

A narrowboat is moored on a canal at dusk. The boat is dark with a red stripe and has a cabin. The canal is surrounded by green trees and grass. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, indicating sunset. A gravel path runs alongside the canal.

A view of the future?
14 days on NB SIENNA

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How it all started

It's late afternoon, on the 14th of February 2013. A blizzard howls around the house. Not the first one this year in the Netherlands, and probably also not the last. Inside my house I'm curled up in my favourite chair next to the cosy warm wood stove, with a hot cup of tea and a magazine. A magazine that, a month ago, I didn't even know it existed. And I'm getting more and more excited.

A month ago Lawrance, my partner, asked the difficult question that pops up every year: *When and what? I need to book my holidays for this year!* We usually go on a golf-cum-camping trip somewhere in the UK, but as we seem to get older every year (and the weather worse) it might be time for something completely new. I suggest a fortnight on one of them narrow houseboats I've seen on TV. This idea falls on good soil, so we have a look on the internet. Houseboats doesn't get us anywhere, and longboats is something for the Vikings, but then I spot the word narrowboat. Bingo! And as we happen to be in the UK for a couple of days, I almost immediately go to the shop to buy a magazine.

A whole new world opens up for me. Of course, being Dutch, I'm familiar with canals, locks, bridges and boats. But this is a completely different cup of tea. I see pictures of snug little palaces on water, either in a marvellous scenery or moored next to a picturesque pub, or both. And, I must admit, always in nice weather.

Lawrance told me yesterday he has booked our boat, so after supper I'm going to study the Boating Handbook...

It gets worse

About two months later narrowboats are still an important factor in daily life. Due to the fact that, one day, I had the stupid idea of: *I could live on a narrowboat!*

Straight away came about a thousand reasons why me and Lawrance should buy a narrowboat.

- 1 Lawrance retires next year, so living and cruising on a narrowboat would give us a new goal in life.
- 2 I have my own company but, due to recession, a lot of my work is now done in India, for less than a tenth of my hourly rate, so I could have an early retirement.
- 3 No work for me means financial problems in a couple of years. If I sell my house and buy a boat I would easily make my retirement day with my savings.
- 4 ...

No. I won't mention all the one thousand reasons. And yes, I know, I've never set foot on a narrowboat yet, but I'm sure I'll manage. Although I have a big house, I used to spend a lot of time in my Volkswagen campervan, to save myself driving home after socialising with friends. And over the last ten years I've spent maybe half the time in a truck. In the truck we have two Captains Chairs, a coffee machine, a microwave, a pull-out bed, all squeezed into a space the size of a boatman's cabin. Just think of a narrowboat as a truck and trailer, but turned around. Then we would have not only the truck, but also the trailer as living space. Wow! And a real bathroom (not the under-the-trailer one). And a wood stove. And...

So, having nothing to do, I switch on my computer, click on Adobe Illustrator and start designing. Internet provides me with a heap of information, especially about things I have never heard of. Like weed hatches, calorifiers, fenders or bilges. I still don't know the Dutch words for them.

Once I created a rough plan for a narrowboat, I make a list of things to discuss with Lawrance, include the boat plan, make an e-book of it and send it to Lawrance, who at this time is on his way to Las Palmas (no, not on holiday, but with the truck). To my surprise his reactions are like: *Oh, and we could...* and *Yes, I like...* Or in one word: positive!

So, two months after my first encounter with a narrowboat, we have a detailed drawing for a 57 or 58 ft trad narrowboat, with a traditional lay-out. We'll have a cabin with an in-line bed, a walk-through bathroom, a galley on both sides of the boat, a L-shaped dinette (a bed for all the people that, undoubtedly, will come and visit us) and a saloon with captains chairs. I designed the under-furniture storage space, the high-level cupboards, the heating system, all the lights, and the hot and cold water system. So far it's the second boat plan (the first one had a reverse lay-out), the second galley plan, and the third plan for the bathroom.

The drawing as such is to scale, but since Illustrator can't deal with feet and inches I end up with some strange measurements, and at the moment the boat is 58.6813 feet in length. But a boat builder can open my drawing in AutoCAD and the measurements will all convert to proper feet and proper inches... (I hope)

Then the holidays get nearer and nearer, and we're about to set foot on a real narrowboat, for the first time...

Monday 27-05-2013

After doing some necessary shopping we're off to Acton Bridge. We, that's me and Lawrance, and Eddie and Carol, Lawrance's older brother and his wife. They have been on a narrowboat before, albeit years ago.

Twice we miss Black Prince's yard, but the third time gets us there. Our boat, Sienna, is not ready yet (we are a bit early) so we walk to the (second) nearest pub, the Leigh Arms, to have an excellent lunch. Properly fed and watered we then are allowed in, or should I say on our 'house for the next two weeks'. We put all our stuff in the saloon for now, and start getting our instructions.

Everything explained, Danny from Black Prince locks his office and accompanies us for the first half a mile. Lawrance takes the tiller first. Within a few hundred yards he manages to hit the side of the canal. He then thinks he has done enough driving for the day, and tells me to take over.

Danny is still with us, and he gives me some additional advise. Then he wants me to steer to the side of the canal, he jumps off, and we are on our own.



At first everything is going OK. It's raining, and a bit cold, but I'm doing fine. Until... I get oncoming traffic + moored boats at starboard side + a very small part of the Trent & Mersey Canal. I need to steer... and slow down... and...

I hit a moored boat...! The family inside gets the shock of their life, but they survive. My pride doesn't. I'm awarded 25 points for the hit.

After this initial misbehave I'm doing well. And we soon arrive at our first tunnel, the Saltersford Tunnel. We find out that it is a timed tunnel, so we have to wait about 45 minutes. There is another boat waiting, and me and the other skipper have a yap. He tells me not to worry but just follow him, with a boats length distance between us.

The Saltersford Tunnel is only 424 yards, but it is eerie. Especially when you wear glasses (like I do) and these glasses are full of raindrops. And you're in a tunnel that is certainly not straight. And even with the tunnel light AND all the inside lights switched on it's still f**g dark. But, other than some people we know, I DO NOT hit

the walls in the tunnel. In fact, I'm doing very well.

And after this first tunnel (with the usual sharp bend at the end) comes the next tunnel, Barnton Tunnel. This one is even longer (572 yards) and as crooked as the Saltersford one. But again I don't hit walls, and we're still in one piece when we emerge at the other side.

It brings us to Anderton Boat Lift. We would like to visit this, but there is no space to moor. So on we go, or better, I go.

We're passing a lot of industry (and former industry) here. Mainly salt works. And a bit further down there are football stadiums on both side.

When we get to the visitor moorings at Wincham Wharf we call it a day. We've done seven miles, and most of the time it has been raining. Now it is time to find the nearest pub.

We do find a pub, but they don't do food (it's too late) so, after walking for a couple of miles, we end up in a (posh?) Indian restaurant, where we have a good meal. Which is then immediately used as energy for the same miles back to the boat.

It's cold, and we still have the central heating on. One part of this central heating system is somewhere near our bedroom. And because it is so noisy, I will not get a lot of sleep tonight.

Tuesday 28-05-2013



The next day Lawrance starts as skipper. Eddie is the second officer, and Carol and me are the cabin crew, as well as today's lockies (or should I say wind lassies?).



Although it's dry when we start in the morning, we will get more and more rain, as the day progresses.

First we're amidst industry (Roberts' Red Rose bakery) and distribution depots (Morrisons). Then we're in the country. Once in a while the canal gets very wide, when we pass the so called flashes. We pass our first aqueduct, Croxton Aqueduct. After six miles of cruising we arrive at our first lock, Middlewich Big Lock. Time for Carol to teach me how to do locks.

Locks turn out not to be difficult. With the lock gates closed, sluices (the paddles) are opened to let the water in or out. When the water level in the lock is the same as the level the boat is on, the lock gates are opened and the boat can get into the lock.

Opening and closing lock gates, and winding paddles, is certainly

hard work, though. One often has to climb a lot of steps to get to the lock, and turning the paddles is heavier than winding the legs of a trailer. Me and Carol assume we will look like Arnold Schwarzenegger before the holiday is over.

Almost immediately after the Big Lock is a series of three locks, Middlewich Locks. They are dog-legged, very deep, and slow to use. And Lawrance does a very good job to get into the third lock, having to pass another boat that's on it's way north.

Then we get a sharp turn right, into the Middlewich Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal, towards Nantwich and Chester. With a lock immediately after the turning. Hard work again, but after the Stanthorne Lock (just after bridge 27) me and Carol are off duty as lockies.



The rain gets heavier, and I keep Eddie company for a while. He takes over from Lawrance, who is soaked to the skin.

We stop for the day at the visitor moorings at Church Minshull. Other boaters tell us that there is a nice pub called The Badger Inn, just next to the church. It's a short (about 700 metres) but a bit of a dangerous walk (small road, a lot of fast driving cars), so we decide straight away to take a taxi home, tonight.

It's jazz night in the Badger, with live music. We have a couple of drinks and an excellent meal. The taxi takes us safe back to the bridge where we're moored. After a night cap it's off to bed. This time we do switch off the heating system, and I sleep like a log.

Wednesday 29-05-2013

After a good night we're off in the direction of Barbridge Junction. The weather is still not too good, but we don't need our waterproofs. The cabin crew spends a lot of time to clean the vessel of all the remnants of dirty shoes. But also finds a moment to man the tiller, while others have a tea break.



Barbridge Junction is another T-junction, where the Middlewich Branch meets up with the main Shropshire Union Canal. And T-junctions mean a 90° turn (right, in this case) with no way to tell if there is any oncoming traffic. And yes, after Lawrance is halfway in the right turn: another boat. It takes some manoeuvring to get our boat heading in the right direction (i.e. north).

And after the junction we get two more 90° bends. All goes well, though, and watching the trucks on the A51 finding their way through bends, traffic lights and heaps of other traffic, makes us feel even better...!

We need to do some shopping and refill our water tank, so we stop at Calverley. While Eddie and Lawrance find out how to get water, me and Carol walk towards the village to find a shop. But when we get to the A51 we don't see any shops. I ask a postman for the nearest shop and he mentions the Texaco fuel station we passed just half a mile ago. So that's a no-go. We get rid of our garbage and start heading towards our first staircase lock. There is a queue at the lock, and we are able to see the Bunbury Shuffle: three boats using the lock at the same time, two heading north and one heading south, with the one heading south passing the other two in the lock.

We want to go to Chester, but to get to Chester Basin to moor we have to do four locks before we get to Christleton and eight locks after that. And, of course, the same locks on the way back. So we decide to cheat a bit. We will go to Egg Bridge, turn around at the winding hole and moor. From Egg Bridge we will take a bus to Chester, the following day.

When we get to Egg Bridge the winding hole is no longer in use, so we proceed to Christleton. There Lawrance gets his first experience in turning the boat around. He doesn't do too bad...

Back in Egg Bridge we moor at bridge 119. It is early, and everything is improving, the weather and even our looks.



There is a shop in Egg Bridge, and Eddie and Carol try to buy some messages. But the shop doesn't have what we need.

For supper we walk to the nearest pub. Well... nearest...? It turns out to be a 1,2 kilometre walk to The Plough.

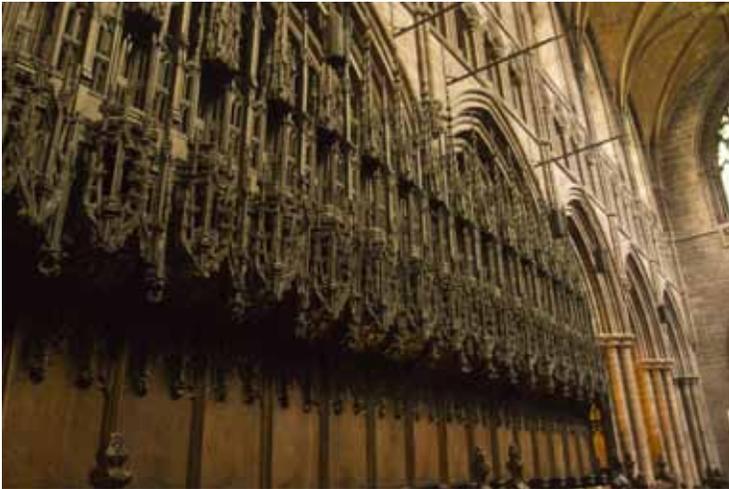
But it is worthwhile. The food is excellent (again). And when we ask the landlord, David Owen, to phone for a taxi, he even takes us back to the boat in his car!

Thursday 30-05-2013

Today we leave the boat for a couple of hours and take the bus to Chester. It still might rain once in a while, so we have our umbrella's with us.



Chester has some nice houses, and a beautiful cathedral. The cathedral has very intricate (old) wood work, and it's enclosed garden is a tranquil place.



We visit the Military Museum, do part of the city walls walk, have an excellent lunch and finish off with a visit to the cathedral. After that our feet are sore and we take the bus back to Egg Bridge.



We don't want to walk all the way to The Plough Inn, and besides that, we still have stuff to do our own meals, so chef Carol prepares a delicious chicken curry.

Friday 31-05-2013

For Eddie and Carol Egg Bridge is as far as they will get with the boat. From now on they are on the way back. It is still difficult to grasp, though. They live in Warrington, and if someone asks them where they went for this weeks holiday, they have to answer: Chester. Which is only 33 kilometres away as the crow flies, and only 40 kilometres (about half an hour) by car. But it took us about three days...!



Today the weather definitely improves. Eddie is skipper, and me and Lawrance are the lockies. Lawrance gets his first lessons in doing locks. Notice the sun cream on the hatch!



The cabin crew (i.e. Carol) provides us once again with a perfect lunch.



At Calverley we stop to get water. Because it is busy Eddie moors on the opposite side of the canal. I jump off, walk over the bridge to the other side to make sure no one gets in the space before us. I see Eddie doing some strange manoeuvres and I think he's practising reversing. But he managed to get grounded, and has a lot of trouble to get floating again.

At Bunbury Staircase Locks there is a lock keeper on duty today. We see another Bunbury Shuffle but, when we are in, we have the lock to ourselves.



Once again we stop at Church Minshull for the night, and walk to The Badger Inn (and back, this time) for supper.

Climbing up the steps to get onto Cross Lane I realise, that being on a narrowboat is something like living in a different world. The underworld, so to speak. Ten, fifteen steps to go from a peaceful, slow moving heaven into a hell, where everybody is in a hurry, and only think of: Me, me, me.

Saturday 01-06-2013

I'm the skipper for today. I need to practice steering and handling the boat at locks because after tomorrow afternoon, me and Lawrance are on our own. So Lawrance does the locks.

Everything goes fine, Stanthorne Lock, Wardle Lock. And while Lawrance is still on shore, after doing Wardle Lock, I have to turn left towards Northwich. It is extremely windy, today, and as soon as I'm out of the Middlewich Branch the wind from the left catches the boat, and, instead of the boat turning left, the wind moves the entire boat to the right. Nothing I can do.

As soon as we are near a shore, Eddie takes the pole and tries to get the bow into the wind. With not a lot of success. Only after the stern gets blown away even further, I manage to steer the boat in the right direction. We will definitely have bow thrusters on our own boat! After that, the three Middlewich Locks are a piece of cake. And Middlewich Big Lock I hardly notice...

We stop for the night at Broken Cross. There is a pub (the Old Broken Cross), next to bridge 184. We moor on the tow path and head for the pub.



Sunday 02-06-2013

We have an early start, this morning, Eddie wants to be back at Acton Bridge around lunchtime. We pass Anderton Boat Lift again, and again no place to moor. Now Lawrance gets his first tunnels, Barnton Tunnel and Saltersford Tunnel. I will not mention the amount of points he collects here...



At Acton Bridge Eddie and Carol pack their stuff into the car, while Danny provides us with water, and does a pump out. He also tells us how to fit the tv aerial. The four of us go to The Leigh Arms for lunch.

Then Eddie and Carol say goodbye, and we are off towards Wigan. It's only the two of us now, so when I need the toilet (just after we leave Acton Bridge) I ask Lawrance: *Are you OK on your own, while I go to the toilet?* The answer is: *Yes, of course.* So that's me off to the toilet. As soon as I sit on the toilet I hear the engine being forced into reverse, immediately followed by a big BANG. Did I not hear, not so long ago, someone saying he would be OK on his own...?



About two miles after Acton Bridge we get to Dutton Stop Lock and the Preston Brook Tunnel. The water difference at Dutton Stop Lock is only about two inches, but the lock gates are absolute horrible. I need my whole body weight to move them. Luckily there is a guy who helps me.

This guy just took his boat to the dry dock, and is on his way back to his home marina. To save him climbing around the tunnel we give him a ride. Lawrance steers the boat, while I try to take pictures in the tunnel. Our passenger comments on the candle that, on our boat, acts as a tunnel light. He reckons it's a bit dim. So far it was not a problem for me, but Lawrance manages, even in this completely straight tunnel, to hit the walls as well as to damage the top of the boat. More points!



After 22 minutes we're back in daylight. And on the Bridgewater Canal. This means a canal that (in theory) is a lot wider than the Trent & Mersey Canal. But the sides are sometimes overgrown by (beautiful) rhododendrons, especially in Higher Walton. It is definitely spring now!



We moor at Stockton Heath. People from the house next to the towpath take a look at their neighbours for the night to be, and before I finish fastening the front rope, Lawrance and the man are talking diesel...! Having trucks of his own the man knows a lot of people in the industry. Even Lawrance's boss. How small is the world.

We decide to have a drink at The London Bridge Inn. We take a seat on one of the sofa's, and at 6 o'clock we both yawn. What a life! Unfortunately they don't do food at this time on a Sunday, so we try to find a fish-and-chips. And end up with a take-away pizza from Domino's Pizza. After that it's an early night.

Monday 03-06-2013

I'm the skipper again, today. I find out that it is a lot easier to sit and steer with something under my feet. We first think to use a six-pack of beer for that, but later decide for one of our folding crates.



The weather is absolutely gorgeous, and sun cream is certainly needed. At lunchtime we moor in Lymm (no, not at the truck stop!). We do our shopping at Sainsbury, and eat a delicious salad at The Golden Fleece. Al fresco, in the beer garden, where it is almost too warm.

Did the bridges on the Trent & Mercey have numbers, on the Bridgewater Canal they have names. And tonight we stop at Sale Bridge, which is (how amazing) in the Manchester suburb of Sale. Next to the bridge is a nice pub, The Kings Ransom.



As per usual we have a drink, and after that an excellent meal. When walking back to the boat I count my steps: 43 steps, and that's on the way back. How much closer can we moor to a pub?

Tuesday 04-06-2013

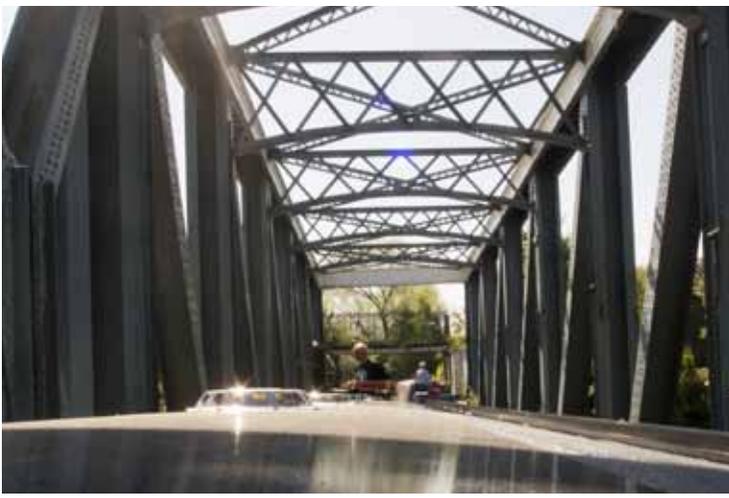
Today we're going on the 'ring road' around Manchester. Lawrance is skipper, I'm cabin crew and lockie. Not that there are any locks in this part of the Bridgewater Canal...



But there are motorways, in this case the M60. And then, after we turn left at Waters Meeting, something special: the Barton Swing Aqueduct. At first it looks like a gate, a very small gate, though. Certainly too small for two boats to pass (we think).



But once we're on the aqueduct we get oncoming traffic. The aqueduct turns out to be just wide enough for two boats. Only just. And I'm glad that Lawrance is today's skipper...!



It is definitely weird to be on a boat, on a canal (Bridgewater Canal), going over a canal (Manchester Ship Canal).

Still with Lawrance at the tiller we approach Worsley. A nice little village with a very tight 90° bend in the canal. I don't know what Lawrance is thinking when taking the bend (driving a truck, probably?) but he doesn't quite make it perfectly...



We stop at Bridgewater Marina, for lunch and to talk to boat builders and boat owners.



At Leigh (bridge 11) the name of the canal changes into the Leeds & Liverpool Canal. Bridges have numbers again. And after a couple of miles we are in for our next, new experience: Plank Lane Lift Bridge. According to our guidebook this bridge is operated by a bridge keeper, and we have to phone a number to get the times. When Lawrance phones he finds out that the bridge keeper is no longer there, that we have to operate the bridge ourselves, and that we can pass whenever we want, except for the rush hour (08:00–09:30 and 16:30–18:00).

At the bridge we first park up, to assess the situation. Lawrance walks to the other side of the road and speaks to one of the boaters. This man tells him that everything is explained on a computer screen, but that one definitely needs reading glasses. We're not sure how to handle this. I don't feel comfortable enough to handle the boat while waiting for Lawrance to open the bridge. But I also fear that there might be something on the screen I don't understand (English only being my third language). In the end Lawrance does the boat and I do the bridge.

With the BW key I go to the terminal and activate it.

Welcome to Plank Lane Lift Bridge, press the button on the left to switch the traffic lights onto red, it tells me. Suddenly all the traffic comes to a halt. The traffic lights must be red then.

*Press the button to lower the barriers, is the next instruction. I press the button, nothing happens. I press it again. The barriers move a touch. I think: Shit, the mechanism is broken down. But no, I need to keep the button pressed! Just in the bottom of the screen, in the smallest font there is, it says: *Keep button pressed*.*

After that it's a piece of cake. Press the button again, and the bridge opens. Lawrance gets the green light.

Once he is at the other side, everything repeats itself in the opposite order, by pressing the button on the right.



It's only a bit difficult to get on board again. With all the traffic starting again it takes some time before I am able to cross the road.

While looking in our guide we couldn't find a winding hole in Wigan, so we decide to use the one at bridge 4 near Dover. It's a 60'-er so we should not have a real problem. But there are people moored, and we get nasty looks from a guy we almost reverse into.

Then we moor at the other side of the bridge, and go to the Dover Lock Inn, for a drink and (again) an excellent meal. Life can't hardly get any better...



Wednesday 05-06-2013

Now we are on our way back to Acton Bridge. Once again we pass Plank Lane Lift Bridge. This time there is another boat in front of us. They do the bridge (also for the first time) but now the screen on the terminal must be hard to read because of the sun.

Our amount of milk in the fridge is running low, so when we see a sign for a farm shop we stop at Astley Green, and although I'm the skipper today, I also walk to the farm shop, while Lawrance prepares lunch. On my shopping list: milk, bread, newspaper and mushrooms. But since milk, bread and newspapers don't grow on a field I get back to the boat with only mushrooms. And when I think of it, they don't grow on a field either...



After lunch I have to negotiate the 90° bend in Worsley and the Barton Swing Aqueduct. No problem whatsoever for me...



At Broadheath we pass the old Linotype Works and after that we moor up for the night at The Kings Ransom in Sale. We have a chat with Dave Devonport, a Boat Safety Examiner, about our future boat, and then it's time for the usual: drink and supper. It's my turn again to pay for supper, but this time they don't accept my card. Strange, because two days ago I actually did pay with my card here...

Thursday 06-06-2013

Still running low on milk we stop at a village called Dunham Town, where there should be a shop, according to our guide. But once I'm on my way I don't see one, and when I ask I'm told it is about 20 minutes away. That's too far, I think. Our next stop then is Little Bollington, to get water and to get rid of our garbage. And then it's Lymm again. And again we do shopping at Sainsbury and have lunch at The Golden Fleece (l'histoire se répète?).



From Lymm it's only a short trip to Stockton Heath. We moor before London Bridge and have a drink AND supper at the London Bridge Inn. The food is so good that we will take Eddie and Carol to this restaurant next week (then all of us being landlubbers again) for supper.

Friday 07-06-2013

It's my turn to do the Preston Brook Tunnel (and the Saltersford Tunnel and the Barnton Tunnel) today, while Lawrance decides to stand on the bow with our torch. And making pictures. The torch really helps, I can see a lot better now in the tunnel. But then, to my surprise, I see the torch (and Lawrance) walking towards the stern. And I can still see a lot more than before. How strange. When he climbs up the stern deck Lawrance explains it: our tunnel light is bright enough, but only if it is shining up, towards the tunnel, and not down onto the bow deck.

But I still find it difficult, the first part of a tunnel. The outside wall painted a very bright white, the first metres inside the tunnel seem to be extra dark. Especially when the sun is shining the contrast is enormous. So I usually hit the wall, once inside. And a bright sun doesn't exactly improve the sight once you're in a tunnel. The light at the end of the tunnel is almost blinding...!

Lawrance is doing the Dutton Stop Lock this time, but I have to negotiate the sunken barge, right after the tunnel. Which I do with a big smile.



We pass Action Bridge, do the other two tunnels (that are a lot easier with our now proper focussed tunnel light) and stop at Anderton Boat Lift. Unfortunately too late to see the lift in operation, but perfectly on time to go to the Stanley Arms for an excellent supper. Again al fresco, of course.

Saturday 08-06-2013

We're on familiar terrain again, heading towards Middlewich.

Passing the same swan nest, but this time there are cygnets (why are they not called swanlings, I wonder?).



And the house on the picture didn't change either. Only the sun bathing heron wasn't there the last time. Due to the rain, I guess.



We stop at Uplands Marina to speak about our boat. I promise to alter my original plans and mail them to Jonathan. He will forward them to Billy at Nantwich Canal Centre where we will meet him next week on Tuesday.

Just before Middlewich Big Lock we use the winding hole to turn back towards Acton Bridge. The winding hole should be big enough (70') but Lawrance tries to avoid some fisherman, and thus making a complete fool of himself. We do get turned around, though...

Again we stop at Broken Cross. We get a bit of an argument here. I have to jump off, to moor the boat, but with all the flowers I can't see where the water stops and the bank starts. And I don't want to break my leg...



We have a meal in the Old Broken Cross, and I use their electricity and wifi to send the altered boat plans to Jonathan.

Sunday 09-06-2013

And this will be our final day of cruising. Passing a nice house, which is for sale, and a very important sign on a canal: to the pub.



We stop at Anderton Marina, but we don't class them as being friendly.

Next stop is Anderton Boat Lift. It's open, and a day trip boat is going down onto the river Weaver, while a narrowboat and a cruiser are going up into the Trent & Mersey Canal.



Then it's time to make our way to Acton Bridge. As soon as I set off the lady from the ice cream boat warns me that there is something going on at the next bend. I know the bend, but all I can see is a boat blocking the entire canal. So I progress slowly, steer to the left, and

Lawrance jumps off to assess the situation. No, it's not an accident, it's just four narrowboats trying to moor in a bend, in a space that's just long enough for three narrowboats. So the last boat is blocking the entire canal. After all of them move forwards a touch I'm able to pass them.

Then, in the next, tight bend to the left, I get oncoming traffic. A lady driver, so say no more... She doesn't steer to the right in the bend, and, although I'm going very slow, she manages to force me into the trees. In the corner of my eye I see that they end up diagonal in the canal. And I... I'm grounded. And before I realise it, I'm diagonal in the canal as well.

I know: when grounded, reverse. But I'm already in the trees. So Lawrance pretends we're in Venice. With no result. And so we don't have a clue what to do now. There is no other traffic, so we can't ask for help. What to do? Lawrance once again takes the pole and walks to the bow. And all the sudden I feel the boat moving. So I say: *Stay there!* Slowly but surely I manage to get the stern out of the trees and turn the bow into the direction of Acton Bridge. We look at each other and both think the same thing: bow thrusters.

We reach Acton Bridge without any more problems. Danny and his wife meet us to fuel up, so we can pay for our diesel. She is pregnant and she and Danny will be in hospital tomorrow for delivering her baby.

We speak to Andy, who has a mooring at Acton Bridge. He shows us his boat, and, more important, his cassette toilet. My plans originally had a macerator toilet, but remembering the ease with which Ian emptying his cassette toilet at Calverley, and speaking with the couple at Bridgewater Marina we decided to go for a cassette toilet as well.

Due to the fact that it is Sunday the Leigh Arms doesn't do meals, so we make ourselves a salad as our last meal on the boat. Notice the absence of a smile on the face of the person in the picture...



Monday 10-06-2013

After a shower and breakfast we putt all our stuff in the car. Then a very old Rolls Roys turns up. The former owners of the place, now standing in for Danny. Reluctantly we hand over the keys.

Landlubbers again...

Back to the rat race...