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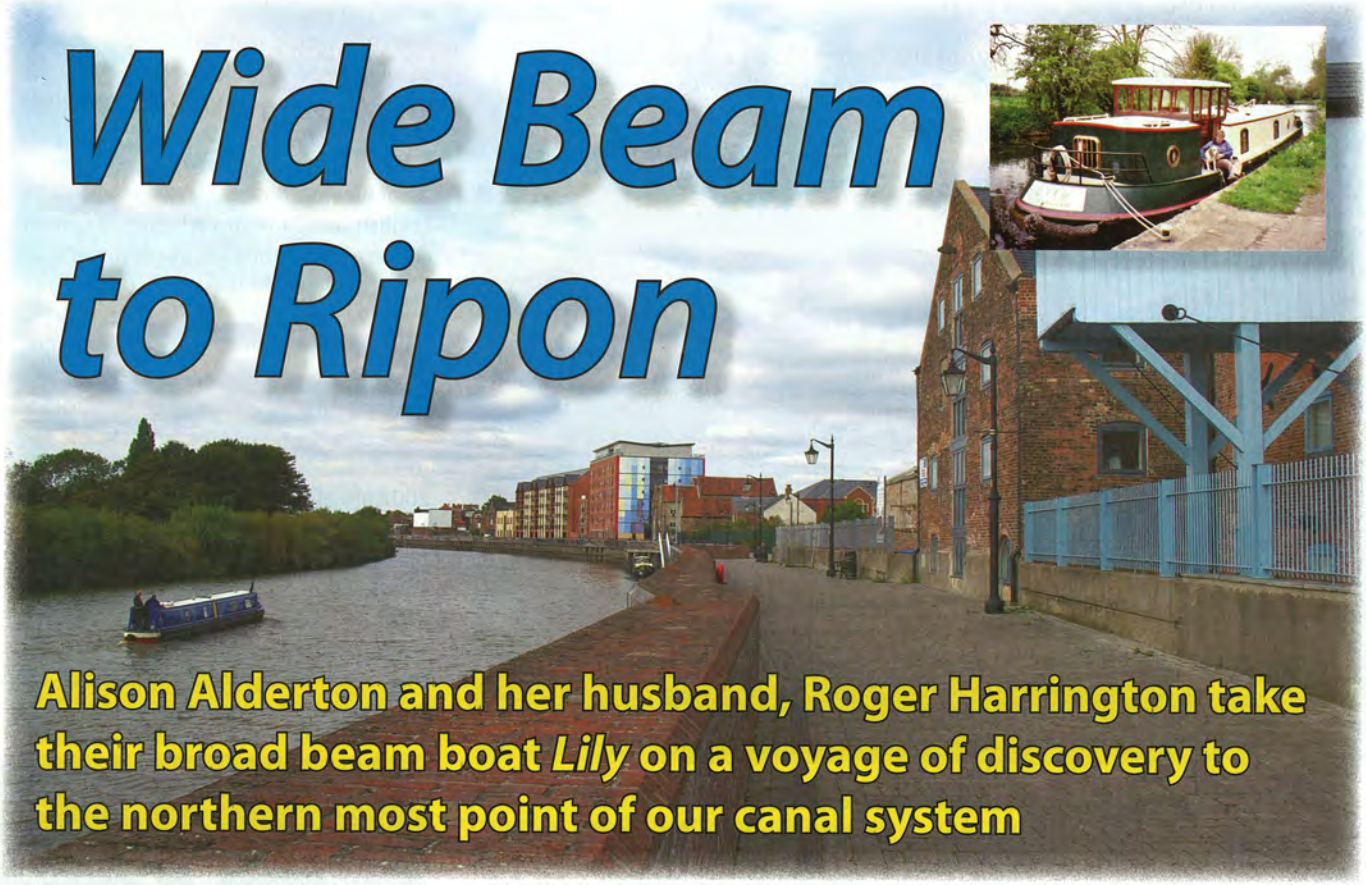
Wide Beam to Ripon



Alison Alderton and her husband, Roger Harrington take their broad beam boat *Lily* on a voyage of discovery to the northern most point of our canal system

Our first big adventure on *Lily* was to reach Ripon, the northern most point of our canal system. From Farndon Marina our base on the Trent, this would involve travelling downriver joining the tidal section and following it to its confluence with the River Ouse at the notorious Trent Falls. These two great rivers merge here forming the Humber Estuary and tides can be fast and at times unforgiving with few places for shelter. From this point the Ouse is navigated to its tidal limit at Naburn. Ripon is then accessed via the non-tidal Ouse, the River Ure and Ripon Canal.

Helpful advice

My husband, Roger had successfully completed a Day Skipper Course and with a good understanding of tidal systems was eager to put what he had learnt into practice. As this was our first taste of potentially dangerous waters plied by seagoing vessels, we spoke to fellow boaters and the Trent lock keepers beforehand whose helpful advice was invaluable. Setting off we were on familiar waters penning through Town Lock, which is spectacularly situated near Newark castle, and Nether Lock. The huge lock at Cromwell heralds the start of the tidal section and the two-hour cruise to Torskey, our first overnight stop.

Torksey cut is bordered with pontoons for craft in transit and for those waiting to lock up onto the Fossdyke and Witham navigations. We are frequent visitors to these waterways but had never ventured below Torskey before so it was with eager anticipation that we set off the following day for Gainsborough. We had heard mixed reports of mooring here, it seems that some boaters have experienced problems with youths which is a shame as the newly rejuvenated riverfront and compact town have much to offer the visitor. This is the last place where moorings are available on the river and also marks the end of BWB jurisdiction

TOP: **Gainsborough's rejuvenated waterfront.**
ABOVE: ***Lily* passing beneath "The Cliff" on the approach to Trent Falls.**

LEFT: **East Ouse No. 2 Beacon in the Humber estuary.**

CENTRE: **Skelton railway swing bridge.**

BOTTOM: **A narrow boat prepares to enter Naburn Lock, at the tidal limit of the River Ouse.**

with Associated British Ports taking over the role reminding one that this is now a commercial waterway.

Early start

It was an early 6.30am start on a miserable grey day. If we had done our sums correctly, it was going to be a twelve-hour cruise so *Buster* our Beagle needed a long walk before leaving. We had cut a section of turf from our garden and placed it on the front deck for use as a doggy toilet, the plan being that we could then roll it up and dispose of once we found a suitable refuse point. Despite the dull weather our spirits were not dampened and we excitedly left Gainsborough taking in the new sights. We passed West Stockworth, the entrance to the Chesterfield Canal before reaching Keadby, where craft wishing to avoid Trent Falls can lock up and use the canal network to reach Selby on the tidal Ouse. With the water falling away rapidly as we approached lowest ebb, Keadby Lift Bridge loomed out of the morning murk to greet us. We were now in the throngs of commercial craft, docks and warehouses. The eerie weather adding to the atmosphere of these ramshackle jetties with their skeletal cranes silhouetted against the blank sky. We cruised on in awe passing huge coasters lining the wharves perched high and dry waiting for the incoming tide, their friendly crew stopping to wave before carrying on with their tasks in hand.

Approaching Burton Stather we should have hit the flood but had made better time than expected so not wanting to anchor in deeper water to await it, a common practice for craft taking this route, we slowed. We had chosen a neap tide which gave us best water level at lowest point of ebb sufficient for our draft but still needed to meet the flood about half an hour before reaching Trent Falls to clear the shallows. Passing the prominent power lines we switched banks feeling for deeper water towards the "Cliff", a well-known landmark signifying the run-in to the estuary. Slowly the land began disappearing and with the flood now making good, we were surprised not to see any other craft at this desolate spot.

Into the Humber!

With Apex light in view and the greyness of the day beginning to lift we speeded up heading out into the vast expanse of the Humber. We had been warned about turning too soon as the fast tides can throw you off course into the training wall which separates the two river mouths. Once sure we had plenty of space we turned *Lily* into the flow and in no time at all we were flying, caught up in the rushing flow of the tidal Ouse, its muddy brown waters carrying us along as it we were weightless. We had rounded Trent Falls in a matter of minutes and were left wondering what all the fuss was about!

The Ouse is way-marked by an easy

LEFT: **Blue Bridge, the entrance to the navigable River Foss.**

BELOW: **York's staithes viewed from Ouse Bridge.**

BOTTOM LEFT: **The stunning York Minster viewed from the City Walls.**

to follow numbering system. The early flood swept us past Blacktoft Jetty at a rate of knots and onwards following the river's wide arcs to Goole. This is a busy working port and the limit for sea-going ships however large vessels still operate as far as Selby. As we approached, we could see the entrance to the once navigable Dutch River and immediately after the enormous Ocean Lock, the main entrance into the commercial docks followed by the Victoria and Ouse Locks which are smaller in size.

Sailing beneath the first of the famous Ouse swing-bridges at Skelton, we realised that *Lily* was small compared to the huge scale of the vessels that could use this river with both headroom and depth being vast. All the bridges on this tidal section with the exception of the M62 bridge, have opening spans and Bridge Operators can be contacted on VHF9. At Howden Dyke Island, a huge expanse of water resembling a lake, the route needs to be followed carefully as below lay hidden mud banks. Directly after the motorway we needed to negotiate Booth Ferry Swing Bridge, opened in 1929 this replaced the last ferry crossing on the Ouse. Not far beyond is the mouth of the once navigable River Aire, lined with Poplar trees it remained us of a French waterway. The skyline is now dominated by the huge Drax Generating Station, Europe's largest coal-fired power station which opened in 1973.

Rising tide

Barmby Lock and tidal barrage, allows the boater pre-bookable access onto the Environment Agency controlled River Derwent and Pocklington Canal. As we passed we were aware of the rising water level and the rivers diminishing width and decided to call ahead to Selby Bypass Bridge to check headroom. We were assured we had plenty of clearance for our 3m wheelhouse height so with stomachs rumbling I placed a pre-prepared Chicken Casserole in the oven as Roger navigated *Lily* beneath this modern structure. After passing the Selby Canal entrance the river is bordered by imposing warehouses and mills. Negotiating the route beneath Selby Railway and Toll Road Swing Bridges can be difficult as the river narrows considerably and the flow is forceful especially on the sharp bend which leads towards Barley.

Cawood lies hidden from view but gaps in the lush banks did allow us the occasional tantalising glimpse of this pretty village before reaching the

Cawood Swing Bridge. Once through a water ski section leads to River Wharfe, which is navigable with care to Tadcaster. With the flood now slowing we caught up with two narrow boats, the first leisure craft we had seen all day. They had locked down at Selby after making their way through the canal system and we took up our place behind them feeling the tiredness creeping in.

Naburn

At Naburn there are two locks with the largest mechanised one being the most used. We all locked up together and as we were raised off the tidal reach an enchanting scene of workshops and bygone equipment unfolded whilst the smell of home cooking wafting up from the galley reassured us we would be eating well. The short canal cut lined with mature horse chestnut trees and providing 48hrs moorings is the ideal place to moor and gather ones thoughts after

the tidal stretch, which is exactly what we did. Throughout the day *Lily* handled well, we averaged a speed of approximately 6mph and felt safe aboard her encountering no problems. For those of you who are wondering about *Buster* and the turf, it was a waste of time as he held on for the twelve hours not relieving himself until we were securely moored up and able to access dry land!

After a restful morning we set off for the short cruise to York. This first non-tidal section is busy with moored craft but the river is wide with plenty of passing space and delightfully wooded banks. It is also home to Naburn Marina, the largest on the Ouse providing moorings for over 250 craft. The Naburn Railway Swing Bridge is now disused and is topped by an unusual fisherman sculpture which bought a smile to our faces. Midway between Naburn and York stands the impressive Bishopthorpe Palace, residence of the Archbishop of York.

Once beneath the elegant Millennium Bridge built to resemble a bicycle wheel the approach to York begins with shady tree-lined walks and parks on both banks. Just after the entrance to the River Foss with its bright blue bridge we found ourselves entering the bustling city, its public houses and restaurants spilling out onto the pavements and riverside, where there is a mixture of new and old staithes, quays and trip boat boarding areas.

The Guild Hall, the glorious Minster and the city's latest addition the York Eye are all visible attractions from the river. York was once known as the "City of Chocolate" and large deliveries of cocoa beans regularly arrived by barge. Despite Terry's closing down in 2005, Rowntree's (Nestle) are still manufacturing at York but sadly no longer use the river.

Mooring in York

The best place to moor is beyond Lendall Bridge where a new river frontage was constructed in 1966 with funding from the Joseph Rowntree Memorial

Trust. Adjacent to the moorings are the delightful Museum Gardens whilst the city centre is just a stroll away. There are no secure moorings but we encountered no trouble however, as in any major town or city be vigilant and ensure your craft is secure when leaving it unattended. York's attractions are endless but amongst the most popular are the Minster, walking the city walls, the Jorvick Museum and The Shambles, cobbled streets full of interesting shops. The best value for money is the free National Railway Museum, which kept us amused for hours. The city is compact and easy to get around on foot and not far from the moorings we discovered two recreation grounds where *Buster* could let off steam! Many of the houses and shops have flood defences which are an eye-opener to the destructive reputation this river possesses during times of flood.

After three days of city life we continued northwards through open countryside passing beneath Clifton Bridge and beyond Asylum Landing. A narrow gauge railway once carried transhipped coal from here to the nearby hospital hence its name. Skelton or Poppleton Railway Bridge was built in 1840 and carries the East Coast Main Line so be prepared for the high speed trains that dash over here shattering the silence. Most of the banks are now high and dense with willow trees but Monkton Pool is delightful and one of the prettiest sections on the waterway. The pool itself is no more than a wide bend in the

TOP: **A nightime scene of an illuminated York trip boat moored at Lendal Bridge.**

CENTRE: ***Lily* moored at the Museum Gardens with the York Eye in the background.**

LEFT: **Roger preparing Milby Lock on the River Ure for *Lily*.**

LEFT: **Rhode's Field Lock, note the by-pass weir which is clearly visible to the right hand side.**

CENTRE: **Boroughbridge's impressive 250ft well stands in the centre of the market place.**

BOTTOM LEFT: ***Lily* sharing the BW 72hrs moorings at Ripon Canal Basin with a narrow boat.**

OPPOSITE TOP: **Oxclose Lock, the entrance to the short 2.5 mile Ripon Canal.**

INSET: **Ripon Cathedral.**

Ouse into which flows the unnavigable River Nidd. There are no moorings here so to explore the village of Nun Monkton or the nearby National Trust Property Beningbrough Park one has to nose into the bank or bow in on the small sandy beach alternatively, use a mud weight then reach shore by dinghy. For many craft this is the limit of navigation as the section beyond leads to Linton Lock and is littered with the notorious "Clay Huts", mounds of clay lying just below the waters surface which catch out unaware boaters. The approach should be taken with care keeping to the centre of the river which we did and with a draught of 0.9 metres encountered no problems.

Imposing

The downstream view of Linton Lock is imposing. The vast lock gates towered high above us whilst the weir spilt forth its stewed tea coloured waters to greet us. *Lily* fitted snugly into the lock, the operation of which was hard work, mainly due to its depth and unusual winding gear. Next to the lock there is a small restaurant and in the cut pontoon moorings. Linton-on-Ouse RAF station is nearby and aircraft training takes place week days making for interesting if somewhat noisy viewing so don't expect a lay in if you moor here overnight as we did!

Above Linton the river is free of "Clay Huts" and is a mixture of wide stretches and narrow winding bends to Swale Nab where navigation continues on the River Ure. Milby Lock and cut leads to the pretty town of Boroughbridge, our overnight stop where there are good moorings. This pretty market town has a good selection of shops and an impressive 250ft deep well in the centre of the market place. During the 18th century Boroughbridge developed into a significant inland port for the linen trade of nearby Knaresborough with the navigation carrying great quantities of flax as well as coal and timber.

The next morning we set off to Westwick Lock; beyond here the river is wide as it sweeps past Newby Hall and Gardens with its attractive moorings for visitors to the grounds. Unfortunately no overnight stops are permitted here and there is no denying that these waterways could do with further moorings. BWB seem to be faced with constant land access problems preventing the construction of additional pontoons so if visiting at peak periods it would be advantageous to carefully plan your overnight stops.

The Ripon Canal

The river gently meanders through open countryside towards Oxclose Lock and the Ripon Canal, the entrance to which is made via a short cut. Once safely through the lock we needed to dismantle *Lily*'s wheelhouse in order to clear the low bridges in particular the pretty red brick Renton's Bridge. This bridge is extremely low with approximately 2.5 metres of clearance and with our wheelhouse down we measure 2.3 metres so we proceeded cautiously!

Ripon Motor Boat Club gave us a warm welcome. They produce what has to be one of the best cruising guides for this area, full of useful advice on these waterways and many others situated in the North East. From their base the approach to the next lock is through a small nature reserve, which is well equipped with hides and information boards. The remaining locks have by-pass weirs so be aware when approaching as the flow can interfere with steering. Immediately adjacent to Bell Furrows Lock lies Ripon Racecourse Marina which, as its name suggests borders the grounds of Ripon's famous racecourse.

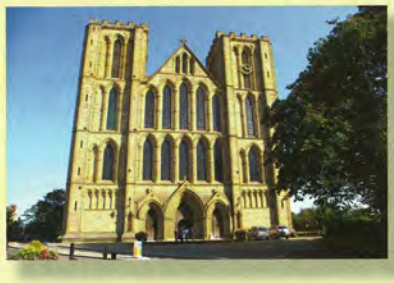
We had good depth throughout and were amazed at the unbelievably clear waters of this canal. We could see right to the bottom and watched fish darting to and fro as *Lily* gently disturbed the waters. Rhodesfield Lock is the last on this short canal, adjacent to which stands the former lock keepers cottage. A little further on the BWB sanitary station has been thoughtfully constructed in the same style as this cottage and for several years during restoration was the terminus point. The Ripon Canal Society have done a fantastic job in restoring this charming waterway with the last section, which ends at a pretty basin, only being opened by BWB in September 1996. This final stretch into Ripon is accompanied by a main road and industrial area and along here we received some surprised glances from workers as few wide beams ever reach this point. After passing beneath a low road bridge we were suddenly at the terminus, a small basin bordered by a mixture of both original and newly constructed town houses. After winding we took a place at the 72hrs moorings with just one narrow boat for company. Jubilant after finally reaching our destination we set off to purchase our "head of navigation" plaque which will take pride of place in our wheelhouse.

Ripon

Ripon has all the facilities one could wish for and a stunning cathedral. From here you can visit many sites of interest; one of the loveliest is Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Water Gardens which are easily accessible either by bus or on foot for the keen walker. Dogs are permitted into the grounds so *Buster* came along with us for a great off the water day out.

Getting to these Yorkshire navigations is not easy but with some careful forethought and planning the trip can be undertaken by any competent boater and once you have experienced the delights of these routes you will realise that it was worth the effort. After relaxing in Ripon our thoughts now turned to the journey home which would involve retracing our steps to Selby before taking an alternative route back through the canal system.

WAY TO GO! Fact file on this cruise



USEFUL INFORMATION

York Tourist Information Centre
Tel: **01904 621756**
Website: **www.visityork.org**

Maps & Guides

Nicolson Guide No 6 - Nottingham, York & the North East
The Boating Association – The Trent
Chart Series - No 2, The Tidal Trent & No 3, The Yorkshire Ouse, Trent Falls to York.
Cruising Guide to the North East Waterways - Ripon Motor Boat Club
Northeast Waterways by Derek Bowskill
Please note - Although published some time ago, and despite the many changes that have since taken place along the route, this book is interesting and full of useful information

Places of Interest

National Railway Museum
Leeman Road, York YO26 4XJ. Tel: **01904 621261**. Website: **www.nrm.org.uk**
Opening Times – Daily 10.00 to 18.00. Closed 24 – 26 December. Admission – Free

YorkBoat (Guided River Trips with Commentaries)
The Boatyard, Lendal Bridge, York YO1 7DP. Tel: **01904 628324**.
Cruising Times – Approx every 30 minutes throughout April to October. Prices – Adults: £6.50p; Child: £3.30p; Seniors: £5.50p
YorkBoat also offer Floodlit Evening Cruises, Ghost Cruises & Themed Party Cruises as well as self drive motor boats. Please telephone for prices.

York Minster

York Minster Visitors Department Tel: **01904 557216**
Website: **www.yorkminster.org**
Opening Times – Mon to Sat 09.00 (09.30 Nov to Mar) to 17.00. Sunday: 12.00 to 15.45. Admission Prices for Minster – Adults: £5.00; Child: Free (Under 16 years); Senior: £4.00. Additional admission charges apply to the Undercroft, Treasury, Crypt and Central Tower. Please telephone for further details.

Jorvik Viking Centre

Coppergate, York YO1 9WT Tel: **01904 643211** (24 hour information line)
Website: **www.vikingjorvik.com**
Admission Prices - Please call for prices

Newby Hall & Gardens

The Estate Office, Ripon, North Yorkshire HG4 5AE Tel: **01423 322583**
Website: **www.newbyhall.com**
Opening Times - 1st April to 1st October Tuesday to Sunday inclusive plus Bank Holidays and Mondays in July and August. Gardens: 11.00 to 17.30 (Last Entry 17.00). House: 12.00 to 16.30 (Last Entry 16.00). Admission Prices - please call for prices