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www.alisonalderton.com

LILY HEADS EAST - PART TWO

By Alison Alderton and Roger Harrington

It was always going to be hard to pull ourselves away from Potsdam but the inclement weather helped to make our departure a little easier. This impressive area surrounded by glistening lakes and spell-binding palaces oozes opulence but beneath the façade lie remnants of war and it seemed the further east we headed the more prominent these became.

Our route along the River Havel took us beneath the Glienicke Bridge which during the Cold War was a restricted border crossing between the Eastern Bloc and the Western powers. Due to its strategic location it was used for exchanging captured agents and became known as the 'Bridge of Spies'. In the grounds bordering the waterfront lies Glienicke Palace. When the young Prince Carl of Prussia returned to Berlin following a trip to Italy in 1823 he set about converting the existing grounds of this summer residence into his Italian dream. Most of it lies hidden from the boater but the casino gives one a tantalising glimpse of the architectural style of the grounds. The palace and park is now a Unesco World Heritage Site along with many others in the Potsdam area.

We were now entering wide water and it was a windswept day but with the experience gained from our years based on Lough Ree we felt at ease and were soon crossing the Wannsee, one of the larger lakes surrounding the capital city of Berlin. This is the weekend playground of Berliners, the place where they come to unwind, socialise and play during the balmy summer months. However on a mid-week day in April it was quiet.



Check Point Charlie

At Spandau we joined the River Spree, heading for the centre of Berlin and the public moorings at Tiergarten. Beyond this point navigation is restricted; during the day numerous trip boats ply the waters and have priority playing second fiddle only to the few commercial vessels taking the same route. Leisure boaters, with the exception of those able to speak fluent German over a VHF radio to book passage, are only permitted during the early morning or late evening so

we settled in for an overnight stay, enjoying the easily accessible sights from this central mooring point. The Neo-Classical Brandenburg Gate, the Holocaust Memorial and Check-point Charlie were among some of the places we visited.



Museum Island

The next morning we were up bright and early, however the weather was dull, grey and not at all what we had hoped for. All was quiet as we motored along the river taking in the city's most famous sites, the twin cylindrical towers of the Bundesministerium Des Inneren, the Reichstag building with its glass dome and the impressive Museum Island. Sitting midstream in the River Spree this is home to five of Berlin's major museums and galleries as well as the stunning cathedral. From here we had good views of the Fernsehturm, a tall rotating TV Tower known locally as 'The Toothpick'. We had a short wait at the city's lock, located adjacent to the imposing Neuer Martsall building, whilst a commercial barge exited; this was the first boat we encountered all morning so we really had had the city all to ourselves!



Oberbaum Bridge

Being a lover of unusual architecture one of the highlights of this trip was passing beneath the Oberbaum Bridge. A red brick Gothic double-decked structure carrying both trains and vehicles over the Spree. With the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 it became part of the border between East and

West Berlin. To complete our circular boat tour of Berlin we needed to lock onto the Landwehr Canal but with time to spare before it opened to navigation we headed further along the Spree taking in the towering sculpture of Molecule Man standing in the waters opposite the Trep Towers. Mooring to wait for the lock we had a stunning view downriver to the Oberbaum Bridge and bacon butties with steaming mugs of tea were the order of the day.



Molecule Man

The Landwehr Canal is completely different from the Spree. It runs through the city's parks and residential areas rather than past the main sites of interest, is just shy of 11km long and was built between 1845 and 1850. Headroom is limited and the course is relatively narrow but a one-way system is in operation so there are no worries about meeting oncoming traffic. One of the most interesting sections is at the Technikmuseum where a Dakota plane sits precariously looming down over the waterway looking as if it is about to dive-bomb passers by. The final stretch of the canal passes through the Tiergarten and the Berlin Zoological Gardens. The strange calls coming from the monkey enclosure quickly enticed our dog Buster out of slumber and to trot around the deck peering bewilderingly into the lush surroundings in an attempt to catch a glimpse of whatever was making the noise!



Berlin Technikmuseum

With Berlin behind us we joined the Oder-Havel Canal. Travelling northwards the waterway slowly began to change character, becoming narrower and with less commercial traffic. At Oranienburg we took time out to visit Sachsenhausen, one of the most notorious concentration camps in Germany and situated directly on the

waterfront, the former brickworks of Klinkerhafen. This acted as a forced labour satellite camp for Sachsenhausen and those based here worked on the canal and its harbour, where many met their death. A soft drizzle fell from the sky throughout our visit which somehow seemed totally appropriate especially during the quiet moments of reflection spent at the flower-clad quayside memorial. We were to encounter more camps throughout our journey and the one thought which regular came to mind was how can places so stunningly beautiful be linked to something so atrocious?



Lock controls

Turning off the Oder-Havel Kanal to join the Obere-Havel Wasserstrasse we encountered our first self-operated semi-automatic lock. Mooring up we simply had to pull a lever and wait for the green light, a digital display relates what is happening in English

and German. We found these locks easy and simple to use and made good progress through them. This is without doubt one of the most beautiful river navigations I have cruised on, it is a pleasant mixture of natural river and canal cuts bordered by tree-lined banks and beautiful countryside littered with small villages. The further north we headed the denser the surrounding woods became. The early spring sunshine filtering through the trees was magical; the strange calling of the crane which migrates to this area for the breeding season filled the air, whilst high in the blue sky circling birds of prey climbed an invisible spiral staircase of warm thermals. Osprey, sea eagles, red and black kites all make their home here and thrive well in the area. Seeing these raptors prompted talk of Lough Derg's sea eagles and we wished them well for the breeding season ahead.



Obere Havel Wasserstrasse

Entering the Mecklenburg Lake District we were both taken aback by the beauty of the place. The sheer volume of water is amazing and it is easy to see why this area is known as the land of a thousand lakes. This is about as close to Ireland as I have ever come in another European country and over the summer we have had numerous conversations with German boaters who frequently compare the two. Those that had never been to Ireland before seemed hungry

for information on the inland waterways, a subject both Roger and I will quite happily while away the hours over. Whilst steel cruisers seem to be the favoured vessel on these waters we encountered many weird and wonderful contraptions including motorised platforms onto which you can drive your own caravan or motor home. There are also floating cabins which come in a variety of different shapes and sizes and are affectionately known as Bunbo's, short for Boat Bungalows all of which are extremely popular and would perhaps do well on Irish waters?



Caravan platform

Our plans were to spend the summer based in Mecklenburg and we had made initial enquires at one of the largest hire fleet operators, Kuhnle Tours for a berth at their marina. Based in the Claasee on the eastern shore of Lake Muritz it has similarities to Castle Archdale on Lower Lough Erne having once been used as a flying boat base and there is a museum nearby relating its history. Unfortunately we were unable to secure a satisfactory berth as Lily is considered a large vessel in these more 'touristy' waters overhanging the available pontoons. A hectic search to try and find somewhere more suitable began but as the season was already underway our options were limited. It was also the week of Muritz Sail, the famous sailing regatta where boats and crews gather from around the world to race their yachts on the vast open waters of the lake and it was getting busy! We finally found a marina with room for us at Rechlin on the southern entrance to the lake. The marina is completely dog friendly which met with approval from our canine companion and



Mecklenburg Lakes

the staff young, vibrant, always happy to help and a pleasure to deal with.

The remainder of the summer was spent exploring Lake Muritz and the surrounding local areas. Highlights include swimming off Lily in the crystal clear shallow waters on the

lakes eastern shore and coming face to face with wild boar in the Muritz National Park. Lake Muritz is of a similar shape and size to Lough Ree but lacks the tree-covered islands and rocky shoals, the bottom here is mostly sandy and the whole lake is bordered by a shallow ledge which protrudes for some distance. The pretty ports of call all have their own character just as they do on Lough Derg. Robel with its boat houses on stilts, Klink with its French-style chateau and Waren with its Mediterranean style waterfront often referred to as the gateway to the Muritz National Park. In stark contrast to the wide open space of the lake, there are the narrow tree-lined remains of the Bolter Canal to explore. Whilst this is only navigable for 2kms for motor craft, the remainder of the route forms a popular canoe trail leading through unspoilt waters known for their abundant water lilies. We enjoyed taking the Muritz Arm, a dead end route leading to the port of Bucholz where in a small vessel further exploration into the twisting and turning reed-lined channels reminiscent of the Carnadoe Waters can be undertaken. The only downside we have found is the lack of free moorings and due to this, anchoring up is common practice but there are plenty of secluded bays and pools in which to do this and it is usually possible to find somewhere suitable.

Lily has come a long way; from Friesland in the Netherlands to the Mecklenburg Lake District in Germany, she has covered a total distance of 857km travelling through 54 locks and 55 opening bridges. Many more kilometres on top of that have been spent exploring the lakes and yet more again when in the autumn we retraced our steps back to Berlin to overwinter. On this occasion we travelled through Berlin city centre in a night convoy, it was the trip of a life time but not for the faint-hearted as we had to contend with trip boats sporting discos, projected light shows and laser beams as well as fully-



Night convoy through Berlin

laden commercial craft all in the pitch black of night - it took us several days to come down from that high!

Our plans for 2015 involve a trip back to the Mecklenburg Lakes to pick up where we left off. From Lake Muritz we will finally turn westwards and begin heading back towards the Netherlands however, I think Roger may have other plans afoot...

Photos: Alison Alderton and Roger Harrington