfast then a walk up into the town and a short drive out of one side of the town, around behind in the countryside and back in the other end; a great many cyclists going the same way. Dull, with a hint of wetness. Roast lunch in the hotel. Again our table booking made at breakfast did not appear on a reserved board so we sat at an unreserved table anyway, very good roasts but took most of an hour to arrive; again they were turning people away but the place did not look busy. The manager (Donna?) was running around like the proverbial b-a fly fixing things; probably a better system would not need so much managing. Later a walk to the west, but it started to rain and we got wet. Evening to the bar for more Abbot, still good. The sun came back for the evening.

Mon 2024-05-06

Bank holiday. The bathroom mirror had a heated centre section which didn't mist up which came on with the electric towel rail. Today rain and more rain. To the Needles. Cost £4 to park (special rate for NT members, £6 else) and could see the rocks from a small viewing platform without much walking. Otherwise there was the collection of tacky huts and children's rides of the Needles Landmark Attraction, also including a chairlift down to the beach, the free steps being conveniently closed as unsafe. This is where the rain started, so we just dodged into the cafe for a while and then came away. Saw nothing interesting enough to justify looking for parking as we passed through the narrow town centre of Yarmouth so on to Newport. A drink and a cake in Morrisons and then a look round. Onwards to the steam railway where we arrived just too late before their long lunchtime timetable gap so watched the one we could have almost caught going out and coming back, 2-6-2 tank 41313 and about 5 antique coaches. It was raining heavily all this time, the umbrellas that happened to be in the car proved useful. It was a special event day, a Real Ale festival, and admission to look round was free. Then back to the hotel. Topped up fuel from a typical small station which also happened to be the island's Renault dealer. Evening walk down (up, rather) to S Fowler, the local Wetherspoon, where the Abbot was just as good as at the hotel but half the price and the food came almost immediately; not quite the same atmosphere though: it was lively and efficient.

Tue 2024-05-07

Seven cars in the hotel car park last evening at 20:00, for 18 rooms plus bar customers; six cars overnight. To Mottistone Garden NT, a very pretty and peaceful garden in a small valley, formal at the lower end and wooded at the higher. The centre of the lower garden was a lawn with beds shaped as a four-arm spiral which the ancient NT guide said was based on Fibonacci. Sat at the highest point looking down over the garden for a while, then had a sandwich and ice-cream in the tea rooms (well, a vegan approximation to ice-cream). Then to Compton beach, watching the tide going out, a few others around, not busy, again very pretty though the cliffs were

collapsing. Came back following the military road along the south coast and through some of the towns. Ventnor had several roads closed and we went round in circles before finding an escape route and recovery from there to Shanklin. Back to hotel, now four cars in the car park. Quick drink in the bar, Abbot now off and IPA on instead.

Wed 2024-05-08

Car park much busier overnight and obviously many breakfasts completed before we got down at 08:40 but mostly empty by afternoon, they'd had some slimming group event with a breakfast and morning session. Misty start but by lunchtime sunny, and warm in the sun. To Bembridge, after missing the turning for the fort, and round again to Bembridge Fort, finding the turning this time. Owned by NT but the fort itself was let out to a business so it was inaccessible outside special tours, but the downs around were very peaceful and pretty. Spent a while watching the mist clearing, then moved a bit further down the road to Culver Head where there was a pub for lunch (Culver Haven Inn), substantial sandwiches with chips. We had a bit of an explore here too. Back to hotel then to Ryde pier, or rather three parallel piers, one for a road, one for pedestrians and one for the railway (double track). Walked part way along, saw a train passing, saw a hovercraft coming in. Quick refreshment in the sun outside the hotel bar then θ to rest and ϕ walk on the beach. A digger and dump truck were moving big rocks from one part of the beach to another. Further along east there were big piles of sand that looked as if they might have been similarly dug up, moved and dumped.

Thu 2024-05-09

The centre pedestrian walkway of the pier was completed only last year, before that it was a derelict tramway. The roadway pier was the original from 1814, the tramway next east from 1864, the railway next east again from 1880 and the new walkway from June 2023. My cooked breakfast took more than 30 minutes today. Sunshine all day, shorts came out. To Osborne House, English Heritage, arriving not long after they opened at 10:00, which was just as well, as the coach parties soon came rolling in. We were advised to look round the house straight away before the masses caught up and even then it was a slow-moving queue in places. Not much different to me from all such grand houses, this one appeared to support a cottage industry in "do not touch" notices. The coffee and nibbles place by the house was busy and had no seating left so we went back outside to the bigger cafe by the shop which was almost empty and then went back inside, by showing tickets again, to see the walled garden and some more of the grounds. By the time we left they had twenty coaches in, including some school parties, and the main car park was filling well. Back to Ryde, θ for a nap and ϕ for a walk out to the end of the pier, which was nothing exciting (it's for the catamaran service to Portsmouth not amusements) and also explored some way to the west along the Esplanade. The ice-cream van at Osborne House was electric.

Fri 2024-05-10

The day began with sunshine which lasted all day though windy by the afternoon, but across the water seemed to be misty all day, we could barely make out the funny white tower at Portsmouth. Sat by the beach watching the world going by, eating ice cream and tracking the passing boats on an app; ϕ bought a blue cloudy-sky sun hat. Later θ for a nap in the room and ϕ for a walk around and a sausage bap for lunch. Evening we ate lightly in the hotel. They were busy, but oddly the food was very quick this time, only ten minutes. Our last stroll along the Esplanade, still many people about in the evening sunshine. We had cocktails in a beachfront bar. So far on this holiday, everything has been paid for using the phone, no cash, no physical card. Have seen nowhere insisting on cash only (though at least one sign said they took cards but liked cash) and a few places were card only.

Sat 2024-05-11

Sunny again and warmer, 23C on the car. Last breakfast, paid the bill and set off at 09:50 for the 10-minute journey to the Fishbourne port, timed not to arrive before the earliest allowed 10:00 for the 11:00 crossing. But the road-side flashing signs warning not to arrive more than one hour before departure were not lit today and we were offered the earlier 10:20 crossing, though for some reason we were in the first three cars loaded. A different ferry, this one Victoria of Wight (hybrid power), which always goes forwards. As we had driven on at the front end and were parked waiting to go out via the back, it backed off and spun round to cross like a normal ship; the outbound ferry the St Clare was bidirectional, including moving the red ensign to the other end for each trip. Again lots of car alarms going off during the crossing. It was very smooth and quiet, no motion detectable. Home by the M27, M3, A34 route with one stop at Tot Hill arriving home at 14:00, so 4 hours 10 mins; the outbound journey was 5 hours 50 mins with two shorter stops and congestion.

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