

↑ Kingston Mills Lock is the site of the first mill built on the Rideau here at Cataragui Falls in 1784. The site today features three locks, a turning basin, detached upper lock and the Robert Anglin Visitor's Centre. That is the main CN rail line originally built for the Grand Trunk Railroad in 1853. The falls still generate power to this day.

The Rideau Waltz

Story and Photos by
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HAVE LIVED IN ONTARIO MY ENTIRE LIFE BUT HAVE LIKELY EXPLORED MORE SQUARE MILES OUTSIDE MY OWN PROVINCE AND PERHAPS EVEN COUNTRY THAN WITHIN. SHAME ON ME! BECAUSE CLEARLY THERE'S MORE TO DISCOVER HERE.

IF YOU DON'T KNOW ME BY NOW If you had told me a year ago that I would be enjoying our "calvacade of colour" cruising up the Rideau Canal in a houseboat, you'd have knocked me over with a feather. And although travelling by houseboat may have never been on my 'to do' list, I'd certainly add it to yours now.

Keep in mind, however, that there are many other ways to explore this heritage route that extends 202 kilometres (of which only 19 are man-made) from Kingston on Lake Ontario

to Ottawa on the Ottawa River.

If you are short on time, and merely want a taste of the Rideau without the challenge of the locks (not really), you can virtually drive its entire length: Take Highway 15 from Kingston to Smith Falls—Highway 43 and 2 from Smith Falls to Kempsville and Highway 415 from Kempsville to Ottawa. Allow plenty of time for stops though...whether it's detouring, dining, shopping, apple-picking or simply soaking up the views. If you can add an overnight stay in one of the many charming towns, the Central Rideau offers a few great sight-seeing loops to distract you even further. Walking and biking trails also offer up a great workout in many lovely settings.

Daytrippers and/or campers can paddle canoes and kayaks through the entire system due to the excellent flat waters but beware of lock traffic in the height of the season. Of course, the shy and inexperienced can always portage. There are four Provincial Parks, more than 20 private campgrounds (most on the water), and most lockstations offer

overnight camping too. Keep in mind, however, that access to provisions is limited (especially in the Lower Rideau), so be prepared.

The Rideau, however, can accommodate virtually any kind of boat, power and sail, up to 27.4 m (90 ft.) in length and 7.9 m (26 ft.) in width. The maximum vessel height (including the mast) is 6.7 m (22 ft.). There are eight fixed bridges between Ottawa and Kingston that provide this clearance height. Lower bridges are equipped with a swing or lift mechanism that allows passage to larger vessels. Parks Canada maintains a minimum 1.6 m (5 ft.) depth throughout the Canal. Regardless of vessel design, any vessel drawing more than 4 ft. 6 in. must request special passage.

We started our houseboat adventure in Gananoque. After a leisurely drive along Highway #2, we arrived in time to enjoy a walking tour of the town and a chance to do some provisioning at the local grocery store followed by a casual but delicious ▶

DESTINATION THE RIDEAU WALTZ

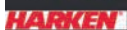


➤ The Brass Point Bridge, which carries a county road over the canal, is located at Brass Point between Little Cranberry and Cranberry lakes. At Brass Point a timber causeway and swing bridge carry a county road across the canal. This photo was taken during our Kouri's Kopters helicopter tour.



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pan-fried Ontario pickerel dinner with herb-roasted fingerling potatoes, French beans and lemon almond butter served at the Muskie Jake's Tap and Grill in the Gananoque Inn.

Before heading out on the boat the next morning, we popped into the The Socialist Pig Coffeehouse to fuel up with hot, frothy coffees and a plethora of sweets to (hopefully) charm our captain, Peter Latchmore, of Houseboat Holidays who volunteered to be our guide for the next three days.

Our accommodation was respectfully appointed with all the necessary amenities: dishes, linens, a fridge, a stove, a flushing toilet, a shower 'made for one' and a whistling kettle. In addition to the appointed space for the captain's helm, the cabin boasted two comfy couches and a dining area for four along with a galley kitchen and two double-bunks.

Departing from Clark's Marina, we were immediately tempted to head due south to the beckoning Thousand Islands but even the few hours we snuggled to the north shore of the St. Lawrence River introduced us to the many seductive bays of Howe and Wolf Islands. Another adventure. Another day.

We were greeted by Kingston's four Martello towers that are now part of the Rideau Canal and Kingston

Fortifications World Heritage Site. When we turned the corner and entered into the Cataraqui River, all signs of urban icons, historical or otherwise, had all but disappeared from view and were replaced by the swamps and marshes of the river.

As a competitive sailor, with twenty years and many crew positions to boot, cruising on a houseboat is quite a different experience. Instead of the constant tango with the wind, we were waltzing up the Rideau Canal...at a very different pace.

After an hour or so, we slipped into a different rhythm...and as we cruised our way up the river, we became mesmerized by the ever-changing scenic shores and the slow steady pace of Big Blue IV—our 48-foot houseboat that was to be our home base for the next few day—more than spacious enough for two and cozy enough to accommodate a family of four (or more)...and a perfect way to bring a pet along.

UNCHAINED MELODY

Soaking up the fall colours surrounding us, we almost missed the approach of the looming gates of Kingston Mills Lock (46-49) that were waiting for our arrival. Looming, too, was our first lesson about locks. Being accustomed to receiving specific instructions and



➤ Take the time to shop, explore and putter around this historic village. Tree lined streets with clapboard cottages are reminiscent of Nantucket.

crew positions before rounding a mark in a sailboat race, I waited for Captain Peter to dole out his own sermon as we watched the first pair of gates open. He didn't say much. In fact, it was the resident lockmasters who took over the step-by-step process while Captain Peter remained at the helm.

Gates open...boat enters lock... attach lines at bow and stern—to minimize any forward, back and sideways motion...water pours in or water pours out—depending on whether you're locking up or down...gates open...next flight ...and so on...through the entire lock system of the Rideau. There are 45 locks along the Rideau Canal, 47 if you include the two locks at the entrance to the Tay Canal. (If you are manning the lines, I'd suggest a good pair of gloves to get a good grip and save yourself from cold water and/or dirty, slimy lines.)

SOMEWHERE IN TIME

Leaving the Kingston Mills Lockstation in our wake, I'm convinced that someone put the world on pause. We seemed to be miles away from anywhere even although the highway flirts with the canal for most of its route. We shared the Rideau with paddlers, canoers, fishermen, power boaters and sailors of all shapes and sizes. Today, however, we were the lone houseboat.

We carried on through Colonel By Lake, River Styx and up the Cataragui River at a slow and steady pace for the next 15.7 kilometers before arriving at Lower Brewers Mills Lock (45)...our overnight stay.

To the west of the bridge, and for a taste of local art, visit Doner Gallery—a unique restored studio and gallery housed in the stunningly

renovated historical Washburn gristmill. Handcrafted metal sculptures and whimsical garden art are the artistic treasures of Randal Doner. Make sure to drop by the small studio there that showcases stunning silver jewellery creations by wife Darlene.

A stone's throw from where we were moored, you can go apple-picking at Waddell's Apple Orchards; it's well ▶



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The lock at Lower Brewers was the perfect setting for our catered dinner provided by Wendy’s Mobile Market. Our “Flavours of the Rideau” gourmet picnic basket was delivered to our houseboat and included everything from appetizers to sweets, all beautifully packaged with colour-coordinated linens, napkins and flatware.

The next morning, only 2.8 kilometers up the river waits the Upper Brewers Mills Locks (43&44) that is set in an excavated channel with the river passing to the right. Once through these locks, we embarked on the last and the longest stretch of our houseboat adventure. The route to Jones Falls Lockstation is a mix of small lakes and natural channels that wind through the hard granite bedrock. Does anyone ever get tired of looking at our Canadian Shield?

En route, we took a small detour and ducked into Seely’s Bay, a small

waterfront village offering basic marina services and provisioning. From there we headed to Morton’s Bay—a beautifully protected anchorage where you could easily spend days, both on and off the water. If we had a little more time and had remembered to bring proper hiking boots, Rock Dunder which rises 275 feet above, provides trails that lead to one of the highest points of land in the area offering up breathtaking views of the surrounding lakes and woodlands. Back onto Rideau proper, we headed for our final stop, Jones Falls.

Claimed to be one of the prettiest lockstations on the Rideau, Jones Falls (39-42) is home to the “Great Stone Arch Dam.” We decided to take the one kilometer Redpath Trail that began right at our mooring spot, over the long bridge, past the flight lock, visitor centre, and Sweeney House to the dam. This keystone arch dam, constructed of interlocking tapered vertical stones, was referred to (during construction) as the “Seventh Wonder of the World”, and is easily the most spectacular engineering structure on the canal.

Without the ingredients to whip up a meal, we decided to dine at the

One of the prettiest lockstations on the Rideau, Jones Falls (Lock 39-42) is home to the "Great Stone Arch Dam." When completed in 1831, this was the highest dam in North America (almost 60 feet).



historic Hotel Kenny. Originally built as a fishing lodge in the 1800s, this lodge still evokes steamboats chugging down the Rideau Canal. And surprisingly, there are still a few around in the area. We were flattered to be joined by new owner Frank Folts—a regular summer visitor here while growing up. Five years ago, when the hotel went up for sale, he couldn't stand the thought of it falling into the wrong hands, so purchased it and bought a house nearby where he lives all spring and summer, commuting from his home in Martha's Vineyard.

Although apprehension lingered at the "get go" of this trip—largely due to the darkness of the marina, unknown waters and our very first time on a houseboat—it dissipated the next morning in tune with the fog. When, three days later we had to debark our floating house, we just weren't willing to leave. But needs must, so with maps, rendezvous and a full itinerary, we set off on a road trip to explore the Central Rideau area. This circular route took us north to Perth, and back south to Westport and Newboro...all, by the way, accessible by boat too!

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DEFINITELY NOT THE BLUE DANUBE, BUT... Perth, located right on the Tay River, presented us with a surprise around every corner. We could have happily stayed there for a while discovering its many shops, restaurants and landmarks. While waiting for our hosts to meet us for lunch, we did a little local exploring and found ourselves following the scent of the best coffee ever...and we usually drink tea! Housed in the historic Code's Mill, this locally owned coffee joint exudes the smell of freshly roasting coffee beans, so grab a paper and some freshly baked snacks (including gluten-free options) and settle down in the cozy seating area, inside or out for a while. Code's Mill on the park offers restaurants, retail shops, and offices wrapped in exposed limestone, high timber-frame ceilings, and glorious balconies.

Without a doubt, our favourite land-based activity on this trip was lunch at The Masonry. Owner Kyle Woods opened up three months before



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our visit and had clearly found the recipe for success with full tables at breakfast, lunch and dinner. The menu features local, including many gluten-free choices; everything is made fresh to order. We chose the local lamb burger, perfectly cooked and served with avocado and goat cheese. The side: a fresh greens salad tossed with roasted apple slices, parsnip crisps and a lemon thyme vinaigrette. Simply plate-licking delicious!

Next stop and our only sleepover was in Westport. Although a seemingly sleepy little town, the Cove Country Inn was rocking that night and apparently every Thursday night with live jazz. We were treated to the Spencer Evans Trio and Ila Vann, a soul legend who belted out many favourites. On our morning after walk, we were seduced by the scent of baking cinnamon buns. No doubt Vanilla Bean's Cafe Creamery lures boaters and locals alike to this hot morning spot. No visit to Westport would be complete without a trip to Spy Rock lookout at Foley Mountain located high above a granite ridge overlooking the Upper Rideau Lake and the village.

For a fabulous finale to our trip, Kouri's Kopters took us back over our route, so we could see the locks and lockstations from the air. Regular tours will take passengers over the City of Kingston, the 1000 Islands, Boldt Castle. Private charters for fishing, hunting, aerial photography or whatever you fancy are also available.

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW

The last stop on our Rideau route provided us with the shopping fix anyone could ever dream of. Kilborn's, located in Newboro, offers every brand you know and want and then some. And it's not just about the shoes and boots. You could spend hours browsing kitchen accessories, furniture, clothing, gourmet foods, baby clothes and garden accessories. And just when you think you are done, there is more to explore.

But I could say that, too, about the Rideau Canal. ■

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