



## *Canal des Ardennes to the Saone...*

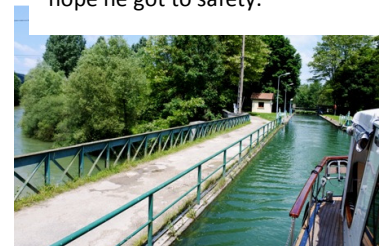
*nice weather for ducks...*



87 km long, the Canal des Ardennes links the Aisne and Meuse Valleys, has 44 locks and one tunnel. From Pont a Bar to the Champagne region, we meandered along through the very rural, picturesque and green countryside. First climbing through the locks and later descending 26 locks in 9 km., a lock every few hundred metres, with not much time to rest in between. You could see from one lock to the next, but although they date from 1846 and are old, they are automated, so we only had to tie on and fend off. We had days of lovely sunshine but also a lot of rain. This was just before the Paris floods. The locks were full to the very brim which can make it tricky not to float onto land once they are filled!



A baby deer that fell into the canal one morning - we couldn't get him out, but hope he got to safety.



Somehow, we skirted around the heavy flooding that hit central Europe from France to the Ukraine. In Paris waters reached a 30 year high at 6.2 m. above normal. Closed rail rail, metro and major museums. Though the water level on the canals is regulated, we had to wait out closed rivers and dangerous currents for days in several places. Heard of a Dutch boat that braved a lock in fast-flowing current and smashed into far wall simply unable to stop, put a hole in his boat and had to be lifted out by crane. Another got wedged in sideways. Then we had diesel shortages from the strikes!



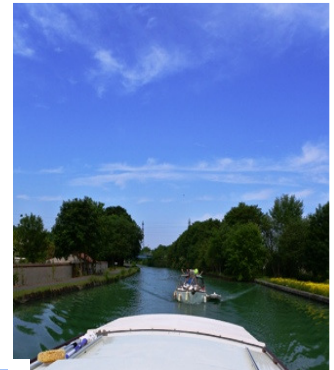
But we loved it and also found wonderfully tranquil spots where we were all alone except for the frogs. Tuck was enchanted!



We made a stop at Langres - said to be one of France's most beautiful walled towns. In the pouring rain, we traipsed 3 km uphill only to realize once we got there, that we had been there before with Havana. We did enjoy a nice lunch though. A number of villages and canalside stops later, just hours away from St. Jean de Losne, we were forced to wait for three days for the rushing waters of the Saone River to subside. Too high to get under the bridges and too fast to stop...you just whizz on past your stop....there are no brakes downstream and it's too dangerous to turn mid-stream in a current of 12 km instead of 4/5 km.!! Being protected on the canals for so long, it came as a shock when we did see the rivers. And we only had a few km. to go to our entrance to the Canal de Bourgogne!

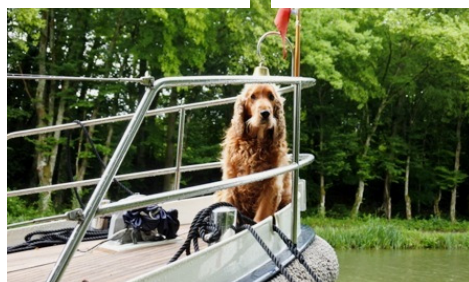


The flooding hit just the region we were heading for particularly hard, the Seine, Paris, and the Yonne River, our gateway to the Canal de Bourgogne, so two days before Paris we stopped and rerouted via the Canal Saone a la Marne, through the small champagne-producing villages after Reims, the same route we had followed 10 years ago aboard Havana. But changes often give unexpected bonuses....like meeting Brits, Mike and Sheila, from "Kalo" whom we followed all the way through many locks to St. Jean de Losne (the opposite end of the Canal de Bourgogne). They were cruising in their lovely, old boat, lovingly rebuilt and restored, and formerly the Admiral's tender for the British aircraft carrier "Ark Royal." Amazingly active, as soon as we stopped, they were off on their bikes, staying in training for a long trip of several hundred km through France in September. Tuck and I made do with long walks along the canals. Jan, frustratingly, has been plagued the whole summer long by a flare-up of arthritis in his ankle which has limited his activities.



In Reims, we helped out a young Australian couple with a tiny infant, sailing their boat from Greece to Norway when their engine conked out and had to be removed. They waited three weeks for someone to help. We gave them a tow for 10 km. to a safe ort where they left the boat for the winter.

It could look like this....but it could also look like this...see below. Caught in a heavy thunder storm in the middle of sluicing up when lightening closed down the lock electrics. All alone (as it is automatic) at the bottom of the lock, (well, I'm not climbing up in the lightening!!) we wondered what to do when suddenly a cheerful little man from VNF (The French Waterways) appeared in his van (they monitor the locks on camera) and got things going again....soaked to the skin, no rain jacket but nothing but smiles and very gallic shrugs. We have nothing but praise for the staff we have met all along the way...they are great, obliging, uncomplaining,hard-working and considerate. On the manual locks, we often had two lock keepers to help us all day, for just us!!! **Vive la France** all the way!!!. They know how to do service....



My boys...the crew.