

GEMINI DUO TRIP TO TURKEY, 2008

PART 3 – The River Danube, Kelheim to Vienna

1 to 14 July 2008

The Danube is broken up into 3 sections, Upper, Middle and Lower. We have completed the first 500km from Kelheim in Germany to Vienna in Austria.

We found the river very civilised being fully buoyed with every kilometre marked along the bank and numerous navigation signs and warnings. What was new to us was the blessing of having a 2 to 5 knot current flowing with us which has done wonders for our engine's fuel consumption. We were able to cruise at an average of 20 km per hour and the only delays were the locks.

There might not be many locks on the Upper Danube – 16 in 600 km – but they make up for it in size. The barges are huge here being not only very long but super wide too, and the locks, which come in pairs, are up to 264m long by 24m wide with falls of between 10 and 20m. Fortunately the deeper ones have floating bollards so once tied on you can relax while the boat descends effortlessly.

Private boats that turn up at locks are made to wait until a commercial ship comes along. The best way to make speedy progress is to follow a moderate sized barge which ensures, in most cases, that the lock gates are prepared for an immediate entry. On some occasions we have followed one barge for a whole day, becoming quite friendly with the captain and crew in the process.

Having spent the first night on the Danube in an expensive marina at Kelheim, the next day we arrived at the historic small city of Regensburg where our mooring at the sports boat haven was back up the fast flowing weir stream through the centre of town. The tricky part was negotiating the 12th century Stone Bridge. The current was very strong against us and we opted for the central arch which although narrower than the others looked like it had the deepest water. We needed full power to get under the bridge and we moored at a very nice pontoon alongside a pleasant park with great views of the old city.

Regensburg, originally the Roman's frontier on the Danube, is the largest city in Germany to be unscathed by WWII and is utterly charming. After two pleasant days of seeing the ancient sights and being visited by the boat club president (in his Jaguar XJ8) we departed with his advice of taking the wider arch on the left. We shot under the bridge into a large whirlpool and crunched the boat into the rocky river bottom and came to a dead stop at a slanting angle! After much swearing about the president's advice we realised that the front of the boat was still afloat. A man in a rubber dinghy with a small outboard motor helped to pull us off the rocks and we proceeded on our way with great relief that there seemed to be no damage to the rudder or propeller. We shall see what it has done to the hull when we lift *Gemini Duo* out of the water at the end of the year!

Finding nowhere to moor up that evening we dropped anchor behind an island where there seemed to be enough depth. Inching in slowly the depth went from 4 metres to nothing in 20 seconds and we ran aground again! Sand this time, so full power astern remedied the situation and the anchor held very satisfactorily until the morning.

We had hoped to stop in Passau, another historic town, but the quays were jam packed with huge passenger boats and there was nowhere for us to tie-up. Instead we continued on, crossing from Germany into Austria where the scenery became very alpine with hills covered in pine trees and little “Heidi” houses everywhere. The Austrians love the outdoors, especially walking, canoeing and cycling. There is a dedicated cycle path along the Danube with small ferries to transport cyclists and pedestrians from one side to the other.

We were also unable to stop in Linz having tried two sports boat havens that were both full and were pleased to find a quiet marina further down the river that was virtually empty. No locals or visitors meant we had a choice of pontoons and we never did find out why it was almost deserted.

One morning we woke to the sound of running water coming from the engine compartment of our boat! Very worrying! The needle on the water tank gauge was dropping fast. Roger quickly tracked down the source – after pulling out the washing machine, which is not easy in a narrow galley, he managed to turn off the faulty supply tap. We spent the next hour baling out nearly 100 litres of water under the engine. No bilge pump here as this area should not get wet!

Emmersdorf was the first marina we stayed in Austria that was near a town or even any shops. The harbour master called a taxi for us to cross the river to the pretty old town of Melk where we visited the hill-top golden abbey, Stift Melk, home to monks since the 11th century. The picture-postcard town has much to offer, including a supermarket where we were able to stock up on supplies for the first time in a week.

The next day on our way to Vienna we passed a square-rigged hand-built wooden sailing boat, some 6m long by 1.5m wide, with a “hen coop” for accommodation sporting the message on its sail “Regensburg to Odessa”, nearly 4000km. This seemed a rather ambitious project for a boat that only has one small sail and a 5hp outboard motor. The three Ukrainians were fine going along with the wind behind their sail but stopping proved to be a big problem as we saw when they caught up with us at the next lock. Without Roger catching their rope and quickly putting a turn round a bollard they could have careered into the closed lock gates.

In Vienna Marina we berthed alongside one of the four barges in the Dutch Barge Association trip down the Danube. We had met the members in London last year so it was nice to meet up with some of them again. We also were reunited with a Dutch couple in their Linssen Sturdy who we had met in two previous marinas. Vienna turned out to be a very social stop indeed including dinner at a local restaurant where an Austrian wedding party was being entertained by a Spanish band and a Turkish belly dancer!

There is much to see and do in Vienna with striking architecture round every corner. Apart from visiting the magnificent Hofburg imperial palace, the Stephansdom Cathedral and other historic places, our main objective was to arrange to have the engine oil and filters changed. The marina service centre was very efficient, although somewhat more expensive than anticipated – their engine oil turned out to be 58€ for a 4 litre can and we needed five of them. Liquid gold! It was in Vienna where our Vodafone broadband plug-in packed up and an expensive local IT expert could not get it going. It was only when phoning Vodafone to arrange for a replacement to be sent to us in Budapest, we discovered we had been disconnected for running up a

£70 bill! They said they had sent an email which we couldn't access as they had cut us off! Catch 22! We are back online again but unimpressed with Vodafone UK.

After 5 enjoyable days in Vienna we filled up with diesel before we departed the marina – the cheapest fuel we had come across on the trip, as the Austrian tax is lower. Whereas going up the Rhine we were using nearly 3 litres for every kilometre travelled, now going down river are using only 1 litre for nearly 2 km travelled. A 600% improvement in fuel consumption, and in our bank balance!

Germany and Austria have been delightful to cruise through with everyone being very helpful and friendly. The scenery has been varied, and spectacular in parts, with vast forests and lots of wild flowers. There are thousands of castles, cathedrals and churches, with every village and town have several places of worship. We are now entering Eastern Europe – next stop Slovakia. More to follow ...

Auf wiedersehen

Roger and Diane

The logo for Gemini Duo London features the word "GEMINI" in a large, bold, blue serif font. Two gold stars are positioned above the letters "I" and "N". Below "GEMINI" is the word "DUO" in a similar bold, blue serif font. At the bottom, the word "LONDON" is written in a smaller, bold, blue sans-serif font.

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