

Commodore: ALECK TIDMARSH  
e.mail : [aleck@mq-sales.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:aleck@mq-sales.fsnet.co.uk)  
mob:+44 (0) 7905 105 596

Treasurer: SUSAN STACEY  
e.mail: [susanmstacey@sky.com](mailto:susanmstacey@sky.com)  
mob: 44 (0) 7985 022 540



Secretary: PETER GIMSON Tel: +44 (0) 1 202 773 749.

e-mail: [Peter.Gimson@sky.com](mailto:Peter.Gimson@sky.com)

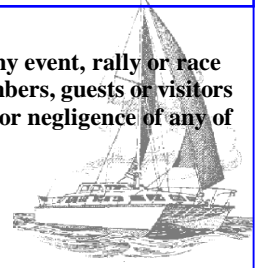
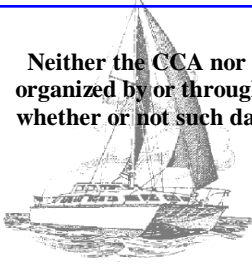
[www.bobcatandcatalac.btinternet.co.uk](http://www.bobcatandcatalac.btinternet.co.uk)

#### Disclaimer

Neither the CCA nor Committee will accept any liability for personal injury arising out of participating in any event, rally or race organized by or through the CCA whether sustained by members, guests, or visitors, or caused by the said members, guests or visitors whether or not such damage or injury could have been attributed to or was occasioned by the neglect, default or negligence of any of the officers, committees or servants of the CCA.

Boat Owners Third Party Insurance

It is the responsibility of all boat owners to have adequate third party insurance in respect of him/herself, vessel, his/her crew for the time being & his/her visitors.



### February 2011

Hi to all you Catamaran Sailors.

#### DON'T FORGET MARCH C.C.A "MEET & EAT & AGM"

To be held on Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup>. March at the Gun PH. Keyhaven.

Please let us know if you are able to join us so we can advise numbers a week before

Text to 07971 808777, or e.mail to [peter.Gimson@sky.com](mailto:peter.Gimson@sky.com) ASAP please.

Members are asked to suggest venues for the 2011 bank holiday rally on the second bank holiday in May. At the moment it's split between Newport and Folly Reach, both on the I.O.W.

---

This year some members are a little late in sending their subs, which we would be grateful to receive before the AGM.

Smarten up your boat with a new CCA burgee for the coming season £15.00 inc p.p.

If, like me, you are a bit behind after the cold winter with preparing your boat, I bet you are now all busy trying to get your boat ship shape and Bristol fashion before the start of the season.

I see from PBO that Martin Minter Kemp has been testing antifoul at Golant on his 9M ECHO of FOWEY.

Bob Freeman has purchased a new plotter with built in AIS and updated his Autohelm 4000.

John Waller is running his mainsail reefing lines back to the cockpit so that he doesn't have to get out of the cockpit to tame his new mainsail.

We look forward to hearing how they find their mods and new gear.

(1) Hon. Sec. Office 196 Harewood Ave. Queens Pk. Bournemouth, Dorset BH7 7BQ

Dagnall Clutterbuck has modified his chart table and fitted the latest type Raymarine wheel pilot.

## ***Autohelm and Chart Table Fitting to 8m***

After a number of comments at some recent "Meet and Eat's" I thought I would try and put together a little note for the Newsletter showing how I fitted the Autohelm to Scubacat.



First, here is a picture of the finished product:

The Autohelm drive unit is fitted conventionally to the wheel, with three fittings on my six spoke wheel. In the background, you can see the Control unit, which has been fitted in a GlassFibre box.

The key difference from "normal" fittings is that the motor drive unit has to be fitted through a hole in the console. (In a normal fitting, the wheel is on a pedestal, and so the motor is in the open).

On the Catalac, 8, or at least on Scubacat, the space above the wheel was the location of a ship's compass, and we also have the outboard remote controls to the left of the wheel.



The photo on the left shows the space inside the console before I drilled the hole for the autohelm motor.

I decided to have the motor "at the top" of the wheel because I have made a Chart table fitting that replaces the normal access panel, and putting the motor at the top keeps it out of the way of the "bookshelf" I made for the Almanacs.

**Unfortunately** this then places the motor right next to the ships compass, which then permanently pointed north, so I took out the compass and I now use the Electronic Compass built into the Autohelm.



Aaron at Hayling Marine Services made me the glassfibre box for the autohelm control, and also glassed in the hole where the compass was. With his usual skill it is now impossible to see where the compass was.

You can also see the Garmin GPS holder.

Drilling the hole for the motor was very much a case of measuring twice and then drilling once. I think it took half an hour to measure and check before cutting the hole.

I am very pleased with the positioning, as it is almost perfectly located, but to provide a bit of resilience, the hole is about 3mm greater in diameter than the motor, and I have some "o" rings around the motor that fit tightly in the hole. They serve a dual purpose of allowing a small amount of movement to the motor when its working, and keeping the wet out.

The inside view of the console shows just how “high” I managed to fit the motor.



To the right, you can see the switch panel that I fitted some years ago. This is simply made of plywood, I glued and pinned some “L” shaped battens around the edge of the original hole so that the panel then slides in and out for maintenance (from the left).

The switches are simple 2A lever switches from CPC, and were one of the cheapest I could find with circular holes (easy to cut!) and integral LEDs. The “button” to the left of each switch is a Circuit Breaker made by Tyco Electronics, (also bought from CPC). (I much prefer a circuit breaker to blowing up pieces of wire, and then not having spares on board)

The circuit breakers have worked fine, but the switches have proved a bit weak for this sort of use. The contacts are very simple, and although they are working OK, the actual switch mechanism can pop out if the switch is knocked sideways. Also, on a couple, the fine wiring to the LED has broken, so the lights are now out on a couple.

You may also note that I have fitted a very simple Perspex chain guard over the steering wheel pinion and chain. This prevents any wiring from interfering with the steering, and vice versa – most important!. I found out the hard way that the wires can actually lift the chain off the pinion if they get caught. Fortunately we were not near anyone, and it was easy to remove the access panel and refit the chain.- But the guard has prevented any reoccurrence!

When the rest of the chart table modification (/access panel!) is replaced, the whole lot forms a very nice backwards facing chart table.



It has 12V power for an internal red light for chartwork at night, and the “library” was designed deep enough to take a Reeds Almanac. There are also USB connections for when I put the PC on the table, and the PC can then be connected to the GPS, and AIS (but not the Autohelm –yet!).

Lighting the switches: to enable you to read the labels at night, is provided by a length of special fluorescent wire. This is mounted under the Left “L” wood panel to give a recessed lighting effect.

You can just see a bit of the (lit) white wire disappearing behind the light panel at the top.

My finishing details leaves something to be desired occasionally, but overall I am very pleased with the results and I hope you liked reading about it.

Very good Dagnall, I may have to change my wheelplot. I am reluctant to do this partly because it would involve making more holes in the fiberglass and my current one made by Simrad is only six

(3) Hon. Sec. Office 196 Harewood Ave. Queens Pk. Bournemouth, Dorset BH7 7BQ



years old. It is in need of a new belt and I understand from the Simrad website that the pilot is now obsolete.

Despite contacting several repairers I have not, as yet, been able to find a new belt. Sadly from checking on the web I see that I am not alone with this problem, spares don't seem to be available although some chandlers still have the complete wheelpilot in stock for sale. This is not the service one should expect from a large manufacturer and supplier of marine products. I for one will not be buying any other marine equipment from Simrad.

---

We now join Chefren as she sets off on her voyage of discovery.

## CHAPTER 1. ENTERING ST VALÉRY

### The Odyssey begins

It was a sunny Saturday afternoon when we sighted the coast of France. A cloudless sky arched above us and the sea was calm, as it had been all through the trip. We were tired, having been up most of the night, but exhilarated to have made landfall without mishap. We congratulated ourselves that our first obstacle was over.

On board Chefren, were myself, my husband John, and Hobbs who was crewing for us. Hobbs was a blonde haired giant of a man who's many talents proved very useful as the trip proceeded, and his quirky sense of humour added greatly to our team spirit.

We'd sailed from Cornwall to Newhaven and from there to France, taking it in turns to sleep during the night, arranging the watches so that there were always two people on deck. We left before midnight to catch the tide and arrive in France during daylight, on a rising tide.

The trip was not without event. While off the Isle of Wight I was asleep down below. I was disturbed by a change in the note of the engine. We were slowing down. Trouble, I thought, and quickly pulled on my sailing jacket and shoes. It was early dawn, as I appeared, bleary-eyed, on deck, in time to see Hobbs leaning over the guardrail, with a boat hook in his hand. "Got it, John!" he called, and began to pull something on board. A body? A fish? My sleep hazed mind worked overtime. It was a deck chair, washed out to sea from one of the many beaches on the south coast. It had suffered from its time in the ocean, but proved a useful addition to our boat's equipment. Another heart-stopping moment had occurred as we left Newhaven marina at 23.30 to enter the narrow harbour channel. Heading for the open sea we could see lights ahead of us, and some of those seemed to detach themselves from the rest and move towards us. The terrifying blast of a ship's siren alerted us to the fact that a huge Superseacat ferry was entering the harbour. Pulling into the side to give her a wide berth reminded us that we hadn't called the port radio station to let them know we were on the move. They would have warned us of the approaching ferry. Black marks all round.

Half an hour out, under sail, enjoying a cup of steaming coffee, and with the auto helm steering our course, a noise disturbed our complacency. It was the warning beep, beep, beep of the autohelm. The drive belt had snapped, we were thrown off course and lost the wind from our sails. For the next few miles we went back to steering by hand, no problem really, just a little boring at that time of night, especially as the wind was constant. Eventually the ever-resourceful Hobbs made a temporary repair using some duct tape and staples, which lasted until daylight.

Otherwise the crossing was uneventful, the wind was on the beam, blowing steadily all night, and we used the engine as well to increase our speed. Overhead the moon's kindly beam gave us enough light to steer by and we made good progress.

It was an exhilarating experience to feel the gentle breeze on my face, to look up at the graceful curve of the sails outlined against the midnight sky and see the stars winking reassuringly. We were really on our way.

We needed to cross two busy shipping lanes and whilst we were concerned about this we knew the procedure. Hobbs and John had a lifetime of sailing experience, but I was a comparative newcomer with only 11 years of sailing to my credit. However the credentials I had obtained, which allowed me to obtain the Overseas Certificate of Competence, made me (laughably) the most qualified sailor on board.

In the event, the horror stories about heavy traffic had no basis, we only saw two other ships all night, another Superseacat, and a fishing boat. Maybe we were just lucky.

We didn't have a life raft on board, but we did have an inflatable dinghy that we carried ready inflated in davits, and all the usual safety equipment. During the night we wore harnesses when we were on watch, securing us to the boat, and self-inflating life jackets attached to our wet weather jackets which we wore all the time.

In the Baie de Somme, as well as the ever-changing buoyed channel, there is a submerged sea wall that is covered at high tide. To get local knowledge is sound advice for inexperienced sailors, but as we have sailed regularly in and out of the Mersey and also over the Caernarfon bar, we are familiar with buoyed channels.

We had planned to arrive on a rising tide so that if we did go aground on a sand bank we would be sure of floating off again when the tide came in. Like all good sailors we also had an alternative course to another harbour planned should conditions be unfavourable.

There are 50 buoys marking the channel that winds tortuously across the wide bay to St. Valéry at the mouth of the Somme. Realising that these might be inaccurate we approached with healthy caution, looking for the cardinal buoy marking the entrance and hoping to see a local boat that we could follow into the river estuary.

As we approached we could see that the bay was alive with boats. Craft of all shapes and sizes were taking advantage of the summer sunshine and the light airs, many with brightly coloured spinnakers, creating a kaleidoscope of shape and colour on the sparkling blue water. No one as far as we could see was keeping to the buoyed channel, and we were tempted to do the same and head straight for where we judged the estuary to be but, we were British, and the Brits stick to the rules. The pilot books told us to keep to the buoyed channel, and keep to it we did, carefully threading our way from one buoy to the next, avoiding the sailing boats that were taking advantage of the fact that 'power gives way to sail'. It took us at least an hour to negotiate the channel, and we were at buoy 32, well in sight of the line of marks indicating the submerged sea wall, when a local fishing boat appeared from the direction of Le Crottoy on the north side of the bay, and led us into the river mouth.

We then motored down a wide channel bordered on each side by marshes, where it's possible to pick samphire grass and marsh lilies. Amongst the marshes we saw distant figures with shotguns slung over their shoulders. No doubt the local duck population was being decimated that day. It was the first day of the six-month hunting season, which various bodies are now campaigning to shorten in order to preserve French wild life.

Reaching the outskirts of St. Valéry, we motored along, admiring the rather opulent residences that edged the quay. They were all different shapes and sizes, with ornate balconies and steep roofs. They reminded me of the sea front houses that were part of the Jacques Tati film, 'M. Hulot's Holiday'. We learned later, that they had been built by former ship owners who had made their fortunes exporting salt.

Suddenly we found ourselves surrounded by boats. A marina had been built in the river itself, presumably because this was as far as one could go before the lock into the canal. On our right, finger pontoons protruded into the river where motorboats, yachts, and canal boats, from the opulent to the downright scruffy, filled every conceivable space. On our left was a single long pontoon a little way out from the shore, which turned out to be the visitor's pontoon. A young Frenchman in a dinghy appeared from nowhere to greet us and escort us to a berth. He took our lines and made them fast then welcomed us by shaking each of us by the hand and showing us the whereabouts of the Capitainerie. He spoke no English and I had to exercise my rusty French, being the only one on board with any knowledge of the language.

I had taken a French O level forty years before and had used it little since, except for the few holidays I had had in France in my thirties. I was greatly reassured to find that as the trip progressed fluency returned and I was able to understand and be understood in most situations, with only one or two hiccups. French teachers out there take heart, some of us do learn what you teach and it stays with us – well mine has.

The visitors' pontoon was on the opposite side of the river from the Capitainerie and there was no bridge, instead a fleet of little orange fibreglass dinghies with outboard motors were provided, but at that stage we had no idea that these were for our use. Instead we launched our own dinghy and rowed ashore.

At the Capitainerie we were given a Releve de Balisage - a chart of the bay with the positions of the buoys updated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July, only two weeks previously. It is issued by the Direction Departementale de l'Equipement de la Somme, and would have been invaluable to have in advance if we had known of its existence.

Having reported in and paid our dues, we could relax. We sat on a wide veranda outside the marina bar, overlooking the water, basking in the warm sun, surveying the other boats, and taking stock. We were still a little apprehensive, a long trip was ahead of us in unknown territory, but we had successfully negotiated the channel crossing and the Baie de Somme so we felt that a congratulatory refreshing drink was in order, and allowed ourselves to savour our arrival in France.

In addition to the bar, which also served meals, the marina provided water, electricity, rubbish collection, toilets, free showers and hot water. All of these very modern facilities were housed in an attractive wooden building situated above the pontoons on the steep bank of the river, approached by a floating walkway. It was one of the best marinas we encountered on the trip.

The toilet block was unisex. This is often a shock to those coming to France for the first time, but the French take these things very much for granted and it is all very proper.

We discovered a notice, in French, about the little orange boats. It asked users to ensure that there was always one boat left on the pontoon at each side of the river. This posed some difficulties when only one boat remained. It reminded us of the puzzle about the fox, the hen and a bag of grain that need transporting across a river. We worked out a solution involving all three of us and two boats, causing a lot of hilarity as we ferried backwards and forwards. Especially when the motor stopped half way across and the two boats started drifting down river!

We never saw any French people doing this. The French have a healthy disregard for rules and regulations, and for authority generally. This seems to be a legacy from the Revolution when the people executed the aristocrats who had previously exercised the authority. Was it because we were British that we went to such pains?

There was an air of festivity in the town, which was thronged with holidaymakers wandering along the quayside, and taking trips on the petite train that seems to be a feature of all tourist towns. A small white engine pulling two open carriages ran along the road, giving visitors a guided tour of the local sights. As well as this there was a real 'Puffing Billy', which was 100 years old. Its railway line ran along the quay and it occasionally announced its presence by a blast on its whistle, encouraging pedestrians to get out of the way. The route of the train was over the bridge spanning the river just before the lock gates, and its route took passengers to Le Crotoy and to the war museums of the Somme.

Overhead light aircraft circled, trailing banners advertising Spécialité Les Plongeurs Fous, which seemed to be a reference to mad divers, and verbal announcements of other attractions were made by loudspeaker vans which touring the streets. My ear was insufficiently tuned to the new language to distinguish just what attractions they were advertising.

Having a French meal was our next priority, and on Sunday evening we ventured into the little town to find a suitable establishment. We were surprised to find that most of the restaurants were closing by 8 p.m. and had to search hard to find one that was still open. Perhaps it was because it was Sunday, and this was only a small town?

Eventually finding a restaurant we treated ourselves to the 'whole hog' - appetisers, three courses, and wine. John was keen to try pastis Ricard, which he remembered from his previous visit to France. I tried, for the first time a kir, white wine with Cassis (black-currant liqueur) which was to become my favourite drink during the trip.

The meal was memorable not only for the food, but also for the service. When the young, rather nervous, trainee waiter brought our food he clumsily knocked over a carafe of water into John's lap. Fortunately John's trousers were drip-dry, suitable for life aboard, and the water made little impression other than dampening his spirits! The embarrassed waiter provided napkins to mop it up, but I thought he could have been a bit more apologetic. Perhaps it was the language difficulty? Later, the same waiter was pouring our wine, and the maitre d'hôtel (female) came across and lightly tapped his forearm to make him raise the bottle just a little higher, avoiding drips. Well, they don't mind drowning their guests with water, but it wouldn't do to splash the wine, would it?

The next day dawned bright and clear, the sun beat down from a cloudless blue sky and the night had been warm. We were eager to finish equipping the boat and begin our trip. We visited a chandlery across the road from the marina to buy a new belt for the auto-helm. It was about 11.00 a.m., but whilst we were there they began to pull down the shutters and close for lunch.

Most French establishments close for 2 hours in the middle of the day and stay open later in the evening. We were not surprised by this, nor the turning away of customers, but we were surprised that they should be doing it so early. Walking on into the town we found the Office du Tourisme also closed. This caused us to stop and think. We remembered the restaurants which had been closing early the previous evening, the chandlery closing early, and now this. Peering through the door at their clock we realised our mistake. French time is one hour ahead of English time and we hadn't put our watches forward. I wondered what other gaffes we'd make before our trip was through?

A visit to the supermarché to fill the galley shelves with 'goodies' for our trip was next on the agenda. After obtaining instructions (in French) from the marina staff we set off down a little flagged street of typically French houses huddled together. These were the fishermen's cottages in the heart of the town, single storey with coloured shutters and flowers in window boxes and tubs at the door. We walked a long way and there was still no sign of the supermarché. I took my courage in both hands and asked a knot of people who were chatting at the roadside. I could just about manage, « *Est-il un supermarché pres d'ici, s'il vous plait?* »

We gathered from their reaction that we had walked in the wrong direction and the supermarché was a long way back. Our faces fell, and, as we turned to retrace our steps, they called us back and offered us a lift. I had just enough French to thank them effusively for their kindness, and to introduce us but that was about all. This was our first encounter with ordinary French people and we felt we were going to enjoy getting to know their compatriots.

Something had gone seriously wrong with my translation of the directions we had received and I didn't discover what this was until much later in the trip when I made the same mistake.

St Valéry itself is an ancient town, founded around 611 by an apostle from Luxeuil in the south. The little black and white chequered brick chapel, dedicated to St. Valéry was visible from the marina, looking like a gingerbread house. This building, which was rebuilt in 1878, is said to commemorate where the saint lived and is buried. The main event for which the town is famous is that it was from here, in 1066, that William (*the Conqueror*) set off for Britain. It's a picturesque little place and in 1837 Victor Hugo wrote that it was "charming at dusk, the moon which went down an hour after sunset, descended slowly towards the sea, the sky was white, the earth brown, and portions of the moon leapt from wave to wave like balls of gold in the hands of a juggler."

We stayed for two nights, and were wondering whether to remain another day and do some sightseeing, but made a hasty decision to leave, late on the Monday, when we realised that if we didn't go on that particular tide the sea lock might not be open to traffic the following day, as the tide would be too late in the afternoon. When we saw other boats casting off and disappearing up river we decided to follow.

At this stage we still had our mast in position and had been told we could have it removed once we were in the canal. There was an anxious moment when we realised that we needed to pass through a swing bridge into the lock. All the other vessels, motorboats without masts, had already passed under it. I had to use the radio and ask for the bridge to be swung for us. I couldn't understand what was said in reply, but at the point when we were about to turn

back, the bridge opened and we were able to pass through into a wide basin where the other boats were already waiting for the lock gates to open.

When the level of the tidal river reached that of the river on the landward side we went through into a short stretch of canal, which disappeared under another bridge. This was not a swing bridge, and there was no way we could pass through until we had had our mast removed. The boatyard was here at the Quai Jules Verne<sup>1</sup> on the right bank, but it was closed. We would have to wait until morning. The other boats had already disappeared. We had to find somewhere to tie up, but the only available pontoon was fully occupied by French canal boats. On the bank near the pontoon were several dogs and children, whilst the Dads were fishing alongside. The general impression was of a group of boats sailing in company, and we felt we would be intruding if we rafted alongside.

On the opposite bank a huge barge was tied to a small quay and at that moment a dark-haired middle-aged woman, in a turquoise sweater, appeared on its deck and spoke to us in English. She explained that we wouldn't be able to go any further without having our mast taken down (that much had become obvious), but if we liked we could moor alongside their barge, named Maja, until the boat yard opened in the morning.

We were glad to take up her offer and later clambered across their barge (taking care to only climb across the foredeck as is sailing etiquette,) and scaled up the steep quay using their ladder. Once on shore we looked at the steep crane in the boatyard and discovered where to moor the following day. The occupants of the barge were an English couple, Audrey and Tony, who lived permanently on the French canals. Their beautifully kept boat was an old commercial barge decorated with tubs of flowers and lace curtains at the windows, and a piece of equipment on the foredeck that resembled an old mangle for lifting the anchor. The following day they had visitors who also lived on the canals. We invited them aboard Chefren and they told us about life on the waterways. We were to meet many such expatriate couples, living in France, full of enthusiasm for the French country and its people, not to mention its food, its wine, and even its health service.

Going ashore to make arrangements at the boatyard, we were shown, by le patron, where to tie up, in a little 'cut' alongside the main quay. He warned us to be careful as we entered because the river current was very strong, and there was also a breeze blowing from up-river. Both of these factors would affect the behaviour of our boat. Tied to the main quay were a number of very smart yachts and motorboats, probably in for storage or repair. Le patron was concerned that we might damage one of these if we were not careful and emphasised his instructions (in French) with hand signals.

John is quite used to handling boats in similar circumstances and had weighed up what he needed to do as we approached, compensating for current and wind. Suddenly one of the employees of the boatyard appeared on the quay, shouting and gesticulating. Whilst we couldn't understand what he was saying, we did understand his body language and his shouts of "Non, non!" as he waved us off. We were very puzzled and tried to explain that le patron had instructed us to go there, but he was insistent.

We backed off, and immediately we were caught by the wind and the current, and found ourselves being taken sideways downstream towards the lock gates. John began what should have been a three-point turn to make another approach but discovered that the boat would not answer the helm and continued its sideways progress. We were not in any real danger but the whole thing was becoming very embarrassing as he attempted to turn the boat around under the scornful eyes of the employee.

Hobbs and I watched helplessly, making ourselves ready with boat hooks and fenders to keep us off other boats and the bank. Hobbs didn't realise that there was a problem with the steering and was itching to get his hands on the wheel. I think he thought John was inexperienced. A couple of days later he had an opportunity to discover the problem for himself. Chefren has an inboard engine, but an out-drive steerable leg. This leg was changing direction of its own accord. In addition, when the engine was put into reverse, the leg was lifting out of the water instead of remaining locked down. What a way to start our trip. Further down the canals we met two other catamarans with similar problems, but at this stage we had no idea what was happening.

After much filling and backing, and revving of the engine, not to mention colourful language, John got the boat round and headed back to the boatyard, feeling very embarrassed. We discovered that the employee had wanted us to tie up at a quay around the corner so that he could warp us round using ropes only, not under engine.

He was very concerned about the strength of the current and the possibility of us being swept down onto other boats. In fact, he put the other boats in greater danger by chasing us off as he did.

Getting from the quay to the cut became a major performance. After much throwing of lines, reversing, swearing and English/French translation we eventually managed it. It took us two hours, and by this time it was 12 noon and everything went quiet as they knocked off for lunch. So we did the same, sitting in the cockpit in the sunshine



enjoying the fruits of our trip to the supermarché - pâté, cheese, salad and French bread, washed down with a bottle of Cabernet Merlot which had cost us 150 FF (£1.50). We were enjoying this.

On the dot of 2 p.m. we heard the engine of the crane start up, and there was le patron with two of his staff ready to remove our mast. He drove the crane while the two men set about dismantling the mast. They were two very different individuals. The employee who had warned us off was a typical dark-skinned, good-looking Frenchman, with a long lean body displayed to advantage in shorts and immaculate T-shirt. In contrast his mousy-haired companion had missed out in the good looks stakes and had done nothing to assist nature. He was clad in a purple T-shirt and ragged jeans, and had allowed his wispy hair to grow well below his ears. A drooping moustache framed a mouth filled with stained teeth and many gaps.

They leapt nimbly about the deck and took down the mast quickly and efficiently. We were pleased with the cost too only 300FF. ( about £30.00 English money) later on our trip we heard of charges upto 900FF. at other marinas. It took the rest of the day to support the mast properly it was then so late that we stayed the night. It was at this stage we realised that we had not needed to undergo any customs formalities. We hadn't been asked for our passport, or my certificate of competence - nothing. We were two weeks into the trip before anyone asked for papers of any kind.

When I opened my eyes the following morning, the day was already bright, although it was still early. I found it hard to believe that at last we were on our way into the French waterways, and our dream was starting to come true. With all our fenders tied to the outside of the boat ready to protect us in the locks, we got underway and passed under the first bridge and into a tree lined canal. Chefren, deprived of her mast, was looking like a graceful swan that had turned overnight into an ugly, ungainly duckling.

The sky was cloudless, the birds were singing and our spirits were high, although it was not without some apprehension that we anticipated our next lock. What would it be like? Would we be bounced around by the sluices; would we have enough rope for the depth of the lock; did we have enough fenders to protect our hull? But the lock was 15 km away and we had some time to relax and enjoy the scenery.

This canalised section of the river Somme stretched straight as an arrow before us, lined with leafy chestnuts on one side, and fields and distant villages on the other.

We found that all the canal banks throughout the trip were lined with trees, planted to absorb moisture and prevent the banks from softening and caving in. The rivers we used, like the Somme, had been canalised by building locks, straightening out some of the curves and strengthening the banks.

There were four swing bridges to negotiate on the first stretch. The first was opened for us and we passed through without incident. The next gave us quite a scare because we did not realise that it would swing, although we could see that it was very low, and we passed under it. As we did we realised that we had very little clearance, and in fact the top of the Dan buoy scraped the bridge and our crosstrees, which were still attached to the mast on top of the cabin, cleared only by a matter of inches. We set about removing the Dan buoy and the crosstrees thinking that this was a possible height for canal bridges. It was only on reading the guidebook later that we realised our mistake. No wonder the bystanders looked interested!

The English couple on Maja had advised us to buy Navicartes, or Guides Vagnon. These are detailed guidebooks to the French waterways which give a map of each waterway, showing possible hazards, and the bridges, locks, quays, with distances, heights, depths of locks etc. They even tell the reader whether a lock is automatic or manual, and list the services available at each tying up point. We didn't manage to obtain any of these until much further on, although we did have a couple of very comprehensive guidebooks to the waterways, which provided excellent information but were insufficiently detailed.

We could have obtained Navicartes in Britain had we known of their existence, and I would recommend their purchase to all would-be travellers on the French canals.

If we had had a Navicarte we would have avoided the next little incident which occurred at Abbéville.....

*The above is an extract from "Floating Through France, by Catamaran from the Channel to the Carmargue" by Brenda Davison. Published by Gopher Publishers UK, and is available from the author via email on [brenda@brenda-davison.org.uk](mailto:brenda@brenda-davison.org.uk), or from the website [www.gopherpublishers.com](http://www.gopherpublishers.com)*

*It may be ordered by post from Brenda Davison, 28 Wirral Gardens, Bebington, Wirral, Merseyside, CH63 3BH or from your local bookshop.*