

SOME LOCKS ARE DOWN 2020

by
WRT

and

Magda M.W. Wensing



FROM THE EDITOR

In Holland going to Grammar School in the seventies usually meant visiting Rome. So did I in 1973. One of our duties was to write a travel journal. This was the start of the numerous travel journals I wrote over the years.

So when the word 'narrowboat' entered my vocabulary I immediately realised: this is going to be a journey as well (but not as we know it). I kept track of everything narrowboat-related after that. And when I finally moved to the UK I decided to keep a weblog. Primary for myself, but also for 'the folks back home'.

Reading a weblog on a day-to-day basis is one thing, but reading all posts about one subject in one go is very awkward. Reading it as a pdf or as an e-book is a lot easier.

This document contains all the posts of our adventures in 2020.

If this book is unreadable on your e-reader, please tell me, and I will try to correct it.

Enjoy reading.

REQUIEM FOR A JUMPER – 15 JANUARY 2020

Dear Jumper,

Just over thirty years ago, on the 27th of December 1989, you were born in Heddal, a small village in Norway. In a house about 100 yards away from the famous Stavkirke.



100 yards from Heddal Stavkirke

It was cold, even at daytime, but luckily it stopped snowing.



Minus 19°C at daytime

I had just decided to get divorced, and my whole world was about to change. But you would be my companion in all the good and bad times to come. You even accompanied me when I moved to the UK. And together we spent many hours at the tiller of WRT.

But sometime last winter you began to fall apart. You started to become (w)holy. And I knew I had to face a time without you.

Which seemed impossible. I still loved you. So there was only one thing I could do: clone you.

Before going to the UK I scanned your pattern, and the yarn was still available.



Lusekofte* pattern

So 30 years, between two jumpers (and the maker, of course).



Jumper in the make

And if the picture above is not enough proof of there being two jumpers, this will do.



Two lusekofte

Dear 1989 jumper, rest in peace...

PS Your replacement is still way too warm to wear inside the boat (as you were, when you were young), but it won't be long before I'll be on the tiller again, in wind and rain...*The lusekofte (Norwegian for lice jacket), also called the Setesdalsgenser (Setesdal sweater) is a traditional Norwegian sweater, dating from the 19th century. The original sweater features a black and white design, the name referring to the isolated white stitches.

ROCKED TO SLEEP AGAIN AND AGAIN – 16 FEBRUARY 2020

And polished brass again and again. And cleaned windows again and again. Something like that. An update of all that happened over the last month or so.

First of all I still owe you the results of the oliebollen bake contest.

No, they didn't really look like oliebollen. Yes, they were round, and had approximately the right colour. But when fried in oil they look like amoebes. My muffin pan oliebollen looked too smooth... And I didn't manage find any poedersuiker in Tesco or Aldi.



Muffin Pan Oliebollen

But they tasted absolutely heavenly. As soon as our guests arrived the oliebollen just disappeared...

We spent New Year's Eve playing cards.

A game called Shithead, but because shit is not a nice word we call it Poo.



Playing Poo

With Chris having her birthday on the 4th of January the girls decided to go out on a girly night to pre-celebrate that. In the end six of us went to nearby Nellie's. Walkable, but not on high heels, as I found out...



Girl's Night Out at Nellie's

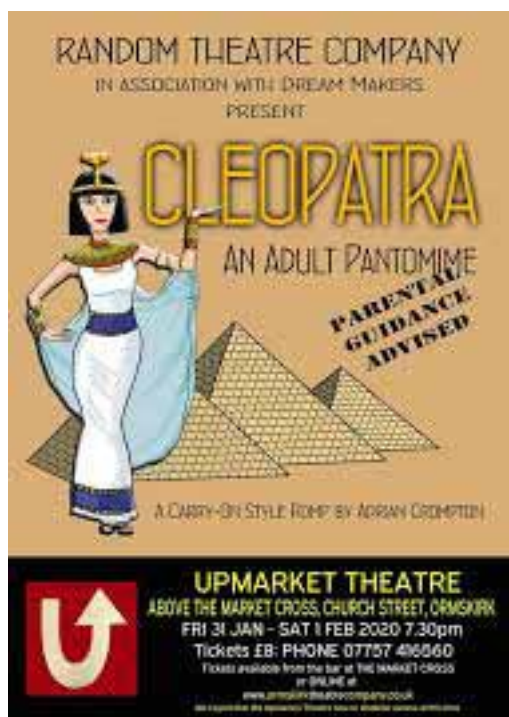
And except for saying cheerio to my Norwegian jumper (see Requiem for a jumper – 15 January 2020) I also had to say goodbye to something that has been with me for at least 45 years.

The General, as it was called by my parents. Because it did look like General de Gaulle to us.



The General

Living on a boat is hard work. But there also is time to relax.
For example by going to an adult panto. Something completely different from a normal panto, but it had us in tears (although I probably only got half the innuendoes...).



I've polished our Warp Drive. Or is it our WIFI? Our new Washing Line setup maybe?



Warp Drive? WIFI? Washing Line setup?

Warp Drive? We wish.

Wifi? We wish.

Washing line set-up? I wish not.

But unfortunately it is. Because I bought a new washing machine. A proper one.

The twin tub I got for my birthday, in 2018, worked OK, but turned out to be a washing machine for right

handed people. And squeezing the water out of garments was just too hard for my wrists. And when Ann told me how to operate a normal washing machine just of the inverter, I decided to get one.



I bought it at Currys/PCWorld and had it delivered and installed.

Well, that was the plan. They delivered the machine, but, although we told them it had to be installed on a boat, the refused to do that, mentioning Health and Safety as the reason. It was too dangerous to get the machine from the engine cover onto the floor, in such a small space...!

Rubbish, of course. They were late already, and this would take more than the 15 minutes they had to install the machine. In the end they f***d off, Lawrance and Mick lowered it to the floor, and Lawrance connected it to the inlet and outlet.

I actually ended up polishing all the brass on the boat.

Had to polish the handles on the side doors twice, because they got completely stained again in just one night. Luckily the mushroom bases stayed OK. I don't mind polishing these bases, but they are so horrible to screw back in place. They are just at a distance where I can't focus properly, so putting them back is a real struggle.

Our fire also was a struggle for a while.

Every morning I clean the fire door window, open the vent, put some cola on and let it catch.

One morning however, there were still no flames, even after 3 hours. But CO-levels were up to 46 ppm.

And the smell in the boat...!

Because Lawrance had swept the chimney just three weeks ago he reckoned it was not the flue. So it must be the coal from this just opened bag. To rule things out I order a bag of coal from the marina. That coal behaves a little bit better (just).

But in the end smoke comes out of the vents and the flue so I decide: it must be the flu.

Anyway, we let the fire go out, and switch the central heating on. Lawrance sweeps the chimney once again and lo and behold out come the culprits: two huge lumps of solidified tar.



One of two, blocking the flue

After that our fire is as easy going as ever...

Of course, being in the marina, it's still the same old, same old: yoga, gym, swimming, going out for supper, playing cards. And new recipes for supper. As former colleague Alan Wilson used to say: "There is a first time for everything" I serve Jerusalem Artichokes for the first time in my life.

Roots that have nothing to do with Jerusalem or with artichokes, but, depending on your country of origin it's either a wrong spelling of *girasole*, the Italian word for sunflower, because of its familial relationship to the garden sunflower.

Or, if you're from Holland, it's a wrong spelling of the word *Terneuzen*, a city in Holland where, around 1610, Petrus Hondius, a Dutch botanist, planted a shrivelled Jerusalem artichoke tuber in his garden and was surprised to see the plant proliferate. The first Jerusalem Artichokes to appear in England came from Terneuzen.

Whatever explanation you fancy, the tubers are delicious, and easy to prepare. Try them, if you see them in a shop.



Jerusalem Artichokes

Oh, and before I forget, I cleaned all the windows inside and outside. Because of the problems with the fire a whole layer of dirt had been deposited on the inside. And as soon as the sun would come out, the windows would turn solid grey... So I HAD to clean them. And did the outside as well. Just to find out that we must have had very dirty rain, because the next morning the portside windows of WRT are covered in dirt spots again.



High pressure

Did we have the highest air pressure I've ever seen since I'm on WRT on the 19th of January, (very dry), on the 9th of February storm Ciara hits us. Starts on Sunday, ended more or less on Friday.

For 6 days walking from bow to stern is difficult (hand rails come to mind), understanding each other is difficult (ear plugs for the constant roaring howling wind around mushrooms and topboxes?) but falling asleep?

Great! Every night I'm rocked to sleep, Knowing for sure that WRT will keep us safe afloat.



Dennis on his way

At the moment we're just at the end of storm Dennis. Strong, but short-lived.

Hopefully Dennis did not cause a lot of trouble on the railways, because tomorrow me and Ann are off to London.

Yes! Again! Why not?!

This time we travel by train, and are away for four days. To see Cirque du Soleil in the Royal Albert Hall, to visit museums and galleries, and to eat at more famous restaurants.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION FOR CRUISING – 13 MARCH 2020

And everything else that happened between my last post in February and now.

First of all me and Ann went to London to see Cirque du Soleil, visit various museums and eat at posh restaurants.

And see millions of kids...

Did the National History Museum. That was a waste of time; it took us 40 minutes to go through this entire kindergarten. And to take this picture of an Archaeopteryx fossil I had to push away about 50 kids.



Archaeopteryx

We skipped the Science Museum, because of the queue of about 100 yards that was at the entrance, and we basically expected the museum to be a huge kindergarten as well.

Did the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery. Both were OK, but the Portrait Gallery will close for about 2 years, to be turned into... a kindergarten (staff was asking parents with kids how they would like the museum to be).

Spent most time in the V&A. That was great. Loved it. Especially discovering this painting of Singraven Water Mill, because I used to live about 10 minutes south of it.



Singraven Water Mill

We also went on a boat trip to Greenwich. That was like being on the North Sea: huge waves, and a very high tide. We were probably the last ones to get a boat back to Westminster Pier.



Choppy ride

In Greenwich we decided to have a quick glance at the Maritime Museum, with the idea to come back another time. Did the whole of this kindergarten in about half an hour...!
And no, we won't come back.



Cirque du Soleil

Cirque du Soleil was disappointing. Everybody complained about there not being a kind of story line. And all 'stunts' went on way too long, as to stretch them to fill the 2 hour show. What I once saw on TV, and what Ann saw in Glasgow, was much better.

Back from London preparations for cruising really started. All cabin lace had to be washed, starched and ironed (no, not ALL, I managed to forget the ones inside one cupboard).



Cabin Lace

I went to an opera, for the first time in my life. Madame Butterfly, with a pre-theatre dinner for the four of us, and me and Ann staying for the opera.



My First Opera

It was also time to get our wall carpets cleaned. To get that done we actually cruised! About 100 yards, which might turn out to be a significant cruising distance, this year!



Carpet Cleaning

Cruise planning at that time was still rudimentary. I planned to leave on the 7th of April, after Lawrance's army reunion (and me and WRT's obligatory Girls Weekend Out). Cruise to Anderton Boat Lift, meet up with Anne from nb Pratty Flower to cruise the river Weaver together.

That was it. I just didn't feel like planning.

So I should have know. Usually, when I feel I can't plan, something major happens, which would have ruined my plans anyway, had I made them. But who could imagine something that big.

At first Lawrance assumed we would still go out cruising. But I couldn't really estimate the risks if we would go out.

Lawrance is one of the vulnerable people: over 70, male, overweight and high blood pressure. He just would have to stay in self-isolation. That would mean I would have to do all the shopping, cassette, water etc. But that's the same, either being in the marina or while cruising.

I supposed he could be on the tiller, without a risk to catch the virus from a stranger. It would prevent him getting roaring mad because of sitting in the boat and having nothing to do. Which would make my life a lot more pleasant...

So everything pointed to: go cruising.

But I had three 'buts'. One is: will the government look at a boat=home in the same way as us? Are we staying at home in self-isolation while cruising?

And a more important 'but': what to do when one of us gets very ill somewhere in the middle of nowhere. No phone signal, no road access to the canal, not registered with the local GP? Should we stay in the marina a bit longer?

And what to do with shopping? One day we went to Tesco, and, besides no toilet paper, there also was no flour (how many people do you know that are able to make their own bread?), no long life milk (the only milk that we can store on the boat, having a small fridge). How far would I have to walk to find shops that might have what I need? When in the marina at least I have a car...

We decided to see how things would develop, and I started the first of long overdue cleaning jobs. It surprised

Lawrance that much that he immediately took a picture of it. I did something he had never seen me doing: scouring a pan...!



Magda scouring a pan...?

Then the decision was taken out of my hands: a total lock down.

The pre-theatre meal at Bliss Kitchen will be the last meal out for a while. Our (mini-)cruise across the marina will be our last cruising for a while. Lawrance plays golf on his telephone now, the marina quiz night turned into a weekly event, all sitting on our own boat, in front of the computer.

The only thing that changes every day is not the scenery around us, but the sky.



Ever changing gorgeous skies

And even that stops. After a couple of days the sky is blue, day in, day out.

Absolute perfect days for cruising...

PERFECT DAY FOR CRUISING – 27 APRIL 2020

Today, and yesterday, and the day before. And last week, and the week before that. No gale force winds, no torrential rain, plenty of sunshine. A perfect day to spend locked down, in the marina.

Just before the sun comes up, I get up. It's awful quiet, not only because it's around 5am but also because there is nothing on the road. The only thing I hear is birds.

I spend breakfast doing an online course, one that doesn't ask a lot of attention, like *The History of the Book in the Early Modern Period: 1450 to 1800*. After that I spend an hour doing a course that needs all my attention, because it is a difficult course, like *Farm to Fork: Sustainable Food Production in a Changing Environment*, or involves meditation, like *Mindfulness for Wellbeing and Peak Performance*.

Then, after a break for a cigarette it's time to jump in the car to get newspapers for Lawrence, and Ann and Mick. The fire has to be done, and kefir made.

Around 9am I do my first household chore, a 'normal' one. And after that I do a task that is long overdue.

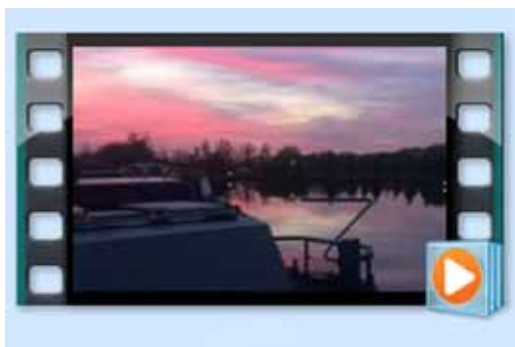
Lunch around noon, followed by walking part of the marina to pick up litter. A great chance to speak to a lot of people. And my first daily exercise.

Somewhat later I borrow Mick's bike to spend around 45 minutes cycling more or less around the marina. I try to do about 6 miles, which is hard. The bike has an absolute torture saddle and the marina has too many speed bumps and pot holes.

At 4pm it's time to download and read my Dutch newspaper, and when it's my turn to do the cooking, that task has to start at 5pm.

The evening is for knitting (I'm on my first corona-jumper still), and reading all extra information I downloaded from the online courses.

Evenings are always very quiet, and usually have beautiful skies, as you can see on this video, made by Karen.



Tranquil Evening Mood

By the way, did you hear someone playing melodeon in the distance (you have to turn the volume right up, to hear me above the very loud birds...)?

Yes? Then it is Thursday, when *The Rusty Boater's Band* performs on the patio of the Tearoom.

Or if it's Saturday, because then it's Quiz Night in the marina, on Zoom, of course.



Weekly Quiz Night on Zoom

Oh, of course being a member of one of the best bands in the marina (not to say the only band in the marina) also means practising melodeon and concertina, sometime during the day.

And I just have to watch our resident swan. He just keeps doing it, hour after hour after hour. See this wonderful video made by Kurt (also a member of The Rusty Boater's Band).



Life is hard for some

Around 9pm it's time to do the fire again, and chill out, reading one of the old books I have on my e-reader.

And at 10pm I'm in bed.

A day well spent...

WE'RE OUT! – 24 JULY 2020

And we've already done 14 locks...

The experienced boater will do a quick calculation: 14 locks, that means they must be on the Middlewich Branch.

Well, no. We're still in the marina. The first *We* that is NOT me and Lawrance, but it's actually WRT. *We're out* just means: we're out of the water, or, even better, WRT is out of the marina.



Did we take a wrong turn?

We only moved to a different place in the marina, to get blacked.



We're out!

We needed to be blacked this year anyway, so we might as well do it now. Blacking, touching up the paint, and after that we're ready to start cruising.

Being out of the water also means new tasks: emptying waste water tanks, first thing in the morning.



Waste water tanks to empty...

With new curtains, and matching cushions, new curtain rails, new radiators, new cupboards, and blacked.



Old and new curtains, and new curtain rails



Matching cushions



New cupboards and radiators

And what about the 14 locks, I hear you think? Well, Kurt, one of our neighbours in the marina, had to go to Tarleton to get his boat overplated. Since he is on his own, me and Ann helped him through locks and swing bridges. Seven locks up to Tarleton, seven locks back to the marina.

Anyway, although the weather one days is almost too hot to do any painting, and we get drizzly rain some of the other days, we manage to get blacked, and even do one tunnel band. In fact, everything goes so fast, I don't even get a change to take a picture of the pristine black bottom of WRT before we get back into the water.

At 9 am Daniel starts putting the trailer back under WRT.



Almost back on the trailer

And 25 minutes later we're touching water again.



Almost back in the water

Back in the water, and, very important, back to our usual tilt.

When WRT was on the railway sleepers, the bow was is lower than the stern. And with the heavy rain on our second day out, water accumulated at the front of the cabin, where there is NO run off. So after a couple of hours I discovered about an inch of water inside our fire. Only remedy: make a hole in the sealant of the cratch cover, in case we would get more heavy rain.

And when I tried to open my side of the wardrobe, I found out I couldn't. The floor in front of the wardrobe slightly bulged out, just enough to prevent the door from opening. So now, back at our usual place, I can finally get a change of clothes...

And now, with most of the tasks done, it's time to start thinking of cruising.

SEASON'S GREETINGS (PART 1) – 21 DECEMBER 2020

I know, I just noticed the date of my last post... So this one will cover SIX MONTHS! Well, I suppose I could divide it in two: our time cruising, and our time not cruising. Therefore **Season's Greetings part 1** (cruising) and **Season's Greetings part 2** (not cruising).

Yes, we actually do cruise. We leave on the 1st of August, heading in the direction of Liverpool. But the Leeds&Liverpool is not as we know it. It is reduced to the width of one narrowboat. This picture, taken the next morning, gives you an idea. I had to turn around at this winding hole. Could not figure out where exactly the winding hole was, turned in too late and got stuck in the greenery. Try to turn a narrowboat when stuck in thick weeds...



Narrow Broad Canal

Turned around we're starting heading south. For corona safety reasons we plan to moor only in the middle of nowhere. Like here, just before Dean Lock.



Just before Dean Lock

In the middle of nowhere, I said. Well, although it's only friend Chris of nb Basingstoke that's on the towpath in this picture, on average it is a lot busier. I reckon on average there is one person per minute walking past the boat, every minute from about 7 am till 8 pm. And that's with the nearest town about 5 miles away...

It is actually less busy when we stop in Lymm. We planned to, but we also have to. A truck driver didn't obey the signs about a hump bridge, and 'parked' his low loader, with a huge crane on it, right on the bridge. So bridge closed, and canal closed.



Going Nowhere

By that time Chris and Ray arrive in Lymm as well, and the six of us go for a meal to The Church Green, a very good restaurant, with Aiden Byrne as chef.

After a while of cruising 2 hours a day, or 1 hour and 45 minutes or even less, we decide we need to set ourself a proper goal. Since me and Lawrance never did the Macclesfield Canal, that is where we in the end are heading for. And I'm glad we did, I really like the Macc!

Not that we keep on moving..

We just have to spend a couple of nights at the bottom of the Bosley Locks. Because friend Ian is there. So lots of wine get consumed and lots of cards played.



Bosley Locks part 1

Even the Peak Forrest canal (also new to us) gets a short visit. We spend a few nights in Bugsworth Basin, and have two brilliant meals at Casa di Pizza in Whaley Bridge.



Bugsworth Basin

On the way down to the Trent&Mersey we again stop just after Bosley lock 12. And always being up very early in the morning, I witness one of the most impressive sunrises I've ever seen.



Bosley Locks part 2

Back on the Trent&Mersey Ann and Mick are heading south towards Great Haywood, and we're heading north towards the river Weaver.

We use our new washing machine (and part of the towpath) for doing the laundry. We've moored here before, but under very different circumstances, as this picture from the 4th of April 2018 shows...!



Washing Day



Same place – Different Weather

On the river Weaver our first stop is at the new pontoons in Northwich. Not that there is space to moor, but we just breast up against another boat. Which happened to Swansong (and of course we knew that...).



Familiar Sight

As Ian mentions on his weblog:

“If stories begin to circulate of drunken Northwich boat parties and revellers returning home in the wee small hours then we might guess at where they could have started and how exaggerated they have already become.”

By then Covid-19 starts to worry me a little bit. Cases are going up rapidly, and I have visions of a complete lockdown, and us caught on the river Weaver because Anderton Boat Lift would be closed. And/or stuck just outside Wigan, because all the locks in Wigan are closed (and padlocked).

So I book the lift for as soon as possible. And on the most windy day of our time out cruising I have to try to get 18 ton of steel off the wall at the lift and into the caisson while the hurricane force wind pins me against that wall.



Heading Home

And it is obvious: the rainy season has started. About every other day we have to stay where we are, due to heavy rain.



Start of the Rainy Season

Luckily it is dry when we go through Wigan, together with Bernie and William of Spindrifft and neighbours in the marina.



Neighbours

The following day is again a ‘sit-the-rain-out’ day. It just rains, and rains, and rains. Just look at the tree behind Spindrifft and the same tree some 40 odd hours later.



Rain, rain, rain, repeat, repeat, repeat,...

The next day is fine, but the Leeds&Liverpool canal looks a lot wider. And there are lakes on both sides, that were not there before.



Autumn has started?

Other than that, it's not a bad day, and after 64 days out (of which 44 days actually cruising) we're back in the marina.

Out for 64 days, cruised on 44 days.

Did 260 miles, and this year I did more locks than Lawrance, but Lawrance did more bridges than I did. I spent 15 minutes more on the tiller than Lawrance, while he covered 0.2 more miles...

Definitely a weird year...

SEASON'S GREETINGS (PART 2) – 22 DECEMBER 2020

So what do we do the rest of the year?

Well, we do go into the lockdown I expected. From the 5th of November till the 2nd of December. So I have to celebrate my 65th birthday completely different from what I was hoping to do.



Signs of a Birthday Party

My plans were to go to Cornwall for a weekend, and have a meal at Nathan Outlaw's seafood restaurant. But instead it is a (delicious) luxurious take-away lunch from The Tearoom at Scarisbrick Marina, at the picnic table nearest our jetty.



Birthday Party (not Christmas Meal...)

Note the only tablecloth we have (among two couples): my mum's old Christmas one...



Birthday Party in full swing

And although it is cold, and it looks like it's going to rain, as soon as we start the party the sun comes out.

Other than that it is a matter of making use of all the time in the best way.

Mark, a guy that lives and works in the marina, asked me to cross stitch a waterways map, for his new boat. That's what I do, and because I like the pattern, I do one for me as well.



Waterways Map x 2

In fact, I get hooked to cross stitching again (thanks, Marc) and decide to do a Christmas pattern I've done before but which I gave away to the Cross Stitch Museum in Holland. It's one of the things I kind of miss, but I still have the original pattern.



Sintirklass

The pattern costs \$10 on the internet, at the moment. I paid \$3.50. I could have been rich (if I had bought 1 million of them..).

Whatever lockdown or Tier we're in, me and Ann can still go for a walk. Which we do 2 or 3 times a week. To the farm shop, or from Tesco back to the marina, or explore some of the public footpaths around here (impossible at the moment because of all the rain we had).

And I start litter picking in and around the marina again. Usually I find snack wrappings, the odd face mask and tissues. Last Sunday, though, I found something completely different: half an Audi.



Half an Audi

Head lights, part of the grill, the number plate. He must have done light speed, considering the damage to armco barrier, the rubbish on the bridge and the damage he did to a stone wall on the other side of the road. He did wake up half the marina, including me, at 3:57am.

And I go back to my MOOC's. "MOOC?", you say? Well, a MOOC is a Massive Open Online course. There are thousands on the web. At the moment I'm on my 55th course.

What kind of courses? From archeology, via happiness and wellbeing, mediaeval manuscripts, science of cooking, to weather forecasting, and 3 courses about Star Trek.

Some of the courses are interesting but easy. Other ones are a lot more difficult, and I find myself with pen and paper to write down complex chemical formulas at 5:30am!

And of course we do have the most gorgeous skies again...



What a sky (again)

Besides all this, it's now also the time to plan for Christmas. Lights and decorations have been out for a while, and Christmas meals have been planned. Ann would do two meals and I would do two meals.

On the 19th of December we had to change that to one meal, half done by Ann and half by me.

I wouldn't surprise me if, on Christmas Day, some people will go from one boat to the other, to deliver full plates. Due to the fact that all getting together will be banned...

We just have to wait and see.

Whatever happens, it will be Christmas in about five days. So I'll finish this (probably) last blog of the year with our digital Christmas card.

See you all in 2021!



MERRY CHRISTMAS

AND

A HAPPY NEW YEAR

**LAWRANCE
MAGDA
WRT**

FROM OUR CHRISTMAS BAUBLE TO YOURS

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