

Aster trip - Day three

We departed Molinet at 8.15am, much to the disgust of those still eating breakfast, in order to arrive in Digoin Port at 9.00 am and a rendez-vous with the deputy mayor of Digoin, Nicole Georges. We were delighted to welcome her aboard with her colleague and she showed great enthusiasm for Project Aster wishing us well both for the remainder of our trip and for the future of Aster. Residents of the port stood by and waved us on our way.

The sound of our engine is one that turns heads, the 3-cylinder motor thumps out a steady rhythm - 'pum pum pum – pum pum pum – pum pum pum' echoes off buildings and trees. Cyclists, walkers, car drivers and truckers all wave, smile give us a thumbs-up. How can you not smile when you see a grand old lady chugging down the canal crewed by a group of misfits dressed in yellow shirts and black caps.

En route to Paray-le-Monial we hit a submerged object so stopped to check for damage to the propeller. This involved six people. Our skipper, Charles Gerard, led the operation while standing on the propeller (which had been raised out of the water by means of a winch) to see if it had been bent. The remaining five people stood by, muttering, offering unhelpful advice. Fortunately the propulsion system was passed fit and we continued through Paray where they were in the process of erecting the marquees for the annual ingress of pilgrims. Our regular pilots have been 'Number Two' Matthew Morton and 'The Admiral' (Charles) but they now introduced a newcomer, Steve Nell. In the words of The Admiral, 'Steve did really well. But we did give him an easy stretch of canal on which to cut his teeth'. This, I can assure you, is totally unfair.

Today we cruised 36 kilometres ascending 11 locks. We travelled from 8.15 am until 7.00 pm when we moored at Genelard. We passed one single boat all day – it is quite extraordinary how quiet the canal is.