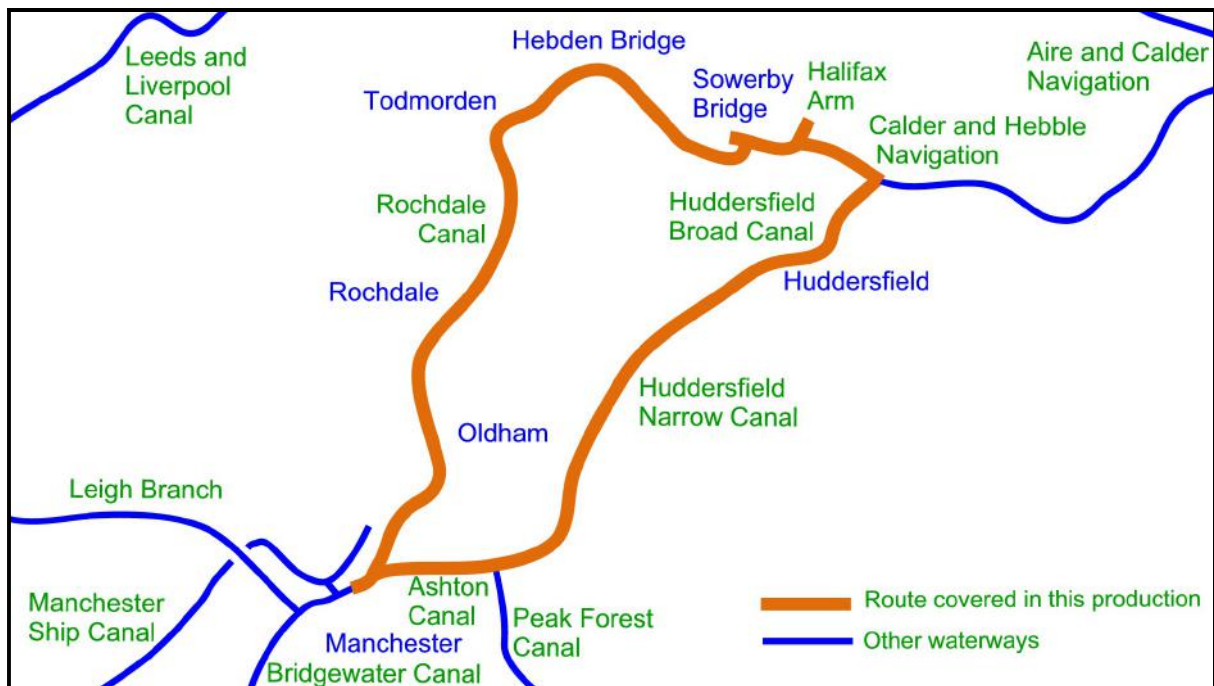


**Monday 22 April 2024
to Monday 6 May 2024**

South Pennine Ring



Today we have begun a 2-week long canal spectacular. Normally our canal trips are a week long Saturday to Saturday (actually about 6 days cruising to allow the boatyard time to service the boat) however, this years is 2 weeks long as we are doing the South Pennine Ring, Monday to Monday week.



We are collecting the boat on the Shire Cruisers boatyard at Sowerby Bridge before going around the ring clockwise. Getting this trip set up has had its challenges as there are 4 features on the ring that we need definite bookings for. Up to last week we had two options with respective bookings, clockwise and anticlockwise, however advice from the Canal and River Trust led to the cancellation of the bookings for anticlockwise.

For the first couple of days we will be on the Calder and Hebble Navigation and the Huddersfield Broad Canals, neither of these canals ever closed to navigation. However, the Huddersfield Narrow Canal and the Rochdale Canals were closed in 1944 and 1937-1952 respectively. When I first graduated in the 1990's and was living in Altrincham near Manchester I'd walk these canals, they were then quite derelict in places, and look at the restoration works. The restoration was being carried out piecemeal with 'difficult bits' being left. Both canals then got Millennium funding to complete the 'awkward bits' and both reopened in the early years of the 21st century.

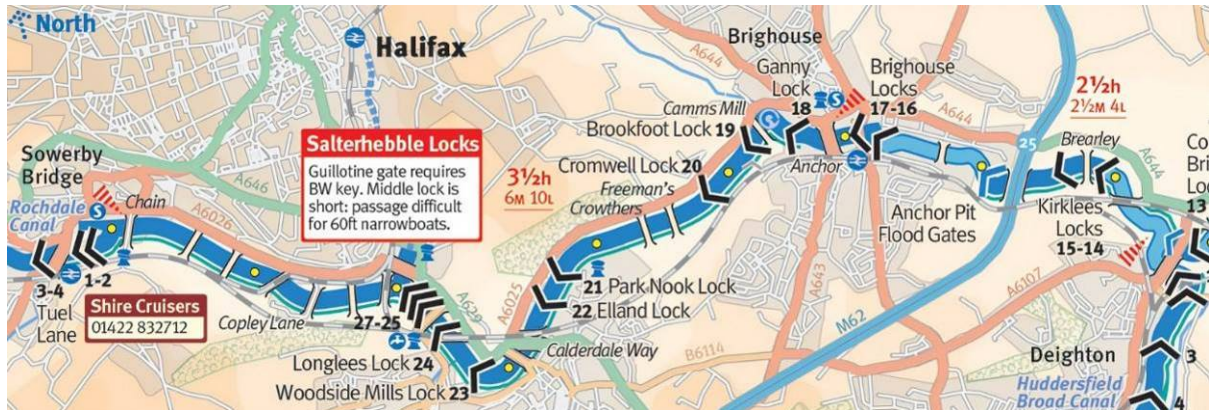
So, the aim in the next two weeks is to cross the Pennine watershed twice, whilst the 'lock-miles' being attempted each day is less than we would normally do there will be quite a few challenges and probably delays possibly then resulting in some long days to catch up. We will also be negotiating over 200 locks and the highest, longest deepest canal tunnel in the UK.

Monday 22 April - Day 1 Sowerby Bridge to Cromwell Lock

Today was a short first day as we didn't collect the boat until after lunchtime then had to have all the briefings.



Left is our boat the 'Sussex' waiting for the off from Sowerby Bridge Basin. Right is a row of other boats awaiting collection. The boat is 56' long which means it just fits in 57' 6" long locks on the Calder and Hebble Navigation. Being shorter than a usual boat we'd hire (65-70') it means inside it is a bit of squeeze.



For the first part of this trip, we were heading downstream on the Calder and Hebble Navigation down through 13 locks to the canal's junction with the Huddersfield Broad canal. Like many canals in Yorkshire, the Calder and Hebble Navigation is a broad canal having locks 14' wide (narrow canals are 7' wide).



After a couple of miles of cruising we reached the Salterhebble Locks, someone from the boatyard met us there to make sure we knew what we were doing, Right is the oddity of the Calder and Hebble locks being the paddle mechanism which is pulled around with a 3' long of wood supplied by the boatyard.



In the 1930's the road across the bottom of the Salterhebble Bottom Lock was widened necessitating the installation of a guillotine bottom gate, this gate moves electrically, rather slowly, and still proudly has a plate saying it was built in 1938.



The canal has lots of very old mile posts. Right is a very aggressive male swan guarding its mate on a nest by attacking the back of our boat.

Tuesday 23 April – Day 2 Cromwell Lock to Aspley Basin (Huddersfield)



Fiendish location of the day, we are on part of the Calder and Hebble Navigation which is in the River Calder, the actual navigation heading towards Dewsbury and Wakefield has just left to the left. We needed to pass under a bridge and turn sharp right into the first lock on the Huddersfield Broad Canal. All of this whilst trying to avoid going over a weir.



Turnbridge Loco bridge is a rather curious lifting bridge, the bridge lifts on chains and nowadays is propelled by motors, beside the bridge is a complex control panel you have to work through to make the bridge work.



Wednesday 24 April – Day 3 Aspley Basin (Huddersfield) to Aspley Basin (Huddersfield)

In planning this trip, we were expecting one or two delays due to 'canal difficulties' and today the first occurred. Today we should have started our journey the Huddersfield Narrow Canal to the Standedge Tunnel. This involves negotiating 42 locks in 8 miles. The first lock, Lock 1E has been leaking and we have had to book a passage with Canal and River Trust. Just after we arrived last night, we received a call from them to say that our 11am booking for today would not happen today due to insufficient water and would happen tomorrow. So, we spent a happy day moored next to the scenic splendours of Sainsburys Huddersfield, making occasional sorties to Lock 1E to check on progress.

On the Huddersfield Narrow Canal there are 74 locks, 42 on the east side numbered 1E to 42E and 32 on the west side numbered 1W to 32W.





Water levels slowly rising in the pound above Lock 1E over the period we were waiting for the water to rise.



Lock 1E in the middle of Huddersfield University

Thursday 25 April – Day 4 Aspley Basin (Huddersfield) to Lock 32E (Booth)

This morning, we received a call from Canals and Rivers Trust and following the removal of the stop planks above the lock we were able to move into Lock 1E at about 10am and were on the move out of the troublesome lock by 10.30.

Over the day we then headed up 32 locks up the Colne Valley.



Left, Lock 2E has been relocated upstream so during the restoration of the canal as a factory had been built over the course of the line of the canal. Right entering a lock



'Excuse us whilst we barge through' Above Lock 7E there were a couple of maintenance barges moored.



Cruising in the upper Colne Valley.



We stopped at Slaithwaite (AKA 'Slawit') for a 'tea and a cake', this is another part of the canal that had been piped during closure and needed re-excavating.





Cruising along.



Evening mooring.

Friday 26 April – Day 5 Lock 32E (Booth) to Uppermill

Today was a bit of big day, 11 locks up to the 650' summit through the 3 ½ mile (5.2km) long Standedge tunnel then down another 11 locks to Uppermill.

After the last 11 locks to Lock 42E we reached the lovely little town of Marsden.



This is the former Mechanics Institute in Marsden; right are Tenter Posts used to stretch woollen cloth after scouring.



This is the 'does what it says on the can' place 'Tunnel End' at the start of the Standedge Tunnel.

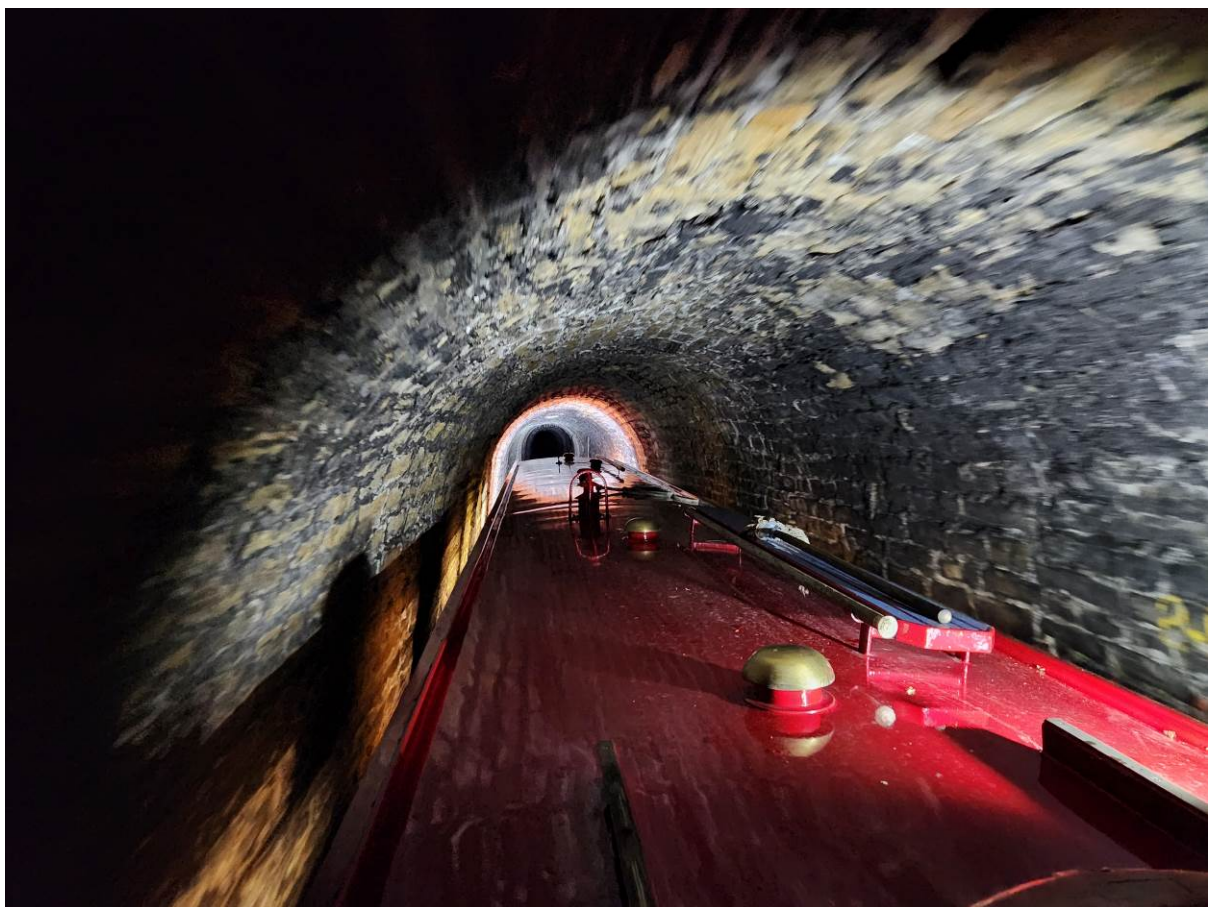
Construction of the canal tunnel at Standedge commenced in 1794 and it was finally completed in 1811, 16 years later, a phenomenal piece of construction for its day. The tunnel is still the longest, deepest, and highest canal tunnel in the country. It is also the longest operational canal tunnel in the world.

The canal tunnel assisted in the excavation of the adjacent railway tunnels. There were originally 3 railway tunnels, two single track tunnels opened in 1844 and 1847 and a double track tunnel opened in 1894. Only the double track tunnel has an operational railway in it today. There are plenty of cross passages between the tunnels and the canal tunnel is used to drain the railway tunnel. The last commercial boat passed through the canal tunnel in 1921 and after that it was closed before being reopened in 2001. Whilst the tunnel had decayed over its 80 years of its closure it was in generally good condition.

The tunnel is far from straight and uniform in section, parts are unlined stone, parts are lined with stone blockwork dating from the tunnel's construction. The construction of the double track railway tunnel caused the need for a lot more lining. There are also areas of repair dating from the restoration in 2001.

When initially reopened boats were towed through by a battery tugboat and passengers sat in a glass sided passenger car, today you are able to drive your own boat through under the supervision of the Canals and Rivers Trust.

So just after lunch we met our guide and chaperone Alistair, were supplied with copious quantities of safety equipment, our boat was fitted out with large floodlights and off we set, into the tunnel. We were shadowed in the parallel disused railway tunnel by another member of Canal and River Trust staff who showed up occasionally at the cross adits.



Heading through the 1790's built stone lined section of the tunnel.

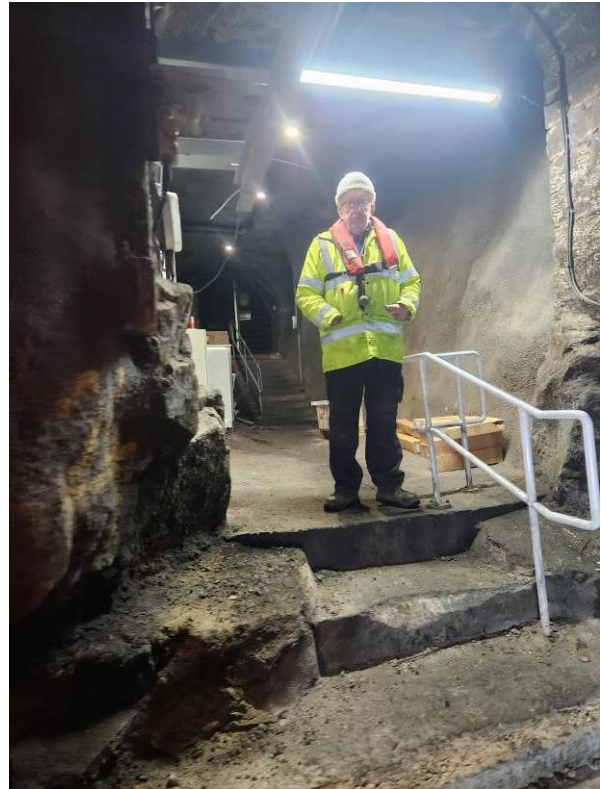




The boat got a good wash in a couple of places.



After initially being at the rear of the boat it went up to the bow, the feeling was surreal, the water was completely calm, and totally reflective giving the impression you were flying down a stone tube.



Cross passage to the railway tunnel, Canals and Rivers Trust man keeping an eye on us in a cross passage.



Going through chicane.



After 1h 40 we reached the western entrance, just after we came out the guides closed the gates, which have a lovely representation of the leggers who used to leg the boats through the tunnel.



Descending Diggle Locks looking back towards the hills with the tunnel through them.



Crossing the aqueduct just above Lime Kiln Lock.



Saturday 27 April – Day 6 Uppermill to Uppermill

Last night we moored just above Lock 21W in Uppermill. Because of the adjacent road, the right bottom gate balance beam is short and has an ingenious ratchet mechanism to make the gate move.



First thing this morning a Canals and Rivers Trust man came to Lock 21W and told us that there was a problem with the bottom gate and that he'd had to drain down the pound below the lock to repairs the gate. Whilst the repair was done quite quickly, the pound took all day to refill and we spent the day in the nice settlement of Uppermill.



Stuck in Uppermill I went to the Saddleworth Museum, which was good, the posters at the top. Below the DIY shop was rather good, very reminiscent of 'four candles'



Sunday 28 April – Day 7 Uppermill to Dukinfield

Today we had to get a move on and do what was planned to be two short days in one long day, so this morning we did the 15 locks and few miles to Stalybridge.



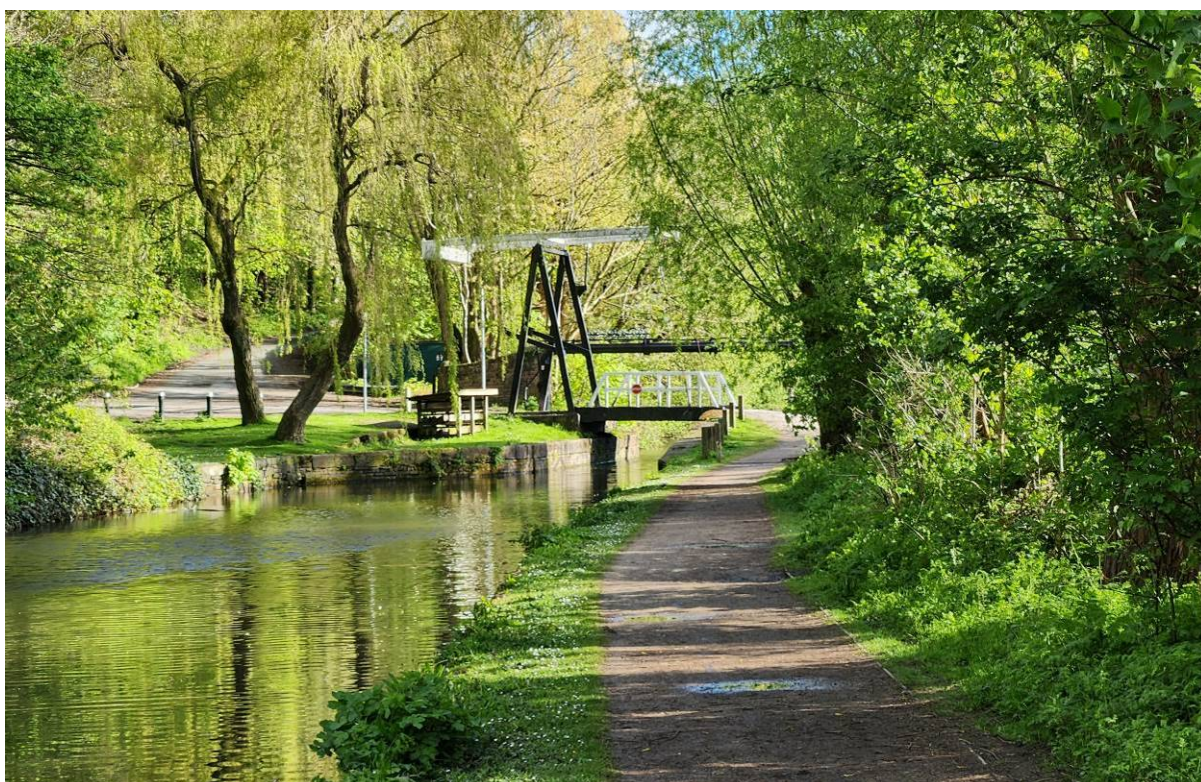
At Scout there was another short (200m long) tunnel.



Just west of Scout the canal had been filled in and a pylon built over the canal. When restored a channel was cut through between the pylon's legs.



Cruising along through the post-industrial apocalypse! A very grand old textile mill in the background.



To find a mooring at Dukinfield we went a short distance up the Peak Forest canal, turned around and came back to near the junction. This involved passing twice through this rather scenically located lift bridge.

Monday 29 April - Day 8 Dukinfield to Manchester



The second week of this epic began with the last descent through the 18 locks of the Ashton Canal into Manchester.

It has to be said that the Ashton Canal caused us one or two problems; it has a bit of a 'reputation' and we got quite a bit caught around the propeller and ran aground a couple of times.

However, we weren't as bad as our friends on 'Harry' who had been with us since Uppermill. Their 75 year boat has quite a deep draft (2' 10") and at one stage we had to pull them off when they got well stuck.

In the end what should have been a simple 6-hour cruise took all day and we moored up in Islington Basin where at least there were on-shore loos and showers.



Traditional motorboat and 'butty' (powerless towed boat) at a boatyard on Ashton Canal.



Lock 18, the highest on the Ashton Canal was once a 'double lock' due to the traffic, the near chamber is still in use and the far chamber has been out of a long time.



Towing Harry.



Left, Great fire escapes of Manchester!

Above, must always have tea!!.



In Ducie Street Basin we turned sharp right and started to head uphill again, Lock 83 was the first lock on the Rochdale Canal; we've only got to get to Lock 1!



This is the entrance to Islington Basin; the Rochdale Canal goes from left to right and there is an interesting 'three way' footbridge over the basin entrance. I then did a quick nip to a café to use the Wi-Fi, getting last week's diary sent and do my end of month billing, inset is the rather fine Lemon Meringue Pie cooked by the galley team of the day.

Tuesday 30 April - Day 9 Manchester to Newton Heath

Today was 'all change' day with two crew members leaving us and a new team member joining us. So, there were several walks to Piccadilly Station to drop people off and collect them.

We also resolved the crisis of the loos and their retention tank. We hoped to pump out yesterday and Portland Basin but there seemed to be nobody around. This morning, we considered going down 9 locks through Manchester to a boatyard at Castlefield Basin only to find after a call to our hire company there was nothing there, so our options were running out. At Islington there was no-one around in the office, so we tried the pump-out machine and it seemed to work so we gave it a go with success.



Heading up through East Manchester. The mechanism in the foreground is used to assist in pulling on lock gates with short balance beams.



Left a crow pestering a heron, right above Lock 76 another empty canal.

Initially leaving Manchester we were going well until we reached Lock 76 and found the canal empty. Above the lock there were 3 empty pounds and we found that it would take until the morning to get the canal refilled. So, we ended up spending the night in Newton Heath, which is not ideal as it is a bit of a rough area. Fortunately, we were in a more industrial area and were fine.



Sitting there waiting to go somewhere. Right, this is the Queens Road bus depot in Manchester, it was originally the Queens Road Tram Depot, and the trams went in and out where the arched window is on the corner.

Wednesday 1 May - Day 10 Newton Heath to Slattocks

We met with Canal and River Trust this morning and by about 10am we were on the move again with a determination to get out of built-up Manchester. The plan was to moor up at the River Irk Aqueduct, but we got there quite early so decided to ascend the 10 locks to Slattocks Top Lock.



Whilst the Manchester area has lost a huge number of textile mills many still remain, some are still an industrial use whilst many have been converted into apartments or offices.



Lock 65 is the top lock at Failsworth with a rather fine converted mill in the background.



Two projects built as part of the canal's restoration. Left is the Bridge 76a the vertical lift bridge, this bridge was built as part of the canal's restoration and is fully automatic, you turn up, put in a key and push a button and the barriers come down and up goes the bridge.

Right is the curve approaching the A62 bridge at Failsworth. This whole area is new as a shopping centre had been built over the canal during closure. During the restoration the shopping centre was demolished and rebuilt, and the canal reinstated.



Sussex coming into No4 Laneside Lock in the Slattocks flight. In the background a Northern Rail train crosses the canal on a large skew arch bridge.

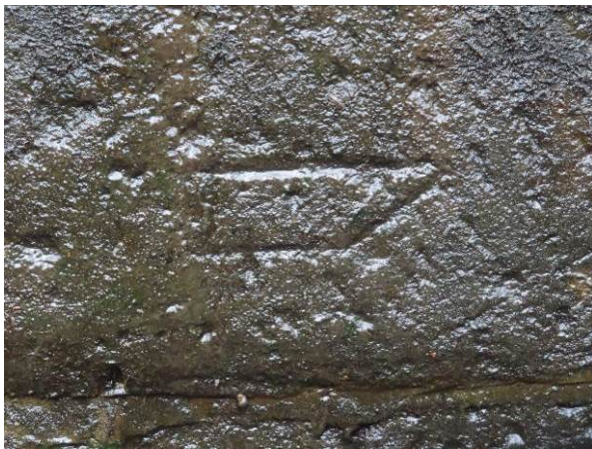


Left Slattocks Top Lock (No54) top lock lockkeepers' cottage. In bygone times the end wall of the cottage was painted white so boaters at night knew they were approaching the top lock.



Right is the rather fine Salmon and Sweetcorn Pie produced by the galley crew for dinner.

Thursday 2 May - Day 11 Slattocks to Littleborough



Mason's marks on the stones in the lock walls. Each mason had their own mark, and the marks signified the blocks produced by a particular mason so they could be paid for them.



During the canal's closure the M62 motorway was built across the canal, fortunately about 100m east of the blocked canal was an underpass. With a relocation of a lock, it was possible to divert the canal through the culvert. It's a bit narrow for the broad canal, so in order to get the broad boats through the towpath is on a floating pontoon that has to be towed out.



Coming into Lock 50 in Rochdale.

Rochdale was generally grim, and we tried to get across the place as fast as possible, albeit with a stop at a supermarket and a few stops when the boat lost control and we had to stop to remove debris from the propeller.

Today was a bit of an easier day with only five locks passed through and seven miles cruised, and we moored at the bottom of the Littleborough Locks ahead of our final ascent to the summit of the canal tomorrow.



Tonight, we had a dinner ashore in the Grape and Grain in Littleborough, starter was small tapas plates and followed by mains.

Friday 3 May - Day 12 Littleborough to Todmorden

On Saturday (tomorrow) we had the last booking of the trip to traverse the summit of the canal at the appropriately named 'Summit'; this is because during the years of closure the canal sold most of its water supplies in the area and water is in short supply. As our booking was for 11am tomorrow, we planned to go to one lock below the summit tonight. As it was on a recceing run this morning Iain found another boat was planning to come in the opposite direction, so we were able to pass over the summit today.



Geese and goslings, geese seem to be multiplying at a very fast rate.



An outing of the 'Mallard's Mens' Shed'



Rather nice bench backs at Littleborough.

On his recce Iain found that two short pounds of the canal were empty, but as we approached them Canals and Rivers Trust arranged for them to be filled and assisted them us the summit.



Crew, I think you might have a few problems opening that gate with the length of that balance beam. Right, east of Rochdale the locks had alcoves for a second set of bottom gates provided to make them the same length as the locks on the Calder and Hebble Canal. However, the gates were never fitted.



At Lock 37 on the summit, the highest broad lock in England.



Passing through the summit pound, the canal passes through a deep slot on the hills and it really feels quite upland with bracken at the side of the canal.



Above, the rather fine church in Littleborough, I think the bit at the right hand end is a later addition.

Left, crew member standing on the 'right side of the line'.



Old steps to enable boaters to reboard their boats after leaving a lock. Right, weir with stone-built towpath bridge.



Rather fine canalside house and garden complete with their own mooring, Right Walsden Church.



Moored up for the night at Lock 26 Pinel Lock above Todmorden.

Saturday 4 May - Day 13 Todmorden to Rawden Mill

Today began with most of Team Boat competing in the Todmorden Parkrun.



Crew members completing the Parkrun-

After a coffee and a bit of shopping we were off again descending through the Todmorden Locks.



The rather ornate Todmorden Railway Bridge, right, passing the 'Great Wall of Todmorden' apparently this contains 4 million bricks.



Todmorden Coop, and town hall.



Taking on water in Todmorden with the Todmorden Folk Festival happening in the background.



Rochdale Canal Boundary Post and Milepost.



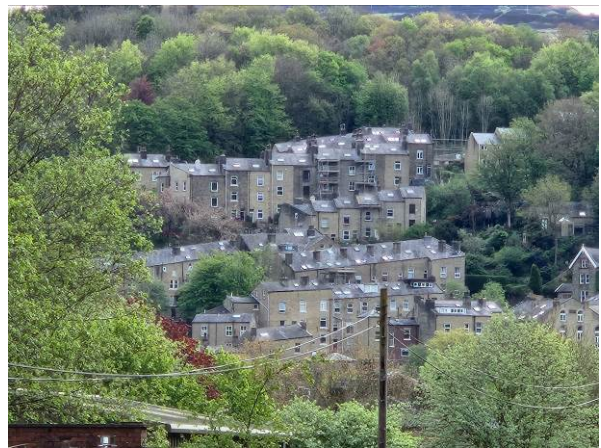
Sunday 5 May - Day 14 Rawden Mill to Luddenden Foot



Last night's mooring.



The local speciality, back-to-back houses with the access to the rear houses accessed from a walkway cantilevered over the river.



Left, approaching Hebden Bridge, old mill chimney reflected in the canal. Right above another local housing speciality. Four storey houses 2-two floor houses one on top of the other; access a level 1 on the downhill side and level 3 on the uphill side. Bottom Right. apple strudel for morning tea.



Hebden Bridge aqueduct.



Falling Royd Bridge, top photo, scanned from a book, probably from the 1920's with a Halifax Corporation tram crossing the bridge, bottom is the same scene today. The bridge was demolished when the canal was closed and during the restoration a new 'tunnel' was built. I love the road sign in the top picture 'Death Trap' !!



Mooring for the last night at Luddenden Foot.



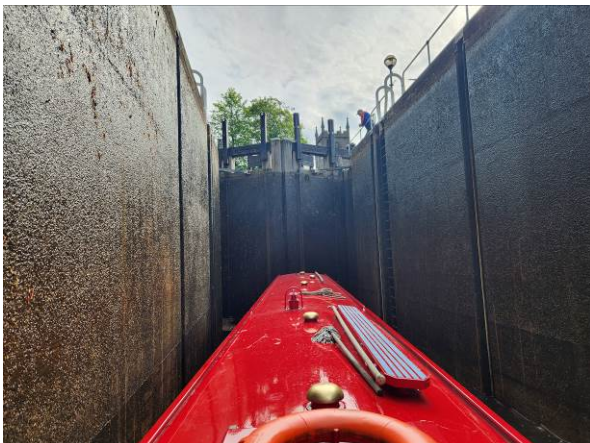
'Team boat' celebrating the end of this epic trip.

Monday 5 May - Day 15 Luddenden Foot to Sowerby Bridge

Today we were up quite early to give us time to pack and return the boat after the last 2 miles and 3 locks to Sowerby Bridge.



There was one final challenge, the Tuel Hill Lock, AKL Locks 3/4. During the Canal's closure Locks 3 and 4 were demolished and the main road up the valley widened. For years there was a good length of the canal restored up from Sowerby Bridge but with no actual connection. In 1996 a double depth lock was built, and a tunnel constructed under Tuel Lane to provide a link. The Canal and River Trust operate the lock and we just rode down the 19' 8" deep lock on the boat we even got a certificate to prove our accomplishment.





We then descended the last two locks to the boatyard and moored up in the same basin we had departed from 2 weeks ago, A full circuit of the South Pennine Ring having been successfully completed.

The term 'bucket list' is vastly overused but this trip has been on my to do list for a very long while.

- In the 1980's, whilst a student, we went orienteering near Todmorden and I saw the canal under restoration and we very intrigued by this very 'locky' canal,
- In 1990 I was in Altrincham and a few of my jobs seemed to be near canals, this led to a reawakening of my interest in canals, and I walked both canals in stages looking at the restoration and what needed to be done,
- I particularly remember going to the Littleborough locks on the Rochdale canal on many occasions watching the restoration,
- I was a member of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal Society for many years,
- Whilst good progress was being made there still were substantial bits to do, the millennium funding was the gamechanger and both canals were fully restored to navigation in the early 2000's.

Neither canal is easy, they never have been, but as a Canals and Rivers Trust lockkeeper put it, *'they were built cheaply and restored cheaply'* so there are always going to be some challenges.