

Life in the slow lane



A midweek spring break in the Midlands could seem to be a bit of a hit or miss affair – until you add the magic word ‘narrowboat’. For a canal cruise is a great way to discover the best of rural England at a pace that allows you to appreciate the countryside and its wildlife.

This trip started at the splendidly-named village of Stretton-under Fosse – on the old Roman Fosse Way – at Rose Narrowboats. And after a comprehensive and cheerful run through and briefing from the boatyard staff we were on our way down the northern section of the Oxford Canal, which is separated from its southern section by a bit of the Grand Union.

Heading south gave a choice of routes centring on a famous canal-side haunt, Braunston Turn. The junction features a double ➔

Floating through the countryside

By Richard Cheesbrough

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➔ bridge that takes the towpath over what looks like a couple of ‘slip roads’ onto the Grand Union Canal.

The junction and the area around it is busy with boats and boating activity but after mooring, a pleasant walk into the village of Braunston itself is well worth the effort. Impressive period buildings line the picture postcard village street, which, along with a couple of pubs, a handy store and a great local butcher, makes it a splendid stopping point for boaters.

An afternoon jaunt to the bottom of a flight of locks at Napton on the South Oxford terminated at a lonely pub charmingly called The Folly, which makes boaters particularly welcome.

Back at Braunston, it was decided that a half day trip on the Grand Union would be worth the effort. A flight of wide locks and a tunnel which had a number of slightly disconcerting bends and kinks in it added to the interest, though a couple of the crew decided to walk the old boat horse track over the tunnel to enjoy the spring sunshine while they could. After turning – or winding as it is properly called – the trip back to base took a leisurely day and a half. And it all looked so different from the other direction.

Just a few days but it seemed so much longer. Fresh air, exercise and miles of open countryside which suited the amateur bird watchers on board; the log of their spottings was quite impressive with buzzards and baby moorhens – moorchicks? – at the top and bottom of the spectrum.

The boat itself was a delight to handle and held its line splendidly even when the wind gusted.

And with lots of storage space, relaxing beds and a spanking hot shower, it provided the comfort indoors while enjoying the spectacular outdoors.



The trip was with Drifters – a consortium of award winning holiday boat companies. For more information telephone 08457 626252 or see website www.drifters.co.uk. There are also many ideas for enjoying the waterways on website www.waterscape.com

Readers of *Green Tourism and Heritage Guide* can enjoy a great incentive to get out on the water if they quote Castle Wharf

Promotions/Go Boating: £50 off a part week, £100 off a full week, £250 off two weeks. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer.



PICTURES: (clockwise from top left): Tranquillity on the Grand Union; saving water by sharing a trip up a flight of broad locks; busy Braunston. Pictures: Peter Eddleston