

Jesta VI Summer Cruise

Germany, France and the Netherlands

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We were forced to overwinter *Jesta VI* at Winnigen on the Mosel, since the Rhine water levels last September were too low for boats to enter harbours along the river. We rethought our cruise plan for 2019 and decided to use the opportunity to go further south to Strasbourg and join the Rhine there, as opposed to Koblenz, then return back to the Netherlands.

In mid-May we flew to Düsseldorf and caught a train to Winnigen. We spent a few days sorting out the boat, checking that everything was working as it should, before Michael and Jackie Scott arrived to cruise up the Mosel to Trier. However, this was not to be. The Germans decided to close the locks on the Mosel for a week for annual maintenance; we were trapped again. Our time was used to go wine-tasting and we made a visit to Koblenz, where the Mosel joins the Rhine. Morale improved when we were informed that the locks would reopen on 28 May, which was true, but not until 2359, 'another wasted day'. We finally left for Cochem, where we said goodbye to Michael and Jackie and were joined by James and Sara Pickford (RCC).

In order to make up for lost time, we left early in sunshine and negotiated five locks on the 102km to Neumagen, where they were hosting a



Arzwiller tunnel (2.3km)

steamboat rally. This explained why we passed many on the way. They were all immaculately kept and maintained. We continued on to the River Saar, which runs into the Mosel just above Trier. Having spent a night at Saarburg we continued on to Mettlach, where we had an Old Rugbeian reunion with David Franks, who was passing through the area by car; the three of us were at Rugby together. David and Jenny joined us in the morning as far as Merzig and we continued on to Saarbrücken, which is on the border with France, and moored up in the Osthafen. We had completed 290km and been through 15 German locks, which

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are large compared to the French ones that lay ahead. We changed crews whilst in Saarbrücken, James and Sara departed and we were joined, a couple of days later, by Edward and Elizabeth Pickard, friends from Scotland.

We entered the Canal de la Sarre at the French border, having paid the VNF fee and picked up our remote for operating the locks on the French canals. Our first port of call was Saarguemmes, which had a fascinating Faience museum. The next day was Edward and Elizabeth's 46th wedding anniversary and our 47th the following day, so we decided we should celebrate with a lunch ashore at Le Victoria, a canal-side restaurant at Wittering. We enjoyed an excellent meal with good French



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wines and we decided it was prudent to spend the night there, as we couldn't face the many French locks that lay ahead. Over the next three days we passed through 22 locks, stopping at Harskirchen and Mittersheim on our way to Port de Houillon, the last place on the Canal de la Sarre. We then joined the Canal de la Marne au Rhein, which would take us to Strasbourg.

Niderviller was our first stop on Canal de la Marne au Rhein. Whilst having lunch, a boat moored up in front of us with a Guernsey ensign. It was Andrew and Jo Warry on *Dawnside*, who were on their way to the Mosel via Luxembourg. As it was Edward and Elizabeth's last night on board, the six of us went



Boats ascending in Plan incline d'Arzwiller

out to dinner, at Auberge Altenburger in the forest of the Vosges Mountains. The restaurant provided a courtesy car from and to the boat. The following day our New Zealand friends, Warwick and Penny Leyland, joined us for a month, hence we would have no deadlines to meet until we got back to the Netherlands.



Chateau de Rohan, Saverne

On leaving Niderviller we immediately went into two tunnels with a combined length of 2.8km. Thankfully they were straight and partially lit and had a clearance of just over a metre at the side of the boat.

These tunnels went through the Vosge mountains. Once through them, we arrived at the *Plan incline d'Arzwiller*, which is a boat lift that takes one 45m down the hill side and replaces 17 locks; it took about 40 minutes from loading to exiting at the bottom. We stayed the night at the charming little village of Lutzelbourg before heading off to Saverne, which was a lovely town dominated by the Chateau de Rohan, opposite our mooring. We visited the Rosary, that had over 300 different species of rose, a gardener's delight. In the afternoon, we took a short taxi ride to Chateau Haut Barr, mainly a ruin, but with wonderful views, locally known as 'The Eye of Alsace' since it overlooks the Alsace plain. One could just make out the spire of Strasbourg

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Cathedral, some 45km away. On leaving Saverne we had to pass through 18 locks in 36km to reach Souffleweyersheim, a pretty village on the outskirts of Strasbourg.



European Parliament Buildings, Strasbourg

The following day we had the last three narrow French locks to go through, before passing the European Parliament (with the Union Jack still flying, but for how much longer?) and mooring up in Strasbourg Marina, having logged 149km since entering France.

We spent three days exploring Strasbourg, a wonderful city with many canals and rivers and a fascinating history. As one of the major European crossroads, it has been burnt down, ransacked, destroyed and rebuilt many times. More recently, it has been under German rule and now French. It is because of its location that the European Parliament and Council are located in the city. The Gothic Cathedral Notre-Dame, built from the pink sandstone of the Vosge, is one of the finest in the world and has some wonderful stained glass windows and a fascinating astronomical clock dating back to the 15th century. La Petit France was once the fishermen's, tanners' and millers' district and is one of the best preserved areas of the old town. It includes the Ponts Couverts, three bridges connected by large towers spanning the River Ill. We could have spent longer there, but we had to move on down the Rhine.

Having locked out of Strasbourg, we joined the mighty Rhine which after the French canals required a degree of concentration. Thankfully, we only had two locks to contend with, both within 40km of Strasbourg before getting back to the Netherlands. We were squeezed in at the back of the locks behind the commercial traffic. Some of the barges were enormous, 250m long and fully laden, being helped down the river with a 9-10kph current, with them or against them, when travelling upstream. One had to be alert to Blue Boarding protocol to change over from starboard side of the river to the port side.



Clear waters of the Mosel joining Rhine at Koblenz

Only commercial vessels are allowed to travel at night so we had to find suitable harbours each night. Many of them were gravel pits that had been turned over to water sport areas. The major cities had small harbours for private boats. It was a challenge entering the harbours, since the entrances were narrow and the cross



Pfalzgrafenstein Castle & Gutenfels Castle in the Rhine Gorge

currents were around 10kph, which in some cases created back eddies.

We were looking forward to going through the Rhine Gorge with spectacular castles dominating every viewpoint. To get there, we passed through some glorious countryside and industrial areas such as Mannheim. Our overnight stops were peaceful at Offendorf, Leimersheim and the Eicher See, where we swam from the boat. It was incredibly hot with temperatures in the 30s. On our way to the gorge we passed vineyards, which were not so steep as on the Mosel. We arrived at the infamous Bingen Hole, where the waters boil and the current can run up to 20kph.

We were lucky it was fairly benign, but still tossed us about. One had to get it right as there was no way to turn around against the current. We passed Loreley Rock and entered the peace and quiet of the harbour at St Goar, where we spent a couple of days.



Warwick, Penny & Susie at Leimersheim

The scenery on the way to Koblenz was pretty with vineyards and more castles lining the

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banks. At Koblenz we turned onto the Mosel for 12km to arrive at Winningen. We had a problem with the lifting mechanism for the saloon roof, which had been replaced over the winter by the yard. It was nice to see the staff at the yard again. Christian Kuhn, the owner, drove us to a vineyard to stock up with wine as our cellar was nearly empty. The yard diagnosed the roof problem, one of the motors had seized, so they sent for a replacement under warranty. They knew it would take a few days to come and suggested they would come and fit it wherever we were on the Rhine, either Köln or Düsseldorf. It turned out to be the latter.



Köln Cathedral

Once back on the Rhine we stopped at Oberwinter before spending a couple of nights in the Rheinau Sportshafen near the centre of Köln. The city was disappointing, apart from the Cathedral, though not as impressive as Strasbourg; the architecture in the rebuilt dock area was lacking in imagination compared to Düsseldorf. Susie though was delighted to find the Eau de Cologne museum and shop dating back to



Three Frank Gehry buildings by the harbour in Dusseldorf

1723. It was Warwick and Penny's 49th wedding anniversary, so we found an excellent restaurant in the university area, which was near to the boat – chosen because it had white table cloths. Düsseldorf, our next stop, surprised us all. The harbour was right in the centre of the city below three Frank Gehry designed buildings. They were all different and changed with the light. The city fathers had vision and all the new buildings on their waterfront were interesting and complementary to their environment. There was an excellent daily market close to the harbour where one could obtain everything one might want. We celebrated my birthday early at a wonderful fish restaurant overlooking the harbour. Warwick pointed out that it would have been the right day in New Zealand.

Our time on the Rhine was nearing its end. We spent our last night in Germany

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at Wesel, no more schnitzel, sauerkraut or German wines. The next harbour was just across the border in the Netherlands at Tolkamer. We moored in the Jachthaven De Bijland. We only had 3km to go before we left the Rhine and entered the calmer waters of the Pannerdenskanaal that took us to the Gelderse IJssel that eventually runs into the IJsselmeer. Our journey down the Rhine from Strasbourg was 576km, but due to the current we only logged 328km - 248km were free!

It was good to be back in the orderliness of Holland where everything is clean and works. Our first stop on the IJssel was Doesburg, one of the seven Hanseatic Ports on the river whose heyday was in the 15th century. We encountered rain for the first time since leaving Strasbourg, so we took shelter for lunch in De Waag.



Chained Library, Zutphen

This restaurant claims to be the oldest in the Netherlands, having been the town's inn since 1478. We proceeded the next day to Zutphen, another former Hanseatic Port. It was a delightful town. We were lucky enough to be taken by a guide in St Walburg church, into the vaulted chained library, constructed in 1564. It has not been altered over time and contains many rare medieval books written and illuminated by monks.

It is understood that there are only two surviving chained libraries, that are in their original state, in the world.

We continued the theme of visiting Hanseatic Ports and went on to Hattem and Zwolle. Warwick and Penny left us and we were joined for six days by my NZ cousin, Tania, and her husband, Robert. We visited Kampen, the most northerly of the Hanseatic Ports on the IJssel, which is famous for the ship Kamper Kogge. It was more seaworthy than its predecessors and facilitated international trade and thus the town's prosperity in the 14th century. We left the river IJssel after 118km when it ran into the Kettlemeer, only logging 86km as the current gave us the rest.

We then entered the Randmeren, a group of lakes which eventually take one into the Markermeer. We visited



Botter fishing boats at Sparkenburg

Elburg, a charming rectangular fortress town with a moat and ramparts, much of which still exist. It was an important fishing port for many centuries on the Zuiderzee, until it was closed from the sea by the Afsluitdijk in 1932. Sparkenburg,

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Jesta VI with Elizabeth, Susie & Edward

our next port of call, was similarly a fishing village. In 1900 its fleet was more than 200 boats, today there is just one. The old harbour still has its shipyard which maintains the largest fleet of botter fishing boats in the world. A third of all bidders in the Netherlands are moored there. We then moved

onto Naarden, which dates back to 1350. In the 17th century a twelve-pointed-star-shaped fortress was constructed round the town with a double canal ring. Naarden became one of the fortresses that surrounds Amsterdam. Tania and Robert departed for the airport so we had just over a week to please ourselves.

The weather was improving and getting hotter. Whilst in Naarden, we met up with some Dutch friends that happened to be attending a funeral nearby. The following day Susie and I headed north to the village of Schardam where Sally, an old school friend of Susie, and her Dutch husband, Bill, have a holiday cottage. They invited us for a BBQ. Whilst crossing the Markermeer I noticed that the engines were losing power and had probably got something round the propellers. I mentioned this to Bill and he said it is likely that reeds had got tangled up, apparently a common thing this year. As luck would have it, his next-door neighbour was a diver. He fixed up for a friend of his to meet us in Hoorn, only 6km away, the next day. He cleared the props and shafts of weed. It



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was so hot, at 38 degrees the highest temperatures ever recorded in the Netherlands, and windless, so we decided to stay in Hoorn and enjoy the air conditioning of a Michelin-starred restaurant. We then departed on the 37km passage following the coast to Medemblik where we left the boat. The engines behaved perfectly.

In ten weeks of mainly excellent weather, though a little too hot at times, we logged 1,040km, but covered 1,342km over the ground, thanks mainly to the current on the Rhine and the IJssel, a welcome saving in fuel.