

Ships Log

Emerald Dove

## Log

### The voyage of the good ship Emerald Dove

The voyage took place from the 22nd September to 27<sup>th</sup> September on the Staffs & Worcs Canal in the UK just outside Birmingham.

38 Miles and 72 locks round trip.

Crew were Beverly and Richard Lewis, Paul and Margaret Fay

The vessel was a 62 ft narrow boat driven by an inboard diesel engine.

Weather conditions on route were mixed but generally on the good side with rain confined to the early morning or late afternoon leaving plenty of dry and bright weather for the passage.

**On day one** we had to do a familiarisation session which lasted about 1 hour we also had to read the health and safety manual which was 62 pages long and watch a 25-minute video. This was done in the week prior to our trip.

The layout of the boat was very good and comfortable with crew quarters at each end of the boat and the galley in the middle. After ensuring all supplies were stowed and we had enough water on board we set off with a fair wind at our backs making a good 2 knots through the water.

In the early stages of the voyage we had to get acquainted with the boat and how she handled. Making tea was not as difficult as we were used to at sea as there was no heeling involved and therefore no spillages.

The boat handling sorted we settled into life aboard with lookouts on the bow calling back to the crew on the helm if they spotted other boats coming in our direction and to take avoiding action.

The helm usually responded with a loud blast from the horn which was mounted on the bow to warn the oncoming vessel of our presence. This action usually caused some consternation with lookouts who were not amused with our action.



Emerald Dove in her berth at Gaily Marina

The first bit of excitement we encountered was within an hour or two of leaving the marina when we arrived at a sharp bend but also had to decide of 3 routes which were branching off we were to take. After a very quick discussion and reference to the map we picked one route however it is very difficult to steer a 62 ft narrow boat around a sharp bend " they don't respond like a well mannered sail boat more like a 300000 tone oil tanker, it takes time to get a response to the helm. Anyway suffice to say we made it around with nobody looking and no damage only to find we now had to encounter our first bridge just as we came out of the turn . Bridges are generally low and very narrow when you take into account the tow path the canal can be almost the same width as the boat. With lots of signals from the look outs on the bow telling us there was an ice berg dead head we grazed along the edge of the tow path but thankfully this did not result in the same faith as befell the infamous ' T##### '

Our first stop was at a beautiful pub called ' the Round Oak ' with some great pub grub and English beers . We had a quick chat with some other canal rats who were very experienced and told us about the 'stairs' and the 'bratch locks' we were told not worry it's not as bad as it sounds.

We departed contented but worried !

It was an otherwise uneventful afternoon taking in the scenery and the wildlife cut off from the Huggle and bustle of the real world which was nearby but totally out of sight and sound.

At about 5 pm we decided on an anchorage for the night which was near a pub. We tied up using the gear supplied for such things and careful to observe the no parking signs. After enjoying a relaxing drink we went back the boat to cook up a storm using fresh Irish Steaks, onions and gravy with mashed Irish potatoes washed down with French Wine,,, Yum ! Yum !. The cooking facilities in the galley were very good and made life easy for preparing a nice meal ( No gimble cooking ) .



The crew were very tired after the firsts days exertions and decided an early night was on the cards so we all retired for a good night's sleep as we knew there were locks involved with the next leg.



**Day 2** dawned with the sun shining down and we sat on deck for breakfast



### **The first Lock**

We were all lock virgins so it didn't matter who went forth to engage with what appeared to be a monster gushing water from many orifices. We had read the manual and looked at the video but still we approached with caution. No need to worry it all worked out however a word to the wise all windows on the boat should be closed when entering a lock as water doesn't only enter the lock through the gates as we found out during our first encounter, it can pour out from the walls at either side of the lock.



Managing the lock gates

Having successfully negotiated the first set of locks it was a doddle after that we got really expert and were quite proud of ourselves and happy to engage with the 'Stairs' no problem.

We had to navigate 12 locks on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day and it was quite exhausting but good fun. We again moored up for lunch at a nice Pub which is the thing to do when on this type of sailing holiday 'one must' Pub 2 was called the mermaid, It was a short walk up to the real world and amazing to find traffic and noise all around so we had our lunch and retreated to the sanctuary of the canal and set off in search of the elusive 'Kingfisher'.

It was late in the afternoon and rain was forecast but just before we pulled in for the night we spotted the blue flash that is associated with a Kingfisher in flight it was only a quick flash be we

knew then that they were in the area. The rain came shortly after we moored up and as it was to fall heavy all night we decided to cook on board and have a duvet morning until it cleared the next day.

It should be noted we were very well stocked as the Irish and English crews brought enough food to feed everybody on the canal. Perhaps a good thing is to agree who is bringing what to avoid the 3 dozen eggs situation.

**Day 3** Dawned as expected very wet but after a late breakfast it was decided to take a walk up to a nearby garden centre that had a craft shop and coffee corner. This proved very welcoming and was enjoyed by all. On the walk back to the boat the rain cleared and we set out for the 'Stairs'

The stairs is a series of 3 locks together but separate and it requires a little understanding of water technology i.e. make sure the correct sequence of locks is filled with water. We arrived on schedule and sent out the lock crew to inspect that all was in order. They gave the signal and we were ready for the decent.



Entering a lock

The by now very capable crew of the good ship Emerald Dove navigated the stairs like pros and came out the other end unscathed and quite proud of ourselves. At this stage we could take on anything but it was necessary to stop for lunch at 'The Anchor' before we ventured any further.

We had to navigate the ' Bratch Locks before nightfall but we were told there were lock keepers in attendance so less pressure. The Bratch is a series of 3 locks joined together and requires more understanding of water technology but with expert overseers we were in good hands.



The lock Keepers at Bratch Locks ( CAN BE BRIBED WITH HOME BAKED SUMERSET APPLE CAKE )

We moored for the night in a town called Kinver and found a lovely Italian Restaurant so we decided on fine dining with fine wine after all our hard work.



A lovely atmosphere with great food and wine and good company.



**Day 4** Saw the crew up bright and early Beverly and Richard wanted to visit a local tourist attraction which was about a 45 minute walk and a climb to the top of Kinver Edge where people in the olden days dug into the sandstone cliff to provide houses for themselves. These dwellings were inhabited up to the 1950's . Paul and Margaret decided on a more leisurely stroll around the town to visit the local craft shops and a stop off for coffee and cake. Beverly and Richard returned earlier then expected a little frustrated having found the site closed and they were not able to visit. They were more frustrated by meeting one of the caretakers telling them to come back the next day.

This was the turning point of the trip were we had to find a 'Winding Hole' the canal is about 20 ft wide but with a 62 ft boat you need to find somewhere to turn it. We had one on the map but it took a bit of looking before we found it just outside a town. If we didn't find it there some of them are hidden in tall growth at the side of the canal we had to go along the canal for another 3 hours to get to the next one. This was a new skill to be mastered which required the bow of the boat to be guided into a V in the side of the canal and with the throttle in forward the boat is driven into the V with Helm hard over until the boat rotates about itself.

The exercise went very successfully and we were pointing in the right direction for home.

We moored up at a town called Compton and cooked up a nice meal on board Omelettes and side salad,,,,, very nice !.

A visit to the pub finished off the evening well .

**Day 5** We had to renegotiate the stairs going up this time so no major problems encountered except it is very much harder to line up with the lock from the other side but all went well. We spent some time trying to spot the elusive Kingfisher,, we did see a total of 4 along the way but all were a blinding blue flash so no photos available.

We did have one near miss on the way when a barge coming the other way didn't abide by the port to port rule but cool heads saved the day and as we passed it tuned out to be a rookie crew ( they shouldn't be let out on the canal on their own 😊 ) Its as well we didn't encounter them in the 'narrows' which is a long part of the canal hewn out of the sandstone rock where only one boat at a time can go through. Phew !!!

We stopped off at the Anchor again for lunch as it was good for grub and beer.

**Day 6** we were heading toward our destination ' Gaily Marina ' and had completed all but one lock, our final hurdle on the trip. We spent some time ashore walking between locks on day 5 as the locks were close together and it gave some time ashore to stretch the legs and regain our land legs. We moored up outside the marina for the night and got dressed for our last night out ashore. We found a great pub about 15 minutes along a very busy and dark road so we had to be careful where we walked. Food was not as good as expected and we were in the middle of a kids party for the duration. When compared to our week on the water with the peace and quiet it was back to the real world with a bang.



View from the deck on our last night.

**Day 7** It was a joy to watch a real expert in action when a member of the Marina crew came and took charge of our boat and brought it into the marina and moored it between two other barges after turning it in a circle around itself. We have a lot to learn.! We packed our bags and loaded them into the cars and prepared for our trip home.

After saying our farewells we hit the road for Hollyhead,, Richard and Beverly set out for Kinver Ridge which was about 45 minutes by road but it had taken us 3 days by barge interesting how things have changed 😊.

It's a very different world that exist along side of our very busy and noisy world but it's really worth being added to the bucket list it's relaxing and tiring all at the same time.