

Trip Report - HRCKC UK Canal trip June 9 to 16, 2025 by Peter Walker

Photos taken by Martin, Naomi, Peter, Robyn, Herta and Dean (and a few found on the 'net')

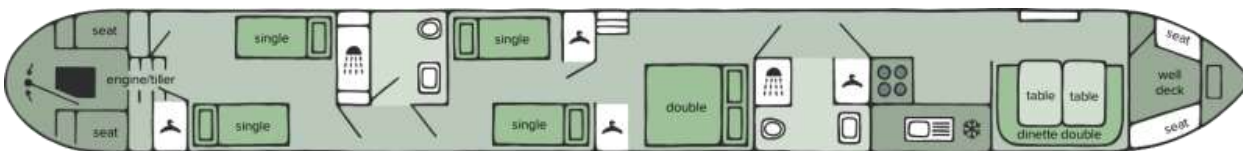
At the April 2024 club meeting, I gave a presentation about a potential club narrowboat trip on the UK canals in Spring 2025.

The potential became a reality, and on June 9th 2025, 11 members and one guest met at the Chester, UK railway station, after flying from Newark to London, Dublin or Edinburgh and having made their own arrangements for pre-trip accommodations and travel.

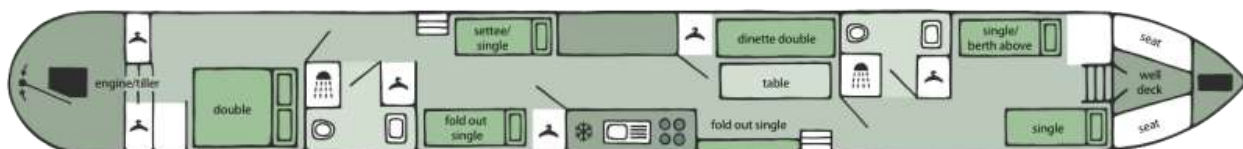


We then travelled together by train and taxi to the boatyard to embark on our narrowboats, had a brief orientation to our home for the next seven days, and walked along the canal to get supplies from the local supermarket.

Six of us would be on “Greenish Warbler”, diesel powered, 69 feet long and 7 feet wide



and the other six on “Scops Owl”, with the same dimensions but a different layout.





Returning to the boats, we were educated in the operation of locks using a small model



and on opening lift bridges.

Following instruction on boat operation, we departed the boatyard and travelled a short distance along the canal accompanied by boatyard staff before mooring for the night.

We walked in the town (Ellesmere) again that night, and enjoyed dinner in a pub restaurant that luckily was able to put together a large table for us at short notice.

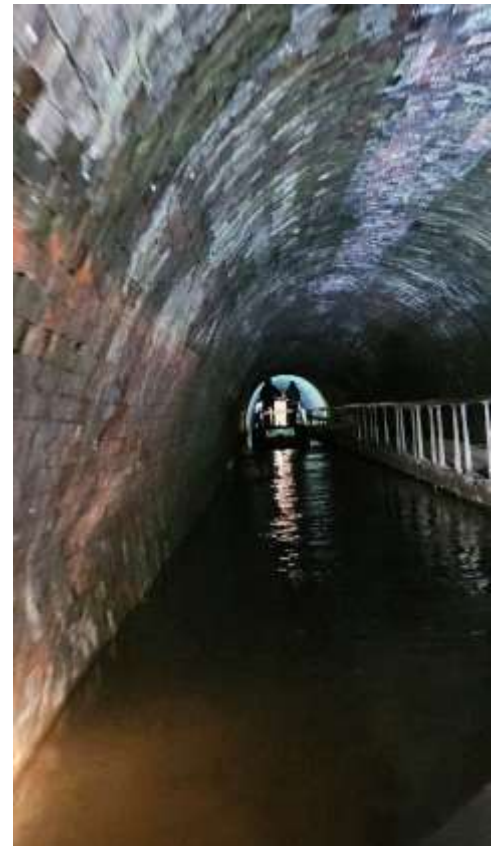
The following day we set off in the boats after breakfasting on board. We stopped for lunch just before the first locks of the trip, and after walking up to pre-view their operation, we “locked through” and then carried on to our mooring for the night.



From there it was an easy walk downhill to the Bridge Inn, the “last pub in England” (before entering Wales), where we enjoyed dinner on their deck with a view into Wales and the aqueduct we would cross the next morning with the higher railway viaduct behind it.



The next day we travelled about 9 miles to the Welsh town of LLangollen, passing over Chirk Aqueduct (237 yards long), through Chirk Tunnel (459 yards long), through Whitehouses Tunnel (191 yards long), over Pontcysyllte Aqueduct (336 yards long, 12 feet wide and 126 feet above the river it crosses.) We also had to manually open two lift bridges and pass through three sections of canal too narrow for boats to pass, which required sending crew members ahead to ensure the way was clear. After turning the boats and mooring for the night, we explored the town, and bought additional food supplies. Some of us had dinner at a restaurant overlooking the river, while the others enjoyed a home cooked meal on board.





In the morning we set off on our return journey, but this time we stopped at the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct so 6 adventurous crew members could paddle across it and back. I had arranged to rent three canoes from an outfitter, but failed to arrange for the sunny weather to continue, and the rain started just as they were setting out. While the paddlers were getting soaked, others went for local hike, explored the area and the small museum, or just relaxed on board.



The wet weather continued intermittently as we travelled on, so we moored a short distance before our intended destination. Taking the first available good mooring spots after we had decided to call it a day meant that our boats were a distance apart for the night, and dinner was on board for both crews.

The next morning, we moved the boats a short distance to be at the closest spot from which we could walk to Chirk Castle. The castle was originally built in 1295 as a border fortification, but was rebuilt after being partially demolished in the English Civil War. Owned by one family for 4 centuries from 1595, it is now owned by the National Trust and the house, gardens and grounds are open to the public.

The fine weather having returned, 10 of us hiked down the local lane, past the ornamental gates at the entrance to the grounds, and took a path across the parkland to the former stable area, where we browsed the gift shop and walled vegetable gardens. After lunchtime snack at the café in the castle courtyard, we explored the house and extensive formal gardens, before retracing our steps to the boats, and continuing our journey back through the longer tunnel and across the shorter aqueduct, and down two locks before mooring for the night.



The last two full days of our trip took us down a different canal that fell into disuse in the 1930s. The section we would travel was reopened in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Llangollen Canal we had been on up to now is heavily used by pleasure boats and is also used as a drinking water supply channel, moving water from Wales to a reservoir and treatment plants in England. The Llangollen is relatively wide and deep, with banks mostly reinforced with concrete and steel piling, while the Montgomery Canal we would now be on is mostly a narrow channel with heavy bankside vegetation. To protect the natural environment and due to the limited number of boat mooring spaces, only 12 boats a day are allowed to pass up or down the locks at the entrance.

On entering the Montgomery Canal, a lock-keeper and his volunteer assistant managed our passage through the first two locks, which are a “staircase” with the middle set of gates being extra tall as they are shared by both locks. We then passed through 6 more locks before stopping for lunch and for some, a quick visit to the local pub. We then travelled on as far as time permitted, turning a few miles before the end of the currently navigable stretch of canal, before returning to our lunch time stop to moor for the night, have dinner on board and another opportunity to visit the pub.





On our next and final full day, we had to leave the canal before the locks closed at noon, and it was only a short distance from there back to Ellesmere, where we moored close to the boatyard to which the boats would be returned the next morning.

The pub restaurant we had eaten in on our first night was closed, and other options were booked up or not to everyone's taste, but we found a pub that also was not serving food, but was happy to have us just buy drinks from them and bring our own food into their outside seating area. This ended up working out well, as we could get "take-away" from either nearby Indian and Fish & Chip restaurants and all eat together for our final dinner.



We returned the boats the following morning, and most of the crew took trains back to London and on to Heathrow Airport before flying back to NJ the same evening.