

Report of February trip to North Frodingham

In December 2009 we bought a new narrowboat, new to us at least though it had been for sale in the beck for quite some time, and named it 'Ardencaple' After a quick run to Hempholme lock and back on December 12th, I was abroad for a while and itching to go for a run on my return! So we decided to have a weekend on the Driffield navigation, to make sure all is working before heading further afield in the summer.



Ardencaple and 'flotilla' at the shipyard

Friday

I spent most of Friday assembling all the necessary equipment, fuelling the boat, loading fresh water etc, and moving to the boatyard side of the beck to get the boat on the mains for a while to charge the batteries. Our original plan was to head down to Ennerdale Link bridge and have a pizza for tea, as there wouldn't be much light left after the kids finished school. However, watching the river during the day it was becoming obvious that the levels would not drop enough to get under the bridge on Saturday morning and I'd have to ask Steve for a bridge lift.

We had decided to take a small boat with us as well as Ardencaple's tender, and I was just leaving the slipway at Weel with this when the 'Arctic Fox' came down the river towing 'Summerjem' to the beck for lifting out and repairs (failed outdrive leg) As they had booked a bridge lift to go straight back up, a quick change of plan resulted in my taking Ardencaple out of the beck and north through Weel bridge with the 'Arctic Fox' at 1500 to wait at the shipyard for the rest of the crew. We left Beverley quite late and made it as far as Aike before it got too dark to continue. It was very cold on the run up to Aike, and snowed intermittently – I was very glad to stop, tie up and move into the warm for a hot sausage casserole! Ardencaple has a diesel fired boiler which runs the central heating system, this takes about an hour to warm the boat up then keeps the boat nicely warm even on minimum setting with the temperature outside just above zero. We had a very pleasant and quiet evening playing board games and listening to music, we don't have a TV onboard yet. At this point my phone died, and the charger was one of the things I did not remember to bring, so there are not many pictures of the weekend I'm afraid.



Saturday

After a very lazy start, more than partly due to a reluctance to get up and start the heating, we continued on to Hempholme where we had lunch after locking through. The lock has deteriorated somewhat since I last went through, the bottom gates do not close well and leak a lot of water – I think that these may cause problems in the summer when the difference in water heights is greater. The gates do not seem to be well seated on the stonework and hang out from the top, maybe they'd drop into place if there was more water pressure on them. The difference in water height between the navigation and the river was only 6 inches at low water, more on this later.

After lunch we continued on, I took our tender ahead under the swing bridge to the landing stage to open the bridge while Terasa brought Ardencaple through, as it was quite I open the bridge early only to have a steady procession of cars arrive. In total I opened and closed the bridge 3 times before Ardencaple got there, for a total of 5 cars! It really wasn't a very nice day, so we cancelled our planned dinghy trip to Snakeholme lock and went straight to Frodingham wharf. Our kids spent some time rowing about in the dinghies and I had a walk into North Frodingham to Cherrys' store to get some engine oil as the generator was running low, but arrived too late - they'd just closed, otherwise we stayed onboard with books and board games and the radio.

Sunday

Sunday was an early start as Steve wanted to get us through Weel bridge by 1300, we left Frodingham wharf at 0715 to arrive at Bethels bridge at 0800 and then through Hempholme lock by 0915.

I took the dinghy over the weir instead of through the lock, with a height difference of just 9cm I couldn't resist! I also tried to row back up the weir, but the current was just too strong – I could get up to within about 4 feet of the blade then could make no further progress. But the blade was lowered so far that there was sufficient water to use the outboard motor, this happily pushed the boat over the weir. With the tides not being particularly high, if there is still as much water in the river at the next springs there must be nearly a level at Hempholme. The white painted mooring posts on the entrance to the lock from the river were awash with about 2" water over the stonework.



We arrived back at Beverley Shipyard at 1200, to find that Steve had sent a text message changing the bridge time to 1415, so we tied the boat up and went home for an hour, when I returned to take the boat back to the beck. More drama here, as there was something stuck in the lock gates and I couldn't get them to close. With the small difference in heights and the beck spilling over into the lock, enough water was coming in to get the lock full and the boat into the beck, but the lock was empty again by the time I'd tied up. I went back to the gates and a small block of wood bobbed up when I reopened that outer gates, that seems to have been the problem as they then closed properly. I have to assume that lack of use over the winter is to blame for all the locking problems!