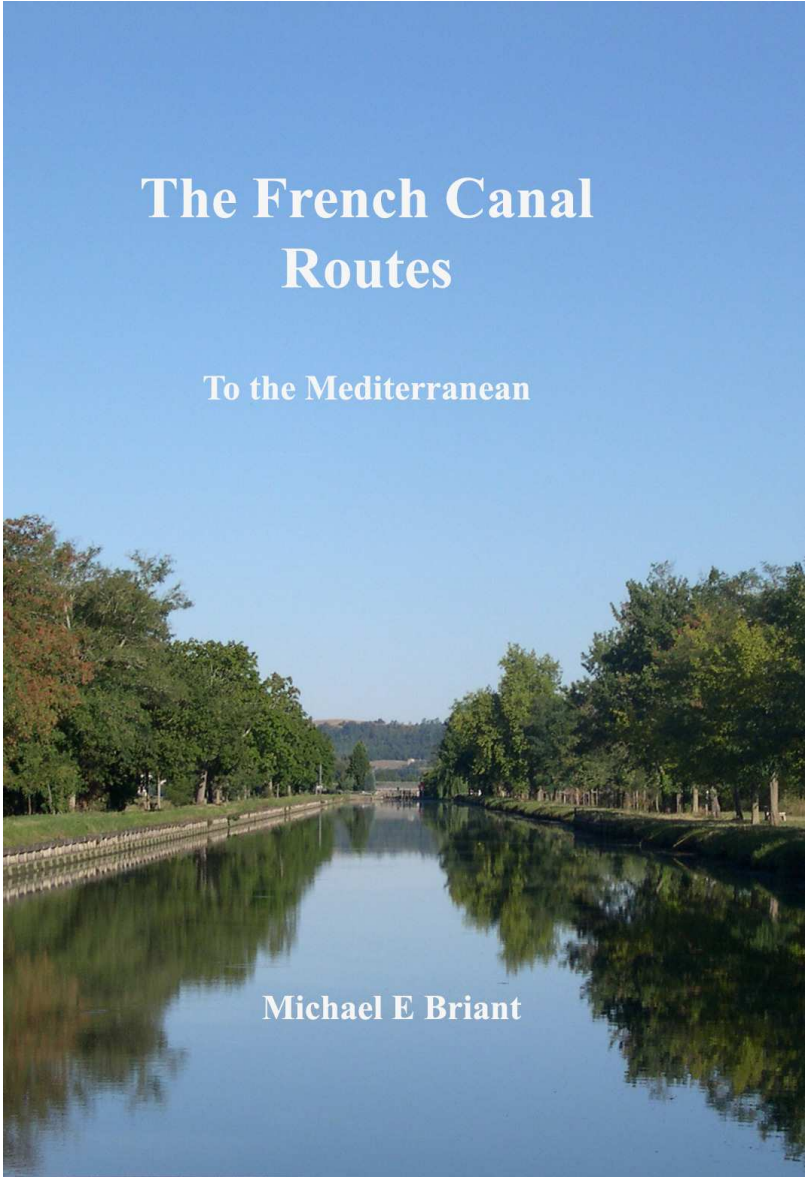


The French Canal Routes

To the Mediterranean

Michael E Briant





***THE FRENCH CANAL
ROUTES***
TO THE MEDITERRANEAN

By

Michael E Briant

Published by:
Edwin Éditions
www.michaelbriant.com

michael@michaelbriant.com

© Copyright Michael E Briant 2012 Ronda Spain
ISBN 978-2-9527849-0-0
11th edition - totally revised, August 2012

Also by Michael E Briant

Living Aboard Around the World
(A circumnavigation)

Gentle Sailing Route to the Mediterranean.
(The sea route down to the Med)

Strait Sailing to Gibraltar
(How to transit Gibraltar Straits and local ports)

La Rochelle Guide Book

All the above available from

www.michaelbriant.com

Who is Michael Briant?
(Memoirs of a TV director and sailor)

Tale of Two Cities'
(BBC TV adaptation for classic serials).

Hotel Charlie
(Novel)

The intention of this book is to allow you to plan your route and have an overview of the options before you buy the expensive waterway guides, – Fluviacarte - the new name for Navicarte.

It would be possible to do the canals and rivers with just this book and Fluviacarte #21, which is a one sheet 'chart' of all the navigable waterways of France. It lists locks, marinas, depths, widths and air heights. You would need a magnifying glass but it is the cheap way to do it.

The appropriate detailed Fluviacarte give details of all possible stopping places, shopping and tourist information and much, much more. I recommend them. It is important that the information contained in this book is not used for navigation. You should use properly corrected up to date chart books.

Whilst I have tried to make all the contents as accurate as possible, I take no responsibility for any errors or omissions. So if you bump into something or get lost, please don't blame me.

I really would like your feedback. If during your river & canal transit you find information, which you feel would improve the quality of the book, please forward it to me and I will include it in later editions. I will of course credit you and your boat, if you want.

CHAPTERS

1. OVERVIEW OF THE ROUTES

The 'fast' route

The 'slow' route

The Calais / St Valery sur Somme 'scenic' route

Canal du Midi route

2. FORMALITIES

ICC - International Certificate of Competence,

CEVNI – canals and rivers qualification for France

VIGNETTE - French pleasure boat licence

3. PRACTICALITIES

Engine, Taking down & stepping the mast, Gas, Fuel,
Plank, Warps etc.

4. LOCKS

Opening times, Manual Locks, Automatic Locks, Oval
Locks

5. THE CHANNEL ROUTE TO PARIS

The Seine to Paris

6. THE CLASSIC FAST ROUTE

Canal du Loir & Briare

Canal Lateral de la Loir

Canal de Briare

7. THE CLASSIC SLOW ROUTE

River Yonne

Canal de Bourgogne

8. THE SAÔNE

9. THE RHONE

to Port st Louis & Sete

10. THE CALAIS / ST VALERY SUR SOMME

Scenic route

11. TO PARIS FROM NOYANS

Alternative to Calais/St Valery 'Scenic route'

12. CANAL DU MIDI

13. SETE to the Classic Routes

14. Netherlands & Belgium Route.

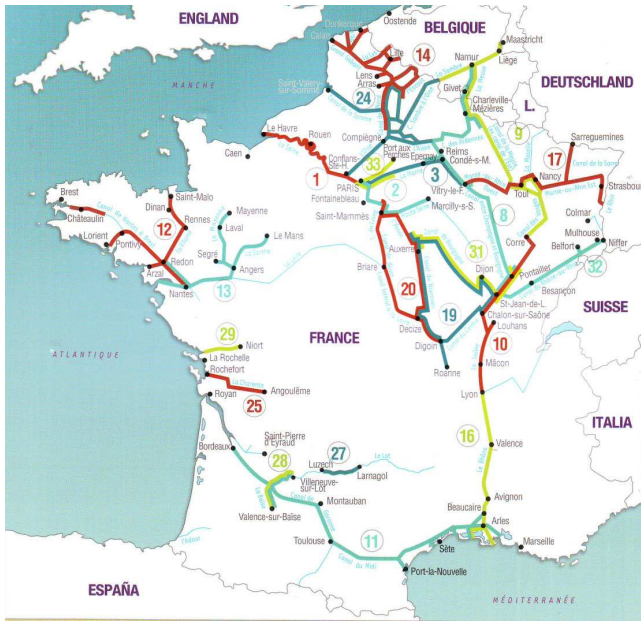
Appendix

Fluviacarte availability.

Mast and Boat transport companies.

General notes.

The Navigable Waterways of France



The numbers and colours refer to the relevant

Fluviacarte

Chapter One

OVERVIEW OF THE ROUTES

The object of this book is to provide information on moving a boat via the French rivers and canals between the UK and the Mediterranean. To assist the sea going yachts plan their passage and decide if this method is preferable to the sea routes or simply putting the boat on a lorry in either France or the UK.

There is little doubt that the French river and canal system provide a very pleasant and often quicker method of moving boats from the UK to and from the Mediterranean.

Certainly, the Windward Passage from Gibraltar to the English Channel is hard work and time consuming. The easier passage, via Ushant, Cape Finisterre, Portugal is mainly down wind, arriving in Gibraltar some 10 days to two weeks later. It does require several nights at sea and a wary eye being kept on the weather forecast.

It is just possible to do the river and canal trips in 10 to 14 days, if you are lucky with the locks, and work very hard at it. You must be at the first lock, every morning, at opening time and continue all day, without stopping, only 'mooring up' in the evening when the locks close and never taking a 'day off'. A more reasonable time is 3 to 4 weeks,

depending on the route and of course, it is possible to spend an entire summer in France making it a leisurely holiday.

All the routes, except the Canal du Midi, include the rivers Saône to Lyon and then the Rhone to the Mediterranean. Both rivers have relatively few locks and are busy commercial waterways with a speed limit of between 15km/h and 35km/h. Unlike the canals, they are fast flowing.

Heading north, from the Mediterranean, on the Rhone, you can encounter up to 4-knots of adverse current, but normally 2 or 3-knots. When the Saône is in flood, in winter, it will be more. Both rivers have been widened and carry an authorised draft of 3 metres with an air height of 6 metres so should present no problems for most pleasure craft. The River Seine from Paris to the Channel has the same depths and air height, but is tidal, so it is essential to work with tides and currents.

The canals are much shallower and have very low bridges. There is a speed restriction of 6km/h (4 knots) throughout most of the canal system with a few exceptions. It is not so much the speed limit that slows you down as the time it takes to get through each lock. This can vary from 15-20 minutes if you are lucky, to 1 hour if you are unlucky. In the canals, the locks close for lunch.

The **maximum** dimensions for the canals are:-

Length: 38.5 metre (124ft.7ins)

Beam: 5.metre (16ft.4ins)

Draft: 1.8 metre (5ft.9ins)

Height: 3.5metre (11.4ins)

Most of these dimensions are controlled by the lock size –

The 16.4ft **Beam** is the absolute maximum beam available in a lock. If your boat is ‘wide’ you should include room for fenders and board. Be aware there are frequently considerable cross current in front of lock entrances that can ‘push’ the boat sideways. If you are close to the beam limit of 5 metre, (16ft.4ins) this can be very challenging, particularly after some rainfall.

The ‘**Draft**’ is in the middle of the canal and is frequently less at the sides. Whilst the lock system is used to maintain the posted level, fed by rivers and streams, in mid summer if there is a drought it can be less.



The Canal du Midi is another ballpark!

The dimensions are different:-

Length: 30 metre (98ft 4ins)

Beam: 5.5 metre (18ft.)

Draft: 1.6 metre (5ft 2ins)

Air Height: 3.30 metres in the MIDDLE and 2.40 metres at 5.5mtrs SIDES = 2.25 metres from the centre line on each side.

The '**draft**' is an absolute maximum and because the canal is fed by reservoirs, if there is a drought then it will be lower and the 'floor' of the canal is not mud but rock for much of the distance. It was a considerable engineering feat to construct this waterway between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Every year one or two yachts (frequently French) go aground and have to be lifted out by crane and put on a lorry!

The '**air height**' is also a problem – many of the bridges are narrow (Beam: 5.5 metre -18ft.) they are curved – arched, not square so the height at the sides may be as low as 2.40 metres on a 5.5 metre beam. It is without doubt, the most beautiful canal in France despite all the hundreds of self-drive holiday boats.

Theoretically you're not allowed to pump out either 'black or grey water' into the canals but should use

holding tanks. In reality, there are very few ‘pump out stations’ and this regulation is aimed at commercial barges, hotel barges, hire boats and local craft. It’s not normally enforced on visiting boats.

THE BASIC ROUTES:

France has thousands of miles of navigable inland waterways all different and special in some way. The routes to the Mediterranean are varied, but the selection is governed, for the most part, by the sea crossing you choose to make from the UK, so in the end there are really only four basic routes.

The Classic Routes:

Cross the channel to either Le Havre or Honfleur as a first stop, drop the mast, then up the *River Seine* for 365 kilometres to the heart of Paris. The choice is then the ‘fast route’ with fewer locks but a longer distance or the ‘slow route’ with more locks. Both routes join the *River Saône* to Lyon, into the *River Rhone* and finally the Mediterranean.

1. The ‘fast’ classic route

River Seine to Paris (368 kilometres = 229 miles)
 into the canal system and the Saône to Lyon (643 kilometres = 400 miles)
 then the Rhone to the Med (312 kilometres = 194 miles).

Total Distance 1323 kilometres = 823 miles

This route is fastest because it has the least locks to negotiate.

2. The 'slow' classic route

Again, cross the channel to either Le Havre or Honfleur, drop the mast, then up the *River Seine* for 365 kilometres to the heart of Paris. Just past Paris you continue to the Canal de Bourgogne with more locks but shorter actual distance. This route features a tunnel that is 3.3 kilometres long with a head height of 3.10 metres controlled by traffic lights at each end. Without doubt, this route goes through some of the most beautiful parts of France and is full of charming villages, interesting châteaux and you are in the wine area of Champagne then Burgundy. If you are a Francophile then this is the route for you.

The 'slow' classic route - River Seine to Paris (368 kilometres = 229 miles) –
 into the canal system and the Saône to Lyon
 (629 kilometres = 391 miles)
 Rhone to the Med
 (312 kilometres = 194 miles)

Total Distance 1309 kilometres = 814 miles

This route is slower because it has many more locks to negotiate.

3. The Calais / St Valery sur Somme – Scenic route.

The shortest sea voyage possible to France, is from Dover or Ramsgate to Calais, which brings you into the *Canal d'Aire*, that leads to some of the most scenic routes to the Mediterranean. Alternatively, leaving from Eastbourne, bound for either Boulogne or Dieppe you can stop for a night or two before heading for St Valery sur Somme and into the *Canal de la Somme*. This route takes you through numerous WW1 battle sights as well as passing a steam railway system similar to the Bluebell line. The canal is a delightful backwater which links to the 'barge motorway' *Canal du Nord*, from where you can either follow a country route or make the detour to Paris then south to the Med on either of the classic routes.

Either of the 'scenic routes' will add at least a week to your trip, but are very rewarding, picturesque and less crowded than the 'classic' routes. You have the choice of avoiding Paris and the River Seine altogether and using some charming country canals, with some very long tunnels, all the way to the Saône or joining the Seine at **Conflans** and proceeding through Paris avoiding the fast flowing lower reaches of the Seine.

4. Canal du Midi Route.

This involves a long sea trip to the *Gironde River* south of La Rochelle. Then, as the Cockleshell Heroes did in 1942, up the river to Bordeaux and into the sea lock entrance to the *Canal du Midi*. This is arguably the most beautiful canal in the whole of France. A minimum of ten days travelling fast or you could spend all summer transiting this wonderful canal, which eventually leads you to Sète on the Mediterranean.

Many yachts using this route are heading north, in order to avoid the prevailing winds blowing down the Portuguese coast. Nonetheless, boats from the UK West Country often prefer to ‘cruise’ the charming French Atlantic coast that can be ‘day sailed’ all the way to Bordeaux.

There is very little commercial traffic after Bordeaux so the entire trip could be done in about 10 days to Sète. Compared to the other routes there are remarkably few locks and you are unlikely to be asked for your CEVNI, because the drivers of the three to four hundred hire boat craft, of up to 40ft LOA, will not have a CEVNI or be required to have one.

Total Distance 503 kilometres = 312 miles.

(You need to add a day getting from Royan to Bordeaux, then another from Bordeaux, down to the canal sea-lock entrance.)

There are of course many more variations and routes in the waterway systems of France. Unlike most British, the French canals are still commercial waterways. On all the rivers and major canals, you will encounter sea-going ships, commercial barges and push-tows of up to 5,000 tons, who will not give way or slow down, as they are not required to. At locks, they always have priority even if you got there first!

On smaller canals, there are commercial barges, 'peniche', who will hold position in the centre of the canal, forcing 'pleasure' boats into the side. Frequently the deep keels of yachts will go aground, and you will lose control as the water is 'sucked in' by the deep barges as they pass. You need good fendering.

On the other hand, you will see rural France at its best. Wonderful, old, charming villages, towns, and stopping places on a canal bank, alone in the countryside, for the night. All of this makes the canal experience truly memorable.

It might be just possible to do these routes, with only this book and perhaps Fluvicarte #21, which is a general map of all the navigable waterways in France but to fully enjoy it, you need the full information that is in the highly detailed tourist canal chart books published by Fluvicarte.

Fluviacarte

This company has taken over from the Navicarte operation and has spent a great deal of time and money updating their canal chart publications. It has taken over a year and it is hoped, by the spring of 2011, the collection of totally revised charts, will be available again.

For the purposes of planning your trip I really recommend

Fluviacarte #21 - Navigable Waterways of France is a one-sheet chart of the entire French waterway systems. There are details of marinas, fuel places, boat-yards and all canal - lock dimensions. Very useful for an overview and to decide which routes you want to follow.

The following six 'Fluviacarte' cover both 'Fast and Slow' routes.

#1 La Seine Aval

This book covers from Le Havre or Honfleur up the tidal River Seine to Paris. It contains detailed information on tidal flow and currents, the buoyed channel out of Le Havre and the ship channel up the big river estuary.

#2 La Seine Amont

You need this book for the section between Paris and Saint Mammes where you leave the River Seine and enter your first canal. Essential for both slow and fast routes.

#20 Bourgogne Ouest

This book covers the central canal system From Saint Mammes down to Digoin. Essential for both the slow and fast routes to the Med.

#19 Bourgogne Est

This takes care of the final section after Digoin to the Saône. It also covers the 'slow' route which is shorter but has more locks

#10 La Saone

This is the book which runs down the SAÔNE from Heuilley, St Jean de Losne and Chalon sur Saône to Lyon.

#16 Le Rhone

The Rhone joins the Saône at Lyon and goes all the way to the Med. (Port St Louis.) The Rhone is a very big river and you must have this book.

The following are the Fluvia carte you will need for the 'Scenic route' from Calais or St Valery sur Somme.

#24 Picardie

Entering the system at St Valery sur Somme, use this chart. It shows the offshore buoy ATSO.

Unless going by Paris, you also need Fluviacarte #8 – Champagne, #10 Saône and #16 –Rhône.

#14 Nord Pas-de-Calais

You only need this chart if you enter at Calais. It takes you SE to join chart #24 - Picardie. You would also need Fluviacarte #8, Champagne, #10 Saône and #16 -Rhône

#8 Champagne - Ardenne

From either St Valery or Calais you need this chart to get you out to the beautiful 'scenic route' down to the Saône. You also need #10 Saône and #16 Rhône

#G004 & #G005 Canal du Midi

These two books are needed for the Canal du Midi. They cover the waterways from Royan/Bordeaux to Port St Louis, with a plan of the Gironde Estuary, listing the stopping places and their facilities for fuel and cranes for the mast.

The coverage of the Gironde Estuary from Bordeaux Port to the start of the Canal du Midi is in Fluviacarte #G005.

I normally stock all Fluviacarte for immediate dispatch from France at French prices.

www.michaelbriant.com/navicarte.htm

they are also available from good chart agents and sailing bookshops in the UK.



Chapter Two

FORMALITIES

Essential papers:-

Passports: - for all members of the crew.

Ships registration papers: – either SSR (small ships register) or Part 1, for UK vessels – national registration papers for vessels of other countries

Proof of VAT payment –If the boat is older than 1987, it should not be a problem. Otherwise the original bill of sale showing VAT paid.

(The RYA in conjunction with the BMF, is currently negotiating with HM Revenue and Customs and government officials, to find a solution to the unsatisfactory situation boat owners experience when trying to establish or prove, the VAT status of a vessel.)

Ships VHF radio licence & operators certificate

Copy or original boat insurance policy

(not a legal requirement but many French marinas ask to see it)

ICC. International Certificate of Competence.

The Europe Inland Water Committee has decided the International Certificate for Operators of Pleasure Craft (known in the UK as the International Certificate of Competence (ICC), as the documentary assurance from one government to another, that the holder meets the levels of competence.

Whilst in the UK, you are not required to have any qualification to skipper a motorboat, most other European countries, including France, do require a 'certificate'. The French require one for using a motorboat with an engine bigger than 3hp and they require that certificate to have an endorsement for French inland waterways ~CEVNI~.

Once you take the mast down your sailboat is legally a motor boat. You must have a motorboat endorsed ICC.

The ICC allows UK Citizens and bona fide UK residents in the UK, with UK registered pleasure craft, (up to 24m in length) to visit the waters of France/Belgium/Netherlands, without the need to comply with local laws.

The ICC is an RYA qualification that requires the completion of RYA courses.

The following is from the RYA website:

To obtain an ICC you must prove your competence. If you have attended a RYA practical training course presenting your certificate with your ICC application form may be sufficient, otherwise you will need to take a practical test at a RYA recognised training centre.

The ICC has five categories. When an ICC certificate is issued, only the categories for which competence has been proven will be validated.

1. Coastal

The RYA practical training course or practical test must have been taken on coastal waters.

2. Inland

The applicant must have passed the CEVNI test at a RYA recognised training centre.

3. Power up to 10m

4. Power up to 24m

5. Sail up to 24m

Which of these categories are validated, depends on the certificates presented with the application form.

Once you have established how to prove your competence, to ensure you receive an ICC validated for the categories you require, you need to complete an ICC application form. This should be sent, together with a passport size photograph, and payment to the Certification Department. (see the application form for the current charge)

CEVNI stands for Code Européen des Voies de Navigation Intérieure. It is the code governing navigation on the interconnected European inland waterways and is the basis of the various countries' own regulations.

Signs, rules and procedures for navigating the European inland waterways are all included within the CEVNI code and in the same way as pleasure craft on coastal waters are expected to abide by the COLREGS, pleasure craft on the inland waterways of Europe, which in places are heavily utilised by commercial traffic are expected to know and follow the CEVNI code.

*If you require an ICC valid for use on inland waters, you must learn the CEVNI code and sit the CEVNI test at an RYA recognised training centre. The "RYA European waterways regulations (the CEVNI rules explained)" **Publication G17** from the RYA provides the information you need to learn the code in a clear and concise way. The CEVNI test is a short multiple-choice paper*

The training centre will confirm successful completion of the test by signing the relevant section of the ICC application. In addition to the passing the CEVNI test, you must present a qualifying RYA practical course completion certificate or pass an ICC practical test at an RYA recognised training centre to be eligible to be issued with an ICC.

Issue of the ICC is free of charge for RYA members and it is actually slightly cheaper to join

and get the ICC free than to buy it as a non-member.

CEVNI

On top of the above course(s) for the ICC, you must have the CEVNI endorsement. This is not a practical test rather a 'classroom', multiple choice test, that needs a few days study. There are some internet sites with online tests in the appendix

If you are not a *'UK Citizens and bonafide UK residents with UK registered pleasure craft'* but are from some other country then 'to be legal' you need the equivalent of a competence certificate from your home country. Catch 22 is, you still need the CEVNI endorsement. You can only get from the French, but to get it, you need to do the French motor boat course first.

A very useful contact for foreigners is 'h2o', in France, which is a boatyard, brokerage, deliveries, tuition, run by 'Brits' etc for canal boats and ask their advice?

<http://www.h2ofrance.com>

I have never been asked to produce my ICC with its CEVNI endorsement. There are however, quite substantial fines for not having a correct ICC on board and of course, once discovered without one, you would not be allowed to move the boat, until you obtained one. The problem of not having it might arise if the boat were involved in an accident

or collision, in which the French authorities became involved and they would require to see one without any doubt!

On the Canal du Midi, it is unlikely that you will be asked to produce it, so the risk of not having it is minimal. There are hundreds of self-drive pleasure boats, rented out without the requirement for the hirer to have any qualifications whatsoever! You will also encounter many little boats of less than 3hp, hired out by the hour, to people with no qualifications.

The French will always ask for, and are far more interested in, the **Boat Licence ‘vignette’**, which is tax for using their waterways. It is essential that you display one of these in the window (Starboard side) of your boat when you are on French Canals and Rivers. Lock keepers will look and ask for it. They are issued for 1 year, 4 months, 1 month, 16 days or daily.

How to buy boat licence vignette?

You can buy your vignette, by post, by telephone with a credit card number or from any VNF office. Better still buy online from:-

<https://www.vnf.fr/vignettesVNF/welcome.do>

You may print it out yourself or have it sent by post.

The following documents are required for a application:

1. The name of the owner and his address,
2. The name of the boat and its draught,
3. The length and overall width of the hull (You multiply the length by the beam for the surface of the boat in m²)
4. The inscription, serial number, = SSB or Part 1 number
5. Details of horsepower of engine.
6. The 'Category' of toll and the dates of the start of the canal navigation – whether you want a yearly, spring, summer, autumn, winter, 30 days or just 16 days.

Methods of payment: - By bankcard (Visa, Euro card, MasterCard) or pay cash at a VNF office.

How the Vignettes are costed

It is a combination of the square metre area of the boat x length of time to be spent moving on the waterways.

Multiply the LOA by the Beam and apply that total to the top line by the time you expect to be using the canals which is along the first column. The Euro number in the box was correct for 2010.

Days must be consecutive.

Winter : 1 January – 20 March	Spring : 21 March – 20 June	Summer : 21 June – 20 Sept	Autumn : 21 September – 31 Dec.
Leisure : trips to 30 days	Holiday : trips to 16 days.	3 days : 3 specific days.	1 day : a specific day.

Categories	<12m2	12 to <25m2	25 to<40m2	40 to<60m2	60m2 and above
Freedom	84.90 €	121.50 €	244.10 €	427.40 €	553.30 €
Winter	75.30 €	107.70 €	216.40 €	310.80 €	384.40 €
Spring	77.60 €	110.90 €	222.90 €	320.10 €	396.30 €
Summer	81.30 €	116.30 €	233.70 €	335.70 €	415.60 €
Autumn	77.60 €	110.90 €	222.90 €	320.10 €	396.30 €
Leisure	31.00 €	63.90 €	94.90 €	125.90 €	158.60 €
Holiday	23.40 €	48.50 €	72.00 €	95.40 €	120.50 €
3 day	16.70 €	32.80 €	49.50 €	65.90 €	82.30 €
1 day	12.00 €	23.40 €	35.40 €	47.10 €	56.80 €

Freedom = Annual!

There are offices all over France and many locks sell the vignette. If you decide to buy on arrival in France the following VNF offices may be useful.

<p>Calais 45, Quai de la Meuse, 62100 Calais 03 21 34 25 58</p>	<p>Le Havre La Citadelle – Ave Le Corbeaux, 76600 Le Havre 02 35 22 99 34</p>
<p>Rouen 71 Boulevard P Doumer, 51084 Rouen 02 32 08 31 70</p>	<p>Dunkerque Terre plein du jeu de Mail, 59140 Dunkerque 03 28 58 71 25</p>
<p>Bordeaux Direction Regional de VNF, BP 61, Bordeaux - cedex 05 56 90 58 00</p>	<p>Sete 1, Quai Philippe Regy, 34200 Sete 04 67 46 34 67</p>
<p>Narbonne 9bis Quai d'Alsace, Écluse de Gua 11100 Narbonne 04 68 42 23 27</p>	<p>St Valery sur Somme There is an office close to the yacht club – ask for directions</p>

Chapter Three

PRACTICALITIES

Engine:

You are about to motor more during the next two to four weeks, than you will normally during an entire season. The motor should be serviced, with an oil change and you should carry spares – a fan belt, raw water pump impeller, water filter, oil filter and fuel filter. The biggest danger to the engine is overheating, caused by the water inlet or the water filter becoming blocked.

The amount of rubbish, (weed, leaves, broken branches, and plastic bags) you can encounter, will cause you clean the intake or the filter at some point. Make certain the engine raw water inlet ‘sea cock’ works easily and it’s possible to get the hose off, so you can poke a wire or screwdriver down, to push away the plastic bag or whatever that has been sucked into the water intake.

I normally close the sea cock, take off the hose, open the cock again, push a wire coat hanger down till the water flows freely, close the cock and put the hose back on then open the cock again...

You should clean the water filter and check the engine oil, daily as a matter of course. Fuel and oil are not always easily obtainable, frequently only from a supermarket close but not adjacent, to the canal.. It is essential to carry spare fuel jugs – plastic jerry cans of around 6-gallon size. A couple of little folding baggage trolleys to transport them on are invaluable. Carrying 6-gallon jugs for a several kilometres, on foot, under the hot sun can be tiring.

Fendering:

It is impossible to have too many fenders and if you decide to use motorcar tyres as well, you are required to have two lines on them in the Paris area. They should be covered or the black will come off all over your hull. One solution is to cover them in plastic bin bags fixed with gaffer or wide Sellotape.

The biggest fender problem is in locks that fill to within a couple of inches of the top. Normal fenders just float up and tyres can slide upwards as you come alongside the rough concrete edge. A strip of 2x1 inch wood batten, suspended to the waterline can help.

A plank between the fenders and or tyres can also stop the side of the boat making contact with the rough sides of shuttering, that are sometimes used in locks.

Taking the Mast down:

There is the choice of carrying it on deck or having it collected by a French lorry at the port of commencement and having it delivered to the port of arrival a few weeks later. This will probably cost around 1,000€ but you should get quotes. Several French haulage companies offer this service and one of the biggest is:

AUGIZEAU TRANSPORTS (Christine speaks English)

Tél : 02 51 55 54 07

Fax : 02 51 54 30 11

E-mail : augizeau@althead.com

<http://augizeau.online.fr/> This site is in English and French - Probably the largest boat/mast transporters in France/Europe

(See Appendix for more boat/mast transporters.)

The Mast

When you demast, it is possible to have the mast collected by a transport company, stored at their depot then delivered to you, when you arrive at your destination.

Most people carry the mast on the deck. To do this you need two wood 2x2s, 'X shaped crosses', with a bolt through them, fore and aft and possibly a T shape in wood or just sail bags, half way along the coach roof to stop the mast bending in the middle.

It's sometimes difficult to find the wood and the bolts, to construct a couple of **X**, so it is something you might consider making, before you leave your home port.

Having arrived at the final French port, prior to entering the canal or river system, the first thing to do is to book the crane. There are cranes available in the marinas or yacht club at Calais, St Valery sur Somme, Le Havre, Rouen, Bordeaux, Sète, and Port St Louis. Normally you book on arrival. They are either self-operated or by someone from the club or marina. You will need at least two people on the deck of the boat preferably three or more. Masts in slings, swinging about, together with furling forestays, need a lot of attention, in several places at the same time!

De-Masting:

1. Take the sails off the main and forestay and bag them.
2. Take off the boom and fasten it to the deck so it doesn't roll into the water.
3. Disconnect all the electrics that run down to the base of the mast. Some will be deck fittings with plugs and sockets and some will be through deck, but all need to be either undone or cut, below deck level

A digital camera for taking pictures of each coloured wire connection (particularly something

like the radar that has 10 – 15 connections) is very useful. I normally back the photos up with a rough drawing kept in the logbook showing the wire connections. Disconnect the power from the VHF radio set so nobody transmits with it by accident – with no antenna, it will wreck the set.

4. At the bottle screws slacken all the shrouds and back stay - forestay as well, if it is without furling gear. Take all the split pins - wires out of the bottle screws so the whole rig is loose - bit floppy - (You are in a marina - no waves). The mast has no pressure on it, so it can move about a bit, perfectly safely.

5. You are ready to ‘pull’ the mast – At the appointed time motor under the crane and tie up - breast & spring lines. It is important to make the boat is tightly moored.

6. Now carefully undo the ‘inners’ and (with gaffer tape?) tie then to the mast. As the crane lowers the strop, you want it to go around the mast and slide up to rest under the spreaders. It cannot go up the mast if the lowers are in place.

7. Once the cranes strop is in place under the spreaders, you need to release or take off, what ever it is holding your mast to the deck. The mast step bolts, tabernacle or whatever.

8. You should assign someone to look after the forestay with the roller furling on as it is very heavy and you do not want to damage it. The crane

tightens the strop on the spreaders – you and the crew/assistants run round letting go the final shrouds and stays and the mast goes up in the air.

9. You need someone on the foot of the mast so it does not swing around as it leaves the deck.

10. Then you must either lay the mast in the two X shapes, 1 fore 1 aft, which you have previously prepared or put it on land and (gaffer tape?) tie all the shrouds and stays up, possibly removing the spreaders....

11. Do the same with the mizzen, if you have one and make it all tidy, so the shrouds/stays are all safe and secure.

12. It is worth taking all the delicate items off the masthead – Windex, anchor, tricolour lights, wind instruments etc and fix a bucket over it to protect the end. Crane operators are normally doing dozens, if not hundreds of masts each season. It is sensible to be guided by them.

Note: Do not use Gaffer or any other sticky tape, if you intend being more than 3 weeks on the trip. It will become a horrid stick mess and difficult to remove.

Stepping the mast

Reverse of above - take off all the ties etc get ready with pliers and bottle screws and new split pins. Put the mast strop around the mast over the lowers under the spreaders, and then put someone strong

on the foot of the mast, to hold and guide it and another strong person on the forestay.

It is the furling gear on the forestay that is most vulnerable and difficult to manoeuvre, so get the foot to just above the deck fixing or thru deck and tell the crane to lower it onto the deck. Fix forestay first, then outers, then backstay and hand tighten the bottle screws before taking the weight off the strop.

Lower the strop and take it off then fix lowers. Head back to pontoon and make fast again, leaving the crane free for the next boat. (it's useful to have previously fixed a line to the strop, to haul it down)

Without tightening everything up, get the mast upright - go ashore and from the bows, look to see if the mast seems straight with the boat. Adjust it until it appears to be at right angles to the deck by upper shrouds... then tighten it all up a bit.

Look up the sail track and see if it is 100% straight – it will not be. Gradually tighten / loosen up the shrouds till it is straight - Now tighten the back stay - depends if you have an adjuster or bottle screw - you need it tight to get the furling gear taut... should be able to twang it but not rock solid. Tighten the shrouds a couple of turns at a time on each one equally Keep checking by looking up the track - go round a couple of similar sized boats and feel their rigging to get a sense of how tight you should go! If you have a tension gauge this is the time to start using it.

When you are next sailing hard on the wind the lee shrouds should be slightly loose but not flopping all over the place. If they are rock solid, close hauled in 15-18 knots then they are too tight... if floppy as hell, then too loose.

It will probably have taken at least a couple of hours to 'set up' the mast.

Mooring stakes: Normally you will find somewhere to moor for the night that has either mooring bollards or rings, but occasionally you will be out in the country on a bare canal bank.

Generally, there is a towpath running beside the canal and just beyond that, trees or a fence. The problem is that walkers, cyclists, and VNF officials (with little vans or scooters) use these paths and do not take kindly to tripping over or being knocked down by your mooring line.

You need a couple of strong metal stakes, about 15 inches long, ideally with rings in the top and a heavy hammer or mallet.

Coming alongside in canals: Be careful not to damage your propeller in the shallows. It's safer to angle the bows into the bank first. Let the crew get ashore so they can pull the stern of the boat in with a line, keeping propeller stationary. If you cannot get close enough, back out and try a bit further on.

Warps: Because of the frequency of the locks, you need to have lines permanently fixed to the boat, which can be adjusted from the cockpit. One way of achieving this is to fix a couple of blocks on the bows – one to port one to starboard so that the head-lines is led back to the cockpit, and onto a winch. With this method who ever is in the cockpit can adjust the head-lines and the crew ashore deals with the stern lines, as the lock fills or empties. Sometimes it is difficult for one crew to adjust both lines, when the locks fill or empty quickly.

Deck knife: It is worth keeping something like a diver's knife, with a saw edge, permanently in the cockpit. Hang-ups can happen when ropes get jammed in worn concrete sides or other reasons. It is better to cut the warp fast when this happens, rather than let the weight of the boat eventually rip out the cleat and lets the boat drop several metres.

Boat Hooks: A long one and a short one are very useful for placing the fixed loop of a mooring line over a bollard. They are very good for giving what is technically know as 'a good shove off' from the side of dirty lock wall, which you really do not want to touch with your hands.

Binoculars: Very useful for reading signs up ahead and spotting out mooring places in the wide rivers.

Plank: The plank may be used as a passerelle to get ashore on. As mentioned it is useful for laying along the fenders to protect the hull and it will enable you to get ashore if you go aground, a

couple of metres from the bank. Scaffold boards are excellent for this.

Horn: very useful for ‘waking’ lock keepers who are frequently students busy reading a book or having a doze and do not see or hear you coming.

Fuel: You need at least two 6-gallon plastic jerry jugs/cans mounted on ‘wheels’ to carry fuel, to the boat, from more distant fuel stations.

Gas: Calor gas is a non-starter in France – and indeed most of the Mediterranean. Virtually impossible to get the cylinders refilled. The simplest solution is to abandon your Calor system and replace it with Camping Gaz which is readily available everywhere. I put a Camping Gaz regulator onto a Camping Gaz bottle and then just run it into the system via the old fixed regulator

There are pressure differences but you will probably not notice it. Calor UK, supply fittings to change the threads of the fittings to Camping Gaz. You should address this problem before arrival in France, as they are unlikely to have the relevant adapters. Camping Gaz is expensive in France and cheap in Spain.

Power Cable: The French provide electricity points and although they are nominally 220volts, you will notice no difference between that and our nominal 240v. Some of the power points will take the blue marina electricity plugs as used in the UK but others use little round sockets that take a round

3-pin French plug. (The plugs have only two pins with a hole to take the earth pin from the socket.) You can buy these in all French chandleries and most supermarkets. Use one to make up a short adaptation cable, with a female blue marine socket at the other end, so you can adapt your long cable to either system.

Hand Held VHF: Do not use your in boat VHF to transmit, unless you have a proper aerial attached to it. You will blow it up! A hand-held is perfect for the canals if you can speak any French at all. It helps to call the next lock, when a couple of miles from it, and give your ETA.

This is particularly true in the rivers, with the huge commercial locks, but the little canal locks are also connected to VHF system. Ask any lock keeper for the channels to use. In the mighty Rhone your Fluviacarte will tell you which channel, normally 20 or 22, depending on the proximity of the next lock. The Fluviacarte book also lists the emergency and intership channels.

Water: Is normally obtainable at all locks (except the big Rhone locks) and is drinkable – ‘potable’. Often the canal locks have a neatly coiled hosepipe near the control hut and, with the permission of the lockkeeper; you can fill your tank during or immediately after, the locking operation.

In summer months, tapped water may not be used to wash the decks – use canal water for this. In the Rhône, most stopping places have a water tap

beside the electricity point, but you will need your own hose and the screw fittings which are particular to France. The rubber 'push on' type will normally work.

GPS: Running your GPS is a very good way of judging the progress on rivers, showing actual speed, rather than speed through the water from the log..

PK or Km Kilometre stones or posts are on nearly all the banks of the canals and rivers and make 'finding a mooring before dark' problem easier to solve. In the Fluviacarte books, there are signs on the maps saying PK something or Km something and you will find corresponding markers on the bank. They all mean the same thing – a certain distance to or from the end of a canal or river.

I have chosen to use the Km way of expressing it throughout this book. It is a useful way of knowing how far to the next fuel or mooring place without having to measure the distance on the charts.

Note: I have only noted a few of the more important stopping places on the routes, with the exception of the Rhone, that has every stopping place I know of, listed,



Chapter Four

Locks

Locks come in all shapes and sizes, some manual operated by lock keepers, some electric, some automatic or self operated. The rise and fall of the water level can be 10 to 15 centimetres, to 20, or 30 metres, in the giant Rhone locks. (You tie to floating bollards and it rises or falls with the changing water level) Some have straight sides, some have sloping sides and some (particularly in the Canal du Midi) have oval sides which makes 'parking' challenging and exiting requires a good push off sideways.

Where the locks are manned, the lock keeper will not take your lines. It is not his/her job. They expect you to be able to handle the warps and mooring of the boat yourself. If they are obliged and do help, then it is correct to give them a small tip – say 1€. Single-handing it's different and they will nearly always take the lines, if you fail to sort it yourself. They appear not to expect to be tipped for this.

Nowadays the majority of canal lock keepers are male or female students on summer holidays from university. They work hard, are very helpful,

friendly, and are generally considerate in opening or closing the shutters, slowly, in order to keep the speed of the water flow down so it is easy for you to control the mooring lines. Sometimes the 'regular' lock keepers are less considerate. On flights of locks, the 'lock keeper' will travel with you on a moped, scooter, or van from lock to lock, so that the gates are already open when you arrive.

In the late afternoon, they will ask if you are going on through the next lock and, if not, what time you will start in the morning. It is important you keep to the given time. They will make a special trip to open the gates for you. Where there are resident canal lock keepers, they will call ahead to the next lock to inform the lock keeper of your imminent arrival and that keeper will 'prepare' the lock for you and open the gates.

It is courteous to inform the keeper of the lock you are leaving that you intend stopping before the next lock for lunch or the night, otherwise 'water' can be wasted in 'preparing' the lock and perhaps delay a boat going the other way.

Opening times vary with the canal system or river. Almost all work from 08.00 to 18.00 with a 'lunch break' between 12.30 and 13.30. On the rivers, some of the locks work 24/7 but pleasure craft are not permitted to travel after sunset.

FLUVIACARTE Canal Chart Books will tell you what the opening times are for each separate canal or river. The times are far more restrictive in

the winter months, so progress can be a lot slower than summer. The VNF is gradually modernising all the locks to being automatic. It appears to be a matter of luck as to if an 'automatic' lock works during the lunch break or not. They all have an emergency button or pole that, if activated, produces the presence of a lock keeper, on a moped or in a van within minutes, which is perhaps why, sometimes, at lunchtime, they are inoperable.

Manual Lock systems frequently work with traffic lights but if not, the lock keeper will wave you in. When you arrive at a lock, and the gates are closed, and the lights are red. You have the choice of parking up on the canal bank and putting the crew ashore to hold the two mooring lines or drifting in the middle of the canal, with small adjustments of position by engine.

If you have just missed a lockage, then the delay is going to be at least half an hour. The lock has to fill, gates open, boats untie and leave, next boats enter and tie up, gates closed, shutters opened, water level changes, gates open, boats leave – and only then do you go in. More like $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour!

As you approach the gates of the lock (and this applies to almost all types of locks), there will be a cross current. Normally seen on the water but pre-judging the strength is very difficult. As your boat gets into this current, it will push or pull you to one side or the other. This effect is difficult to handle entering the lock as you are going slowly but easier

on leaving, where can use more throttle and there is room to manoeuvre.

It is normal to 'park' on the starboard side – but this is not obligatory and sometimes not possible because of the boats ahead of you. When going into locks that are 'empty', it may be easier to put the crew ashore, either on the towpath or on the steps at the side of the lock entrance. They can be up on the side of the lock ready to take the lines as you throw them.

When you are in and parked, and any other following boats have completed the entry, the keeper will close the gates. If they are manual, then it is OK for you or the crew to help the lock keeper with closing the gate on your side then walking to the next gates and helping to open or close the shutters and then the gates.

(Shutters are the panels on each lock gate, under the water, near the bottom of the gate. They are raised or lowered from the walkway, to admit or contain the water.)

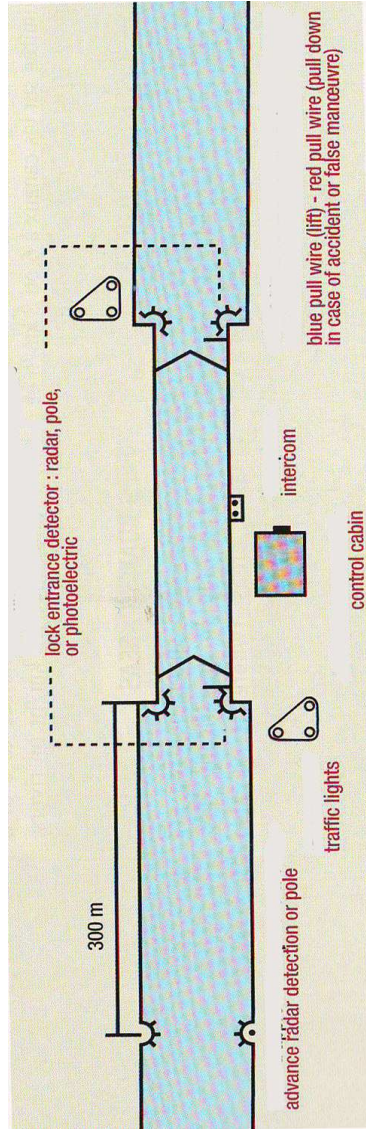
Often the lock keeper will wait for a 'nod' from the skipper to indicate the boat is properly moored up and ready for the lockage, before starting to open the shutters and releasing water in or out.

Once the level has changed and the gates open, you are free to recover the lines and go. If you have gone down in the lock, your crew should have looped the two mooring lines over bollards and got

back in the boat with the loose end. When you pull the lines back down onboard, do it slowly or the 'loose' end will wrap around the standing part and the rope will be locked at the top!

Automatic Locks types 1 also come in various forms. Some have a 'radar beam' situated across the canal banks which, as the boat 'breaks' the beam, signals to the lock of the presence of the boat. The traffic lights will turn from red to flashing red or amber. You then hang around while the lock 'prepares' itself and the light turns green.

After the boats already in the lock have left, you motor in and tie up. If you are following another boat it is important you keep close as there is another radar beam just in front of the gate which, when broken, indicates to the automatic lock you have entered and after a few moments the lock gates start to close. Some beams 'count' the boats, and some do not, which is why you should follow boats ahead as closely as is reasonable.



As the gates close, you need to park up as near to the fixed poles on the starboard side of the lock. One is red and the other blue or green. When you are happy with the mooring, 'lift' the blue or green pole and the shutters will start doing their thing and letting water in or out of the lock. The Red pole is the emergency alarm switch. If you pull that, bells will ring; the lockage will stop altogether and a lock keeper will arrive by moped or van. Only he can reset the lock!

When the water level is correct, the gates ahead of you open up and you should leave promptly. There is a 'radar' beam on the exit side and some sort of timing as well. If you leave it too long after the gates open, to cast off and exit, the gates will start to close again. A loud alarm bell rings to indicate the gates are now closing!

If you are ever trapped between two closing gates, don't panic, they will push closed to a certain pressure then just stop.... They then loosen slightly but not enough to release the boat, hopefully without damaging it. An alarm will sound and a lock keeper arrives.

Automatic Locks Type 2 do not have radar beams. Instead, there is a high wire slung across the entire canal supported by telephone poles or a gallows arm, from which, a piece of plastic hosepipe is suspended.



This pipe, requires a ‘twist’ of a quarter turn – you can hear it click as the circuit is ‘made’ -sending a signal to the lock, that the boat is there and ready to enter. The plastic pipe is soft, so you can run the boat under it and it won’t damage your superstructure if it touches.

Again the traffic lights will change to indicate the lock ‘knows’ you are there and as before, you wait for the green. Once inside the same lifting ‘pole’ system operates the gates as type 1. Again, it is important to leave as soon as the gates open as these gates run only on a timer. On exiting, you will see another plastic pipe suspended from a high wire. Do not touch this as it is only for approaching boats not departing boats. The gates will close automatically behind you after you have left.

Automatic Locks Type 3



are only on the Canal du Midi and present a special challenge for the single hander. They run on the pole entry system as type 2, but when you get in and moor up there are no red and green poles. Instead, beside the disused and abandoned control hut, there is a box two buttons. The first button closes the gates behind you and opens the shutters automatically. The second button will open the gates for you to leave but 'catch 22' is that it only becomes operational once the shutters are fully open.

The lock water starts going down the moment you press button one - the shutters open and the water level starts to fall and the boat goes down. If you watch the rods on the lock gate very carefully, you can see when the shutters are fully open and the

2nd button becomes operable. If at that moment, you press the 2nd button and jump back in the boat, it has probably only gone down a metre or so and when the water equalises, the gates will open.

The alternative is to obey the rules and stand on the side of the lock until the water level has equalised then press the 2nd button to open the gates and climb down a ladder to the boat, clutching the mooring lines. You will possibly have to pull the boat into the side manually, in order to get back on board. Easy if there are two of you or more – less so if single-handing.

Entering an ‘empty’ lock of this type you are committed to climbing up one of the steel ladders, clutching the warps, but once the water has filled the lock, you just press button number 2, step aboard, push off as the gates open and motor out.

Oval locks are encountered on the Canal du Midi. Mainly lockkeepers operate them, but work appears to be going on to automate even this more difficult type. They were designed oval, to make the water flow swifter, but not violent thus filling and emptying the lock faster without inconveniencing the barges. Apparently, the water moves round the ovals with less turbulence for a given amount, than in a straight-sided lock.

Manoeuvring the boat in and out of the oval is not as easy as in a lock with straight sides. For departure, a good push off then let the boat drift towards the centre of the lock seems to be a good

solution. Going in, putting the bows into the oval, and then going astern with the helm over should swing the stern inwards.

There are slope sided locks but these will not be encountered on the main Channel to Mediterranean routes described in this book. If you do however encounter a slope sided lock, either stay in the middle under power or moor on the knuckle, close to the top or bottom gate, where the sides are vertical.

Lock keepers will always give priority to commercial barges. Occasionally the gates will open, the lock empty of boats, but the traffic lights remain red. Some time later a commercial barge will arrive and go in ahead of you. If there is room the lock keeper will signal you to follow, if not you just have to wait for the next lockage. In worst circumstances, you will have to wait for up to half an hour but after that, you will be allowed in first, as the priority boat, as a matter of right.



Chapter Five

THE SEINE CHANNEL ROUTE TO PARIS

Both the 'Fast' & 'Slow' Classic routes are the same from the Channel ports, until you are south of Paris.

The Seine to Paris

From **Le Havre** to **Paris** it is approximately 368 kilometres.

There are 6 locks after the tidal reaches.

From **Rouen** the authorised draft is 3.50 metres. In **Paris**, the draft is 3.00 metres.

Air height is 5.69 metres to **Amfreville**,

5.75 to **Paris** then

3.70 in **Paris** - all at HW

For this section you need:

FLUVIACARTE no 1 Covers Le Havre to Paris including sea area.

(At the end of each 'route' chapter is the full list of Fluviacarte required for that route)

Le Havre and Honfleur

Le Havre – Harbour Master telephone 02 35 21 23 95

You can enter Le Havre at any state of the tide, proceed to the ‘visitors’ pontoon, first on right, then report to the harbour masters office who will allocate you a marina berth.

There is fuel and fresh water available and a 6-ton mobile crane to pull or step your mast, at or near high water. You should book this on arrival via the harbour master’s office.

There are all the facilities you would expect of a first rate marina, chandlers, launderette, travel lift although the town and general shops are a considerable walk from the harbour. The crane belonging to the Harbour / Capitainerie costs around €58 for half an hour, which is all the time you should need if you arrive prepared at the crane.

Le Havre – Crane and Mast Transport by Road.

The mast can also be taken down in Le Havre by: **Stephan Reiset of Chantier Naval Havre & Manche**. Talk to him on his mobile 06 19 46 46 23 or fax 02 35 24 44 18.

He will need a few days notice. He normally does three or four boat masts at a time and they can be transported to the Mediterranean, on a flat bed truck.

His price includes taking the mast off by crane, bubble wrapping, storage at Le Havre, transport, and storage for as long as you need at the other end. Most of the cost is in the transport. Be prepared for a long days work on your own boat and helping others. In 2009 he charged 1100 Euros for a 36 foot boat. Putting the mast up at the other end was an extra 100 euros.

Alternatively, either going north or south and needing help organising the transportation of your mast from Port Napoleon to the North of France contact:-

Mark De Schutter Tel. 04 42 48 41 21 Fax. 04 42 86 06 63

sales@port-napoleon.com

www.port-napoleon.com

Honfleur

Harbour Master telephone 02 31 14 61 09.

The lock opens for entry, on the hour and for exit on the half hour. The lock is closed 2 hours either side of LWS. There is a waiting pontoon outside. VHF channel 17.

A current of up to 5 knots, runs across the entrance at certain states of the tide. Once through the lock, follow the wall on the right to the visitors pontoon, moor up and see harbour master to arrange crane and fuel.

Fuel is available from a nearby service station – jerry-jug it by hand or arrange delivery by tanker, and there are chandlers, laundrette etc. There is a crane available for demasting. You do not need to book this crane in advance but you should inform the HM as soon as you arrive, if you wish to use this facility..

In 2009 the charge was €110 euros per mast and because of the bridge opening times, you will need to spend at least one night in the yard at a cost of €14 per night. (Same price as in the Inner Basin Marina.)

Because of the lock gate restrictions, it is essential to leave Honfleur early to get the ebb tide to lock out before low water, then park up for a while so that you can start to ascend the Seine the moment the tide permits.

In 2007 the waiting pontoon outside was in a poor state of repair.

Rouen.

It is possible to demast or step the mast at Rouen in the ‘Basin St Gervais’ by arrangement with the

Rouen Harbour Authority. The harbour office is up river, on the left bank, near the new bridge. They charge (2006) €150 for the crane. You pay and they find a driver for the crane. There is a visitor's pontoon opposite the cranes in the harbour but no facilities. They use the same huge cranes as for unloading ships, which is why it is expensive.

Apparently, you will be 'fitted in' when it suits them, so need to allow around two / three days for a 'slot' to become available. Rouen marina staff do not recommend it. The marina in Rouen is good. There are shops just over the bridge and a chandlery.

Tancarville Canal:

If the weather is really foul, it is possible to use the Tancarville commercial canal, from Le Havre. There are two locks to negotiate plus lots of lifting or swing bridges, not to mention fast moving commercial traffic. I used it once and would not do it again. It is not a place for relatively small plastic boats and is very time consuming.

The Departure towards Paris:

The big problem of the lower reaches of the Seine to Rouen, is that there are very few safe places to stop for the night.

It is essential you pass Honfleur and are in the main 'Chenal de Rouen' at least by the time the tide turns and the flood begins. Provided you do this, you should be able to make Rouen, on the one tide. It

turns foul later and later as you proceed up the river.

The strength and speed of the tide, added to the hull speed, should enable you to complete the 122 kilometres, but you are not permitted to navigate ½ hour before sunset and ½ hour before sunrise.

Keep near midstream, to gain the strongest tidal advantage, but all ships have priority, as they are ‘constrained by their draft’.

If ‘daylight’ hours availability, during a flood tide are not sufficient, then there are a couple of possible stopping places before Rouen.

Chaudebec-en-Caux 58 km up the river (331 from Paris) has got a possible mooring but has lots of commercial pleasure craft.

Duclair 61 km up the river (277 from Paris) has huge mooring buoys and pontoons for commercial pleasure boats.

Have a good look at the **Fluviacarte no.1** and you will see that there are a very few other possible stopping places. After Duclair it is almost impossible to moor up anywhere else on this river until Rouen.

This lower part of the Seine is considered to be part of the sea so you do not strictly need the Vignette, boat licence for inland waterways, until you get to Rouen where there is a VNF headquarters. It is

essential you have the vignette before you proceed any further.

ROUEN is a major city with fuel docks, chandlers, marina/port de plaisance, laundrette, repairs etc. Once you get here, the pressure is off. You can relax and start moving in easier stages. Almost everything is closed on Sunday and Monday morning. It is only 40km to the first lock at Amfreville, but you should still 'work the tide' if possible.

Amfreville (202 from Paris) Is the first big Sea Lock. VHF 18. **Les Andelys** (174 from Paris) is a nice historic town but the quay only has a depth of 1.20mtr. and can be very crowded.

Port St Gabriel (157 from Paris) and is after the 2nd big sea lock Notre Dame de la Garenne. There is a proper little port de Plaisance.

Vernon (150km from Paris) A big town with a proper Port de Plaisance with all facilities except fuel.

Rollbois (119km from Paris) just after the next lock at Mericourt there is a purpose built fuel point at Rollbois. The fuel is not cheap here but you may need to refuel before heading into Paris.

Limay (110km from Paris) a yacht harbour and marina under small bridge with 3 mtr air height together with other mooring possibilities in the area.

Ecluse d'Andresy (73km from Paris) This is an important lock as just after it is the junction with the **l'Oise** on the left at **CONFLANS**, which is a major commercial barge centre.

Heading north - downstream:

If you are on your way home, this is the moment to start watching the weather. Because the tide turns earlier, ahead of you, as you proceed downstream, you will probably need two days. When you 'park up', use your strongest warps and make sure the 'springs' are balanced. When the tide turns downstream, it is incredibly powerful, particularly at springs. It can be worth turning your bows into the ebb tide and current for the night.

Conflans/ l'Oise For those yachts coming down from Dunkirk, Calais or St Valery sur Somme etc, this is where you join the River Seine to pass through the centre of Paris and may then choose the 'Fast' or 'Slow' route down to the Mediterranean.

For boats heading North for the UK East Coast, Belgium, Netherlands, the ***l'Oise route*** is an excellent alternative.

Heading South - upstream

Between Conflans and Paris there are mooring possibilities every 10km or so culminating in a fuelling pontoon at:

Issy-le-Moulineaux (10km from Paris) On the L bank just before a bridge. There is a very busy and

susceptible to wash from passing barges, mooring place at:-

The Old Port de Plaisance by the Pont de la Concorde.

There is also a 45mtr long mooring quay near the Eiffel Tower, at the '**Port de Grenelle**', that is only open during the summer.

A more comfortable and secure place is obtained by locking into the **Arsenal Yacht Harbour**.

Contact HM on VHF ch 8 to lock you in. Advance booking in the season is recommended (01 43 41 39 32) There is Video surveillance controlling the lock gates. This is perhaps the best place to visit Paris from, if that is on your schedule.

The next bit of magic is the trip through the very centre of Paris, past Notre Dame on the Ile de la Cité. It's really unforgettable going under the bridges of Paris, in your own boat, as you head for the canals.

The route is controlled by traffic lights and works like this:- **Up stream** between 0 and 20 minutes past each hour. **Down stream** between 35 and 50 minutes past each hour.

From this point you need

FLUVIACARTE 2. (LA SEINE – **amont de Paris a Marcilly**)

Having transited the centre of **Paris** – continue along the **Seine** as far as the junction with **the Canal du Loing**.

The following leads to both the ‘fast route’ and the slow route.

There is again a bit of a shortage of good overnight mooring places so you need to plan ahead.

Port de la Rein Blanch is a small marina with modest facilities at **Melun** about 50km from **the Arsenal**

There is another at 10km further on beside the lock **le Cave 3** at **Chartrettes**.

Champagne-sur-Seine is another 10km further on. It has a marina with fuel and local shops.

ROUTE DECISION POINT

Just after the lock, **Champagne 2**, is where you decide on the shorter but with more locks ‘**Slow Route**’ with its tunnel of 3km or the longer, but fewer locks ‘**Fast Route**’ which tends to have more commercial traffic

For the Fast Route:- Just after the lock Champagne 2 and round the bend 2km further on, at **St Mammes**, you hang a **right** out of the Seine and into the **Canal du Loing**.

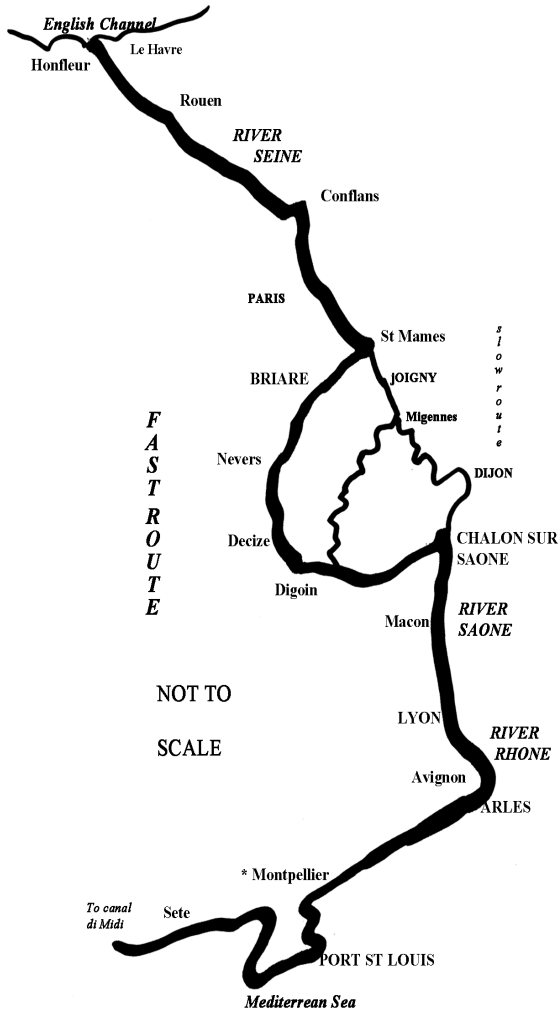
For the Slow Route:- Do not turn to the right into the Canal le Loing, after the Lock Champagne 2,

but continue along the Seine under the bridge. You pass the big EDF power station into the lock VARENNES 1 – (VHF ch 22) under one more bridge and arrive in **MONTREAU**.

This is a large town with a commercial boat yard, a VNF local head office and fuel available from service stations in the town. At the next Y junction with a bridge across it, fork to the right, enter the **River Yonne**.

See Chapter 7 – for the ‘Slow Classic Route.’





Chapter Six

THE FAST ROUTE

**Canal du Loing & Briare
Canal Lateral de la Loire
Canal du Centre**

This route passes through heartland France, where little villages have built ‘halts’ for you to park your boat and go shopping or eat. The VNF have also built ‘halts’ in the countryside to make mooring up easy and there are several refuelling points. Most of the locks you use will be automatic.

On the Seine, just after the lock Champagne 2 and around the bend 2km further on at **St Mammes**, you hang **a right** out of the Seine and into the **Canal du Loing**

**At this point you need
FLUVIACARTE 20 – Bourgogne**

You have now entered the canal system of France. The scale and pace of things change but there are still commercial barges albeit smaller ones, trying to make a living and moving right on the speed limit.

Many of the locks will be automatic and you can moor anywhere overnight, except on bends where you might impede other traffic.

CANAL DU LOIN AND CANAL DE BRIARE
103 km – 7 locks.

Nemours is the first little town with a ‘Halt’ with electricity and water with shopping in the town supermarket.

Montargis skip the mooring in the commercial port and continue to a ‘halt’ on the left bank just above lock 33 where there are some good restaurants in the area with picturesque views.

Montbouy There is a quay with water, toilets and showers.

Rogney has a good mooring beneath some trees just below lock 18 with shops and restaurants close by. (There is a flight of disused locks close by that were constructed in the 17th century)

Briare you fork right to visit the town or fork left to continue by crossing the Loire on a aqueduct and the canal runs alongside the river and the canal now follows the route of the Loire river

CANAL LATERAL DE LA LOIRE
196 km 7 locks.

There are numerous purpose built ‘Halt Nautiques’ all the way and some beautiful mooring places on

the canal banks. Several fuelling points and delightful villages.

NEVERS. Is a big town situated on the Loire. If you want to visit you need to lock in at Verville 22b and follow the spur up to the Halt Nautique

DECIZE. Is the junction with the Canal du Nivernais by crossing the Loire River. You should not take this junction but carry straight on.

DIGOIN. Just before arriving in the town, you pass the junction into another canal on the right. Do not take this, but continue ahead into Dijon, where you will find a large Port de Plaisance with a hire boat centre, where you can fuel up, shower and take on water. Your canal now becomes the

CANAL DU CENTRE.

112 km 61 locks.

Many of the locks in this section are automatic. This is a very beautiful canal and the last chance to savour the slower pace before entering the two giant rivers that take you down to the Mediterranean. you pass **PARAY-LE-MONIAL**, which has an excellent quay and the famous basilica of Sacré Coeur.

GENELARD has a little Halte Nautique and is a pretty village with a service station.

MONTCEAU-LES-MINES is the local industrial centre but has excellent shops and you can also

moor in the canal basin. There is a quay side market on Saturdays.

ST LEGER SUR DHEUNE has got fuel by the quay, and a Halt Nautique. Some good restaurants and is set in lovely countryside.

CHAGNY is the centre of the Burgundy wine trade and once you have negotiated the flight of 8 locks after it there is a very nice café on the left bank.

CHALON SUR SAÔNE is off to starboard as you reach the last canal lock and having passed through it you arrive at the T junction with the ***SAÔNE RIVER***.

Turn right and make your way down to the extensive marina complex of **CHALON SUR SAÔNE boat harbour**. This is a place to leave the boat for an indefinite period or to simply chill out for a while. The footbridge across to the island and then the bridge into town, is a pleasant walk and has a different view of the river.

The island itself has wall to wall restaurants that set their tables in the streets for the evening meal. Some excellent food at reasonable, but not cheap, prices. You can also moor to the quay beside the town on the main river if there is room..

For the '*fast*' route from Le Havre/Honfleur to the Mediterranean you need the following:

- Fluviacarte 1** La Seine – aval du Havre a Paris
- Fluviacarte 2** La Seine – amont de Paris a Marcilly
- Fluviacarte 19** Bourgogne Est. Auxerre – Dijon
- Fluviacarte 20** Bourgogne Ouest St Mammes, Briare
- Fluviacarte 10** La Saône – de Corre à Lyon
- Fluviacarte 16** Le Rhône – de Lyon à la Méditerrané .



Chapter Seven

THE SLOW ROUTE

If you have chosen the *slow* route at St Mammes, you will now be on what many people consider to be one of the most beautiful waterways in France, after the Canal du Midi. There are excellent facilities everywhere, fuel at Joigny, which is a particularly picturesque little town. Another 10k south is Migennes, where, if you wish, you can branch off into the *Canal du Bourgogne* and follow that delightful route for 242K and 189 locks. It has a depth of **1.50mtrs** and a low **bridge of 2.70mtrs**



The long tunnel at *Pouilly* has an air height of 2.70 metres at its highest part, but be careful the tunnel roof is sharply curved. If your boat is a bit square, near the maximum height, I wouldn't risk it!

Although it is actually shorter than the 'fast' route there are far more locks, so it takes longer but the canals are less commercial and busy. The barge traffic is very light but there are many hire boats. On many public holidays, the locks are closed.

RIVER YONNE

(**Montereau to Laroche**) = 86km with 17 locks.

CANAL DE BOURGOGNE

(**Laroche to St Jean de Losne**) = 242km 189 Locks.

**For this part of the route you will need
FLUVIACARTE 20 – Bourgogne Ouest
FLUVIACARTE 19 – Bourgogne Est–**

MONTEREAU (km 108) You can more on the right bank on a quay above the bridge. It is a large town with a commercial boat yard, a VNF local head office and fuel available from service stations in the town.

At the next Y junction with a bridge across it, fork to the right and enter the **River Yonne** and leave the **Seine**.

PONT-SUR-YONNE (km 79) Has an excellent Halte Nautique, if it is not full of hire boats with all facilities except fuel.

SENS (km 67) Has a Port de Plaisance with all facilities.

JOIGNY (km 31) is a particularly pretty and picturesque little town. It has a hire boat base where they speak English and have fuel, water, electricity, and some spares. It might be possible to lift out the boat and it could be left here for extended periods, by arrangement.

LAROCHE-MIGENNES (km 23) has also got excellent repairs facilities at the boatyard Chantier Fluvial de Migennes.

This is the Junction with the Canal de Bourgogne.

(If you carry straight on along the Canal Nivernaise, you encounter **depths of only 1.10 metres, air height of 2.71 mtrs, max beam of 5.05 mtrs** and 110 locks until Decize, where you would rejoin the 'fast route'. (Because of these limitations few 'cruising boats' use this canal route)

You branch off left into the *Canal du Bourgogne*, which has **depth at 1.50mtrs** and has a low **bridge of 2.70mtrs** at the centre of the arch. It's somewhat meandering course takes you through a quite challenging **189 locks**, mainly in long flights, over the **242 kilometres**. For some, this canal is the

high point of their passage to the Med, for others it represents very sore hands from line handling. At the summit of the canal the 3.3K Pouilly tunnel is controlled by traffic lights. You will pass Dijon (of mustard fame) and after, a very long flight down of locks, into the ***River Saône***. This part of the voyage is to be savoured. You will probably look back on it as the high point of your trip through France by boat.

ST FLORENTIN has a hire boat centre and all repair facilities but finding a space can be difficult in high season.

TONNERRE has a port de Plaisance with all facilities. Very nice little town.

ANCY-LE-FRANC. Has a lovely renaissance chateau and a quay to park on.

MONTBARD has a Port de Plaisance.

Plenty of stopping places everywhere to **POUILLY-EN-AUXOIS** which has a Port de Plaisance and a pleasant town. More interestingly, it is the summit of this canal and through the top of the hill is a tunnel of 3.3km long and a height of 3.10km. The entrance is controlled by traffic lights and is lit. The walls do slope down on either side so it is important to keep to the centre.

VANDENESSE-EN-AUXOIS has the village of Châteauneuf with its castle which is well worth a visit. Very beautiful stopping place.

DIJON Famous for its mustard, is a large city with all the facilities you would expect in such a place. There is a Port de Plaisance and a hire boat base which can be useful, in case of breakdown, as they speak excellent English.

ST JEAN DE LOSNE has a mooring spot just before the last lock and just after it. It is the end of the canal section of the trip to the Mediterranean and where you join the River Saône.

Having cleared the last lock, immediately on your left, is the very big Port-Marina of Joel Blanquart. Everything is available in terms of repairs, spares, gardinage – main dealer for several engine manufacturers plus whatever.

A little further along on the left corner with the Saône, is a fuel berth selling reasonably priced diesel.

For the ‘*Slow*’ route from Le Havre/Honfleur to the Mediterranean, you need the following

Fluviacarte 1 La Seine

Fluviacarte 2 La Seine

Fluviacarte 20 Bourgogne Ouest

Fluviacarte 19 Bourgogne Est

Fluviacarte 10 La Saône

Fluviacarte 16 Le Rhône

Chapter Eight

THE RIVER SAÔNE

From St Jean de Losne to Lyon it is 170km.
From Chalon-sur-Saône to Lyon it is 142km.

For this section of the trip, you will need:
Fluviacarte 10 - La Saône – de Corre à Lyon

There are only 5 locks heading down stream to Lyon, where you will enter the mighty *Rhone*. I find the Saône the least interesting part of the journey. Once you have got used to the very long, tree lined reaches, which mask the countryside, it all begins to feel a bit the same.

Much of the Saône has been ‘modernised’. Dredged, widened and many of the natural twists and turns have been straightened out to make the river navigable for sea going ships and giant 5,000 ton push tows. The speed limit through the lower parts is 35km/hour and the push-tows and hotel barge-ships are all going flat out. From here to the sea, it is obligatory to wear life jackets in all the locks. (Every member of the crew on deck) You are supposed to wear them whilst underway, but that rule is not widely enforced. The largest locks are

185 metres long – 12 metres wide with a depth of 4 metres over the sill.

Commercial traffic always has priority and will enter the lock, against the red signal, even if you are waiting outside. You will then be allowed to enter, if there is room. If you are travelling alone, without other small boats, then the lock keeper will wait 20 minutes, to make certain no other craft turn up, before locking you. When there are a group of pleasure boats together, they will not be kept waiting. The use of the VHF, to warn the lock of your approach, is very useful, even if you can manage only basic French.

It is very tempting to ‘straighten’ out the bends – take the racing line - to cut down the distance you have to travel, particularly if there are no other boats in sight. This puts you on the ‘wrong’ side of the river and if you encounter a big push-tow, making 15 knots, coming at you, unable to stop it can be challenging.

The river becomes very wide, with long reaches boarded by trees. This makes mooring up for the night a problem, as the branches hang down into the water, making approach to the bank impossible.

In the FLUVIACARTE you will see reference to ‘vertical quays’ and ‘inclined quays’. The vertical ones are no problem but the ‘inclined’ ones are impossible to moor against. They slope away, out of the river and if you pull up alongside you will end up scraping your boat against the concrete

under the waterline. Basically ‘Steps’ and ‘Inclining’ are useless for mooring so discount them when planning your next stopping place.

It is important to ‘plan’ your overnight mooring, as unlike the canals there are many areas where it is impossible to find a mooring place. Anchoring is sometimes possible but there is a lot of debris (trees etc) underwater. The Saône is a mixture of long boring reaches, which all look the same after a while, canalised sections that are industrial looking and wide dull pastures continuing for hours, interspaced with big locks and a few nice towns. Others may feel differently about it of course.

THE SLOW ROUTE ENTRANCE TO THE SAÔNE

Having refuelled at St Jean de Losne, you turn right under the bridge and start your river experience.

SEURRE (km 187) there are pontoons with finger berths after the lock. Shops and restaurants close by.

VERDUN-SUR-LE-DOUBS (km167) There is a Relais Nautique and a vertical quay right in the centre of town. Just after Km 145 you will pass, on your right, the entrance to the Canal du Centre.

THE SLOW ROUTE JOINS THE FAST ROUTE.

CHALON SUR SAÔNE boat harbour. (km 142)
Town and boat harbour.

This is a place to leave the boat for an indefinite period or to simply chill out for a while. The footbridge across to the island and then across the bridge to the town is a pleasant walk with a different view of the river. The ‘island’ itself has wall to wall restaurants that lay out their tables in the streets for the evening meal. Some excellent food at fairly reasonable prices. You can also moor to the quay beside the town on the main river if there is room.

MACON (km82) This is a must see stop even if you do not like wine. Just after the Port de Plaisance, which is a little way out of town, there is a stepped quay and just past that a vertical quay- if you can find a spot there, it is ideal.



PORT ARCIAT (km 73) has a vertical quay – there is a hypermarket 3km away! Water on the quay.

Warning: the Fluviacarte suggests there are many marinas between here and Lyon, but mainly they are designed for small boats – runabouts and are too small for the average yacht..

LYON (km 1) I think the outer approaches to Lyon are beautiful, spectacular, and as the ‘island’ splits the traffic, the buildings become lovely and very romantic. After the long succession of bridges you will find a parking spot beneath the willows on the left hand side, just before the VNF offices. There are normally quite a few boats of passage there and you can moor up anywhere there is a space. Lyon is a lovely city with wonderful shopping facilities and a place to enjoy and take a breather, having completed 80% of your trip.



Chapter Eight

THE RHÔNE

From Lyon to Port St Louis it is 312km and 12 giant locks.

FLUVIACARTE 16 – le Rhône – de Lyon à la Méditerranée. (This Fluviacarte covers to Port St Louis but if you want to go onto Sète, you need the Canal du Midi Fluviacarte# 11 as well.)

The current in the Rhône does not normally exceed 4 knots and most of the time is much less. It has been reported, in times of flooding, to reach 6knots, when it is dangerous for small craft.

The Mistral is a very powerful wind that blows up the river against the current, sometimes for days on end. It creates a wind over tide situation, which can produce waves that will break over the bows. It can make manoeuvring in front of locks and mooring up in them very difficult.

The locks are giants compared to anything else encountered so far in France. The turbulence is however very slight and the 'floating' bollards make it easy to ride up and down with the water without having to adjust the warps. All the locks are equipped with VHF on channel 20 or 22. It is worth warning the lock keeper of your arrival time if your French is up to it.

It will probably take 3 days to descend and 4 days to ascend between Lyon and Port St Louis, unless you are caught by a mistral and have to stay put for a while. It's very difficult to spend longer in the river because there is a great shortage of tenable mooring places.

Up to now, I have only mentioned a sample selection of overnight mooring places for each part of the trip. The following are all the places I know of in the Rhone. **Almost impossible to park elsewhere,** Most – but not all the locks - have a small boat 'waiting pontoon', frequently awkwardly placed behind the 'waiting piles' used by ships and barges. I suppose if you really were 'caught out' at sunset you could moor up to one of these for the night. You are not permitted to navigate at night.

THE FULL LIST OF STOPPING PLACES ON THE RHONE.

(There are some other places with sloping quays that I would not use in a sailing or motor boat, as there is no way I know to properly fender and protect the boat from wash.)

LYON Halt Nautique under willows near VNF office - just before 3 bridges - left bank going downstream. Inexpensive fuel from barge, just past bridges, on same side, heading for the Rhone. Opens 08.30.

Vienne (29K from Lyon) Public Quay on L bank past 2nd Bridge

Les Roches de Condrieu (km 41) Proper Yacht Harbour - Fuel – Shops

St Valier (km 76) Quay on L bank

St Valier (km 78) Quay on L bank

Tournon (km 91) Yacht harbour and Quay. Both little depth + - 1.30Mtr.

La Roche de Glun (km 98.5) in the branch to the barrage on right side, with assorted Pontoon moorings for 6+ boats, near a sweet little village with everything. Do not moor to low pontoon as they are for sailing dinghies only.



Valance (km 110) Good Quay in town

Valance (km 112) large Port de Plaisance - fuel, travel lift, restaurant etc.

La Voulte (km 128) Quay on Right Bank

Le Pouzin (km 133) Quay on Right Bank before bridge

Montelimar (km 160) Public Quay 3k down stream from town past bridge.

Viviers (km 166) Public Quay - Port de Plaisance (shallow I think)

Derevation de Donzere (km 171- 177) Straight shuttering by using stakes it's possible to park along here.

Nr Eurodif (km 186.5) Right Bank - just into barrage branch - Not very attractive and has shuttering on low commercial wharf.

ST Etienne des Sorts (km 204) Floating pontoon for 2 boats max - possible 'dodgy' parking places just before village.

Caderousse (km 218) Good anchorage in the backwater - lots of space. I think there is a pontoon there as well?

Roquemaure (km 225) Public Quay - very exposed to mistral waves.

Avignon (km 241) Public and paying pontoons or quays. You have to leave the river to get there but together with the famous bridge and walled town, it is well worth the visit.

(Just before Arles there is an exit on the right into the Petit Rhône. This eventually leads to Sète and the Canal du Midi. You lock out of this pretty, little river, with its sandbanks and overhanging trees, into a big sea lock where you are raised six inches! Chapter 13 - SÈTE TO THE RHONE has details of this route, for which you need FLUVIACARTE #11.)

Arles (km 282) Pontoon mooring on Right bank.. This is the best place to leave the boat to visit Arles. A wonderful town with a coliseum that is now used for bull fights, without killing the bulls – lots of fun.

Port St Louis (km 322) You must do the next 40 km run, in one hit, from Arles to Port St Louis, as there is nowhere to moor up in-between. If the

mistral is blowing it can be really rough with wind over tide – I actually got half way down once then turned back, as I was taking it ‘green’ over the bows! Although the canal/river runs through the wonderful Camargue countryside, you can see very little of it as much is hidden by the trees and hedge rows on either side.

At km 322 there is a final sea lock to negotiate which lets you into the big basin, which is now the marina of Port St Louis. There are all facilities you could wish for but it is actually quite a long way from anywhere. Wash the dirt off the decks, step the mast and bend the sails – you are now in the middle of the French Mediterranean.



Chapter Ten

CALAIS

OR

ST VALERY SUR SOMME

SCENIC ROUTE

From either port, you enter the canal system and have the choice of dropping down to the Seine and passing through the centre Paris, then taking either the 'fast' or 'slow' routes, or taking the charming 'scenic route' down to the Saône by using the Marne.

CALAIS

You are required to obey the traffic lights system at the entrance or use VHF ch12 to contact harbour control. This is a very busy ferry port. Whilst there is lots of water in the main harbour as you approach the lock, in the Bassin des Chasses it shallows to 0.5 of a metre so you must work the tides.

Entrance and Exit to the marina is 1 ½ hours either side of HW and you are not allowed to anchor or wait alongside outside the Marina Bassin.

The marina shop runs the mast crane in Calais. Telephone no. 0033 (0)321960757 It is a 3ton crane to take down the mast. When you are ready to leave you must get the HM permission to leave the Marina and lock into the Bassin Carnot and then lock out of the other end into the Canal System.

You will need

FLUVIACARTE14 – Nord-pas-de-Calais
FLUVIACARTE 24 – Picardie

Canal de Calais 30km. 1 lock. 5 automatic lifting bridges, controlled by your boat breaking a radar beam. . (If they do not work VHF ch. 10.)

This canal gets a lot of weed growth in summer, so watch the temperature gauge in case the engine overheats and you need to clean your water intake and filter. There are several mooring places along the route, where you can overnight, before turning right into the ‘barge motorway’ *Canal du Nord*.

The pace and size of everything changes abruptly. Commercial barges from the Netherlands and Belgium compete with French barges to make their deliveries as quickly as possible.

You can make a detour to Arras, an interesting WW1 museum town or carry on to the ‘*Ruyaulcourt Tunnel*’ (4354 metres long!) towards Peronne with its ‘Historial de la Grande Guerre’ an excellent WW1 museum.

A tunnel of only 1058mtrs awaits, then half a dozen locks, before arriving in Jonville near the junction with the *Oise* which then runs through 7 big locks down to Paris.

It's far more gentle to head east on the *Canal Lateral à Aisne* towards Berry au Bac, into the calm meandering waterways of rural France passing the cathedral city of Reims with its marina / port de plaisance and excellent shopping.

La Liaison de Grand Gabarit – at the fork go right into

Canal Du Nord – (10 locks + 1 tunnel to Peronne) this canal is like a motorway and goes all the way to Paris. It is used by fast heavy barges heading north and south.- you join it at:

Arleux – (km 1) where there are shops and a barge museum and famous for its garlic production.

Ruyaulcourt Tunnel – (km 25) is 4354 mtrs – 4 ½ kilometres long! There is a passing zone half way up. It is controlled by traffic lights at each end. VHF ch 22 to tunnel control.

Peronne – (km 44) The Junction with the **Canal de la Somme to St Valery**.

ST VALERY SUR SOMME

For this route you need

FLUVIACARTE #24 Picardie St Valery to Canal du Nord – 120km 18 locks after the sea lock.

You must work the tide correctly to cross the big Bay de Somme. If coming from a UK port it is probably easier to go to either Boulogne or Dieppe first, fuel up, then make the relatively short trip to the North Cardinal Buoy *ATSO* positioned approximately at **50° 14.5N 001°28E**. From here you should be able to see the channel buoys (roughly **50° 13N 001°30.5E**) that lead you up to the yacht club marina at St Valery.

Allow at least 2 hours to get from the north cardinal buoy *A SO* to St Valery You need to be at the buoy about 2 ½ hours before local HW. Do not attempt this in strong onshore winds or indeed in bad weather. The channel is very well buoyed and easy, so long as you follow carefully, the very winding route which changes constantly and criss-crosses the bay.

The excellent yacht club marina and their fixed crane will help you take down or put up your mast for €30 - £20. If you use the ‘isolated’ pontoons on the left, there are 5 little motor boats, to self drive across to the club, and you pay less for the marina berth.

There are 2 chandlers close by, 2 Supermarkets, and fuel from a 'Garage 500' metres away. You can borrow a club trolley for your jerry cans.

Having de-masted and ready to leave, ask the yacht club to contact the 'Sea Lock' which opens between 1 hour before and 1 hour after HW. This is a big lock with sloping sides. You don't need to tie up in this lock just hold position inside and wait for the gates to close behind and those ahead to open – normally only a few minutes.

There's a mooring pontoon just beyond the lock on the right, (km156) opposite the boat yard. After the slightly unattractive long straight section, this becomes an absolutely charming, gentle and delightful canal, all the way to Peronne. The 2nd bridge is very low with a clearance of only 2.50mts. If you think you cannot get under it ask the lock keeper to open it.



Abbeville. (km 141) has an excellent little quayside mooring place under the trees with water and electricity. A supermarket is 30 metres away with a fuel facility – closer than the one at St Valery.

Pont Remy 23 Lock (km131) There are some very strong currents around this lock entrance and it is better to wait well back then use quite a lot of power to get in so the cross currents affect you for best time.

Amiens (km 94) Several overnight stopping places on banks and a little port.

Junction with Canal du Nord (km 37) you go under the bridge and straight ahead for two kilometres towards:-

PERONNE (km 49- new numbering system)

This is where the Calais and St Valerie Sur Somme routes combine.

The Canal du Nord is a bit of shock after the quiet, gentle and very charming Canal de la Somme. There is a choice of a marina type port in the cut and just past that, on the right, is a long concrete wall with a few mooring rings on it. High-speed barges thunder by!

Junction:- Canal de la Somme (km 65) This canal is now closed – buoys strung across it and it has silted up in parts.

Tunnel 1.058 kilometres long. (km 78) traffic lights control entry and it is well lit.

Noyon km 93. Moorings and a major barge harbour on junction with l'Oise.

THIS IS A DECISION POINT

Via the Oise and Marne to the Saône by turning sharp left off this busy waterway into the l'Oise and head down some charming canals to the Marne and eventually join the Saône and the Classic Route on down to the Rhone. (561 Kilometres Locks 164 to the Saône)

Or

(See Chapter Eleven)

Continue south – straight on to the Canal Latéral (80km 2 locks) which becomes the l'Oise (99km 7 locks) again and flows all the way to **Conflans**, just outside **Paris** where you join the route in chapter 5.
THE CHANNEL ROUTE TO PARIS

Via the Oise and Marne to the Saône

In addition to the **FLUVIACARTE 24** Picardie you will need:-

FLUVIACARTE 8 – Champagne–Ardenne.

Noyon to Abbécourt = 15km 3 locks

Abbécourt to Bourg et Comin = 48km 13 locks

Bourg et Comin to Berry-au-Bec 20km 1lock

Onto FLUVIACARTE #8

Berry-au-Bec to Condé sur Marne 58km 24 locks

Condé sur Marne to Vitry-le-Francois 58km 10 locks

Vitrey-le-Francois to the Saône 224 km 114 locks

Route Notes:

Noyon to Abbécourt = 15km 3 locks and is a rather industrial little canal. It is a relief when you hang a right at Abbécourt into the lock from where it is all absolutely charming. It is worth noting that if you go on past the lock to **Chauny**, you will find a Hire Boat base, where you could leave a boat for a while with spares and fuel nearby, as well as other moorings and shopping facilities.

Abbécourt to Bourg et Comin = 48km 13 locks.

Anizy-le-Chateau km25 is a useful stop on the right by a bridge. Supermarket and fuel just behind the building.

Braye tunnel km 40 is a 2.365 kilometre long tunnel controlled by traffic lights and well lit.

Bourg et Comin to Berry-au-Bec 20km 1 lock

You join the Canal de l'Oise a l'Aisne going to the left until you arrive at Berry where you enter a lock and as soon as you exit you turn right into the next lock (rather than go straight ahead and you change onto:-

FLUVIACARTES to number 8 - Champagne – Ardenne.

Berry-au-Bec to Condé sur Marne - 58km 24 locks

Come out of the lock at km19 and turn left heading south.. There are numerous stopping places along the route until you enter the suburbs of Reims.

Km21 has a possible fuelling point at Port Colbert.

Reims - km23.This is a big city with a Port de Plaisance on the left which is remarkably inexpensive but situated by a flyover. It has all facilities except fuel, which is a long way off. Good shopping close by. Good showers and a secure place to leave the boat for an extended period.

Mont-de-Billy Tunnel km 46 Another tunnel out in the country controlled by traffic lights 50 and 2.302 kilometres long and well lit. It is actually quite narrow as it has a ‘path’ running down one side of it. – control telephone no: 03 26 03 90 28. Most of the locks and control points seem to use the telephone rather than VHS perhaps because hilly nature of the terrain makes VHS difficult.

Condé sur Marne 58km this is the Junction with the Canal Lateral du Marne – turn left when you reach the junction.

Condé sur Marne to Vitry 48km 63 locks (km 48)

Chalons-en-Champagne 32km. You can park just upstream lock no 9 which is the ‘control’ lock for the next flight. There is also a commercial port, in the branch under the bridge, where you are ‘tolerated’ – allowed to go, if you can find room.

Vitry le Francois 1 km has excellent facilities on the Port de Plaisance Quay and a big boatyard where they ‘convert’ barges. If you decided to buy a barge and have it converted to your own design then this is the place to bring it.. The canal becomes very narrow as you leave lock no 1. This is because of all the barges parked up on either side of the boatyard. You fork left to the T junction and then turn right under the bridge. The Port de Plaisance is straight ahead or you swing round to the left to continue

Vitry to the Saône 224km – 114 locks

There are several ‘*flights of locks*’ on this canal and you are accompanied through the flight by a lock keeper (normally a University student making money during the holidays). It is essential to keep to the agreed time of departure in the mornings – a lock keeper may travel a considerable distance to meet up with you.

If you intend stopping early then you should let the lock keeper know so that they can report back to ‘control’. If you mess them about you may find considerable delays before you can be slotted back into the system. The lock keepers stop for lunch and so will you. Normally one hour or slightly more, if the lock keepers have a long way to travel to their base for lunch.

Vitry km 1

Saint-Dizier km 28 Port de Plaisance, fuel and all facilities – a somewhat industrial town. There are lots of stopping places for the night along this canal which is pleasant and meandering. The VNF have built several mooring places with straight sides, mooring bollards, water, electricity and rubbish bins.

Conde km106 has an interesting bridge which is controlled by ‘radar’ and opens automatically for you.

Chaumont km 110 has a ‘port de Plaisance’ on the left with good facilities except fuel. Just before it at km 109 lock 25 Ralencourt, there is a supermarket complex with fuel. If you can park up in the area of the lock it is a 5 minute walk. If you wait till you get to the Port de Plaisance it is a long way!! If you spend the night in the Port de Plaisance then the lady in charge will take note of your intended departure time and inform the ‘lock keepers’ so there is a lock keeper to travel with you on their moped.

Batilles km 155 is a very long tunnel – almost 5 kilometres long. Simply because of the length there can be a considerable wait. It is controlled by traffic lights and well lit.

Maxilly-sur-Saône km 224 is the junction with the **River Saône**. You have completed the canal part of your voyage. As you turn right there is a big Saône

River lock just ahead. The little locks and narrow canals are a thing of the past!

You join the **Saône at km254** – finding mooring places for the night is not as easy as the canals.

Change to

FLUVIACARTE 10 – La Saône et la Seille

Lamarche-sur-Saône km 245 – mooring under the bridge – nice restaurant

Auxonne km 234 There is a straight quay just before the bridge and a stepped quay which is no good for yachts just after the bridge.

Saint-Jean-de-Losene km 215 on the right corner with the Junction with the

Canal de Bourgogne. is a fuel berth selling reasonably priced diesel. If you turn towards the entrance to the **Canal de Bourgogne** on your right is the very big Port-Marina of Joel Blanquart. Everything is available in terms of repairs, spares, gardinage – main dealer for several engine manufacturers plus what ever. Another place to leave the boat for a considerable length of time.

You have now completed the The Calais or St Valery sur Somme Route scenic route

From St-Jean-de-Losene, you connect with the ‘Classic Routes’ and continue on down the Saône and Rhone to the Mediterranean. For this route

from Calais or St Valery you have travelled around 681 kilometres and locked at least 182 times.

FLUVIACARTE14 – Nord-pas-de-Calais: (Only if you entered at Calais)

FLUVIACARTE 24 – Picardie (For St Valery and Calais route)

FLUVIACARTE 8 – Champagne – Ardenne.

FLUVIACARTE 10 - La Saône – de Corre à Lyon

FLUVIACARTE 16 – Le Rhône – de Lyon à la Méditerranée

Go back to chapter 8 for the River Saône



Chapter Eleven

TO PARIS FROM NOYANS AND INTO THE CLASSIC ROUTES

From the decision point in chapter 10 you continue south-west – straight on - to the Canal Latéral (80km 2 locks) which becomes the l'Oise (99km 7 locks again and flows all the way to **Conflans**, just outside **Paris**, where you join one of the Route in Chapter 5. (179 Kilometres and 9 big locks to Paris)

THIS IS A BUSY & IMPORTANT BARGE ROUTE.

Noyon km 93. Moorings and a major barge harbour on junction with l'Oise. Instead of turning off to the left into the l'Oise carry straight on ahead.

Longuiel Annel km33 There is fuel available on the left bank as well as repairs and breakdown service, shops etc.

Junction with l'Aisne canal km 99 – an alternative route to Reims.

Margy-les-Compiègne km 97 This is the first proper Port de Plaisance on the left as you head

down to Paris. – showers, electricity, water, rubbish bins. A little further down in the town is a Fuel Depot where you can fill up. This is a very historical town and worth a visit – the Kings and Queens of France came here to ‘relax’ – it also has good shops.

Plle de Verneuil-en-Halatte km 62. Good mooring on left bank just after the bridge with water available.

Creil km 59. good mooring on right bank just before the bridge.

Noisy-sur-Oise km 39 there are two purpose built mooring places in the little backwater – the charted depth is 1 metre and I would not risk it and would go onto

Persan-Beaumont km 35 and moor up in the ‘Harbour Area’ just before the town bridge if there is a space amongst the barges.

Parmin km 28 just after lock L’Isle-Adam, there is an island with bridges joining it and immediately on the left there is mooring place with water etc and not far from the shops. A little further on is pontoon only to be used by passenger barges.

Pantoise km 12 which is after the town there is a ‘base nautic’ with all facilities on the left hand side. Certainly petrol is available there and possibly diesel? Just round the bend is a ‘bassin de vitesse’, which means small motor boats may be driven

around at very high speeds, sometimes towing water skiers!

Pile de Cergy km 9 on the right has a little boat harbour that boasts showers, water, rubbish bins, washing machine etc.

Conflans-St-Honarine km1 is the major barge centre where they wait to pick up loads and to generally congregate. It may be possible to get fuel here but they are more used to selling it by the ton rather than the litre! More importantly, you join the River Seine just north of Paris and are ready to explore this wonderful city.

Go to chapter 5 for details and the route though Paris onto the Classic Routes to the Mediterranean.

All the above route is in
FLUVIACARTE 24 – Picardie



Chapter Twelve

THE CANAL DU MIDI.

The route between the Atlantic coast of France and the Mediterranean

From Bordeaux to Sete 503km 139 locks

Dimensions: Length 30 metres (98ft.4ins)

Beam 5.5 metres (18ft)

Draft 1.6 metres (5ft 2ins)

Air Height: 3.30 metres, in the middle of arched bridges, but only **2.40 metres** at 2.5mtrs either side of the centre line.

The Canal du Midi with its 503km and 139 locks from Bordeaux to Sète, on the Mediterranean, is the most delightful way to cut the corner off the long sea route. Having made your way to La Rochelle on the west coast of France, you need to travel the next 50 miles down to the Gironde river entrance in one go.

A serious amount of water flows out of the estuary, so you need to carry the tide to Royan Marina and then to the waiting pontoon outside Bordeaux docks. Use the tide for the next leg of around 58Km up the *Gironde* river to the sea lock of *Castetes 53* and into the *Canal Latéral à la Gironde* which leads to the real *Canal du Midi*.

Buying fuel at hire boat centres is very expensive but there are few other options.

As you can see the draft of **1.6 metres (5ft 2ins)** is normally the reason boats cannot use the Canal du Midi. In some places it was blasted out of rock so if you run aground then you will not be pushing mud – rather stuck solid! You should also bear in mind that in mid summer, during a drought, the VNF may not be able to hold this level because the canal is fed from a series of purpose built reservoirs. If they are low then there is no way to replenish them until it rains! If you get stuck, the only solution is to hire a crane and a lorry and have the boat lifted out and deliver by road.



Another limiting factor for some boats, is that the bridges are oval shaped, and although there is the stated height in the middle, it can come as low as 2ft at the sides. Having said all that, it is the most beautiful canal, perhaps in the whole of France. There is virtually no commercial traffic except for Hotel and site seeing barges but there are 3-400 self drive hire boats operating, so many 'Port Plaisance' are full with them. There are however, lots of other parking places and the canal is maintained with a view to encouraging the tourist trade.

Entrance to the Canal du Midi Is beyond Bordeaux up the Gironde. This is a big fast flowing river at the mouth of which are a large area of sand banks and a relatively narrow channel that is well buoyed. You need proper charts for the approach and because of the shallows and size of the river you need a proper chart to get up stream. Do not cut across the approach, even though there is enough charted depth, as it can be very lumpy. Big holes in the sea!

Royan situated just inside the estuary has all the facilities you would expect of a major town including fuel and a crane so the mast could come down here. This is the place to wait for low water and take the flood all the way to Bordeaux..

Alternatively stop at Pauillac, which is a popular and efficient place to move the mast. There is a fixed crane that pulls and sets many masts each season but you need to enter at least after half tide

as it is shallow alternatively wait till you get into Bordeaux to ‘pull’ the mast. There is a waiting pontoon outside the ‘Bassin a Flot’ where you enter, via the lock, + or -1hour either side of high water. Proceed into the marina (2nd basin) and there is a DIY crane, at the far end, you can use for €30 a half day – you get the key from the chandlers just beyond the crane. There is also a supermarket just across the road from the crane and useful chandlers etc.



Whether from Pauillac or Bordeaux you must carry the tide up to the lock gate at **CASTETES-EN-DORTHE** where you actually leave the Gironde, via a double lock, into the canal system. There are a couple of possible stopping places at **Langoiran** (km49) and more likely at **Cadillac** (km36).

Personally I prefer to do the section in one go, arriving at the big double **lock of Castetes 53** on the tide and ready to lock in. If you are early, there is a good floating waiting pontoon just before the lock. The Gironde is still a big fast flowing river, even after Bordeaux, with a lot of debris floating around.

FLUVIACARTE G004 & G005 are what you chart for the canal system from Atlantic to Mediterranean

Immediately after **Castetes 53** there is small lock **Gares 52** after which there is private Port de Plaisance with a bar and restaurant, where you can relax and prepare for the gentler part of the delightful trip down to the Mediterranean.

The first part of the trip is on **Le Canal Latéral á la Gironde** Le Canal Latéral á la Garonne to Toulouse and the junction with the Canal du Midi at Toulouse, is 193 kilometres and 49 locks. The locks are all automatic – self-service and work by twisting the hanging pole as you approach to make the lock fill/empty and the gates open for you. On the green light, you enter, moor up and operate the switches on the side of the abandoned control hut. When the water level has changed and the gates open leave fairly promptly as they are on a timer.

Although there are many proper mooring quays or Port de Plaisance, there are also lots of areas where you can just moor up to the canal bank. At all the hire boat centres – Crown Blue Line, Emeraude Navigation, Aquitaine, Locoboat etc. you should be able to buy fuel. The only problem is that they sell it to you and to their customers, at a premium price, sometimes as much as 30% above the price from a service station. Their private ‘marinas’ may not be quite the place you want to spend the night. Not cheap either!

The 'Port de Plaisance' or 'Halt', that have been established by small villages or towns by their Syndicate d'Initiative are mainly free, except for electricity and water.

Ferme de la Falotte (km 146) 17th century farm restoration (km 146) free mooring – pay to visit farm, water, restaurants etc.

Sérignac-sur-Garonne (km119) Little village and you can jerry jug fuel from its service station.

Agen (108 km) Major town with a couple of places to park. Quite interesting 'flight of locks' leading to a big aqueduct which is one way and controlled by lights. Views from the aqueduct are impressive.

Valance-d'Agen (km81) Free Syndicate Initiative mooring with pontoons. Water and electricity. Pretty little town up the hill with a small supermarket and big outdoor market.

Castelsarrasin (km56) Has a little boat yard for repairs with a 24 ton crane and all facilities except fuel (jerry jug from garage)

Montech (km43) there is a Halte Nautique with everything except fuel. Just after the lock there is a canal to the left which goes up to Montauban. To Toulouse and the C du M carry straight on.

Grisolles (km 27) fairly ordinary little village but with a couple of good moorings.

From here on as you approach **Toulouse**, the area becomes more and more industrial and the graffiti approaches the concept of art! You pass extensive railway sidings, factory areas and at **(km 0)** you arrive in a big basin – pretty shallow and hang a sharp left into **the Canal du Midi** at Km 1.

None of this area from **Saint-Jory (km 15)** to perhaps **Port St Sauveur (km6)** is where you would want to spend the night. Very industrial and run down but the graffiti is amazing.

Locking through the middle of the city of Toulouse is a slow business. The locks are controlled by lock keepers and the traffic lights, (with hanging sticks) are some distance and out of site of the locks. They must be obeyed despite some long waits. The canal now becomes pretty narrow and canalised! Interesting experience being in the middle of a major city in a boat.



As you come out of Toulouse, you enter the world of barges. Mainly converted to homes, they are parked up all the way to a big barge boat yard at Ramonville-St-Agne (km 11) and just a little

further south at (km12) Port-Sud the Port de Plaisance de Ramonville-St-Agne, which has everything including fuel. This is still all quite industrialised.

Castanet (km 15) there is quite a pleasant 'halt' here and the lock is the first of the oval locks you will encounter from here to the Mediterranean. You are now out of the sprawling suburbs of Toulouse.

Montferrand (km 50) There is a proper Port de Plaisance here with everything except fuel. Nice village on the other side of the canal from the Port.

SUMMIT km 46 to km 56 after this the Canal du Midi starts it's slow descent to the Mediterranean.

Castlernaudy (km65) having passed some beautiful Châteaux and in delightful tree lined canal reaches you pass under 3 bridges with some pretty tight turns into the 'lake' basin. There is a fuel station on the far side. Park up along side the 'door' ring the bell, and a few minutes, 'the man' will come down from the service station on the road above and use his long hose to fill your tank.



The flight of 4 locks controlled by a lock keeper are very impressive. The skill of the lockkeeper in ‘moving’ groups of boats up and down through the flight at the same time with new ‘fleets’ joining at top and bottom every time is amazing. Worth trying on well as a lot of water runs through this flight.

Carcassonne (km105) A beautiful and historic town with a problem. It has become a sort of rendezvous place for people who are SDF - *Sans Domicile Fixte*, No fixed abode, who are mainly young people ‘travelling’ under the generous French social security rules. They frequently have dogs with them (or occasionally other pets) which are not allowed in ‘homeless dormitories’ so they become entitled to a financial hand out in order to find their own accommodation. There is a double problem – a lot of dog ‘merde’ everywhere, to the extent the Mayor has designated some streets in Carcassonne, ‘dog free’.

It is not a place to leave your boat for very long.. There is a good spot after the basin and the lock in the town centre, before the railway bridge, but you

have to be lucky to find a vacant berth. After that – you must make up your own mind. Once you are clear of the flight of locks at km109 there is no problem.

Port la Robine (km168) This is the junction with another canal that goes down to the sea at Port la Nouvelle. It has a maximum draft of 1.60 metres. There is a part of it that goes under some houses in Narbonne with a maximum air height of 3 metres. There is another bridge which only has 1.85mtr but will open on demand. You have to use part of the River Aude which has rocks and sand banks.

Depths below Narbonne, towards Port la Nouvelle, may be as low as 1.20mtrs. Check with lock keepers.

Capestang (km 188) fuel available at the little port here and the bridge is particularly narrow.

Colombiers (km201) Is a port de Plaisance with all facilities including fuel in the small basin. The canal in this area is just lovely. The best restaurant in the port, overlooking the basin, gave me a major attack of diarrhoea, which put me out of action for a day!

Beziers (km 208) is famous for wine and for rugby. It also has a flight of 7 locks which operate on a one way basis. Downstream 08.00-09.30 & 13.30–15.30 Upstream 10.00-11.45 & 16.00-18.45. A lot of Beziers is quite industrial.

Agde & the round lock (km232) The famous '*écluse ronde de Agde*' is quite interesting and a little challenging to park in – because it is round with 3 exits. There is an exit out to the sea at Le Grau d'Agde by taking the River l'Hérault. Check with the lock keeper for water levels. There is a boat yard with a crane near the mouth of the river so it may be possible to step the mast there and if not in Cap D'Agde, the big yacht marina is only 4km up the coast. Most boats will continue on down the Canal du Midi towards Sete.

Marseillan (km 240) This is the Mediterranean base of the famous Brittany Sailing school Glénans. There is said to be a crane for raising or lowering masts but if they are busy I am not sure how interested they would be. Most people wait to get to Sète. The whole narrow canal is full of parked boats on either side and the area has a somewhat run down look about it particularly after the beautiful tree lined reaches of the Canal du Midi which you have just, or are about to, pass through.

Pointe des Onglous Light House

You are now entering the Étang du Thau which is a very big salt-water lake surrounded by commercial oyster beds with several towns bordering. From the lighthouse to the stone light-buoy of Rocher de Roquerois, it is 19km – 12 miles, if you use your GPS and take the direct route across. If you follow the channel and recommended route it is 2 or 3 miles further. The trip takes 2 ½ to 3 hours and if the mistral is blowing a nasty chop can appear and

visibility drops away fast. Probably better to wait 24 hours.

SÉTE

Entrance to SÉTE

There is a railway bridge then a road bridge just inside the two breakwaters. The air height of the railway bridge is 2.20 mtrs so you will probably have to wait until it opens.

SNCF RAILWAY BRIDGE OPENING TIMES

09.45 – 09.50

13.06 – 13.16

19.13 - 19.23

If you miss the last bridge, do not be broken hearted. You can moor up for the night FOC, on the breakwater to port as you approach. The unprepossessing café on corner nearest to the big railway bridge becomes a place of magic in the evening. Tables appear in the street and on the bank beside the water. French people, in cars, come from miles around to sample the most delicious and most inexpensive fresh seafood I have ever found! You order lots of tiny little portions for €2 or €3 each, a bottle of fine local wine and some water and ... well its worth staying outside for the night just for the meal!

Once the Rail Bridge opens head down to the Vieux Port – straight ahead and park up. The Yacht club has a crane and operator, who can put the mast up most economically and you can leave your wood supports – car tyre fenders and all the canal stuff you no longer need, beside the crane for the next boat coming in from the sea heading for the canals.

The port has all the facilities needed for a yacht including fuel, travel lift, mechanics etc. It is of course now very crowded with lots of liveboards there because it is such a relatively inexpensive and nice place.

Chapter Thirteen

SÉTE TO THE RHONE

FLUVIACARTE G004 canal du midi.

This route assumes you want to return to the English Channel via the conventional routes of the Rhone and Saône rather than the Canal du Midi.

When you arrive at Sète from the sea, make your way to the Yacht Club pontoons, where they have a crane and can take your mast down. If you are lucky, you will find spare tyre fenders and wood to make crutches for the mast and maybe even a plank left by the last boat. When you leave the canals, you can drop them where you put up the mast again, for the next boat.

You are going to need a **waterways licence** – tax vignette (see chapter 2) You should also have a **ICC** - International Certificate of Competence with a **CEVNI** – canals and rivers qualification for France. The ‘Vignette’ waterways licence you must have, pay for and display. Lock keepers will ask for it, if they cannot see it in the window of the boat. You can get this from: Bureaux de la Navigation 1, quay Philippe Regy, Sète 04 67 46 34 00 take your

ships papers, proof of engine power and your CEVNI if you have it.

If you have not got one for goodness sake do not tell them. *Chapter two* tells you how to get these two items if you are a British citizen with a UK address. Application for the ‘Vignette’, via the internet is a safer bet.

Without a CEVNI and ICC you will get into trouble and fined if a lock keeper VNF official catches you. However I have never been asked to show mine. You will always be asked for the Waterways licence (vignette). The French Waterways Authority (VNF) want their licence fee paid to have money for the keep up the canals etc....

Having fuelled up, sorted your paper work, got the mast fixed to the deck or on a lorry, you are ready to head for the Rhone, Saône and the canals to northern Europe .First problem is getting out of Sète – the Railway Bridge to the Etang du Thau opens

09.45 – 09.50

13.06 – 13.16

19.13 - 19.23

Having gone through the bridge you enter the etang, hang a right and follow the marked channel up to the entrance to the

CANAL DU SÈTE A RHÔNE. (Km 97)

This runs through an industrial estate an is pretty ugly and even worse when you get to Frontignan

there is an even lower railway bridge that opens

: Weekdays Weekends

07.30

09.00

13.30

17.00

16.00

For goodness sake, check the above times locally, for both bridges, as occasionally they change the schedule.

Frontignan (km 92) is a sort of OK little town but the shops are far from the bridge. Good mooring available on either side of the bridge.

You then cross the Etang de Prévost in a canal. There are 'drain' gaps from the canalised sides into the Etang de Prévost and when it's windy some pretty strong currents run in and out.

Palavas-les-flots (km 75) is a crossroads junction with a branch canal that goes down to the marina and the sea. Catch 22 is a bridge with only 2.20mtrs / 2.65 mtrs.

There is a 'halte nautique' just before the bridge, and traffic lights control the entry into this 'spur'. The other side of the cross roads has a branch that goes up to Montpellier. Go straight ahead to the Petite Rhone.

Carnon (km 70) Hire boat base with fuel just past the town.

Aigues-Mortes (km 53) You have the choice of bypassing Aigues-Morte or taking a dogleg through the town – the main mooring place has a depth 1.3 – 2 mtrs.

Gallician (km 39) Mooring on finger pontoons with water and electricity normally full of hire boats – long walk to town centre. Less crowded after the bridge where there are livaboards and ‘travelling’ boats.

Canal Junction (km 29). Fork right into the lock cut for the écluse de Saint-Gilles and the Petite Rhone river. It is better to wait until you have a full day to make it to Arles or beyond as it is difficult to moor up in the Petite Rhone because of over hanging trees and sand banks. The water can drop during the night and leave you stranded!

Écluse de Saint-Gilles (km 299) is a huge great sea lock 12mtrs x 195 mtrs. Moor up near the control hut so the lock keeper can take your particulars and the lock raises or lowers you a good 6 inches unless the river is in flood. When the lights go green, out into the Petite Rhone turning left.

21 km to Arles The charted depth is 2.20mtrs (air height 4.70mtrs) and you need to keep to the centre of the dredged channel between the buoys or posts. It shallows off steeply closer to the marks.

Fourques & junction with Rhone (km280) As you exit into the mighty Rhone you have the choice

of turning right – down stream towards Arles and mooring up on the right bank to the pontoons for the night, visiting this lovely city, or going left to **Avignon** (km 241) .

See *chapter 9* for list of parking places, which are few and far between on the Rhone! Do not forget you are now going upstream and the river can reach 4 knots although generally is less than this.



Chapter fourteen

NETHERLANDS & BELGIAN ROUTE

Maastricht in the Netherlands, through Belgium via Liege, to Corre in France and the navigable head of the river Saône

Total distance: 579Km.

If you are coming from the Netherlands or Belgium and heading directly towards the Mediterranean, then assuming you enter the French/Belgium system at Maastricht, it is pretty straight forward and only requires the Fluvia carte No 9 'Canal de l'Est' to get you to the head of the navigable part of the Saône River at Corre.

The minimum depth for this route is 1.80metres. There are a staggering 184 locks to pass through, many in steep 'flights'. Nothing difficult, but your hands will ache at the end of some days, from handling the warps.

From the huge sea lock at **Maastricht** you head south following the route of the **Meuse** to:

Liège Km 30. There is a jetty in the middle of the town centre to moor to. There are a couple of small marinas a bit upstream but to do the tourist thing use the Jetty.

Namur Km 93 Is the junction with the Sambre which could take you to northern France and Paris. Jetty in town. Marina for boats to 11mtrs LOA.

Givet Km 143 Belgium/French border town.

Charleville-Mézières Km 225 you begin to encounter automatic locks. This is a junction with several branches of the Meuse River.

Verdun km 349 the site of the massacre of 800,000 men during WW1. There are several mooring possibilities in town so you may visit the memorials.

Toul Km 430 Junction with the Moselle. Wonderful flight of 9 automatic electric locks.

Nancy Km 456 The direct route actually passes at some distance so if you want to visit this town you need to take a canal branch off.

Epinal Km 518 wonderful 'flight' of 13 locks which you do accompanied by a lock keeper on a moped. Again if you want to visit this town with it's marina you need to branch off. There are flights of locks all the way down to

Corre Km 579 Where you leave the canals to join the River Saône.

For this route to or from the Mediterranean, you need:-

Fluviacarte no. 9 De Liège a Corre - Belge.

Fluviacarte no. 10 La Saône

Fluviacarte no 16 La Rhône

The above route is the fastest and most direct from the Netherlands to the Mediterranean.



Appendix

Fluviacarte #21. Carte de France – Itinéraires Fluviaux.

This is a one sheet map of all the navigable waterways in France, on which you can plan your own ‘scenic’ route. It details the dimensions of all the locks and waterways as well as many of the boatyards and mooring places.

Whilst it might be just be possible to do the trip with only this book and **Fluviacarte 21**, you really need the full information that is in the canal books as published by Fluviacarte. They cover the canals and rivers in detail. All the stopping places, fuel, food, tourism, lock dimensions telephone numbers and VHF channel numbers.

They are available from my website at French prices

www.michaelbriant.com/navicarte

the bookshops or chandlers in French coastal town, which has access to the canals or many UK specialist boat book shops, chart agents or some chandlers.

The French Waterways authority is the
VNF = Voies Navigable de France –

Web site <http://www.vnf.fr>.

Here you will find dates and times of canal/lock breakdowns and repairs & details of license fees, canal offices locations,. The web site is in French and English although the English version is not always up to date!

Mechanical Breakdowns If you need spares on the way, the French Postal services do an overnight delivery at very reasonable cost. Your only problem is it does need to go to a ‘proper’ address rather than the English boat on canal xxxx. Lock keepers will frequently let you have stuff delivered to their house or a Port de Plaisance is also fine.

Ted Johnson is an English boat engineer based in France and stocks most spares for boat engines etc.

Ted is very knowledgeable about boats and their engines, and having lived in France for 20 odd years speaks the language. His company is

Marine Diesel

Chitry-les-Mines

58800 Corbigny

Tél : (+33) 03.86.20.14.80

Fax : (+33) 03.86.20.14.84

contact@marine-diesel.fr

**IF YOU NEED A LORRY FOR YOUR BOAT
OR JUST THE MAST.**

AUGIZEAU TRANSPORTS (Christine speaks English) Tél:int-33-(0)2-51-55-54-07 Fax:int-33-(0)2-51-54-30-11

<http://www.augizeau.fr/En/Augizeau.htm>

E-mail p.guyon@althead.com : Probably the largest boat transporters in France/Europe. They will also just transport your mast.

ALBATRANS TRANSPORT is a very good transport company based in La Rochelle - <http://www.sarrion-transports.fr/> they do not have a English web site but certainly can read it. martineau.t@sarrion-transports.fr. They move boats and masts all over France on a daily basis. Situated in La Rochelle - one of the most experienced boat haulage companies in France - Up to 40 tons.

ABAT - GARRONE Transport de bateau
ZI Sud Port à sec
13500 - MARTIGUES FRANCE
Tel : (33) 04.42.07.03.33 71
Fax: (33) 04.42.07.37.54

BRITISH BOAT HAULAGE COMPANIES

Peters & May Ltd.

Branch Manager Richard Geary

Plymouth Tel: 00 44 (0)1752 794 794

Mobile : 00 44 (0)7887 686 734

Fax: 00 44 (0)1752 775 699

Email: richard@petersandmay.com

WEB: www.petersandmay.com

Peters & May, Southampton,
Hampshire, SO50 4NU.
UK. Tel: +44 2380 480480
Fax: +44 2380 480400

<http://www.boattransport.co.uk>

The above is based in Gloucestershire If you have a smaller boat - up to 29ft then a good option

Useful Web Sites

The Marina at Port St Louis has a web site
www.port-napoleon.com

If you want your boat transported to or from the USA or Med or Europe by specialised ship then:
<http://www.yacht-transport.com>

michael@michaelbriant.com





