

HBA conquers the Pill - a journey to Piltown in County Kilkenny - Aug 2011

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When the HBA's Three Sister fleet first considered navigating the Pill River to Piltown in celebration of Heritage Week and then received an invitation from Paddy Walsh to moor beside his paddock in Piltown, others said "it can't be done" but have never been up that river" and words to that effect.

But Paddy and the HBA knew that boats had indeed been up the river; fifty years ago, the Piltown Barge 4B plied her trade on the Pill and the Suir Rivers and documentation from the 1830s states 126 barges annually, delivered their wares to the Market House (now the police station) in Piltown. Unfortunately, 4B was not able to join us in the south, but four barges set out to conquer the Pill; heritage boats 68M and 72M both sixty feet long, built in the 1930s, Aqualegia 45 feet long and the 50 footer, Trust Me Scout. They made their way down from Carrick-On-Suir on Friday afternoon, Aug 26th, hung a left at the White House and proceeded up the Pill River on a rising tide.

On board cheering on the skippers and crews of this small flotilla were twenty guests from Piltown. The boats were greeted by well-wishers on bridges and on the banks as they determinedly pushed their way through. Bernie Tiernan, skipper of Trust Me Scout, who led the boats from the railway bridge into Piltown, said "preceded by Giles in his RIB we battled our way up this lovely tidal river through heavy foliage, hanging trees and many twists and turns and arrived to a welcoming startled village. One local asked were we craned in!" There was a real feeling of accomplishment when all four barges were safely moored and the crews mingled with the residents of Piltown.

Our two architects on board with other members of the HBA were delighted to spend time over the weekend exploring some of the built heritage in the immediate vicinity. The stone Bridge, the old Creamery buildings formerly a Mill, the original Winding Hole for the old barges, the stone Quay wall, all now hidden beneath overgrowth and silt, but still within sight of the beautifully kept old Market House and gardens and Anthonys, the old Bianconi Inn.

The crews enjoyed exchanging stories with the locals, discussing the HBA's display on the history of the Association and boats and attending the 185th Iverk Agricultural Show. By Sunday all the barges had succeeded in turning around, a major feat as silt in the winding hole now forms a small island.

The HBA will be departing early next Saturday morning and rumour has it they will then endeavour to navigate the Clodiagh River, up to an old quay wall below Portlaw. Â© EOL

Photos by Giles Byford, Paul Martin, Bernie Tiernan and others

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