

## Pudmuddle goes West – part 2, Going Down

**30<sup>th</sup> May** (*continued*)

After 200 years the brick-lined Bruce Tunnel seems to be in good order, and still has remnants of the chains once used to pull barges through by hand. We were glad of our electric propulsion, it can't be much fun in the tunnel with the noise and fumes of a diesel engine!

After emerging from the western portal into the dappled sunlight of the cutting, we went on to moor before the Wooton Top Lock (closed until 09:00 next morning due to water shortage). We walked about a mile and a half to the village of Wooton Rivers for fish and chips at the thatched Royal Oak.



After descending the four Wooton locks, we wound our way through Pewsey Vale, arriving at the wharf after a brief lunch stop next to one of the many old humped-back bridges. The boat was secured to the bank between two barges and we set off home for a few days.

**Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June**

We left the car at Devizes Wharf, and caught a bus to Pewsey. After emptying the portaloos at the wharf-side facility, we motored the 12 miles (no locks) to Devizes, stopping for lunch at the Bridge Inn, Horton. As it was a longish stretch, we used the inboard engine for a while, but soon got fed up with the noise and reverted to the electric outboard. slowly.

We also found that, in sunny open areas, we could charge the battery by connecting direct to the solar panel, albeit We tied up in Devizes opposite the wharf car park overnight, and took the opportunity for some food shopping. Next morning, an early start to get through 6 locks in the town before the top of the Caen Hill flight (15 locks).



***Mobbed by swans in Devizes***

## Pudmuddle goes West – part 2, Going Down



***Caen Hill lock flight***



Naomi, Tom and the children joined us here, and helped us down the flight, Tom running ahead to fill and open each lock. Bacon baps and a friendly canal volunteer sustained us.

After a brief stop for lunch at the bottom of the main flight, we descended 7 more locks and stopped by a car park where Tom had left their car earlier. After saying goodbye to Naomi and family, we carried on to the Barge Inn (another 3 locks), and had a well-earned dinner. In all we descended 31 locks this day.

### **Mon 9<sup>th</sup> June**

We stayed in Seend Cleeve for the morning for a “make & mend day”, meeting family members Heather and Geoff for lunch, then continued to catch up with our car at a canal-side car park at Hilperton, near Trowbridge. After securing and locking up Pudmuddle, we were off home.

Back aboard on Fri 13<sup>th</sup>, we proceeded to Bradford-on-Avon where things got busy with lots of hire barges queuing for the lock. Occasionally we shared a lock alongside a narrow barge, but it was a tight fit and fenders had to be inboard. We passed over the Avoncliff and Dundas aqueducts, stopping to walk around the former, and tied up for the night on the approach to the Claverton pumping station.



***Bradford on Avon***

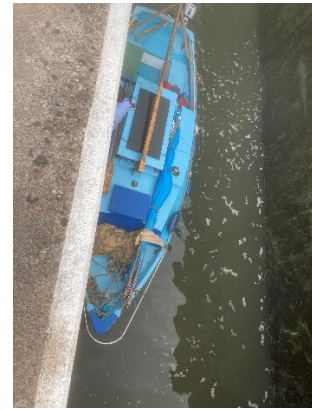
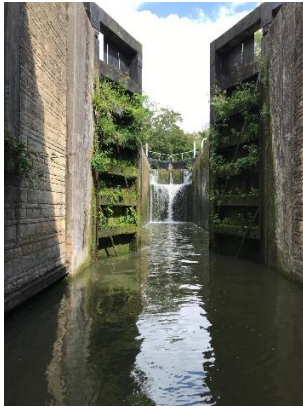


***Claverton pumping station***

As the pumping station had an open day, we paid a visit. A massive wide water wheel drives a beam engine water pump, which we saw in operation, very impressive (<https://www.claverton.org>).



## **Pudmuddle goes West – part 2, Going Down**



***Deep locks, and a tight squeeze***

By this point the river Avon is well below the canal, which clings to the steep hillside, often sharing it with Brunel's railway. Following the valley through Bath, the canal descends rapidly via 6 locks, the deepest of which drops over 19 feet. Emerging from Bath Bottom lock, we were in the river Avon itself, a wider waterway prone to flooding.



***The Avon below Bath***



***One of Brunel's railways***

Swineford lock was the most difficult we encountered. The bottom gates leaked so badly, the lock took forever to fill, and it was not until another boat arrived that we had the combined strength to open the top gates. We stopped above Keynsham lock for the night, then on to Hanham lock where there is a visitor pontoon and 2 pubs (we had dinner at the Chequers).

Below Hanham lock is Bristol Harbour territory, so a separate licence was required – available at the next lock (Netham) from the lock keeper. This done, armed with a useful harbour map, we went on through a crumbling industrial landscape and into the city, finding a mooring on the Arnolfini pontoon.

## Pudmuddle goes West – part 2, Going Down



***Bristol city approaches***



***SS Great Britain***

We then caught a train from nearby Temple Meads station to Trowbridge, and walked to Hilperton to collect our car. This we drove to Sharpness (where the Gloucester canal meets the Severn estuary), then via taxi and train back to Bristol. We had hoped to have showers, but the nearest facility was under repair. So, we remained grubby and consoled ourselves with a takeaway curry.

**Tue 17<sup>th</sup> June.**

We had booked the lock out of Bristol harbour back into the Avon, for a little after half-tide. Fortunately we were low enough not to require any bridges opening, At 10:15 we reported ready in the Cumberland Basin. Inside the huge lock, the keeper took our long (15m) lines. The descent was gentle and we were soon heading out towards the Avon gorge and under the famous suspension bridge.



***Clifton suspension bridge***



***The village of Pill***

Spectacular views along the winding gorge, the current against us but not a problem. Past the attractive village of Pill, under the M5 bridge and out to the end of the Avonmouth docks breakwater, then south directly towards the Portishead marina entrance, passing (carefully) by the Portbury dock entrance and dodging the occasional tug-boat wash. Arriving a little after midday with plenty of water, we called up the marina and were soon able to enter the lock.



## **Pudmuddle goes West – part 2, Going Down**

This has pontoons so it's easy to manage the boat as it rises or falls, though there is a lot of white water as it fills.



***Turning south off Avonmouth docks***



***Portishead marina***

A pontoon berth, and showers at last! Co-op shop and eating out avail on the quay, and a pleasant walk on the headland.

Lock-out was arranged next day for 10:00 with the objective of having 3 hours of rising tide (nearer neaps than springs) to arrive at Sharpness (17 miles) at around HW Avonmouth (12:53). Light easterly wind, visibility good, sea state slight. We had a route set up using an ancient ipad with very old Navionics, backed up by an up-to-date paper chart (Imray 2600 portfolio). Preparation included reading accounts in cruising guides and online. A concern was the lack of a working depth sounder.

With good visibility and Justine navigating, we stuck to the prescribed route pretty well. Two of the visual aids were hard to miss, viz the motorway bridges (R remembers watching the construction of the first Severn bridge, from the ferry below. It opened in 1966). Much of the time our speed over the ground was 8-9 knots. There was turbulent water especially between the bridges, and we would not recommend the trip on a spring tide. Our progress and stability were aided by raising our standing lug sail. We were a little early at Sharpness which was a problem because we had to wait for two ships to come out. This meant stemming the tide for the best part of half an hour. However, the boat managed it perfectly well and we were able to lock in before local HW.



***Severn bridge***



***Entrance at Sharpness***

## Pudmuddle goes West – part 2, Going Down

In the lock, a keeper took our long lines, passing them through rings and back to us. There is a very low swing bridge above the lock and there was some discussion about whether it would work in the hot weather.



Sure enough when we came to the bridge, it was jammed shut. We would have to wait until it cooled down – or maybe if we take out the mast crutch and keep our heads down? With millimetres to spare we crept under. We had arrived in the Gloucester and Sharpness ship canal.

For the rest of the summer Pudmuddle was moored along the canal, moving on every 2 weeks to comply with the CRT licence, short trips often with family and friends. In October she was lifted out by tower crane at RW Davies yard at Saul Junction, and covered over for the winter.