

2010 Shannon Challenge

The Boy of Hope

Helena Bergin

Donnacha Attig (his real name is Donald, but a friend of his thought that Donnacha was Irish for Donald, so he is now known under both names) is a 75 year old pensioner who has now started his second attempt to row over a ton of live aboard boat and gear solo the entire length of the Shannon and beyond. To make the engineless transit from the start of the Shannon Navigation at the Inishmagrath marker, on Lough Allen, in County Leitrim to the end of Shannon Navigation at Killaloe, County Clare and beyond to the Port of Tarbert in the estuary requires dealing with 33 bridges, 6 locks, and nine lakes, single-handed and without mechanical power. To row and sail such a heavy boat single handed represents the ultimate challenge and requires enormous reserves of determination, stamina, commitment, physical and mental endurance.

His little live aboard cruiser, *Omar's River Bird*, has racked up over 1,000 kilometers of engine-less transit from 2007 through 2009. The boat was designed and built by his son Omar, who was a boat designer in Donoughmore, Co Cork, as a camper boat to be used for cruising down the river by



Omar's River Bird pictured passing LRYC on Sunday 22 August.

The boat is bigger inside than you might think. It has berths for a family, enclosed toilet room and cast iron heating stove.

families who would love to get out on the water but could not afford a big motor cruiser. This is the only boat of this type that was built. Omar sold two in the first week but never built them because, as Donald says it, 'Omar stepped into truth after a car accident and moved in with the Lord'. If you wonder what the two signs on the side of the boat means, it's Mandarin Chinese for 23, his registration number in River Lee navigation. Under Irish navigation laws you have to have your boat registered and the

number displayed but the law does not say anything about in which language....

Between the ages of 71 and 73 Donald was involved in establishing International Benchmark records in the fields of Endurance Challenge and Adventure Challenge. He really shows us that you can still live an active life no matter what age you are. All three of his Benchmark establishing efforts were witnessed by thousands of persons and recorded at length in the media and press. The members of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland supported, followed and chronicled the efforts. In 2007 the Lough Derg branch of IWAI awarded the boat and crew honorary membership in their annual Lough Derg rally. In the same year, the IWAI Cruising Club formally welcomed the boat into Foynes harbor, as it returned after completing the Benchmark establishing efforts at Tarbert. The club also made the crew and boat officially part of the 2007 Killaloe to Kilrush Cruise in Company.

The official launch of the 2010 Shannon Challenge was from Carrick-on-Shannon in the middle of August. The boat was then towed to the marker at the top of Lough Allen which is the beginning of the Shannon Navigation. The Shannon Challenge is to draw attention to and raise funds for his charity In His Footsteps, (#CHY12973). The charity was started in 1998 when Don and two of his friends saw the need for a small charity in India. A person they know, Maureen Clarke, worked voluntarily with disabled children in India. One of them was ten-year-old Tony, from Tamil Nadu, who he says has a remarkable intelligence and lust for life despite being born with no arms and only one boneless leg. He calls Tony 'The Boy of Hope', a title for Tony was originally coined by the RTE Crew from Nationwide that made the July 6, 2008 segment of the program called Boy of Hope. This charity has also built up a centre where they teach disabled children to use industrial sewing machines so that they can make a living by sewing. They are now building up a computer training centre for visually impaired people. These people live there until they have finished their education, found a job and saved enough money to buy a house for themselves.

Donald Attig was born in Pontiac, Illinois in 1936. His father was German and his mother was Irish, from Castleblaney, Monaghan. At various times, he has been an inventor, plastics engineer/formulator, boat designer, entrepreneur, yachtsman, gold



Donald Attig on *Omar's River Bird* outside Athlone Castle on Sunday 22 August

prospector, forestry worker, home birth midwife, fireman on steam powered railroad engines, soldier, missionary, building contractor, roofing contractor, CEO, janitor, restaurateur, author, chaplain, social worker and pastor. He has owned and operated several boat, plastic fabrication and construction companies in many places in US. While still in his twenties Attig retired the first time to carry out a record setting voyage in a power cruiser, which he designed and built. In 1968 by permission of the Hon. Brian O'Kelly he became the first person to build a 3 mast sailing ship in the US under the Irish flag.

For ten years Attig and his family lived and voyaged on the 3 masted sailing ship. Attig sailed with his wife and new born son to Ireland in 1977 and travelled to many places from there, including ocean crossings. Two of his five children, Omar Brendan and John Paul, were born on the vessel. For years, during the troubles in Northern Ireland, Attig and his son Omar operated free sailing excursions on the schooner, for at risk youth of any religion and others in need. After Omar was involved in the fatal car crash, Attig turned the ship over to the VEC Youth Reach Program. In 2001, on the day this gift was announced at Ballincollig, County Cork, President Mary McAleese personally thanked Attig for his gift and services to the Irish Nation.

If you wish to make a contribution to this worthy cause, then the details are: In His Footsteps/ Account Number 18236065/ sort code 934267/ Allied Irish Bank, 33 North Main Street, Cork City. You can send a cheque, bank draft or postal order to Don Attig, Nano Nagle's Anchorage, Donoughmore, County Cork. He can be contacted on the mobile (evenings only while he's rowing!) on (087) 9640805. After the challenge is finished: (021)7337303 His website is <http://donattig.wordpress.com>, email dadattig@hotmail.com.