

SAILOR MEETS HOUSEBOAT

By Pete Smyth
Photographs by Joan Smyth

*Canada supplies both boat and canal
for a deep water man's
first venture into houseboating*



Photograph by Merwin Crowe

*Sun sparkling on the water, outdrives
bubbling under the counter, our Alcan
cruises happily down the Rideau River.*

*Lush scenery is everywhere on the Rideau.
This is the upper approach to the double
lock at Long Island.*

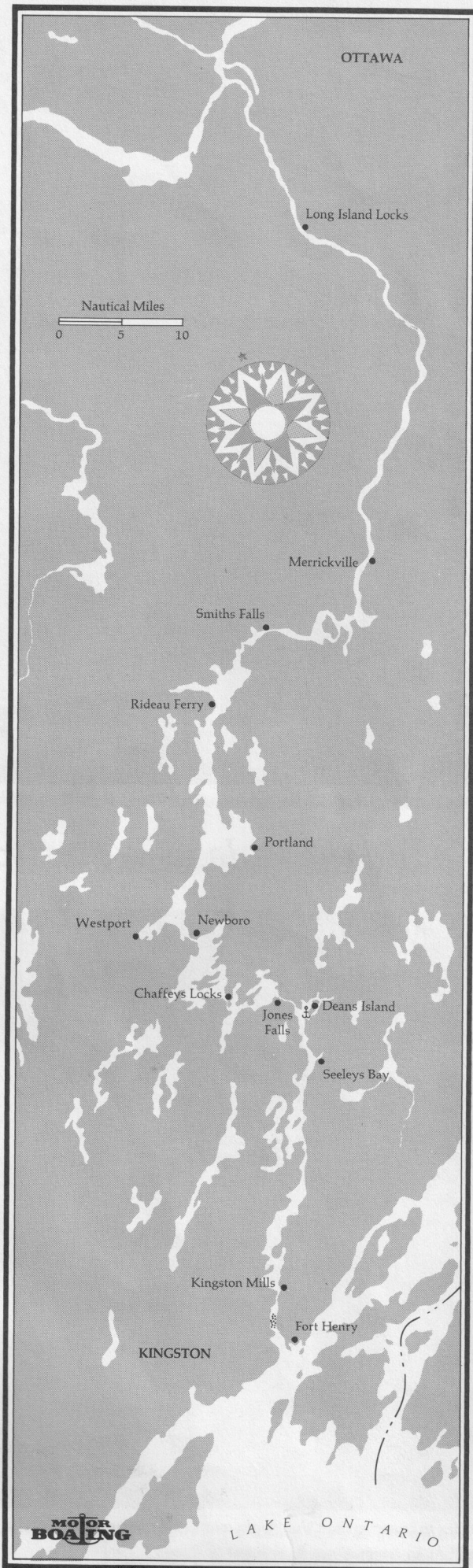
A SAILOR DOESN'T need a sailboat if he has a houseboat. With a twenty knot breeze a houseboat can make a good five knots downwind without the benefit of any engines at all. With the wind on the beam a houseboat, if she is going slowly, has more than a passing resemblance to a rectangular crab.

However, seamanship is a handmaiden of experience and so, on our cruise through Canada's Rideau Waterway in a chartered houseboat, we learned to cope, although in the early stages I was often reminded of the old flying school adage that "any landing you can walk away from is a good one." On any day that we had a lot of wind, our feeling was that if the metal itself wasn't dented, the maneuver (docking, entering a lock, etc.) was successful. Although our Mr. Chapman would shudder at some of the techniques we evolved, they did accomplish what they were supposed to accomplish. And that, after all, is the name of the boat handling game.

Actually, I'm making it sound a good deal worse than it was. By the time the cruise was over, there was only one set of conditions for which we had no good solution: the wind on the quarter, proceeding down a channel only slightly wider than the boat and, perhaps, having to stop at the end. The stern can be held upwind with the outdrives, but then the bow will tail off dead downwind like a flag. Downwind, in this instance, is across the channel and if the channel isn't wide enough? Well, you can always fend off, but that is so terribly unseamanlike.

In our own defense—and particularly in defense of the delightful Alcan 370 houseboat we were cruising aboard—we did fare considerably better than most of the other houseboats we met along the waterway, and we met plenty. The Rideau is a paradise for houseboats, and it would be hard to imagine a waterway better suited to our purposes. To wit: to find out about houseboats and houseboating in general, and, in particular, to find out about the Alcan 370.

The Alcan 370 is 36 ft. 7 in. long with a beam of 11 ft. 10 in. and a hull draft of 21 in. As the name Alcan implies, she is of aluminum with all the virtues which that material offers, mainly stiffness, ruggedness, and very light weight. The entire boat, with all the kids soaking wet, weighs a bare six tons. Light weight does tend to make a boat skittish, but it offers marvelous performance with relatively limited power. We had only a pair of 160 hp Volvo outdrives, yet we cruised easily at twenty knots or better. Say, with some validity, that speed isn't important to houseboating, but there are times when speed and/or an excess of power is very nice indeed. The speed will make short work of long, dull passages: the power will bail you out



of some otherwise difficult or impossible situations.

The 370 belongs to what can be called the second generation of houseboats. The first generation was composed mostly of mobile homes on hulls; the second has been designed as real boats with houseboat configurations—relatively low hulls with big houses. The Alcan hull, which has considerably more deadrise than many houseboats, is almost a cruiser hull in design. As a result she is, for her type, quite sea kindly. We did experience some fairly rough water—a two to three foot chop—and in this respect we had no complaints. Her rough water ride is not as soft as that of most cruisers, and she is certainly not in the same league as a deep-vee boat, but for the purpose, she is more than satisfactory.

Something that many people tend to forget is that there is nothing 'free' in boat design. Whatever quality you get on one hand, must be paid for at the sacrifice of another. Soft riding is a case in point. Softness can be obtained by deepening the vee of a hull, or softening the bilges, and so forth. Unfortunately, all of these devices reduce interior room—and they reduce static stability. The opposite is true, as well. Consider a flat barge: it has plenty of stability at rest and a maximum of interior space, but its performance in rough water would loosen your fillings if it didn't break her up. What is needed in a houseboat is a compromise and, in my opinion, the designers of the Alcan did an excellent job in designing a hull with the required, though antagonistic, qualities in optimum proportions.

Sure, a lot of hide-bound shellbacks will look at the Alcan (or any houseboat) and say that "you can't go to sea in that thing." That may be true, but neither can you comfortably cruise the Rideau in one of the half-tide rocks favored by the offshore cruising set. In fact, I'd rather go to sea in the Alcan than cruise the Rideau in a stuffy little cutter rigged for breaking seas off the Horn. Going to sea in a houseboat is not the best idea in the world, but it can be done, provided all the normal seagoing safety precautions are followed. A number of things make the Alcan more seaworthy than many houseboats. The first is her aforementioned substantial vee. Second would be her higher than normal bow and substantial bulwarks extending right around the boat. Third would be the pipe railings solidly welded on top of the bulwarks. And last would be the safety glass that is installed in all the windows and doors, which in turn are made of very heavy industrial channels of anodized aluminum. Alcan, of course, stands for Aluminum Company of Canada. In building the Alcan 370, they were able to draw on all their divisions for materials and technology. The windows and doors are made by the truck and railroad car people, and they make most houseboat windows look like they were made of Reynold's Wrap.

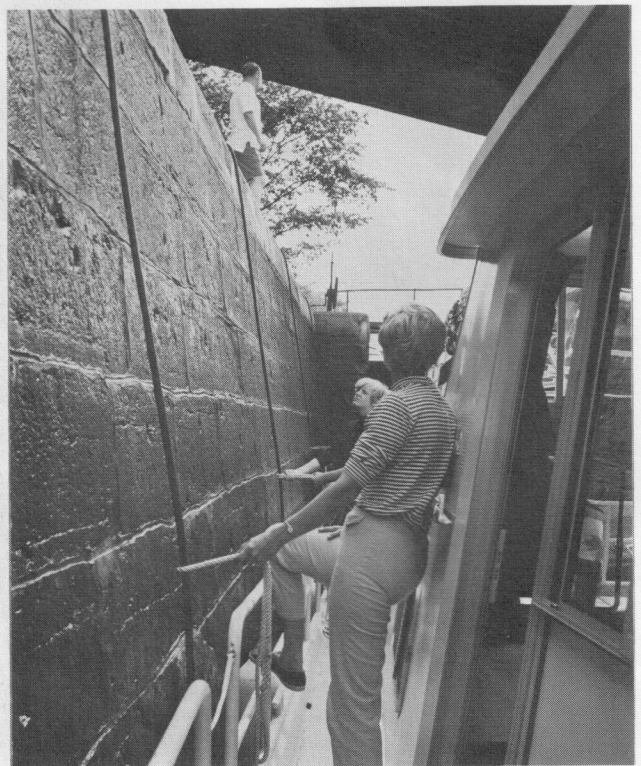
All this makes the Alcan 370 sound pretty good, and she is. But no boat is perfect. Further, the people who design them aren't perfect. They make mistakes, and the boys at Alcan did too. They made some important mistakes, some that are only annoying. Some were done by design, but others were by accident—those little bugs which no one ever seems to catch before a boat is built. One of these was the impossible-to-predict conflict between the convertible lounge forward and the windshield wiper control. Converting the double bed back into a lounge invariably resulted in turning on the windshield wiper. Very minor—even good for a couple of chuckles—and since cured by moving the control.

The major flaw done by design was, in my opinion, the very strange electrical system, or at least the shore current part of it. The designers felt that, since the boat had a 6.5 kw generator on board, the shore connections should be



The Rideau is houseboat country. Above, our Alcan creeps into the center lock at Jones Falls, followed by a rental boat from New York.

Locks and more locks—49 of them—stud the Rideau Waterway

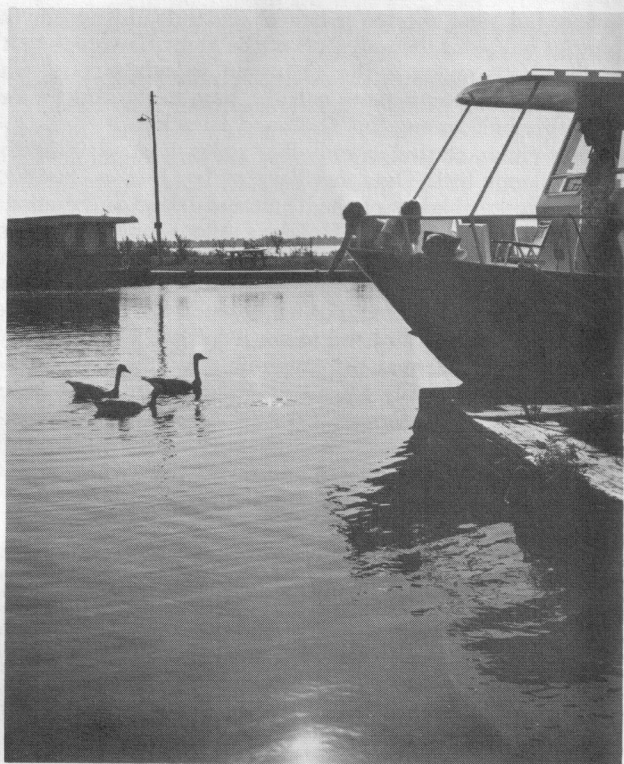


The Rideau ends in Ottawa with a giant staircase of eight locks. They are easier to traverse than they look: witness the casual line handling.



Typical of the waterway is this pastoral scene above Jones Falls. The best cruising area on the Rideau is between Jones and Smith Falls.

Rideau cruising isn't all work: there's time for feeding swans



Feeding swans at Westport, a lovely town at the western end of Upper Rideau Lake. The town is at the summit of the canal.



Meeting people has always been a favorite yachting activity. On the Rideau, the younger you are, the easier it is to make friends.

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able to supply that much power too. Now, they knew that most marinas have dock circuits fused to 30 amperes or less. This, at 110 volts, would have made only 3.3 kilowatts available on board. To them the solution was simple: install two lines and split the on board utilities between them. Good thinking, except that you have to have both lines in operation in order to run the ship's appliances. One line will let you cook—but you won't have any light to work by without the other line.

The problem, of course, is that it is hard enough in some marinas to find one good, working outlet, much less two, and a marina normally only supplies one outlet per boat. If the dock isn't crowded you can use the one in the slip next door, but if the dock is full, you do have a problem.

By providing two shore connections, usually port and starboard, which can work in parallel, with both shore circuits feeding power into *one* on-board circuit, the problem is easily solved. With that setup, you can rig one shore line and be careful about electricity use, or hook up two, when outlets are available, and bake a cake, boil an egg, press a dress, and take a shower at the same time (If you're very clever).

The Alcan 370's other important flaw applies only to certain families or groups. This flaw the Alcan shares with many other houseboats and cruisers: All the bunks are double, and all of them convert into something else in the daytime. An arrangement like this will sleep six only when the crew is composed of couples who are willing to sleep together. With two daughters, a son, a mother's helper (another daughter of sorts), my wife, and myself, this arrangement didn't work. We ended up with one on the cabin sole in a sleeping bag. And I don't think my family is at all unusual.

The solution would be to make the after lounge convert into an upper and lower, instead of into a double bed. This would require changing the window line, but that is a small price to pay for interior flexibility.

The interior, otherwise, needs no improvement. As I have implied, the boat's appliances are all electric. With a three burner stove plus oven and rotisserie, hot and cold pressure water, electric Monomatic head (more about this later), electric refrigeration, and lights, the craft has all necessary and a few unnecessary conveniences. Back aft, tucked between the two Volvos, is a Kohler 655 generator of the non-demand type. You turn it on and it runs until you turn it off, idling when there is no load.

A study of the pictures accompanying this text will provide you with a grasp of the remaining details worth grasping about the Alcan. Throughout, the construction of the boat, the methods of assembly, and the finishing left little to be desired. At least, we found very little to complain about—except what has already been mentioned—during our cruise along the Rideau Waterway, so now let's talk about the cruise.

I, for one, find no reason to argue with the assertion that the Rideau is the prettiest waterway in North America. While burbling peacefully along its placid reaches, it is hard to imagine that it was the threat of war which caused its construction. These days, when the Canadian-United States border is guarded by no one more war-like than a grumpy customs official searching for pot in a hippy's beard, it's hard to remember that at one point open warfare raged all along that portion of the border formed by the Saint Lawrence river.

The Canadian government, during the period following the War of 1812, was much concerned with the vulnerability of the Saint Lawrence as a supply route and, after considerable discussion and debate, decided to build an alternate water route from Lake Ontario at Kingston to

the Ottawa River. One Colonel By was placed in charge, and construction of what was to become the Rideau Waterway was commenced in 1826—the same year the Erie Canal was opened for business.

By the time the waterway was ready, in 1838, war between the two countries was a quarter of a century in the past and they were well on the road to the good relations which exist today. Thus, the main purpose in building the Rideau was dissipated before the first boat passed through all of the 49 locks that Colonel By and his crew of stalwarts hacked out of the wilderness. The Rideau became a peace-time waterway. Small steamers and barges plied the waterway, providing transportation and communication to the villages that sprang up along its course. The village at the northern end, where the waterway descends—via a flight of eight locks—was the only village to become a town and later a city. It was first called Bytown, in honor of the good Colonel, but it was renamed Ottawa when it became the national capitol.

Commercial traffic on the Rideau is almost non-existent now. The canal is maintained for the pleasure of yachtsmen only. And the Rideau is indeed a pleasure.

It is not a canal in the strict sense of the word. It is a waterway of interconnected lakes and rivers, 123 miles long, connecting Kingston on Lake Ontario with Ottawa on the river by the same name. In the process of going from one to the other, it climbs 163 feet from Kingston, reaching a height of 405 feet at its summit at Upper Rideau Lake. From there it runs steadily downhill, via the Lower Rideau Lake and the Rideau River to Ottawa. Although there are 49 locks, the passage is not as difficult as that number would seem to indicate. The locks are not very high and many of them are ganged together in flights. Besides, two of the total are not on the main channel.

On the negative side is the fact that virtually all of them are hand operated and therefore slow to fill and empty. They can also get crowded on summer weekends. There is no real need to traverse the whole waterway, however. The classic cruise, the so-called Golden Triangle, is through the Rideau, down the Ottawa to the Saint Lawrence, and back to Kingston. If you like a lot of dull boat driving this is fine, but since the lower half of the Rideau is by far the prettier half, and the only part of the Saint Lawrence that's really worth seeing is the Thousand Islands section, why not take it easy and spend half the time in the Rideau and the other half among the Thousand Islands?

Our cruise started twenty-five miles East of Kingston in the sleepy little Ontario village of Ivy Lea—a cluster of houses in the shadow of the Thousand Island International Bridge. A rental agency—Holidays Afloat—operates a fleet of houseboats including Alcans from Ivy Lea, so it was an ideal place to start our cruise. Bob Kemp, an Alcan employee who was the sparkplug behind the entire houseboat program, was on hand to see us off.

A problem that was to plague us throughout the cruise reared its head at Ivy Lea: a nasty little virus that struck us all down at various times. Little Peter's turn was first—at Ivy Lea. He was sick enough to send the tireless Mr. Kemp off in search of a doctor who said what doctors usually say: "Keep him quiet and give him plenty of liquids."

With that unhelpful bit of advice we went 'a cruising. Fortunately, small children recover quickly, and Peter's virus was gone in time for him to argue about wearing his life jacket by the time we entered Kingston via the new raised-span bridge to the east of the old, low bascule bridge that has to open for anything higher than a toy boat with a broken mast. The new bridge is about 13 feet high and thus doesn't have to open for everybody.

Kingston is a historic town whose prime attraction is Fort Henry, squatting solidly on the high hills overlooking the harbor. It is fully restored and manned by an eager cadre

of college students who spend their summers recreating the pomp and ceremony of the era before good neighbor policy replaced cannonball diplomacy. The kids do a grand job of it, and a visit to the fort is well worth the time and trouble.

Kingston is the last town of any real substance you will come to on the Rideau until you reach Ottawa. The towns along the way are big enough for general needs, but anything special—including repairs to the boat—should be anticipated and obtained or taken care of in Kingston.

The Rideau waterway begins in Kingston harbor, and for the first five miles it follows a very well-marked channel through the center of the wide and marshy Cataraqui River. It has to be well marked. To stray from the marked channel is to risk instant impalement on any one of several thousand invisible stumps. These first few miles convinced us of another fact of Ontario cruising: the fuzz means business.

There we were, planing along, minding our own business when an outboard-style patrol boat waved us down. I thought we might have been exceeding a speed limit we didn't know about, but no, they were spot checking boats for required gear. While we are on the subject, it might be well to point out that there *is* no speed limit on the Rideau. Presumably you can go as fast as you want to go. Two facts must be borne in mind: One is that, written law notwithstanding, you are responsible for any damage your wake does, and the second is that it is usually preferable to remain in the water while boating. If you tried to take some of the tight little corners on the Rideau at speed, you would end up digging your own channel across a farm yard before coming to a stop in Farmer Brown's chicken coop. Besides, what's the hurry?

The first locks, those at Kingston Mills, lie a short distance inside the first land cut. This is where we found out that the locks can get crowded. The boats were packed in like sardines, going through without room for even an additional dinghy. Fortunately, no one was left over, and the load in the first lock was the same load that filled each succeeding lock. In more or less the same order, too. When each lock opened, the jumble of boats would dissolve like a jig saw puzzle falling apart in slow motion: each piece starting off up stream followed closely by the next piece which disentangled itself. At the next lock, the puzzle would put itself back together: each boat in the same place with the same people in each strategic spot.

There was, unfortunately, little time for me to realize that the scenery was getting prettier and prettier as we moved higher into the heart of Ontario. Even if I had been running the same boat for a long period, boat handling would have required most of my attention. Since the boat was still very strange to me, an unknown quantity in many respects, boat handling required all my attention and more. Fortunately, there was little or no breeze. That came later.

Actually, in rechecking the chart, I see that we really didn't do much of anything that first day. We passed through the four locks at Kingston Mills, the singleton at Washburn, and the double-header at Brewers Mills, and we were still only 16 miles from Kingston. At the time it seemed like a lot. In any case, by the time we cleared Kingston Mills and entered Cranberry Lake, my loyal—if still green—crew of line handlers had had enough. With rare good fortune, we immediately found a lovely place to spend the night—Seeley's Bay.

Seeley's Bay is the name of a village and a tiny inlet on the southern shore of little Cranberry Lake. The village has a municipal dock with power and water, all free for the taking. When we arrived, there already were two boats doing the taking, both at the end of the short dock furthest from land and, presumably in the deepest water. Problem: was there enough water behind them? Solution: yell to shore. Answer(s): Sure, nope and a gallic shrug.

There was nothing to do but inch in and hope. There was enough, but only just enough. Later probings with



The Rideau passes through all sorts of places: bustling cities, sleepy villages and, above, bucolic countryside.

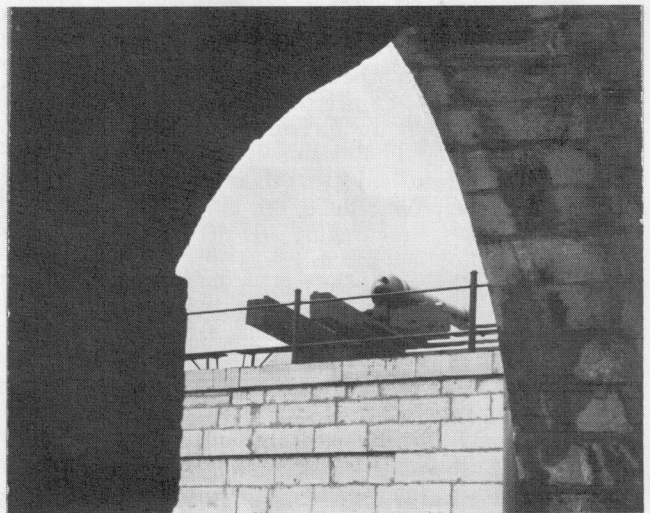
the boat hook revealed a good inch of clearance between the bottom of the outdrives and the nearest rock.

That made three boats at the dock, and we were soon joined by two more: another houseboat (making three) and a small cruiser. And a friendlier bunch would be hard to meet. In a matter of minutes, the kids were all involved in whatever kids do, while the grownups began the houseboat game of you look at my boat and I'll look at yours. As these things sometimes do, the evening ended with a happy hour in the dinette of the Alcan, the children banished to the nether reaches of the dock.

Sometime in the middle of this, the ladies disappeared into town to find a laundromat. In the process, they found that Seeley's Bay offers a respectable assortment of grocery and general stores. There is little, however, in the way of marine supplies.

That was Sunday. Monday proved to be a variation on the same theme. The weather was hotter and stickier and the locks seemed higher and harder, although there were fewer of them: the four at Jones Falls and single ones at Dalis Lock, Chaffeys Lock, and New Boro. What with the weather—and the very pleasant company of another houseboat manned by Don McCarthy and his tribe—we managed to fritter away the day in grand fashion.

The first stop, for swimming, was a mere three miles



Fort Henry squats stolidly on the hills above Kingston Harbor. The fort is manned every summer by a cadre of college kids.

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from Seeley's Bay. We'd been told about the little bay behind Dean's Island, and it lived up to its billing. The entrance is tight, requiring a lookout forward, but once inside there is plenty of placid, hill-encircled water to anchor and swim in. If you didn't care about being dockside for the night, this little bay would be a delightful anchorage for a night or longer. It must be entered during daylight, though, if you're a stranger.

Anyway, on with the cruise. Our next stop was a scant two miles further along at Jones Falls, traditionally the real beginning of Rideau country. It is certainly one of the loveliest villages along the waterway and it is blessed with many attractions. History buffs can see the gigantic dam that Colonel By built, the kids can swim, the captain can refuel while the mate loads up the larder with home made bread from the Shangri La Hotel. The lady who runs the Shangri La is known up and down the waterway for the home cooked meals she'll prepare if you give her a little advance warning. To make the scene complete, there is a grand old hotel at the foot of the locks, complete with docks, pool, and Victorian veranda.

Four locks are a lot of work. By the time we were through them it was time to swim again. Being the nautical mastermind that I am, I picked a spot in the lee of an island on Sand Lake. The McCarthys tied up alongside. We promptly began to drag anchor. Don threw out his kedge, too. We still dragged. We let out more scope. All the scope. Nothing. We weren't dragging too fast, so we all went swimming anyway. Then we weighed anchor and discovered that both of them were fouled by a mess of weeds and grass.

One more lock and we were in Opinicon Lake (still only 35 miles from Kingston) and rapidly approaching one of the few sour notes of the cruise. It began with the misreading of a guide book which said, I thought, that the Opinicon Hotel (famous for its breakfast and dinners) was above Chaffey's locks. We dutifully locked through and tied up at the first marina, Alford's. Then we found out that said hotel was below the lock. We'd seen it but thought it was a different hotel.

So far so bad, but it got worse. The crew at Alford's allowed as how we could not stay there since they no longer took overnight dockage, or they were waiting for bigger spenders, or they simply couldn't be bothered. Did they have any ideas? Nope. Very helpful types.

We called the Opinicon to see if they had space. They did but only for boats 10 feet wide. Could we stay at the approach docks of the lock? Not unless we were broken down. We weren't, so we had to chuck the idea of eating at the Opinicon.

We had to press on whether we wanted to or not. We certainly didn't want to since these lakes we were traversing with such abandon are the cruising heart of the system. Many people lock up the Rideau only as far as Sand, Opinicon, or Newboro Lake and spend their time lolling, poking, fishing or cruising around there. But in our case it couldn't be helped. Evening was coming and the sprouts were beginning to grumble—we had to go on.

Newboro Lock was the next town on the chart, and it was on this stretch that the speed of the Alcan was appreciated. The wind was beginning to blow in earnest, turning the usually calm surface of Newboro Lake into a mass of whitecaps. The Alcan dusted them off in grand style. The public dock at Newboro was full, and there was no commercial dock capable of taking us. The lockmaster, who at first had stopped us, finally relented (maybe he heard the screaming kids) and let us lock through and secure to the approach dock above the lock.

After a very belated meal, Don McCarthy, and I went

off to see the town. It proved to be composed of a fishing station manned by the inevitable bewhiskered and bewhiskeyed fishing types outfitted in dime store yachting caps, suspender supported pants, and undershirts of indeterminate age, all sitting around swapping lies and swilling the Canadian version of Chuggalager Beer. Up on the hill was Newboro's other claim to fame, the Newboro Lodge, the chief delights of which seemed to be a pin ball machine, a ping pong table, a juke box, a coke machine, and a veranda, fully equipped with wicker rockers and a squeaky oilcloth-covered glider.

Meanwhile, back at the boat, life was staging one of its ageless dramas: McCarthy's eldest girl and our baby sitter (also, in a manner of speaking, our oldest) had discovered boys, or the boys had discovered them. Either way, it was the girl's first encounter. It probably was the boys' first, too, judging by the amount of foot shuffling going on.

Two mothers kept telling two husbands to do something. The two husbands kept hoping they wouldn't have to. And they didn't. Before long—and certainly before the crashing thunderstorm cum cold front descended on us—all hands had dispersed. It was the kind of storm that only the Canadian woods seem to be able to generate. In spite of the Alcan's very substantial insulation, it sounded as if we were anchored securely and directly under the main spillway of the Hoover Dam. I took the occasion to see how well Alcan had done in the leak-proofing department. I found but one, a tiny little dribble in the overhead where a deck fitting could have been better bedded. Under similar circumstances, many new boats would have been nearly as wet inside as outside.

If the storm was the kind that only Canada can produce, the next morning was the kind of morning that also seems possible only in Canada: the air was so clear, you could easily see five hundred miles up. But it was windy, very windy. This was the day we would find out about houseboat handling.

All things considered, it went pretty well, except for an untidy moment at Westport (see *Mail Boat*, October '69). Westport, by the way, is another very lovely little town at the western end of Upper Rideau Lake. It is plentifully supplied with stores that are plentifully supplied with staples, and has a surprising number of gift and souvenir shops. The town has a large dock which is, once again, free for the tying up. At Westport, and at other stops on this windy day, we learned:

1) A good wind can plaster a houseboat against a dock. Getting off against the wind, if the wind is strong, requires using spring lines against the engines to get either the bow or stern far enough upwind to draw clear.

2) Approaching a dock to windward requires nimble footwork on the part of the line handlers. If you come in bow first, the crew has to hop off quickly before the wind pushes the bow away. If the crew isn't agile, coming in stern first is preferred. You can hold the stern in with the outrives, secure a stern line and then work the bow in.

3) Stopping in a lock or against a dock with the wind astern requires getting the stern secured first. The bow can look after itself while you get the stern lines on.

4) Holding tanks have a habit of getting full.

5) The food at the Rideau Ferry Inn is terrible.

Our particular Alcan was equipped with a Monomatic recirculating head hooked up to a 20-gallon holding tank. The reason for having both is to multiply the range of each one. The Monomatic is good for 40 to 50 uses before recharging. Each recharging pumps about four gallons of goo into the holding tank. Therefore, since the tank holds 20 gallons, you can go five times as long before pumping out. The problem is that it does, eventually, have to get

pumped out and pump-out stations are not nearly as plentiful as hula dancers in Holland.

The Province of Ontario publishes a guide listing pump-out facilities, but it was prepared by someone with a good imagination and no research ability. The stations simply weren't where they were supposed to be. We'd been counting, as a last resort, on pumping out at the village of Portland—another beautiful spot along the way. No one in the village had the required gear, although the Ontario guide clearly lists Portland as a town with the proper facilities. There was nothing for it but to plug on, hopefully.

Rideau Ferry was our next stop and there, for all the world to see, was the official Ontario pump-out station sign. In a matter of minutes the tank had been emptied and flushed, and with absolutely none of the mess and what-all I had expected. We left the dock wondering why every marina doesn't spend the couple of dollars necessary to install pump-out gear. Safari Marina's gear was very simple: a length of flexible hose coupled to a hand diaphragm pump joined by another hose to a tank. When the tank is full, a honey dipper comes and cleans it out. All the connections are fluid- and odor-tight, so the operation is clean, neat, and finished long before the gas tanks have been filled.

I felt so good about getting the tank emptied that I decided to treat the entire crew to dinner at the nearby Rideau Ferry Inn. It was a poor plan. We should have stayed aboard and eaten franks and beans. The Inn is rather English and, as you probably know, English food comes in two varieties: Quite good and inedible. Our food was definitely of the latter persuasion. To add insult to injury, the bill was enough to send a more wealthy man than I screaming off into the night.

A few miles north of Rideau Ferry lies Smiths Falls, the end of the Rideau lakes and the northern terminus of many cruises. The four locks at Smiths Falls drop the waterway into the bed of the Rideau River from whence it does not stray until it reaches Ottawa. Although the scenery, north of this point, is interesting in its own way, it does not compare with that of the lakes and the lower waterway.

Smiths Falls is worth a planned stopover. The locks are split, one singleton and a triple header, and in between is one of the finest municipal marine facilities on the waterway. It is right in the heart of town, well landscaped and superbly maintained.

Once clear of Smiths Falls, we spent the remainder of the day chugging along the waterway. There were only three events of note. We were held up for the first and only time at Kilmarnock Lock: Weeds had clogged the sluices, and we had to back and fill while they cleared them out. The second event was a pleasant stop at Merrickville, site of the Block House Museum and the location of another pumping station. I was so glad to find the station that we pumped the tank dry again. The third happening of note was a night's stopover at Long Island Locks. The lead photograph of this article tells that story. Words would be superfluous. (See page 36.)

The next day was our last on the waterway and it was marked by the strangeness of plying a canal through the heart of a major city and descending eight locks in a row: the famous staircase at Ottawa. We had been warned to expect an interminable delay and we had allowed plenty of time. As it turned out, we were in the Ottawa river less than an hour after arriving at the head of the locks. It was just as well. The bug that had been plaguing us all along the waterway shot me down almost as soon as we cleared the last lock and docked alongside the lower approach wharf.

The rest of the crew went touring around Ottawa, visiting the houses of Parliament and the old Bytown Museum.

This museum, a real must for waterway buffs, is housed in Colonel By's original headquarters building, a building as substantial as the rest of By's structures. As the nation's capital, Ottawa has lots of things to see and do. Any boatman who is planning to lay over in Ottawa should plan to do so above the locks. There is no marina worthy of the name on the Ottawa River. There are a couple of gas docks, but nothing to compare with the solid public facilities on the canal proper.

The bug that bit me moved on to happier hunting grounds by morning, and soon after dawn I was sitting up and taking nourishment. Although I, too, would have liked to see Ottawa, time was running out. We were due in Montreal that day. We had no choice but to cast off and start down the Ottawa. Our Rideau cruise, whether we liked it or not, was over.

And now it is four months later, and we can look back on our week and sort out what we learned and didn't learn about houseboats and houseboating:

- We learned, for openers, that the Rideau is a marvelous place to cruise, and that a houseboat is the *ideal* vehicle for such a cruise.

- A corollary to that statement is that houseboats are definitely here to stay. They are a valid addition to the marine scene, fulfilling the need for a second home: afloat and mobile.

- Houseboats are not designed or built to perform primarily as cruisers—long, roughwater passages are not their forte.

- The sharp edge between cruiser and houseboat configuration is rapidly being blurred by boats, such as the Alcan 370, which have many of the attributes of both.

We learned a lot more than that, of course, but the other things are difficult to explain. For example, houseboatmen seem to have a totally different approach to boating than cruiser men—or sailors. This is also particularly true of their wives (and mine). The antagonism, latent or expresses, that boating wives seem to feel towards their hubby's boat seems to be lacking among the houseboat set. To them, a houseboat is a house, or home, that just happens to float—it is definitely not thought of as a boat that happens to have the conveniences and appurtenances of a house.

And what did I, as a person weaned on salt water and sails, think of it? Although I thought the Alcan 370 was superior to many houseboats, I would have been much happier if it had some sort of lateral control. Perhaps a small centerboard forward would help hold the boat in a breeze. And I would have liked it to have a flying bridge (Alcan says they'll have this next year) for two reasons: it would put the skipper in the party, instead of isolating him in his wheel house, and it would make maneuvering much easier. Steering from a wheel well forward makes it difficult to tell which way the boat is turning. An amidships control station would solve this.

Overall, I was much taken with inland cruising, inland cruising people, and inland cruising boats. To me, any boat is a good boat if she honestly fulfills a specific function. Her particular function may not be my own ideal of boating pleasure, but I can appreciate her on the basis of how well she does whatever she is supposed to do. And for cruising in restricted waterways, a houseboat has to be the best creation yet devised by man.

Houseboats aren't perfect yet, by any means. But the houseboat industry is very young. Time and experience—and competition—will improve the breed. And, although these improvements will tend to narrow the price differential between them and cruisers, houseboats are so good at their designated job, that it is safe to predict that they will play an increasingly important part in the future marine scene. (See "Design Showcase" for more details about the Alcan 370.—Ed.) ‡