

**CRUISING
GERMAN LAKES**



We were surrounded by dense forest, lakes and trees to the water's edge

A Crusader 52 is one of many hire boats available for cruising holidays in Germany

Discovering Müritz

The Mecklenburg Lakes, remnants of communist Germany, offer untouched beauty and unrivalled links

the authors

Wendy Johnson and Gary Blake

Wendy and Gary are photo-journalists, with more than 20 years' boating experience, although they are relatively new to motor and river cruising

the boat

Crusader 52

A three-cabin charter boat from Crown Blue Line that sleeps six



One of the legacies left behind by the German Democratic Republic after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 was an area of relatively unspoilt wilderness to the north of Berlin called the Mecklenburg Lakes.

Approximately 1000 lakes form the largest area of interconnected waterways in central Europe, and were once the preserve of the East German political elite, who used them for hunting, shooting and fishing.

Since 1989, the Government has poured more than €1.5 (£1.18) trillion into the area, restoring towns and villages to their former glory. Private enterprise has also returned, with new marinas, hotels and restaurants. Bars are still pretty hard to find though.

This route seemed to offer the sort of adventure we were looking for but, as neither of us know any German and, English is not the second choice tongue for an old communist



START 1 Wolfsbruch

42 miles

Havel-Kan

2

Waren

Müritz

20 miles

Kölpinsee



regime, we approached a German colleague, Claus, to accompany us.

A minibus from Berlin's Texel Airport took us 80km (50 miles) to the Crown Blue Marina **Wolfsbruch** in Kleinzerlang. This was our starting point to explore the larger lakes, particularly the **Müritz**, the second largest in Germany after Lake Constance.

The hour transfer from the airport costs €105 (£83), a reasonable price when divided between the occupants of the minibus.

All on board

At Wolfsbruch we found a modern marina development with a Best Western Hotel, restaurants, a bakery and the Crown Blue Line office.

We boarded our boat on a busy Sunday. Claus hadn't joined us yet but, luckily, receptionist Katharina speaks

excellent English. She handed us the Captain's Handbook – a loose leaf manual consisting of log book, maps and phone numbers, all in German but with a supplement called 'The Theoretical Charter Instruction', translated into English.

Claus arrived after travelling 250km by car from Hamburg. We'd already looked over our boat – a Crusader 52 – but Frank, the yard manager, who didn't speak much English, still had to give the hands on instruction. From him we learned we were the seventh British party to visit that year, joining a list of other boaters from as far afield as Australia and even Cuba.

When we asked Frank what foreigners liked about the area, he said, "Beautiful nature, plus..." with a laugh, "the German thoroughness in boat preparation. I'd rather spend another

Waren's modern marina makes the perfect base for cycling tours or an afternoon of apple strudel

hour showing someone how to use the boat than six hours repairing a dent."

With the thorough demo over we worked out our route for the week, based on input from Frank. We'd been told before we left the UK that we'd need an International Certificate of Competence (ICC) if we wanted to go on the commercial waterways and canals near Berlin and Postdam, as well as the eastern parts of Lake Müritz. This can be obtained after a special one-day course from an RYA-approved training centre or if you have the Day Skipper Practical for Power qualification. However, for our intended route, an ICC wasn't required.

New surroundings

Once underway, we found ourselves in a wilderness of dense forest, with lakes and trees to the water's edge, and campsites sheltered beneath the canopies. The level of activity on the water was unsettling as canoeists of all ages piled high with tents and gear travelled from camp to camp.

The lakes were filled with East German boats crudely fashioned from plate steel and known as Irons, after the old flat irons they're supposed to resemble. Lake and cruise boats with rows of touring cyclists on deck were in abundance and we noticed boats from Switzerland, Holland and Denmark. The most interesting sight of all, however, was watching the canoeists and the cruise boats jostle for position as they entered the locks.

For all our people-watching though, we were also paying close attention to the charts in the loose-leaf manual. We found

Canoeists of all ages, piled high with camping gear, filled the lake

It's low tech all the way when it comes to collecting the fee at Malchow Lock



Fleesensee

Malchow Lock

3

Müritz

47 miles

Havel-Kan

Plau am See

it slightly disconcerting to see red buoys to starboard, which showed the flow of the water, and kept our eyes open for the striped buoys that show where the current changes direction due to the influence of a major contributing river. For this stage, travelling to **Plau am See**, we went into the main current so the red buoys were on our right.

The rest of the trip to Lake Müritz was spent meandering past small wooden sailing boats, fishermen, canoeists and other boaters, with the odd wave from naturists based at small wooded campsites. We were told that naturism was a defiance against authority during communist rule.

Müritz is an imposing lake of 117sq km. As we approached, we took stock of the weather, as we had to ask for permission from Crown Blue Line to cross the lake. If there were winds of Force 4 or above we'd be unable to make the journey.

Surprisingly, there was no VHF on board, so we had to rely on our mobile phones, which are a compulsory requirement.

With a Force 3 westerly and black skies to the north, we estimated it would take about three-hours to cross the lake, so we moved over to the west side of the lake and the green buoys. The buoys are numbered with one kilometre spacing and are close enough to the shore should a breakdown occur. The eastern and middle routes are for commercial traffic and require an ICC.

A few white caps appeared and it became clear why caution is needed when crossing such a large lake. We were in awe of the scenery too. All around us was thickly forested national park with villages and church spires visible between the trees. And a



The route to Wesenberg was a dream: beautiful landmarks and even the odd free drink

castle next to an old communist sanatorium that is now a hotel.

Boating investment

At the head of the lake is **Waren**, capital of the Müritz district. "So this is where the €1.5 trillion has been spent," said

Claus as we entered a modern marina with red roofed buildings and cobbled streets. A tourist train travelled down the streets and Claus thought it looked like Disneyland. To us it looked eastern European – spacious and neat.

There were bikes everywhere. Claus told us that his 90-year-old mother had recently stayed in the town as part of an organised cycling tour through the Müritz National Park. For the not-so-active, ferries cruise the lake, offering circular tours which

include a bus tour through part of the park and an afternoon tea of apple strudel and delicious cakes at the lakeside sanatorium hotel we'd spotting on our crossing.

The marina is clean and reasonable (€10/£7.90 per night) with modern showers. Right in the middle of town, it's the perfect base for exploring Waren. We ate at the U-Nautic Restaurant and tried barschfilet from the lake, halibut and schnitzel. The portions were generous and it was good value at €13 each (£10.25) for two courses with wine. The following day we took a guided tour of the town and climbed the 14th century church spire of Marien for a view of the area. At the well-stocked supermarket, we picked up excellent cheeses, ham and pickled herring before going

“ We were in awe of the thickly-forested national park scenery ”



New marinas, hotels and restaurants abound along the route



No need for an alarm clock when you've got the swallow dawn chorus



Wesenberg's quaint, quiet streets make for a truly enjoyable stopover





This must be a sure-fire candidate for MBM's ugly boat of the month. Don't worry, it's not one of the choices available for hire

cycling through the national park. The park wetlands are home to waterfowl, ospreys, white tailed eagles and cranes. It's a vast area of 100 lakes, countless ponds, streams and rivers. The trees towered above us, allowing only small shafts of light to penetrate through. The perfect setting for a dark fantasy tale from the Brothers Grimm.

Sight-seeing

Our third day on the boat, we set off for Plau am See through **Kolpinsee** and **Fleesensee**. Visibility was good and the journey very pleasant and uneventful until we reached **Malchow Lock**. Here the lock-keeper emerged with a fishing net on a long pole to take the €1 fee. Malchow is using this money to raise funds for a new marina which is currently being excavated.

All the people we'd encountered so far had been incredibly polite and friendly, but they were all trumped by Peter, the manager at **Plau Marina**, who asked our nationality, then hoisted our national flags on the marina's flag pole. Plau am See is the gateway to the Elde Waterway, which eventually takes you to the River Elbe and then on to Hamburg. These waterways are not well-worn tourist trails and still require a little pioneering spirit.

Plau am See itself is very quiet, dotted with pretty half timbered houses. As we approached the must-see, lifting road bridge – it elevates its platform to allow boats underneath – the air filled with the smell of fresh smoked fish. You can pick some up from a small shop beside the smokehouse or eat at the small

selection of restaurants in town. We chose the excellent Fischerhaus Restaurant beside the river and enjoyed our fish and Goulash, washed down with Riesling. Three courses with wine set us back just €14 (£11) each.

The following day, we agreed to spend a night at anchor, to really feel like we were part of the stunning countryside. We retraced our route, crossing the Müritz and chose **Zotensee**, a wide part of the canal surrounded by dense forests, as our spot for the night.

We dug the anchor into the mud bottom of beautifully clear swimming water and settled in for a cosy night on board with millions of stars sparkling in the black sky. But our sleep was shattered early in the morning by tapping on the hull. The entire local population of swallows had decided to take a rest on our boat after feeding. They left at 8am, but what a sight to

start the day. And it got better – a lock-keeper gave us free, local cola, while an elderly fisherman suggested

a waterside café for lunch and **Wesenberg** as a top spot to stop over.

We took his advice and were the only tourists in town. At the Restaurant Werlestuben, the waitress was keen to practise her English and discuss the positive side of the old communist regime: the excellent school system and free heating and light.

Next day, we set out for **Rheinsberg**, taking us back past the Crown Blue Line base. Visiting the lakeside town to take in a throwback to the Prussian Empire: the manicured gardens of the Rheinsberg Schloss, was a must, before an early morning start took us the remaining 4km back to the Crown Blue Line marina for the handover which completed the week-long trip.

Wide expanses of forest, moorland, gently sloping hills and a seemingly endless string of clean water lakes and rivers for swimming, make The Mecklenburg Lakes a stunning place to visit. Lovers of nature, cycling, watersports and boaters, prepare to be charmed!

Don't miss out on the tasty, locally smoked fish at Plau am See!

Take time out for a spot of history at Rheinsberg Schloss



factfile

Fuel

Calculated in engine hours. Our total was 28hrs at €7.10 (£5.60) per hour. Total €198 (£156) Fuel capacity was 300 litres and we returned with 2/3 tank

Water Capacity

1500 litres – We refilled halfway through the trip

Costs

Marina prices averaged around €10 (£7.90) a night Market food is cheap .

Eating out was around €12 (£9.50) per person for two courses and wine.

Eating

U-Nautic Restaurant

17192 Waren / Muritz 0049 (0)399 166 3710

Fischerhaus, Plau am See www.ferieninplau.de 0049 (0)387 358 390

Restaurant Werlestuben Mittelstr. 2

17255 Wesenberg 0049 (0)398 322 6920

Charter costs

2008 pices for a seven night trip range from £955 (low season) to £1915 (high season) for the six berth Crusader

Charter company

Le boat/Crown Blue Line

Port Solent, Portsmouth, 02392 224252 sails@leboat.co.uk www.leboat.co.uk

Flights

Air Berlin

www.airberlin.com 0871 5000 737

Tourist information

German Tourist Office

0207 317 0908 www.germany-tourism.de

Marina

Marina Wolfsbruch

Wolfsbruch 3 16831 Kleinzerlang Germany 0049 (0)339 215 0956

Cruising advice

RYA

Hamble, Southampton, 0845 345 0370 www.rya.org.uk

total 156 miles

Hütten-Kan

6

2.5 miles

Wolfsbruch 7 **FINISH**

Rheinsberg