

Training Notes: 2 - Kildare and narrow locks

by Neil Ratcliffe/Nick Haynes

One of our pet hates when we see boats being worked through locks, both wide and narrow, is the way that they are allowed to bump around whilst in the lock. What follows is our suggestion for a way of minimising the bumping and keeping the boat under control at all times. It is not “You will do it this way” but it is a suggestion.

Downhill

I will start with working downhill in a single lock. If you are lucky, ‘Kildare’ will be waiting in the mouth of the lock while ‘President’ descends, if unlucky another boat will come up in the lock in between, and ‘Kildare’ will have to wait further back from the entrance. In some circumstances it will be best if you can take both boats down without another coming up in between, if this is the case, then please check with the oncoming boat, be tactful and explain your reasons. They will normally understand and let you go ahead, but as we all know, there is always the odd one.

Whatever the situation, the top gate will open to allow ‘Kildare’ to be pulled into the lock. If you can line the boat up with the lock, pulling will be easier. There is no point in pulling too fast as you have to stop it before it hits the bottom gates, ideally stopping just as it touches the gates.

When there is no more need to steer the boat the steerer should remove the tiller and lay it on the cabin top, then pull the rudder round and fasten it to lessen the risk of it hitting the cill as the boat descends. It will also act as a bit of a brake in this position.

When the boat is ready, whoever has pulled the boat into the lock should control the raising of the paddles to drop the water in the lock.

As the boat descends in the lock, keep the stem post in contact with the gate. The natural flow of the water out of the lock will tend to do this anyway. With the boat in this position there is no problem with the rudder and cill meeting. Keep an eye on the boat at all times, making sure that it is descending smoothly and not getting caught on anything sticking out from the side of the lock, or anything trapped between boat and lock wall.

When the levels are nearly equal, the boat will tend to start drifting back away from the gates, allow it to do so until you have enough space to open the gates, then stop the backward drift. When the gates are open pull ‘Kildare’ forward so that President’s steerer can attach the cross straps. Always pull ‘Kildare’ to President, not reverse ‘President’ to ‘Kildare’, because if anything should go wrong ‘Kildare’s rudder could be pushed into the end of the lock. Once the cross strap(s) are connected, coil your towing line and drop it onto ‘Kildare’s forecabin. When the boat starts moving forward and the steerer is sure that there is no more risk of the rudder hitting the cill, release the rudder securing line and then place the tiller back into the

rudder stock. Also be aware of any bridge at the tail of the lock that may necessitate the removal of the cabin chimney.

Uphill

Positioning 'Kildare' whilst waiting for the lock to be made ready is the same as for downhill but beware of the turbulence as the water exits the lock. Pulling and stopping in the lock are also the same, aiming to stop just as it touches the end of the lock. The steerer's duties are also the same. Before any water is let into the lock the boat must be secured to stop it going back and hitting the bottom gates and then surging forward to hit the top gates. It is always best to use a line from the mast for this bit, as a line attached to the T stud will be at too great an angle to stop this movement.

If using a line from the mast to pull the boat into the lock, then to slow the boat you should loop the line around the T stud, not pull backwards on the looby. The looby is designed for a forward pull only. Also before looping it round the T stud, make sure that the line is on the opposite side to the forecabin chimney, otherwise when the line becomes taut you run the risk of losing the coolie hat from the top of the chimney.

With the boat touching the end of the lock, pull the line from the looby tight and take a couple of turns around the balance beam or step if there is one. Never use the handrail. In one hand I hold the end of the rope that is wrapped around the beam or step, and the other is used to pull up on the part between looby and beam, taking out some of the stretch from the line.

Water can now be let into the lock. Whoever has pulled the boat into the lock should control the raising of the paddles to raise the water in the lock.

Slowly wind up one paddle about half way and wait, the boat will go backwards a bit, when it starts to come forwards again, take up the stretch in the towing line and then wind up the rest of the paddle. Then repeat this procedure with the other paddle. As the boat nears the top level, it will tend to stay against the gate. You can then unwind the line from the beam or step and start to coil it. When the gate opens pull 'Kildare' to 'President' as before.

Flights of locks

If you are using the long line to tow the boat into the lock, when in a flight, a method to keep a tidy line is to stop half way along the lock, keep tension on the line but take double drop loops of the in i.e. you drop every other arm's length and coil the line. Then as the bow of the boats gets to you drop the line onto the T stud to stop as below.

Each individual lock is worked as above, but instead of pulling 'Kildare' to meet 'President' you tow it to the next lock yourself. Getting the boat moving out of the lock is the hardest part, but never start pulling until you are sure that you can go straight into the next lock. You do not want to have to slow the boat down once it is moving, it is more effort and also pulls the boat into the bank.

I have found that it is better to get the boat moving as fast as possible until it is about half way out of the lock. Up until this point the lock is keeping the boat fairly straight. If you continue to pull after this point, you start to pull the boat in towards the bank, but if you let

the boat drift until it is clear of the lock before you start pulling again, the steerer stands a chance of keeping the boat in line for the next lock and away from the bank.

Things to remember:

If you manage to find somewhere to attach the loop at the end of the towing line to, make sure that the line will drop off after the boat has passed.

If you are standing by the lock as the boat is being towed out, use a stern line and help pull.

If you are the one doing the towing, make sure that you know where the boat is heading, the steerer may not be able to get the boat round some of the bends, and you may have to help by pulling sideways.

If you meet another boat in a pound, be certain that this boat won't try and pass between 'Kildare' and the towpath.

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