

*An Insight into life on Board....
the Shannon Princess II, Cruising in Ireland on the Shannon River
and Loughs Derg and Ree*



We gathered on deck for pre dinner cocktails in the warm evening sunshine. *How we talked.* Well! It had been quite a day, and all aboard the **Shannon Princess II** had an adventure or story to contribute to our barging log. All old friends, we are a charter party of 10 'bargees' –a mix of first timers and old hands. We are onboard the elegant Irish Hotel barge – Shannon Princess II. And how thrilled the ladies were to find modern baths and crisp spacious interiors!

Each morning onboard our skipper greets us with the days itinerary and invites us to breakfast with slow food for the soul! Light and fresh or as indulgent and decadent as a guest may wish (or indeed as a man's wife may allow). Showcasing Irish Organic & Artisan foods all prepared and served by Olivia our chef on pretty local porcelain's and potteries.

Our **typical midsummer breakfast** consisted of **bowls of fresh berries – Raspberries, loganberries, boysenberries, strawberries, blueberries and cherries all from the walled kitchen gardens of Portumna Castle. Platters of Farmhouse cheese – a softly oozing Carrigburn, a nutty Carrigaline or a salty Cashel Blue. Charchutereries of spiced local sausages and cured meats, bought in country markets. Smoked fishes from Lough Derg and the river Shannon, smoked eel, trout & salmon served with a rich tomato relish. Poached free range eggs or low fat organic yogurts and cottage cheeses were a success, as were poached Damsons, warm compots of gooseberries, rhubarb or maybe elderberries – lovely when sprinkled with muesli or even wholesome Irish porridge splashed with Bailey's Irish Cream.**

Fresh from our galley oven came sweet buttermilk scones, coconut & bran muffins & sinless honey & oat biscuits (made with real honeycomb) eaten hot with homemade jams and jellies or salty Irish Butter. A firm favourite was Lemon Curd and cheese baked in buttery flaky pastry, washed down with leaf or infusion teas or a frothy cappuccino.

But wait! – Soon its morning coffee & strawberry shortcake.

After Morning coffee while cruising up river in a flotilla of pretty little heritage sailing dinghies, my gal pal Sally and I had treated ourselves to a cookery lesson. The others joined our Guide Paddy on deck for a mid morning talk on Irish Poets and their women! Back in the Galley we chatted and busied ourselves with ingredients as Olivia skilfully prepared lunch for us. We smoked Shannon Pike with Jasmine tea and herbs. Sally's husband Jack had caught the pike that very morning, or so Jack claims, we think the Gilly may have donated the Pike, to avoid Jack loosing face in front of us harsh critics!

We lunched on our smoked pike with rockets leaves and salsa verde, confit rabbit legs with bean and sour tomato cassoulet, mussel & artichoke risotto, tartlets of nanny goats cheese and honeyed onions, salads of pea and lettuce hearts, basil and aubergine, sweet chillies and roast peppers, followed by farmhouse cheeses, and summer pudding with clotted cream.

The men competed with the female crew as we entered Meelick Waters, busying themselves with ropes and warps to lock through the barge and tie up quayside.

The Dillons, - Clinton and his pretty new wife Penny spent the afternoon horse riding and some how ended having afternoon tea with a retired Parish Priest and a Master of fox hounds and had arrived back to the Barge with Wild Orchids, Honey Comb... and a horse! Clinton had treated his new wife to an "Irish Draught" – not as it sounds, a pint of Irish Stout but a blood horse bred in Ireland and used around the world as a show horse. The Colt now renamed River Shannon was to be Air freighted to the US!

The Snyders, Art and Jeanie, a darling couple from Florida, had been to the Arts festival up in the village, and had spent the afternoon looking at various art installations and had fallen in love with a tiny Templers Chapel riverside. At a sand-sculpturing exhibition in the village the Snyders had met an Irish couple with a traditional "Guinness Canal Barge" berthed here in the marina. They'd visited with the couple and Art a keen Engine buff spent a couple of happy hours investigating the 1920's engine room with its original single cylinder Bollinger engine. Jeanie claims she saw the Couples resident Ships Ghost but Art put it down to too much *Connemara Wine* or "Moonshine" she had enjoyed while visiting!

Molly and Lee from Maryland had spent a few relaxed hours visiting the Shannon side Portumna Castle with its walled Organic Victorian Gardens with Lorna, one of Shannon Princess three Stewardess. At the Garden they had gathered bunches of fragrant Sweet Peas in pinks, whites. Ivory and purple, blood red heritage Roses and bunches of flowerings herbs, nasturtiums, tansy, sky-blue borage, verbenas and bur-nette. Velvet furred berries, courgettes and gourds. Molly had much enjoyed haggling at the farmers market. And while walking back to the barge had insisted on helping the bridge keeper collect his tolls! Cruisers and Yachts wait along the bank for the bridge to open and let them through. No sailor dared refuse Molly and a few impressed captains even tipped! Molly and Lee had seen some lovely old traditional barges, and while investigating met new friends and became honorary members of a waterway cruising club. The club were on route to a rally near Banagher, where we cruise to tonight. We are all invited to celebrate the eve of Summer Solstice with fireworks and tradition music Riverside tonight.

Jill our Stewardess refreshes our drinks and passes around hot nibbles from the Galley. Our log is put aside till tomorrow as the Shannon Princess' engines start up. Slipping out from our mooring we wave and call farewell to our new friends and head up the lazy river for a sunset dinner cruise to a new village and more adventures.

But wait! Where was my husband? – Had we left him behind, where & when had I seen him last? Was it really one hour ago in the old church craft shop talking to the potter. I jumped to my feet and scanned the Quayside. A toot toot from the Shannon Princess horn brought my attention to the wheelhouse – "Cheers" – the Skipper had a new mate! Husband found!

