

Towpath temptations

The lack of progress of our plan to live on a narrow boat has been pretty depressing when combined with the dark winter months and without actually discussing it we have refrained from walks along the local towpaths. In the same way that you might avoid walking past endless confectionery shops during a self-imposed abstinence from sweet eating during lent, we have avoided the temptation of bumping into sickeningly contented and blissfully happy live-aboards enjoying the lifestyle that we so

envy but can't yet have. But you can't avoid temptation forever.



Peaceful Lancaster Canal



Signs of Spring

It may have been a bunch of daffodils or snowdrops that did it but something lifted my spirits and gave me the urge to get back out there and start dreaming again. Come to think of it, it may have been those loveable thespians Timothy West and Prunella Scales who were back on the telly, bumping into various obstacles on the Leeds and Liverpool canal and oozing love and contentment as they casually destroyed locks and jetties on a borrowed narrow boat. Better TV might have been to view the owners of said boat watching

the program Goggle Box style and weeping quietly into their Pinot Grigio as their pride and joy bounces from one side of the canal to the other.

Whatever it was that spurred me on, it resulted in a lovely walk along the Lancaster canal. It's not the busiest of canals at any time of year so in the depths of winter we knew we would be unlikely to bump into many occupied craft. As it happened we only saw three boats and whilst they all looked beautiful and homely I was relieved to see that

none of them bore a For Sale sign or sign of life so we were safe. Safe from conversations about living on a boat that inevitably end with the well-meaning but frustrating advice to 'just get on with it' without any acknowledgement of the fact that getting on with it costs money that we don't currently have. Fortunately there were plenty of distractions of the feathered, flowery and woody variety to keep us more than occupied spotting early signs of spring, or more accurately, the end of winter.

A male goosander taunted us by waiting patiently for us to get within about twenty yards of him and then just as I raised the camera he would take to the air and fly just far enough along the canal to be out of photographic range before repeating the process.



Not so close up goosander



Being teased by a Goosander

I got bored in the end and turned my attention to a much more obliging swan who seemed to think that I was a photographer from the avian equivalent of match.com or something as he paraded up and down like an over inflated gigolo.



What a splendid chap and didn't he know
it.

As far as we could see he was
wasting his time as there wasn't
another swan anywhere in sight;
unlike the female mallard that
seemed to be enjoying being
diligently followed by not one but
two hopeful suitors. I'm not sure

how she was going to make her mind up because it looked to me as if she was being pursued by identical twins. We had a really close up view of a moorhen next and what a stunning bird it is.



Look at those feet! (Photo from
<http://www.nerjarob.com/>)

There is a perception amongst those not interested in such things that all British birds are small brown jobbies. Well this beauty is brown, black, white, red and bluish grey with huge striped yellow feet. I mean how exotic do you want?

We joined the arm of the canal that links it to the river Ribble and the rest of the national network.



Deep scary locks

A set of deep locks takes boaters down onto the branch and under the main road to wind through the suburbs of Preston.



Under the road

Canals in these situations are a haven for wildlife and it was a delight to see grey wagtail and long tailed tits busy amongst the budding trees and catkins. We took to a woodland path alongside the railway to get back to the Lancaster itself and make it a

circular walk avoiding a stretch of boring tarmac. The trees are all like coiled springs at this time of year, just waiting for another couple of degrees of warmth and another hour or two of daylight to spur them into a frenzy of leaf production.



'Now you see me' nest.

Just a few more weeks and the stark outline of naked branches will be transformed into a rich vibrant green canopy hiding the nesting birds and providing food and shelter for a wide variety of life. The abundance of summer will be here before we know it and those that live all year on the canals will be joined by the weekenders and the holiday boaters. Fingers crossed we will be joining them.