



## MANCHESTER CRUISING ASSOCIATION

Narrow Dog to India River  
Terry and Monica Darlington  
8 January 2009

To be a sailor you need to be – at least in a fairly restricted sense – bonkers. . Why otherwise would you spend good money to be thrown around on malign liquid and in turn be bored, uncomfortable and terrified? For offshore sailors this remains a mystery; the only key to it, adventure. And if sea sailors view canal cruisers as a different breed it's perhaps because they can't see where the adventure comes in: the waves are ripples, refuge is anyway just feet away and there's always a pub across the tow path.

But if you thought there weren't any bonkers ones, you haven't met the Darlings. They have made two epic journeys in their narrow boat *Phyllis May*: the first to Carcassonne in the south of France and the second to the USA. They were accompanied on both trips by their whippet Jim (Narrow Dog) who looked as if he thought they were bonkers too. To the Ds he is, according to their website, “cowardly, thieving, and disrespectful”. To me he seemed aloof and disdainful as befits his view of them.

On the first voyage *Phyllis May* travelled from her home port at Stone, Staffs to London and then, after waiting for some settled weather, down the Thames to Ramsgate. The last part of this passage was in darkness but they were thrilled by the phosphorescence which Terry told us was due to micro-orgasms. This news was received respectfully by MCA members, always willing to learn of the goings-on of sea creatures, particularly erotic bioluminescent behaviour. The flushed cheeks in the audience quickly returned to their normal winter pallor as they realised it was probably just a slip of the tongue – and an outstanding one at that. Minds anyway moved on when the Ds set out across the Channel the following day. A potentially risky venture, the sea was exceptionally calm and the only hazards were the Goodwin Sands and the wakes of ferries (green water over the coachroof) as they approached Calais. Then down through the canals with an enchanting tour of Paris, through the quiet Burgundy Canal, down the Rhone with the usual scary tales of intimidatingly large barges, to Sète, across the Etang de Thau and thus to Carcassonne.

The book describing the voyage (“Narrow Dog to Carcassonne”) did well and they were soon off again, this time to the USA. They had *Phyllis May* shipped to Portsmouth, VA and then took her down the Intracoastal Waterway. After the Great Dismal Swamp Canal, their major surprise was that much of the route was not quite like say the Leeds-Liverpool Canal: much of it was through vast estuaries and sounds and rather exposed. They needed charts, a GPS and proper VHF. They also needed two Sea Captains to help them but they did make it to the east coast of Florida. It was then just a matter of nipping across the alligator-infested 30-mile wide Lake Okeechobee in the fog and down the Caloosahatchee River to Fort Myers and the Gulf of Mexico. 1100 miles in all. Read about it in “Narrow Dog to Indian River”, Terry's second book.

What Jim ( or to give him his full name “Brynula Great Expectations”) made of it all we can only speculate, informed by pictures of him looking variously haughty, lithe, alert, bored, terrified and once even rather narrow. All of them however consistent with him thinking them gloriously bonkers. He's probably already worried about his involvement in their next project: a novel from Terry set around Loch Ness with flavours of Biggles, Buchan and Ryder Haggard. Oh, a dog's life.

GM