

Sailing and Pedalling Through the *Kleinseenplatte*

by Clemens Wergin

Stock photograph

" The waterways of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern cover a vast area of more than 2,000 lakes connected by canals and rivers, and surrounded by forest. Like many parts of Germany, this is one largely enjoyed by locals. I'd heard about it from some Berlin residents who told me it was a favourite summer getaway. Not that the mental picture they had conjured was entirely accurate. Before setting off I blithely told people: 'It's like the Norfolk Broads.' In the marina I started to realise how inadequate a description that was. This is a universe of waterlands, encompassing dozens of towns, hundreds of villages and, for many inhabitants, a whole way of life..."

Kevin Rushby, travel-writing in [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com).

WAS IN LUCK WHEN I ARRIVED at the small Marina of Priepert in the Northern German region of Mecklenburg. When I drove my car to the waterfront two guys who came by kayak were eating lunch on the lawn. After they finished they helped getting my CLC WATERLUST canoe from the top of my car, which is too heavy to be taken down by only one person.

I chose Priepert as a starting point because it sits somewhere in the middle of the series of interconnected lakes that are commonly referred to as die Kleinseenplatte in German – as opposed to the bigger lakes like Müritz and Plauener See to the northwest. Together they form the biggest surface of interconnected lakes in central Europe, carved into the landscape by the glaciers of the last ice age. *(See map on page 64)*

Exploring the numerous lakes, a two-hour drive north of Berlin was actually a default option; I had looked forward to taking part in the Venice Lagoon Raid for years and had blocked a week in June for it. Then





1. Priepert Marina

COVID-19 came along, the Raid was cancelled and here I was, desperately in need of taking some time off for sailing. With international travel still uncertain I settled for a region close by our home in Berlin. And while I had planned to take my Welsford Navigator to Venice, the Waterlust seemed the better choice for the German lakes, because I expected to be able to sail only part of the voyage and to use the built-in Hobie Mirage Drive as an alternative propulsion to navigate the many channels between lakes.

The first day offered exactly those constantly changing conditions. From Priepert I headed up north, to explore a series of lakes that are forbidden to motor boats and attract mostly people with kayaks and canoes. I enjoyed a nice and easy downwind ride over Großer Priepertsee to the adjacent Wangnitzsee. From there I took down the sails and cycled with the Hobie drive up the river Havel, touching Drewensee on the way. At the end of the long Havel channel that connects to Woblitzsee I encountered the first lock at Wesenberg at the entrance to Woblitzsee.

My map book displayed a red warning that the lake can be dangerous in high winds. And indeed, it was an exhilarating downwind ride with top speeds of up to 6 knots. That's when the Waterlust starts planing and you feel you might lose control at any moment. After that little bit of excitement I turned in for a late lunch at a small Imbiss* at Camping Havelberge with a small dock. Relaxing with a herring roll I finally had some time to admire the blue sky dotted with little clouds that gave all the scenery a tremendous amount of depth and looked almost artificial.

Carrying on via the Havel towards Großer Labussee I was conflicted about staying the night at a campsite there – or carrying on via Useriner See. The map said

* Imbiss — small café, or snack bar

that the connecting lock only operated three times a day, the last one at 4 pm. So I raced with the Hobie Drive against time, up the Havel and then along part of Großer Labussee to get to the lock. I barely made it, but there was no sign of any activity at the lock. So I called it a day and headed for the Campsite Zwenzower Ufer for the night. Passing this lock that seemed to be inactive I had seen a trolley for portaging. I would figure out the next day if it was feasible to go further up north.

The campsite proved to be well equipped for accommodating canoeists, with a small beach to land on and an adjacent lawn to put up a tent. In the coming days I would discover that most campsites were similarly welcoming to small boat cruisers. Most of the time I would pull my Waterlust up a little beach or occasionally I would leave it moored to a dock.



The next day I figured that to go further north I'd not only have to use the portage trolley – which I didn't feel entirely comfortable about, with a fully loaded boat, but after that I would also have to take out the mast and therefore detach the mainsail to pass under a bridge which was indicated to be only 3 metres high. I decided that was too much of a hassle and headed back to Priepert to explore other approaches to this vast expanse of lakes. This time I sailed over the Großer Labussee before entering the Havel again.

Sailing Woblitzsee proved uneventful this time and I decided to check out the little harbour of Wesenberg, a cosy little village. Then I hurried on by Hobie drive towards Drewensee where I wanted to try a fisherman's place for lunch that I had spotted the day before.

Landing my canoe at the little restaurant, which has a place to haul out kayaks, I had the only accident of the whole trip. While pulling up the rudder I hadn't noticed that the downhaul line was stuck. I pulled up the boat on the lawn and the rudder touched ground. The pressure made the line guide break off the tiller head. Curses were muttered and I reprimanded myself for not being more attentive. But I discovered that the downhaul still



kind of worked, albeit with more friction, so the trip was not in danger.

The fisherman's place had a lot of smoked fish, local and imported, and different side dishes of potato salads which made for a simple and tasty lunch.

Afterwards I decided against exploring Drewensee in order to get further along. Favourable winds made it easy to pass Priepert again and proceed further south along Ellbogensee, after which I passed through another lock at Strasen. I had decided to stay the night somewhere in the south of Großer Pälitzsee. Still with wind from aft I passed the nature campsite to check out two wild camping sites further south, indicated on the map. I only found one of them, which, being in the woods right at the lake shore, didn't seem to be a good fit to accommodate the mast of the Waterlust. So I tacked all the way back to the nature campsite and tied the boat to the dock there. The picturesque place was built on the slopes of a hill with different terraces for the tents.

I enjoyed the evening sun on the little beach. Every now and then the regulars of the campsite would come down to the water, attach their gowns to little hooks on wooden boards and go swimming naked. Nudist culture is strong in the former communist Eastern part of Germany. Some campsites in the area are especially marked as nudist camps, but even at regular ones like this one it is normal to see people go for a swim in the nude. A sight you get very quickly accustomed to, travelling the lakes in Brandenburg and Mecklenburg.

The next day I tacked back north and then turned east into Kleiner Pälitzsee. There I faced a choice. Turning south towards Rheinsberg with its beautiful castle at the lake, or heading to the northwest versus Mirow. I chose the latter, passed through Canower See and the lock behind it, after which I turned into another Fisherman's place for lunch.

Crossing over Labussee to windward proved to be quite a challenge. The wind had freshened up and with 80 square feet of sail shared between main and mizzen the tippy sailing canoe tends to get overpowered easily.



But that's also when the boat is most thrilling to sail, when you are hiking right out and need to be super vigilant not to capsize. In gusts I touched between 4 to 5 knots to windward.

I have two reef points in the mainsail, which I didn't use all week. Mainly because winds around these small lakes can be very fickle. You can go from almost no wind to almost too much in a few minutes, so once you decide it is time to reef you might already be into the next calm.

Next I passed the lock of Diemitz. It is one of the most frequented in the whole region, because it is the main choke point between the smaller lakes and the big Müritz, the second largest lake in Germany. Fortunately, with kayaks and canoes you are allowed to skip the long lines of waiting motor boats and go up front, where you can slip in between the big guys once the lock has been filled. Beware the house boats, though, which are often steered by inexperienced first-timers who sometimes struggle to navigate the narrow locks.

From there I sailed further west, crossing Vilzsee towards the forest campsite at Zethner See. That was the only campsite of the trip that wasn't directly attached to the shore. I left the canoe on the little beach, crossed the street and hiked up a little trail to pitch my tent.

The next day I went off the beaten track north to Schwarzer See in another area closed off to motor boats. And I was surprised to see that the water was anything

but black, as the name would indicate. Instead the lake sported a beautiful turquoise colour. The further north I tacked, the more the wind freshened up and I had some problems tacking through a narrow passage in the northwest corner of the lake when I turned back. That's usually when things get dicey with the Waterlust, when you fight for every metre of tacking in a narrow passage, because on the one hand you need the long daggerboard to be entirely down to get the best angle to windward. On the other hand, capsizes usually happen when you run aground hiked out, because the swift change in the balance of the boat is too much to counterbalance. This time I got lucky and didn't touch the ground. I tacked my way back through Zethner See and Vilssee then headed north via Mössensee and Zotensee, with the wind at my back and consistently hitting 4 to 5 knots, which made for a thrilling ride.

I took down the sails to cycle up the channel northwards. At the end you have the choice to either head northwest towards the Müritz, or to head north via Mirow which I did. The little city is really pretty, especially the castle with its little garden island, which is well worth a visit. North of Mirower See you get once more into kayak country, where the use of motors is only allowed to the locals living there. If you have a light kayak or canoe and are willing to portage some distance you can attempt a loop to the north which then heads west, connects via portage to the Müritz and then takes you back south versus the Kleine Müritz. I knew that portage wasn't an option for me and I wasn't interested in the big lake and the long connecting channel back anyway, so I decided to go as far towards the portage point as possible and then turn back. This gave me the chance to stay two nights at the canoe station in Granzow which sports a really nice and comparatively big beach and a small campsite only for tents.

The next day I headed north via Großer Kotzower

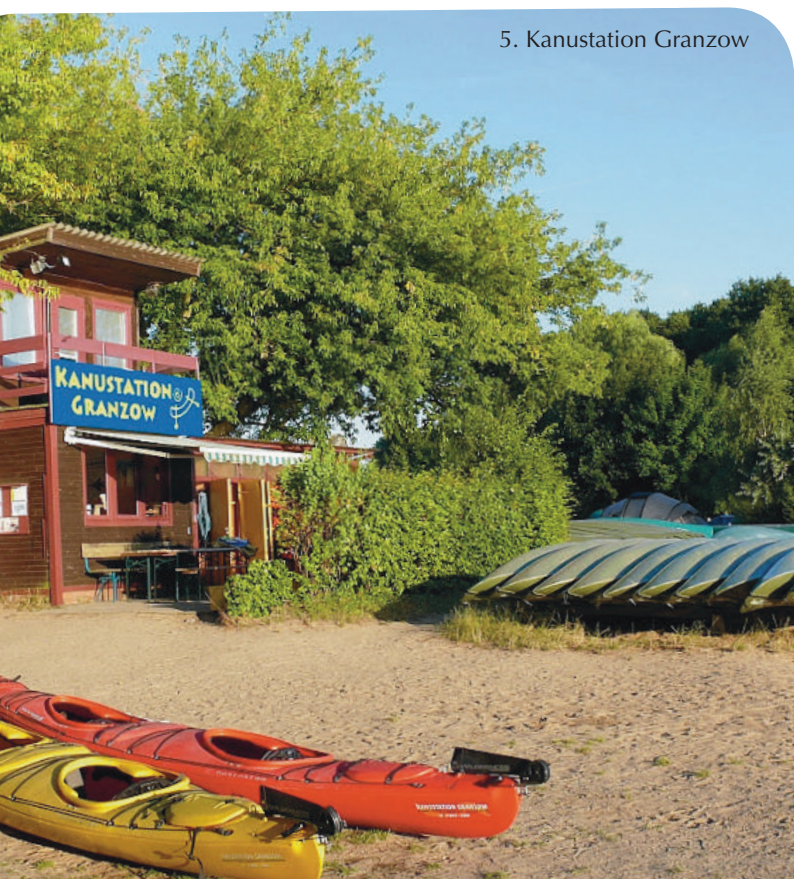


See and Leppinsee. These are areas where sailing boats rarely travel because of the narrow and winding passages. But I found that the areas closed off to motor travel and most adapted for canoes are also the prettiest. The connecting channels between Leppinsee and Waterfitzsee and then to Caarpsee were covered by trees. I was basically gliding through a forest avoiding the occasional branches that threatened to entangle my mainmast. An utterly peaceful and otherworldly experience. In Caarpsee I anchored off, went for a swim and had a frugal lunch in the boat before turning back towards Granzow.

Just before arriving at the campsite I passed a line of traditional-looking vacation homes. Wooden houses built on platforms over the water and covered with thatched roofs. A woman sitting on the terrace of her home called out to me and was completely taken by the beauty of the Waterlust canoe. She was so enthusiastic that I told her that I'd land at the beach of the campsite if she wanted to have a better look. She came running over with her husband and we had a nice talk about the Waterlust, which is designed by Chesapeake Light Craft in Annapolis in the US, but which is also sold as a kit at Berger Boote in Berlin (and by Fyne Boat kits in the UK). That's one of the nice things when you travel with a traditional-looking boat: you get a lot of smiles, compliments and interest. There is something about wooden boats which triggers good vibes in people.

After the second night in Granzow I broke camp and headed back towards Mirow. I struggled with the lack of wind on Mirower See on that sunny day. I traced my way back further south to Vilssee where I turned to the

5. Kanustation Granzow



The thatched vacation homes

northeast right before the lock of Diemitz. There is a loop which is very popular with the kayak crowd there, with a portage at Fleether Mühle. I knew from previous bike tours that the portage point with the Restaurant is highly frequented and I hoped to find some people who would help me carry the boat over the road to the other side. And indeed, after lunch I managed to find enough helpers for the portage. Rätzsee is again closed to motor traffic and when the lake bends south to the channel for Gobenowsee you find a nudist campsite with people without tan lines paddling along naked on their S-UPs.

The Drosedower Bek, which connects Rätzsee and Gobenowsee, and the connecting channel further south between Gobenowsee and Labussee, were among the most wild and beautiful places I travelled that week, with fallen trees reaching far into the water, which are cut only when they stop boats from passing. I stayed the night at another beautiful campsite at Gobenowsee where I encountered a lot of fellow cruisers who came by canoe or the traditional folding kayaks, which are still very popular in the region.

The next day I got lost due to a navigation error. I made it a point this week to not check with the navigator app on my phone but to travel by analog map only. With the result that I took the wrong exit from Gobenowsee to the east instead to the south. I walked the boat under a bridge only 3 metres high and sailed across Klenzsee into the eastern arm of the lake, which I mistook for the way across Labussee to the lock of Canow. Only, of course, that there was no lock. Fortunately, I found a fellow kayaker who helped me realize where I actually was



and that I had to work my way back under the bridge to Gobenowsee to find the right exit for the south. Entering Labussee then for real, I again had to battle strong headwinds which made for a thrilling ride even if I sailed at the edge of what was advisable; it would have been better to reef this time.

After lunch at the fisherman's place at Canow, which I had visited already some days earlier, I passed the lock, sailed the little and the big Pälitzsee and stayed the night again at the natural campsite on the shore of the Großer Pälitzsee. That was in striking distance of my departure point at the marina of Priepert for the next day, where I had started out a week ago. The good people of the marina helped me lift the canoe on top of the car and I headed back to Berlin a happy camper. **CW**



Key to Map:

1. Priepert – Clemens' starting point
2. First night at campsite Zwenzower Ufer on the shores of Großer Labussee
3. Second night at Naturcamping by the Großer Pälitzsee
4. Third night at the forest campsite at Zethner See
5. Fourth and fifth nights at the Canoe Station at Granzow
6. Caarpsee – lunch stop on day 5
7. Fleether Mühle – the portage point on day 6
8. Sixth night at the campsite on the shores of Gobenowsee
9. Eastern arm of Klenzsee – an unintended diversion!
10. Final night back at Naturcamping by the Großer Pälitzsee

Map & Key by Jennifer Heney

A Closer Look at the WATERLUST

I have had the Waterlust canoe for three years now. After the prototypes had been built in the CLC shop in Annapolis I was probably the first private person to finish building one. The Waterlust is a combination of traditional lapstrake looks — reminiscent of the sailing canoes developed in the UK in the second half of the 19th century — combined with modern features like a monocoque structure enforced by epoxy filleting, and a well just forward of the board slot to take a Hobie drive for secondary propulsion.

The Waterlust is a little over-canvased, like many CLC boats, which are designed for the protected waters of the Chesapeake Bay. The balance lug sails enhance the traditional looks of the boat, but they are also tremendously practical. Hoisting them up or taking them down is a matter of seconds, which was very welcome under the varying conditions of the lakes and channels. And they sail closer to the wind than people might imagine, helped by the deep daggerboard that CLC's Dillon Majoros has designed for this boat. The mizzen gives the boat a nicely balanced feeling under sail and I came to appreciate it as a safety feature, too. When sheeted in it acts like a weather vane to keep the boat to windward when you need a break or want to manipulate the mainsail.

All in all, I found the Waterlust to be the perfect hybrid for the voyage, offering good sailing performance on the one hand, but also a more than decent performance under Hobie Mirage Drive. You can comfortably sustain a cruising speed around 2 to 3 knots over extended periods of time and get to around 3 to 5 if you push it further. And the Waterlust lives up to CLC's designation as an expedition canoe. I had no problem packing everything I needed for a week into the forward compartment, which is much bigger than you'd think from the outside. **CW**

Please note that the photograph below, and the previous shot of Clemens sailing *Hanuna* three pages back, were taken on other expeditions. Clemens sailed solo this time of course, but I wanted a couple of shots of *Hanuna* under sail, and he obliged by sending these.

If you visit clcboats.com (Chesapeake Light Craft) you will easily locate Waterlust and immediately be linked to an excellent WoodenBoat review and the boat's lines.

In the summer of 2016 CLC partnered with the filmmaking team **Waterlust** to design and build a pair of 17-foot sailing canoes. They then embarked on a 1,000-mile expedition down the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) in the finished canoes, from Norfolk to their home base in Miami, Florida—**Ed**

