



When my good friend, _____, asked me to help him deliver his newly acquired 1986 Grand Banks 36 Classic from upstate New York to Maine through the Erie Canal I jumped at the chance. He had found a rare gem of a one-owner used boat that had been in freshwater since new.

The plan was to take the boat from Alexandria Bay, New York, to her new home in Portland, Maine. We would enter the New York canal system at Oswego, New York, connect through the Erie Canal to the Hudson, past New York City, and up the coast to Maine in the Spring of 2020.

As our departure approached, COVID delayed canal maintenance, leaving one lock on the Oswego closed. We investigated alternate routes like taking the St. Lawrence into Canada and then through the Chamblay Canal into Lake Champlain, ultimately connecting to the Hudson. Unfortunately, the Whitehall lock at the south end of Lake Champlain was closed with opening dates uncertain. We considered running the St. Lawrence all the way to the Atlantic past Nova Scotia to Maine. This is a long and arduous journey that would likely subject us to extreme conditions, including intense fog, but is supposed to be extremely beautiful.

The Canadian government gave us a lukewarm response regarding this route. A vessel like ours could transit Canadian waters but we would be severely restricted, with limited or no ability to go ashore. We could refuel and take on supplies but would be quarantined aboard. The boat, in the meantime, was hauled out at Bonnie Castle Marina, and as winter turned to spring the yard worked on replacing the vintage electronics with state-of-the-art Garmin products, including a new radar, which would be

imperative if we went through the St. Lawrence Seaway. We contemplated our options and waited as May rolled into June. Lock openings kept getting pushed back and we were now actively preparing for the long haul through Canada when we received notice: The Oswego canal would open August 10. We could run through the Erie Canal after all!

DUE DILIGENCE

Arriving in the yard, we surveyed the boat proudly perched on her cradles. Having weathered a New York winter, she was dirty outside, but in good condition for a boat this age. Inside, the boat was immaculate. It was like a time machine had taken us back to 1986 when the boat first launched. Cushions were in their original factory wrapping. The oven manual was neatly tied to a rack having never been used. The parquet floors and abundant teak cabinetry shined like new. The boat was kept on a boat lift on a private island since new and was used as an excursion boat for the owner and his guests. No one had ever slept or cooked onboard from the look of things.

We had a checklist and started going through systems. I checked belts and fluids in the engine room and looked for signs of leaks and problems. I opened sea strainers and turned seacock handles to make sure they worked. When I got to an unused through-hull meant for a never-installed genset, it wiggled slightly. Concerned, I asked a guy from the boatyard to have a look.

"Don't do anything, just check it," I said as he jumped into the engine room.

The words barely crossed my lips when he grabbed the through-hull and ripped it right off the inside of the hull. I was astounded as he laughed and handed me

About the boat



Overall, *Tala* is a simple boat, almost like a sailboat where the systems are basic 12V. Engines and systems don't incorporate any electronic components or fly-by-wire; simple tools can fix a lot. She's very lightly used and we were the first folks to actually sleep onboard. The 1986 version of the Grand Banks 36 Classic was toward the end of the original production run of the model that was essentially unchanged since 1965, except for the transition from wood to glass in 1973. In 1988, it was updated with a little more beam and length. I like the look of the older version better and later models have a slightly different ride. The boat has two staterooms, two heads, a lower pilothouse station, the salon settees make berths, and there is a tremendous amount of storage.

- **Engines:** 2 x Ford Lehman diesels (~450 hours)
- **Fuel Capacity:** 2 x 200-gallon tanks
- **Water:** 2 x 85-gallon tanks
- **Cruising Speed:** ~8.5 – 9 knots
- **Range:** At 9 knots, burn is ~5 gallons an hour total. With 10% reserve that gives us ~648 nautical mile range
- **Draft:** 3'11"
- **Beam:** 12'2"
- **Displacement:** 23,300 pounds
- **Vertical Clearance w/ mast:** 20'7"
- **Vertical Clearance w/ mast and Bimini lowered:** 14'8"

the broken off seacock. Luckily, the boat yard had a replacement, so I carefully caulked the hole and installed the new valve. As an added precaution, I hammered every through-hull with a rubber mallet to test their integrity. The checklist and our diligence helped us avoid a serious issue.

THE PASSAGE: ALEXANDRIA BAY TO OSWEGO

Underway between the rocky shoreline of Canada and the U.S., I admired all the magnificent island homes in this area. Boats of all sizes cruised by as we left the towering Bonnie Castle behind us and headed into Lake Ontario. In the hot afternoon, the wind piped up as we angled 45 miles across to Oswego and

Erie Canal prep

Fastidious planning is essential on any delivery — especially for a trip through the Erie Canal. A “Delivery Notes and Outline” document (see sidebar on next page) was sent ahead of time by our Captain _____ in preparation for our passage. This not only provided particulars of our vessel — including her draft, vertical clearance, tankage, proposed cruising speed and range — but also outlined all the locks and bridges we would traverse in a day-by-day itinerary. This information, extracted from charts and guides, helped us execute our trip. We knew what to expect, and we checked off each bridge we passed and each lock we went through, pinpointing our location as we went. I encourage anyone running the Erie Canal to create a document like this to define and organize the voyage.

Lock systems



Be prepared for different lock systems that include lines, cables and pipes. Lock lines are common and are easiest to handle with ropes hanging into the lock. Simply grab the line with a boat pole and hold it as you go up or down. Cables are fixed vertically in the locks, and you place a line around the cable and then let it slide, holding both ends of the line onboard. Cables can be rough and dirty, so gloves and older docklines help. Pipes work like cables; with a line tied to the boat, you slip it behind the pipe and hold it as you slide up or down the wall. It's best not to let your boat push hard against the wall, as fenders can get pinned in voids. Rising water tends to push the boat against the wall, so boat poles or simply pushing off with outstretched arms maintains separation.

(Top left) _____ holding onto the lock lines. (Top right) Crewman _____ preparing to catch the lock lines. (Bottom left) Captain _____ and _____ on the flybridge. (Bottom right) The distinctive blue and yellow tugs and support vessels of the N.Y. Canal system.



our canal adventure. The steep lake chop occasionally sent a cool splash of freshwater up to the flybridge. The beauty and power of the lake brought me back to my childhood on Lake Michigan and left me craving further exploration. After our brisk run across Lake Ontario, we settled on the wall at Oswego and lowered our radar mast for better bridge clearance. With some bridges just above 21 feet, we did not want to take chances with a 20-foot, 7-inch mast. Sailboats traversing the canal lash masts on deck or in braces holding their rigs horizontally during passage. We had no shore power as the 30-amp service on the wall was not working. The next morning, we awoke to dead batteries. A mile walk up the road, a Napa store could order the batteries, but anxious to get moving we opted for a portable jump starter. With engines started, we would keep them running and look for batteries elsewhere. We were on our way! Hailing our first lock, Oswego Lock 8, on VHF Channel 13, we got the green light and entered. The orange ball-type commercial fenders we purchased are ideal for the locks because they keep the boat further off the wall and roll up and down easier. I manned the bow with crewman _____ at the stern and _____ driving. On deck we each had a boat pole and wore leather work gloves for line handling, pushing off the wet and grungy walls and working around lock cables and pipes. Many boats handle the locks with two, but three worked well. We grabbed hold of the lock lines that dangled down the wall and started up a series of



seven locks on the Oswego. This first lock raised us about 11 feet but we would traverse locks over 30 feet on our journey. Enjoying the scenery between the locks, we established a routine: Hailing locks upon approach, entering and settling along the wall for locking. Some locks are close, and others 10 miles or more away. Views vary as the canal cuts through farmland, industrial areas and cities. Sometimes roads or tracks run adjacent to the canal and other times you cut through remote forests and rivers. Some sections with houses are no-wake, but in many places you can run at speed. We completed seven locks on the Oswego Canal, turned east into the Erie Canal, and after one lock we approached Winter Haven Marina. This full-service marina has fuel, water, guest docks, haul-out facilities and a small marine store. Our batteries did not seem to be holding a charge, so we purchased two new 8D batteries. Lifting the old batteries out of the engine room and lowering in the new ones was sweaty and difficult but everything fit perfectly. We slept well knowing we would not be stranded in some remote section of the New York canal system.

DOWN THE ERIE CANAL TO THE HUDSON

A light morning mist hovered along the shoreline as we crossed Oneida Lake running 27 miles to our first lock. The sun broke through as we reached the lock and our routine resumed. Climbing two locks we reached Whitesboro Lock 20 and



began our downward journey toward the Hudson. The boat lowered more gently, locking down, with water streaming out. It can be sunny and breezy at the top as you converse with the lock tender and then down you go into the calm and shadow until the doors open. Lock 17 at Little Falls, our final lock that day, drops an amazing 40 feet to the Mohawk River. You could see some debris in the water as we exited. Near the opening, we heard a thump and saw small branches rise to starboard. They were attached to something already under the boat. Scrambling with our boat hooks we pushed the log out as _____ backed up. The submerged tree lay perpendicular to the gate and our exit. Approaching again, we both shoved the debris down as _____ skirted the log until it popped out behind us. Checking our bilges and shafts, we luckily did not seem to have any damage. Tied outside Lock 16 for the night, we were still a bit rattled by the log incident. It was a hot summer evening, so _____ and I set off in search of beer. We crossed the lock on foot and accessed the Erie Canalway trail on the other side. Heading off through the woods, we trekked the 1.5 miles to St. Johnsonville. The town, now quiet, is lined with old brick houses reminiscent of another more vibrant era. We filled our backpacks with beverages and junk food at Kinney Drugs, under the gaze of a befuddled cashier, and hurried back through the dusk and mosquitos to the boat. Those cold beverages tasted amazing in the humid evening air as we toasted to another day and our lock log calamity.



Dropping through nine locks along the Mohawk River we wound through open stretches, cruised past Schenectady and ended the day at a large metal control gate. Local boats sped across the sun-drenched water into the evening. The gate opened the next morning, putting us in narrow, rocky channels leading to a series of locks close together. The tender locks you through the first, then jumps in his car and speeds ahead to meet you at the next one. You could hear the rush of water flowing off adjacent dams as we dropped through the locks. We passed the Canal Corporation Depot with repair locks and facilities lined with tugs and barges painted in brilliant New York blue and yellow. This historic section is criss-crossed with old canals, dams and channels — some dating back to the original 1825 canal. After a series of 30-foot-plus drops, we emerged from Lock 2 finally in the Hudson. Stopping along the river, we put our mast up and prepared for our open-water journey to Maine. Winding down the Hudson, we passed Albany and West Point, until the river widened and New York City's Statue of Liberty beckoned us to the sea. Rough weather outside and favorable currents sent us up the East River. Dodging water taxis, we crossed under the Brooklyn Bridge and marveled at the Empire State and Chrysler buildings as we passed. Rocketing through the race with current behind us, we emerged into Long Island Sound. Our solid old Grand Banks got her first true taste of the sea, with salty waves crashing upon us as we powered into the night. ★

Delivery notes & outline

General Path: Alexandria Bay, New York to Newport, Rhode Island via Lake Ontario > Oswego Canal > Erie Canal > Hudson River > East River > Atlantic > Block Island Sound/Atlantic > New Bedford, Massachusetts > Portland, Maine.

Locks: Plan on 30 minutes per lock on the Erie and can't run the canal at night, so we'll be in the ditch for three days.

Day 1, 8/11: Alexandria Bay, NY, to Oswego, NY: 65 miles. Approx: 8 hours. ETD: 0600. ETA: 1400 hours. Slip for overnight: Free dockage. West wall next to Lock 8, and Alex's on the Water Bar at the Quality Inn. Four pedestals with 30-amp service. Note: Drop mast upon arrival.

Day 2, 8/12: Oswego, NY, to Brewerton, NY, at Winter Harbor Marina: 32.49 statute miles. Oswego Canal to Erie Canal. ETD: 0700. ETA: 1430. Slip for overnight: Winter Harbor Marina, Brewerton, NY. Locks: hours of operation 0700-1700. Note: There is no Lock 4. On this day, we'll transit seven locks on the Oswego Canal and one on the Erie, and estimate 30 minutes per lock to transit, plus some waiting time.

Day 3, 8/13: Brewerton, NY to St. Johnsville, NY: 80.62 statute miles. All in the Erie Canal. ETD: 0500. Note: First lock not for 27 miles so we can make some distance before the 0700 opening. ETA: 1730. Overnight: Free wall tie-up just west of Lock E16, which we'll miss opening. Tie up here for 0700. No electric.

Day 4, 8/14: St. Johnsville, NY, to Waterford, NY, at the mouth of the Hudson. Last grouping of locks is called the Waterford Locks and we need to arrive there by 3 p.m. to get through due to 90-minute transit time and nowhere to stay in between locks. ETD: 0700. ETA: 1600. Overnight: Crescent Boat Club.

Day 5, 8/15: Final portion of Erie Canal into Hudson. After the 112th Street Bridge between Erie Canal and Troy Lock, we can put up the mast. ETD: 0630. ETA: 1900. Overnight stay: Riverfront Marina, Newburgh.

(Top left) Exiting a lock after a major drop down. (Top right) Lock with adjacent damn/waterfall, a common set up. (Bottom left) Lady Liberty welcomes us as we pass New York City. (Bottom right) _____ is a proud owner as Tala is lowered into the water in Alexandria Bay, New York, at the start of our journey.