

The Rashbrooks on Tour 2016

It's that time of year again and for the first time ever, because the children are older now we are able to travel out of school holiday time. We have chosen the first week in July because my mother-in-law's birthday is then and she always has glorious weather! My sister in law got married on 3rd July for just that reason and had the best weather imaginable!

We have decided to travel from Gailey again – we fancy the sound of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal as it is one of the oldest and reputedly one of the prettiest canals on the network.

There are four of us – my husband Simon and me, with my daughter Sarah and her boyfriend Ben, the same party as last autumn and we plan to travel from Gailey to Stourport-on-Severn and back over 7 nights.

We arrive at Gailey at around 1.30pm – we have been here before and we know there is no big supermarket very nearby so stocked up on groceries before we left Worcester.

However there is a 'corner shop' just down the road to buy any last minute essentials and a pub and Garden centre too that you could have lunch at if you wanted to arrive earlier.

Our boat – Upland Goose, an 8 berth – is ready for us.

David, the owner of Gailey Marina greets us. We have met before – and he takes us through the usual health and safety paperwork - paperwork that I have to sign to say that I understand the rules and regulations of the canals.

We are shown onto our boat by Katie and she walks us through the boat explaining where the wardrobes and cupboards are, where the gas cylinders are, the water tanks, giving advice regarding the toilets (2 ply only please!!) all about the heating and the cooker – just general information really, and then we begin the business of unpacking. At Gailey what happens is that you drive your car as near to the boat as possible and unpack – we generally put empty suitcases, cooler bags etc. back into the boot of the car once unloaded. You then take your car further uphill to a larger carpark area which is out of the way and leave it there.

We store all our clothes away – we have bags and bags of space of course being on a big boat – and unpack all our food and drink – there is a full size fridge for perishables and a fair amount of cupboard space – we shuffled things around a bit to suit us. It's worth noting that there is no freezer on board – just an icebox at the top of the fridge – enough space for an ice cube tray and a bag of peas!

Once unpacked we go and tell Katie and she gets Nigel, an engineer to show us the engine and the weed hatch. There are a couple of 'housekeeping' tasks that should be done every day – making sure the weed hatch is clear and turning the greaser – all will become clear to you so don't worry!

We are going south but there are a lot of boats around and a very sharp turn to get out of our bay so Nigel very kindly offers to steer us out and then along the canal for a bit, to get us under way, an

offer we gladly accept. He expertly guides us out and we travel at tick over along for 50 yards or so and he jumps off and we're away!

We have looked at our Map (Nicholson's Guide No. 2) and because we have got away at a reasonable time we decide we are going to head to Compton which is around 4 hours cruising away we reckon – with no locks at all. At Compton there are a couple of pubs and a couple of takeaways plus a supermarket in case we discover we have forgotten anything! We all have a hankering for fish 'n' chips so this seems like a grand plan.



What a beautiful afternoon!

Another stop you could make is just 2 hours cruising away at The Fox and Anchor at Cross Green – very popular for boaters on their first afternoon.

It is the most beautiful afternoon and we cruise gently along through green and pleasant countryside.

Almost exactly 2 hours after leaving we pass the aforementioned Fox and Anchor and carry on through the very narrow cutting just passed Forster Bridge – approaching Autherley junction. We are lucky here and nothing is coming in the opposite direction – but there are passing points – in fact on our way back later this week we encounter boat after boat coming this way but manage to pass all of them safely and without mishap, so don't panic whatever you do!



Approaching bridge 71 at Cross Green – just past the Fox and Anchor pub 01902 798786

As we emerge from this narrow bit we come across a couple of canoeists who warn us that there is a tree down across the canal a little way ahead – but they reckon it is passable.

Well it turns out that it is, but only just! The branches at the top of the tree are right across to the other side of the canal and whilst it looks easy enough to pass through it's actually fairly difficult – the barge pole has to be called into play – we know that CRT will remove

it very quickly but I give them a quick call anyway – the phone number for this type of thing is in the boat manual. They already are aware and are sending someone out.

So onwards we go and soon enough we are approaching Compton – we choose a place to moor – there are plenty of moorings all along this canal and the towpath is mostly lined with steel pilings so it is easy to just apply your mooring hook (looks like a large safety pin) and Bob's your uncle you're safe as houses!



Steel pilings for the banks



We moor up just before the first lock and it's a mere 5 minute walk to the fish and chip shop from there – by 7.30pm we are happily munching away, and I would highly recommend them! Walk to the bridge past the lock – turn right and its about 200 yards. We all had massive portions for under £20!

There is a TV/DVD player on board so we decide to watch a film and around 10.30pm we are all yawning and ready for bed.

Next day, we oldies are up first and enjoy a lovely cup of coffee sitting on the front of

the boat and just enjoying the view. Today we plan to get to Stourton Junction which is around 16 locks away – we reckon this will be very doable with 2 able-bodied teenagers on board!

Pronounced Wittick



We decide we will eat on board

tonight – I have bought some food already and we'll have a



Ben



Sarah

curry and concentrate today on just getting as far as we can. If we can get beyond Stourton Junction then we will and so be in Stourport super early on Monday.

It's a beautiful day and I manage to take lots of great photos.



Can you spot the terrapin?





Narnia!



Emerging from Swindon Lock

We cruise all day stopping only briefly for a picnic lunch. Sarah and Ben do the locks, sometimes with my help but mostly not – it is truly beautiful – the sun is shining, everything is in full bloom, the canal winds and turns through gorgeous scenery and we take our time, yet make good progress. We rarely have to wait at any locks to pass through. We seem to be leading a charmed life!

The only bit that we were a little concerned with was Bratch Locks which we have been told is a series of 3 locks with a very short pound between each lock – one not long enough for the boat! This sounds quite confusing to us – but as it turns out it is permanently manned by lock keepers and once you see how it works it all makes sense – and they get us through in no time. However I imagine that during busy periods you could wait some time as it takes about 45 minutes to get a boat through and 3 locks worth of water takes a bit of time to fill up and disperse! If there was a queue I can imagine you might spend quite a few hours here. It's very pretty though and always something going on so you won't be bored!

Today we need to find water and we have been advised by David that there are only 2 water points on this route (the only drawback of this journey) and the map book has shown us that the 2 water points are actually quite near each other – which seems a bit mad! We stop at Greenforge where there is actually a sanitary station – which means, rubbish bins, toilets and sometimes showers, as well as a couple of water points – and fill up here and decide that if we moor up soon then we can all have showers etc. either tonight or in the morning and then refill again just past Stourton so we have full tanks for tomorrow too.

We are pleasantly tired and hungry now so moor up after Greenforges lock and have some supper – not only have the youngsters got us through the locks but they cook tea for us as well and we play some cards and it's time for bed. Sarah and Ben have a shower tonight and we will have ours tomorrow.

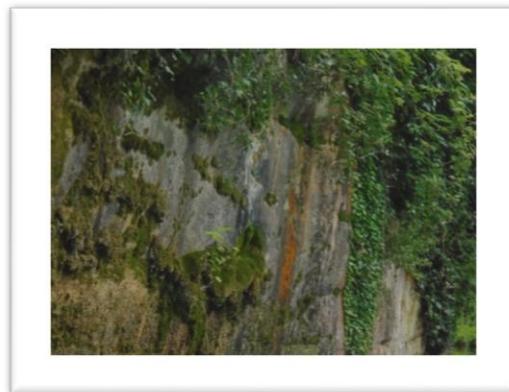
The next morning after our showers and a lovely cooked breakfast we get cracking once more. After stopping at Stewpony Wharf to fill up the water tanks (to be fair that doesn't take long so we reckon we are underestimating the size of the water tanks) which is just after Stourton Junction we tootle on, taking it easy now. We aim to be in Stourport at



around 4pm. From around Kinver the canal starts to cut through impressive red stone cliffs – see below



Debdale Lock - they hold concerts in the cave here!



The canal is not so open

now but even more winding and interesting with red stone cliffs towering above us – when the sun glints down they can be quite mesmerising.

Soon enough we are travelling through Kidderminster – it is very busy and noisy, one lock is right by an extremely busy ring road, approaching the lock is a lovely old church but the other side, under the bridge is a graffiti strewn wall! Quite the juxtaposition!



Approaching Kidderminster Lock



The other side!

We were actually advised by Katie at Gailey that although Kidderminster is perfectly fine in the day – and indeed very good for shopping – there are good moorings right next to Weavers Wharf which

has numerous shopping outlets including a large Tesco and popular restaurants such as Frankie and Benny's and Pizza Hut, that we shouldn't attempt to moor overnight.

So we carry on and very soon we are back in the country again. At either end of Kidderminster there



[The Lock at Wolverley 01562 850581](#)



[The Watermill 01562 66713](#)

are rather nice pub restaurants as well so plenty of possibilities for lunch.

Only another hour or so later we are on the outskirts of Stourport. We've taken the decision to moor on the outskirts just before a handy winding hole, as we prefer to stay in the country – we estimate it's about 20 minutes walk into the town centre from where we moor up, just after Bullocks Lane Bridge. However you could carry on into Stourport Basin itself and use the visitor moorings - £1 per metre per night. Possibly best to moor up where we did!

It turns out we are correct – that evening it takes a little less than 20 minutes to walk into the town. What we didn't figure on was that a lot of the places to eat in Stourport are closed on a Monday! So although we have got here in record time we might have been better off taking it a bit more easy and arriving on Tuesday – then all the nice restaurants – and there quite a few from Chinese to Indian to Italian would have been open. As it is we select a pub next to the Stourport Fair and near the river and just settle on a bar meal. We reckon we will come back at some point because some of the eating houses looked really good!

The next morning Simon and I walk back into town to get a bit of shopping and we then start to wend our way back. This time we intend to take it very easy and spread the 29 locks more evenly.

In retrospect we wish we had done that on the outward journey – but you live and learn and one of the reasons I am writing this is so you, dear reader, can learn from our mistakes!

All in all we thoroughly enjoyed our trip – it helped of course that the weather was superb for the whole week – but you really couldn't find a prettier canal – it's true there aren't any spectacular aqueducts or long spooky tunnels – but the surrounding countryside is exceptionally lovely and every day there are places you could stop and lunch or have an evening meal – we had a Chinese takeaway meal at Compton (remember the amazing fish and chips on the outward journey) which was excellent and on our last night dined at the Fox and Anchor (lovely gastro-style food) before trundling on for another hour to get closer to Gailey.

Finally then, on Saturday morning, we wake up to pouring rain – Simon dons the waterproofs provided and bravely steers us back while the kids and I pack up all our gear and clean and tidy through the boat.

We pull into Gailey at around 9.00 am and meet Nigel again who helps us steer the boat back in and moor up abreast of another boat ready to re-fuel.

We retrieve the suitcases from the car and pack up really quickly, dispose of our rubbish in the bins provided and after thanking David we are making our way home. Another lovely week, totally relaxing and doing every one of us the world of good.

Can't wait to do it again next year!!