

# FLOATING THE BOOK LOVER'S BOAT

THE BOOK BARGE · CANAL DU NIVERNAIS · FRANCE

Escape and go on a journey with a book. This floating bookstore sells its valuable cargo all along the canal—and 100 percent offline



RIGHT Sarah Henshaw's charming Book Barge ends up in the remotest backwaters on its travels.

OPPOSITE The interior of the floating bookstore is a colorful mix of literature and personal belongings.



The Book Barge is going against the current—or, more precisely, against the Amazonian current, stresses Sarah Henshaw with a wink. And she means it literally: her floating bookstore is the opposite of the online giant in almost every respect. “In 2011...when a lot of other independent bookshops were being forced to close down because of the aggressive discounting of online and chain stores, I took the boat on an experimental six-month tour of the UK’s inland waterways, trying to get people to re-evaluate a book’s worth,” says the bookseller. At that point, the Book Barge was completely unsuitable as a place to live, as there was no bathroom, kitchen, or bed on board the charming, book-filled vessel.

As she went along, Henshaw therefore bartered her literary freight for food and lodging: “The latest hardback for a home-cooked dinner, or a stack of secondhand children’s encyclopedias for a spare sofa to sleep on that night,” she

recalls. “For a few heady weeks in London, I was even able to write out lengthy shopping lists, hand them to a customer, and swap books to the value of the till receipt and bagged groceries they returned later that day. As well as being a useful corrective to the easy acceptance that value for money has just one currency, the trip was transformative in other ways, too. Not least because it taught me that books are gateways to new friendships and experiences—not just within their pages, but by the simple act of being passed along to the next reader.”

Of course, there is a certain order to the selection of titles on the Book Barge. The books are roughly arranged into adult and children’s literature. In any case, Henshaw knows exactly where every book is and is happy when customers →