

Forth & Clyde Canal

Although by no means the first club members to transit the Forth & Clyde Canal since its re-opening, we thought it was worth recording what a positive experience we enjoyed in the hope of encouraging any other members who might be hesitating.

The tricky bit is getting the timing right to enter the canal with sufficient water to get up the Carron River but not too much in order to duck beneath the Kerse Bridge, and to do so at a time when the lockkeepers are on duty (longer hours in the summer months). The canal basin at Grangemouth is secure either to leave the boat or a car and in spite of being close to the motorway is a pleasant and peaceful place to overnight. From there we completed our transit to Bowling in two days during which time we had the undivided attention of 4 canal men travelling by van or bike who opened and closed all the locks and bridges for us. The men caught our ropes at each lock so a crew of two was fine.

There are a total of 39 locks, each with its own character, some with magnificent stonework, other covered in flowering plants, some with gentle water flows, others gushing water from all directions. The bridges also had their own characteristics, opening in all directions.

The men are all friendly and helpful and glad to tell tales of the canal and those who use it. The countryside is very pleasant, almost all rural and even in the towns there was plenty wildlife to be seen along the canal. We lost count of the number of swans' nests we passed and we saw lots of moorhens, swallows and martins and heard the songs of many warblers. To our surprise you hardly realise you are in the middle of a city for much of the stretch through Glasgow – a sort of linear greenspace. We were pleased to see the towpaths being well used by walkers and cyclists and almost without exception they greeted us with a cheerful wave or comment.

We spent the night at the Stables near Kirkintilloch where we had a good meal in the restaurant. (The only snag was the lack of shore-based toilet facilities in the morning.)

We had no problems going through the centre of Glasgow and enjoyed our fish and chips from McMonagles boat and were amused by the crowd in the Clydebank shopping centre who waited as the footbridge closed to let us pass.

We had no trouble with weed or debris – much work was done in the spring to clear weed, and we were told where to avoid a sunken car by George who travelled his (western) section of the canal by bicycle. Most of the way there was a clear 2 metre depth.

The canal basin at Bowling is also a good secure place to overnight or leave the boat and has a crane to cope with the mast as well as good toilet, shower and laundry facilities.

The cost of this amazing trip was £45, probably the best value for money we have ever had!

We would have no hesitation in recommending this transit to any member with a suitable boat – all you need are a couple of ropes and plenty of fenders.

Roger & Alison Richard
April 2007