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# LILY HEADS TO THE BALTIC

By Alison Alderton

We spent last winter in Berlin based at Wassersportzentrum, a large marina situated in Köpenick, once part of the Eastern Bloc. The marina is ice-free; when temperatures plummet below freezing compressed air is pumped through pipes lying on the river bed stopping the build up of ice or breaking up that already formed depending on how severe the frost. With *Lily* being a steel barge this isn't a necessity, the real appeal is the large lock-free area in which it is situated allowing us to cruise throughout the coldest and darkest days of a central European winter.



By November temperatures of minus five degrees were commonplace. A fierce easterly wind often made it feel colder and created waves on the Mugglespree, the waterway connecting Berlin's largest lake to the River Spree, which splashed on *Lily* to leave a fringe of long icy fingers dangling from her stern. Christmas markets were in full swing and we enjoyed visiting Alexanderplatz where one of the largest is held. An outdoor skating rink, fun fair, stalls selling delicious foods and beverages as well as arts and crafts filled the square. With public transport being easy to use and dog-friendly we often took the trains, trams and buses however it is also possible to moor freely for 24hrs on the Spree Canal situated a short walk from the city's main sites.

Winter explorations further east led into a series of three beautifully rural inter-linked lakes where we enjoyed peaceful solitude however their lack of flow meant ice-breaking on occasion so visiting had to be undertaken with caution. We are not new to ice-breaking, having had to smash our way out of the Carnadoe Waters back in 2009 when we awoke on the Kilglass moorings to discover a deep freeze had descended overnight! Another favourite winter haunt was the village of Schmöckwitz, situated on the River Dahme, where large pusher tugs with dumb barges full of coal, the great black heaps often sporting a dusting of snow, kept the navigation ice-free.

Easter 2015 saw us braving snow showers whilst heading back to the Mecklenburg Lakes where we had been based last

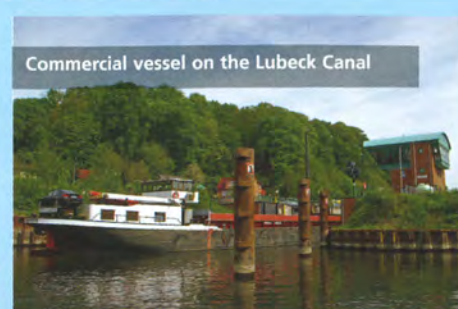
summer. A month's stay enabled us to revisit some favourite places, explore others previously missed including Rheinsberg with its waterside castle and prepare *Lily* for the voyage ahead.



Joining the River Elde on Mecklenburg's northern reaches we entered new waters. Known as the Silver Ribbon, this delightful river navigation flows through some beautiful scenery and tourist hot spots including Plau and Malchow. A diversion to the city of Schwerin coincided with the gathering of storm clouds and strong winds. We quickly put into restaurant moorings opposite the fairytale castle and watched horrified as black clouds swirled above, thunder roared, lightning flashed and the heavens opened. We later discovered that this had developed into a tornado skimming Schwerin but hitting Hamburg causing death, structural damage and havoc at the port where container ships broke mooring lines. The wild weather delayed our departure longer than expected but with the stunning view from the boat we didn't mind. It was a magical setting enhanced by the castles classical music concerts, the sounds of which were swept up by the wind to gently and rhythmically float by the wheelhouse windows.

At Dömitz we joined the River Elbe. With its reputation for low water levels and shifting shoals the channel needs to be followed closely. Skippers of craft over 15m in length require a special qualification or be accompanied by a pilot to navigate the Elbe so we felt rather privileged to be let loose on one of Europe's major waterways. We enjoyed a late afternoon cruise downstream and as the sun set arrived at Lauenberg where a decision had to be made? Our original plans involved heading back to the Netherlands from here but thoughts of a sea voyage were prominent in Roger's mind. On leaving Ireland we'd hoped to cross the Irish Sea from Dublin to Liverpool but the weather had other ideas. After a month in the Grand Canal Docks followed by a further two weeks in Poolbeg Marina, involving a couple of failed attempts at departure, we reluctantly had *Lily* transported by road. This has played havoc with Roger ever since with the Irish Sea becoming his nemesis. The only way to cure him was to venture out onto salt water again and where better to head than

the Baltic Sea, bringing *Lily* home to Denmark for a while.



Turning *Lily's* bow towards the coast we left the Elbe joining the Lübeck Canal. This once formed part of the Salt Route dealing with vast shipments of the commodity. Some of the former warehouses have been beautifully preserved in the city of Lübeck which due to its extensive Brick Gothic architecture is an UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is also the birthplace of marzipan and everything edible seems to be flavoured with it, from coffee to ice cream. We certainly overindulged whilst there particularly with the delicious marzipan cake!



From Lübeck the tidal River Trave leads to the seaside resort and port of Travemünde, where early one morning we set off to cross the Baltic Sea. With *Lily* being a relatively slow vessel (max 6 knots) we decided to break our journey at Burgstaaken on the German island of Fehmarn allowing Buster, our dog, time ashore, ourselves a break and the chance to visit the interesting U-Boat Museum. It wasn't long before we found ourselves in conversation with the harbour master who after printing off an up-to-date weather forecast advised leaving straight away as a weather front was approaching bringing a prolonged unsettled spell.

With the sun shining down on us and the blue sea gently rolling beneath *Lily's* hull we hugged the coast of Fehmarn to pass Staberhuk lighthouse finally leaving German soil behind. The further we ventured away from land the more pronounced the swell became; the Baltic Sea has strange wind-created ebbs and flows and this produced an odd feeling as the wind gently pushed *Lily's* stern in one direction whilst the swell pulled her in the opposite. The huge Nysted and Ridsand wind farms boasting some 162 turbines soon became visible backed by the distant smudge of Danish land. By the time

we reached the shipping lanes we were tacking back and forth, not to find wind as a yacht would do but simply to make the journey more comfortable. It is unusual to see a barge at sea; especially one constantly travelling back and forth adjacent to major shipping lanes so it wasn't long before we attracted the attention of the Danish Coast Guard vessel. They monitored us for a while, no doubt wondering what on earth we were doing but once we had safely crossed in-between two gigantic vessels they lost interest and steamed away.

Finally rounding the wind farms we caught sight of Gedser, Denmark's most southerly town and port, situated on the island of Falster. In fading light we fell in behind the Rostock to Gedser ferry following the lighted buoyed channel into the marina. The journey, a total of 66 nautical miles, more if we were to calculate the tacking, had taken all day to complete. By the time we finally motored into the safe confines of Gedser Marina it was 10pm. Exhausted and in need of sleep this became our home for the next seven days as around us winds howled. These unsettled weather conditions became a main feature and at times huge hindrance to our summer on the Baltic.



Leaving Gedser and taking the Guldborgsund, separating the islands of Falster and Lolland, this pretty stretch with limited depth and narrow channels is more like the waters *Lily* is used to. Denmark is made up of many islands; it's a boater's paradise and we thoroughly enjoyed harbour hopping from port to port and island to island in this southerly region of the country. Highlights include Vordingborg on the island of Zealand with its impressive castle ruins; the island of Bogø, where we took a trip on *Ida* one of the few remaining wooden passenger ferries still operating in Denmark and the delightful island of Nyord with its extensive salt marshes. These are used for grazing cattle in the summer whilst during winter they flood attracting great numbers of wildfowl and are reminiscent of the Shannon Callows. The inhabitants of Nyord were once considered heathens as they worked on Sundays, tending fields and livestock or fishing. To remedy this, the clergy from the larger island of Møn built them a pretty octagonal church now the centrepiece of the village.

At one time pilots were used to assist ships through the waters surrounding Nyord. To continue northwards along the coast of Zealand, Denmark's largest island which we

hoped to circumnavigate, we needed to cross the Bigestrom, one of the most treacherous stretches but thankfully today this is a well-marked route. A diversion westwards allowed us a week in the sheltered waters of Præsto Fjord, followed by a stop at Rîdvig which nestles at the southern end of Stevns Klint, an extensive headland of white cliffs before heading into Copenhagen via the sea lock.

Copenhagen's waterways and moorings are always busy so finding a free place at Amaliehaven, opposite the impressive Opera House was a dream come true. It was wonderful spending time here but the high quay wall made it difficult to get on and off the boat so we moved to a relatively unknown mooring a short walk from the famous statue of the Little Mermaid called America Quay. The former docks for ships arriving from or departing to the USA this is currently under rejuvenation and consists of restored warehouses, modern apartment's, office space and shops situated around a large sea water basin with floating pontoon moorings.



Leaving Copenhagen we passed the extensive cruise ship docks before heading out to Flakfortet, one of three artificial islands housing former WWI fortresses constructed to protect the city's waterways. Now converted into a restaurant with visitor's moorings it offers fine views of the Rîsund Bridge linking Denmark to Sweden and provides guided tours of the fortifications. Boaters are spoilt for choice along the east coast of Zealand as there are many ports of call. Heading northwards our stops included Skovshoved, where Buster was able to just walk across the road to have his annual inoculations keeping his pet passport up to date and Rungsted, the former home of Karen Blixen author of *Out of Africa*. Offshore lays the Swedish island of Venn where on a balmy sunny day we dropped anchor and took our first dip in the waters of the Baltic.

At Helsingør the narrow straits between



Denmark and Sweden are overlooked by Kronborg Castle, Hamlet's Elsinore in Shakespeare's play. Here we entered the Kattegat Sea which connects the Baltic to the North Sea, and turned eastward. Conditions can change quickly here and there is a long fetch allowing waves to rapidly build up. Despite departing on a still morning this degenerated into a series of unsettling squalls making the journey along Zealand's north coast long and testing. The day concluding in sunshine as we motored by the former home of polar explorer, Knud Rasmussen to enter the port of Hundested which situated at the entrance to the Isefjord and its branches marks the beginning of our home waters.

We enjoyed several weeks exploring the fjords where our arrival was heralded by harbour porpoises and smacks of moon jellyfish so dense we thought they would bar our way. Unfortunately during August tragedy struck when Buster, just ten days after celebrating his twelfth birthday, suffered heart failure and passed away. He had spent a lifetime on the waterways with us and his passing has left a huge hole in our lives. Our sorrow has for the time being



rendered us unable to continue our journey so this winter we will collect our thoughts and re-plan whilst *Lily* remains in the sheltered waters of Roskilde Fjord close to our home.

As mentioned in Alison's article, Buster the Barge Beagle owned by Alison and her husband Roger Harrington, died in August.

Buster spent his whole life on and around the waterways of Great Britain, Ireland and Europe. In 2007 he attended the IWA National Festival and Boat Show held at St. Ives, Cambridgeshire, UK where he acquired the title of 'The Admiral'.

