



Text and photographs: Aad Huijs

CARVING THE ARDENNES WITH THE LINSSEN FLEET SIXTEEN

EVERY YEAR SINCE ITS INCEPTION, THE LINSSEN OWNERS GROUP (LOG) NETHERLANDS/ BELGIUM HAS ORGANISED A TOUR FOR ITS MEMBERS WITH A SPECIAL PRACTICAL TOUCH. IN PREVIOUS YEARS, DESTINATIONS INCLUDED THE FRIESIAN ISLANDS, SAIL AMSTERDAM AND FLANDERS. THIS YEAR'S TOUR IN MAY OFFERED AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO MASTER THE SMALL FRENCH LOCKS AND TUNNELS. AAD HUIJS, SKIPPER OF *CÓMPLICE* (A LINSSEN GS 40.9 SEDAN) DESCRIBES THE EXPERIENCE OF CARVING THE ARDENNES WITH 16 LINSSENS.

16 May 2012, Fleet Sixteen was on it's way. At 8 a.m. sharp this morning, the fleet left Nautilus harbour in Roermond, heading for Luik (Liège). After the palaver in the Nautilus clubhouse last night – accompanied, of course, by drinks and cheese supplied by Mr Cheese (Leo of Vergeer Kaas, participating with Elisabeth II) – we were ready for the long haul. With the dark clouds and

cold wind (5 C) that accompanied our start, the weather conditions could only improve. We all fitted in the first lock (Linne), as well as in the second one (Maasbracht), where Yvonne Linssen was waving us goodbye and wishing the fleet a good voyage. It must have been a thrill for her to see so many Linssen's and their happy owners climbing together with the raising water!

MUD WRESTLING

We had less luck at the first Belgium lock, where we arrived around noon. There were quite a few barges and other yachts waiting their turn. The numbers seemed to increase by the minute and there was little mooring space. Fortunately, the sun appeared and it was time for lunch. It was not clear how long we had to wait, just a few of the fleet could enter together with one or two barges. The lock keeper at Ternaaien must have been surprised by so many Linssen's at one time. He also decided to use the small yacht lock on the starboard side. When we rose the 12 metres and repacked the lines during the lift, we discovered that this lock isn't used all the time. There was plenty of mud on the repack bollards. This was nothing more than mud wrestling. Our clothes, our faces, everything was covered in mud. If you ever have the chance, go for the large portside lock, if going upstream, which is not as dirty as the small lock. As only two or three of our fleet could pass at one time, the fleet split up. No use in waiting for each other. The first trio arrived at around 4 p.m. in Luik. However, the last boats did not arrive until 6 p.m. at the nice port in Luik with the remarkable statue at its entrance.

NO GAMBLING TODAY

17 May 2012 at 9 a.m. sharp, our fleet musician, Theo Winnubst, skipper of the Harfie, blew the reveille on his trumpet. It was time to unleash the lines. The fleet set sail for Namen (Namur). To see the armada of 16 boats passing the richly decorated bridges of Luik was a magnificent sight. Very soon we neared the foothills of the Ardennes. The nature was more pleasant than yesterday when we sailed past the industrialised zones around Luik.

We had to pass through five locks. At the first lock (Ivoz-Ramet) on the outskirts of Luik, it looked as if we were entering a lottery. There were quite a few barges waiting their turn, others were also nearing and there was hardly any mooring space left. It was not clear who would be first, who would follow and how and when the Sweet Sixteen would fit in. We decided not to take part in the lottery and to wait patiently. A friendly Dutch skipper of a brand new barge with powder tanks invited a few of us to moor alongside. He was a proud skipper who was keen to show off the technical marvels of his vessel and some of us even descended into the bowels of the ship. And he was full of admiration for our Linssens. Every time the lock gates opened, only a few of our fleet could enter with the barges. So we split up again and we were now sailing in groups of four. We hardly had to



wait at the next locks and at 6.30 p.m. the final group moored at Namen quay on the city side just below the casino. As the secured Port de Plaisance de Jambes on the other side of the river was being worked on, there was no place for us there. If you have the choice, the Port de Plaisance is preferable to the quay on the city side. We were planning to stay for two nights so we had a full day to explore the pleasant and lively city with many pavement cafés and a nice old town centre. We climbed the famous Citadel and enjoyed the superb view of the river. In the evening, we had a dinner buffet with the group in the casino (an excellent buffet with free drinks for €20). We just had dinner and nobody risked gambling away a Linszen. The only disappointment was that no one left the harbour with a convertible (the casino lottery prize for this week) on the aft deck.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

19 May 2012. Waking up after our second night in Namen, we soon noticed that many of the Linszen's saloons had been defaced by indecent texts and illustrations drawn with a whiteboard marker. Fortunately, with a special polish and a bit of elbow grease they were soon removed. Well, for those interested in the classics: "Nomen est omen" – the name is an omen. "Namen" is Dutch for "Names". So I suppose you could expect the inhabitants to leave their signatures (someone even joked: "it's the mayors signature"). That is why it's pref-

erable to moor at the secured harbour.

After the cleaning duty, we left Namen quay at 9 a.m. in two groups. The first lock was around the corner and this had room for only eight boats (four on each side). Going further south there were not many barges, but just as we departed one showed up heading in the same direction. So we had to wait until it has passed the lock. Sailing for Dinant, we had to navigate six locks, each 100 x 12 meters. If there was no other traffic, we could easily proceed in a group of eight. We were now entering the heart of the Ardennes and enjoyed the river winding through the hills. This is a real holiday and leisure area with plenty of camping sites. In some places, people were even climbing and descending the steep rocks bordering the river.

We arrived at Dinant around 4 p.m. We had reserved, so the entire jetty was available for our fleet. We were close to the famous Dinant rock and its church. We strolled through the town, but decided not to climb the Citadel this time. Instead, we found a nice pavement café for a drink with a splendid view of the boulevard and the Fleet Sixteen on this sunny Saturday afternoon.

BREAKING NEWS!

20 May 2012. We were heading for Givet in France. Again we left in two groups to fit into the locks. It was not far, but we were kept waiting at the first lock (Anseremme). Along this stretch of the Meuse, the





river swings like a belly dancer, especially after the 2nd lock (Waulsort) where the bends are almost 360°. The views were magnificent, also thanks to the sunny weather. At around noon, we arrived at lock Les Quatre Cheminées, where we entered France. For those who hadn't bought a vignette online, it took quite some time to obtain one on site. The vignette entitles boat owners to a remote control to operate the upcoming locks. We waited for each other in order to arrive together in nearby Givet. Our remaining route to Givet took less than an hour. When we arrived the show really started. Givet has mooring places on both sides of the river. On the port side (going upstream) brand new jetties extend into the river. On the starboard side, you can moor at the quay. The fleet had reservations for the jetties. But after we had moored, it soon became clear that the river cur-

rent and the weight of the Linssens were too much for these jetties. After a while, they were leaning like a sloping roof and some of us had to relocate. Now that was where experience counted. With the full current flowing against the hull, it was only possible to move the boats without causing damage by using one spring line and taking bold and quick decisions. Obviously, a fleet doesn't arrive every day in a provincial town like Givet. A journalist and photographer from a local newspaper "L'Ardennais" turned up and later produced a full-page article with the headline "La halte fluviale surbookée: Arrivée d'une flotte de Linssens, la Rolls Royce des bateaux!". They were followed by various officials who came to see what had become of their new municipal jetties.

SOME LIGHT PLEASE!

22 May 2012. We stayed in Givet for two nights with half the group. From here on, only two Linssens fitted into a lock (36 x 5.40 metres). Splitting the group in two and taking the locks with two boats together helped reduce the waiting time.

Half of the fleet left yesterday for Revin and today we were taking over their places. The other group would continue to Charleville-Mézières where the Fleet Sixteen would be reunited. We had to lower the masts from this point on as the self-service locks have cable gutters at 3.50 meters. The aft cabin versions also had to lower their hoods.

The sun has disappeared and we were sailing in overcast conditions and mist. But that was no problem seeing that we would be entering Ham tunnel – 600 metres of darkness – after the next lock. We fitted a construction



lamp on the front deck and used a flashlight. The tunnel was only 5.70 metres wide at the water's surface and less above due to the roundness of the tunnel. The width of our Linssens meant that there was not much space left. A good steering strategy is to position the boat in the middle of the channel upon entering the tunnel, place the rudder in the middle and make slight corrections with the bow and stern thrusters. This avoids the boat slinging from side to side.

The same strategy works well when entering and exiting the small locks, which have even less space on both sides (lock width of 5.40 metres). Nevertheless, rubber mats hung on the sides at the waterline are recommended to protect the hull. Because the water level is sometimes very high in the locks, the fenders do not always help because they float. The rubber mats don't look nice, but they do work. We were therefore able to pass the next seven locks without problems.

Our course led us through the heart of the Ardennes. The nature was impressive but unfortunately it took the sun a long time to appear. There was another tunnel before we arrived in Revin, but this was far shorter but did involve a bend. Directly after the tunnel, there was a sharp turn to starboard for Revin, Port de Plaisance, our destination.

IT'S THE JOURNEY THAT COUNTS

23 May 2012. Sometimes people ask what we do while we are sailing. Someone is always at the rudder, of course, but what does the rest of the crew do when we are not in the locks? Well it goes without saying that we enjoy the passing landscape! For us, boating is more than just getting from A to B. If it were just a matter of travelling to your destination, it would be easier to go by car – it's quicker.

Revin was one of the destinations where we would have liked to have stayed a bit longer. It's very nicely situated and has a relaxed atmosphere that is perfect for a lazy day. But as part of a group, we had to leave. Fleet Sixteen was approaching its finale with a captain's dinner in

Charleville-Mézières.

Today's journey was relaxed with splendid nature and good weather. There were nine locks to negotiate. By now, each pair had developed a routine for taking the locks, which meant it usually took only 10 minutes to pass through.

As we neared Charleville-Mézières the weather suddenly changed. Dark clouds appeared and a fierce wind started blowing. And, needless to say, a thunderstorm erupted precisely at the moment when the last pair moored. Cushions and other outdoor articles had to be thrown inside, windows and the sliding roof had to be closed and lines had to be fixed to counteract the

Dinant



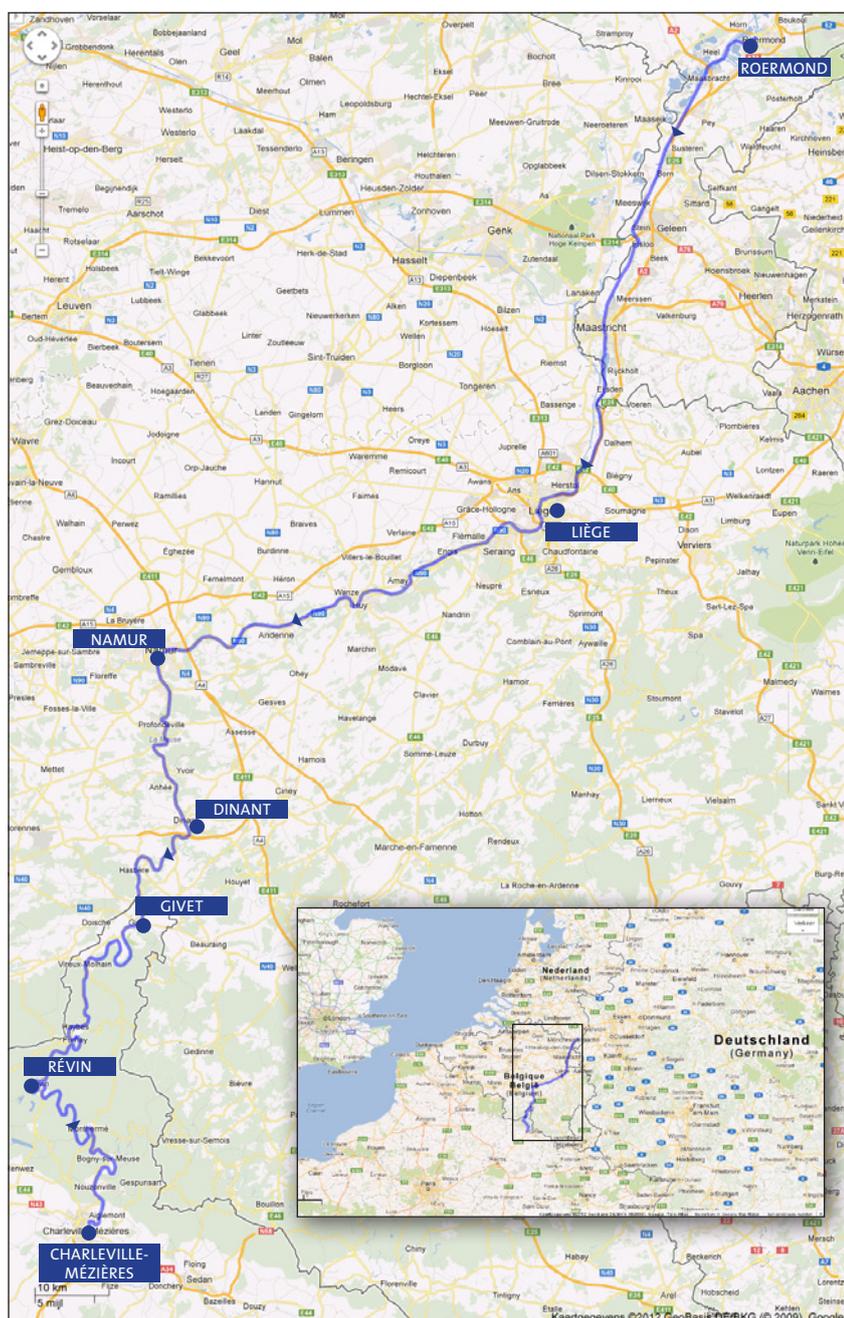
strong gusts. I have to admit that multi-tasking is not my strong point, but sometimes it has to be done. We moored safely.

Thirty minutes later the sun was shining again. In the evening, we enjoyed a pleasant walk to the nearby restaurant for drinks and a convivial captain's dinner to round off the club tour. Others would return to home base from here. We continued in a group of four, and the Linszen Fleet Sixteen became a Linszen Quattro for the rest of the Meuse-Moselle-Rhine tour.

See also:

www.linszen-owners.nl

www.mylinszenexperience.blogspot.nl



MARINAS

Port autonome de Liège

Quai de Maestricht, 14
B-4000 - Liège (B)
Tél.: +32 4232.97.97
portdeliege@skynet.be

Haven Henri Hallet

Boulevard de Meuse
B-5100 Jambes (B)
Tel : +32(o) 81 31 39 46
portdejambes.namur@skynet.be

Port de plaisance Dinant

Haute Meuse Dinantaise
B-5500 Dinant (B)
Tel : +32 (o)82 - 22 28 70

Port de plaisance Givet

Quai de Meuse
F-o8600 Givet (FR)
Tel: +33 (o)3 - 24 42 14 33

Port de plaisance Louis Auboin

Rue des Paquis
F-o8000 Charleville-Mézières (FR)
Tel: +33 (o)3 - 24 33 23 60

PARTICIPATING LINSSEN'S

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| Adje Nooitgedacht | Range Cruiser 450 Sedan |
| | Wheelhouse L-Class |
| Anna Catharina | Grand Sturdy 410 AC Mark II |
| Cómplice | Grand Sturdy 40.9 sedan |
| Fiddlers Green | Grand Sturdy 43.9 AC |
| Harfie | St. Jozef vlet |
| Loisanne | Grand Sturdy 470 AC Mark II |
| Margarita | Linszen 44SE |
| Minos | Dutch Sturdy 380 AC |
| MS Elisabeth II | Grand Sturdy 43.9 AC |
| Rietvaer | Grand Sturdy 430 AC Mark II |
| Santessa | Grand Sturdy 40.9 sedan |
| Serious Pleasure | Grand Sturdy 410 AC |
| Smient | Grand Sturdy 430 AC |
| Solaris | Grand Sturdy 430 AC |
| Victoria | Grand Sturdy 500 |
| Vivente | Grand Sturdy 40.9 AC |