

# Rideau Canal

## History Lesson

The Rideau Canal is an inland waterway between the Canadian capital of Ottawa and Lake Ontario at Kingston. It is North America's best-preserved "slackwater" canal, and the only one from the great 19th century canal-building era that still operates along its original route with

most of its original structures intact. It is named for the Rideau River, which was in turn named for the Rideau Falls. Rideau, French for "curtain", is derived from the curtain-like appearance of the falls where they join the Ottawa River.

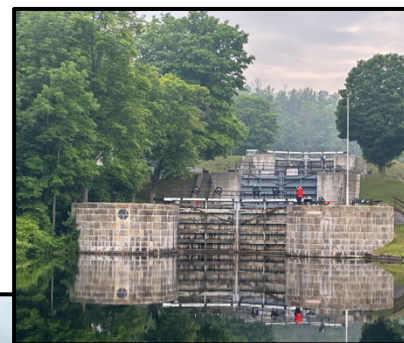
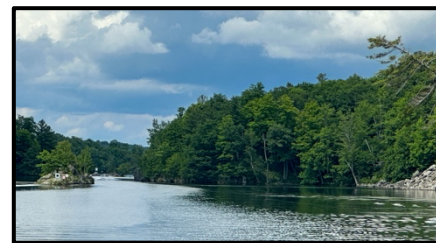


Built as a military project to provide a secure connection between Montreal and Kingston, the construction of the canal was supervised by Lieutenant-Colonel John By of the Royal Engineers. The canal work started in the fall of 1826, and it was completed by the

spring of 1832. John By designed a 5-foot-deep canal that used several natural waterways, including the Rideau and Cataraqui rivers and a series of lakes. Even with the natural waterways, the canal still required a total of 47 locks, and, because of the natural elevation change between bodies of water, it required multiple locks at several sites. At the canal's terminus, the 82-foot change in elevation between the canal and the Ottawa River



required the construction of eight connecting locks, followed by a 4,200-foot channel dug through unstable clay. In total, the system required 33 locks between the Ottawa River and its summit at Upper Rideau Lake, for an elevation change of 273 feet. From the summit to Lake Ontario an additional 14 locks were built, for a total lift of 164 feet. Early in the process, John By resolved to build a canal large enough for oceangoing steamships to use. Although he had to curtail his optimum size for the locks, the compromise lock size of 134 feet long by 33 feet wide was substantially larger than that of the canals built in the United States during the same period. Soon after the opening of the canal, John By was recalled to London to face an inquiry by the British Parliament into cost overruns on the project. Because of the cost overruns he was retired, and he received no accolades or recognition for his tremendous accomplishment. Except in Ottawa! There was a statue of Lieutenant-Colonel John By overlooking his canal.



# Kingston, ON

As soon as we had Tonto secure in her slip at Confederation Basin Marina on Wednesday, 21 June, David hoisted our quarantine flag and then called Canadian Customs. For us, the process was very simple. David had Tonto's documentation information and our passport information right in front of him. The customs agent asked if we had any firearms on board. No. Then if we had any cannabis on board. No. end of conversation. He said enjoy your visit. The quarantine flag came down and the Canadian courtesy flag went up.



Mary & I viewed Bellevue House, home to Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, when he was a young lawyer just getting started. While the house is being restored, the visitor center had a very nice display about his life and terms in office. The grounds were very nice.

Sharyn & Gary, Gulf Harbour friends, joined us on Friday. It was fun having them on board and very helpful going through the Rideau locks. Everyone had their team assignment. David drove into and out of the locks. I caught the lock cable at the bow and Gary did the same in the stern. Sharyn was in charge of our thank you treat bags. It was sort of like giving out Halloween Candy in the US. The treats had to be store bought and individually wrapped. The first day both Exhale and Tonto gave out thank you bags. After that we combined one bag from both boats. Tonto gave them out one day and Exhale the next day.



As I mentioned earlier, most of the Rideau Locks are original and the gates are cranked open and closed. Each lock or flight of locks has a crew of two to six Canada Parks employees depending on the number of locks in the flight. The lockmaster is usually a full time Park employee, and the rest of the crew is made up of college students. Everyone on the crew was very nice and helpful. They were always very appreciative of their treat bags.

## Jones Falls

We stayed at the Hotel Kenney dock just below the Jones Falls locks. I planned two nights there because I wanted to be sure we had time to hike to the falls. Every time I did an internet search of Jones Falls Canada, Mr. Google returned this photograph. David & Gary spent quite a bit of time talking with Lockmaster Noel. Not only did they learn how the locks work, but they also learned we were 190 years too late to see the falls! The Jones Falls in Mr. Google's photograph is outside Owen Sound between Georgian Bay and Lake Huron. Now I need to plan another summer vacation to the Great Lakes!





The Jones Falls on the Rideau were lost when the Stone Arch Dam was built during 1831 & 1882 to flood a long series of rapids and falls as part of building the canal. Unlike most other dams, this one does not depend on gravity to hold it in place and keep it together. The stone courses cannot be lifted and separated by water and ice penetrating between them, but actually become stronger as they are pressed into each other and against the natural rock inclines on each side. This is the same concept as the arch of a Roman aqueduct transferring the weight of the water into the unmovable ground. Even Buttercup joined us on our walk to the dam.



On the way back from the Stone Arch Dam we stopped at the locks. It was interesting to see the locks in action from the outside.

David even got a chance to help close one of the lock gates.



## Chaffey Lock



We tied up next to each other on the Upper Lock Dock. It took Rick and David a while to find two pairs of 30-amp outlets that were phased correctly to piggyback to a 50-amp cord. Red Dragon, Behind Exhale, was very helpful and moved their single 30 amp plug a couple of times.

David & I and Sharyn & Gary explored town and walked to the Iron Bridge. In 1911 the Canadian Northern Railway began building this section of the railway between Smiths Falls and Sydenham. The complex construction involved spanning gorges with cribbing and fill, dynamiting rock outcroppings and constructing the trestle. Trains began operating along the line in 1914 and it became a busy passenger and freight conduit. In 1923 the Canadian National Railway acquired the track.



Although traffic diminished over the years, it remained an active railway until 1979. After the tracks were removed, the rail bed became part of the Cataraqui Trail.

## Westport & Smith Falls

Westport is located on the banks of the Upper Rideau Lake and is the largest village in the Rideau Lakes area. As we entered the lake, the red & green markers changed sides because we were now Red, Right Returning from Ottawa instead of from Kingston. Wednesday evening, 27 June, we enjoyed a very nice dinner at the Cove Country Inn. It was Sharyn & Gary's last night on Tonto this trip.

After getting tied up at Smith Falls, we explored the village and found an eclectic spot for lunch. Boomtown Fusion Eatery specialized in Italian, Indian, Sri Lankan, & Canadian fair. Then we had to say good-bye as Sharyn & Gary caught a taxi to the Ottawa Airport Hotel for their early flight the next morning.

## Merrickville Locks

Tonto tied up in The Pond on the dam wall. Exhale tied up on the Lock Upper Wall. We toured the Blockhouse Museum. It was originally a defensive building built by John By to protect the Rideau Canal from possible invasion. By the time it was completed in 1832, the threat of invasion had passed and the building was repurposed as the home for the lockmaster and his family. Sgt. Johnston and his wife and children lived in the Blockhouse from 1833 to 1855. The Blockhouse has had many other purposes in the intervening years, including a storage facility and a church.



Friday morning, 30 June, before we could lock through, the swing bridge had to be opened. This was one of the bridges that were still manually cranked opened.



## Manotick, ON

All the lock walls are very crowded over Canada Day weekend. Mary & Rick suggested back in February that we make marina reservations for 30 June & 1 July (Canada Day). Hurst Marina outside of Manotick was our choice.

St. Charles Yacht Club friends, Edith & Mike, summer in northern NY state. They joined us for a very nice dinner at the Black Dog Bistro on the 30th. We enjoyed a very quiet Canada Day catching up on boat chores. Because it stays light so late all the big fireworks shows did not start until 10 pm. We did not want to be driving back to the marina at midnight in a car and on roads we were not familiar with.

# Hogs Back & Hartwells Locks

These were our last locks before downtown Ottawa. Donna & Paul, Gulf Harbour friends, both grew up in the Ottawa area and were very helpful with all kinds of tips about what to see & do in the Thousand Islands and along the Rideau Canal. Their



summer home is a couple of blocks from the Hogs Back Lock, and they greeted us on the upper lock wall. The Rideau Canoe Club is next to the lock and had several dragon boats tied up there. Donna explained the club hosts an International Dragon Boat Competition every year. All the marked lanes still in the water were from that competition.



There is no overnight dockage at the Hogs Back Lock, so we spent the night on the upper wall of the Hartwells Lock. Donna & Paul picked us up and we enjoyed a fabulous Thai dinner at the Green Papaya.

## Next Stop

I have rambled long enough for now! Next up will be Ottawa and the Ottawa River.