



The mystical Kelpies in Helix Park



Halfway down the Falkirk Wheel



Sail-through chippy at Clydebank

Given the low number of boats on the water in April, mooring at designated sites was always easy. Most had pontoons, some with water and electricity posts. My favourite on the Union Canal was Causeway End, aptly nicknamed 'the secret basin', which has a couple of residential moorings and space for about five visiting boats, and delightful walks through woodland behind.

It seems that not many visitors bother to go down the 18 locks and five bascule bridges to Bowling, and back again the following day, but for me that was a highlight of the trip. The last lock down sits right under the mighty Erskine Bridge over the Clyde. Bowling itself is fascinating, with its sea lock (no longer in use), lovely old custom house, graveyard of rotting hulks and super pub with its collection of photos illustrating numerous community gatherings and celebrations. Thanks to an extensive regeneration partnership, the arches underneath the old railway bridge are being converted into shops, cafes and artists' studios, which should attract more visitors and boost the economy of the town.

Other sightseeing highlights included Edinburgh Castle, Linlithgow Palace, Helix Park (home of the famous Kelpies, which tower over the beautifully reconstructed eastern terminus of the Forth and Clyde Canal) and the Roman Antonine Wall (built by the adopted son of Hadrian) and associated hill forts, running parallel to the Forth and Clyde. In Glasgow we visited the Rennie Mackintosh-inspired Willow Tea Rooms for very upmarket tea and scones, and at the other end of the scale, enjoyed fish and chips bought from the only known 'sail through' chippy, McMonagles at Clydebank. All in all, a brilliant holiday, and especially fun for me as, hitherto, I had never helmed another boat!

How black is your keel?

'Keelblack' is a low-viscosity bitumen emulsion that can be applied to new steels hulls, back-to-bare steel or to all previous hull coatings including bitumastic paints. Surfaces should be clean and old flaking paint should be removed. The blacking flows behind existing bitumastic, filling voids and helping to re-adhere previous coatings to the steel. Bare steel should be degreased and treated with a zinc-phosphate rust prevention system and primer.

It can be used on damp surfaces, eliminating the need for drying. The coating should be applied in dry conditions but once touch-dry, within around 30 minutes, it can be exposed to all weathers. Two coats are usually sufficient on

existing coatings or three coats on bare steel. It is quick to apply, with one coat on a 60ft narrowboat taking less than one hour. Hulls can be re-launched after 36 hours curing. The coating has virtually no odour and emits no fumes. It can therefore also be used inside to protect against corrosion and as a rust-resistant bilge coating. Keelblack is the hardest grade of emulsified bitumen available, and dries to a tough finish that resists abrasion.

The cationic product has greater adhesion to the sub-surface than anionic bitumens which can flake or plate. It has been tested for strength and wear characteristics at the University of Saarbrücken in Germany and found to outlast two-pack epoxy by almost two times and single pack bitumastics by a factor of six.



One litre will cover about 9m² and it is available in 5 litre amounts at £42.60 (£8.52 per litre) or 25 litres for £160.20 (£6.41 per litre). Further information at www.keelblack.co.uk.

The Bridgewater Canal: once is not enough

The Bridgewater Canal, stretching 40 miles from Runcorn via Manchester to Leigh, is owned and operated by the Peel Holdings Group. It provides an important link between the Trent and Mersey, the Rochdale, and the Leeds & Liverpool canals.

It's a wide canal with no locks and can be cruised in a few days. CRT licence holders are entitled, by a reciprocal agreement with the Bridgewater Canal Company (BCC), to be on the canal for seven consecutive days. The terms and conditions, last updated in 2014, can be found at www.bridgewatercanal.co.uk/boating/licensing. We are getting reports that the BCC has decided to change the rules and add an additional requirement of 'no return within 28 days'. This requirement is not published on the

company website so we have only the reports of boaters, the IWA and CRT to go by. For a visit, or one-way 'ring' passage, there is no problem. But for a through passage, say to visit Liverpool for a few days, returning within 28 days, enforcement staff are charging boaters a £40 supplementary licence fee for the return journey. Hire-craft and shared ownership boats are vulnerable too, as who knows what route the previous crew took?

CRT had recently extended the agreement to allow additional time for Bridgewater licensed boats to visit Liverpool, and so it is particularly disappointing that there seems to be no 'reciprocation' from BCC. So if you are cruising the Bridgewater, look out! We will investigate and see what is behind this change.