



TRAVELS IN THE NETHERLANDS WITH BOAT AND CAMERA

Text and photographs: Christine & Siegfried Günther

OUR 2017 BOATING SEASON WAS DIVIDED INTO TWO TRIPS: FIRST TO FRIESLAND IN MAY AND JUNE, AND THEN TO THE WESTERN PROVINCES OF THE NETHERLANDS FROM EARLY AUGUST TO MID-OCTOBER. WE HAD SET OUT FROM MAASBRACHT TO THE VECHT ONCE BEFORE IN 2015. IT WAS THIS FIRST EXPERIENCE THAT PERSUADED US TO EXPLORE THE NETHERLANDS IN GREATER DEPTH.

Having sailed the Meuse, the Moselle and the Saar on our Linssen yacht "VAGABOND" in 2016, last year we checked out the Netherlands as a cruising area.

Friesland was to be our first destination. We had already heard and read a lot about it and now wanted to experience it for ourselves.

It certainly wouldn't be our last "Netherlands experience".

TO DOKKUM AND BACK. ON THE MEUSE HEADING FOR THE WAAL

On Thursday, 4 May, we set out from Maasbracht, our "home port" of Van der Laan, on our touring season. We took our time on the Meuse stage, with the idea of entering the Maas-Waal Canal in three days, i.e. following the route Maasbracht > Venlo > lake Leukermeer > Linden.

It was our first time in Linden, where a major new water sport area has been created, offering a wide variety of leisure activities, such as sailing, speed-boating, water touring, etc.

We spent the night in the WV Kraaijenbergse Plassen

marina, where we moored at the long "registration jetty".

FROM THE MEUSE TO THE IJSSEL

We left the Kraaijenbergse Plassen marina at 8:30 in dull weather, after laying out the life jackets to ensure our safety and talking through the codes of conduct for dealing with emergencies once again.

It was not raining when we set off, the wind was moderate at force 3 on the Beaufort scale and it was still very fresh.

Even though cargo vessels sail round the clock seven days a week, we chose the Sunday, in the hope that there would be less traffic on the Rhine.

The first stretch was from the Meuse as far as the Maas-Waal Canal, where things were unexpectedly quiet. We hoped our plan would work, as some 600 barges cross the Dutch-German border every day.

After travelling for two hours, we reached the lock for the river Waal (Rhine) near Nijmegen. When we sailed out of the lock, only one hundred metres separated us

from the Waal. On the right-hand side we could see the Nijmegen traffic control centre at the junction. We called in on VHF 4: "Vagabond coming from Meuse, downstream on Waal heading for IJssel". The traffic control centre advised us to wait for the barge travelling upstream. The barges travelling downstream were about 2 km away but were approaching fast.

As soon as the traffic allowed, we sailed on the right-hand side of the river, where a special channel for recreational craft is marked out by buoys.

We stayed on the right-hand side of the river at first as the current was weaker on the inside bend. The 18 km stretch between Nijmegen and the entrance to the Gelderse IJssel has a lot of bends in it and the current at Nijmegen was quite strong. During our trip, it reached 8 km/h under the bridges, where the strong current and busy traffic agitated the water considerably.

We changed sides at the next bend after about 6 km, where the channel for recreational craft was marked out by green buoys. The current and the traffic eased somewhat and we progressed at about 5 km/h. Despite the heavy traffic on the Waal, there are also times when you can enjoy nature.

After three hours of non-stop sailing, we turned into the Pannerden Canal, having informed the traffic control centre of our intention. We immediately picked up speed and headed for the IJssel at 16 m/h as far as Giesbeek marina, which we reached at about 3.30 p.m. after a varied and interesting journey.

ON THE IJSEL HEADING FOR ZWOLLE

This stage was to take us from Giesbeek to Zwolle. We remained for two days in Giesbeek marina after

the Waal stretch. The Rhederlaag recreation area contains several generously proportioned full-service marinas. We opted for "MV Giesbeek", which also had a restaurant. We took the opportunity to refuel there. From the marina, the town of Doesburg is an easy 30-minute bike ride. Because of the sunny weather, we were able to enjoy the ride, despite the wind. It was also worth the trip. We took the opportunity to seek out the marina for passing traffic as well. It was still quite empty. Three boats were moored there that day.

The stretch on the IJssel took us through a delightful landscape. However, you always have to keep your wits about you on this river, with its many bends and very heavy traffic. AIS enabled us to detect approaching vessels at an early stage. In certain situations, we were approached directly by professional skippers who told us how to avoid dangerous conditions. After 30 km and two and a half hours of travelling time, we approached the town of Zutphen and its port in the Vispoortgracht right in the town centre.

As we knew from our reading and from friends, care is required when entering the port. We had therefore been warned in advanced and first sailed past the port entrance and turned our boat downstream and then entered the port upstream, against the current. The entrance reminded us of the port of Neumagen Dhron on the Moselle.

It is also advisable to wait until the water in the river has calmed down after a ship has sailed past. There, we were immediately offered a mooring for boats over 10 m. The north side of the port was nice and quiet but was in the shade in the mornings and evenings, which was regrettable given the temperatures at the time.

The port had a very pleasant ambiance. The harbour





master was on hand all day from 9.00 a.m. until 6.00 p.m. He told us that as many as forty passing boats a day were moored there in the summer. We wondered how tightly packed the boats would have to be in order to fit. A new port is currently being built downstream.

It's worthwhile taking a stroll round the well-preserved Hanseatic town. We also stayed there for two days.

Our resumed journey took us past Deventer to the port of Veessen.

When we arrived, we found out that the port was being extended and was not accessible. We therefore decided to go as far as Hattem near Zwolle, where we arrived after four and a half hours.

As soon as we tied up in the IJsseldelta Marina, we were impressed by this beautiful and well maintained place. The city of Zwolle can be reached in ten minutes by a direct bus route (number 203). A bus leaves the marina every 30 minutes (Hattem Centrum stop). The town can be reached by bicycle by taking a nearby ferry.

Friends advised us to avoid the marina for passing boats in Zwolle. It's probably a matter of taste. It's certainly safer and more peaceful to moor outside a big city. When sightseeing in Zwolle we also came across the marina, which made a good impression on us.

This time, the bus was our preferred option for going into town. Zwolle is a major shopping city. Despite being situated in a beautiful location and retaining many old buildings, it lacks the charm of Hattem or Zutphen.

We ended this stage with a "historical" walking tour through the centre of Hattem.

FROM THE OVERIJSEL TO FRIESLAND

We completed the stage in six stages but it can, of course, also be done faster. We permitted ourselves a

small detour via Meppel. The total distance from the Overijssel to Friesland is about 120 km.

In particular:

Hattem > Zwartsluis: 2.6 hours

Zwartsluis > Meppel: 1.3 hours (there and back)

Zwartsluis > Vollenhove: 2.9 hours

Vollenhove > Steenwijk: 3.9 hours

Steenwijk > Echtenerbrug: 4.5 hours

Echtenerbrug > Sneek: 4.1 hours

The towns on the route are not particularly noteworthy apart from Blokzijl. Meppel and Sneek are also worth a visit.

The marinas are all well equipped. Between Zwartsluis and Vollenhove, you cross lake Zwarte Meer, where you can enjoy nature to the full. You should therefore keep your binoculars handy. From there, we proceeded to Beulakerwijde. None of these lakes is very deep, but if you keep to the buoyed fairways you won't have any problems with water depth.

"Water tourism" is booming from Echtenerbrug onwards, where water sports are the only activity. Despite all this, agriculture is still important and the surrounding countryside remains intact.

From Echtenerbrug we first travelled to lake Tjeukemeer, heading towards Sloten. From there we continued to Sneek via Woudsend. In the municipalities, we were required to pay a toll of about €2 to cover the operation of the bridges. Sometimes it's even more expensive, when several bridges are operated by a single bridge keeper.



TRAVELLING IN FRIESLAND

The boat was not our sole means of transport in Friesland either, where we also travelled by train, bus and bicycle. In this way, we made a detour to Lemmer, Lauwersoog and Bolsward.

By boat we completed a round trip of 270 km from Sneek to Stavoren in seven stages.

Sneek > by bus to Lemmer

> Grou: 4.2 hours

> Dokkum: 5.2 hours > by bus to Lauwersoog

> Leeuwarden: 3.6 hours

> Grou: 5.3 hours

> Lemmer: 4.2 hours

> Akkrum: 4.5 hours

> Sneek: 3.1 hours

> Stavoren: 3.7 hours > by train and bus to Bolsward

The journey took us through canals, rivers and lakes. What is striking is the harmonious coexistence between nature and industry, between town and country, between humans and nature and between amateur and professional skippers.

Although we were not yet in the high season, the number of boats was astonishing. What must it be like there in high summer! The available range of moorings gave us some idea... In leisure strongholds like Grou, it can get crowded at any time of year. Sailing boats take over the lakes, especially at weekends.

We should emphasise that the facilities are generally both in very good condition and well equipped. Even the simple moorings in open countryside (known as "Marrekrite") are cared for and well maintained.

After two weeks in Friesland, our impression of the landscape was ambivalent: on the one hand, everything was very harmonious, well kept and peaceful while on the other hand, we felt it was a little lacking in variety. To put it another way, the landscape is a little monotonous. However, if what you are looking for



is a cruising area, this is the right place for you. But what we particularly liked about Friesland were the small towns, such as Dokkum and Akkrum. Lemmer, Sneek and Grou are real "tourist hot spots" and immediately put us in a holiday mood. Leeuwarden, Friesland's capital, impressed us with its beautiful moorings right next to the park. Our tour of Friesland ended in Stavoren, the launch pad for our crossing of lake IJsselmeer.

ON LAKE IJSSELMEER

After our experience on lake Tjeukemeer (strong wind resulting in very choppy water/force 5-6 on the Beaufort scale) we waited in Stavoren for two days, until lake IJsselmeer calmed down.

The weather service promised an improvement for the next two or three days. We therefore decided to moor our boat in the "Buitenhaven" (Outer Harbour) so that we could make an early start the next morning. We entered the sea lock at about 1.00 p.m. with another motor yacht, which was starting the crossing. Following a quick discussion with the other crew, we decided to change our plan at short notice and follow them... First, we remained inside the buoyed fairway. As soon as we left it, we set course in a southerly direction (180°).

The wind was blowing from the north at force 2-3 on the Beaufort scale, i.e. the best conditions for our "virgin" crossing.

We arrived in Enkhuizen after almost three hours. You get a wonderful view of the town from the water. When strolling through Enkhuizen, it's easy to imagine the former wealth of these trading towns. We liked the town a lot. It's worthwhile at least taking a walk round it. We strolled through the narrow streets for a second time the following morning, before setting off for Hoorn.

However, we first had to enter lake Markermeer through the "Naviduct" (a dual lock for leisure craft). Our journey to Hoorn then took us past the coast, first



towards the lighthouse, then to leisure craft buoy FL5 and then we set a direct course for the port (296°).

This also has an impressive entrance.

We tied up in the old town port, "the place to be". Hoorn or Enkhuizen? Which is the more beautiful town? We liked them both very much, each in its own way.

The next morning we set off for Edam. Visibility had deteriorated. We selected the direct route, a straight line (175°), which quickly turned out to be a mistake. This part of lake IJsselmeer contains a very large amount of seaweed, which soon fouled the propeller. The speed dropped considerably on several occasions and we tried to free it by moving forward and back. This met with only partial success. We managed to reach the small canal in Edam and tied up in front of the sea lock on the quay.

A propeller inspection was now on the programme despite poor underwater visibility. It proved to be necessary. It took several dives to get the propeller and shaft clean again.

After this experience, we decided to continue our journey to Amsterdam via the canals. When we set off the next day, our attempt came to an end after the first lock. The bridge keeper informed us that a railway bridge would not be opened all weekend to allow for construction work. In pouring rain and because of the storm warning for the next few days, we decided to set off directly for Muiden in order to get out of lake IJsselmeer.

The conditions were right despite the variable weather. We sailed far from the shore in order to avoid the seaweed. Next, we reached the island of Marken as we headed south. We sailed past the harbours of Volendam and Monnickendam, very busy tourist attractions which we had briefly visited by bike. We set course for the buoyed fairways and, after almost four hours, arrived in the "Royal Marina". After registration, the harbour master hoisted the French flag.

Stavoren > Enkhuizen: 2.8 hours/22 km

Enkhuizen > Hoorn: 2.6 hours/24 km

Hoorn > Edam: 1.9 hours/15 km

Edam > Muiden: 3.7 hours/29 km

SPECTACLE ON THE VECHT

We set off from Muiden on the Vecht towards Maarssen, where we turned into the Amsterdam-Rhine Canal. We made a stopover in Loenen, where we were treated to a special spectacle on Pentecost Sunday.

Like the eye of a needle, the lock and bridge formed a bottleneck that had to be overcome in order to sail back to the Loosdrechtse Plassen or from there to the Vecht.

The lock was jam-packed all day and then we had to pay... Many eager spectators installed themselves comfortably alongside the lock to enjoy the show.

FROM THE VECHT TO THE HOLLANDS DIEP

After the days we spent on lake IJsselmeer, we left ourselves enough time to get from the Vecht to the Hollands Diep. The weather remained unsettled and the forecast storm came to pass.

We waited two days at the renovated jetty for passing boats in Breukelen until the situation improved and we could resume our journey without risk.

We were on the Vecht for the second time (see 2015).

Muiden > Loenen: 3.6 hours/23 km

Loenen > Breukelen > Maarssen: 1 hour/8 km

Maarssen > Schoonhoven: 5.1 hours/36 km (current on the Lek 1 - 2 km/h)

Schoonhoven > Streefkerk: 1.1 hours/8 km

Streefkerk > Dordrecht: 2.2 hours/19 km (current on the Lek: + 2 km/h; North: - 3 km; Oude Maas: - 3 km/h)

Dordrecht > Strijensas: 1.8 hours/15 km

We really liked sailing on the Lek despite the heavy rain. It was our first trip on this river.

The river was very wide at this point. There was not so much freight traffic as on the Rhine and the current was moderate.

However, caution is required when turning north towards Dordrecht as this is a crossing point for cargo vessels, ferries and pusher craft on their way to and from Rotterdam.

We tied up in the "New Haven" marina in Dordrecht in summery temperatures. You can only enter for ten minutes every half hour. We arrived at just the right time, 10.30 a.m. After we reported in on VHF Channel 74, the bridge was opened to let us in.



We took advantage of the fine weather to take an extensive tour of the city past the many harbours and the banks of the Oude Maas and Merwede, via the weekly market. The right time and place to buy soused herring...

The following day, our journey took us from Dordrecht to the marina in Strijensas, where we stayed for two days and took advantage of the surrounding area. There, on the north bank of the Hollands Diep river you can find the purest nature and, on the south bank, the major Dutch refineries.

IN THE BIESBOSCH NATIONAL PARK

We left the Bergse Maas near Drimmelen and turned into the Biesbosch. After proceeding for 1 km, we found a mooring for about eight boats. This access to land gave us the opportunity to take a long walk through the unspoilt, almost jungle-like countryside. We made sure to mark our route... The evening ambiance was wonderful, with us sitting on our aft deck enjoying Mother Nature. The following morning we set off in the direction of Heusden. From there we were back in familiar surroundings on the Meuse, which we are getting to like more and more.

Six weeks later, we were moored up at the Van der Laan Yachting Marina in Maasbracht again after completing 1,014 km in 138 hours without a hitch. The journey taught us more about the Netherlands and we learned to appreciate the country more. Once again,

the trip involved many new "experiences" (!) in terms of landscape, technical aspects, culture and more. Where, to us, France is the land of locks and landscapes, we can safely say that the Netherlands is the land of bridges and towns.

Maybe another useful tip: you should definitely visit Friesland in the low season. Since swapping our VW bus for a "New Classic Sturdy 36 AC" five years ago, we have been exploring Europe from the water, giving us a whole new perspective. The boat trips provide us with opportunities to make many valuable contacts and, not least, to take great photographs.

You will also find additional and up-to-date information here: <http://vagabond4you.com>

