October 2006

Water, water - everywhere ! Plus life in a £300 static caravan.
Sunday 1st October

Having failed at the last hurdle yesterday to get the caravan water supply connected, today we were determined to finish off and move in.

Armed with the missing parts, we arrived on site and I had the supply pipe connected up pretty quickly.

Emma turned on the cold water tap in the caravan kitchen, and I gingerly opened up the two stopcocks. A bit of hissing and gurgling later as the air in the supply pipe was replaced by water, we had a nice stream of cold water from the tap and we gave ourselves a little cheer.

We stood and watched the water run for a few happy minutes until it was steady and no more air came through. I thought it might be a good idea to look under the caravan just to make sure all was well, only to see Niagara Falls descending from the bathroom floor. I quickly turned the stopcock off and investigated. After pulling the bath panel off (I use the term "bath" loosely, it's more of a glorified shower tray, in a fetching salmon colour), I could see that the copper supply pipe to the bath cold tap had a nice big bulge and a gaping split where it had obviously frozen before. As we don't need to use the bath taps - Steve, the previous owner, had installed an electric shower - the easiest solution was to cap the supply pipes below the floor.

However - this required another trip to B&Q, over an hour's round trip away, to buy a selection of Speedfit fittings.

We got back and I writhed around under the caravan in a comedy style, spluttering as pipefulls of water drained into my face when I removed and replaced the old fittings. Time for attempt two.

I turned the stopcock again. No leaks from the bathroom, but now that the water was being forced further through the pipes and boiler, a torrent of water appeared under the caravan just below the door, from the boiler outlet pipe. The connector at the bottom was completely broken off. I congratulated myself on having had the foresight to buy a few spare fittings from B&Q, and fixed this fairly easily.

Third time lucky we hoped. I turned the stopcock on again, and....

....a deluge of water coming through the floor under the kitchen cupboards. Off went the stopcock.

After emptying the cupboards and removing various panels - thoroughly messing up the caravan so neatly cleaned by Emma the day before - the problem was fairly obvious. The copper outlet pipe running from the high wall-mounted boiler down to, and through, the floor had not one, but two big bulges and gaping splits from frost damage. This required more work and fittings that I did not have. So the idea of moving in today disappeared out of the window, I will have to buy more pipe and fittings and try to sort it during the evenings next week.

We spent the rest of the day barrowing heavy, wet clay soil back into the driveway trench, in the hope we might be able to get the cars onsite again soon.

Sweaty, muddy and exhausted, we returned to our lodgings for a well earned tea, and a bath...Monday 2nd

Yet another trip to the B&Q warehouse near work today to stock up on pipe fittings.

Got to the caravan in the evening and made short work of removing the offending copper pipe with my angle grinder, and replaced it with Speedfit pipe and fittings.

So...what would happen this time when I open the stopcock ? Well, not too bad - no major torrents anywhere, just some dripping from a connector underneath. Stopcock off - fitting replaced - stopcock back on. Plastic plumbing is growing on me, it's so quick to put together.

Now I don't know if you've ever seen Das Boot (wartime submarine film), but there is a scene where the captain has to take the boat deeper and deeper, way below it's maximum safe depth. The whole crew are silent, but tense and shaking with terror in the dark as the boat creaks and groans under the immense pressure.
Well it was a bit like that - I kept opening the stopcock a tiny bit more, and cringed as the pipework creaked each time in the darkness - I was waiting to see which joint would pop off and see me getting showered in water. OK maybe I wasn't in quite such danger as the submariners but the similarities of darkness, creaking and risk of getting wet were there, just without the risk of instant death.

But nothing gave, it held. I opened each tap in turn to let air out. The toilet cistern finished filling and fell silent. I could not

hear any dripping. Hurrah !

On a roll, I turned on the gas and lit the boiler. I turned a hot tap on and the boiler fired into life, nice hot water. I flushed the toilet. I switched on the electric shower, it worked and nothing tripped out (the lights do dim quite impressively though). And still no leaks, though I'm sure there will be at some point...

But for now - we're watertight. I turned the water and gas off and headed home, where more good news lay in wait.

The architects have finally finished the drawings and submitted them for building regulations approval. They sent us a copy too (and their final bill, there's always something to spoil things, eh ?).

So the day ended on quite a high. And I'm even beginning to like plastic plumbing...Tuesday 3rd

Another trip to the caravan after work to check if the plumbing still holds. So far so good - another hour at mains pressure and nothing let go. Plenty of hot water run, shower and toilet OK too. Looking good for the weekend !Saturday 7th

The morning saw me at the plot trying to get the driveway trench filled enough to get our cars down, while Emma stayed behind to fill her car with the stuff we needed in the caravan.

By the afternoon the driveway was just about passable with care, so after I'd returned for lunch, we both drove to the plot to move in to the caravan.

After having only ever been to the caravan to work on it or fix things, it felt quite strange to actually be living in it, and call it "home". It's actually reasonably comfortable - yes it does lose heat quickly and will be a challenge in winter - but with a little fan heater in the lounge area it's just fine. If there is a hardship it's getting used to the lack of space - or more specifically, the lack of worktop space in the kitchen.

We spent the afternoon cleaning; the bathroom almost seems welcoming now. Once this was done I knocked up a makeshift TV aerial from a bit of wire and we settled down with some vino in front of our widescreen (a.k.a. 14" portable) telly for the evening.Sunday 8th

We survived our first night OK. I spent most of the day barrowing more stones and hardcore into the driveway trench. A few runs of the Passat up and down the drive started to compact the backfill, but it couldn't compete with the weight of our neighbour's Landrover which did a far better job. Thanks John !
Emma started tidying up some of the garden, and made getting to the caravan less like exploring a previously-undiscovered jungle.Monday 9th

The car started making some ominous knocking noises from the rear as I got close to work today. A look underneath at lunchtime revealed the culprit - a rock had lodged itself on the rear suspension arm while I was running up and down the drive yesterday !

In the evening I made a start on installing some site lighting; managed to erect a post and attach the PIR light to it, but ran out of daylight and couldn't get it wired in.Tuesday 10th

Managed to get home with just enough daylight to spare, and got the light wired in. We now have security lighting on site, which means we can actually find our cars in the (early) morning now.

Have bought a very large roll of bubblewrap off Ebay. After seeing the cost of suitable-thickness pipe insulation for the water supply pipe, I decided to make my own by wrapping a generous thickness of bubblewrap around the pipe, at a fraction of the cost. My theory is that bubblewrap will trap lots of insulating air and should do as good a job, possibly better. Who knows, if it gets really cold in winter there should be enough to wrap the whole caravan, and just cut holes for the doors... Sunday 14th

A busy day on site today, mainly to make it look less like a jungle. After all we have to look out of the windows at it every day now. I spent the morning strimming the overgrown greenery back, while Emma started untangling some of the plants we want to dig out and save. It's a bit of a wildlife haven - countless baby frogs everywhere, and a resident robin following us around quite closely.

The afternoon saw me starting to insulate the caravan water supply pipe with bubblewrap and do a bit more trench filling, and then....

Frog Rescue ! A while ago I dug two deep trial holes for the structural engineer to peer down, and never filled them in. Well, we peered down one of them today to see around 10 frogs in the bottom, presumably trapped. So I lowered myself down (being careful not to tread on any), picked them all out, and let them hop to freedom. 15 frogs in total, of various sizes. I left a couple of planks of wood angled down to the bottom of the hole in the hope that any more victims can climb

out. We consider calling the house "Toad Hole".Tuesday 24th

Removed my first snail from the caravan toilet seat today. I really should fill the gap in the floor around the waste pipe.

Also bought a roll of plastic sheeting and orange netting from Allplas. The plastic sheet is to make a "skirt" round the bottom of the caravan to reduce heat loss and lessen the risk of frozen pipes in winter.

Not much else to report. Still no broadband at the caravan. Friday 27th

Spent the day boxing in the water standpipes, and bubble-wrapping the water supply pipe under the caravan, as the first frost is surely not far away. Tuesday 31st

To round off October, here is a question:

Q. How do you get a chest freezer into a caravan room through a 20 inch door ?

A. {mosimage cw=200 popup=1}