



Prydwen Log – by Maryanne Webb – 2003 Moving Home

Collecting the boat



The boat spent the winter on the wrong side of Lake Erie. Desperate to move aboard we had to show patience and wait until the lake thawed – that same lake that had not even frozen over for the last few years was now fully covered

with thick ice – but we expected it to be clear by 1st April. As I could not travel to Canada, we made plans around Kyle's work schedule.

The first date we set (April 7th) to have the boat moved from its winter storage – the snow was still thick – no go. Next week all the snow was gone – but ice reports were still bad on the lake – the boat was moved by Heritage Marine to the Port Stanley (Stan's marina) on the 14th April ready for a break in the ice and Kyle's next break from work.

21st April – Kyle sails boat across (with the ice drifting away in time off to the east). Maryanne flies to CLE – and drives to Erie to meet him. Expecting to watch him sail in between 3 and 6pm – after much driving up and down the coast to find suitable vantage points, and some worry – Kyle calls me on the mobile phone at 1:30am to say he was in the Marina in Erie – waiting – where was I? I have no idea how I missed him, nor how I missed the blazing lights of the tug boat that had to tow him in due to lines around the prop. It turns out that Port Stanley is too shallow for Prydwen, so a 5am planned start turned into a 1pm tug out of port Stanley, and a



foveled propeller. Kyle sailed across, but could not sail into the Narrow Erie channel – with the wind blowing in the wrong direction – so he ordered a tug boat!

Several days were spent in Erie with the car to 'move in' properly, buy provisions, and become familiar with our new home. (You know how it is when you move into a new house

– there is always something you find that you did not expect). My main problem was with the cooker (stove). The cooker works on pressurised alcohol as a fuel (you prime the tank with a bicycle pump) – but the fuel leaked from all joints it seemed. Worse still – the tank and the pump area was located under one of the rear bunks that we had used for storage. Every time I wanted to look at the thing I had to move all the ‘stuff’ off the bunk, and lift the bunk cushions, and effectively ‘climb’ into a tiny, ill lit space to work. Luckily I had the car, and there was a specialist store in Erie (SIRCO) that deal with pressure hoses etc (mainly for fire appliances etc it seemed). They sold me the valves I thought I needed to replace, but when I returned to the boat and fitted them – the thing just leaked from the next joint. Having no money, and now no way to cook any of the food I purchased – I HAD to fix the cooker somehow. I went back to SIRCO, and they were SO KIND, not only did they replace all the problem joints/valves etc – but also ‘designed’ an extension so that I could prime the stove without having to lift up the seat and all the ‘stuff’ on top. Not only that – but they donated the whole new setup as a wedding gift. Great and friendly people, and now at last a wonderful working cooker. Hot food at last.

Eventually it was time to move the car to Virginia, and fly back to Erie in time to meet up with Kyle and set off for our adventure to start for real.



ERIE – BUFFALO. The Lake Erie sailing from Erie to Buffalo was in light winds, so we had time to play with the spinnaker (a sail new to both of us, that Kyle referred to as the sail of death). The spinnaker is a beautifully coloured sail on most boats – and ours is rainbow coloured – it looks fantastic when she is up and full of wind. It also needs plenty of hands, although we managed her in the light winds – we don’t see it being a sail we use with confidence for a while. We spent a night anchored off Dunkirk – the smiles broad on both our faces. We were pleased to see that the boat handles really well, even when we tried it was impossible to get her to heel over far.

28 April – Night in Buffalo, and in the morning of the 29th set off for Tonawanda (via our first lock – the Black Rock Canal to avoid the strong currents of the Niagara river) and for Wardell’s boat yard. This it seems is the only reasonable place to unstep the mast (The mast has to be unstepped, (removed), in order that the boat can travel under the bridges of the Erie Canal). Wardell’s boat yard closely resembles a junk yard. Equipment is old and looks it, and piles of scrap everything lay heaped around. However that same junk yard provided timber for our mast supports and that dodgy looking equipment did the job. Inside Wardell’s shop, an amazing collection of pristine and lovingly restored outboard engines was on display (surrounded by various expected junk) – it was obvious where Mr. Wardell liked to spend his time. Dennis Wardell appeared quite surprised to see us so early in the season – he checked back through his records since the early 80’s and decided that we were the earliest (29th April) that he had ever unstepped a mast in the season. Kyle was proud.





I spent the next 6 days in the Tonawandas while Kyle went off to work. The Tonawanda's (North and South) have a great 'small town' feel. Pleasant



parks and canal side trails. I did laundry, collected mail, and used and abused the library computers to keep in touch with people. It was not all great however, there were clearly problems with the head (toilet and waste tank). Several days of mystery leaks, cleanup and investigation

eventually lead me to a blocked pressure release valve. But there were some horrid, smelly, disgusting moments that I never wish to repeat again. Enough said.



LOCKPORT. 6th May. First two locks Eastbound on the Erie Canal are at Lockport. 2 25' locks replace an older flight of 5. The staff were great, Kyle was happy to hear we were the first Eastbound boat that season, we purchased our pass, and something of a tourist attraction began the canal.

The (modern) Erie Canal is not like a British canal, mostly the route runs along rivers so it is wide, and even the locks are wider than those found in British canals. We soon found out that although the canal was officially open for the season, few, if any of the marinas, diesel pumps and pump out stations (for the head) were open. By the time we reached Gasport we were really worrying, but the folks at Gasport opened especially for us, and even let us have a shower.

WILDLIFE : Eagles, Blue Herons, Blue Jays, Cardinals, Barn Swallows, Chipmunk, Beavers, squirrels.

FIRE ABOARD. Remember that great cooker? Well – it seems that I can't be trusted – I must have over primed the oven and fuel spilled from the spill pan and into the oven itself. Once lit – it caused quite a fire. Luckily water should put out an alcohol fire – but it was too much for me (the water has to be pumped, I could not pump and distribute fast enough). Eventually I gave up and used the fire extinguisher (thank goodness we had them on board). The fire was out but the MESS was unbelievable. The fire extinguisher I used covered the whole boat with a fine layer of very stubborn white dust (which we were still finding over a month later). Everything had to be pulled out of the boat and scrubbed and cleaned. Lessons learnt? Sure – everyone should have a fire extinguisher, and alcohol stoves should be treated with respect. We also re-positioned our fire extinguishers after that – so there was one at each end of the boat, and you could not be trapped with a fire between you and the extinguisher. I will probably also look for a fire blanket for 'future' use.



We overnighted at Middleport, and finished off the cleaning up as best we could. Also managed to pump out again (always a relief). In the morning before we set off, Kyle decided his hair was too long, so he shaved it off. That day (7th May) we stopped off at Medina to look around (here a river, oak orchard creek, runs under the canal), and we spent the next night in Albion



Albion – Rochester. More great countryside and towns. We passed by the beautiful Spencerport, intending to head for downtown Rochester (one of the biggest cities in NY state), but we found the canal passed just a mile from Rochester Airport so we stopped short. A later walk/run by Kyle to the Genesee River showed the docks were not even readied and the river was jammed with logs and other debris from the winter storms. We spent several days here, tied up close to the airport but in peaceful seclusion. We did some exploring together, then Kyle went to work he left me to explore further on my own. We used the University library here – open almost all hours, and a beautiful location. That last day in Rochester involved thunder, lightning, rain and a tornado warning. I had no idea what to expect – but luckily we were saved the tornado.



At Rochester the canal crosses the Genesee river.



University Library

Rochester – Fairport. 12th May. RAIN. The journey to Fairport – more rain. Fairport however was a fantastic town, a real jewel in the canal. I have never seen a library so used. Great showers were also available (clean, powerful and hot).

Fairport – Newark (NY). Stopped early as canal lock was still under repair. Treated ourselves to a trip to the cinema to see Anger Management. After Kyle's morning run (more like a reconnaissance trip) we learnt the canal was open again. The canal



side facilities at Newark were not open (as usual), but Gary at lock 28B let Kyle use the shower there.



Nobody need think we are going hungry on this trip. I still won't fit into a bikini and look decent – and Kyle manages to munch his way through as much food as ever.

All the way along the canal the Lock keepers were friendly, helpful and kind. I am sure that they are 'told' to be this way – but it felt, and I am sure it was, genuine in nearly all cases – these people really added to our enjoyment of the lock. Lots did 'extra' stuff for us (one guy even took our used engine oil to dispose of appropriately for us).

14th May – Fairport to Buoy number R444. With Lock 27 now open we could go on our way. 1st eastbound boat again, we were starting to meet with westbounders now. All through the canal way the keepers had talked about THE ICE STORM which had caused a power outage for 6 days in some places, this winter had been one of the coldest for a while. This last 2 days of travel we have seen the most debris, huge trees ripped from their homes and now lodged or passing through the canal. Despite careful lookout, every so often we don't see one in time and have to listen and hope as the hull resounds with the strike as we pass. Great patches of remote canal, we start to see Golden Eagles, lots of Blue Heron, etc – we are really enjoying our binoculars.



Ran out of stove fuel when Kyle was preparing his morning coffee. Stopped off in Lyons today and found bargain fuel at a

hardware/lumber store. Suitable walls/marinas were very absent in this stretch – all closed, crumbling or just too shallow, so as the river was wide we decided to just anchor out by Nicholson Island, just west of Weedsport. We took the dingy to explore the shallow waters, and slept with the hatches and doors wide open – moonlight of the full moon pouring through, and awoke to a beautiful sunrise, and a mist on the water – life is good.



R444- Syracuse. A great journey through the Seneca River. Kyle said he saw an Emu, I being sceptical, after interrogation determined he had seen a heron!. It is HOT and SUNNY. Plenty of hawks entertain us on the journey. Syracuse is just off the Erie canal. The canal passes at one end of Lake Onondaga, Syracuse is at the other. The diversion to Syracuse (for Kyle to commute to work) was worth it. The waterfront area 'inner harbor' is recently renovated, with park land, new docks etc – and we had the place to ourselves. Despite being within a half hour walk of the centre of Syracuse, and although so much money and effort had clearly been spent in the area – none of the locals in town (even the bus company and a cab driver had never heard of the place). While Kyle was at work, I made use of a book shop in the local shopping centre (Carosel) to read, and the library downtown.

Syracuse – Sylvan Beach via Oneida Lake – 20th May

Stopped at Baldwinsville for diesel / oil. Then crossed lake Oneida – a big lake!. Cold and windy, the mast supports were stretched to their limit, and several times we worried that the mast would leave the boat. But we survived – extra ropes tied around the front mast support now give a very spaghetti appearance BUT worked. We heard at last that the money for Kyle's old boat had made it to the Bank. We had hoped to make use of one of the marinas with showers here – but they were all too shallow or too expensive (or had giant ants in dirty showers), so we ended up at the town wall for free (and without a shower). At the end of the lake, Sylvan Beach has a small sea-side-town feel (amusements, etc). We did the laundry and walked on the beach.

Sylvan Beach – Utica (21st May)

Another long day – and up current. Passing through Rome, was wondering what it might be like to be in the 'real' Rome... The canal parallels (and later joins) the Mohawk river. We stopped at Kitties on the Canal – there is a public wall (with power) you can use for free (pump out and fuel pumps are there but not working... I guess the local government must have run out of money). After a long day travelling we decided to treat ourselves with a meal at Kitties – with a table right beside our boat – great view !.

Utica – Fonda/Fultonville – 22 May

Awoke to fog – and erie start to the journey, Kyle enjoyed sounding his fog horn every minute. Our longest planned day – 7 locks. Once the fog cleared we found that there is lots more traffic



on the canal now although it is still relatively quiet. Kyle wore his kilt once the sun came out and the fog cleared. Little Falls lock (17) is the biggest drop of a single lock on the canal at 40.5' The lock itself is in a natural canyon – so the walls of the lock, and the walls of the canyon give a dramatic impact. We ate a huge dinner of chicken burritos underway and wondered if we would ever be able to walk again... On route we took shower and pump out at St Johnsonville. We tied up at Fonda wall (needed very long

ropes) – and were entertained by a local kids soccer match – where we were advised that

Scotland is near Britain... he he he. Yeah – like ‘Texas is near the USA’ I should have said ! You have to love their geography teachers don’t you ?

Fonda – Arrowhead (RV &) Marine park 23rd May



Cool day but still not the forecast rain thankfully. We stopped at Amsterdam to collect mail. The oil filters we had ordered were waiting for us so Kyle decided that now was a great time to change the oil. The first oil change was "fun" and ended up with Kyle in the engine with a hacksaw - chopping off bits..... spouting lots of swear words and complaints about the engine design/location Hmmm.... The engine is fine now - but I WAS worried for a short while. No such thing as a five minute job is my quote for any computer work – now extended to engine maintenance too. On Kyle’s run today he swears he saw an emu – but I am not convinced since his last emu

turned out to be a heron.



The canal now joins the Mohawk river, as we head east it widens more and more, and the locks now have dams along side them to span the river.

Arrowhead – Waterford (24th May)

Cool day, more rain. What had started out as a planned short day, turned into one of our longest. Showers at Arrowhead started us off well. The river continues to widen as we travel east, and the highlight of the day was nearby Niskayuna park, where we spotted two bald eagles which sat quietly for us to watch them for ages through the boat binoculars - amazing sight. The water was too shallow for us to get close enough for a photograph (not much of a zoom lens unfortunately). All through the canal we have seen lots of wildlife Beavers, lots of birds, even a chipmunk – every sighting now is a treasure and our bird recognition is getting better by the day. The swallows are the most fun, they are real acrobats, swooping and darting



around the boat and at the surface of the water – we have seen 3 common types along the canal – the Tree, Barn, and Rough-winged swallows – all entertaining and fun to watch. At Amsterdam we had hoped to collect a new wind vane for the boat mast (we had lost ours in a tree !), but the order with SailNet.com was messed up. Lynda at Blanes marina near Colonie/Albany was especially kind, she and her husband arranged to buy one at the local marine store and had it waiting for us as we passed by their marina. We were very grateful to our fellow cruisers.

We extended the day and descended the "Waterford flight" - a series of 5 locks all very close together - quite a dramatic end to the canal. The end of the canal. As the boat travelled though the last lock of the Erie

canal - although this is only a fraction of our whole journey it was really sad to see the end of the canal. We have travelled over 400 miles in around a month. A major road (the I-90) follows the route of the canal really well - you would do the same journey in less than a day by car - but you would not have seen half the things we have seen, nor would you have tasted a flavour of New York State small town America.

We arrived in Waterford late, and tired and decided to treat ourselves to a take away meal of some sort. As we left the boat to gain our bearings we became a tourist attraction and found ourselves joining tourists from New York city for a meal (fish and chips) in a local Irish bar. Life could be much worse eh ?

Kyle left for work for a few days, leaving me in Waterford to reprovision the boat, and to catch up with the web sites, emails etc. Next part of the journey is the Hudson River to New York city.