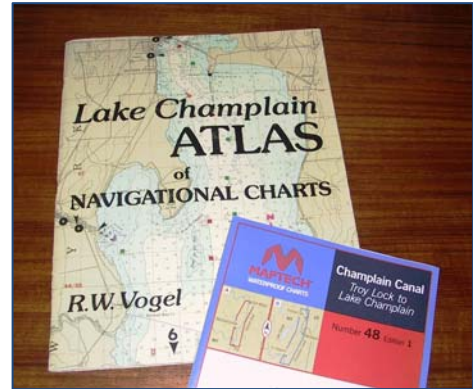




Whitehall, NY. Although we'd been traveling what seemed like a river for most of the morning, it was time to officially leave Lake Champlain. We did this with a mixture of sadness and excitement, tempered with just a touch of sheer terror. But as a good friend once told us: "a little terror is good for you" ..., so on we went.

Time to set aside the familiar Vogel chart book, and move on to Maptech Chart #48. We would continue to refer to our dog-eared copy of McKibben's *Cruising Guide to Lake Champlain* all the way to New York City, supplemented by Dozier's *Waterway Guide*. Our primary navigation tool at the helm is a Raymarine C70 Chartplotter, newly installed this season, which has been working flawlessly and will become increasingly important to us as the trip goes on.



The Lake Champlain lake level ("at the King Street Ferry Dock") was 97.8 feet on the morning we left, the Hudson River is at sea level, and there is a ridge of mountains in between. The Champlain Canal connects these two bodies of water with a series of locks (think of a lock as an elevator for a boat).

We've heard many stories of what can go wrong in a lock, and had been advised that a third person on board would be a wise idea. Pam's brother Ted is an avid and capable sailor, so we invited him to come along with us to help protect the boat from harm and to share a part of the adventure with us. Ted was waiting for us on the dock at Lock 12 Marina in Whitehall (thanks for the great photos, Ted!), and after a quick stop to get him on board it was on to Lock 12. (We'd been discussing the possibility of a lunch stop for burgers, fries and a beer at Whitehall... but since the restaurant didn't open til 4PM, that last ditch effort at procrastination failed!)

Entering that first lock was a bit ominous, and watching the doors swing closed behind us even more so. Lock 12 southbound is an "up" lock, and we were immediately confronted by 16 feet of slimy lock wall. Nasty. Made us wish we had remembered to dig out the rubber gloves we'd been told we would need. We had rigged numerous fenders in advance, as well as one continuous spring line along each side of the boat from bow to stern, with a working loop mid-ships to secure the boat to the wall. One person handled the line, the second fended the bow with a boat hook, the third stayed at the helm with a second boat hook to fend off the stern. This system worked great, and the spring line did most of the work to keep things under control. The valves opened, the water rushed in and whoosh – we had climbed 15½ feet! One lock down, eleven to go. "Wow, that wasn't so bad... but let's find those gloves before we reach the next lock!"



We passed through the next two “up” locks without incident. We had feared that the canal would be a long straight monotonous ditch... but it really turned out to be fascinating. The day had turned hot & sunny, for a change, but the muddy brown color of the canal water quickly dispelled any thoughts of a dip over the side to cool off.



The fourth lock was Lock 8 (Lock 10 was eliminated from the system years ago), and this presented a new challenge: our first “down” lock. We quickly settled into a new routine where the helmsperson used the engine to balance the boat against the current, and the other two wielded boat hooks fore and aft to fend off the wall. In place of our continuous spring line, we hung onto lines that were mounted and hanging from the lock wall. The gloves came in real handy here! The doors closed, the water rushed out and down we went, 11 feet in a matter of minutes.

The Champlain Canal is maintained and operated by the state of New York, and many of the locks are surrounded by park-like grounds. It was easy to get our four legged crew-members ashore to stretch their legs as needed. The lock-tenders were an incredibly friendly and helpful bunch, giving us instructions as needed, answering our many questions, and calling ahead to let the next lock know when to expect us. Most locks were set waiting for us to enter as we arrived.



Since we started our canal passage at midday, we knew we would be spending the night somewhere along the way. We called it a day after passing through four locks, and tied up for the night at a floating dock just north of Lock 7.

On the recommendation of one of the lock-tenders, we took a short walk through “historic Fort Edward” to the Anvil Inn, a cozy local restaurant in a converted blacksmith shop. Steak dinners took the place of the burgers and fries we’d been thinking about earlier.



The next morning began with quite a surprise on the other side of Lock 7. This is where the dug section of the canal joins the upper reaches of the Hudson River, and the transition was quite remarkable. As soon as we exited the lock, the water turned from muddy brown to deep blue, and the canal route changed abruptly from straight & narrow to a winding passage that followed the natural contours of the river, with many houses and several small towns along the banks.



One after another, we steadily worked our way through the locks and down to sea level, somehow leaving the serious storm clouds just behind us. Two of the locks dropped almost 20 feet in height and it was amazing how fast this happened; we could literally feel the boat moving downward, very much like an elevator. We made a short stop in “historic Schuylerville” to service the boat and find lunch at a great little diner – burgers, no beer. (For anyone contemplating this trip with an overnight in the canal, Schuyl Yacht Basin would make an ideal place to stop over – clean and very friendly.)

More quickly than we could have imagined, Lock 1 and the Champlain Canal was behind us...

We settled the boat on the wall at Waterford, NY for the night – which is where we will pick up the story next.

To be continued...

The crew of s/v Charis: Pam & Bruce... & Ted, and Shadow & Shelby

