

Trevor and return from Blackwater Meadow Marina

Day 1-

My name is Keely and I am the newest member of the ABC booking office team. I am very excited to be going on this narrowboat holiday, my only past boating experience is going on a friend's holiday for the day. Joining me for the trip are my parents called Jo and Mike and my partner Ben.

We are all very much looking forward to the trip and we are doing a fantastic route: from Blackwater Meadow, heading towards Llangollen. As we are novices, we plan to only go to Trevor basin just the other side of the Pontcysyllte aqueduct and return. I am following Pearson's Guide 3- Welsh Waters as I find it easiest to use but you could also follow Nicholson's Guide 4- Four Counties and the Welsh Canals.

We have the Friday off work and make the journey to the marina, we have decided to get there for around midday as we want to explore the town of Ellesmere and get some lunch too. We find a parking space in the town (it's 10p for up to 2 hours- madness!) and walk towards the shops. It is a lovely quaint little place with butchers, bakers, sweet shop etc. We stopped at Pete's sandwich shop for lunch followed by the bakery for a cake and they were both delicious.

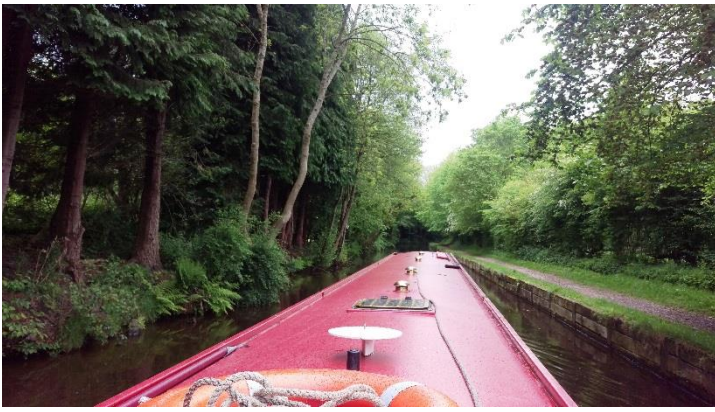


We arrive at the marina slightly earlier than 2.30pm in the hope they may be able to get our induction started earlier. We check in and our boat isn't quite ready but they are going to start our handover which is great. We explain we are novices and they show us everything we need to know including lock demonstration, how to use and work everything on-board and how to steer. When we go on-board to put our belongings on the boat, I notice the team have added fresh flowers and made the towels into hearts and swans- how lovely!

Paul who was teaching us was super helpful and even cruised the first bit of canal with us and then showed us how to moor up including the clove hitch knots. We managed to get cruising just after 3pm. Paul said if we want to go to Llangollen we should aim to get to the Lion Quays pub for our first night but as we are going to Trevor we won't have to go as far as that. We have our dinner on-board for tonight, being newbies we didn't want to feel restricted as to where we would need to stop! Paul also mentioned that you if we do go to Trevor, you can moor here and then get the bus into Llangollen so we may do this.

We enjoy our first hours of cruising despite it raining constantly! We are passing so many animals: sheep with their lambs, cows with their calves and ducks with their ducklings. I even saw a heron and we saw some guinea fowl in a field with some sheep. What a great time to cruise the canals with all this lovely wildlife to admire.





We pass many bridges, Dad and Ben are mostly cruising but I did give it a go too! The scenery is beautiful despite the weather, lots of hills and fields that seem to go for miles. It is mostly easy cruising but we are having to make lots of hot drinks to keep our hands warm!

We get so much further today than we expected and the weather finally starts to brighten up. We manage to get through the only 2 locks on the journey and as we pass through them fairly late there's no one else around. Ben and I take charge of doing the locks whilst Jo and Mike stay on-board. I thought this would be complicated but I am pleasantly surprised by how easy it is! Ben really enjoys the locks too. The next lock can be seen from the first and we are just leaving it when another boat is coming in so they take over so we can get on-board. Perfect!



We cruise past the water points and moor not far after these, on the straight stretch before bridge 13w- there is plenty of room here. We don't stop for water as we haven't been on the boat long or used much water yet but the advice is to stop for water every day. We will stop at the next point along the canal.

We have homemade lasagne and garlic bread which we brought with us to eat on-board as we didn't want to

restrict where we could stop for our first night. We are in-between pubs (past Jack Mytton but before Lion Quays) so if you do want to stop at a pub then plan where to moor accordingly. A boat cruised past and we almost came adrift! I took over doing the knots this time, they seem to come naturally to me, probably my girl-guiding background. I have gained the title of knot queen from my crew.

Day 2-

Today we wake and I step out on to the stern of the boat. Oh my, how beautiful it is. It is early and so peaceful. There is a cow just a little further up the canal having a drink. We have poached eggs on toast for breakfast and we are away for 8.30am. Ben is captain for an hour or so this morning and he does a brilliant job. We soon pass the Lion Quays restaurant which looks very grand. I looked it up on the internet and find it is actually a hotel, spa and country club- very fancy! There are private moorings here for people using their services. We head for Chirk where we plan to stop and explore.





We go over Chirk aqueduct, leaving England and crossing into Wales. The aqueduct and the views are spectacular. The tunnel is almost immediately after and is 459 yards in length. It is such a great experience and at least it keeps the rain off us for a short while! Dad does an excellent job at cruising through, he is becoming quite the boater. You need to check if anyone else is coming as it is single traffic for both the aqueduct and tunnel.

It says in our Pearson's guide that to visit Chirk we need to moor almost immediately after the tunnel. As we come out of the tunnel, we can't see where to moor for Chirk as there are lots of boats waiting to go through, we are unsure if this is even the right place! Later on we realised there was a path that you needed to take up into Chirk but it was too late by then, perhaps we will try visit on the way back as the guide paints a good picture of the little town.

We carry on cruising, past Chirk marina and the rain is really heavy now! These boats are very well equipped with an umbrella and 2 sets of waterproofs so we make use of them. We travel through Whitehurst tunnel, this one is much shorter at 191 yards. Dad does really well with steering through these tunnels, they are narrow and single file traffic so the tunnel kind of guides you through anyway but he hasn't touched the sides once!

Next up is the swing bridge which is already open so we don't have to get off the boat. There is also a queue of boats behind us so we won't have to shut it either. A pity as we wanted to experience one, but perhaps we will be able to on the way back. Shortly after here there are water points. She was very thirsty and seemed to take forever to be filled!

Then WOW we are going over the Pontcysyllte aqueduct. We can't see anyone the other end so go for it. An incredible experience with the River Dee thundering below us and the views are so picturesque. I enjoy every moment, absorbing it all.





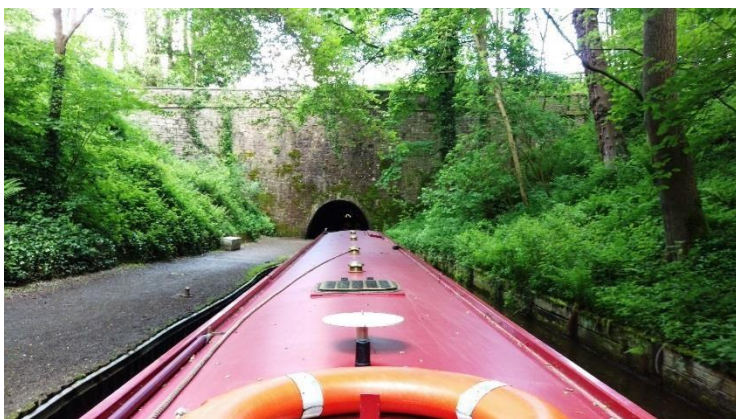
Almost immediately after the aqueduct you are in Trevor. We try to moor here but there isn't enough space so we turn in the winding hole. If you wanted to go on to Llangollen you would turn left after the aqueduct and it is around 3 hours cruising there and 3 back.

As we head back out of the basin, another boat is leaving so we could have moored after all! We decide to cruise back over the aqueduct and moor somewhere here but can't really find anywhere suitable. We go back through the lift bridge (this time we were able to close it behind us- Yay!) and moor a little further on to stop for some lunch which we eat on-board using our provisions. We are a little too far out now to walk back into Trevor and get the bus to Llangollen. My parents are keen motorcyclists so they are planning a ride out to Llangollen in the future as it sounds lovely.



The new plan is to visit Chirk on the way back. Finally the sun shine comes out- Hooray! A few hours cruising and we moor. There are no pilings, pins or rings so we have to get the stakes out. We manage to moor up okay and let a boat go past just to double check. We all walk along the towpath and towards Chirk, past the train station and towards the small town.

It has a few pubs, a convenience store, a tea room and a very limited amount of other shops that are all closed even though it's only 4pm on Saturday. We were looking forward to the butchers called McArdle's as apparently it did wonderful pork pies and baps but unfortunately it closes at 2pm. The convenience store is open so we pop in here to get a loaf of bread and some milk.





We go back over the aqueduct and with the sun out, the view looks like something you see on a postcard. Absolutely stunning.

We keep cruising and decide to find somewhere for dinner. Our options are The Bridge Inn, the last pub in England just by Bridge 21w or The Poachers Pocket a little further down at Bridge 19w which we decide would suit us better.

It looked like there weren't going to be any spaces outside Poachers Pocket, the boats already moored had left some rather big gaps in-between, the one boat calls out to us, "did you want to squeeze in?" So we say yes and the boats in front and behind shuffle their boats forwards and backwards to make a larger gap for us to squeeze in to! They are both so friendly and helpful, pulling us into the space and even tying all our knots. We are literally touching the boats both ends and the boat behind says: "I hope you don't snore!" which makes us laugh. It really opens my eyes up to how kind and helpful all the other boaters can be, we had a nice chat with them afterwards.

We are so close to the Poachers Pocket, literally 2 steps from the gate! It is very busy in the restaurant and we hadn't booked but they manage to get us a table. We have a lovely meal, I even have dessert and it was delicious. Great service here and we were even mistaken for Australian's which was very flattering indeed!



Day 3-

Today we wake early again and we depart at around 8.30am. We have a sunny start to the day but it goes dull again after. We travel back through the locks, still only a couple of boats to wait for. We go ahead and help some of the boats and meet a very nice crew from Dallas, Texas. It's amazing where people travel from!





We carry on, heading for the marina, today we get to see everything from a different perspective. We pass through all the bridges again and see more wildlife.

The canal seems much busier today with lots of boaters around, sometimes we have to wait to allow other boats to come through the bridges. We get slightly stuck when allowing a boat to pass but soon push off the bank with the pole and are were away again.

We admire lots of lovely canal side houses which we are all very jealous of! What a view to wake up to each morning. I think we will be back to the marina just after 1pm which suits us as we have other commitments in the evening. Usually if you are on a weekend break you have the boat until Monday morning at 9am so you would aim to be moored near to or in the marina on Sunday evening. This also means that you have some extra hours compared to what we did so you are able to take the route at a more leisurely pace.

We ring the office to let them know we are outside, as the team there advise that crew shouldn't attempt to manoeuvre the sharp bend back into the marina themselves. We moor up and load the car for the journey back home.

What a great first canal boating holiday. It was a shame it rained for most of the trip, however as I write this blog only a week later, the weather has been 20c+ but that's just British weather for you! I still think May is a superb time to go, especially with all the delightful flora and fauna you get to see. I would highly recommend this route with 2 locks, 2 tunnels, 2 aqueducts and 2 swing bridges (if you go to Llangollen) it has a bit of everything for you to experience. The views are beyond spectacular and the canal feels very tranquil. Overall a truly excellent trip.



