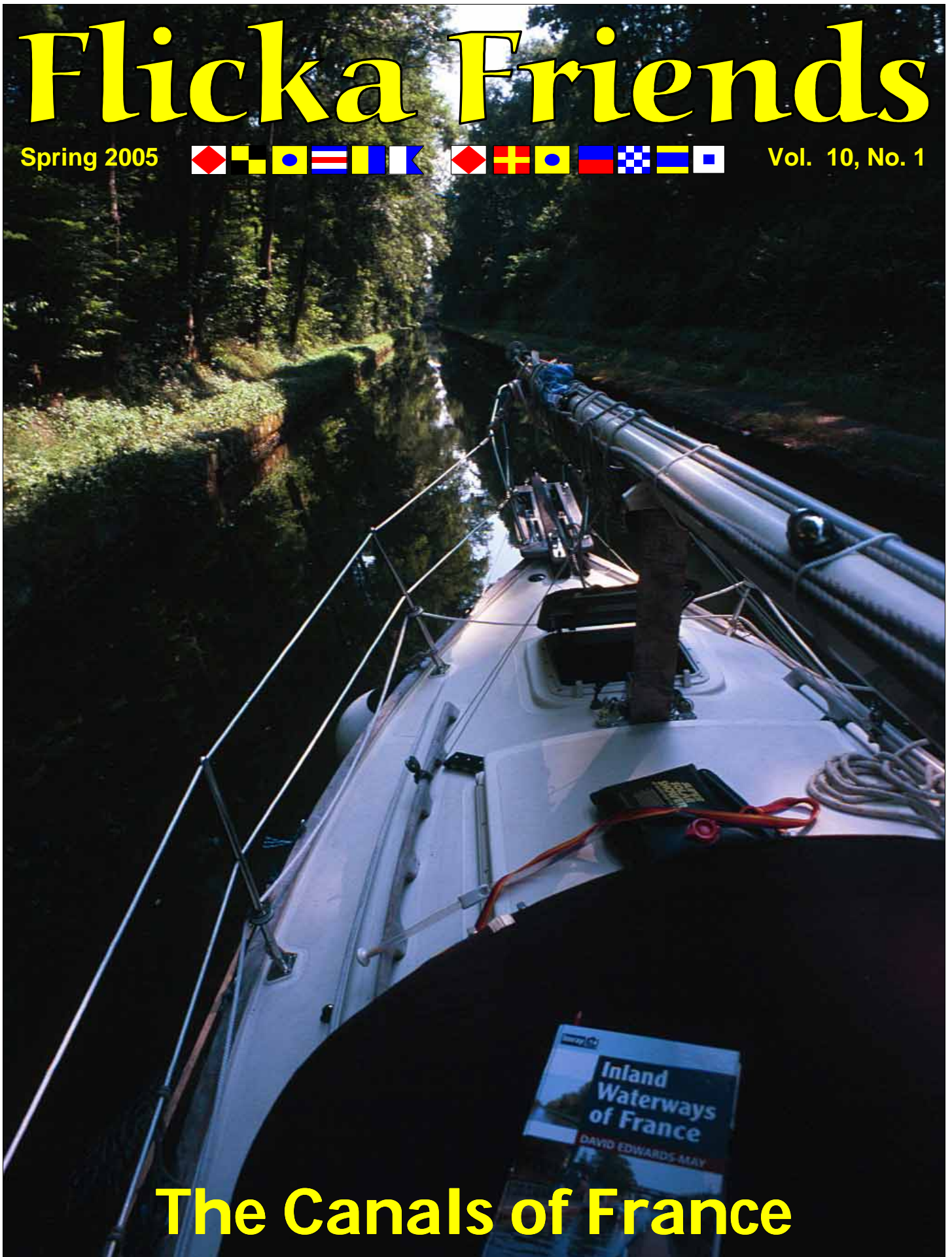


# Flicka Friends

Spring 2005



Vol. 10, No. 1



## The Canals of France



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## From the Editor



**BEN MAIN, JR. is nearly ready for another summer on Lake Michigan.**

*Photo: Tom Davison © 2005*

## Next Issue...

- Tenth Anniversary Issue of Flicka Friends
- HRAI ROO—The second installment of Debbie & Jim Custer's trip.

## Cover Photos

### Front Cover

Traveling the Canals of France aboard s/y CARAWAY.

*Photo by Angus Beare*

### Back Cover

Eric Jungemann aboard HOTSPUR on the way to the Flicka Rendezvous.

*Photo: Bert Felton*

If you have a high quality photo of your Flicka and would like to see it on the cover, please let me know.

[flickafriends@coslink.net](mailto:flickafriends@coslink.net)

*By Tom Davison*

This issue of Flicka Friends contains the first installment of articles about traveling aboard two different Flickas. One is written by Debbie Custer about sailing in the Pacific. The other is from Angus Beare about traveling across the English Channel and into the canals of France.

Deb and Jim Custer sailed their Flicka from the Pacific Northwest of the United States, down the west coast from Seattle, Washington to Oregon and California. Next, they explored the west coast of Mexico, visiting Baja California, the Sea of Cortez and the Mexican mainland. Their next destination was the most ambitious...the Marquesas Islands. They traveled north through to the Hawaiian Islands and then shipped their Flicka HRAI ROO back to the U.S. on the deck of a ship.

Angus Beare has been published in Flicka Friends before. His current story

is about wandering south through France to the Mediterranean is another trip that many Flicka owners might wish to do. This story will continue as he travels the canals and reaches the Med. And continues to Corsica.

Both articles and photos are a welcome addition to this newsletter. While this will likely be the longest series yet published, I'd like to encourage other Flicka owners to consider sending stories about their trips. While maybe not as grand as a trip into the South Pacific or a trip across France, a short story about your favorite cruising area might inspire another Flicka owner to pay you a visit. A step by step project would also help others in maintaining their fine little yacht.

My thanks to Debbie & Jim and Angus for sending their articles. I'm looking forward to following their travels aboard s/v HRAI ROO and CARAWAY. Thanks to Bert Felton for his article about the S.F. Rendezvous.



## Ten Years of Flicka Friends



**BEN MAIN, Jr. approaching the dock at Suttons Bay, MI**

*Photo: Tom Davison © 2005*

*By Tom Davison*

The next issue of Flicka Friends will mark the tenth year of publication. Hopefully, this newsletter has continued to meet the goals of Dennis Pratt.

The first issue of Flicka Friends was a four page photocopy newsletter. In the beginning, there were attempts to publish color issues, however the printing costs were just too much. Maybe the best improvement for the newsletter was the change from photocopied issues to the Adobe Acrobat PDF format. This allowed publishing a full color issue that anyone with internet access could obtain. This eliminates the need to charge for the newsletter and all of the printing, collating, folding, labeling

and stamping the issues. It also provided the newer Flicka owners with the ability to get a complete set of the newsletter, something that wasn't possible before.

Publication of this newsletter has been difficult at times due the limited availability of articles and images. An example would be 2004. While there were nearly forty pages of Flicka Friends published, only two issues were created.

If you have a story to relay, a repair to share, or just a good photograph of your Flicka, please let me know. With the help of the many Flicka owners, we should look forward to another ten years of Flicka Friends.

## About Flicka Friends

**Flicka Friends** is a newsletter written for the people who own, crew aboard or are interested in the Flicka, a 20 foot sailing vessel designed by Bruce P. Bingham.

Based on the Newport boats of Block Island Sound, this little ship has been built from various materials from the since the 1970's. This includes Flickas constructed from plans obtained directly from Bruce's California office. About 400 sets of plans were sold. According to Bruce Bingham, many Flickas can be found in New Zealand Australia and Sweden.

A number of hulls were built by Nor'star and some were completed by Westerly Marine. The manufacturer of the bulk of the class is Pacific Seacraft Corporation who built 434 hulls in California.

**Flicka Friends** is published on a quarterly basis, with issues being mailed in March, June, September and December. Articles, letters, comments and photos relating to the Flicka are welcomed and encouraged.

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# Flicka Rendezvous:

*By Bert Felton*

**Angel Island Flicka Rendezvous  
April 29-May 1, 2005**

Eric Jungemann on Hotspur and Karl and I on Dream Catcher motored over to Angel Island on San Francisco Bay Friday morning to make sure we had adequate moorings for Flickas arriving on Saturday. When we arrived, Dulcinea, with new owners Randy and Jill Ramirez, was already moored. We enjoyed visiting and drinking wine. Unfortunately, Randy and Jill had to leave early Saturday morning. So they missed the arrivals of Escape, with Steve and Lorrie on Saturday morning and Alessandra with new owner Cathy and friend Mike on Saturday afternoon.

After having lunch ashore on Saturday, four of us walked around Angel Island which has views of the entire north bay, including the Golden Gate Bridge. We all met on Alessandra to visit after dinner. We shared wine, stories, and of all things, politics. Perhaps the latter wasn't the best idea, but it proved Flicka owners run the gamut from conservative to liberal, and can joke and laugh together the next morning. We had a total of 5 Flickas attend, which is our record so far. This was our third annual. In addition we had a BCC and Vancouver 25 visit. Rain kept going in and out the forecast for the weekend, but we had glorious weather.

If you have not participated in a rendezvous, I strongly suggest you do. It is magnificent to see Flickas moored next to each other, each the same vessel, but with its own individuality, the sun light shimmering off the water in the foreground. We are all looking forward to the next rendezvous. If you are in the San Francisco Bay Area and would like to join our group, please e-mail me.

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<http://homepage.mac.com/ericjungemann/PhotoAlbum8.html>



**ESCAPE, DREAM CATCHER and HOTSPUR moored at Angel Island.**

*Photo: Karl Kreplin © 2005*



**Alessandra with Mike and Kathy and full canvas.  
They had room for everyone!**

*Photo: Bert Felton © 2005*



# Angel Island – 2005



Karl, Bert, Eric, Steve, and Laurie at the Flicka Rendezvous.  
*Photo: Karl Kreplin © 2005*



HOTSPUR on the way to the Flicka Rendezvous. Will the mast fit under the Bay Bridge?  
*Photo: Karl Kreplin © 2005*



DULCINEA on a mooring at Angel Island.  
*Photo: Bert Felton © 2005*



# Photo Gallery:



**DULCINEA, DREAM CATCHER and HOTSPUR.**  
*Photo: Karl Kreplin © 2005*



**ESCAPE, DREAM CATCHER and HOTSPUR.**  
*Photo: Karl Kreplin © 2005*



**Mike and Kathy prepare to meet the crews from the other Flickas.**  
*Photo: Karl Kreplin © 2005*



**ESCAPE on an Angel Island mooring.**  
*Photo: Karl Kreplin © 2005*



**Intrepid hikers had another view of the harbor.**  
*Photo: Karl Kreplin © 2005*



# Angel Island – 2005



Steve and Laurie aboard ALESSANDRA.  
*Photo: Karl Kreplin © 2005*



Hotspur on a mooring at Angel Island.  
*Photo: Bert Felton © 2005*



Steve, Bert and Laurie  
 on Sunday morning.  
*Photo: Karl Kreplin © 2005*



# In the beginning, there was

*By Debbie Custer*

## A rose by any other name.

**Hrai Roo.** Boat names are no mere moniker but a belief in a living entity made of wood, fiberglass and stainless steel. A language created in the mind of a children's novelist, hrai meant one of thousands to the rabbits who spoke this language. Of course being rabbits it simply meant a number beyond their ability to imagine. Roo meant littlest of anything. So the smallest rabbit in Watership Down was of course named **Hrai Roo.**

Having no local translators of rabbit diction, we choose to pronounce it 'rah roo'. Whether we are correct is irrelevant. What matters is how fitting the name became. She truly was 'the littlest of thousands' as she crossed the Pacific Ocean in 2003.

A year has passed since we left **Hrai Roo** on the hard at Gentry's Marina on the Big Island of Hawaii. Hardly a day goes by that I don't think about her. Superlatives come to mind. amazing, magnificent, indefatigable, but no one word is summative of every memory, every emotion associated with her. We hope to bring her home soon. Certainly not in the manner that I had once dreamed about. She'll be freighting her way to windward even though she's more than capable of the hard slog from Hawaii to the Pacific Northwest. Nevertheless, it will bring closure to the voyage that has been lacking since leaving her behind. I've started a longer story about her, that perhaps will become a book one day, but for now I'll share a bit with folks who need no explanation of a Flicka and their magnificence at sea.

## Birth of a Boat.

**Hrai Roo** was birthed by many dreams, but it was the hard work of a young



**Spring Break Haulout. Still 'au naturel' with no stanchions or pulpits.**

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



**Steve and Dawn Puryear from Flicka 'Wishing Star' lend a hand when Jim gets sent to San Francisco the week we pulled out the boat.**

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*





# HRAI ROO and she was good



**Our Final List. Without it we would never had accomplished it all in under six months.**  
*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



**Steve and Dawn join us one more time in Port Angeles to ready 'The Roo'.**  
*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*

couple that formed her into a strong ship. From the coffee stained sketches of Bruce Bingham to the hopes of a new enterprise, Nor'Star, a thick, hand layed white hull emerged in Santa Barbara, California.

Paul and Donna had searched for a boat that could take them across the ocean to Australia. They had no money then. It was 1976. But they were young, strong, bright and resourceful. From odd jobs around the marina they collected whatever anyone didn't want that would create a stout, strong home to house their dream.

Scraps of African mahogany, teak, the root of a rosewood tree, a length of rudder shaft were added to pieces of 1" marine plywood until she had both cabin and cockpit. Fourteen foot sweeps propelled her out the harbor. She was stout, a bit overbuilt, cabin painted a creamy yellow and covered with massive quantities of ground walnut shells.

The horizon of the Australian dream faded from view over the next four years. Trailered instead to the Arizona desert, for several years she explored the narrow canyons that rimmed Lake Powell. In the mid-1980's, taken north to the Idaho mountains, **Hrai Roo** slumbered under a tarped shed. Paul had suffered an injury to his shoulder in a lumber mill accident. After fourteen years of seeing her so far from her birthright, Paul and Donna made an agonizing decision to put her up for sell.

A small ad was placed in 48 North- the local monthly sailing magazine. I spotted it while we were driving home from yet another cold spring day in Seattle looking for the elusive sailboat that would meet our dual criteria of being strong enough to endure our incompetence and having character enough that we'd want to turn our heads and look at



# In the beginning, there was

her just one more time as we would row away from her at anchor. And it had to be under \$20,000. Actually quite a bit under. There was no photo but captivating phrases like 'modestly equipped' and "14' sweeps" and '\$13,500' peaked my interest. Besides what's a Flicka doing in Sand Point, Idaho?

"What are sweeps?," I mused out loud.

"Huhn??". Jim is instinctively leery of my out-of-context musings. I read the ad aloud.

"How do you think a Flicka ended up in Idaho?"

"Beats me."

"I'll call and ask him."

"Uh, who?"

'Paul, apparently.' I dialed the roaming fee rich number and spoke to Paul.

"They're long oars."

"What are?"

"Sweeps are. They'll show them to us this weekend."

"We're going to Idaho to look at a boat?"

"No, we're going to look at a Flicka."

"Huhn??"

In the Northwest, a seven-hour drive is just a weekend day trip. One way. May is a transition month between a lot of rain and a bit of rain. This particular Saturday it was a whole lot of rain. Mind you the only concept we had of a Flicka came from Ferenc Mate's book on the world's best sailboats and a few production ones we had seen on the hard that had no wood below.



**Old style sea harness + climbing harness = Deb's mast gear.**  
*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



**This harness system allowed us to drill at odd angles. Second tether was looped thru mast steps as backup to halyard breaking.**  
*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



# HRAI ROO and she was good



Using a true mask was worth the money for all of the fiberglass and epoxy work, especially below.

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



A second port was added for ventilation and lighting to the quarterberth area.

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*

Paul greeted us. A big-spirited and bodied man in bib overalls and a long beard and a ponytail. **Hrai Roo** was hidden by low hanging dark clouds and a huge tarp. As Jim and Paul walked and talked the exterior of her, I climbed aboard with a flashlight. Entombed in this plastic shroud, I felt like I was exploring some long lost archeological site. Atop the companionway steps, my flashlight revealed a lovingly built exterior of varnished exotic woods and marine plywood painted white.

We left in our trusted old Ford 250 pickup, 'Bob'. Our usual process is to wait a half hour before we discuss our impressions of an idea or an item. I finally blurted out the brilliance of this diamond in the rough. Jim looked at me like I had once again lost my mind. Lemons and lemonade.

Walnut encrusted paint peeling off everywhere. Less scraping to take it off. It looks like its homebuilt. Its one of a kind. Maybe it only looks like a Flicka. Maybe it's the first one.

Two weeks later we were back in Idaho. A price had been agreed to mostly because Paul and Donna believed we were the right folks to have her next. With our first sailboat towing along behind 'Bob', we stopped for gas.

While Jim paid inside, an older Santaesque gentleman spoke to me with a strong Norwegian accent. Just like the boats of my youth. Where did you find her? These are the best in the world. A North Sea fisherman would always come home if he had a boat like this, no matter how bad the storm. I can still remember the sound of their diesels before the sun came up.

HELGA! Come here! You must see this boat. What is she called? A Flicka? That is Swedish for lively little girl. Oh she'll be lively for you but very safe! A good omen I'd say. All this because the



# In the beginning, there was

previous January we'd stopped at a sailing school booth at the Seattle Boat Show and decided that a weekend sailing course would make a good anniversary present to one another.

For the next year we scraped her down to her fiberglass, repainted and put on a gentler non-skid surface. Bingham's project book inspired and instructed us. We'd talk each other to sleep about her most nights.

'Do you really think a 20' boat needs a 6' long galley?'

'Why?'

'Just thinking.'

These words always create fear in Jim. He refused to be there when I had our oldest daughter, home from college, help me use a Saws -All to cut through the bulkheads on the port side for the new quarter berth.

In the meantime, our 'other' boat took us on one last and very expensive voyage from Seattle to Ketchikan, Alaska. We may be the only known couple in the Northwest to switch from power to sail.

The second summer we finally had her ready to launch. Memories of the weekend sailing course were even more vague. 'Sailing for Dummies' filled in the big gaps as we tacked and tacked and tacked and pirouetted when tacking failed, northward to the San Juan Islands.

With aging, duct-taped mainsail and staysail, we learned how to make her move in the lightest of winds. By the third summer we'd found other Flicka owners and would join in on weekend rendezvous where others wondered how we got her to move so fast with such sad, undersized sails. I recommend everyone learn to sail this way.



**Another unexpected project. Fiberglass was missing over port bow area. Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005**



**More drilling and acetone before refiberglassing area. Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005**



# HRAI ROO and she was good



**We modified bridge deck from solid to hinged for easier access to Whale Gusher and spare gas tank.**  
*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



**Just before we add the teak boom gallows. One of the best additions for offshore.**  
*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*

## Birth of a New Dream.

'There is nothing like a dream to create the future.' -Victor Hugo

That following winter, using symphony tickets given to us at the last minute, we met an elderly, distinguished looking couple over tea in the lobby. They told us their tale of having walked away from a Fortune 500 lifestyle of the rich and famous at age 48. They found a sailboat in the Mediterranean and spent twelve years exploring that crossroads of East and West. On the way home Jim mused that it must be nice to have made that kind of money to do something like that. I wondered aloud if the more you have, the harder it is to walk away from it all. What would stop us from doing the same thing, I asked innocently. Such a slippery slope to ponder.

We can't explain at what point our sentence structure changed from 'if' to 'when'. I can tell you that others took notice when we sold our home and moved into a 700 sq. ft. apartment and filled it with charts, life vests, booms, and assorted accouterments of the cruising lifestyle. We do remember it was that Christmas party season that folks started introducing us in this manner.

'Sally, Frank have you met Jim and Deb yet? They're the folks I was telling you about that are retiring early and sailing around the world in a little boat.' Initially Sally and Frank would be simply fascinated. 'Oh I've heard of people doing that but I never thought I'd meet people like you!' 'Well actually we aren't retired, we are going to just stop working and have no income and we really don't know where we are going.

We just plan to hang a left at Neah Bay and see where we end up.' At this point Sally and Frank's eyes would glaze over because now we were really the



# In the beginning, there was

kind of people they'd never met. Vague mutterings of 'Oohhh, Really,

Hmmmmm would be followed by the quick social pass-off.' Joan, Clark have you met Jim and Deb yet? They're retiring early and going to sail around the world in a little boat.' It seems that having no means of monetary accrual and no worthy goal was just too much for most folks to put their minds around. By the second festivity when folks said 'I hear your retiring early and sailing around the world', our eyes would glaze over and we'd smile blankly and simply say. 'That's what we hear!'.

## Endless Lists

Preparing a boat for offshore or coastal cruising raises lots of issues. Issues must have a plan to resolve them. Plans must have lists of things to design, repair, purchase, build, or replace. Each of these lists have their own list of things to scrape, sand, varnish, screw, bend, attach, measure, cut, plane, fair, apply and/or start over. Some projects birth other unplanned projects. Generally at the worst moment.

Plastic portlights that had been screwed and not thru-bolted would be replaced by bronze portlights. Of the eight ports, we'd successfully, if not frustratingly, completed the installation of three of them. We were getting the hang of drilling through sloping surfaces for non-sloping bolts.

The first hole for Number 4 resulted in wood 'pudding' oozing out. That newly birthed project then resulted in the unplanned results of infusing acetone into the plywood on the outside when there was no one in the inside to point out that the newly revarnished six coats on the interior mahogany did not seem to be reacting well to numerous rivulets of acetone. Which led to the total removal of the varnish on the port side. You get the picture.



**Chain plate led to bucket below. Deck plate sealed it at sea. In San Diego we added manual windlass and had to add second chain plate on starboard side of bowsprit.**

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



**Our compromise to a hatch. We installed a low watt fan below to pull in cool air. Again deck plate sealed with silicone at sea.**

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



# HRAI ROO and she was good



Once house was sold, the marina parking lot and the back of 'Bob' became our workshop. Bowsprit cheeks under construction.  
*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



Scrap stainless steel was bent to Deb's design. The use of 'T' fittings ended up being expensive and not as shipshape as welding.  
*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*

What follows is the stem to stern list of projects eventually completed, but not exactly before we left. Almost all items were designed, made or installed by us. Most materials were gathered from every metal scrap yard and second hand marine store in the greater Puget Sound area.

Bow and stern pulpits, thru-bolted new teak bowsprit cheeks, toe rail thru-bolted, dorade vent, manual windlass, chain pipe and water fitting added to foredeck, stanchions and lifelines, new paint and non-skid to entire cabin and deck, all new standing rigging, backstay added, all new running rigging, new boom, rebuilt cockpit adding drains to lazarette and teak surface. Bridgedeck hinged. Redesigned and rebuilt galley, icebox and quarterberth. New bronze port-lights. Bronze mushroom closing air vents, teak and holly ply sole, mahogany hull ceiling. Interior varnished and then parts stripped and revarnished. Resurfaced settee and galley marine plywood with beaded birch paneling, high-gloss enamel paint to said paneling and any other surface not teak or mahogany. Boom gallews. Lazy jacks and mast step preventers. A removable table. Add self-bailing drain in transom. Rudder delaminated and re-fiberglassed. Water system. Two bronze winches with stand. Then comes the equipment. We had three lists. 'Absolutely must have for our own comfort level' list. 'If money can be found' list. And the last list. 'Without our own personal cruising sugar daddy it ain't gonna happen'.

What we already had: 3.3 hp dinghy motor, Whale Gusher hand pump, VHF radio, 25 lb CQR, folding Fortress anchor, 30' chain with 250' rode, three oil lamps and 'Thunder Bucket'-our Porta-Potty that fit under the companionway via a removable bottom step.

What we did get: New 8 hp Honda outboard, bronze water hand pump and



# s/v HRAI ROO

deep single stainless steel sink, flexible 21 gallon water tank, 50 watt solar panel, one gel cell battery, new latex berth and settee cushions, sextant, two hand-held GPS's, Yachtboy receiver, new 8' West Marine dinghy, parachute anchor, junior Trawler lamp, one burner alcohol stove manual windlass, 150' high test 5/16" chain, 20 lb. Delta anchor, new boom, Sea Swing stove, new Lee Sails triple-reef 9 oz. main, reefing storm staysail, reefing 120% genoa, trysail and a drifter in red, yellow and blue. Charts, charts and more charts. Weather books and cruising guides. Foulies and boots. Offshore inflatable life vests, jacklines and tethers. What we added along the way: Fleming self-steering vane. Drogue. Mesh cockpit tarp and tent ground cloth for collecting rainwater.

What we didn't get: life raft, water maker, EPIRB, generator, ham radio, computer charts, weather fax, refrigeration, satellite phone, or radar. There is nothing wrong with any of these items. Some would have come in handy in particular circumstances. Long philosophical debates could ensue in the listing of our rationale for each item not purchased. Perhaps another day.

This is just what I remember. There always seemed to be more. More stuff. More lists. What was less by the end was room for our clothes. We each had a woven basket on the V-berth shelf. 16" long x 10" wide x 10" deep. In that single repository-all the clothes and personal items we could fit in. But then again, the port side shelf held every book we could cram in. It's all about priorities.

In the meantime we were also repairing our recently earthquake-damaged home and actually getting someone to buy it. Jim was DHL's Northwest Airport Operations Manager and still headed the import/export department with his Custom's Brokerage License. As Assistant Principal of a large high school, I worked an average of 55 hours a week



**Rudder post and scrap mahogany poles were used in place of hanging knees in original build. Provided great handholds at sea.**

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



**PVC, fiberglass, mahogany door stops, varnish and bronze wood screws...voila wood ceiling!**

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*





# HRAI ROO and she was good



**Tight fit for one burner alcohol stove did not keep it from dislodging and hitting Deb in settee berth during a broach roll between Marquesas and Tahiti.**

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



**Quarterberth wood ceiling. Scrape off old paint, fiberglass, drill wood in place, remove, paint, varnish wood and reinstall.**

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*

with night duty 2-3 times a week, where I could be heard chanting 'no over-time, no over-time' at sporting events, when not checking the breath of suspiciously happy seniors. The youngest of our four children had turned 18.

We turned a deaf ear to doubts we whispered to ourselves in our sleep or that others cheerfully spoke aloud. When our homebuilt self-steering device revealed a fatal welding flaw days before we were to leave, we opted to hand-steer her down the West Coast to San Diego using surgical tubing and vague directions in an old marine book.

We resigned our positions, had farewells gatherings, and sent our beloved, faithful mutt, Oscar, to live with our oldest daughter in Arizona. And then our youngest daughter and a niece helped us sail up to Anacortes. Our son and a nephew sailed with us to San Juan Island. We said our goodbyes to our children. Every dream has its own price.

The next day we dropped anchor in Reid Harbor on Stuart Island and did nothing for four days in the glorious sunshine of August but sleep and read and sleep some more. We were so tired. It had been too much at times. In truth, most of the time. But drifting back and forth between the invisible line that says this is Canada and this is the U.S. we crossed the Straits of Juan de Fuca, pulled into Port Angeles and spent the next two weeks finishing a long list of installations that just didn't get done before the new boat pulled into a slip we had left on August 3, 2002 for the last time.

One lone Flicka owner on the dock, Penny, came down and hugged us goodbye and took our picture that morning. I often rival Walter Middy in my imaginings of things to come. Hordes of friends and family would send us off on our dream, filling the



# s/v HRAI ROO

docks of Des Moines Marina and the long fishing pier that juts past the massive breakwater. Waving, blowing air horns, flowers drifting along in our wake. Jim, fortunately, isn't afflicted with such silliness but is very kind and leaves me to my self when reality is much simpler and in the end much more appropriate.

Mt. Rainier, aka The Mountain, was out as we motored through the quietly slumbering marina. We left notes of thanks to the many, many folks on 'D' dock who both encouraged and tolerated our shenanigans as we rebuilt her in our slip. The girls were sound asleep on the V-berth. Our closest friends, Dawn and Steve, had returned in their Flicka the afternoon before from their summer voyage. They stayed with us till 1 a.m. helping us lash the boom galls we hadn't had time to bolt and then hugged us long and hard.

Port Angeles became the real beginning of our voyage. It was there that we met folks we'd always wanted to meet-other cruisers. No more glazed looks and blank stares. Where had they been the last two years? Who knew there would be so many of them. Most we would never see after Neah Bay. But one boat, a C&C 35 named Oneida, came in just days before we would all leave Port Angeles having waited ten days for the small craft advisory winds that funnel fifty miles from the Pacific to the eastern terminus of the straits to finally die.

Aboard were Mike and Amie, a young couple with a then two-year-old, Miss Ally. We all hit it off immediately. Miss Ally loved 'Wha Woo'. First by default and then by design we would mostly travel together for the first nine months of our respective voyages. We learned from each other's knowledge and mistakes. A strong lifelong bond has been forged since we will forever hold each other's innermost secrets of sailing sins.



**Zelda-Queen of the Universe' presides over the naming ceremony the night before we leave.**

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



**Ready to see the world-Fort Flagler, WA.**

*Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005*



# More HRAI ROO Photos



Old teak veneer ply (our first bad idea) was chiseled off.  
 Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005



Real teak this time. Epoxied and held in place with copper nails.  
 Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005



Beaded paneling, wood ceiling, new galley, removable hinged table...she'll never look this good again!  
 Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005



This time 1/4" teak over 1/2" marine ply as we rebuild the entire cockpit seating.  
 Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005



Deb designed (courtesy of endless administrative meetings) and built the missing lazarette drain system. Teak coamings get a much needed sanding.  
 Photo: Jim & Debbie Custer © 2005



# A Flicka in France Part 1: Crossing

*By Angus Beare*

I decided to write this adventure in three parts because the journey took six weeks and there is a lot to tell. There's also a lot of information about the practicalities which would be of interest to anyone wishing to do a similar trip in the future.

After getting to know my Flicka, Caraway, for a summer and a winter in the busy tidal waters of Chichester Harbor on the South Coast of England I decided I was ready to move her to the South of France. There are various ways to get there by boat. You can sail the long way around Western France, Portugal and Spain, enjoying some great sailing with the challenge of Biscay along the way. You can put the boat on a trailer and go by road. Or you can drop the mast and potter along the canals under motor for the entire length of France.

Yes, the French canal network is in remarkably good order. It's huge and it's almost empty in many areas. It's not very deep, in fact the Flicka is pushing it at 1.2 metres draft but it is possible to navigate all the major routes at the right time of year. However, you are likely to go aground at some stage, especially if you seek out quiet spots off the beaten track.

About the canals:

The VNF (Voies Navigable de France) is the authority which controls most of the French navigable river and canal network. (Major exceptions being the Brittany canals and the navigable River Somme, which are under local management.)

The VNF website ([www.vnf.fr](http://www.vnf.fr)) has recently been improved, and now offers much more timely and up to date information. The home page is switchable between French and English, although the English translations are occasionally eccentric.



**Crossing the English Channel aboard s/y CARAWAY.**

*Photo: Angus Beare © 2005*



**Large fenders and a board help protect s/y CARAWAY from the canal walls.**

*Photo: Angus Beare © 2005*



# the Channel & Entering the Canals



With the locks shut down after 4:00 PM, stopping was as simple as pulling along the side of the canals  
*Photo: Angus Beare © 2005*

Maximum craft dimensions through France from Channel to Med are:

Length .....	38.5 metres
Beam .....	5.0 metres,
Air Draught .....	3.5 metres
Water Draught .....	1.8 metres.

Lack of dredging means that the choice of routes with the full depth is limited, and there is a much greater choice (and fewer difficulties when finding moorings) with less draught.

The best time of year to enter the canals in a keelboat is spring when there is still enough water to navigate all the way and the weather is beginning to cheer up. Winter floods make many parts of the network such as the Rhone too dangerous to navigate and many waterways are closed.

The CNR (Compagnie National du Rhone) provides both current and historical information about the water flow in cubic metres per second on its website, [www.cnr.tm.fr](http://www.cnr.tm.fr).

For more information check out the company France Afloat ([www.franceafloat.com](http://www.franceafloat.com)) who organize holidays on the French canals. And for a map of the network look at:- <http://www.franceafloat.com/fa1.html>

All you need is a license (vignette) from the VNF that can be bought from France Afloat by post or at a VNF office in France. It costs about £70 Sterling and lasts for a year. That means you can live on your boat in the canals very cheaply. There are some places that have free showers and electricity so you can really take your time. There are also several pleasure boat marinas where you can leave a boat safely and obtain all the usual amenities for a reasonable charge. But generally, one just finds a nice spot and moors up for the night. There are many retired couples from all over Europe who have spent months loafing on their boats some-



The water was cleaner away from towns and cities.  
*Photo: Angus Beare © 2005*



# A Flicka in France Part 1: Crossing

where on the canals. The only important navigational rules you must remember are to make way for commercial traffic in all instances and drive on the right.

When I began to look into the idea and discuss it with a friend who has done the canal trip twice I realized that this was a journey that would require many weeks. Unfortunately, this kind of trip does not fit into the short holiday *allowed* a software developer in a large corporation. I am the kind of person that gets an idea in his head and finds that the idea simply will not go away. Instead it gathers momentum. So, with my resignation letter on the boss's desk I began to prepare.

I decided to enter the canals at Calais and avoid the busy River Seine and Paris and all the madness that comes with navigating in waters with a 4 knot current. Entering at Calais also made the channel crossing much shorter. Dover to Calais takes about 5 hours in a Flicka depending on the conditions. It's also an entry point that is usually open. St Valery down the coast is a much more beautiful place but was damaged by floods in 2000 and had been shut ever since.

The first stage for me was to sail to Brighton from Chichester. This I did in late March, single handed on a mild sunny day. I kept Caraway in Brighton marina until July when my friend Benjy came over to help me across the channel and into the canals.

I had a busy time ahead buying all the things I needed for the trip and for the sailing at the other end. A huge list had been drawn up covering such things as engine maintenance, fenders, ropes, and stakes for driving into mud banks for mooring, first aid, and food.

It was July by the time I was ready. Benjy arrived and the weather promptly turned foul for three days. Westerly

gales with lashing rain soon brought on cabin fever. By the time things settled we were raring to go but a little apprehensive. We decided to go anyway. Caraway inspires confidence at sea. We left quietly at about 10:00 am with a following wind and a heaving swell on the quarter. But soon the seas died down and we had a terrific sail all the way to Dover and I remembered why I love being at sea and how lucky I was to have Caraway. We poled out the Genoa with a boat hook and ran at 5 knots finding Caraway so well balanced that the tiller pilot was barely necessary.

After a night at Dover, we woke to a lovely sunny day. Visibility is critical in crossing the English Channel in a small boat without radar so we were delighted and set off first thing. The wind was only enough to drive us at about 3 knots so we decided to motor and get across as quickly as possible. Crossing these shipping lanes is my idea of hell. It's like being a snail on a motorway. I can never understand why people sail across to France and back for fun! I guess they don't fully understand the danger they're in. Experience has shown me that very large boats can appear out of nowhere extremely quickly. There is no way of knowing if they have seen you. Even if they have they are unlikely to change course for a small boat. I had two radar reflectors up on the spreaders. We had headed west to get out of the cross channel ferry lanes but we still had ship after ship passing bow and stern. Fortunately the lanes themselves don't take too long to cross and the TSS (Traffic Separation Scheme) ensures you know their direction of travel.

On the approach to Calais we had to change direction very quickly when we found ourselves on collision course with a freighter. I could see the eyes of the crew on the bridge as they passed. Why they don't have a channel speed limit I'll never know. Some of the big-

ger ships do 25 knots I'm told and take several miles to slow down. Collisions are very common but given the speeds and frequent fog in the channel its amazing there aren't more.

After a Sea-Cat multi-hull ferry kindly romped passed us leaving a ten foot wash we finally entered Calais harbor. We moored up alongside holidaying French and Dutch sailors and finally began to relax. We ate a hearty meal and took down the sails and packed them away. Then I drank myself stupid on cheap red wine and we slept like the dead.

We had planned to use the Bingham method to lower the mast. However, when we found that the crane was available for only about £10 we abandoned the idea. After a morning waiting for the crane operator to get out of bed the mast was stowed on deck and the fender boards were out. We were off. By the way, I recommend fender boards since fenders tend to roll and ride up in locks as you go down. Boards can be tied to the bobstay fitting on the hull and the middle rudder gudgeon to keep them in place.

After three hours waiting for the lock-keeper to eat his lunch and sleep it off we were finally in the canals! A couple of impatient Belgians grumbled to us about the French being useless and sped off in their smelly power boat with their two smelly dogs. We were glad to see the back of them.

After pattering along for mile after mile in waterways covered with chick weed the engine finally began to over-heat. I cleaned out the raw water strainer which was rammed full of the stuff and we carried on. A few miles later we caught a bin liner around the prop and had to pull over. There was only one thing for it. The water was dirty brown and there was rubbish everywhere. Someone (me) had to go over the side and deal with it. This is when I





# the Channel & Entering the Canals

began to long for the clear blue waters of the Mediterranean. Leaping over the side into dirt brown water with slime and rubbish everywhere was not my idea of fun. But it's not all like this. Most of the canal water is clean and safe but it tends to get dirty near the cities. In general though, it's just not too inviting to go for a dip.

There are hundreds of locks on the canals. Many of them are manned or womaned, some are small, some are huge, most are automated, all are covered in green slime and all are tricky in a keelboat. When the gates open to fill the lock the wash tend to push the keel sideways. It's easy enough to hold a Flicka but I have seen bigger yachts wedged sideways across a lock. Luckily I had Benjy with me and his experience was very useful. I would be on my own later but for now I had an easy introduction. You are supposed to wear lifejackets in the locks but nobody seems to care until the locks get bigger on the Rhone.

There are no instructions on the locks and it's not always obvious that a pole hanging over the canal needs to be pulled before the lock will open. Often the sensors do not see a small boat (they are designed for huge steel barges) and one ends up waiting hours in the lock for someone to come along and help you through. The canals are not a place to be in a hurry. France is like England was 25 years ago. Supermarkets shut for lunch. In fact everything shuts for lunch. There is no Sunday shopping and the unions run the country.

After negotiating several locks we moored up to a bank somewhere on the other side of Calais. Toasted cheese sandwiches followed, a nice walk along the canal to stretch the legs and we were in holiday mode. Benjy is a non-drinker so I had no option but to drink myself stupid on cheap red wine alone again and fall asleep in the cockpit.

The plan was for Benjy to accompany me to Reims in the Champagne region from where he would take a train back down South, leaving me to finish the trip alone. I had tried to find a companion for the rest of the trip but everyone I knew was sadly tied to a job and not able to find the time. It's a shame because the canals are an adventure of the senses and traveling them is a real experience.

A guide is available from Imray called the Inland Waterways of France - Edwards-may, David ISBN: 0852884729.

This book is all you will need to help you navigate through the waterways of France. It comes with a map that shows all the routes and gives you an idea of their water level. All the locks are numbered and the book gives detailed information on places to stop near each lock and local amenities such as water and fuel. It's not the easiest guide to follow but it is accurate and reasonably up to date. It tells you all about the commercial traffic, how to behave on the canals and about safety and facilities. It also gives phone numbers to call when you get stuck in a lock, go aground or break down in tears of frustration. However, it does not help you understand French. Fortunately, Benjy speaks good French having lived in France for six years. I could get by and later I would have to but having a French speaker makes the experience so much more rewarding. It is very important to make an effort. People were very curious about the boat, where we had come from and where we were going. They couldn't believe anyone could come from England in so small a vessel.

We planned to take the Dunkerque waterway to Etrun followed by the Canal de St Quentin to St Simon. Then we'd get onto the Canal de L'Oise a L'Aisne to Braye-en-Laonnais and Reims where Benjy would get the train home to Port Grimaud in the South. As we began to leave the urban areas behind the canals

and the countryside became more and more beautiful. Often the canals are very straight with trees lining the banks for mile after mile. On some stretches there are locks every kilometre or less but on the Rhone and Saone there are much fewer. France is metric so I find myself talking in both systems. I apologise if this is confusing to those used to imperial only.

The trip to Reims took about ten days. We travelled for about 8 hours a day. The VNF operates a 35 hour week so most of the locks operate from 8am until 4pm which means you are limited in distance per day. But this is a good thing because it means that you are never disturbed by commercial traffic at night. Everything stops. Barge wash is unpleasant and dangerous if the barge is doing more than the max speed of 4 knots. On the big rivers the distance between locks is greater and there are many large pleasure barges that do night trips for tourists even when the locks are shut. I learnt an unpleasant lesson when a four foot wash struck Caraway at 4am one night. I will describe this later.

I will not describe the trip to Reims day by day because most days consisted of sitting in the cockpit for hour after hour with a hand on the tiller. Entering a lock, taking the ropes up a ladder, waiting for the boat to rise, getting back in and motoring off again. Sometimes we stopped for lunch, other times we carried on and ate on the move. The weather was mixed. We had some wet and grey days and we had some lovely sunny days. I drank fine wines and we ate fresh baguettes, wonderful cheeses, pates and fresh produce from small village shops along the way. The bilges were full of water, canned food, potatoes, wine, rice etc etc so we always had something to cook if we found ourselves in the middle of nowhere.

The canals are fantastically peaceful. There is commercial traffic but it really





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isn't that much. We saw a handful of cruising boats heading South and many pleasure cruisers. But considering the resource that the canals represent it is remarkably little used. The locals use the canals mainly for walking their dogs and fishing. It is very common to see a whole family fishing or just a husband and wife. Yes. In France women fish almost as much as men! There is a lot of fish in some stretches of the canals and the bird life is tremendous. We saw hundreds and hundred of herons and many kingfishers. You will also see water rats, voles and coypu in some areas.

There is one experience that stands out from the journey to Reims that's particularly worthy of mention. I'd like to point out that all of the other commercial barges I encountered along the way acted in a very professional and friendly way and that the particular skipper we encountered on board the peniche (barge) called Roger was a nasty piece of work.

On entering a very long lock we tied up about 3/4 of the way down and waited for the gates to close. We were about to descend and therefore stayed on the boat holding the mooring lines which were thrown over the bollards on the top. A huge peniche entered the loch and continued towards us apparently unaware of our presence. Either he did not see us, he didn't care or he misjudged the length of his vessel. We'll never know, but my guess is he didn't care and expected us to move forward. Nobody in a small plastic boat would argue with 200 tonnes of steel filled with gravel. I expected him to stop but he carried on coming at an alarming speed. Peniches have two huge four bladed props and can stop very quickly when they want to. Most skippers are incredibly good at moving these beasts in tight spaces so I expected him to gun the engine in reverse and come to a stop. Suddenly we realised he wasn't stopping! "Start the engine!" Benjy



Locking through one of the many locks aboard s/y CARAWAY.

*Photo: Angus Beare © 2005*





# the Channel & Entering the Canals



Locking through with two large barges including the "ROGER."

*Photo: Angus Beare © 2005*

demanded. I quickly leapt to it and fired her up. We let go the ropes and I gunned the engine forward. In the nick of time we got forward before the huge looming steel bows arrived where we had been. I can't imagine what damage we'd have suffered had we not got out of the way. We had about 30 yards ahead in the lock and went right to the end. I was worried that he'd continue and crush us against the gates. We shouted to the lock keeper but thankfully Roger had come to a halt behind us. Phew.

But this was not the end of our experience with Roger. When the gates

opened we sped out and moved aside to let him pass. He steamed out in a real hurry and didn't even acknowledge our presence. Usually peniches appreciate pleasure boats giving them space and wave and thank you. We carried on at our usual 4 knots and looked at the book for the next lock. Another kilometre meant he'd probably beat us to the lock and we'd miss it. When we got within sight of the lock the doors were just beginning to close. We thought we'd missed it. Roger was in there and we expected to have to wait. However, the lock keeper in a small room at the top of a two story building had seen us and decided to let us in. So, we entered

behind Roger. The skipper of Roger, a fat sweaty man in a desperate hurry was very unhappy. We were obviously slowing him down. Hurry, hurry he shouted as we entered, ranting and raving about how slow we were and cursing us for wasting his time. He was livid. Throwing all his toys out of his pram and pacing up and down the quay. Benjy referred him to the lock keeper and told him to take up his grievances with the VNF.

As we left the lock Benjy came up with a plan to really punish this man again. We'd motor at full speed behind him. We'd never keep up but we might be able to make the next lock in time to make him wait again! That would wind him up and teach him a lesson. So, as he left at full throttle we sped on after him at 5 knots trying all we could to make Caraway go faster. The next lock was another kilometre away, we might just make it. Again, we got within sight of the lock, Roger was already in and the gates were closing. We stood on the cabin top and waved to get the lockkeepers attention. Suddenly the doors slowed to a stop and began opening again! We'd made it. "Throttle back!" shouted Benjy. We slowed down to 2 knots and as slowly as we could entered the lock. By this time Roger's skipper was beside himself with rage. He couldn't even speak. He just paced the lock side passing us angry glances and muttering under his breath. Poetic justice had been delivered.

By the time we arrived in Reims we had become very efficient at negotiating the locks. I was getting very good at handling my boat and the weather was getting warmer. Little did I know that the following summer was to be the hottest in France for 500 years and I would boil in my boat for weeks on end.

**To be continued.**

