

# **An Epic Solo Voyage: Stage 1**

**By Chevalier Joe Tiernan KCHS**

## **The North Shannon and Erne Waterways, from Rooskey, County Roscommon, to and including the Ballinamore & Ballyconnell Canal, and return, July 2010**

Having lain neglected and unusable for many decades, the Governments of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland decided to reinstate the Ballinamore and Ballyconnell Canal, thus restoring a navigable link between the Shannon and Erne navigations. Although first opened in 1860, this navigation proved to be a commercial failure, never earning its annual running costs. Conceived as a vital link, via the Ulster Canal, Lough Neagh and the Lagan Navigation, between Belfast and the Shannon basin, the traffic available proved insufficient or it was drawn off by the competing railway lines. As well as that, in an era when canal barges generally relied on horses to tow them, the fact that the navigation passed through a number of lakes proved a significant disincentive to commercial users.

However, in recent years, the growth of inland waterways tourism changed the picture and the potential of the abandoned Ballinamore and Ballyconnell canal as a tourism resource induced the two governments to undertake its restoration. That work was completed in 1995 and, since then, it had been my ambition to cruise the entire canal and to explore the long established Erne lake system, with which it connects.

Initially, I planned to make the trip with friends, believing that the number of sets of lock gates to be mastered, totally 16 between the two stretches of restored canal, would require at least two to work my boat. However, for familial and other reasons, it proved impossible to find compatible companions who would be available at times to suit me or me to suit them. Hence, I decided to try and make the voyage single-handed, and fixed on early June to accomplish the task. Matters became further complicated by delays in getting “Ross Ranger”, my cabin cruiser, ready for the trip. Then, to compound matters even more, my daughter, Sharon, and her then fiancé (now her husband), Darren, invited wife, Mary, and me to celebrate my birthday in Cliveden House, Windsor, London, on Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> of June, 2010, [my birthday being on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June] where they were to hold their wedding reception on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, that same year.

Given the time restraints, it was clear that I would have to make the voyage between birthday celebrations in London and the wedding six weeks later. So, on my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, “Ross Ranger” being now properly fitted out for the journey, I flew back to Dublin and thence to my home, Annvale Manor, Co. Roscommon. The next day at 10:30a.m., I cast off from the Manor pier and, all alone, headed into Lough Boderg to begin my epic voyage.

## **“Ross Ranger”**

With over 1,600 nautical miles under her keel and some 921 hours logged on the instruments, I had every confidence that my boat would complete the round trip of about 340 km without difficulty. “Ross Ranger” is an Olesinski designed glass fibre vessel with deep “V” entry sections reducing to medium deadrise aft.

She is 10 metres long with a beam of 3.04 metres. She draws 0.09 metres. She is powered by a single Volvo Penta MD21B diesel engine of 61 horse power.

She is very comprehensively fitted-out with all the usual comforts for such a vessel. These include the fully fitted-out galley, with spacious deck saloon and self-draining cockpit. Accommodation is six births in 3 separate cabins. “Ross Ranger” was built to my order by boat builder Marine Projects of Plymouth, England, and completed in 1982.

“Ross Ranger” is kept in my boat shed out of the water all during the year, except when in use.

### **Day 1: Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> June – To Leitrim Village and the restored canal**

An hour out from my harbour at Annavale Manor found me at the Albert Lock, which marks the entrance to the Jamestown Cut, a 3.75km canal which takes the navigation around the rapids at Jamestown, Co. Leitrim. Here I met Michael Burke, lock keeper, and also phoned my old friend, Eugene Farrell.

Having locked up into the Cut, it took a little over an hour’s cruising to reach Carrick-on-Shannon, where I tied up to have lunch and where I met Pat Rice and his crew. They keep their boat at Quigley’s Point, Glasson, on Lough Ree. Having lunched on board, I fully charged my lap-top computer and then departed Carrick.

A cruise of about one hour took me to Leitrim Village and the entrance to the newly restored Ballinamore and Ballyconnell Canal at 3.45 p.m. Here, I tied up for the night. Shortly after I arrived, it began to rain. At 5.30 I set up the marine BBQ which I imported from Vancouver Canada, on the stern of “Ross Ranger” and prepared my evening meal. By 7 p.m. the rain had stopped. I took the opportunity to email my daughter, Sharon, regarding transfer of funds for her wedding, which was scheduled about six weeks from then. Afterwards, I retired for the night.

### **Day 2: Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> July - On to Ballinamore**

Finally, I was to begin my exploration of the restored waterway! I breakfasted at 8 p.m. and then headed into Leitrim Village to purchase essential groceries and the morning papers. Here I met in the shop with Teresa Ffrench from beside me in Kilmore. Two hours later I was ready to face the first of the newly restored locks; this was Lock 16 “Killarcan”.

Each lock on the canal is identified both by a number and by a name, typically that of the local townland in which it is situated. Like the other locks on the restored section, entry to Lock 16 requires a magnetic card. This controls the lock’s largely automated operations,

making the locks much less difficult to operate than manually operated locks. The cards are purchased from Inland Waterways Ireland, inclusive of the canal tolls. Lock 16 “Killarcan” is, of course the last lock on the canal, as these are numbered from the eastern end of the navigation, with Lock 1 “Corraquill” on the Woodford River, part of the Erne system and some distance downstream from Ballyconnell.

Having arrived at Lock 16, I found another boat, the “Camlin”, owned by Alfie Egan, of Bray, Co. Wicklow, but a native of the Shannonside town of Termonbarry, Co. Roscommon, not far from the Camlin River on the opposite shore of the Shannon. Alfie was accompanied by two friends from Bray, Malcolm, a Wicklow native, and Tom from Kerry. They told me that they planned to go to Ballinamore that evening, returning the next day. We decided to travel in convoy!

For the next seven hours we made steady progress along the restored canal, working our way through Locks 15 “Tir MacTiernan” (10:45), 14 “Drumduff” (11:15), 13 “Newbrook” (11:40), 12 “Liscanor” (12:00), 11 “Kilclare”(1:00), 10 “Kilclare MID” (1:15), 9 “Kilclare” (1:30), 8 “Castlefore” (2:55), and 7 “Ballyduff” (3.40), reaching Ballinamore at about 4:50 p.m. At 12 “Liscanor”, we stopped for lunch, taken on board. Of the names of the townlands, the most interesting to me was Tir MacTiernan, as it was probably called after the progenitor of the Tiernan sept!

Ballinamore is a pleasant, elongated, little town with a road bridge over the canal. It seemed quietly prosperous and enjoys an ideal tourist location, midway between St. John’s Lough through which we had just passed and Garadice Lough, where the R202, R204 and R199 cross over the canal.

I made a salad meal, which I ate on board. Then, at about 8.30 p.m., I made my way to the Commercial and Tourist Hotel on a warm and dry evening, to meet my new-found friends. There I was delighted to buy drinks for them, as an expression of thanks for the help in working the canal locks. Each round cost €18.00. I enjoyed a double Cointreau.

About 9:30 p.m. Tom and I left Alfie and Malcolm in the hotel to walk back to the boats. We had barely stepped onto the street when a sudden cloud burst forced us to take shelter in a doorway. After sheltering for some 20 minutes, I was hoping a car would park in front of us, as I would then have asked them to drive us the 700 odd metres separating us from our boats. Eventually, a black “Golf” car pulled up in front of us. Taking my courage in my hands, I approached the young lady driver and asked her to drive us to the boats. Graciously, she agreed, while Tom declared that he would never have had the neck to make a request like that in such circumstances.

The rain continued until 11:30 p.m. and then stopped, by which time I was safely and dryly in bed.

### **Day 3: Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> July – Garadice Lough, and the Woodford River to Belturbet**

At 8:45 a.m. “Camlin” cast off and headed back to Carrick-on-Shannon where the three-man crew intended to overnight, before proceeding to Termonbarry, in order to reach Bray, Co. Wicklow, by Saturday night. A little later, I walked to the shop to buy groceries and a daily paper.

At 10:45a.m., I moved “Ross Ranger” to Lock 6 “Ballinamore” and worked through it on my own. This was not easy as the surrounding trees make the task almost impossible. I proceeded to Lock 5 “Ardrum” (11.00). Working this alone was also difficult, as the wind had got up, making control of the boat problematic.

Lock 4 “Aghoo” (11:30), however, was easy and I experienced no problems working it. At No 3 “Skelan” (1:30), the wind and rain made passage through the lock very difficult.

Lock 3 “Skelan” is the location of a holiday home development and new marina. The homes, log cabins, are set along the edge of the canal. Sadly, they reflect the consequences of the bursting of the Irish building bubble, as they were initially priced at €250,000 each, but reduced to €100,000 each! The new marina looked well in the bright sunshine, but there were no other boats there.

I cast off from Skelan at 2:15 p.m. and arrived in Ballyconnell about 45 minutes later, with gale force 6 winds blowing. At 4:00 p.m. boats travelling in the direction of the Shannon helped me work through Lock 2 “Ballyconnell”.

An hour later, at 5:00 p.m, I arrived at Lock 1 “Corraquill” and met the lock keeper, Paddy Deane. I know Paddy’s two brothers in Dublin; indeed, one has an apartment in Gran Marbella, Spain beside my place there.

At 5:40 p.m. I moved “Ross Ranger” away from the lock taking the opportunity to contact the crew on “Camlin”. They had kept going and had reached Dromod where they were dining in Cox’s restaurant. It was then 8:15 p.m.! I also spoke to Anthony on the phone. I stayed in the private 20 house marina at Dromard Lough overnight.

#### **Day 4: Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> July - Lough Garadice, Belturbet and Upper Lough Erne**

I rose at 6:30 a.m., cleaned the boat and checked the engine. All was well so, at 7:15 a.m. I cast off and headed towards Lough Garadice. This is the largest lough between the Erne and the Shannon on the canal route, and feeds the Woodford River, which provides an essential navigable link between the two great river systems. This stretch of the Woodford is also the border between The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Where the Woodford River enters Upper Lough Erne, I turned East and then South to follow the Erne River the 5 km to Belturbet, where I arrived at 9.a.m. Having purchased my paper, I saw a busy restaurant in the town square. Here I ordered breakfast, which I reckon was the biggest served me in any country, anywhere. I was served by Pauline, a young girl from Monaghan whose career to date included a spell as a Health and Safety Officer in Dublin as well as one year spent in Australia. She is clearly a talented all-rounder.

By 10: a.m., I was back at the boat, where I met Cllr George Scott, a Fine Gael member of Cavan County Council. Among other places of interest he pointed out was the house of Professor Richard Conroy, a friend of mine, at the edge of the water and which I had noticed on my cruise into Belturbet. Belturbet is also the location of a marina owned and managed by an acquaintance whom I had met recently, Martin Rowan. I moved “Ross Ranger” to the Emerald Star Cruise Line Marina at 11 o’clock and refuelled with €50 of diesel, purchased from Michael, who lives in Carrick-on-Shannon, near Liam Gilcreast.

I also purchased a set of charts from Pauline in the marina office covering the Upper and Lower Lough Erne system, as it would clearly be impossible to explore this large multiple lake system without up-to-date charts.

The set of charts cost me €15. It covers the total Shannon - Erne system, complete with navigation instructions, and is now used as the standard Guide by all the rental companies and private cruise boat owners. Michael kindly recharged my phone battery and razor. He suggested that I should invest in an inverter, to convert the 12 volt battery to 220volts. This would enable me to power a standard television, laptop and telephone or shaver, etc, from the boat's 12v supply. I have since got a present of one from Anthony!

I now commenced my exploration of the Erne proper, casting off from the Emerald Star marina at Belturbet at 12 noon and headed north down-river to pass Galloon Island; it is a large Island on the Upper Lough. Here, St Tierney built a monastery in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. He did so in order to free himself from his ambitious Grandfather, who wanted the holy man to succeed St. MacCartan at Clogher Monastery. St. Tierney wished to avoid this fate and did so by establishing himself in his own monastery on Galloon Island. The Saint died in 548 A.D. I continued my cruise and arrived at Crom Castle, built at this strategic site on the navigation. Crom means a crooked or twisted place.

Although it was very wild and windy, I successfully tied up "Ross Ranger" without any help from any of the adjoining boats. None of them offered assistance.

The original castle was built in 1610, as part of the Plantation of Ulster. During the Williamite wars the castle withstood two sieges in 1689, only to fall victim to an accidental fire in 1764. The castle has been the seat of the Earls of Erne for some 350 years and is situated in an estate comprising almost 2,000 acres of farmland, woodlands, wetlands and parklands. It is now in the care of the National Trust and is a popular venue for weddings. Indeed, as I walked around the old castle, I heard the sound of music and then saw a horse and carriage outside the new castle. Obviously it was a wedding. When the bride and groom dismounted, the carriage drove towards me and the driver asked me would I care for a drive through the grounds. I gladly accepted and mounted the carriage. The driver then took me on a tour which enabled me to see many areas not open to the general public, but only to guests of the wedding. I was very impressed with it all, including meeting many people from various countries on my tour of the estate grounds.

The wind being still blowing vigorously, I decided to shift to new moorings at Inish Rath, about 4 km downstream, where it was more sheltered. I tied up at 27A marker, cooked a BBQ and settled down for the night. The night was overcast, with light rain and a persistent force 6 gale. Nevertheless, at 8 p.m., I was able to telephone Donal Conlon of Carnadoe marina, beside my house, to check that all was well at home. I also spoke to my wife, Mary. At about 9:30, a power boat approached "Ross Ranger" to see if all was ok. I had a short chat with the driver, and then retired to bed. However, my sleep was disturbed by the repeated striking of the marker by the stern of "Ross Ranger". At 2 a.m. I had to arise, and I tied the stern more securely to the marker.

Inish Rath is an interesting place. It is now owned by the Hare Krishna and they maintain a visitor centre there and run religious retreats, about which I will give more information later.

## **Day 5: Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> July - More Islands and Enniskillen**

I awoke at 6:30 a.m., finally getting up at 8:00 a.m. I tidied up, prepared and ate breakfast. By 9:30 the rain had stopped. I was under way again at 10:30 a.m., reaching Inishcorkish, a long narrow island on the northern shore, half-an-hour later. This island was the home of the Reihill family. I was curious to see a large Hitachi excavator on the island. By 11:20 I had reached Mount Joy Island, one of the numerous small Islands in the Erne. By now the waves were very high, running at over 1.5 metres. At 12 noon, I had reached marker 31B of Naan Island.

Despite the continuing force 5 gales, I moored at the jetty beside Corrigan's Shore Guest House, Clonatríg, Ballanaleck, about 11 km from Enniskillen. After lunch, I resumed my cruise, travelling under Cleenish Bridge, a striking iron viaduct at 1.45 p.m. and passing marker 41A Culky's jetty at about 2:20 p.m. before tying up at the Erne Shopping Centre jetty, at Enniskillen. All the time the weather continued to be very wild. Spent some time exploring the town and finding a shop to sell me my Sunday Independent, before a 6:00 p.m. banquet in McDonald's, where I was able to plug in my laptop, read my emails and even send out a few.

I returned to "Ross Ranger" to bed down for the night. By 8:00 p.m., the weather still remained very wild and remained so when I retired to bed at 10:30 p.m.

## **Day 6: Monday 5<sup>th</sup> July – Lower Lough Erne and Belleek**

I arose at 7:30 a.m. to text Mary regarding the JP McManus charity golf at Adare Manor, Co. Limerick, to which she was travelling.

By 8:45 a.m., I had cast off and was under way. I saw the "Maggie Pepper", a green coloured barge under the command of owner, John Fitzpatrick, Dublin City and County Sherriff. An hour later I had passed marker 48A1 and then proceeded to 50A1 at White Island when "Ross Ranger's" engine cut out! The weather was bad with a force 6 gale blowing. Fortunately, the engine re-started when I turned the ignition key – only to cut out again. In all, this happened three times, but eventually the engine kept going. The probable cause was the severe tossing the boat had received in the short, choppy waters of a gale, which stirred up any dirt in the diesel tank and temporarily blocked the fuel filter. In working to restore the engine, I had become disoriented and, to my surprise, found I had ended up back at marker 48A1, Magurk's Island, again.

By 11:30 a.m. all seemed in order and I had resumed my course down river, passing Lough Erne Golf course and Castle Hume golf course on my left side, opposite White Island. From there I passed Innismacsaint where this great bow-shaped lough begins to open out to its widest. Here, I noticed my dept gauge showed 17 metres under my keel.

This part of the lough is 15 km long and 10 km wide, with no shelter and it is very dangerous in high winds past Owl Island.

By 1:00 p.m., the continuing force 6 gales making the opening lough unsafe, I diverted into Tully Bay at marker 57A1 by Heron Island, where I moored "Ross Ranger" at Carrickcraft hire base. The marina and base are owned by Charlie Parke. I spoke to Philip, the fitter and

mechanic at the base and, indeed, to Charlie in reception. It being much to wild to continue on to Belleek, I decided to resume my journey in the morning, with an early 5:00 a.m. start. I charged up my razor and phone and by 6 p.m. had a BBQ.

By 7:15 p.m. the winds had abated somewhat so I modified my plans yet again and set out for Belleek. I was now entering one of the deeper portions of the lake, my depth gauge reading 25 metres beneath the “Ross Ranger”. By 7:35 p.m., passing marker 58M, the depth was registering a more modest 6.3 metres. Finally, by 9:45 p.m I reached Belleek at the most westerly point of the navigation and on the border between the Republic and Northern Ireland. Although the day had been dry, with neither rain nor sunshine, the force 6 gales had made the voyage exhausting. I made a few phone calls and then retired to my bed for a needed rest.

### **Day 7: Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> July – Belleek, Boa Island, Kesh River and Hay Island**

6:00 a.m. I awoken and I was up at 7 a.m. I checked the engine and then walked uptown to St. Patrick’s Church. Unfortunately, it was closed. Later I checked it again, but it remained shut.

At 8:00 a.m. I went to Rooney’s Centra store and spoke to Gerry there. He agreed to charge my phone and razor. I bought the Irish Independent and sat in the local hotel and read it, waiting for my batteries to charge. Then I did some more shopping and returned to “Ross Ranger” for breakfast at 9:30 a.m. and cast off at 9:45 a.m. on my way upstream onto the lough.

By 10:30 a.m. I had reached Rosscor Island, which marks the beginning of the Erne River, west of the lough, and by 11:50 had reached marker 61C3 at Boa Island which now carries the main road, the A47 between Belleek and Enniskillen. Prior to 1921 the route would have lain through Pettigoe in Co. Donegal, but the Stormont authorities then bridged both ends of Boa Island, which is some six and a half kilometres long, in order to avoid a border crossing. About midway up the island, at marker 62D3, I saw the chain ferry which connects Boa with Lusty Beg Island and seemed to be doing good business.

I took a lunch break at the Lakeland Marine jetty at 1:00 p.m. I was not impressed. No fuel was available and the operatives impressed me as ignorant and not at all as friendly, stating that I was not allowed to moor to have lunch, which I did. After lunch, I continued my cruise along the north shore of Lower Lough Erne, cruising around Estea Island, the most northerly point of the Erne navigation, and then southwards along the side of Hare Island. Here, I recorded a depth of some 7 metres. I then proceeded towards the Kesh River and Kesh Village.

At 3:15 p.m. I entered Kesh River and cruised the short distance to Kesh Village, where I tied up and had a quick walk through the village. About 15 minutes later, I cast of from Kesh and re-entered the Lough. As I passed marker 58R2 at about 4:50 p.m., a force 7 gale struck the “Ross Ranger” literally head on.

So forceful was the wind that the windscreen wipers were unable to clear the screen and I had no option but to navigate with my head out the side window to find the navigation markers.

Minutes later I passed marker 57F at Gull Rock. Here the depth is 26 metres. The rock marks the beginning of the most exposed and dangerous part of the whole system. There is little shelter, and in any event the place is treacherous in strong winds, i.e. greater than force 3 gales!

By 6:00 p.m., I had reached Horse Island, marker 53J and Inishclare Harbour. Minutes later, I had moored for the night under Manor House Hotel at Hay Island, which has moorings for 8 boats, there being no shelter at Manor House Marine. When I arrived at the moorings, a young Northern Ireland couple were preparing to leave, taking their 2 black Labrador dogs and portable kennel with them.

At 7:00 p.m., I cooked a BBQ and settled down to make some phone calls. I phoned Paddy Carroll and Eugene Farrell, Anthony and Mary. I retired by 9:30 p.m.; the day had been long, if interesting, and the weather difficult, with rain most of the day and gale force winds. I remained at the mooring, being the only boat to do so overnight. However, my adventures that day were not yet over as, for some reason, I rolled out of the bed and onto the floor. I was momentarily dazed, not because of the weather, but because I had hit my head in the fall. Finally, I slept.

### **Day 8: Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> July – Devenish Island, St. Maloise and Enniskillen**

I awakened at 6:00 a.m.

At 9:15. I cast off and headed to Manor House Marine to get fuel, charge my razor and telephone. While there, I met many people from Glasgow and some other places. I walked the grounds and up to the hotel, where Eugene Farrell and I had stayed on a pheasant and duck shooting expedition.

By 11:00 a.m., I was ready to resume my voyage and cast off, passing between Ardybeg and Ardymore Island and White Island to reach the western end of Devenish Island beside marker 47A at 12.15 p.m., I tied up at the jetty there and had a shower, followed by lunch. I then moved "Ross Ranger" to a jetty on the eastern side of Devenish at marker 46D to visit the remains of the monastery built on the island by St. Maolaise. This was of particular interest to me as my wife was a Meighan and St. Maolaise is the patron saint of the Meighan sept. The Saint founded the monastery here in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. He himself died between the years 563 and 571 and his feast day is on 12<sup>th</sup> of September. On this date, many thousands of pilgrims used to make a pilgrimage to the remains of the monastery on Devenish, the remains of which are still quite substantial, some at full height and, of course, with a perfectly preserved traditional Irish round tower. Many of the walls were very substantially built, being at least 1 metre wide.

At 2:30 p.m., as I was about to cast off from the jetty, there was a most serendipitous moment when a man, standing at the base of the round tower, began to play the bagpipes – a wonderful sight and sound to see and hear.

By 3:00 p.m., I had reached Enniskillen and moored at the back of the police station. I did a quick walking tour of the centre of the town and met many people, and visited both the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. I took the time to stock up with 2 large T-bone steaks.

I moved the boat to the Erne Shopping Centre jetty at 4:30 p.m., at the same place I had tied-up on the preceding Sunday. I chatted to many of the boating crews there, including Tara from New York, who married Joe from Cork. I shopped in ASDA and purchased the day's Irish Independent.

At 7:30 p.m., I strolled up to McDonald's and had a banquet!

At 8:45 p.m. I met two American families on an Emerald Star cruiser moored beside Ross Ranger. These were Eric Bennett and his wife and daughter, together with Eric's brother, Joe, and his wife and daughter. Eric and family come from Maine, not the State, but a town near Chicago, Illinois. We had a long and interesting conversation.

Eric owns a 60 bed retirement home and his brother Joe is an Orthopaedic Surgeon working in Florida. Joe told me that nobody is refused treatment in Florida because of limited means and that it is quite common to carry out surgical procedures within a few days of the decision being taken. The same applies to cancer patients needing treatments.

The Bennetts are of Irish extraction. Eric gave me his card, which strangely he had printed especially for their trip to Ireland. The card carried details of their cruising plans from Portumna, on the Shannon in Co. Galway, to Northern Ireland and then back to Carrick-on-Shannon. The dates, between 3<sup>rd</sup> July and 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2010, were included! The details of their flights to Shannon on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and departure from the same airport on 14<sup>th</sup> July, their email address and postal address, were also included.

They wished to host dinner for me, but having already banqueted at McDonalds; I was not in a fit state to eat another meal, so regretfully I could not partake of their meal. However, after their dinner, I re-joined them and we continued our discussions on many subjects. In the meantime, I again spoke to Tara and Joe.

Replete and satisfied after an interesting day, I retired to bed at 10:30 p.m.

### **Day 9: Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> July – Sir Nick Faldo and a golfing interlude**

On Monday 5th July, I had booked golf for 3 people at the new Lough Erne golf course for today. After a relaxing morning, we arrived at the Club. Stephen in the pro shop wanted to charge me £105.00 sterling per head. However, I eventually got him to agree to £75.00 per head, with £35.00 sterling per cart.

Joining me were Paddy Carroll, who lives in Cavan Town, and Anthony, who lives in Dublin and is my daughter Michelle's boyfriend. Anthony had travelled to Cavan town to meet Paddy, and both of them then travelled to Ballinamore. Anthony left his car there, and Paddy took him to the jetty in Enniskillen to pick me up. The three of us then travelled to the golf club, arriving at 12 noon for a tee time of 1:10 p.m. Anthony was to stay on "Ross Ranger" with me for the next two nights; his intention being to get back to Ballinamore for Saturday evening. He would then travel back to Dublin the same evening.

We had a light lunch in the clubhouse and the caddy master asked us could a visitor play with us, a man, called Terry McGovern who was a member of Newlands Golf Club, playing off 11. We made him welcome.

As we were walking down to the first tee box, Sir Nick Faldo came along with two others, so we all played together in the company of Sir Nick Faldo, a 6th time Major winner, the most successful European golfer in history and number 1 in the world for 97 days. We had an enjoyable round of golf. However, Paddy Carroll did not participate, but drove the golf cart around and watched us playing. He expressed lots of comments and views on the surroundings and our golf.

After the game, the three of us had dinner. Paddy drove Anthony and me back to the boat, before going his own way.

10.30 p.m Both Anthony and I retired exhausted.

### **Day 10: Friday 9<sup>th</sup> July – On up-river and more on Hare Krishna's island**

At 8:00 a.m., Anthony and I awaked to find the day overcast and wet. I texted Sharon; it was her last day at work in London in her current job, before her marriage on August 14<sup>th</sup>. An hour later we walked up to ASDA and had breakfast. The generous portions were enough for four people and were modestly priced at on £5.20 each. Replete, and ready for what the day might bring, we purchased some brown bread for later use and also the Irish Independent. Returning to our vessel, we cast off at 11:30 a.m. from the jetty.

At marker 39A2, just off Cleenish Island, I recorded a depth of 1.7 metres, but shortly afterwards this had increased to some 4 metres. Finally, at 1:40 p.m. we tied up at Carrybridge jetty and had a light lunch. Anthony took the opportunity to charge his phone in the office as we dined.

By 2:30 p.m., we were under way again towards Killygowan Island and privately owned, by the Reihill's family, Inishcorkish Island, where I recorded a 2 metre depth. By now the weather was dead calm and no wind as we cruised by Trannish and approached Inish Rath Island. We tied up at the Island jetty at marker 27A4. No other boats were moored there.

Rath Island is the property of the Hare Krishna religious group. Nevertheless we were surprised to see a large sign at the jetty that cooking or eating of fish and meat was prohibited by them! Anthony and I walked around the island. We met an Indian family, there on a day retreat. We had a long discussion with them and, afterwards, we visited the large ornate house and temple. We signed the visitors' book. We were made very welcome and invited to partake of all the food that was there. This hospitable offer we declined as we were looking forward to our own banquet later.

The Hare Krishna host individual retreats at this centre, charging a €240.00 fee. They maintain a ferry large enough to take two cars from the mainland onto the Island, if required. They appeared to be a self sufficient community, growing all their own vegetables both on the Island and on the mainland. Rath Island, with its large Victorian house, was left to them by a wealthy Northern Ireland business person. The Hare Krishna religion originated in India and has a small following in Ireland, mostly among members of the Indian community.

Only when I got back to the boat did I realised that I had not taken the two very large T Bone steaks, purchased in Enniskillen on Wednesday, out of the freezer box in the fridge. Because of the T Bone, I had great difficulty getting them out of the freezer box. Having

successfully extracted the steaks from the freezer, I lit up the marine BBQ, which is clipped onto the stern rail on the cruiser and proceeded to defrost same slowly; they were ready by 9:00 p.m. on the jetty. We also had 2 bottles of wine, liquors, port and cheese; all in all, a very good meal.

It had been a warm sunny day with the temperature reaching 23 degrees. This continued until 7:00 p.m., when the weather turned and it proceeded to rain all night. At 11.00 p.m. we retired to bed.

### **Day 11: Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> July – We pay a penalty and proceed to Ballinamore**

We both rose at 8:00 a.m. only to discover that our water tanks were empty. As I am careful about such matters, this omission on my part must have been the result of my failing to obey the signage prohibiting consumption of meat or fish at our anchorage the previous night!!! The problem was soon remedied, as we were able to cruise over to Lisnaskea Boat Club. This is a private club, but they welcomed us to refill our water tanks and also to have showers in the club house.

By 9:30 a.m. we were ready for the day and cast off from the club house jetty. In short order, we cruised by Dernish and Bleamish Islands and, at marker 23A, moored near Gad Tower at 10:00 a.m. I tidied up after breakfast, which we had taken on board. An hour later we were under way again. Shortly afterwards, John Burns, a friend from Dublin, sent me a text to report that he had reached Portumna.

At 11:50 a.m. we entered the Woodford River and 40 minutes later arrived at Lock 1 “Corraquill”, where we met an emerald Star cruiser with 10 lads crewing it, on their way to a stag party. Anthony worked the lock, with the cooperation of Robert, the part-time lock keeper.

We reached, and tied up at Ballyconnell at 2:00 p.m. where we had a sandwich on the boat, before casting off in heavy rain. On our way, I noticed that the harbour near the log-cabins near Lock 3 “Skelan” was vacant; there being no boats there. We cleared Lock 3 at about 3:50 and then Garadice Lake, passed Church Island in the lough and so on, through Lock 4 “Aghoo” to Lock 5 “Ardrum”. Here the lock malfunctioned and we had to phone a canal ranger, who arrived promptly and got us through.

We moored “Ross Ranger” in Ballinamore at about 7:30 p.m. where Anthony had to leave, in double quick time, to return to Dublin as planned. I checked Mass time as a crowd of locals were leaving the church, Mass was at 7:00 p.m. There was a Sunday Mass at 11:30 a.m, which would not suit me.

AT 8:45 a.m. I took myself off to the Commercial & Tourist Hotel in Ballinamore. I had a meal of scampi together with a half bottle of wine and a double Cointreau as a digestive; total cost €34.00. As I made my way back to my boat, I met a retired Professor of Medicine, Tom, with his wife, Eileen, who worked in Africa for many years. He impressed me as a nice man.

Retired to bed and slept well, until 2:40 a.m. when I had to get up and re-tie the boat, due to the wind. Finally, I went back to sleep.

## **Day 12: Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July – Ballinamore back to Leitrim Village**

On arising at 8:00 a.m., I did an engine check. Satisfied that all was in order, I took a shower and had a shave in the Waterways Service building, then went into town at 9:30 a.m. to get two papers for Professor Tom. He was very appreciative and insisted on giving me more money than they cost. He invited me to join them for breakfast. I spoke to many of the boat crews in the harbour, as I was curious to see was anyone going my way, as it would not be possible to work through the locks on the canal alone. Happily, I met an Austrian couple, who hailed from near Vienna and were cruising with their two children. I was absolutely delighted to learn we were both going in the same direction. I let them travel in front of me through the locks, so as to avoid collisions with “Ross Ranger”, using my smart card to operate the locks. By 11:25 a.m., we were at the first lock out of Ballinamore, followed, over the next six hours, by a succession of locks, until we reached Leitrim Village at 5:00 p.m. I noticed that Lock 14 “Druduff” was very slow to empty, but did not discover why. At Lock 16 “Killarcan”, I gave the Austrian couple a bottle of wine as a token of my appreciation for helping me through the locks.

I had a salad for dinner at 7:00 p.m. and retired to bed to listen to the World Cup match between Spain and Holland at 9:30 p.m. – Spain 1, Holland Nil!

## **Day 13: Monday 12<sup>th</sup> July – Acre’s Lake, Lough Allen, Boderg and home**

Awake by 8:00 a.m., I discovered that the gas cylinder serving the onboard fridge was empty. I met Ranger Gerry McCabe, one of the waterways rangers and enjoyed a general discussion with him – a very interesting man.

Proceeded to cast off at 9:30 a.m. and headed for my first lock of the day at Battlebridge and the entrance to Lough Allen. For many years this marked the limit of the Shannon Navigation proper, as the ESB had dropped the level of Lough Allen. They had been given control over water levels on the Shannon in order to regulate the availability of water for the Ardnacrusha hydro-electric scheme. This part of the navigation has been restored now, allowing cruisers to once again cruise the Shannon’s third great lake.

I met Tony Murphy, a part-time lock keeper. A full-time lock keeper, Paddy Joe Carthy, also works this portion of the Shannon. I discovered that my diesel tank was enough to get me to Carrick-on-Shannon on my way home. However, I decided to take a chance and, instead of heading directly for Carrick I elected to work through Battlebridge Lock and cruise into Acre’s Lake and onto Lough Allen, as the day was warm and calm, with no wind, temp 22C. By 10:30 a.m. I had reached Drumleague Lock which was also operated by Tony, because Paddy Joe Carthy was attending a half-day health and safety course at the Shannon Quay West Hotel, Rooskey. Tony would operate the three locks [Battlebridge, Drumleague and Lock Allen] that afternoon. I got his phone number so as to call him later, as needed.

I entered Lough Allen at 11:30 a.m., passing Cleighran More island where I recorded a depth of 22 metres, and I reached the head of the Navigation at Dead Man’s Point and Inishmagrath Island. Near here at Spencer Harbour and Corry Island, I recorded a depth of 20 metres. I then passed the salmon cages, which are near mid-lake at a depth of 34 metres. At Inishfail Island, I phoned Tony to advise him I would be at the lock at 3:00 p.m. I cleared Drumleague Lock at 3:40 p.m. and Battlebridge Lock at 4:15 p.m. Here, there was a slight mishap. As the lock was emptying, water coming off the stone work spilled through a galley

window which was open. Fortunately, no harm was done.

By 5:15 p.m, I had reached Carrick-on-Shannon and fuel. I filled the tank and then phoned Michael Tynan, fitter at the Albert Lock to exchange greetings. He advised me that he was in Tenerife for a week on vacation! I also sent a text to Anthony as I was almost home.

By 7:00 p.m, I had cleared Albert Lock on the Jamestown Cut. Michael Burke, the lock keeper was impressed, as I had travelled through a total of 40 locks on my adventure. Finally, I tied up at my harbour at Annavale Manor, having completed a round trip of over 350 kilometres, more or less singlehanded, in 13 days, and 80 hours engine time.

My previous big cruise on Ross Ranger was a family outing in 1983 from Rooskey to Killaloe and back, over 14 days.

My North Shannon cruise was an epic and instructive trip.

Chevalier Joe Tiernan KCHS