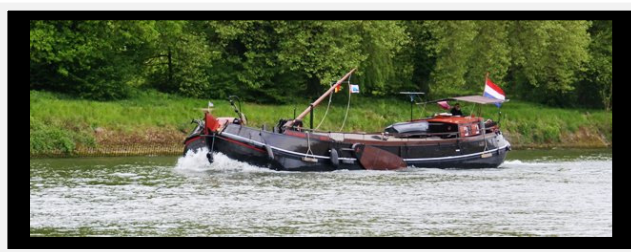




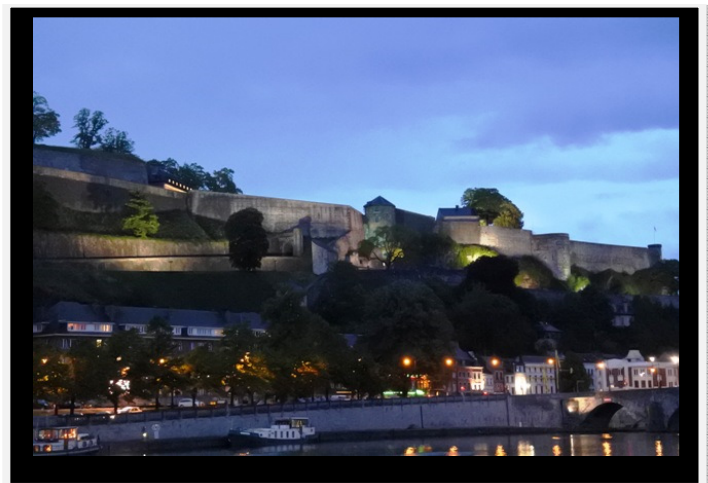
Les Ardennes, Belgium & France

From Holland, we turned south into the Ardennes, the least populated area of Belgium and, at one time, the most industrialised. The first day we passed dozens of old abandoned, rusting steel factories, coal mining areas, small run-down towns, spent an overnight at a solid, stone harbour reminiscent of Cornwall at Huy, then on through Liege to Namur. Cold and rainy. But as it cleared, we had superb view of the citadel from the cockpit and consoled ourselves with a Ardenne pate, sweet semi-dried tomatoes, smoked ham, roast chicken, local cheeses and fresh, crusty baguette. Things are looking up....



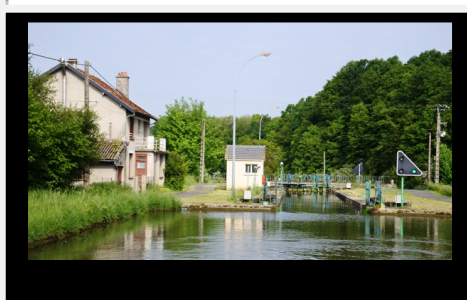


And from the Meuse onwards, it was like night turned into day...beautiful, stone homes lined the banks, lush green canyons wound through the steep wooded hills, small tough, little towns of slate houses and charming Dinant with it's citadel, and massive Gothic church. The birthplace of Adolphe Sax, inventor of the saxophone, it makes the most of it with saxophone statues, cakes and mementos everywhere. Also famous for its rock-hard biscuits, very decorative but jaw-breaking. Even Tuck was stumped. A nice stop.

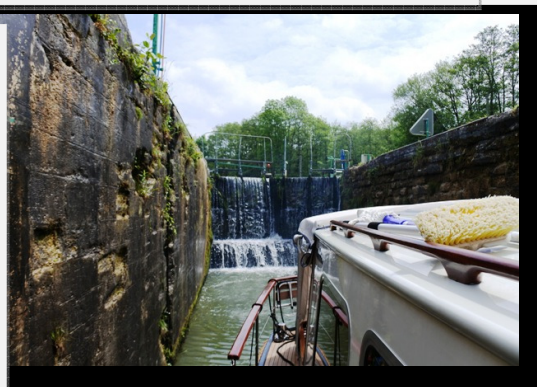
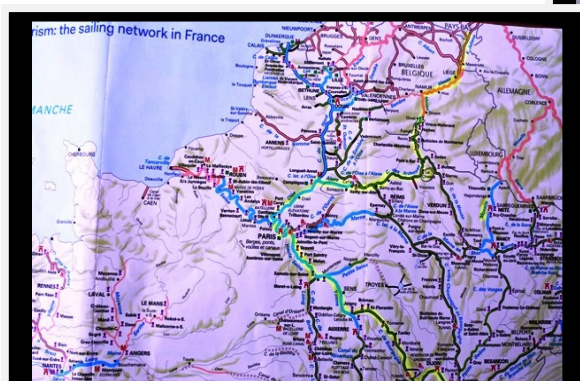


The fastest route from Holland through Belgium to France, this has been an unexpected bonus and the Meuse and Ardennes have been some of the loveliest areas of canals we have cruised in to date. Trying to build up tourism, today it is a mecca for hikers and bikers! The picture of Otter in the lock was taken and sent to us by a French couple, walking around France, around 4000 km. in 8 months. We were lifted around 180 meter above sea level in gentle stages.

Through the lovely, green and peaceful Canal des Ardennes in France, with its set of 33 "step locks" only 200-300 metres apart, finally going down again from 180 m. above sea-level. As there are very few stops en route, we did 28 in one day! They are operated automatically, either by using a remote control like a TV and zapping as you approach the lock to change the lights and set the lock in motion, or by twisting a rod that hangs out over the canal as you sail by. In the locks you simply tie the ropes on and hang on while you are lowered 2-3 metres. We were alone in the locks the whole way through. Lush, green vegetation only a few metres from our sides, big fish jumping, birdsong, petrol blue dragonflies and butterflies, and we spotted a whiskery brown otter just an arms length away on the bank and an eagle eating a fish on a tree stump. An unexpectedly lovely trip.



A local Ardenne cheese made with flowers.



You see a lot of things while you're cruising...some are beautiful, some are astonishing, and some...some are just plain wierd! This is one of 3, a club out for a spin.

Route from Maastricht, NL: south-west down Juliana Canal to Liege in Belgium and on to Namur, turning south into the River Meuse in France, past Dinant, MOntherme, Fumay, and Charleville-Meziers to Pont a Bar and west into the Canal des Ardennes to the Canal Lateral a la Oise southeast to Reims and Epernay, west on the Marne to Paris. From there south east ton the Haute Seine, Samoie-sur-Seine and the Yonne River to Joigny and then the Canal de Bourgogne to Dijon and finally St. Jean de Losne for overwintering from end of July.