

Barging Through Friesland

Wayfarer International Rally Sept 2024

This year's international rally was much anticipated – the Netherland rallies with their 'mothership' barge accommodation make them a unique experience and the cancellation of the 2020 rally due to Covid meant that demand for places was higher than ever. The rally booked up very quickly and names were added to a waiting list. In the weeks before the rally the thoughtful and efficient members of NedWA sent detailed bulletins and tantalising photographs of the barges 'De Hoop' and 'Stella Frisia'.

Arrival & Akkrum to Earnewalde

John Miller W11268

Two days before the rally, Rosemary and I arrived at the Drifveer campsite and marina in Akkrum not expecting to meet anyone, however the first people we saw were Age, Antje and Anthony, the A team (please note that Age and Joke are Dutch first names of two of the hard-working NedWA organising committee, not pronounced "age" and "joke" as English speakers would). They were in the final stages of months of preparation, and it was nice to get such a warm welcome from them. Antje already had her nice new Wanderer in the water ready to go. We were given the camping plot just beside the ramp where the boats would be launched over the next couple of days.

The next day boats started to arrive, Dutch and Danish at first then those from the UK. Rosemary and I enjoyed the campsite facilities after driving from our camping trip in Bordeaux to pick up our boat from Wayfarer sailor Thierry Grenier's house in Normandy before visiting the Ulster Tower and Thiepval WW1 memorials in the Somme. Arriving early gave us the chance to set the boat up and have a nice sail down to Terherne the day before the rally. This is a much busier stretch of water than we are used to at home in Northern Ireland; a taste of the business to come.

The marina is on other side of the beautiful Friesian village of Akkrum from where the two large Friesian Charter barges were moored. On Saturday morning I cycled to the charter boats to give me a better understanding of where we had to go and to have a look at the railway bridge which opened according to a timetable, a bit daunting as I did not want to get my mast crushed by a closing bridge. Unlike the road bridges where boats usually take priority, the trains have priority over the boats; a totally new experience awaited.

NedWA member Anthony was on hand throughout the day to advise and assist with launching, where to leave road trailers and give directions to the charter barges. Leaving the marina Rosemary and I motored to the first bridge which opened for us and two motor cruisers. After this a right at the T junction and then round through the town, successfully navigating the second road bridge and the railway bridge which had both opened to let us through. The road bridges open for boats to pass more or less on demand whilst that railway bridge opens at 18 minutes and 48 minutes past the hour for 6 minutes;

although some participants waited for 45 minutes; I suppose if trains are late this affects the bridge opening times.

Lunch was provided on the barges with people arriving throughout the day. By evening all 20 Wayfarers were moored to or near the barges and we gathered on the quay for a welcome drink and pickled herring aperitif.

The next morning breakfast was at 8am. We took it in turns to set the tables and do the washing up, ably directed on our barge by Timo one of the Dutch organisers. Poul played his trumpet each morning at 9am sharp to call us to the briefing when the rally leaders gave detailed information about the day's sailing route and local information. We set off from Akkrum on our way to Earnewald or Eernewoude depending on whether you spoke Dutch or Friesian.



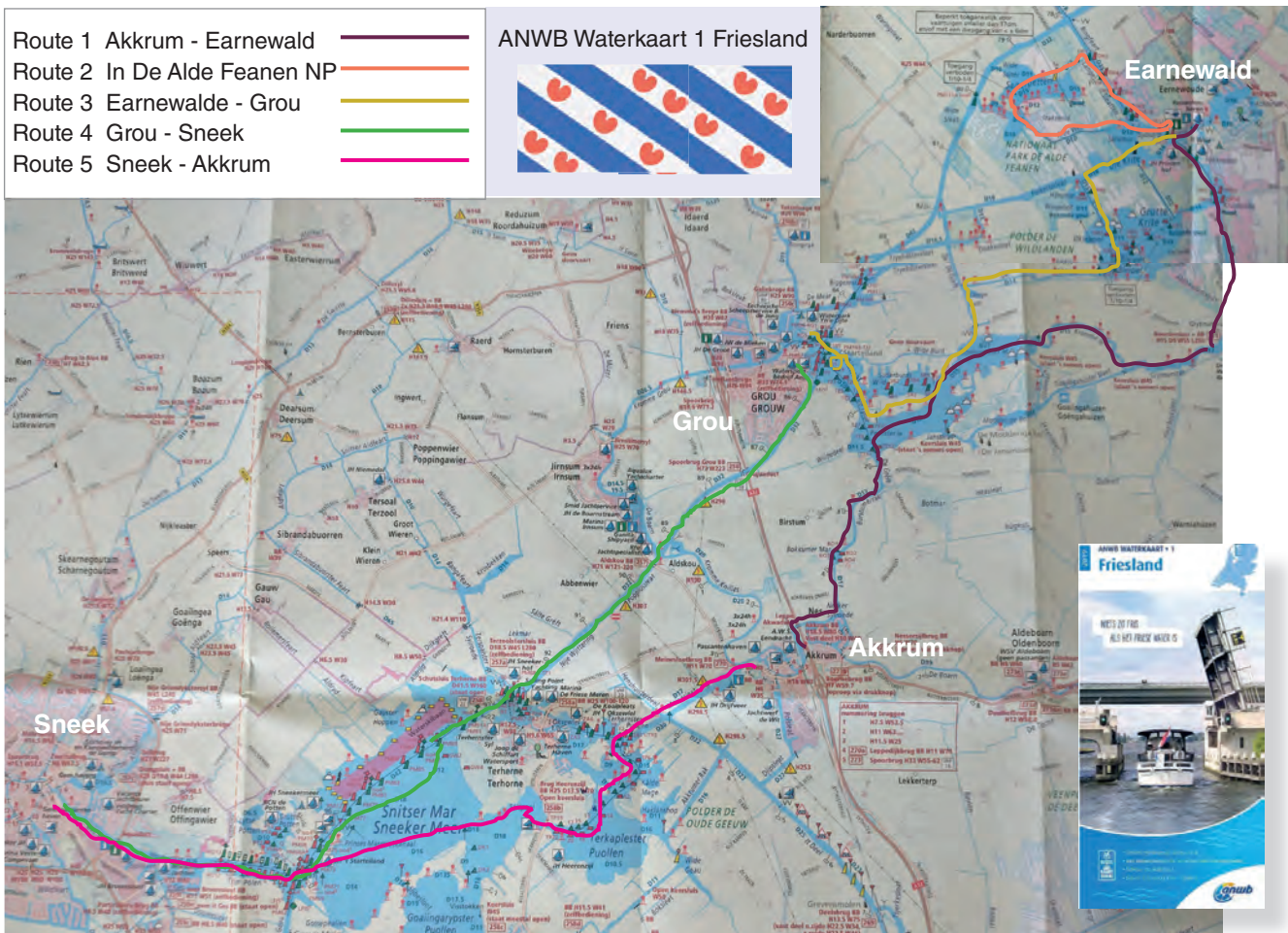
A typical morning briefing and all eyes on the maps

A first for most of us came just 400 metres into the journey when we sailed across the Lepp Akwadukt above a motorway! It's not every day that you sail over a four lane motorway whilst sailing 0.5m below sea level with the surrounding fields even lower. Sailing below sea level was another first for me, previously the only time this happened was during a capsized.

We passed houses right down to the side of the water, some only 40cm above the water level, many with their own moorings. The waterways are totally integrated into everyday life here. For the most part the fields were below the water level with dykes on both sides. In winter the water is pumped out of the fields into the canal and in summer the water in the canal is used to irrigate the fields.

Once out of Akkrum we sailed north up Burstumer Rak and De Greft. I don't believe I have seen so many boats in such a small area, there was total confusion from the hire boat renters as they tried to get past zigzagging Wayfarers. To those that did not understand sailing it must have seemed like trying to get past numerous defenders to score a goal, just when you thought you had spotted a gap these small sailing boats would turn and block the way again.

We arrived at the designated lunch spot at the end of the



channel before Peanster le at 12 noon and tied up at two long plastic jetties to eat our picnic lunches and a chat about the morning's sailing. The two barges motored past on their way to moor for the night and prepare our dinner (cover photo).

A few of us reefed which was a good decision in the gusty shifting wind which had strengthened over lunch. We then tacked across the open water of Peanster le and Sitebuorster Le to the Kromme le channel and into the Grytmansrak. At this stage with my crew starting to blister with the numerous tacks we decided to motor the rest of the way, so we were one of the first to arrive at the De Veenhoop Watersports café for a welcome latte macchiato. Joke, Anthony and a few of the Danes were already there having skipped the lunch stop.

After our short break next came a left turn into another channel through a large road bridge which had just closed in front of us. To let the road traffic clear we waited some five minutes in a stiff breeze for it to open. This was quite interesting as we had our sails up whilst holding onto a large steel structure at the side of the river which looked like it was designed for commercial barges and had no easy hand holds or cleats for a boat the size of a Wayfarer. There was much relief when the traffic light on the bridge turned green and off we went using the 2hp Honda which thankfully started on the first pull. I have been running it on Aspen synthetic fuel and empty the tank completely at the end of each use to avoid any gumming of the carburettor which I think helps with reliability; a real relief at times like this.

I was looking forward to a nice reach up this channel with the wind on our starboard side. The trees were swaying in the breeze but interestingly there was not a lot of wind on the channel; I think the adjoining fields must have been quite a bit below the water and as the wind went up and over the dyke it created a wind shadow on the water. Going as far into the centre of the channel as we could safely manage in the heavy traffic we got a bit more wind and a nice reach.

We arrived at Earnewald which I hoped would be a bit quieter but not a chance, it was twice as busy! It was like a boat show with so many craft, from paddle boards to larger tourist sight-seeing boats, more than I had ever seen in one place, many only loosely following the rules of the waterways. We arrived safely at the barges after a great day on the water. It was very different sailing than I am used to in Ireland where we can have a whole lough to ourselves. The captain of the Stella Friesa told us later that it was particularly busy because of the good weather and it being the last Sunday of the holidays. It should be quieter tomorrow he said.

Having become separated during the day, boats kept arriving right up until dinner at 6pm. That evening we had a great talk on the barge from another Age, this one from the nearby Skutje museum. He was a real entertainer telling stories about life on Skutje barges as they plied the Frisian waterways with their families carrying produce at the time when the waterways were the main method of transport. The next evening we visited the museum but more of that later.

Earnewald National Park de Alde Feanen
Jonathan Bolton W11469 *Kefi*

Our second full sailing day began and ended Earnewald, a delightful village and the heart of the National Park de Alden Feanen. The organisers suggested routes, but we were free to explore the beautiful area at our leisure, this being the only day the accommodation barges did not move. Without the bustle of the water traffic on the previous day and with much lighter winds (if any) our time was spent meandering around the many narrow channels and small lakes of the reserve. *Kefi* has the benefit of an electric outboard so we glided silently along the labyrinth of channels.



A bank of towering cloud crept across the sky and rumblings and lightening flashes warned of trouble ahead. After a short detour along the Prinses Margriet Canal, one of the main commercial waterways of the area with a large amount of barge traffic, the heavens opened so we were grateful to be able to stop for lunch at the waterside Princes Hof Hotel, where a number of our fellow Wayfarers had already moored. It was great to say hello to Giles and Jill (who organised the international rally in Brittany in 2022). Unfortunately Gilles has not been able to sail since a serious cycling accident last year but they had come all the way from France to meet up with this year's rally.

On our meanderings today we passed one of the many World War II memorials around Friesland. This one bears the cap-



tion 'thundering through the clear sky' which is the motto of RAF 61 squadron. The brickwork is 37m in length, which is the length of a Lancaster bomber. On 4 September 1942 251 RAF planes including Lancaster R5682 took off from Syerston (Nottinghamshire). It was shot down and crashed into the reserve. Rear gunner, Canadian James Cooper, could not bale out and was killed. There are 251 holes in the wall for nesting Martins, one for each plane that took part, with 12 holes covered in memory of the planes which did not return. (You can find out about the recovery of R5682 in 2017 at <https://www.memorialflightclub.com/blog/lancaster-r5682-recovery-netherlands>).

The evening's entertainment was a visit to the nearby Skutsjemuseum. The Skutje is a type of flat bottomed sailing barge built and adapted to the Friesland lakes. The museum celebrates the long history of these lovely boats which carried peat to Amsterdam and other big town and cities. Other cargoes included dried cow dung which was much in demand from the flower growers. Today the De Strontrace (Dung Race) commemorates this history and these beautiful boats come out in force for hugely popular regattas every summer.

Ernewalde to Grou

Graham Williamson W11001 *Jasmine*

After breakfast the fleet was rallied for the daily briefing by the now familiar Rally Fanfare. The planned route was to sail from

Left: Jonathan takes Mary Asseltine for a spin round De Alde Feanen and the International Wayfarer boat repair team celebrate fixing a leak on Alison's Mk4 due to a broken keel band. Below: 'When the music stops, sit down!' Bottom: The Skutsje Museum





Earnewald, through the National Park de Alde Feanen, to Grou. Boats without engines paired up with motorised partners as the forecast was for very little wind, however sufficient breeze materialised for the partners to sail in company rather than tow. Paired with *Willen* (Lars and Marianne) *Jasmine* headed west from Earnewald along the Ule Krite from which we took the canal to Grutte Krite. The waterway opened up into a wide lake which we crossed to tie up at one of the many moor-

ing points around the area and join the Danish contingent for their coffee fix! We were very taken with the care taken by the canal authority in topping each of the bollards with the lily pad icon of Friesland.

From coffee we continued west along the De Geau to join up with the rest of the fleet for our picnic at the junction with the De Greft canal. The wind had filled in from the south but remained patchy and the sail after lunch involved a short period of intense short tacking southwards towards more open water enabling us to reach across the Sitebuorster Ie and follow the navigation buoys across to a tiny island bearing a Race Officer's hut and flagpoles.

We landed on the island to the hypnotic smell of a smokery; we had gate-crashed a smoked eel party. Big drums contained skewered eels smoked vertically and covered with a piece of sacking. Unfortunately, none were available for tasting (Editor...which was a relief to some of us)! We were surprised to be given the Sailing Instructions for the 'Inaugural International Rally Race', a short sprint around the cans of the Pikmar. The starting signal was Poul's legendary trumpet and using the very flexible NedWA starting sequence – a three minute countdown, plus an extra minute when many people were not close enough to the start line.

Jasmine and *Silver Lining* jostled for the favoured end of the line close to the island shore and quickly tacked off onto port to aim for favourable tide. *Wunderbar* started further down the line in clear air and continued on starboard to the port lay line, crossing *Jasmine* and *Silver Lining* at the top of the beat by a boat length. *Jasmine* crossed astern and managed to lay the first mark ahead, and then held that position on the fetch to the second mark, extending on the downwind leg to the finish. *Wunderbar* held off *Silver Lining* who crossed the line just ahead of *Mayfly*. The official results were:

1. *Jasmine* 11001 - Judith and Graham
2. *Wunderbar* 10560 - Jesper and Dorte
3. *Silver Lining* 11465 - Monica and Ansis

The race was very good-natured and a great opportunity for those who do not normally race to 'have a go'. By the time it concluded the wind was sufficient to safely sail across the Prinses Margriet canal and to aim for the huge masts of our barges moored in Grou and visible above the buildings and other boats.

The eel smoker and behind him the Inaugural International Rally Race Committee and behind them Wayfarer crews 'Sneaking-off' before they are rolled into the competition.



Trust Monica to come up with an idea for entertainment. A race around a triangular course before crossing the channel into Sneek. Oh, all right then, but I don't want to show everyone up so I will come last. If you believe that then you will believe anything but congratulations to Judith and Graham in *Jasmine* who crossed the line first.
Phil Pemberton

Grou to Sneek

Phil Pemberton W11310 *Chewfarer*

Sneek is pronounced 'snake' like the slimy things in the smoking barrel. There are some days when I would rather be waterskiing and this was one of them. Calm and grey, such that you could use the water as a shaving mirror but not easily for a long sail from Grou to Sneek. This necessitated motoring or being towed along the Prinses Margriet canal (which you can sail across but not along), with clear instructions to keep close to the starboard bank due to the large commercial vessel traffic, until we reached the northeast corner of Snitser Mar (Sneekmeer). On the meer we would rendezvous at a small island Starteiland before crossing the major commercial canal again and enter Sneek via the Houkesleat channel to moor up. So, off we go at 10.30 am with Jannik and Frans in tow gesticulating to make us aware of fishermen, overhanging trees and other Wayfarers in the convoy. The NedWA team took their accountability for the flotilla very earnestly. Age (sounded like Acker as in Bilk) shepherded us in a RIB today as he did throughout the week, and this made me look at the washes the boats made as they trundled up and down the canal. The RIB created a huge wash, the Wayfarers much less and the barges no matter how big they were created hardly any wash at all. Remarkable.

Below: Narrow margin between success and swimming. R: Sneek



There were two low bridges to navigate which brings up a fundamental question...do we hang to the left or the right? Jeff, my crew, and I decide that leaning to the right would be more comfortable for both of us. The first bridge was a doddle. Low bridge..... lean to the right.... nothing coming.... mast cleared the bridge...job done. Second bridge...hell fire that is a big barge coming straight at us...chicken out... big loop... try again. Success on the second pass through a sneaky little bridge to the side that opened up later. Of course, I knew it would open all the time! (not).

Once clear of the canal we cast free of the tow and the wind picked up enough to sail across Sneekmeer. We crossed the commercial canal once again to enter the Houkesleat canal into Sneek and moor up on the two barges. Wet, wet, wet are the words that come to mind as we disrobed from a soaking but the sun came out and the barges turned into two huge washing lines.

Sneek is the largest town we visited on the rally and after lunch we explored its sights including the maritime museum and the Weduwe Joustra Beerenburg distillery which produces a fine 32% Dutch herbal liqueur. Now, I don't remember the tasting so I probably didn't go, but on the other hand I might have got carried away and can't recall any of it.

Within 25 metres of the moored barges were showers and toilets freely available for those mooring to use. I availed myself of the opportunity. I don't know about you, but I am not a fan



of fixed head showers like we had on the barges. They work for all points north, east and west but not things south of my equator; I have yet to master the hand stand necessary whilst pressing on the on/off button to complete the task. Nonetheless after a good soaking on the journey that day they were a very welcome place to warm up and refresh.

Sneek to Akkrum

Merrin Froggett W11438 Weeble

A prompt start was required on the final sailing day as a huge river cruise ship was due into Sneek. We were all making slow progress along Houkesleat due to the wind shadow of buildings when it suddenly appeared three hours ahead of schedule! We squashed into the side as the vessel, the size of an Amazon warehouse went by. Out on the open meer we briskly crossed the Prinses Margriet canal and despite the detailed briefing had difficulty identifying the route – three directions all equally tempting – but spotted one of the rally leaders so followed him eastwards across the vast Sneekermeer.

It was a gloriously windy last sail and we were glad of a reef. We sailed south of the land area of Terherne to gather before Heerenzijl Bridge where the mass of Wayfarers occupied every bit of shore. There being no room for the last few boats they went on through the bridge as soon as the 'traffic' light' system allowed. Most who had stopped then motored through and raised sails to cross Terkaplester Puollen. We continued through the sometimes shallow channels between islands looking for the main route back into Akkrum. En route we were able to recce the secret channel to a campsite where some of us were going the following week. The fleet had a lovely time tacking up Meinesleat, down which the wind was



What can be nicer than messing about on the water with others?

rattling, to make neat upwind landings on a small pontoon back at Drijfveer Marina...at least some did, others made some aborted approaches and some resorted to rope tossing and being hauled in.

The usual Wayfarer team effort meant that pulling out was achieved easily along with lots of chat about the day. The excellent end of rally meal that evening in an Akkrum eatery was full of talk about what a wonderful time we had all had, and gifts were presented to the superb and caring team from NedWA for their fantastic organisation and meticulous planning of what had been a wonderful and memorable rally.

With thanks to Bjarne Manstrup and Jeremy Norman for images.

