

Our cruise on board the Delfin, or how we spent two wonderful weeks on the Quiche Lorraine Tour. Starring Delfin, a charming Linssen Grand Sturdy 29.9, a co-starring the skipper and his lady companion. "Can you tie a bowline?" the skipper asked his nautical companion to be in February.



The Quiche Lorraine Tour with 'Delfin' (part 1)

Two canals, two rivers and three countries

Text and Photos Anette Leistenschneider and Ralf Deimel

So started the preparations for our two-week boating cruise from mid-June to the beginning of July 2009, setting off from the Saarbrücken Osthafen. Once the decision had been taken, the lady at the skipper's side started her preparations in earnest – in the following weeks every rope, cord or piece of string that came within reach was tied into a bowline. The ambition to be able to tie the knots "at half past two in the morning with her eyes shut" had well and truly gripped her,



"...Mademoiselle 'Delfin'..."

and before long the bowline, the clove hitch, the figure-eight loop and all the rest of them had become firm friends.

The sauerkraut tour

"Would you like to do the sauerkraut tour?" the skipper asked a few weeks later. The sauerkraut tour? Yes, the sauerkraut tour! The skipper had found a large number of enthusiastic reports on the Internet describing the circular tour through the Saar canals, the Rhine-Marne canal with a detour to Saverne, and the Moselle and the Saar. We then obtained some further literature – the skipper had gone cruising on the Main the year before, accompanied by Wolfgang Banzhaf's guide to the region, so we got hold of his book on our area and learned that our cruise along the Saar canals, the Rhine-Marne canal, the Moselle and the Saar was known as the Quiche Lorraine Tour. Banzhaf's book was a constant

and reliable guide for us throughout our trip. The plan was to take a trip through Anette's homeland, but looking at it from a completely different perspective than that of a cyclist, pedestrian or motorist. It seemed like a wonderful idea!

Mademoiselle 'Delfin'

The skipper soon found a charterer who had four handsome boats. The Schönberger family from Saarlouis in the Saarland, the owners of Yacht Charter Holiday Tours, were very supportive and helpful in all sorts of ways right from the outset, and we would like to thank them again here. One day in April the skipper and his lady companion kept an appointment with Mr Schönberger at the Merzig marina to have a look at his boats and take one for a trial run. And the two of them fell in love. Not with each other – they'd already done that – but with another lady, who looked so delightful and elegant lying there in the harbour that we immediately decided on a threesome with Mademoiselle Delfin. Mademoiselle Delfin is a Linssen Grand Sturdy 29.9, built in 2007, pretty as a picture and a real gem in all respects. The skipper and the Delfin went on a trial run to get to know each other a little. So manoeuvrable was Miss Linssen that skipper and boat immediately became friends, passing determinedly through the narrow marine harbour entrance and out into the Saar, coming smoothly alongside the quay wall before turning in a very confined space and then returning happily together to the marina, where the Linssen gently backed into her berth.

The skipper sighed contentedly about the sailing qualities of the Linssen 29.9, her direct responsiveness, her manoeuvrability and above all her handling, which was so good-natured and consistent. The two of us looked at each other and we knew – this was the young lady we wanted to take on our cruise along 400 kilometres of river, through 86 locks, 2 tunnels and one inclined plane, covering two canals, two rivers and three countries!

Things were now getting serious – a cruise plan had to be drawn up. How many kilometres would we be able to do each day? How long would the locks take? In which towns



should we perhaps lay up for a day? When would our boat need supplies, and fresh water? Were our initial plans at all realistic? Question after question – which Mr Schönberger patiently answered, giving us lots information and tips about the trip.

The first lock

June 22 moved ever closer, and our excitement and anticipation grew and grew until finally, there was just one more night on terra firma and then we would be off. On Monday morning we were off: Mr Schönberger was waiting for us at the marina in Saarbrücken, and told the skipper and his crew again about everything they had to remember during the cruise.

The weather was perfect for setting off. The sun was shining without being too strong, the wind was still a little fresh (the wind would always freshen up later whenever we could have done without it, e.g. when entering or leaving locks, or mooring in harbours). So skipper Ralf and his Head Deckhand Anette (who would later also be the

Head Lock Operative, Head Fender Putting Out Operative, Head Tying Up Operative, Head Casting-Off Operative, Head Rope Coiler and Head Chef), together with Able Seaman Werner for assistance on the first day, boarded their handsome yacht and set off – directly to the first locks at Gündingen.

DELFIN Linssen glided calmly and peacefully into the first small lock just after Saarbrücken, the two deckhands excitedly preparing for their first lock manoeuvre. Put the fenders out at the right height, check the ropes again, have the boat hooks ready, check the fenders again, can't do any harm – is that boathook still where I put it 20 seconds ago? - will the deckhands be able to grab the bollard at the lock properly with lines and boathooks? - why on earth do the gloves stick to each other like that? - is the boathook still there, are the fenders still hanging properly? With the deckhands sweating from their exertions, skipper Ralf calmly brought the Delfin into the lock in a precision approach and stopped exactly at the bollards. And again I could see from the sparkle in his eyes how superbly manoeuvrable our boat was, making the

perfect approach in the narrow lock a real pleasure. “*Fenders clear?*” “*Lines clear?*” “*Boathook clear?*” “*Fenders clear, lines clear, boathook clear, skipper!*” The lock keeper closed the gates and water rushed in, lifting the boat up 3 metres; the gates opened again and we had successfully navigated our first uphill lock, and sailed on into the Saar Canal.

At the Gündinger Lock the lock keeper gave us a remote control for the automatic locks, which had to be given back just before the Mittersheim moorings. There is a clearly visible sign about two to three hundred metres before the entrance to each lock to activate with the remote control before waiting briefly for the lock traffic light to show green, signalling that it is clear to enter.

Saar Coal Canal

The Saar Canal used to be called the Saar Coal Canal, because until the middle of the 20th century, barges carried coal from what are now the Saarland coal mines along the Rhine-Marne Canal to the Rhine, before returning with iron ore from Lorraine and Alsace for the Saarland steelworks. The locks are exactly matched to the size of the coal barges of the time – 39 m long and 5.15 m wide.

We sailed on in our good-looking yacht through a stunning landscape of gentle rolling hills, with trees and bushes lining the edge of the canal, butterflies fluttering by – and always somebody shouting “*Lines clear?*” “*Boathook clear?*”, as the locks came thick and fast until the lock manoeuvre quickly became routine for the two deckhands. Our first mooring

was at the idyllic jetty at Witttringen, where we celebrated the Head Deckhand’s birthday with friends who arrived later. Supper was cooked on the barbecue at the mooring, followed by a wonderful evening. Everybody was curious to inspect our little yacht, and we were proud to show them all our little gem. Everybody marvelled at the large number of stowage facilities for clothes and supplies, and the clever layout. And so we finished our first exciting and exhilarating day on the boat on the aft deck together with friends, including a small Jack Daniels. The second night on board took us to Mittersheim, where the lake is a weekend destination for many people from the Saarland, the Palatinate and Lorraine; some have small weekend houses there or come to go fishing, rowing or windsurfing.

French inland waterways. Irresistible

Next day, we mastered a chain of 13 locks in close succession, together with a trio of Swiss houseboats. You have to register for the Mittersheim locks the day before, and it is advisable to cast off as soon as the first lock opens at 9 in the morning, since at 12 on the dot the French lock keepers go off for a well-earned lunch hour – and lunch is sacred in France! Not that we begrudged them it, since they accompanied us with their car along the towpath by the canal, opening and closing by hand all those locks that are not yet automated. “*Our*” lock keeper was a lady who was always energetically assisted by the boat crews travelling with us – merci, Madame, merci Messieurs! If you cast off from Mittersheim after 9 in the morning, you have to twiddle your thumbs for an hour in the middle of the chain of locks



“...exceptionally scenic mooring, directly opposite the classical façade of the Château des Rohan...”

– you can't move forwards or backwards. The next morning, we cast off from the harbour at Niderviller in the direction of Saverne. As was so often the case, we encountered friendly helpful people here as well – the harbourmaster even lent us his bicycle so that we could buy fresh baguettes and brioches in the village.

The next stretch is the most outstandingly scenic of the entire trip, according to the British boating writer and photographer Hugh McKnight, and we can only agree. *"If I was ever given just one day to convince people of the beauties of boating on French canals, I would take them on the 20-km stretch on the Rhine-Marne canal between Saverne and Niderviller, in the northwest of Alsace. We would sail uphill through locks, along the Zorn valley between its steep heavily-wooded sides to Lutzelbourg, where we could admire this attractive town in the Vosges before carrying on to Arzviller where the inclined plane would lift our boat up a steep hillside, then sail on through pine woods and finally go underground in 2 tunnels that lead to the gentle Lorraine countryside. These 20 kilometres are a microcosm of everything that irresistibly attracts me to French inland waterways"* (Banzhaf, page 150).

Two tunnels

We were fortunate enough to sail along this wonderful stretch in both directions, as Saverne was where we turned around to come back.

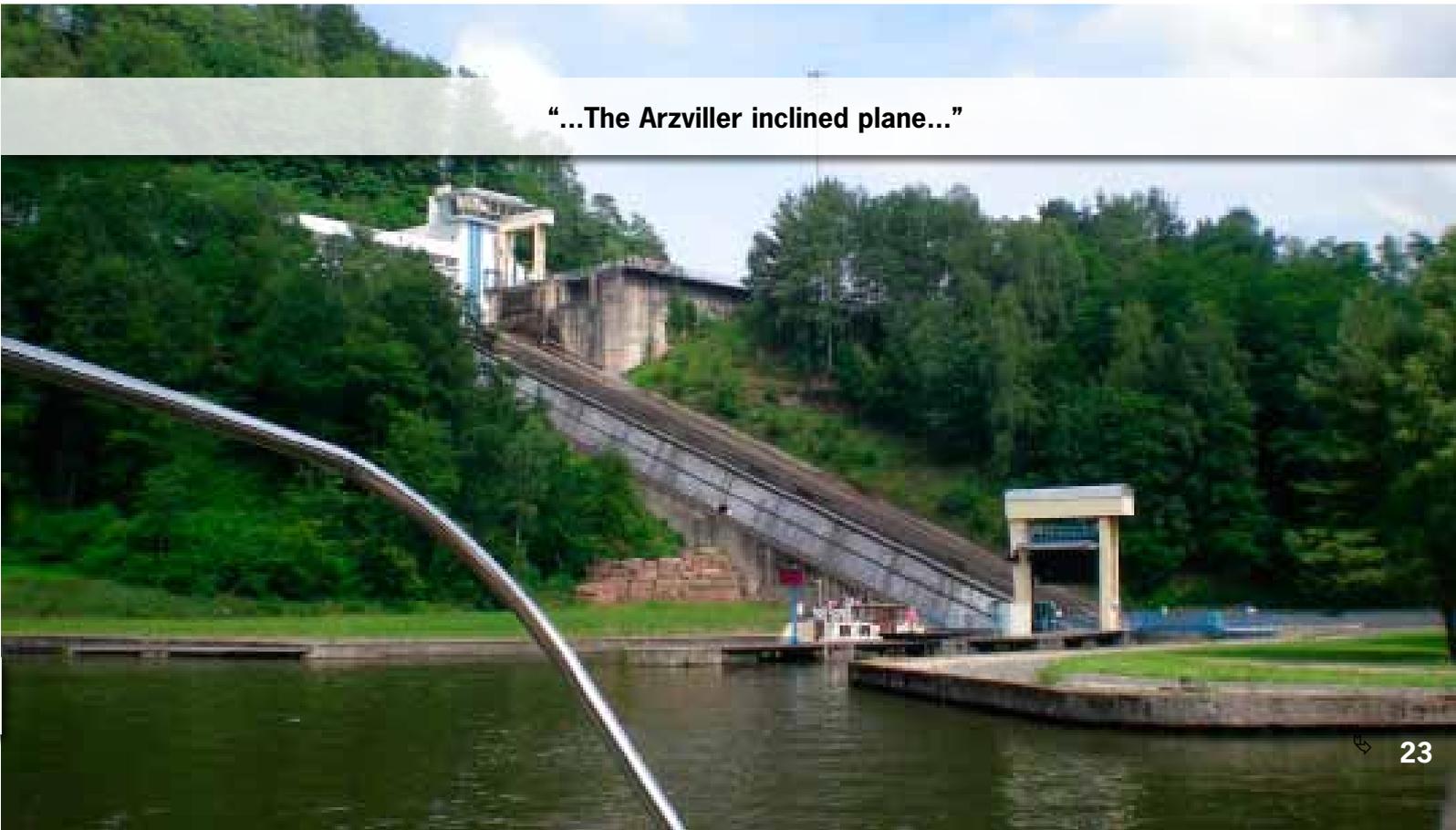
First we went through the first tunnel, 480 m long, where a bat greeted us at the entrance. The second tunnel – almost



"...Our' lock keeper was a lady..."

2.5 km long - called for a bit of concentration, and the use of our 55 W halogen spotlight and its little brother. Scarcely had we emerged into daylight again when another high point of the trip was waiting for us – the Arzviller inclined plane, for which we have to thank the Lorraine coal barges, long since out of service. Commissioned in 1968, the inclined plane was constructed to save the barges from spending a complete working day navigating 16 locks to overcome a height difference of 42 metres. We tied up our Linssen 29.9 in the caisson of the inclined plane, and slid slowly down-↵

"...The Arzviller inclined plane..."



wards. This experience is an absolute must, even if it means sailing down the valley first when taking this diversion to Saverne off the Quiche Lorraine Tour, and then upwards on the way back. If you do the Big Sauerkraut Tour, you carry on from Saverne towards the Rhine and Strasbourg before reaching the Moselle at Koblenz.

Saverne

We tied up in the harbour at Saverne at an exceptionally scenic mooring, directly opposite the 140-m long classical façade of the Château des Rohan of 1740. We got ourselves and our Delfin ready for the evening and finished the day with a couple of tasty Alsatian tartes flambées, accompanied by a glass or two of Pinot Gris in a small restaurant just by the lock.

The next morning we cast off in beautiful sunshine, and navigated the inclined plane and the two tunnels before tying up for the evening at the jetty of a small place with the tongue-twisting name of Xouaxange. Once again our cruise provided us with a very moving and interesting encounter: a pilgrim following the Way of St. James had pitched his tent on the meadow by the jetty, having set off on his heavily-laden bicycle a few days earlier from Ettlingen near Karlsruhe. He was riding some 100 km each day and intended to give thanks to St. James at the cathedral in Santiago de Compostella within six weeks. We wished him wholeheartedly all the best and a good journey.



Anette Leistenschneider, a stage director, and Ralf Deimel, a business engineer, went on their first cruise together in a Linssen 29.9 in the summer of 2009, taking the Quiche Lorraine Tour. The trip was Ralf Deimel's second cruise and he was very happy to do it on board a Linssen. Ralf and Anette were both bitten by the Linssen bug and plan further cruises together.

Read part 2 of the Quiche Lorraine Tour in the next edition of Serious Pleasure.



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