

Aster day 4

Departed Genelard at 9.00 am. We are now moored near Montchanin, close to the first descending lock on the summit pound of the Canal du Centre. The Canal lateral a La Loire became the Canal du Centre in Digoin. Genelard is a pretty, peaceful place with ideal mooring facilities for a big barge. Arriving here in Montchanin last evening at 6.45 pm the Admiral (on advice from his underlings) ignored a beautifully maintained VNF mooring near a leisure lake and parked alongside a thicket of nettles and weeds below a TGV railway line. Fortunately a previous explorer had unearthed some bollards in the undergrowth so we could safely moor, at one with nature, in the jungle. Also the last of those pesky trains roared by at 10.20 pm so by the time everybody was utterly exhausted we could retire to the floor to sleep. Yes, floor. Five of us sleep on various inflatable beds, 3 in the saloon and 2 in the bar! On the first evening my Mattress sprung a leak and within a few minutes I was lying directly on the polished wooden floor. Peter, my co-worker on the ship's bow, has the least impressive 'self-inflating' mattress ever invented. In the blink of an eye it magically expands from the thickness of a sheet of aluminium foil to the thickness of paper kitchen towel. In the morning most of us need to perform a series of extremely unpleasant 'loosening-up' exercises just to get to the bathroom. Of the remaining four crew members, two sleep in their camper van while the others merely disappear during the hours of darkness – to where, nobody knows.

(As I write, the first TGV of the day has just blasted by overhead – it is 6.20 am)

I will introduce the crew a little further. We have 'Admiral' Charles Gerard and First Mate, Mathew Morton. These two do the lions share of the driving and try to blame someone else when they have driven into something. Steve is Systems Officer responsible for keeping the boat lit and watered. He's also taken to a bit of steering. The rest of us don't have titles, we are just here, and have settled into various roles. Peter, Glenn, Helen and Patricia help with using the bow rudder - operated by means of ropes from the rear deck. This quartet produce some fabulous food. Pete and Glenn also take all the photos you can see on the museum's web site. Myself (Jo) and Peter (of the self-inflating mattress) are the bow men who attempt to fend off as we career into the unforgiving stone of a lock entrance. When we've picked ourselves up off the floor we secure the boat for ascent or descent. We are largely detached from the fevered recriminations of the rear deck and can make mistakes, unnoticed, in splendid isolation.

Yesterday we managed 33 kilometres and 16 locks.

Today, in the rain, we are heading for either St Leger sur Dheune or Chagny. We start the downhill run towards the Saone today and its unsure how easily we will be able to cope with the descending locks.