

GEMINI DUO TRIP TO TURKEY, 2008

PART 2 – The River Main and the Main-Donau Canal

16 June – 1 July 2008

After the fast moving Rhine, with between 3 and 6 knots of adverse current, it was a relief to turn off at Mainz into the gentle River Main with less than one knot of opposing flow. Just because there is little current does not mean that we travelled any further in a day, because of the many locks. There are 34 locks on the 384 km River Main all of which are 300m long by 12m wide and vary in height from 3m to 8m, none with any rising bollards. Small craft were not taken into consideration in the design of these locks which were built to service commercial traffic – huge barges – so the inset bollards are up to 30m apart. We devised a system of using one bollard for centre, fore and aft ropes moving them up the lock wall in sequence as the boat rose. Rather tiring when doing 6 in some days!

Our first stop was at Frankfurt-am-Main where we spent two nights in the central Westhafen marina, surrounded by luxury apartments with their own moorings. We had our first encounter with officialdom when two very pleasant River Police Officers moored their speedboat alongside to inspect our papers and advise us on local restaurants!

Frankfurt is the very cosmopolitan financial capital of Germany with skyscrapers towering above the old city centre. Many central streets are pedestrianised with cafes spilling out onto the pavements. We stopped for lunch in one of these establishments, to find it was an Indian-Italian restaurant where we enjoyed Pinot Grigio and pappadums followed by tandoori chicken pizza and salad. Bizarre but delicious.

Our next stop was in the marina at Asschaffenburg which is in a protected side water in a long bend in the river. The pretty town is overlooked by Schloss Johannesburg, one of the most magnificent castles we have seen in Germany.

We were grateful to find our next night's mooring in a tiny inlet at Stadtprozelten where we took up the whole guest pontoon. It was after 6pm when we arrived as we were too large to get into any of the earlier marinas we tried that afternoon. We had even considered anchoring in a gravel pit but ran aground in the entrance, so changed our minds about venturing into any more. Luckily maximum engine power in reverse pulled us off but bunged up our speed log which Roger had to free up the following morning.

Another long day saw us arrive at a small marina at Lohr where we were charged twice as much as usual as we took up all their available space along the entrance wall.

The Main is a delightful river, very similar in characteristics to the River Marne in north-east France, with forests and vineyards. However the main challenges are finding moorings for boats of our size, getting white diesel, and waiting for long periods outside locks. Most marinas are just for small sports boats up to 9 metres long. Bunker boats only sell red diesel for commercials, and the lock keepers won't empty a 300m long lock just for a pleasure boat which hasn't had to pay any fees.

We were advised that the marina at Eibelstadt is one of the few places to buy white diesel so we phoned and reserved a mooring for a couple of nights. Although the pontoon was rather short for our boat and it was very bouncy near the entrance way, it was a delightful spot in a pretty village on the wine route. It was a short taxi ride to Würzburg, a picturesque Bavarian town with the magnificent 18th century Residenz built for Prince-Bishop Schonborn, which is one of the most flamboyant baroque palaces in Germany. We walked across the Altebrücke over the Main where the day before we had been prevented from entering the lock for over an hour while thousands of yellow plastic ducks, patrolled by six river police boats, floated slowing down stream – part of the national midsummer day festivals.

Our next night was spent at a tiny marina in the weir stream above Wipfeld lock, a lovely quiet place with an honesty box in which to place the mooring fee. We took up both guest pontoons and had only just enough water under our hull to float but we were grateful for it as it had taken us until 7pm taht night to find somewhere suitable.

Our final night on the Main was spent on a free mooring. Again we had difficulty finding anywhere to stop and had been refused permission to tie up at Eltman yacht hafen as we were too heavy for their pontoon. Luckily, opposite was an old concrete landing stage where our boat fitted nicely, and a couple of locals came to chat to us.

The following day we entered the Main-Donau canal and almost immediately found a tranquil mooring in the mouth of the Regnitz river that runs through Bamberg. This historic town was unscathed by WWII and is now a World Heritage Site. A half hour stroll up the little river towpath took us past some beautiful old fishermen's cottages and into the centre of Bamberg with its magnificent cathedral, cobbled narrow streets, ancient timber-framed houses and stone bridges.

After two peaceful nights in Bamberg we continued up the canal which was conceived as long ago as the 8th century by Charlemagne to link the Rhine and the Donau (Danube). A canal was in operation by 1850 with horse-drawn barges. The present super canal was finally opened in 1992, linking the North Sea to the Black Sea, to carry barges up to 3300 tons. We entered the first of a series of 16 locks over the canal's 174km length. While these locks are only 190m long, they are very deep with 3 of them up to 25m high. According to our reference book, locks 8 to 16 have floating bollards, so we were rather taken aback when at lock No 8 with its 19.5m rise, the floating bollard system was out of commission and there were no fixed bollards on the usual left hand side either! As the lock had already started to fill we had to hastily move across to the other side to grab a fixed bollard, and then move our ropes steadily upwards. Nothing to panic about!

Boats are not allowed to stop along the banks of the canal, nor drop anchor, so our journey planning was governed by finding places to spend the night. The second night we stopped at Forchheim sports boat marina which was far too small, but luckily there was a disused passenger boat landing stage nearby where we moored up for the night. It was a bit bouncy but quiet.

It was wonderful to find a marina with large berthing for visitors on the outskirts of Nürnberg where the members were very helpful and there was again an honesty box for the mooring fee. The following day we went to visit Nürnberg, faithfully rebuilt after it was flattened in the war, and returned to find the marina deserted as everyone was watching the European football final. When Germany had won their previous

matches we knew by the cheering, hooting, whistles, etc into the small hours, so we guessed they had lost to Spain as there was total silence all round.

Our last night on the canal was spent at a delightful small marina at Berching near the summit of the canal at 406m above sea level. Three members rushed onto the pontoon to assist us in tying up and gave us lots of local information. This part of Bavaria is very picturesque with wooded hills and open landscapes, all the more apparent when the canal is often higher than the surrounding countryside.

At the last lock on the Canal we were congratulating ourselves on our achievement in reaching the Danube and looking forward to cracking a celebratory bottle of champagne that evening. The Kelheim lock gates opened but we were going nowhere as there was total silence from our engine. It was 6.30pm and we were stuck at the bottom of the 12m high lock, explaining on the VHF radio our predicament in fractured German to the very perturbed lock keeper. We, and he, envisaged us bunging up the whole lock system until we could be towed out. We ran round looking for warning lights, trip switches or other clues for engine failure. Finally, Roger noticed minute print in one of the dials on the instrument panel telling him that the boat was in gear. It was hard to tell who was more relieved when we finally motored out of the lock!

While some of the friendly locals we have met along the way have spoken English, few lock keepers do, so our German has been improving daily. Despite language constraints we have coped well and are really enjoying our slow meander through Germany. We have been struck by the displays of wild flowers, the many amazing castles and the numerous ornate churches in every town and village, many with distinctive onion domes.

Gemini Duo is very comfortable, and several people have admired her and enquired about our travels. So far, so good.

Since leaving the Rhine our fuel consumption has dropped dramatically leaving us more to spend on wine and wurst! And, even better, it's all downhill now to the Black Sea as we have the current of the Danube flowing with us.

One month after leaving home and 1025km later, we entered the Danube River. Only another 2410km to the Black Sea – more travel news to follow ...

Auf wiedersehen

Diane and Roger



GEMINI
DUO
LONDON