

# CRUISING THE INLAND WATERWAYS OF FRANCE AND BELGIUM

*A guide to cruising the rivers and canals, with details of distances, moorings and facilities on each waterway*



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# Cruising the Inland Waterways of France and Belgium

This Guide is updated each year by Cruising Association (CA) members actively cruising the waterways and has the advantage that it is very much more detailed and up to date than other published guides. It also indicates what moorings are *like*, not just their location. When using the PDF version of this guide and online, you will find that the numerous hyperlinks in **green** enable you to access a considerable amount of additional information from sources on the internet. Where mooring locations are indicated in **red**, this signifies that they are included on **Captain's Mate**, the CA's proprietary information sharing app (see page 219), ensuring that members have the latest available information on waterways, mooring locations (many with photos) and facilities and enabling them to submit updates for inclusion in the app.

***If not already a CA member, please see page 217 for details of how you can join us and get these and other benefits with 20% off your first year's membership!***

## About the Editor

**Gordon Knight** spent 25 years in the public relations industry, latterly as joint founder and managing director of a top 10 UK PR company (floated in 1987, sold in 1991), then as an independent issues management consultant 'until it got in the way of sailing'. A CA member since 2013, Gordon spent 40 years cruising under sail, mostly in his Oyster 435 ketch *Athene of Lymington* in Northern European waters and throughout the Mediterranean. During that time he was an active administrator on the World Cruising Wiki, largely creating several Mediterranean sections as well as contributing to CA Cruising Reports. In 2015 he purchased a Nowee 38, *Cheyenne of Lymington*, and now spends much of the year cruising the inland waterways of France and Belgium with his wife Soophy. He is a member of the CA's **European Inland Waterways Section (EIWS)** and writes or edits all the Section's publications. He is also author of 17 full-colour photo guides to the French waterways available in both printed and PDF format from the Cruising Association website at <https://www.theca.org.uk/catalog/735>.

**Front cover photograph: mooring at Sarreguemines on the Canal de la Sarre (@Gordon Knight)**

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*Moret-sur-Loing on the River Loing (©Gordon Knight)*

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## INTRODUCTION



**T**he rivers and canals of France and Belgium are a very fine cruising area, providing some 8,500 kilometres of waterways. They can be used as a way through to the Mediterranean but many now just enjoy the wide variety of inland cruising available.

Here are just a few of their attractions.

- ◆ Calm waters – little need to worry about weather forecasts and gale warnings
- ◆ Beautiful and varied scenery – rolling farmland, vineyards, forests, deep gorges
- ◆ Fascinating little villages
- ◆ Fine towns, where you can often moor near the centre more easily than you could park a car
- ◆ In larger cities, easy access to theatres, concert halls and other places of cultural interest
- ◆ Modest costs, even after licence fees and mooring charges
- ◆ Incomparable food and drink

Many routes, including round trips, can be worked out from the maps. Some of the finest canal scenery is in eastern France, especially on the Canal du Rhône au Rhin and the Canal des Vosges. In France, the national navigation authority, the **VNF** (Voies Navigables de France) is responsible for the running of most of the waterways. It now concentrates its resources on the routes with significant commercial traffic, such as the Seine and canals in the north, and is actively working to devolve responsibility for the predominantly recreational waterways to the local regions although it will share funding and expertise with them to undertake maintenance and refurbish locks. The regions are keen to improve the waterways as a tourist attraction and in recent years previously unnavigable canals (such as the Canal de l’Oise à la Sambre and the Canal des Ardennes) have been re-opened and facilities improved. However, in some areas maintenance has not kept pace with deterioration and we report areas where depth at moorings is only 1.4m or even 1.2m, when it would have been 1.8m a decade ago.

Sadly, two further factors have conspired to make navigation of the canals more challenging than previously. Climate change and increasingly dry summers mean that water levels in several canals, especially in the north and east of the country, can run very low by late summer and restrictions or even closures are becoming more and more common. The situation has not been helped by the Covid-19 pandemic: with very little traffic for almost two years, weed growth has choked a number of smaller canals and clearing it is an uphill task for the VNF, since it often regrows as fast as it is cleared.

French lock hours vary from waterway to waterway, but as a general rule most will open during the summer from 08.30 or 09.00 to about 19.00, sometimes with an hour for lunch where locks are manually operated. Times do vary and should be checked with the [VNF website](#), or with lock keepers locally.

The situation in Belgium is rather better. Almost all the waterways handle some freight, and tend to be well maintained. There is also a far more positive attitude to small waterways. As well as providing interesting cruising in their own right, the Belgian routes provide convenient links into both the Netherlands and France.

With the decline of commercial traffic through the rural canals, some infrastructure such as shops, restaurants and fueling points has been lost, but it is still possible to eat well and at fairly modest cost. In revising these notes, we have tried to offer more information about restaurants and shops, especially in rural areas. Cooked dishes from the local *charcuterie* or supermarket can ease the ship's cook's burden. A well stocked store cupboard is helpful and canned or bottled prepared dishes such as *Cassoulet* and *Coq au Vin* are usually of good quality and a better flavour than might be expected. Many restaurants close on Mondays. The number of small bakers has not declined as fast as that of general food shops and they often open amazingly early. Sunday shopping is still fairly rare in France although many large supermarkets (and occasionally smaller ones) will often be open until lunchtime.

Mooring charges remain modest with just a few exceptions such as Paris and ports close to the Mediterranean. Many small towns and villages provide free moorings as a way of encouraging travellers to stop and spend. Even where charges are made, they are relatively modest compared with coastal marinas.

Salt water sailors in many parts of Europe envy their inland waterways counterparts for being able to pursue their boating interests relatively free of cumbersome and expensive bureaucracy. The main requirement for European Inland Waterways is to hold an International Certificate of Competence (ICC) with the Code Européen des Voies de Navigation Intérieure (CEVNI) endorsement (see Permits & Certificates).

Navigating on canals can be hard work if you are in a hurry. Relax if you can, allow plenty of time. Things can go wrong in many ways, involving locks, navigational hazards, other boats, etc. Careful watermanship and constant vigilance are necessary at all times.

## **Weather patterns and when to go**

Weather patterns are similar in Belgium and north west France, but warmer and more stable as you go east and south. Weather apart, the main considerations of when to go are:

- ◆ The time of year - conditions vary greatly according to season
- ◆ The main routes to the Mediterranean rise to over 300 metres
- ◆ Navigation in the winter can be interrupted by seasonal canal closures or by ice
- ◆ In spring, floods can make some rivers difficult and even dangerous and closures can occur
- ◆ Very occasionally some stretches of canals may be closed due to high water levels

In a dry summer, water levels may be reduced, occasionally leading to canal closures, or boats may be asked to wait until two or more boats can lock through together

# FRANCE



1. Grand Gabarit
2. Canal du Nord
3. Canal de la Somme
4. River Oise
5. Canal des Ardennes
6. River Seine
7. Canal du Bourgogne
8. Canals du Loing et de Briare
9. Canal Latéral à la Loire
10. Canal du Centre
11. Canal du Nivernais
12. River Marne
13. Canal entre Champagne et
14. River Saône
15. River Rhône
16. Canal du Rhône au Rhin
17. River Rhine
18. Grand Canal d'Alsace
19. Canal de la Marne au Rhin
20. Canal des Vosges
21. Canal de la Meuse/R. Meuse
22. Canal du Rhône a Sète
23. Canal du Midi
24. Canal de Garonne
25. River Sèvre Niortais
26. River Charente
27. River Adour
28. Brittany and Lower Loire
29. River Moselle

**F**rance offers a wide variety of inland cruising and each area is covered separately in this Guide. Using the many commercial maps available, exciting voyages can be planned to suit every interest. Circular routes can be found through the spectacular scenery of the Vosges, the Nivernais, along the upper Loire, along the Saône, and through the northern plains.

History from Roman times to the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be found in many places and the cities often offer central moorings within easy reach of their great cathedrals, winding streets and café society.

Cruises can also be centred on some of the great vineyard areas – Champagne, Burgundy, Sancerre, Chablis, Côtes du Rhône, Bordeaux and the Languedoc are all traversed by the inland waterways.

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# BELGIUM



- |                                |                                     |  |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Kanaal Nieuwpoort-Dunkerken | 6. Canal Ostend - Gent              | 11. Julianakanaal                      |
| 2. River Sambre                | 7. Albertkanaal                     | 12. Gent - Terneuzen                   |
| 3. River Meuse                 | 8. River Leie                       | 13. Kanaal Leuven - Dijle              |
| 4. Canal du Centre             | 9. River Bovenschelde (Haut Escaut) | 14. Kanaal Dessel - Turnhout - Schoten |
| 5. Canal Charleroi - Brussels  | 10. River Dender                    | 15. Zuid-Willensvaart                  |

Belgium tends to be regarded by many cruisers as simply a route between the waterways of France and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the 1,500km of inland waterways in Belgium traverse beautiful cities, passing remarkable feats of engineering, delightful scenery and pleasant stop-overs. Although many canals are heavily used commercially and some pass through industrialised areas, this is more than offset by scenery that equals anything seen in France. Belgian food is arguably the best in the world, as is their beer. There is much to interest the historian and, in particular, many battlefields from the Middle Ages onwards lie on or close to the canals and rivers. Indeed, the only real drawback to Belgium is the weather, which is decidedly Northern rather than Southern European.

Since 2007, pleasure craft are prohibited from using red diesel for propulsion. As pleasure craft can no longer use many of the refuelling points that primarily serve commercial craft, waterside refuelling points are now few and far between. Currently we are only aware of Antwerp, Antoing, Bocholt, Brussels, Comines, Diksmuide, Liège, Nieuwpoort and Mol (Zilvermeer).

Belgium has good rail services, with over 65s benefiting from a €6 return fare between any two stations in the country. Flemish and French are spoken, depending on the region. If you do not speak the relevant language, English may well be preferred. See note in the Introduction. There are excellent cycle routes, particularly in the Flemish region. See [www.fietsroute.org](http://www.fietsroute.org) for local itineraries.

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# CANAL DU CENTRE



Moorings at Fragnes (©Gordon Knight)

Digoin to Chalon	112km	1.8m water,	Breil 2 and 3,
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**T**he canal meanders through pleasant rolling countryside, with vineyards a feature around Chagny. There is still a small amount of commercial traffic. The canal is subject to water shortages and may close early in the autumn.

Most locks are automatic. (See also Locks in Cruising Details). It is essential to enter and leave slowly. Some locks are full to overflowing, so low fendering is needed. Lock hours: mid-March to mid-November: 09.00 - 19.00. Mid-November to mid-March: Monday to Saturday 07.30 - 12.00 and 13.30 - 17.00. Sunday 09.00 - 12.30 and 13.30 - 17.00.

Two types of lock a) 2.5m rise and b) approx 5m rise. Latter have floating bollards but these do not always keep pace with water and lines go slack at times of greatest turbulence. Mooring to central bollard not satisfactory, best to moor to two bollards if space. When ascending, if crew member can be spared to go ahead, this may be best arrangement.

**FACILITIES SUMMARY** (see individual entries for details)

**Repairs and chandlery:** Montchanin. Hire base: St-Léger-sur-Poui

**Public transport:** Railway stations at Paray-le-Monial, Génélard, Montchanin, Chagny, Chalon-sur-Saône

**Fuel (nearby):** Paray-le-Monial, St-Léger-sur-Dheune, Chagny

## MOORINGS

Underlined port entries also act as links to CAPTAIN'S MATE, the Cruising Association's proprietary information sharing app (available to members only).

### **J PK 103-101.5 Paray-le-Monial**

- Shallow *halte* at **PK 103**, with bollards only.
- Halte* at **PK 101.5** alongside parkland below lock 23. W&E on quay, shower block down bank on edge

of park. Depth 1.8m. €10 for 12m (2017).

Fuel at nearby service station; deliveries possible. Shops and restaurants. In July & August town hosts a pilgrimage. Railway station.

**PK 98 Pont-de-Bord** Possible R bank mooring with stakes. Bins and picnic tables.

**PK 88** Bank with three bollards, close to *Chateau de Digoine*; worth a visit. *Auberge* across lock.

**PK 85 Palinges** L bank quay with three bollards, W&E. Restaurant. Shops up hill.

### **PK 82 G nelard**

a) Basin below lock 16, both banks have quays with W&E. Price for 10m (2017): €10. Bollards very widely spaced. Depths R bank 1.5m - 1.8m and L bank 1.8m.

b) Grassy bank upstream of bridge. Widely spaced bollards. No facilities.

Restaurants, bars, *boulangeries*, supermarket and specialist tool shop. Market Sunday morning. *Centre d'Interpretation de la Ligne de D marcation* beside basin (museum of the wartime division of France). Railway station; also buses connect to Montchanin.



*G nelard basin (@Gordon Knight)*

**PK 65.5-63 Montceau-les-Mines** Formerly a heavy industrial area, now being extensively redeveloped and with good shops in town centre. Lifting bridges downstream of Montceau-les-Mines are controlled by bridge keeper and camera with no pull ropes.

- a) Curving concrete quay at **PK 65.5** for 2-3 boats with widely spaced bollards downstream of lifting bridge. Restaurant.
- b) *Port de plaisance* at **PK 64** with W&E, toilets and showers, WiFi. Price for 12m (2017): €9. Tel: 03 85 69 00 00. Laundrette 5 mins. Good depth: 1.8m off outer pontoons, shallowing to about 1m close to quayside. Be aware of disco opposite the moorings open Thursday-Sunday evenings sometimes until 06.00.
- c) Large supermarket at **PK 63** upstream of lock with shopping pontoon for one boat. Shops and restaurants. Market on quay on Tuesdays & Saturdays. Railway station.

**PK 61 Blanzay** R bank upstream of road bridge. Pleasant 50m quay for 4-5 boats with W&E. Free (2017). *Boulangerie*, pharmacy across bridge.

**PK 51 Montchanin** Bollards outside VNF offices, no facilities. Supermarket near (laundrette inside). Town centre 20 mins walk. Railway station. Around 2kms to TGV station with fast service to Paris and Lyon. English speaking marine engineer, Jeffrey R n l, offers spares procurement, repairs & *gardiennage*. Tel: 06 33 43 20 42.

*There are no other satisfactory mooring places on the summit level.*

**Ecluse 2 Ravin Epicerie** (open 7/7), *boulangerie*.

**Ecluse 3 Fourneau** Pharmacy. **Note:** bridge below the lock reported to have air draught of only 3.40m.

**PK 46 Ecluse 6 Motte** Quay above lock, good depth, opposite canal museum, no facilities.

**PK 44 St-Julien-sur-Dheune** R bank *halte* with 60m quay, nine bollards and two picnic tables. Depth 1.1m; centre 1.8m. Water tap outside *Mairie*. Restaurant & pleasant walk up to lake that feeds the canal.

**PK 36 St-B rain-sur-Dheune** *Halte* with bollards and picnic tables. Good depth.

### J PK 33 St-Léger-sur-Dheune

- a) Hire boat base plus quay for 3-4 boats. W&E, showers and pump out. Price for 12m (2017): €15 on bankside moorings. Depth from 1.8m - 1m by entrance to small basin. WiFi. Fuel at garage (5 mins). Restaurants, *boulangerie*, supermarket by railway station over bridge.
- b) L bank a few hundred metres downstream of the bridge bankside mooring with about 1.4m depth. Fuel at garage, 5 minutes. Restaurants, *boulangerie*, supermarket by railway station over bridge. **Note:** the St-Léger bridge and the next two downstream have only 3.45m air draught.

PK 26 Cheilly Basic *halte*.

PK 24 Santenay Basic but peaceful *halte* for 3-4 boats between locks 23 and 24, with 30m quay, good depth, picnic table and attractive views. Spring water tap. Popular with hotel barges. Village (15 mins) with shops and restaurants. Château does wine tours. Some local wine *caves* will deliver to boat. Pleasant 10kms cycle path through vineyards to Nolay.



*Peace and quiet at Santenay (©Gordon Knight)*

### J PK 20-19 Chagny

- a) Rural quay at PK 20 at small hire base. W&E. 10 mins to town centre.
- b) Good quay and pontoons at PK 19 in old canal basin with good depth. W & limited E. Price for 12m (2017): €15.

Fuel at supermarket 300m. Shops and restaurants 5 mins walk. Large market on Sundays. Base for several hotel barges. An important commercial centre of the Burgundy wine trade. Railway station.

PK 16.5 Rully Basic *halte* for one boat between locks 26 and 27. Wine village 2kms.

PK 8 Fragnes L bank 300m downstream of lock 34, 1.8m depth over 80m of gravelled quay and for about 12m farther at each end. Price for 12m (2017): €10.60, incl. W&E. Good showers €1.20. WiFi and laundry. *Boulangerie* and restaurant *Fleur de Sel*, closed in early season. Small market on Saturday.

PK 4 L'Embarcadère Shopping *halte* for two boats (LB) by large self-service restaurant spanning canal. Large supermarket and *bricolage*. Fuel.

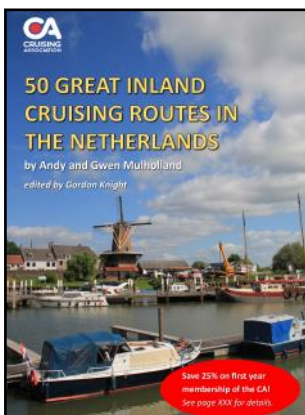
PK 0 Chalon-sur-Saône Junction with the R Saône, 2kms north of Chalon. For port see River Saône.

## CRUISING ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP OFFER

Good as this Guide is, why restrict yourself to the limited information available here when you could join us and receive the full benefits of membership (*including* free access to the annually updated online edition of this Guide)? The CA has an active and lively section, the **European Inland Waterways Section (EIWS)** dedicated to the interests of members cruising this area.

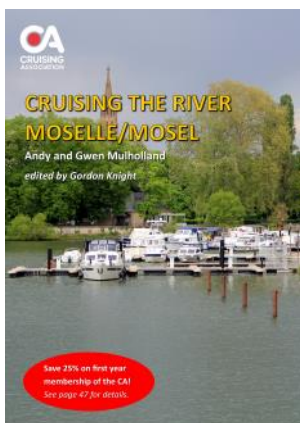
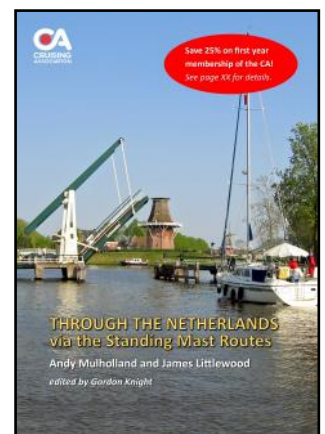
You'll have noticed in using this Guide that over half the mooring entries are shown in **red**. This means that members can access reports on the CA's unique **Captain's Mate** app, which provides instant updates on the respective mooring locations (many accompanied with photos) that are posted by members cruising the inland waterways and enables them to submit updates for inclusion in the app. Over 150 such new reports are contributed every year, ensuring that members have the latest available information on locations and facilities

**EIWS** members also exchange information and cruising advice via the Section's forum, **European Inland Waterways Net**, hosted on the CA server, which is an especially valuable resource for cruisers new to the inland waterways.



This Guide is not the only cruising guide available free to **EIWS** members. A further 258-page publication, **50 Great Inland Cruising Routes in the Netherlands**, provides detailed information on over 50 cruising routes in the 12 different provinces of the Netherlands. It includes step-by-step navigation details for each route; bridge and lock opening procedures and times; descriptions of moorings and facilities; useful sources of information on every aspect of Netherlands cruising; a glossary of important Dutch terms, and tips offering unique insights into particular locations. It even corrects numerous errors to be found in other published guides and chart apps. Like the other guides, it includes dozens of useful **hyperlinks** to further information on Netherlands cruising.

A third 66-page guide, entitled **Through the Netherlands via the Standing Mast Routes**, provides detailed navigational information on 14 different routes by which yachts can transit the Netherlands. Covering nearly 1,000kms of waterways from Vlissingen near the Belgian border to Delfzijl close to the border with Germany, it includes maps, distance tables, lock and bridge opening hours and colour photos to help skippers plan their routes. Like all CA inland waterways guides, it also contains numerous **hyperlinks** to additional sources of information on the cruising routes.



A 54-page guide to **Cruising the River Moselle/Mosel** includes step-by-step navigation details for the river, including distances; bridge heights; lock dimensions and VHF channels; descriptions of moorings and facilities and information on the sights, culture and visitor attractions. The route described runs for 394kms from Neuves-Maison in France through Luxembourg and Germany (where it is known as the Mosel) to finally join the Rhine at Koblenz.

A 20-page **German Rhine Guide** covers about 700 km of the river, starting from the border close to the Swiss city of Basel and continuing downstream to Nijmegen just inside the Dutch border. The guide is illustrated with colour photos and includes advice on navigating the challenges of the river safely, a listing of sources of useful information, and details of ports, harbours and fuelling points.



In addition to these major guides, the section also produces 17 illustrated mooring guides to the French inland waterways, covering the **Canal du Centre; Canal du Loing and Canal de Briare; Canal entre Champagne et Bourgogne; Canal Latéral à la Loire; Canal Latéral à la Marne; the River Marne; the Upper Moselle; Canal du Rhône au Rhin;du Rhône au Rhin(Nord);de Colmar; Canal de la Marne au Rhin(Est); Canal de la Marne au Rhin(Ouest); Petite Saône; Canal de la Sarre and River Saar; Canal de l’Aisne à la Marne, Canal de l’Oise à l’Aisne, Canal de la Sambre à l’Oise and River Oise and Canal Latéral à l’Aisne and River Aisne.**

A range of **Information sheets** can also be downloaded by members, including **Sources of information on the European inland waterways; Summary of maps and guides for the French waterways; Planning for long-term cruising; VHF and ATIS (Automatic Traffic Information System); Tips for cruising the French inland waterways; Winterisation tips** and the **CEVNI rules.**

**Cruising logs** produced by Section members are available online. The CA runs an annual competition to decide the best cruising log submitted by members that year and **EIWS** members have access to all the logs of cruises on the inland waterways submitted for the competition.



Details of possible **Layup locations** on the European inland waterways are provided to members via the CA website or **Captain’s Mate** app, an invaluable service when seeking places to leave a boat safely to return home for family commitments or for the winter months. Currently there are around 80 locations in Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands where boats may be left both in and out of the water.

A quarterly **Newsletter** keeps members briefed on Section activities and updates them on developments in the body of cruising information available. Finally, the Section holds an **Annual Seminar and Lunch** at the CA’s HQ in Limehouse Basin, London, with talks, demonstrations and discussions and, of course,

lunch. This is a great opportunity to exchange information with others on vital topics such as boat choice, regulations, moorings, layup locations, waterway depths and air draft and even practical details such as proximity of shops and helpfulness of marina staff. It is also an opportunity to meet and further friendships with other inland waterways cruisers.

For further information, visit the **EIWS** webpage at <https://www.theca.org.uk/public/sections/eiw>.

## Not forgetting

The CA has over 6,000 members around the globe, so - as you’d expect - offers a considerable number of additional benefits available to *all* its members, including:

- ◆ Quarterly full-colour ‘Cruising’ Magazine packed with useful articles on all aspects of cruising
- ◆ Monthly newsletters on CA matters
- ◆ Member discounts from nearly 150 marine suppliers of everything from boatyard and charter services, chandlery and clothing to electronics, training courses, holidays, insurance and more
- ◆ Comprehensive library and database of cruising information
- ◆ Website with over 16,000 pages of useful information
- ◆ Dedicated Regulations and Technical Services (RATS) team to monitor international, national and local regulatory and technical matters
- ◆ London-based clubhouse with bar/restaurant and inexpensive overnight accommodation

## To obtain your 20% discount on first year’s membership

Join us now, using the online membership application form at <https://www.theca.org.uk/join>. Once you arrive at the Payment Options page, enter the promotional code **XXXXXX** (no spaces) then set up a direct debit by providing your bank details. That’s all you need do to get 20% off your first year’s membership!



## CAPTAIN'S MATE

One of the most valued aspects of Cruising Association membership is the [Captain's Mate](#) app, which enables members to exchange information and updates on literally thousands of mooring locations throughout the inland waterways and coastal areas.

Hundreds of new updates are submitted via the app each year in the form of Cruising Reports to help other members cruising in one's wake and these are automatically downloaded and saved to the app, together with an OpenSeaMap showing all the mooring locations, for offline use. Users can then search reports on mooring locations using the map, by location name or even by proximity to their current location using the inbuilt GPS on their device.

The app also features a novel **Find My Friend** feature to enable users to locate fellow CA members cruising in the same area and arrange meet-ups, exchange bang up-to-date alerts and tips or compare notes on moorings, navigation problems or harbour and marina charges.

Several members have saved themselves days or even weeks of wasted cruising time by receiving warnings of bridge and lock closures from fellow members via the app. An example of reports covering the area of Northern France is shown to the right.

All harbours and mooring locations in **red** in this guide signify that they are included on **Captain's Mate**, ensuring that members have the latest available information on waterways, mooring locations (many with photos) and facilities and enabling them to submit updates for inclusion in the app.

The **Captain's Mate** app is available free of charge to all CA members on both Apple and Android platforms. For further details check out <https://www.theca.org.uk/public/captainsmate>.

*Right: the **Captain's Mate** app puts all the latest information on cruising destinations at one's fingertips.*







*Étang de Gondrexange on the Canal de la Sarre (©Gordon Knight)*