

## ADVENTURE CANADA

# Testing the waterway

One lock down, 23 to go ... negotiating a network of lakes, rivers and canals in central Ontario takes guts for a newbie, but fun is guaranteed. By *Jocelyn Pride*

**L**OOP the rope through the cable," comes a voice from above. Leaning out, I thread the rope around and attach it to the cleat. "Secure at the bow," I call to my husband Peter who's manoeuvring the remaining 11.5 metres of cabin cruiser closer to the starboard wall. "Now for the stern," guides the voice. Clinging to the railing, I edge towards the back past a series of black lines dangling along the wall. "Go for this one." Spotting a hand attached to the voice wiggling a cable I work quickly to fasten the second rope. "We're first-timers," I say out loud feeling the need to dispel any illusion we've experienced.

Peter cuts the engine and we take our positions to manage the ropes while the gates creak closed, water whooshes, and we float up, up, up where the man behind the voice is smiling. "Welcome to Lock 19. Now let's get you untied." Waves of relief make it feel more like I've run a marathon than traversed our first lock. One down, 23 to come.

Managed by Parks Canada, and one of the country's National Historic sites, the Trent-Severn Waterway winds along 386 kilometres connecting a labyrinth of interior lakes, rivers and canals in central Ontario. Created by nature during the last Ice Age about 11,000 years ago, rich in indigenous history and 19th-century engineering brilliance, the waterway is known as "the lifeblood of the region". Over seven days we discover why.

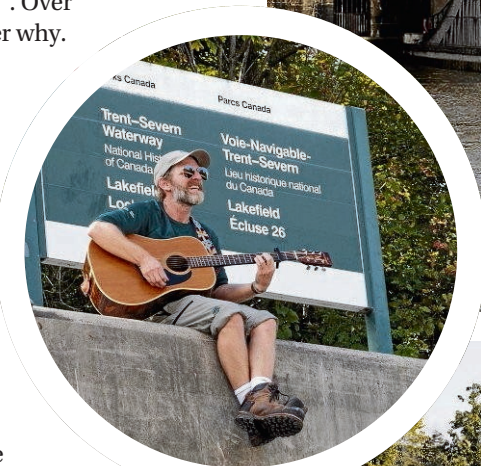
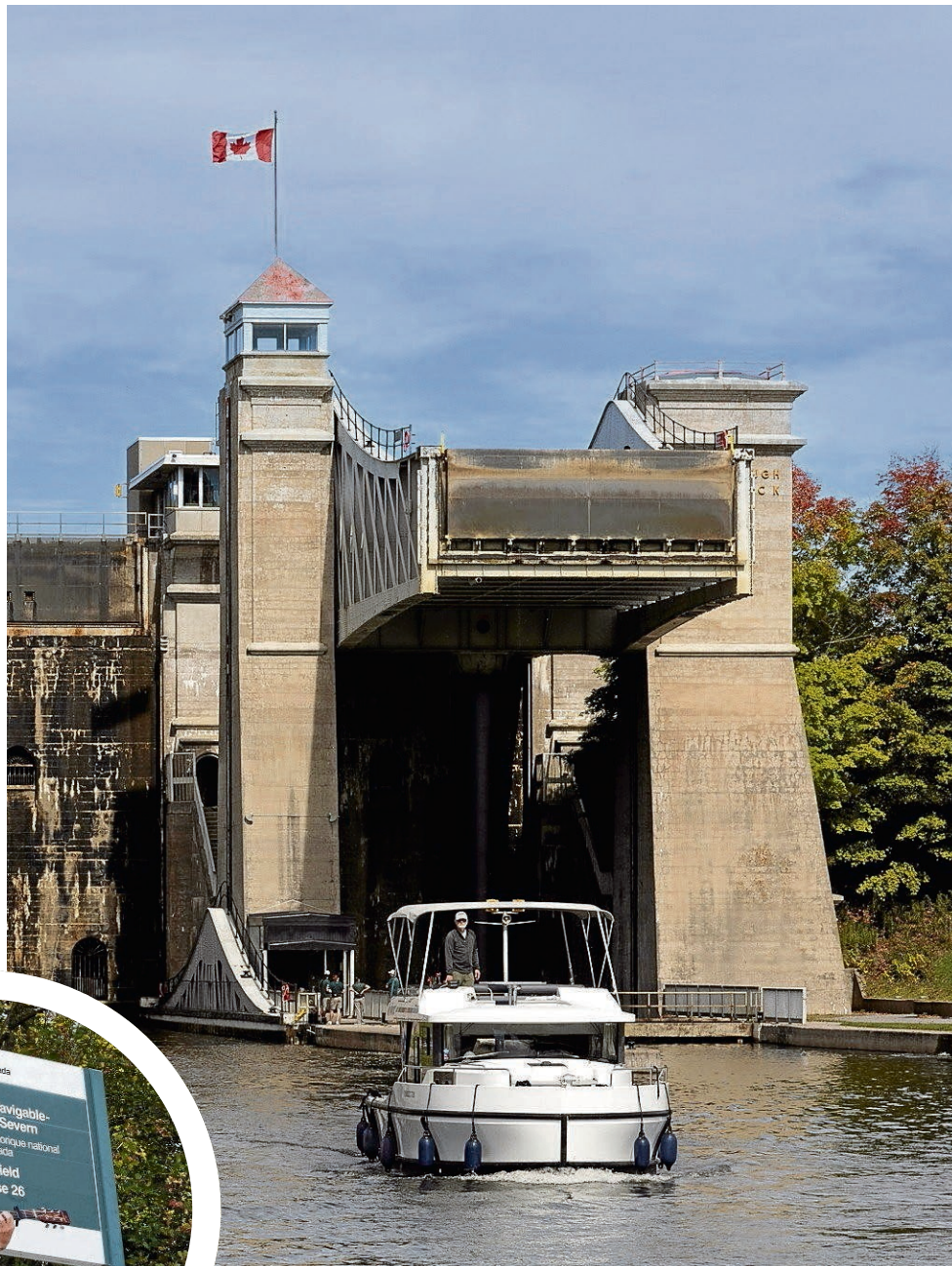
## On-water glamping

We're touring in convoy with a couple of American friends, and each of our two-bedroom, two-ensuite Le Boat rental cruisers, in their debut season on the waterway, is fully accessorised. The orientation session prior to leaving the marina sets us up with the hows, whats and whys, plus a 24/7 support hotline is further reassurance.

First stop is the Canadian Canoe Museum, housing the world's largest collection of canoes and kayaks nestled into the water's edge at Peterborough. Within the Corten steel walls, more than 600 types of paddled watercraft are draped across timber-lined walls, hanging from rafters, stacked in racks, and featured in interactive exhibits. A quote I read by Doug Williams of the nearby Curve Lake First Nation (Oshkiigmong) stays with me: "We are river mouth people that lived at every river that flowed into Lake Ontario. We are here because we love this territory."

## Going with the flow

Travelling upstream we move to the rhythm of the water, and fine-tune our boating prowess - Peter as skipper and me as first mate. It's late September and tinges of red, yellow and orange smudged across the beech, maple and cedars herald the end of peak season. With very few boats on the waterway, transiting the locks becomes



less of a tummy-turner. "If this was July or August, there'd be no elbow room in the lock," says Aaron Beverly, lockmaster of Lakefield (Lock 26). "And you'd be lucky to get a mooring spot."

After a five-lock day, cooking is out of the question. It's a short walk to Lakefield village where colourful hanging baskets dot streets lined with cottagey homeware stores, boutiques, pubs and cafes. Following Aaron's recommendation, we head to the Canoe and Paddle for fish and chips, and local craft beer with names like Publican House Square Nail, and Flying Monkey Juicy Ass.

## Through Hells Gate

The following morning, the weather forecast is accurate. Rain. Forging across water

radiating a steely glow, we stop at Lock 27 - Young's Point. Poking around the village, a happenstance meeting with Mary Ellen Clark-Hearns (nee Young) has me thawing out in the pretty riverside cottage she grew up in. "My great-grandfather was the first lockmaster here. My grandfather was the second," she says. "Rain or shine it doesn't matter - the beauty is the water."

Leaving the river behind we're now in serious cottage country. Nothing ostentatious - glimpses of simple, stylish architecture peek through the foliage of the twin lakes Clear and Stony. As we reach Stony Lake, the rain is too intense for us to drive the cruiser from the fly bridge, so we relocate downstairs to the secondary console. The difference? No GPS. The problem? The two lakes are named

Clockwise from main: Peterborough Lift Lock is an engineering masterpiece; the writer works the ropes; many cottages are only accessible by boat; entertainment courtesy of lockmaster, Aaron Beverly. **Pictures: Jocelyn Pride;**

literally - Clear Lake is clear, and Stony Lake is full of boulders. Peter holds steady at the wheel as we creep through the notorious Hells Gate, guided by green and red navigational markers.

Three locks later we moor for the night at Buckhorn - Lock 31. It's our turn-around point, but not before a morning hike to Adam and Eve rocks, a couple of rare erratics from the ice age, where the legend goes: "If two lovers hold hands and each touch one of the rocks, their lives will be blessed." How can we resist?

## It's all downstream

Over the next four days we retrace our wake, overnighting at different lock stations. At Lock 30 - Lovesick Island (only accessible by boat) - the four of us create one of our famed banquets and sit around the wood fire sipping champagne and reminiscing late into the night.

During the day the sun shines, the water sparkles. Swans glide past, egrets fly overhead. Hell's Gate doesn't seem nearly as scary. The locks are easier downhill - the same friendly staff help tie us up at the top, and chat as we float down in the chamber. At Lakeside, Aaron pulls out his guitar serenading us with a rendition of *The Weight* and we applaud like mad when he takes a bow.

Then there's grand old lady of the waterway - Peterborough Lift Lock, one of the highest hydraulic boat lifts on the planet, ingeniously engineered by local mastermind, RB Rogers, and built 120 years ago. Although we came up it, the ride down is more legendary - a 20-metre descent in 90 seconds. And what a view. With boat (and marriage) intact, on the final day, we land a perfect docking back at the marina and I tie off the ropes coiling the slack into concentric circles. Maybe I'll make a boatie yet.

*The writer was a guest of Le Boat*

## TRIP NOTES

**Getting there:** Le Boat headquarter for the Trent-Severn Waterway is located in Peterborough, about 150 kilometres from Toronto. Air Canada flies to Toronto via Vancouver. Qantas, United and Emirates fly from various capital cities via Los Angeles and San Francisco. Book the Toronto Airport Shuttle Service or a global airport transfer service such as Transfeero to Peterborough.

**The cabin cruiser:** The cost of a seven-night rental for the Horizon 2 inclusive of linen, safety equipment, mooring feed, fully-equipped kitchen and bathroom amenities for 2025 starts at about \$6000. Extras if required include bike and/or kayak hire, starter food packs (recommended) and fuel deal. Shorter and longer itineraries are available, and no licence or experience is required.

**Explore more:** [leboat.com.au](http://leboat.com.au)