

ONTARIO
Yours to discover

Exploring the Lower Ottawa River

TRAILER BOATING BETWEEN
OTTAWA AND MONTREAL

By Craig Nicholson, The Intrepid Cottager

The sunny sky suddenly turned black as we waited on the blue line for our turn to enter the mammoth Carillon Lock on the Lower Ottawa River just east of Hawkesbury, Ontario. Then, just after the lock's giant "guillotine" gate rose overhead to let us in, a strong wind broke the calm. It blew from the east, hammering into the open mouth of the lock and catching several entering cruisers unawares.

Frantic lock staff managed to grab one and secure it, but operating under minimum power and with limited manoeuvring room, two other wayward boats started to turn sideways and drift uncontrollably towards the closed gates at the other end – and into each other. So it was Sea-Doo's to the rescue... a couple of us masqueraded our personal watercraft as tug boats, gently nudging the larger vessels back into position, where grateful lock staff could get them properly fastened.

The guillotine slammed shut behind us, blocking out the wind. As the lock started to fill, we made the steady 30-minute high rise up 20 metres to the top of the lock. The sky had become progressively darker. It capped our tunnelled view up the steep sides of the lock like an ominous black awning. With some trepidation, we toggled up in our rain gear, goggles and facemasks. Good thing, because a torrential downpour pounded us as we exited the lock, blurring our vision.

Fortunately, it was a hot summer day, so the precipitation was warm and we were well protected. As we continued back up river toward Lefaivre, the storm petered out. We'd launched from the public launch there for each of our two days cruising the Lower Ottawa River by Sea-Doo watercraft.



Lots of riding room on the Lower Ottawa.

The Ottawa River is a centuries old historic trading route. It stretches 1,200-kilometres (745 mi) from Montreal to Lake Temiskaming in Northern Ontario. Divided by impassable rapids into the lower and upper, the Ottawa's still a magnet for modern-day marine explorers. The Lower Ottawa River is most easily accessible to Southern Ontario and bordering states. It's a part of a navigable waterway triangle formed in far Eastern Ontario with the St. Lawrence River on its southern side and the famous Rideau Canal on its west. This route makes a pleasant and popular touring loop for trailer boaters and cruisers, but PWC's and some runabouts can't get past the St. Lawrence Seaway locks from Montreal to Cornwall, where

recreational vessel length must be at least 6m (20') and weigh at least 900kg (1 ton).

Not to worry, the Lower Ottawa River by itself offers a touch of everything that's great about Ontario waterways. This broad but protected stretch of water forms the Ontario-Quebec border. It's bookended by Montreal at its east end where it meets the St. Lawrence River, and Ottawa at its west end, where there's Rideau Canal access. The Lower Ottawa widens out considerably as it closes with the St. Lawrence, where it also includes the Lake of Two Mountains and Lake Saint-Louis. The whole route is very navigable, generally deep and well buoyed where needed. It also provides a family-friendly Sea-Doo adventure. I've done it both with couples and with kids aged 11 to 14 riding double with their parents.

About 360 kilometres (224 miles) of boating adventures await you along the well-populated and serviced Ontario shores between these two cities – more than enough to satisfy any boater with a yen for river cruising. That's why we recently spent two very enjoyable days exploring this predominantly Francophone Ontario shore. Unable to find any Ontario riverside lodgings with docks at a half way location between Ottawa and Montreal, we did discover a gem of a place called the Motel Rouleau at Alfred, in the United Counties of Prescott-Russell. It's affordable and clean, has two outdoor hot tubs, a restaurant nearby and plenty of truck

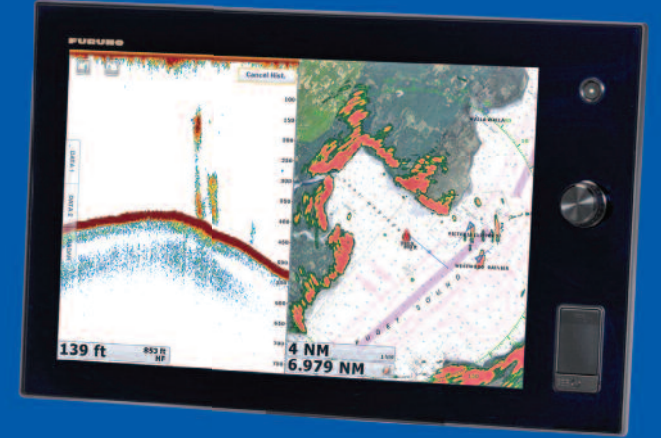


Rest stop on the beach at Petrie Island.

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Lefaire launch.

and trailer parking. Plus, it's only 10 minutes by trailer to the good and free public launch at Lefaire where we staged for each day's ride, trailering back to the motel each night. This concrete launch also offers docks, parking and fuel.

LEFAIVRE TO MONTREAL

This part of the ride is about 94 clicks (58 mi) to the western end of the Lachine Canal. That's a 14.5-kilometre (9 mi) slow speed zone run by Parks Canada that takes boaters into the Old Port of Montreal. Even by Sea-Doo, this day ride didn't allow enough time to canal it into the city. Before arriving there we had to pass through (and wait for) two busy locks, the aforementioned Carillon, and Saint-Anne-de-Bellevue (and also allow time to go back through them before closing time). As it was, with stops for lunch, gas and the double locks, this day ride took us almost 11 hours total, but we knew that going in – and what better way to while away a long, hot summer day? Plus of course, there was that refreshing shower along the way!

The Carillon Lock is about 43 clicks (27 mi) downriver from Lefaire. It's the largest one operated by Parks Canada and boy, did we ever feel insignificant with its vertical walls towering over us! About 40 kilometres (25 mi) farther along, the Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Canal, is a much smaller lock (and very short canal) with plenty of riverside restaurant patios for lunch. We gassed up for the return ride at the Ile Perrot Marina just east of this canal.

Our Lefaire to Montreal ride was a kick-back-and-enjoy the relaxed ambience of the whole experience kinda day. The sights, scenery and the waterway itself were well worth our time – and after all, we still rode a total of almost 200 clicks (124 mi)!

LEFAIVRE TO OTTAWA

This return excursion upstream to Ottawa is uninterrupted by locks or canals en route. But what with spending a couple of hours sightseeing Canada's capital city from the water and stopping for a floating patio lunch and gas at the Rockcliffe Boathouse Marina, we did put



Rideau Falls.

in a full day, riding over 160 clicks (100 mi) total in just over seven hours, including stops.

This part of the Lower Ottawa doesn't widen into any major lakes, but offers many broad stretches where the river widens. We made good time here, running past towns like Rockland and Cumberland, which also have public launches and docks. We took a break near Orleans, where the sandy beaches and services of Petrie Island Park offer an appealing respite, a relaxing swim and a great place for kids to play.

Best of all, it was pretty neat seeing our nation's capital, The City of Ottawa, gradually rise out of the distance, growing larger the closer we got. At the Rockcliffe Boathouse Marina, you can turn to starboard and follow the river sign to the Casino du Lac Leamy in Quebec for a little gaming. However, we stayed along the port shore into Governor Bay, so named because Rideau Hall, the official residence of the Governor General of Canada overlooks its waters (as does the Prime Minister's house at 24 Sussex).

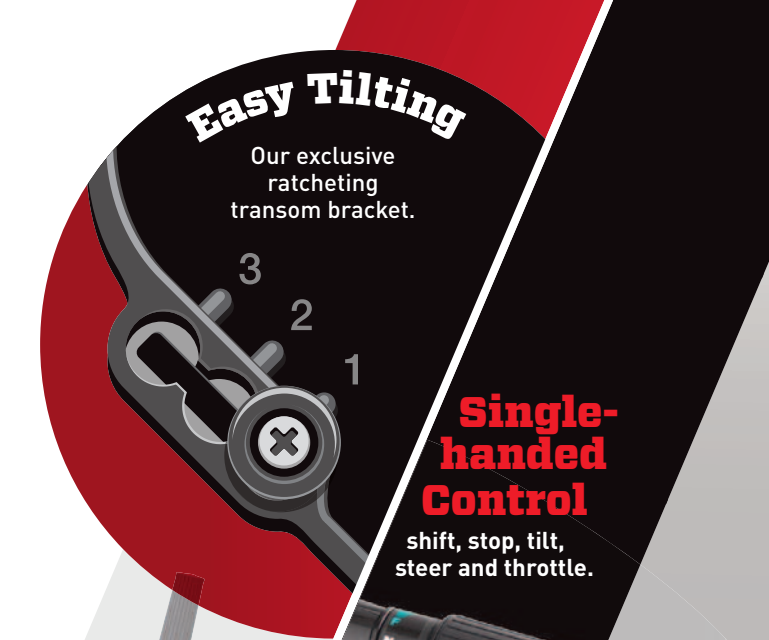
Next up along that Ottawa shore is the confluence of the Rideau and Ottawa Rivers, landmarked by an impressive, thundering waterfall. We moseyed up beside Rideau Falls and into its cooling spray – every time I see a big falls like this I wonder if the water's ever going to end? Where does it all come from anyway?

With Gatineau, Quebec on the starboard and Ottawa to the port, we passed under both the Macdonald Cartier and Alexandra Bridges. Rounding Nepean Point, we had our first inspiring sight of two famous buildings. It was definitely a thrill to spot Canada's Parliament Buildings and



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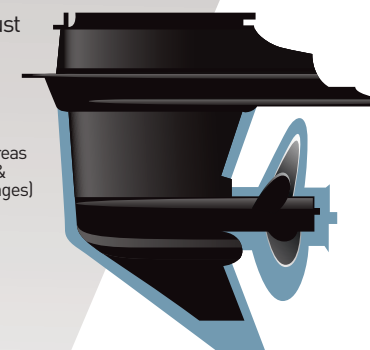
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Carillon Lock.

the Fairmont Chateau Laurier and be able to float in for a water view that can only be had by boat.

Between these two historic landmarks, the eight flight locks that mark the northern entrance to the Rideau Canal are situated, for those who have the time for the multi-day cruise south to Kingston. We discovered that only a kilometre or so east, just past the Portage Bridge at Chaudière Island, the navigable portion of the Lower Ottawa comes to an abrupt halt, where rapids block farther progress upstream. However, apparently a trailer service (613-282-6559 or 613-832-1414) is available from either Petrie Island Park or Dow's Lake (on the Rideau) to get around Ottawa by land. From there, the Ottawa River Waterway provides transfer services for boaters wanting to venture to Arnprior, Renfrew and Pembroke or beyond.

CRUISING OPTIONS

There are a couple of ways to approach cruising the Lower Ottawa River. To do its whole length, you can stage from a midway destination like Lefavre or Hawkesbury as we did, going up river to

Ottawa and downriver to Montreal from there. I recommend this Prescott-Russell option for trailer boaters and PWC riders who need shore accommodations and trailer parking each night. For those able to overnight on board and with more time on their hands, starting from either Ottawa or Montreal and cruising to the other end may be a better choice. Or if your time is very limited, you can launch from any one of the marinas or public launches along the Ontario shore for even an hour or two of exceptional boating.

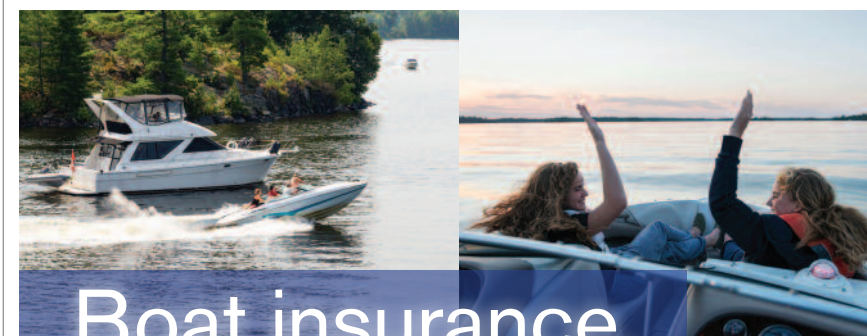
Remember that we cover more water in a day by PWC than anyone is likely to by boat, so if you're going to do the Lower Ottawa by cruiser or runabout allow more time to do it justice. But either way, once you've done the Lower Ottawa River I guarantee you'll want to go back every year for more! •

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#ottawariverwaterway

Special thanks to Claude Aumont and Martin Lacelle for assistance with this tour. Craig's tours are made possible by BRP (Sea-Doo), Gateway Powersport & Marine, and Triton Trailers. For more Sea-Doo tours, visit Craig's web site: www.intrepidcottager.com.



Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Lock.



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Who To Contact

- Ontario Tourism
- www.ontariotravel.net
- Ottawa Tourism
- www.ottawatourism.ca
- Prescott-Russell Tourism
- www.tprrt.ca

Other Resources

- Motel Rouleau
- motelrouleau.ca
- Parks Canada (Carillon Lock & Saint-Anne-de-Bellevue Locks)
- www.pc.gc.ca
- Ottawa River Waterway
- www.ottawariverwaterway.com
- Intrepid Cottager
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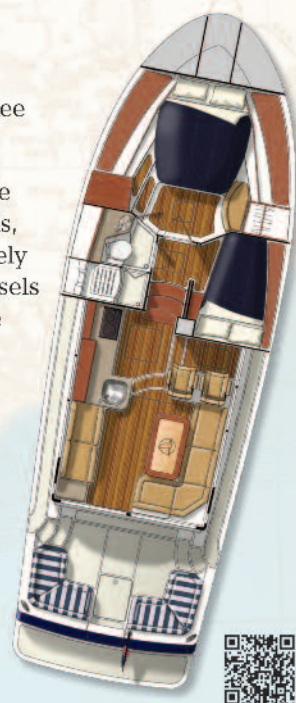
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