

The Saffer I met

30 January 2012

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The first encounters were short affairs beginning with a shout from the canal bank "how far are you going today? The morning after, he appeared on the bank near Fureys as we struggled to haul the beast backwards for a film re-take. This South African living in Enfield was serious about what had me here, which was Rambler and the Royal Canal.

We quickly swapped details and definitely felt more time was needed to discuss our interest, before I gladly handed AJ Vosse my rope and headed back to town. AJ or Vossie had been in Ireland for a number of years, was at that time unemployed and was spending time walking his grandchild along the Royal.

What grabbed my interest was the fact he was writing about, and photographing this pastime in a blog and had used IWA's on-line maps to do his travelling. The real stunner was that he was following "Is feider" which was my attempt at the same business. I phoned before the weekend and arranged to meet him with copies of my early pictures of the story and he in turn mailed me Rambler pictures that I couldn't be around for.

Friday afternoon in Enfield we met for the hand-over and although he knew I was eager to catch the film crew, I knew a chat would be in order. We spoke about families, work (or lack of) and of course the Rambler. From memory that was his last week with the boat in his area but his Summer was about to explode. An early comment he made there are no canals where I come from has stuck with me but Vossie was to link in with Mick Farrell and the voyage of 31B and even spent a day or two on board.

We kept in touch mainly on the internet but in the background was his walk of the Royal canal and now the bright idea of a walking Green and Silver. At the time 4E was in the Abbeyshrule area (aug./sept.) Vossie's walk had progressed to beyond Mullingar and Autumn was setting in. An invite to overnight on 4E in Abbeyshrule was accepted and Vossie was dropped at Ballinea on a windswept Saturday morning.

The tough 21Km. walk was followed by a great evening and return to Dublin the following day. Vossie was very informative on his country and customs and apart from the odd word or saying he thought me a lot about South Africa. Nearly twenty years ago I be-friended an Australian who lived in Killaloe for a few years who had told me more about that country than I would read in a lifetime. Vossie was the same and was enjoying the adventure.

The next couple of months Vossie was with 4E as we travelled the Royal to Leixlip and of course Rambler's Return and the Louisa Bridge work party, all the time contributing his splendid photographs and of course completing his walking canal journey. The Effin Bridge event had him in town to partake but life was about to change drastically. Vossie was re-entering the work force.

I have for years had a saying about a 5am list which contains the names of people I know would help at that un-Godly hour. Vossie would be on that list. Early on I asked his feelings on Irish people and he felt they were great company in pubs only. I hope that the boating community have changed that impression.

When Mick Farrell started a thread in poetry of boating forum highlights of last Summer with links to people's stories, Vossie was genuinely touched and responded.

The summer of 2011 was filled with highlights for me and leaving Vossie with the bow rope of Rambler a wise decision.

The pictures below are a very small taste of his work,

Go to Vossie's site and look around. His photographs of our natural, built and industrial heritage are stunning and his musings on everything and anything very entertaining.

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Joe Treacy 2012 {gallery}The_Saffer_I_met{/gallery}

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