

# POWER

## BOATING CANADA MAGAZINE



Canada's Premier Boating Publicat

[Home](#) | [About PBC](#) | [Magazine Archives](#) | [Boat Tests](#) | [Boating Events](#) | [Subscriptions](#) | [Boating L](#)

[Home](#) > Rideau Story

## Runabout The Rideau (24-1)

by Bill Jennings

[Annual B  
Guide: Fi](#)

[PBC Frer  
Les Plais](#)

[PBC Clot](#)

[Performa  
Boating M  
Poker Ru](#)

[Poker Ru](#)

[Camping  
RV Lifest](#)



***The family runabout is all you need to cruise the Historic Rideau Canal.***

Some of the world's most spectacular boating routes are inland waterways where you are never more than a few yards from 'terra firma'. For boating on waters such as these, the ever-popular family runabout is all you really need for the perfect cruise. Last summer for our family holiday, we hitched up our boat – an Evinrude powered 24' Checkmate - and left Muskoka destined for one of Canada's great waterways - the Rideau Canal. On June 7th, 2007 the Rideau was designated as an UNESCO World Heritage site, joining other world famous sites as the Versailles in France, the Great Wall of China and the Acropolis in Athens, and we wanted to explore this historic waterway.

### The Rideau Canal's History

Following the War of 1812, Canadians noted that a successful defense of Canada against American attack depended upon a secure water route for troops and supplies. To accomplish this, a canal was conceived that would run between the

naval dockyard at Kingston and the city of Ottawa. In 1826, England sent Colonel John By, of the Royal Engineers to supervise thousands of immigrants in the construction of the canal. Over the six-year construction process, over 1,000 workers died of disease and injuries, but in 1832, the Rideau was officially opened as a symbol of Great Britain's global strategy.

The canal is a series of rivers and sixteen lakes, connected by a total of eighteen miles of man-made channels and 47 locks. Some of the locks are in series, making a total of 23 lock stations. For years the canal served as a valuable military and commercial transport artery, but today it serves recreational boaters. It's truly amazing how this legacy of wood and stone lies in striking contrast to the modern world.

### Day 1

As with any trip, a little pre-planning goes a long way and can be half the fun. Back last winter, with pen and paper, we poured over brochures and websites and began to list off what we wanted to see and visit. The Planning SideBar may assist you in your trip this coming summer.

Our holiday starting point would be the historical city of Kingston, which offers a number of choices for launching a boat and storing a trailer. We chose centrally located Kingston Marine. The first few miles up the Rideau are on the Cataraqui River. Plentiful marker buoys resemble telephone poles on a country road, keeping even the most casual boater in the proper channel. (Unless you have local knowledge of the Rideau, it's advisable to stay within the marked channels.)

Approaching the first set of locks – Kingston Mills – we were taken back by their enormous size, spectacular engineering and magnificent stonework that went into the construction. Locking through was simple: just follow the Lockmasters directions, drive in, loop your boat lines around the drop lines, let the water lift you up, and drive out. Beyond Kingston Mills, we entered Colonel By Lake. Outside the well-marked channel numerous stumps and deadheads reared their ugly head, giving us ample warning to stay on track. We lifted through the Brewers Locks at lunchtime then cruised through Cranberry and Whitefish lakes on our way to our overnight stop in Jones Falls.

As with many of the wonderful resort hotels we stopped at along the Rideau, the Kenny Hotel provides what I call the "full meal deal". When you stay there, you get three full meals, whether you want them or not. While this triggers a higher daily cost, we found it very relaxing to have a good dinner, full breakfast and a lunch bag handed to us as we checked out.

### Day 2

Before heading out the next morning, we took a short walk to some of the Jones Falls historical sites. Stone Arch Dam, constructed of interlocking tapered stones, stands 63 feet in height and was the tallest dam in North America when built. We also visited a fully operational blacksmith shop where we purchased a custom-made portable dock cleat for \$5.

The lakes get larger as you get closer to the high point of the Rideau, making for even more beautiful scenery and more cottage residences. Our next overnight was in the town of Newboro. At its peak in the late 1800's this town had over 2,000 residents and 95 prospering businesses. Today, there is basically one store - Kilborn's General Store. But what a store it is! While it looks like an old

department store on the outside, inside takes you through a myriad of sections on different levels.

We overnighted at The Sterling Lodge, set on 13 acres in Newboro. It offers 50 five-star guest rooms with your choice of spacious lodge rooms, lakeside units or rooms in a meticulously restored Victorian manor. The food is great and the prices are reasonable. Mr. Dudley Hill purchased the property in 1976 with his restaurant gaining the reputation for exotic foods such as fresh King Crab. Today, Mr. Hill and his sons, Dudley Jr. and Greg manage the operation - which just happens to include the Kilborn General Store.

### Day 3

Crossing Upper Rideau Lake, we had reached the high point of the canal system, with the remainder of the trip and locks flowing downstream enroute to Ottawa.

We had planned a side trip to the town of Westport - a ten-minute diversion northwest of the main canal. We arrived at their recently expanded public docks and spent a few hours enjoying fun shopping, craft outlets and restaurants.

Let me assure you that nothing could be easier than going through a lock in a runabout. As the gates open and the lockmaster waves you in, most larger boats are directed to one side or the other and slip a line or two behind the guide cables that hold you in place when the water level changes. But when a runabout goes through locks in the company of larger cruisers - which is most of the time - the lockmaster will place the larger boats against the stone sidewalls and tuck you safely in the middle, where you can raft on and not even have to attend your line as the water level changes.

By end of day we had reached Smiths Falls which is also the headquarters for the Rideau system. If you visit nothing else, be sure to see the Rideau Museum and the set of three old locks adjacent to the new lock. You will be treated to a clear history of the canal, with videos and interactive displays that will keep visitors of all ages fascinated for hours. Imagine, having to tell your family it's time to leave a museum!

For a change of pace we checked into one of two Best Western hotels in Smiths Falls. From the public docks it was a short walk to this centrally located, pristine and great value motel. Before leaving on our trip, we had been told to eat at Angelo's. Located in the Rideau Plaza, a stone's throw from the canal. This unassuming restaurant serves up a gourmet Italian meal and it's no wonder why it's listed as one of the top twenty restaurants in Ontario.

### Day 4

It was late afternoon on day four when we pulled into the Merrickville public docks. There are more heritage buildings per capita in Merrickville than any town in Canada, and numerous galleries to tour and artisans to visit. I watched while a glassblower made a multicolored glass vase and then purchased it as a town souvenir. The hotel of choice is the Sam Jakes Inn. Once a major department store in the area, this pristine inn has recently been designated one of Ontario's finest inns. If that is not reason enough to stay there, it is also one of the finest restaurants in Ontario, with every food supplier on a specially approved list. Gary Clarke purchased and renovated this magnificent inn 20 years ago and was there to personally greet us on our arrival.

## Day 5

From Merrickville, it's only a short day trip down the narrow canal portion of the Rideau to the famous flight of eight locks (called the Big 8) at Ottawa that are right beside the Parliament Buildings. Ottawa offers a city environment for you to extend your holiday, or you can choose to simply wind back through the Rideau to where you left your trailer in Kingston.

Our Evinrude E-TEC, 250 horsepower outboard performed flawlessly throughout our journey and sipped fuel so sparingly that our fuel costs came in considerably under budget. The Rideau is a trip you can do season after season, without tiring of the varying landscapes and places to visit. For example, overnight stays on one trip, can be resorts or B&B's the next trip, or you can camp out at your favourite locks.

At most stops along the Rideau Canal you will find interesting historical sites, fun shopping, good food, or a combination of all three. But for me, the Rideau offered an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of Ontario lakes and relax while plying the winding rivers that connect them.

Few experiences can bring a family closer than spending a week together on a boating holiday. Our Rideau Canal trip proved that a family runabout is a plenty big enough boat to enjoy the beauty and history of the Rideau Canal. A first-class holiday on a limited budget.

[\(Page Top\)](#)

---

[Home](#) | [About PBC](#) | [Boat Tests](#) | [Boating Events](#) | [Subscriptions](#) | [Boating Links](#) | [Magazine Archives](#)

Copyright © Power Boating Canada. All Rights Reserved.