

# Canal Thoughts

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Elephants and why they would be perfect for the canals:

By Katie Farrell aged 17&3/4

The initial idea came up some time in 2010 when my boat was sinking "as usual" and we were in Robertstown. For some reason we had about a million Waterways Ireland suggestion sheets laying around the boat, the majority of which had been used as score sheets for "The Rose of Tralee" (a game far too complex for the general public to understand so I won't even try to explain) and only a few were still clean. Dad was sitting in the wheelhouse, drinking tea and smoking, and started muttering about how elephants and not horses would be the perfect animals to tow barges because there are all sorts of added things that they can do. And promptly a list of pros and cons were made.

The Pros (well the ones I can remember):

• Weed Control "instead of walking down the tow path the elephant would be able to walk in the canal, and their feet would compact the mud in the bottom, they would also squash any weeds into the canal bed and they would eat as much of the weed as they pleased.

• Energy Source "elephants poop quite a bit, the idea was we would collect their poo in special slings attached between the elephant and the boat and then it would be dried out on the canal bank and once dry would be used as fuel for stoves.

• They stop your boat from sinking "if your boat is anything like mine is, it occasionally (or slightly more than occasionally) decides to sink. We came to the conclusion that in such cases, the elephant would use its trunk to block the hole until such a time as one can dry dock ones boat. Alternatively you can get the elephant to sit on the front of the boat, thus raising the back, and the hole would hopefully be above the water line.

• Help getting under low bridges "can't get your wheelhouse under an especially low bridge? No problem! Just have the elephant sit/or lean on the back on the boat, lowering it in the water until such a point as you get under the bridge. No more needing twenty people standing on your back deck.

• Washing boats "is your boat in need of a cleaning? Too lazy to fish out the power washer? Just use your elephant to help you clean it. Using its trunk the elephant can spray water on the boat and help you wash it.

• Help with sunken boats "there are quite a few sunken boats along the canal, elephants can help with this. While one elephant (maybe two, depending on the size of the hole) plugs the hole, a separate group of elephants can be used to extract the water. Then, a third group of elephants would have devised some sort of crane system (powered by elephants) to lift the offending boat out of the canal and onto the defunct tow path where it would become a home for local cats.

• Help with locks "quite a few locks along the canal have stiff gates, an elephant would be well able to open or close a gate that a human can't. They would also be able to help with opening stiff racks (although I am unsure if they would be able to reach the furthest out ones.)

• Help cleaning prop "it happens to everyone, especially on the way into Dublin, something gets caught on your prop and then you have to spend ages trying to get it off. With an elephant the process would be much easier. As with when your barge is sinking, just have your elephant sit on the front of the boat and the prop would come right out of the water allowing you to remove the offending rubbish.

The cons:

• We couldn't honestly think of any. The only problem we could think of is what do we do with the elephant once it dies? And we came up with an elegant solution for that too, as I am about to outline.

What to do when your elephant dies:

After the fifty or so years of your elephant's life it will eventually die. And it was a big question, what do you do with it then? We came up with a couple of uses for it.

• The largest bones can be used to make fences, so the ribs, the leg bones, and the tusks (not technically bones, but whatever) would be removed from the skeleton, and made into fencing.

• The feet can be removed from the body, preserved and then used for making bollards for boats to tie to. Someone did obviously suggest we use them as umbrella stands, but there isn't that sort of demand for umbrella stands along the canal.

• The skin can be used to make canoes which are always pretty awesome. The skin can also be used as a temporary cover for your hull to stop you sinking until you get to dry dock.

So as you can see from my perfectly well written argument, elephants are the perfect animal for use along the canals. If you disagree I will get my elephant to sit on your head.