

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)

-

Tony & Wendy's Travel Blog

Carpe Diem – Seize The Day

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[Posts](#)

[Comments](#)

New Blog Site

June 15, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well it's goodbye to our old blog site here at WordPress and hello to our new blog site at

<http://web.me.com/tonyed/Us/Blogs/Blogs.html>.

We also have a new web site at

<http://web.me.com/tonyed>.

If anyone is sad enough to want to access our old blogs then they can still be found here WordPress. But from now on all new entries will be on on new web site and this site will only house the archives.

Our old web site is closing down.

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20110605 – Little Britain

June 5, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – a bit cloudy today with the sun occasionally peeking through, a lovely pleasant change.



Lazy day around the caravan. Couldn't quite summon up the enthusiasm for a bike ride or drive to a big French car boot sale – the mind just boggles at the thought.

I've decided to be a bit more scientific about this Francophobia and see whether we're just being prejudiced, or the general World view is justified. So I'm going to have my own daily civil list. For ever civil encounter such as a bonjour, a nod, a wave or a smile will add one to the civil count for the day. Failure to be civil, to stop and hold a conversation on the middle of a zebra, to snarl, drive up my exhaust pipe, pip, or make a rude gesture will add one to the uncivil count for the day.

Monday – mixed weather. Had a pleasant stroll around Airvault. There's not much to it. We think it was closed. Although the tourist info office was open, not that it was much good as recruitment had failed yet again and they'd managed to find someone who didn't speak English.

In the evening there was a quiz night. Mind you gave it a miss. There's usually no point as the the questions always seem to be about modern pop music, TV and sport = we're clueless thank god. No good for us unless its "name the four beatles", an Eastenders question for Wendy and "how many players are there in a football team".

Civil 1; Uncivil 0

Tuesday – rain this morning until lunch time. Good opportunity to get some work done.

Wednesday – sun and cloud. Drive down to Parthenay just in time to catch the market and wander around the old town. Nothing really spectacular. Although the moat around the castle is invested with frogs, the noise was almost deafening.

Called at Lake Cerebon for a picnic. Yet another lavish feast of an apple. Very pleasant but no birds just a solitary windsurfer.

Civil 1; Uncivil 3

Thursday – mixed weather day again. Wendy does the weekly shop I do some work.

Friday – rain in the morning and sunny after lunch. Wendy's winging about the weather but a gentle reminder of weather in Belthorn soon puts it in context.

We drive into the market at Thoours. Rated as one of the best in the area – doesn't really say much for the rest.

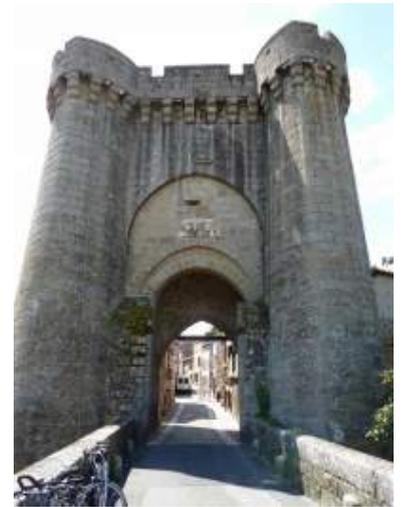
In a good example of French driving Wendy is crossing the road on a zebra, cars are stopped then when she's halfway across man in white citron van decides he's had enough and drives across the Zebra crossing narrowly missing Wendy.

In the evening there's a communal barbeque, all welcome. Take your own food and turn it into charcoal. As usual all the men are there in their pinnies, getting really excited about this boy scout experience. What is this "mans thing" about barbequing. These are the same men who probably, like me, aren't even aware where their kitchen is. Yet get some charcoal, enough heat to melt your utensils and toast your testicles, with enough smoke to hide a battleship in and there in the thick of it. Not for me thanks. Wendy comes back with a plate of charcoal kebabs. Somewhere in amongst it there's raw chicken. She's fuming as apparently the barbeques that hot it's burning everything too quickly before the raw chicken and ecloi in the middle have been done.

Meanwhile research shows "Barbeques, it turns out, are good for your mental health – particularly when they take place in green spaces" according to Sally Augustin, Ph.D., is a practicing environmental psychologist who studies person-centered design and sensory science. And if you've a spare \$71 you can buy the book "Why Do Men Barbeque" to find out the hidden psychological and cultural forces.

Think we'll stick with my original views and give any future barbeques ones a miss.

Civil 0; Uncivil 4 – I'm counting the zebra incident as 3.



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[20110601 – The Epitomie of French Attitude \(Bloody minded and arrogant\)](#)

June 1, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – another gorgeous day spoilt only by the French.

Good news is the Wifi's working this morning unaided. Unless of course our friendly little man in van (yes we're on handshaking terms now, watch out he'll be wanting to kiss me next) got up early to reboot it all – not really likely.



Anyway while we're on the subject of the French lets observe these two photos of our next door but one neighbour. Monsieur Hitler, who is shown here defending his water supply rather than sharing it and then sits on guard just in case an English visitor to his country should have the audacity to empty his grey water. This is all that's bad about the French, it just epitomises there bloody minded arrogance and really starts to make you question why we bother coming. We missed our opportunity at Agincourt.

I've been quite defensive of the French just lately, especially to Wendy who thinks there just a load of miserable gets, whereas I've argued that part of their problem is the lack of English and confidence to speak to foreigners. And, as me Mother would say, "there's good and bad among all", but I don't think she'd ever met any French. Looks like yet again Wendy's right, and the Franco-phobia that runs through British, American, and even European society, is well justified.

Anyway we have a lazy if somewhat eventful day around the caravan arguing with the French. At least I manage to finish my Kindle book Solaris by Ian McEwan. What a great read although probably not every ones cup of tea. Really like the Kindle it perform great in brilliant sunlight. But how can they possibly justify some Kindle editions be the same price or dearer that paper backs. Answer – greed. But what a pity.



Thursday – sun and cloud. By way of a change WiFis down again, so it's another stroll to the office, for a tete a tete.

Wendy's off to L.Eclerc for the weekly shop, and comes back ecstatic because she's also found a Lidl. I have a working day around the caravan keeping out the sun. Also finally get around to changing all my passwords. What a totally dispiriting experience, I think I'd rather lick piss off a nettle. It highlights how badly designed so many web sites are.



There really should be a European law against French swimming attire. Monsieur Hitler parading around in his standard issue, are they free on the French NHS, snail lickers trunks. "How to look a complete pratt, French swimming trunks". I've tried before to understand the rational reason for these sartorial assaults on the senses, but what's the point when you're in a country that has priorite a'droit.

Go to buy a new WiFi ticket in the evening. 20 minutes before closing time. Receptionist can't sell me one, she's cashing up. I ask her if she ever heard

the English phrase "customer service" and point out that she'll have to excuse me as I sometimes have these strange delusions where I think I'm a customer, but not to worry I'm not violent and I'm receiving treatment for it. Typical Gaelic shrug. I also point out that as I've had to traipse over to the office most mornings to complain I would have thought the least she could do is give me a free ticket, so no problem with cash. Appealing to her innate French sense of laziness wins the day, I get a free ticket.

Friday – another scorching day. We set off to Ile de Oleron and then just happen to notice, as we call in for some diesel, that we're sat in the French equivalent of the M25 for 25 minutes. The traffic jam to end all. Turns out Thursday was a bank holiday and guess the French are all playing hooky for the weekend.

If this is what it's like in August we're well out of here.

Abandon Ile de Oleron and drive down to a small village about 10 miles away called Telmont. No traffic allowed, just lovely and relaxing. Even splash out and have a coffee and the inevitable fruit tea.



Meanwhile Wendy's been turned into a mobile food kitchen for flies. We decide we've had enough of flies, Hank Marvin and sandy pitch. So tomorrow we're off.

Saturday – scorching hot and even more infested with flies. Wendy's now a complete take away meal for noseums. Thank god we decided to leave. Just don't breathe through your mouth. We're out of here. We just get caked with black and green flies.

Here's an interesting little bit of news for you the France have banned the words 'Facebook' and 'Twitter' from use on TV and radio. Some people might say that the French have acquired an unfair reputation for being obsessed with frustratingly pedantic rules and regulations (which they expect the rest of the world to follow while they flagrantly ignore them), but this latest ruling would suggest again that reputations are sometimes earned.

Arrive at new site in scorching heat, get a massive pitch and proceed to pitch up in 28c scorching heat. End up like a wet dish cloth.

The sites run by an English couple. It's a proper little Britain and has all the markings of a caravan club enclave, very well organised. Unlike a CC site though the owners are really friendly, know how to smile, can cope with a joke and have a personality. Not a single snail

licker in site but just to keep up the cosmopolitan approach there are two or free token Dutch – like ants they get everywhere.

A bit of a shame really. I'm not sure I really approve of these cultural ghettos, despite the French, but I have to say it is a great site, well organised and everybody just so friendly.

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[20110527 – Royan](#)

May 28, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – another sunny day despite a grey forecast.



Market day in Rivedoux, can't grumble I suppose as I've avoided them so far. Now this is my sort of market, just 3 stalls. Wendy's so disgusted we don't even have to stop.

Drive up to St Martin. Greedy little snail lickers want to charge for parking. However if you visit the cemetery there's free parking and plenty of it, you just need to use them things at the end of your legs.

Now you're talking, a proper indoor food market with all sort of delicacies. Wendy's eyes light up. It's salad for tea so we get the French equivalent of a pork pie, seems to have every conceivable meat in it, delicious; rabbit pate fantastic and tasty; fagots, delicious but I do so worry whether they're politically correct; and 3 dried sausages for E10 – pheasant, fig and blue cheese.

Afterwards we sit by what must be one of the most picturesque harbours in France, have a coffee and people watch.

Saturday – gorgeous blue sky yet again. No matter how much we like it here on Ile de Re it's time to move on, but we'd certainly come back again.

Amazing we've been there two weeks as have some French neighbours. In that time we've given up saying Bonjour and smiling as it's a complete waste of time. Not even a snort back. Then as we maneuver the caravan they actually come out to help – I'm confused!

A pleasant 60 mile drive down to Royan to a site on the beach. That's just far enough.

Very hot. It's a massive site. A real little Britain full of English, oh and one Welsh, hardly any Dutch or French on site.

Sunday – what is it with this 3rd World country! No toilet seat; holes in the ground; no smiles, all forgivable, but crap Wifi now that's a crime against humanity. You spend ages trying various magic incantations. Then miraculously at 09:00, when the office opens, the Internet starts working. But this site must hold the record it's the only place I've ever been where the upload speed exceeds download. 160k download and they charge for it. One of these fat wood pigeons would do better.



Now some of you, like me, probably think that Hank Marvin is in his 70's and has retired, but I can assure you that is not the case. It seems like we've traded the cuckoo and the blind insomniac cockerel for a budding Hank Marvin. Last night he was serenading everyone in the local cafe, and as an added bonus the whole campsite, with The Shadows Greatest hits. He's 40 years younger and has given up the glasses. Fortunately I like the Shadows and unlike the cockerel he gives up at 10:30 but you do start to wonder.



Bike ride through St George de Didonne and into Royan, all along the sea front. Bit of a disaster on the time front as when we get there and the market is still open! Wander around the market, avoiding any spending. The indoor market there is in a splendid domed building with a fantastic windowed roof.

Bike ride along the seafront is lovely, with great beaches and blue sea. As good as the South of France anytime although they do lack that topless touch.

Dinner tonight is bread, 7 cheeses, rabbit pate and a drop of wine. Best meal of the week.

Monday – forecast is for some cloud and maybe rain so plan a work

day around the caravan. Nerds delight.

Firstly I have to crank up the Internet and by way of a change it's not working. Visit the office. "WiFi's not working again", "oh yes it is" says arrogant customer friendly blobbie geezer in the office, "No it isn't on my pitch", "yes it is", "no it isn't", "yes it is" and so on. This continues. Then Dutch geezer chirps up "well my Wifi's not working either", "yes it is" says arrogant son of a bitch. Then we have an instant diagnoses of the problem "It's your firewall". Now I'm "no it isn't". Finally he agrees to send a man. "When?" "This morning". Throw my arms up in the air with a French shrug of disgust as practiced in "Allo, Allo" and storm out. Where do these geezers get their customer service training. Man in van comes within minutes and then disappears to reboot a gizmo. All now working. Why does it have to be so difficult?

By lunchtime the suns out and great weather again but I continue to beaver away.

Tuesday – another gorgeous day, but not too hot. Byway of a change the Wifi's not working again. Get hold of man in van who TOTO's it and all's well again. Why do we have to have this performance every day? Told him I'll see him again tomorrow morning.

Drive up the coast to look around and visit another site that allegedly has wifi on pitch. May have wifi but also has that many trees you can't see the sun. Oh well have to put up with my daily morning groan session. Some lovely places and loads of bicycle paths for us to explore.

Have lunch by the sea and then return for a leisurely afternoon around the caravan reading, followed by wine and dinner on the patio.

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[20110524 – Bike Rides](#)

May 23, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – Grey and miserable for a pleasant change. Drive down to Rochefort – without the q and no cheese – in fact there's not really much there at all apart from a Hyper U. How Wendy's eyes lit up. On the way back from nothingness we called at Foraus, a lovely little town on the coast. Relatively unspoiled, looks like tourism has completely passed it by but at least the sun was out and weather was back to normal.



By the time we got back to our site weather was back to it's sunny blue sky self and it was a somewhat belated (less said about the delay the better) tea – Christmas pudding and custard.

Wednesday – yet another glorious day. Bloody blind, insomniac cockerel still at large, despite a desperate seek and destroy mission.

I've been trying to understand where the day goes as there doesn't seem a moment to spare. This morning starts off with the usual review of emails, nerdy news updates and a spot of French. Then we get a call from the Natwest robot in the fraud department questioning a payment. Give up trying to deal with robot and speak to a real person in the UK in the account team. Two hours later we've figured out our Debit Cards been abused in the USA – Wendy abuses it regularly but

not in this way. Anyway Natwest fraud algorithm has flagged it up correctly and stopped the payment. Nerds 1, fraudster 0. How could I ever be so critical of the computer nerds.

So that's another two hours of my life spent on banks and passwords. Two days since I last had time to read a book. You've no idea how busy this retirement life is.

For a change and because it's so hot I try a sun cream. Well actually I think it was just a Dulux Brilliant white paint, no wonder it's factor 30 it has enough covering power to hide a black wall.

Lunch time set off for our aborted bike ride from Monday. Park up at St Martin; ride along the coast to Loix; then Courade; then Bois Plage. Fantastic circular bike ride. Cycle paths all the way. Fantastic scenery, mixture of marsh lands, vineyards and stunning birds. Pity we forgot the bird book. We see so many new species that it takes ages to get anywhere and by the time we get home we've forgot them. Mind you we are at least rewarded with several sightings of a Blue Throat – now there's excitement for you! And then I nearly have my head took off by two low flying swans. Spectacular, especially the sound of the wind rush through their wings – awesome.



This Island is fantastic. Great cycle paths all around, even if at times it does seem like a senile toure de france. It's just infested with the Dutch riding their two wheel tanks.

Arrive back just in time for the corkscrew hour. Start off with Germanic influence and have a beautiful cold example of the Rheinheits Gebot and then it's onto a cheap and very cheerful St Emillion, supplemented by tea out on the patio hiding from the sun. Even at 19:00 the sun's just too hot.

Meanwhile our friendly little Serin, looks like a yellow budgy, is perched in his favorite tree singing away in competition with the blind, insomniac cockerel.

Thursday – a tad overcast and a bit cooler. It's shopping day so a golden opportunity to do some work done and get my head into powerpoint and some video software. Peace, quiet and tranquility.

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[20110520 – More Birds](#)

May 20, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – just another lazy sunny day. People watching. Still infested with Dutch but there a friendly and hardy lot. Sat



outside at the crack of dawn in short sleeves eating breakfast. Meanwhile the French continue wandering around with faces like a slapped arse. The good news is it's not just antipathy towards the English or even the Dutch. No, they can't even be civil to their compatriots. A nod, a smile or a bon jour doesn't cost much, even us nerds can cope with that.

Saturday – load the bikes up into the car and drive up to the bird sanctuary for a lovely bike ride across the marshes. See 7 new species today, including an Avocet. How exciting can life get. Watch a French geezer raking mud on the salt beds in the marshes. If this is how they get salt from the mud it's enough to put you off for life.

Ride into Arse En Ray, a lovely little village with very distinctive church spire, apparently used as a land mark for sailors. Coffee on the quay side restaurant. Then ride back and come across the LPO – French equivalent of RSPB – who are set up with binoculars and telescope drumming up trade. Amazing even the museum was free today.

Sunday – for the first day since we've been here we awake to clouds. Good day to get some work done so spend the day enjoying myself immersed in a powerpoint presentation – once a nerd always a nerd.

But I have to say I do wonder these days about what's happening to IT. After 40 great years in the industry I do really despair at the quality of software and the main offender seems to be the web. What's happened to common sense; testing; good user interfaces. Even the large companies are as bad. Adobe send me an email hoping I'll spend money with them, yet one of the links is broken. I've been changing all my passwords. Now there's a real opportunity for despair. You either struggle to find the log on; they want to control your choice of passwords; you can't find the log off; they just don't work. Who are these numpties who are allowed to design web pages. The pages may look pretty but that's as far as it goes. At least my conversion to Apple has eased the despair, but the industry still has a very long way to go.



Monday – set off for a bike to Loix and other villages. Get the bikes out the car and joy, mine has yet another puncture, thanks to a drawing pin. Drive back to fix it. Get it fixed and it still won't blow up, yet no signs of an air leak. Turns out that my electric air pump can't deliver more than 5 PSI. Unbelievable two faults.

After lunch set off for a shorter bike ride down to St Marie something or other and then onto Rivedoux. Very pleasant. Cycle paths nearly all the way but not a cafe for coffee anywhere, what has this country come to. After 4 hours on the pedals we get back just in time for the corkscrew hour and a pleasant bottle of Samur – even though it's in one of those Burgandy shaped bottles.

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[20110514 – Ile De Re](#)

May 14, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – leave our massive pitch and head towards Ile De Re. Fortunately it's only a two hour drive, complete with 1700Kg of caravan shadowing my every move.



New sites much busier. Typical large site, mainly plastic hutches and only 21 touring pitches. Fortunately we get a decent sized one down a pleasant cul-de-sac. But the regimentation is still a bit of a shock to us after the open sites we've been used to.

Weather nice and sunny. Good news is that the pitch has WiFi on pitch at the usual rip off prices but I turn my netbook into a wireless router so that we can both access WiFi. I also give our Dutch neighbors free access, anything to stuff it to the WiFi Company who I've crossed swords with before. As the Spanish saying goes "revenge is a dish best served cold".

We seem to have traded the Cuckoo for a blind cockerel, who crows in the dark; a wood pigeon with a stutter; what sounds like a

constipated elephant – oh the joys of nature.

Sunday – a bit cooler and overcast. Pleasant bike ride down the coast. Followed by coffee and amazing some window shopping. Unbelievable nearly all the shops in St Martin were open. What is France coming to, they'll be smiling next! Good cycle paths and there's over 100km of them on the Island. Mind you at E6 toll for the bridge onto the Island I think we'll be staying put for a while.

Monday – fantastic clear blue sky day with bit of a breeze to keep us cool. Amazing here we are in post credit crunch world where all countries, especially Britain is cutting services, yet here in France, on a breezy Ile De Re, they council employ people to go round with those garden blowers blowing the dust off the edge of the road. Guess what happens the next day the dust gets blown back, it's a job for life. And all this in a country that still can't provide toilet seats or get rid of their holes in the ground – unbelievable.

Tuesday – another beautiful day. We drive up the Island for a tour round. Complete with lavish picnic on the beach, boy is it hot, but unlike last week at least there's a little breeze to make it more bearable.

This islands like a geriatric tour de France. There are cyclists everywhere, complete with loads of cycle paths. It's lovely and relaxing here, like Cornwall but with that feeling that you're cut off and away from the hustle and bustle of mainland France. Yes, difficult to believe, but this place makes France seem like a hive of activity.

Being on a caravan site at this time of year you certainly get the feeling you're in the world of Saga, full of escapees from their care home. Average age must be around 70 but to be fair zimmer frames seem to have been replaced by solid Dutch bikes, built like a tank.

Wednesday – more beautiful weather. Lazy day around the caravan, unlike most of the geriatrics who have wobbled off on their two wheeled tanks. Thank god for the awning at least we've somewhere to hide.

Meanwhile it's a make do tea tonight as Wendy's not shopping on the Island – too expensive – we're doing it at La Rochelle tomorrow. Welsh rarebit with bake beans – hopefully not raw but well cooked for at least 15 minutes – yipee. All this caravan living does mean we eat better than at home. Most nights it's some new tasty dish, but all a little bit too healthy.

So I've decided to do my own recipes for the coming week:

Monday – Bake beans (properly cooked of course, at least 15 minutes) on toast with some bacon, spicy sausage and / or black puddings.

Tuesday – cheeseburgers.

Wednesday – Macaroni pudding, properly cooked of course.



Thursday – welsh rarebit with bacon and beans.

Friday – in keeping with religion, spicy Thai fish cakes, mushy peas and chips.

Saturday – corned beef hash with beans and lashings of daddies sauce.

Sunday – christmas pudding and custard.

A gourmet treat that will compete with any French cuisine, Egon Thingy watch out.

Well a very relaxing day yet again.



Thursday – hot and sunny. Drive into La Rochelle. Very pleasant and relaxing town. Lots of old building, traffic free areas, no massive shops and attractive old port. Pity about the tourist info office. I asked for a map in my polite French and was told it would be E0.20. Told them to keep it, at which point the guy said but E0.30 is nothing. Well if it's nothing you buy it for me! Don't understand English sarcasm. Anyway I got last years map for free.

After lunch we, note the we, have to do the weekly shop. I assist by keeping out the way, having a coffee and learning some French, that way the trolley doesn't get lost.

Then it's E9 to cross the bridge back onto Ile De Re. Greedy little snail lickers. I wouldn't mind I bet it was paid by my EU money.

Later I visit the Tourist info on Il De Re. Ask if she speaks English. She replies in French that she only speaks a little – you do wonder. Then ask my question in French, she babbles on at break neck speed in French. What muppet employs someone to work in a tourist office who doesn't speak English, has a face like a slapped arse and last smiled when she was being burped as a baby.

Back just in time for the corkscrew hour. Followed by yet another pleasant meal – bread, cheese, sausage, rillettes (don't ask) and wine – on the patio.

The sites infested with Dutch, no one left in Holland. Mind you at least they smile and speak unlike the snail lickers who still seem to hold a grudge over Agincourt.

Well I'm booked on a one week French course. I'm sure day one will be whatever you do or say DON'T SMILE!

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[20110507 – Cuckoo At Last](#)

May 13, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – arrive at our new site near Ruffec. Joy lovely and sunny all the way down and when we get here it rains.



We're out in the wilds here. Nature all around, great views, very quiet apart from the birds and crickets.

A very relaxing site. We're almost comatose. Hence just a weeks blog all in one. A lovely pool with fantastic views. Only room for about 10 caravans, massive open pitches so we can spread out. Only one other caravan on site.

Weather has been very hot and sunny in general all week. Supposedly a micro climate in the Charentes region second only to Cote d'Azur. We spend most of the time hiding in the shade I've never known the sun so hot. We just fry in 20 minutes.

Take a leisurely stroll down the country lanes, not a road sign or car anywhere. Some lovely properties around here and a lot of English living here.

Good news is we've seen a great spotted woodpecker – far superior to the pilated version. Amazing after 60 years the only bird we can clearly identify by it's call is the Cuckoo, this one here is at it all day, yet we've never seen one. Well we finally get to see a Cuckoo, mind you if I had a shot gun I'm beginning to think we'd be seeing a pile of quiet Cuckoo feathers. That thought should be enough to get me kicked out of the RSPB for life.

We have a day trip out to Poitiers. A pleasant city but there redoing it. Mind you no common sense has been applied, instead of just doing a small area and then moving on they've turned the whole city centre into a building site.

Then we have a day out to Angouleme. Not that impressive, no real character. But at least it's mainly traffic free.

Saturday quickly comes around again and we're ready for the off. Ille de Re next. Typical we've seen no rain all week, but just like arrival there's the odd shower – joy.



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[20110430 – 1st Relaxing Week](#)

May 11, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – hot and sunny. Thank god the royal weddings done with. Perhaps the world can get back to normality and people wearing seatbelts.

To be honest we can't really remember what happened Saturday through to Friday. It was hot with an occasional sprinkle of rain. Much too hot to do anything energetic. Not warm enough for breakfast on the patio but ideal for dinner.

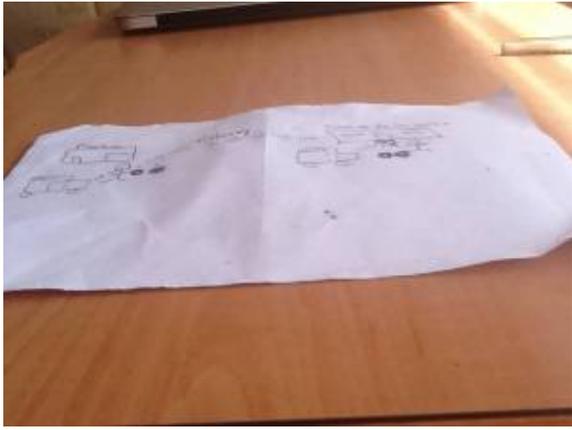
Of course you can't have a week in France without suffering a market, so Monday we walked into Ligueil to see all 8 stalls on the market. This is truly the place for the fashion conscious to flock to. Apart from that it seems like every other stall was selling goats cheese or asparagus. What amazes me is that for a country that seems to be sinking into a quagmire of goats cheese you hardly ever see any goats. Could this be one for the trade descriptions brigade as it's really cows cheese?

Mind you I did notice that Monday was “be understanding of Tonys French day”. 4 encounters and I seemed to get the message across. Perhaps that nice Mr Sakorsky has had a gentle word and told them all to get their arse in gear, realise this is the 21st century and we need tourism.

Wednesday morning a man was supposed to come and fit new tyres on The caravan. Need I say what happened. Discussion on phone and he definitely says “cette apre midi” – this afternoon. Then again its France and promises, especially concerning work, have no real meaning.

Thursday I drive down to tyre place for face to face encounter, complete with Wendy's pictorial communicate. They

finally get the message that they're coming to me. So much for repeating it 3 times on Monday and twice on the phone. Well that's shattered my illusion that French ears have improved – I certainly know my French hasn't.



Anyway face to face encounter, with drawing, does the trick. 30 minutes later a lard bucket turns up and proceeds to lie under the caravan and proudly display the crack of his backside to the gathered ensemble who have come to observe. Then he asks if I have a jack for the caravan. Me, I thought that's what you'd provide! But then it is France. Anyway we borrow a trolley jack and he jacks one side up and then proceeds to slacken off the wheel nuts. Now I'm no mechanic but the one thing I do know is you slacken off and then jack up. By now confidence is ebbing and all 9 onlookers are losing confidence. Then he goes to take off the other wheel. Apparently he has to take the tyres back to the depot to have them fitted. You do wonder whether you're actually in a 3rd world country at times.

Great news is it's coming up lunch time so we'll probably not see him for a good 4 hours, if ever again. Oh yea of little faith two hours later man, 8 stone lighter, and van return with tyres. Now this guy seems to know what he's doing. Alls well that ends well we end up with two new commercial Michelin tyres.

Meanwhile Friday we await an Airsure delivery from home. Paid extra and guarantees two day delivery. Guess what it didn't turn up.

Saturday still doesn't turn up. I can feel a claim for refund and damages coming on.

Set off for a leisurely drive 100 miles south to our new home.

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[20110426 – Escape To France](#)

April 30, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – At last we escape to France. Six weeks in the UK has been more than long enough to create itchy feet and escape from all those jobs planned by Wendy.

Set off at 09:00 it cold, miserable with the odd drop of rain, just the sort of weather that makes it all seem so worthwhile.

We have the long drive down to the tunnel but are kept entertained by Radio 4. What a mine of useless information. There's the Duke of Burgandy butterfly. Poor thing only lives for 4 to 6 days, but what a sex life it has. Each copulation lasts 45 minutes. Then there's womans hour. Why is there not a Mens hour? Big topic of the day is should women wear a night bra to avoid vertical creases between there breasts – fascinating I'm sure.

Tunnel is such an efficient way to cross. Turn up; it reads your number plate; shows your booking and moves you automatically onto the next train; 40 minutes later you're off driving on the wrong side of the road.

Stay in an Ibis at Boulogne-Sur-Mer, despite vowing never to stay at one again after a dismal night in a plastic pod in Paris airport. They've redeemed themselves. Rooms was ok, not quite a Premier Inn, but adequate. Evening meal was ok, not exactly the quality you expect in France, but again adequate, the breakfast was great. Alright no bacon and eggs but a great choice and good value for money.

Wednesday – warmish sort of day as we drive off down the lonely roads to Ligué – just South of Tours. Arrive about

13:00 to brilliant sunshine and very hot. Set up in the sweltering heat.

Thursday – a mixture of sun and cloud and the odd spot of rain the PM. Excitement today as I get to go to the supermarket with Wendy.

Wendy puts me in charge of the trolley as it seems to have a life of its own. Am I ready for such an honour and responsibility. Apparently not as I somehow manage to lose the trolley full of all the shopping. Mind you in my defense I've not had any training for such an onerous task. Anyway that's it I'm not to be trusted again. Oh dear, how sad!

Friday – sun and cloud.

Royal wedding fever has seized not only the UK but has sneaked like a rabid fox through the tunnel here to France. You can't even escape it on French TV. Amazing isn't it all those people queue for all that time just to catch a glimpse. Yet could any of the Royals be arsed to get out their cars and wander across to say hello! Although you do have to admire how good we are as a nation at pageantry.



I heard one fashion commentator have a noisy orgasm on live TV, before the 21:00 watershed, when she saw "the dress". God help her husband he must wear earplugs when having sex with her. Meanwhile there's all these people swanning backwards and forwards and not a seatbelt between them – does the relevant road traffic act exclude wearing of seatbelts at Royal Weddings?

In the afternoon we been invited to a camp site street party, barbecue and of course some wine. Not a Frenchman in site. All very enjoyable, civilised and

very British complete with union flags everywhere but spoilt by a Welsh couple who did nothing but spout Welsh Nationalism and whine about having a union flag in their picture. They really should have built that dyke higher or better still cut Wales off to float into the mid Atlantic where we can't hear them and they can't do any harm. Why don't they stay in their precious country, with their precious obnoxious sounding language and do whatever takes their fancy with sheep.

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[20110304 – Taco Bell](#)

March 6, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – grey with some sun. Forecast overnight was for snow, so up at the crack of dawn and in the lift queue waiting for the lift to open. 8th chair up. But a bit disappointing there's only 2" powder. Never mind it's worth the first tracks.

Pleasant morning skiing. Meet up with a Brit (is that politically correct or will I dragged before the race relations board) and skied together. Finished just after lunch by which time it was a sunny day.

Mores snow forecast for tonight.



Saturday – grey and sunny. No snow overnight. Some bright spark, decides it would be a good day for cross country skiing and to top it he further decides to have a skate lesson. It looks so elegant and easy, one of those bucket list items. Wendy decides to stick with just doing a bit of classic.

After an hours lesson I'm totally knackered, can just about get my skies off. We have a well deserved lunch brake, by which time I'm feeling ready for some more.

We do a 1.5 mile loop, Wendy on classic and me on skate. Well it only takes us 45 minutes to complete. This time I'm totally knackered, Wendy says I look somewhat ashen. It would have been quicker to walk and certainly a lot less tiring. Just in case anyone is confused, regrettably there are no lifts on cross country courses, that's what makes it so exhausting. Being honest about it though we're actually on a golf course and there's only a few slight inclines. So 45 minutes to do 1.5 miles with negligible inclines and I'm totally knackered – is this an age thing. Mind you Wendy's pretty exhausted.

Skate is so much harder than classic, requires more effort, co-ordination and balance. There were a few times when it all seemed to come together and then it's awesome, but within a minute exhaustion takes over and I'm that un-coordinated that it's all can do to avoid stabbing myself in the foot with ski poles.

Next time I see this event on TV I shall be in total awe of these athletes. Cross country skiing is one of the most energetic sports going and burns about 870 Kcal per hour – good for the old diet.

Sunday – cloudy and snowing. We were promised snow overnight again by the muppets on the Weather Channel, but again it failed to materialise. We drive up to the mountain, I'm going skiing and Wendy's off shopping but when we get their it's a total whiteout. Chicken out of skiing and we have a drive / ride up to the Canyons for lunch. Complete waste of time, full of yuppy, overpriced eateries.



Home for lunch – saved a fortune.

Never mind tomorrow should be awesome with all this snow.

Monday – a grey snowy day but they've had 8" of powder. Joy. So it's up at 07:00 and after a giant fluffy buttermilk pancake off to catch the first lifts.

Yes, note the word lifts. What a blessed relief after Saturdays grueling cross country.

Tad disappointing as the 8" seems to have shrunk down to 2". Catch the lift up through the clouds and come out on some blue sky and sun. Later this turns to horizontal snow. Pretty good skiing though on a layer of fresh powder and some grooming, but at the base it's like skiing on a coagulated slush puppy in a 1950's smog – whiteout, does anyone know which way is up?

Good news is the forecast for today and tonight is 2' of powder – I live in hope.

Had a very pleasant apre ski evening at Carol and Hals. Met their new daughter Angela, a friendly little two year old. Just turned two and can already count to ten. They're very kindly going to store our skis, boots and helmets for us so next year we can go somewhere warm for Xmas and January, without lugging all that gear, and then fly onto park city for a proper holiday.

By the time we left carols the snow storm had set in with a vengeance. Great opportunity for my intrepid driver to experience some serious winter driving. We made it to Taco Bells and home no problem – well done Wendy. I think there'd have been tears if I'd missed my Taco Bell treat.

Fluffy pancakes, Taco Bell and powder all in one day, now that's living.

Tuesday – another sunny day. It's Mardi Gras; Fat Tuesday; pancake day or Shrove Tuesday.

Sadly the two feet of powder didn't materialise. Had to make do with a very pleasant 9". Up on the mountain for the first lift to catch early tracks. Good job really as by 10:30 all that beautiful powder is turning to moguls – not good for 60 year old knees.

Meet Wendy for lunch and then call it a good day.

A local on the lift was telling me about these Park City companies that have a 10" or even 6". No it's nothing to do with the minimum size of your manhood before they'll employ you. Apparently if there's over 10" of new powder then you don't have to call in or arrange cover to take the day off, obviously the more enlightened companies have the 6" rule. Now that's what I call civilised.

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[20110226 – Powder, Powder and More Powder](#)

February 25, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – yet more fresh powder overnight. Up and at it for early tracks before 09:00.

It's even more awesome than yesterday and even deeper. Fantastic skiing, words just cannot describe it. Even though it's Saturday it's not busy. Come off just after lunch one very exhausted but happy chap.

I think I'm going to start carrying plenty of \$1 notes then when I come across these urchins with holes in their jeans I can give them a \$1 towards a new pair, and when I encounter these boarders who have their crotch around their ankles and look like they've filled a nappy, I can offer them a \$1 towards a new nappy.

Sunday – sunny day and we're off to Jordanelle State Park to go snowshoeing and discover how animals survive and adapt in winter. Well at least we think we are. Get there in time but it's empty. A few choice words were expressed. Then when we get home we discover it was yesterday. Bloody Mckey Mouse watch was a day out. Just another senior moment. Actually wouldn't surprise me if Wendy's been messing with my watch!

Never mind we have a drive around, stop for lunch at Deer valley to see how the rich do live. Then after lunch we go for a walk around Willow Creek. Gorgeous blue skies, plenty of snow, large open space with some fantastic houses backing onto it. Now we all know this is a country of excess but why is it that most Americans we meet seem to need two houses? Why do most American houses have more full bathrooms than they do bedrooms? What do they do with all these bathrooms. Then you have our superb one bedroom condo which again seems to pander too excess with a water softener that produce water that soft that if you add soap you disappear in a sea of bubbles!

Monday – sunny with some clouds. Wendy's shopping day so I have to suffer yet another days skiing.

Tuesday – a real blue bird day. It must be Wendy comes out skiing. We have a very pleasant morning skiing. Wendy manages to get her photo taken by the mountain photographer – not that we've any intention of paying those ridiculous prices. Mind you I'm impressed he managed to capture her as she zooms down the slopes – is it a bird, is it a plane, is it superman, no it's Wendy:). He must have a fast camera.



Lunch on the mountain and then quit early afternoon. What an excellent day.

Tuesday night I really suffer with the most awful cough. As I can't sleep I research my illness. Every time I come skiing my nose thinks it's a tap and drip on back of throat causing cough. It just doesn't like this cold dry air. Well after 2 hours I realise I have been suffering for years from Vaso-motor Rhinitis. God bless the Internet, who needs a sawbones.

Anyway the consultant I saw last year suggested three course of action; take this nasal spray, it may work; let him loose with a terawatt laser up my nose to desensitise it; give up skiing – totally unrealistic and unreasonable. Seems like it's the laser!

Wednesday – greyish sort of day. Vaso-motor Rhinitis has got the better of me so I decide to have a rest day. A bit of consultancy work in the morning and a lazy afternoon.

If you want to addle your brain then American TV is the answer, so we have a DVD every night from Blockbuster. But what is it with films these days they seem to mumble and whisper so badly that they make Marlon Brando in the Godfather seem like a 1950's BBC news reader with a megaphone. If the quality of the picture was of the same quality

as the sound then we'd be looking at a snowstorm every evening and just would not tolerate it.

Chat with Kurt and Fiona and it sounds like he might be fleeing the nest at last. Let's hope their bid is successful. It will be good for them to get their own place even though we'll miss them whenever we're at home.

Thursday – sun and snowy sort of day. Have an early morning conference call so up early for that and then plan to catch early tracks with the powder that has been promised. Disaster, no overnight powder as promised.

Have another no-ski day to try and shake this cough off. Buy a gallon of cheap cough medicine that seems to do the trick.

Looks like we've found a place to store our ski's and boots over here, so next year we can probably spend a month or so over here, somewhere warm, and then come for a month's skiing in Park City without having to lug skis and boots. Wendy's already planning on what she can buy to fill the extra space we have in our luggage.

Then it's a trip to the Mall. There's a Cheesecake Factory there so I offer to treat Wendy for lunch there. But silly prices, twice the norm, and a queue longer than a dole queue nip that in the bud. More money than sense.

Meanwhile Wendy continues watching the mega DVD epic on John Adams. By now she should be ready for Phd in American history.

It's a veritable blizzard outside so hopefully tomorrow will be another great powder day.

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[20110222 – Pancake Day](#)

February 22, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – sunny and not too cold. Yes I know it's not the real pancake day but it is in my mind. So it's fresh, fluffy buttermilk pancakes with fresh fruit and maple syrup – great American junk food.

Have a good morning's skiing and meet Wendy back at the condo after lunch. Then in the afternoon we take a drive to the local library followed by a trip up to the Olympic park where they have the big ski jump hills and the bob sledge track. Have a wander around the Olympic museum that celebrates the 2002 Olympics here in Salt Lake. Quite impressive and it's free.



Watch a film about the Mormon Handcart trail. Unbelievable stupidity but how people could survive traveling across this country in winter pulling a handcart is beyond belief. It's cold enough just skiing complete with gortex and all the gear.

Facebook fans will have probably seen Wendy's comments about the bit of carrot cake she's treated herself to. Let me put you straight, that bit is a complete slab and is nearly taking over a complete shelf in the fridge

Wednesday – sunny yet again.

Wendy finally ventures out on skies. We have a leisurely ski until 13:00. Great weather and great snow. It's Wendy's first ski so she sticks to the greens. Amazing but it's actually less crowded on the blues. Wendy is so much in control when she skies, these long turns across the slopes and never out of control. It's actually more work doing all those turns.

For those of you who doubt Wendy's 2011 ski debut a photo is included.

Have a leisurely lunch, well Wendy does, and then sit and enjoy the sunshine.

Thursday – grey day with snow forecast – yipee.

Have a leisurely day. Go on a tour of the Olympic park. Stand at top of the 120 metre hill and the bob sledge run. Frightening. For a small fee – \$200 – you can have a ride down in a bob sleigh. Would have gone for it but the sanitation facilities onboard just didn't look up to it. In summer for a



fee you learn to do freestyle aerobatics, down the hill, up a ramp, do a few flips and land in the swimming pool!

Interesting tour, the place is obviously built for lunatics who have no nerves or common sense. Just imagine going 80mph, headfirst down a bobsleigh track with your head just 4" above the ice, that's the Skeleton for you. Good news is it's not as dangerous as the Luge.

Lunch at the bottom of Silver Star, all very relaxing.

Purchased a great little all in one TV control that control 5 devices for \$30, much cheaper than the UK. But then of course I risk slitting my wrists trying to open that silly hard, transparent packaging. It's diabolical the companies should be prosecuted.

Friday – Snow, snow, snow. There's a foot of champagne powder – called champagne because it's the driest snow in the world, contains only 10% water compared to other snow (advert over).

Up at 07:00 – yes it is a holiday – to catch first tracks. Buttermilk pancakes with fruit and maple syrup for breakfast, then gear up and set off.



Fantastic runs, lovely deep powder. Not crowded. It's so deep you really need a leash on your skies. If they come off I'll spend an hour poking around for them it's that deep. Still the champagne tumbles down to keep it fresh. By mid morning I'm cream crackered and need a coffee break.

Meet Wendy for lunch by the log fire in the Krizti Cafe. By now I've filled my boots and had enough.

Awesome. Words can't describe it. Another signature day to look back on.

As I ride the lifts I ponder the thought that I could still have been working full time. Do I miss it? What do you think?

Meanwhile back at the condo my MacAir continues to delight. I've not had to reboot it once and the only failure / problem has been Microsoft Outlook 2011 for the Mac. When I get back home the PC's going to be replaced by an iMac. They work. It's so refreshing.

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[20110217 – Powder](#)

February 18, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday – clear blue sky again. A storm was forecast but it came early and we wake up to 8" of powder.



Up on the slopes by 9:30. Fantastic, but hard work. Mind you at least when I fall it's soft, generally the idea is not to fall but sometimes you get carried away.

Meanwhile Wendy's gone off on the guided nature walk on snow shoes. I was supposed to go but how can anyone in his right mind resist 8" of powder?

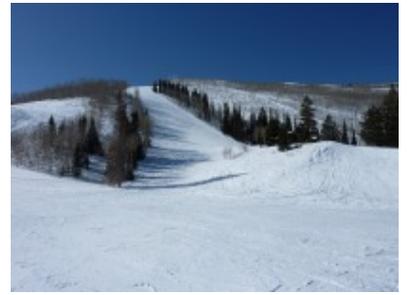
We've now booked our Autumn trip flights and starting to book the itinerary. Go out on 1/9/11 and return 1/11/11.

Friday – overcast and snow forecast. I make the supreme sacrifice and we go into Salt Lake with Wendy for some retail therapy and a dose of holiness.

First stop is Millenium Centre and no trip would be complete without a visit to the Apple Store. As usual it's heaving. Anyway I've got my list. 5 questions, but at least after going away for 5 minutes they come back with answers. Meanwhile Wendy's coveting a bluetooth keyboard for her iPad – see this places appeals to the whole family. An iMac is very tempting but I don't think I'd get it in my luggage. Never mind wait until we get back.

We then take a stroll up to the Mormon centre. Now for those of you who have been religiously following this blog over

the years you'll probably recall (not likely as the average age of all two followers is probably 60 and like me they probably have trouble remembering what they had for this mornings breakfast) the orange flags you picked up and waved as you crossed the ultra wide roads in Salt Lake. Well, they've been removed as they increased traffic accident s by 30%. So, instead you wait for the little man to light up and you've then got 30 seconds to cross, before you're mowed down by 8 lanes of monster gas



guzzlers, and believe you me you need all 30 seconds. You might wonder why all the roads are a minimum of 8 lanes wide. Well apparently when the prophet Brigham Young laid out Salt Lake he decreed that all the roads should be on a grid system and each should be wide enough for an ox and cart to do a U Turn – today's useless piece of information.

We have lunch at the Beehive. A Mormon restaurant, fabulous food and all very cheap. Then we have a free personally guided tour around Brigham Youngs house. These Mormons are all so very pleasant and helpful. Very interesting and as usual all free. In

fact when I offer to make a donation – it was probably only going to be a \$1 – they are most offended. Most other religions have there hands out before you can say Holy Book. As usual they want to send us a free copy, no obligation, book of Mormon and even invite us to a free Mormon Tabernacle Choir concert – but alas I'd miss a mornings skiing. Interesting all their helpfulness, generosity and openness yet their church is closed to the rif-raf!

Saturday – grey and snowy day. Another supreme sacrifice we have a walk around Park City in the snow, mind you it's Presidents Weekend and the slopes will be busy.

Sunday – cloudy and snowing. I've got withdrawal symptoms, so despite the snow and presidents weekend, I'm off at 9:00 for a ski. Wendy says I'm stupid – am I bothered!

Boy is it busy, despite such an early start I only just get one of the last few slots on the car park.



Awesome. Snowing, not too cold, dry and warm in my gear, 12" fresh powder, extra hard work but oh so worth it. Will go down as one of the best ski days ever. If there's a heaven then there must be a lot of fresh powder there. There's something quite euphoric about skiing when it's laying down fresh powder, you're there cocooned in you warm waterproof shell just enjoying the elements that nature throws at you.

Well despite it being Presidents Weekend I hardly have any queues, mind you FastPass comes to the rescue a couple of times, but once you're on the runs its surprising how quiet they are.

Meet two potential house swap couples (Houston and Park City) and exchange cards. Perhaps something will come of it.

Get back mid afternoon by which time Wendy's thinking I've had a major catastrophe as she can't understand anyone wanting to ski in this weather. I'm truly knackered but what an awesome day. Bring on the powder.

By now I think I've nearly mastered the Mac. It has some different ways of doing things that can frustrate you at first but they soon become second nature. I suppose it's all part of Windows withdrawal. But the amazing thing is "IT WORKS", apart of course from Outlook 2011 from Microsoft which just like any PC keeps on crashing. So, that's it for Outlook, I'm kicking it out as well and trying a free 60 day trial of MobileMe to keep Mac, iPad, iPhone and any PC's (that's assuming they don't go through the window) all effortlessly in synch.

Monday – sunny and not too cold. 4" fresh powder overnight. Up at the crack of dawn and on the slopes by 9:00 despite Wendy's acrid views on my sanity. Mind you I had to ski today as it's weekly shop day, so not really much of a decision.

Awesome again. 4" fresh powder. All the benefits of powder without the supreme effort needed for deep powder. By 10:30 I've truly filled my boots and need a caffeine stop. Another fantastic mornings skiing. Beautiful to be able to carve your zig-zag tracks on virgin slopes.

Meet Wendy for lunch and after 4 hours I've had my moneys worth. Moral of the day – get up and out early to catch the fresh powder.

Now I know photos have been a bit sparse so I've included some Park City shots from previous years.

In the afternoon we finalise our Autumn trip. Fly to Vegas on the 1/9/11; two weeks in this condo in Park City; 10 days driving down to Moab and visiting the National Parks in Utah; a week in an awesome looking Sante Fe style property near Zion; a month in a luxurious looking ranch in Oak Creek, Sedona; fly home 1/11/11.

Well it's the corkscrew hour so I think I'll crack my 3rd bottle of wine in 3 weeks. Must be an all time record of restraint.

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[20110212 – Valentines Day, Romance is Not Dead](#)

February 12, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – yet another clear blue sky day. I'm making the supreme sacrifice today and going for a walk instead of skiing – should win me some brownie points.

We catch the free bus from outside our condos down to the old barn. Then walk along the groomed cross country trail along the Swaner nature reserve down to Kimbal junction. Have an exotic picnic on the way, banana and trail mix. It's a lovely walk but we don't see many birds other than magpies and starlings.

Then it's coffee in the supermarket cafe complete with free wifi. What a superb quality of life it is out here, free transport; great well looked after trails; free wifi; mountains; free cross country trails; free outdoors ice rink for ice hockey; lovely surroundings – just like Blackburn.

Mind you we get some weird looks as we walk across the shopping mall to get to the supermarket. Nobody walks, in fact there are very few pavements. The car still rules ok.

I've gone a whole week without any wine but then Wendy puts temptation my way by walking past the state liquor store, so yes I end up with an obligatory brown paper bag. But just because I have a bottle of Merlot doesn't mean I have to drink it.

Well must dash it's 17:00, the corkscrew hour.

Thank god I don't read the news back home too often it just depresses me. The latest example of our stupidity is us giving 1 Billion pounds of aid to India (that's 20 pounds of my money). What the hell is going on? We're cutting back yet we can manage to give aid to a country that has it's own nuclear weapons and space programme – it's just pots for rags. Another clear sign that the country is careering downhill like a greased pig.

Sunday – yet another gorgeous day and it's also quite warm, almost get a sweat on.

I'd assumed it was going to be busy so had a leisurely morning and get on the slopes for 12:00. Where is everyone, they must all be inside troughing. There's hardly any queues and the slopes are quiet. Heaven. Have some great runs while Wendy sunbathes. She's still not ventured onto her skis yet – weird!

Wendy's bought me some moisturising cream. Not very manly! But I'll look 80+ if I don't start applying it morning and night apparently. The ignominy of it all, what am I being reduced to.

Then to top the day off we call in at the bagel shop to order some fresh bagels for tomorrow. What a fantastic breakfast they make.

Monday – starts sunny and warm but clouds come in mid afternoon a bit of a white out – which ways up?

Lazy ski day. Wendy drops me off and I have to suffer skiing while she gets to do the weekly shop. The sacrifices I make. Great this season pass as at \$26 a day you don't feel too guilty if you only do 2-3 hours skiing, whereas at \$90 a day then you just have to ski 09:00 while 16:00 – skinflint.

Valentines day and of course you get all these creeps on face book who make life miserable for us grumpy old men by bragging about the flowers, poems and other such frippery they've frittered there money away on. I bet there's some great deals in the supermarket today from the isles of unsold Valentines Day mush.

At last we get to watch a DVD that's worth watching and we stay awake through. All the previous films (The American, Inception, Cop Out) have been either insipid; too complicated – more than 4 people in them; or just plain boring. Does nobody make any good films anymore?

Tuesday – hot and sunny.

Lazy start to the day I go off skiing while Wendy goes to the Doctors. It seems she's a thing about American doctors. One hell of a wind but it's quite warm so it's softened the snow up. More great skiing.

Forget all I said about Obama supporters I finally met not just one guy, but 3 guys together, who not only admitted to voting for him, but still support him. And they were on a ski lift so they're not agoraphobic; probably not on welfare; over 60, but that's not a crime; and were white Caucasian!

Who said romance is dead. I bought Wendy some Valentine chocolates today, 70% off. What a bargain. And I ventured into the supermarket all by my lonesome. That's it from now on we're going to celebrate all the main rip off events in the year as follows Christmas, Jan 25th; Easter, weekend after easter; Valentines day, 16th Feb, nicer binary date; Halloween and Bonfire night to be ignored. Just think how much we'll save.

Just seen a classic advert on US TV of a man falling onto and through a garage roof. Fortunately it had a sign for the muppets telling them not to try this at home! Could this become part of all action films soon? And no I've not violated my 3 rules by watching daytime TV i'm just checking on the weather.

Wednesday – starts of hot and sunny. Nip up for a few runs but the winds are horrendous. Only 3 out of about 12 lifts are running, fortunately you can get to the top. Have a few runs down but the winds are blowing all the snow off and leaving hard pack. There's a severe weather warning out for the afternoon with 50 mile an hour winds forecast. After a few runs I call it a day and go back to the condo for lunch.

After lunch we take a walk into town and visit a pet shop, Wendy wants to get something for Lexi (Kurt and Fiona's Cocker spaniel pup). It's just unbelievable what you can buy for dogs everything from dresses, nappies and coats – how cruel can you get. They probably all end up with a complex and need to visit a pet shrink! They also sell tropical fish in small plastic containers just like you get coleslaw in, seems cruel to me.

Then the highlight of Wendy's day we go to the Mecca of supermarkets – Walmart. Catch the free bus back as it hailing and even some rain, makes me feel right at home.

Try walking it's almost impossible, three lane roads but not a pavement anywhere. Then we encounter a pedestrian controlled light to get across all 6 lanes. No need to risk jaywalking here. 10 minutes later and still the mans not flashed to say it's safe. I thought it strange there was two skeletons by the button. Oh well we survived.

It's just amazing over here how helpful everyone is. You ask the bus driver a question and he's on his radio to check how long the next bus will be. Can you imagine the response in Blackburn, that's assuming you could even understand them, it'd be something like "get a timetable mate and stop wasting my time". They'd use the endearment mate in the subtle belief that this is good customer service and entitles them to treat you like wart covered leper.

Sorry there's no pictures but we've already photographed nearly every inch of this place but more significantly someone forgot to bring the card reader – I wonder who that could be?

Well battling on with my journey to the dark side. Mastered most of the things on the Mac now. Most of the problems and limitations seem to be down to Office 2011. If I survive this holiday with just the Macbook Air and no major problems then it's goodbye Mr Gates. So far it's looking good, I don't think I've swore at the Mac, I've not had that irresistible urge to open the highest window in the house and teach my Mac Air to fly and I'm sure my blood pressure and inner tranquility has taken a turn for the better. Or perhaps its the mountains and the skiing!

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[20110207 – Heaven](#)

February 11, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – grey wet and miserable as we leave Belthorn, so what's new.

Manchester airport still haven't got their boarding card readers working after 2 years. Instead they continue to employ staff to override the machines – unbelievable is no one accountable.

Pleasant enough flight on Delta, apart from the staff, but a 6 hour lay over in New York was a bit too long. Thankfully the Oasis lounge at JFK is very relaxing and has a superb range of free drinks and food.

Now those avid blog fans, all 2 of them, will probably recall my sarcastic comments about Disney only employing women with tombstone teeth and that permanent blinding smile. Well I've now discovered where the Disney rejects go. They all go and work for Delta. Smile not a chance I'm sure they're frightened it will wear their teeth out. It was just a real delight to watch them serve an under cooked, oblong, veggie pizza with all the panache and enthusiasm of a bored zoo keeper feeding dead mackerels to penguins.

Arrive in Salt Lake on time to a snow storm so we have a drive through a blizzard but fortunately the Interstates not too bad, plenty of snowploughs.

Apartment is absolutely lovely, luxurious and well equipped. Of course it has Wifi.



Tuesday - awake to clear blue skies with great mountain views.

Set off for a light breakfast of buttermilk pancakes, eggs, bacon and lashings of maple syrup. A real cholesterol special. Oh how I like US junk food, they sure know how to live.

Then Wendy drops me off for skiing while she has an exciting day in the supermarket.

Major catastrophe, my helmet, gloves and goggles are back at the condo! I'd asked Wendy to carry them out to the car. She denies all knowledge. Ears obviously not engaged at this altitude or is it attitude Whilst I could ski without helmet and goggles, there's no way I can ski without gloves.

After nearly 40 years of marriage couples have nothing to say to one another that's why god makes old people go deaf!

There's plenty of snow; blue skies; awesome mountain views; picture postcard snow on the trees; empty slopes and to top it off 5" of fresh powder. This must be heaven, never mind promises of 70 vestal virgins, one woman is more than enough. I have a great days skiing but take it a bit easy as for the first time ever I've not done any pre-ski training. An awesome day.

Wednesday – another blue sky day.

Yet another disaster on the equipment front. I'm that obsessed with ensuring I have helmet, gloves and goggles that I forget ski boots. Fortunately I discover it halfway there. It's an age thing. Tomorrow there'll have to be a pre-ski check list.

Awesome skiing just one minor comment, no fresh powder. Fortunately my lack of training doesn't seem to have been a major problem as there's no aches and pains. Wendy has a leisurely day around the condo and somewhat belatedly meets me for lunch. It seems that the summer bus timetable doesn't work in winter!

Conversation on the lifts seems to have reached a new low as I discover that towels from Macy's are so much better than those from Bed and Bath. Mind you I've still not encountered anyone who voted for that "nice Mr Obama" – always gets a gritty response. But I've figured out why. All those who voted for him must suffer from agoraphobia.

At last get to see a bird, magpie, never mind it's a start.

Thursday – more blue sky. Breakfast overlooking the mountains, what a change from the swirling mist in Belthorn with Heathcliff striding out of it.

Pre-ski checklist is a great success. Arrive fully kited out.

Another great days skiing. Also get to see a Mountain Chickadee, very beautiful and amazing how any bird can survive up here.

As a gesture of goodwill I finish skiing just after lunch to go for a walk with Wendy. Meanwhile Wendy's been out walking all morning so is not too keen for more – men from Venus, women from Mars, you just can't win. At least she's finally got a pair of apres ski boots, it's only taken her 3 years to replace her flea bitten old ones. After she's had a brew we have a walk across to the Swan Eco-centre to find out about the nature walks across the wetlands.



Friday – more blue sky. Wendy's still crying off skiing so I set off for yet another awesome days skiing, complete with iPhone blasting out Wagner and Queen – great music to ski to. Meet Wendy for lunch.

Amazing how many locals you get chatting to on the lifts. They tend to be so much more chatty than visitors, mind you can't say as I'm surprised living up here – I think there must have been a mix up in mid-wifery when I was born . All of them rave about Park City in the summer and say September is a great time. Also Moab seems to be well worth visiting.

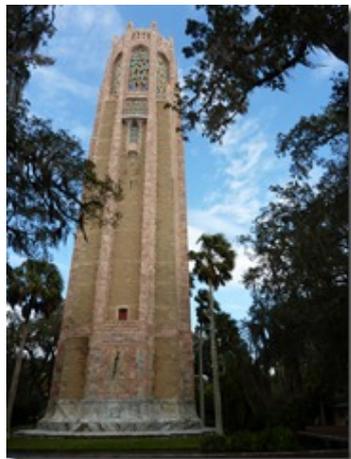
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[20110122 – Birds, Birds, Birds and Bells](#)

February 1, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – sunny but cold in the morning.



After the usual leisurely start to the day Wendy and I set off to Bok Tower and Gardens. Big bell tower and a modern day Quasimodo plays the bells – a carillon concert, how nerdy can we get. The main objective is to see the birds – what birds? Never mind we drive over to another site; get lost 3 times through useless map and instructions that were put together by a muppet who had great difficulty distinguishing left from right; arrived to find the place closed at 15:00.

Sunday – sunny but cold up to lunch time. We all drove down to the Bar Circle B Reserve. What a fantastic birding place and just lovely walking. Spent 5 hours walking around. Saw more birds than we could remember – mind you at our age that's not many, thank god for iPhone. Highlights were the bald eagle and peregrine falcon, also saw alligators and otter. There was even a large pileated woodpecker, but alas I didn't get to see it – we'll have to come back to Florida again to catch a glimpse. Must be the best birding place we've visited and "IT'S FREE".

Just in case your unsure and to remind me of what I missed this is the pileated woodpecker.

Monday – warm and sunny. Joy, break out the thermal underwear and waterproofs, it's back to Belthorn today. Never mind someone has to live there.

So off to the airport. Why is it that the airport lounges are always in the opposite terminal. The thought of two trips through screening, complete with the obligatory long queue that seems to be competing for an entry into the Guinness Book of Records. Pass on that I'd rather wash pots by hand.



Flight on Virgin Atlantic is great. Jumbo less than half full. Before take off Wendy and I each populate a 4 seater row –

the territorial imperative. SO we both get a reasonable sleep – great flight – pity about airports.

Just to make us feel at home it's grey, wet, cold and miserable when we arrive in Manchester – get me out of here. Now Wendy's regretting moaning about it only being 60 in Florida. Never mind, only 13 days to go to a proper holiday.

What did we learn.

Well Florida wasn't as warm as we thought. Had some cold spells and I suppose average was about 60 rather than the 70 we'd expected. Always take at least one fleece. Perhaps it's Mexico / Caribbean next Christmas. Mind you everyone said it was unusually cold.

Do the research on a place before you arrive. In the 5th week we discovered a fantastic map that listed loads of great parks within a 30 mile radius.

As usual American food portions are excessive. If you manage to clear your plate then you will wobble out like a Womble.

Bird watching is very enjoyable, gets you out and is free. Florida has a stunning range of birds.

The theme parks are exhausting but the geriatrics have more energy and cope better than the kids!

Property is really cheap and looks great value but running costs etc. make it financially unsound.

Macs are a lot cheaper in the US.

We still want to spend more time in the US. It's a great place even if they are living on borrowed time when it comes to their standard of living – the excesses just can't be sustainable in the current global climate.

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[20110117 – Kiss A Manatee](#)

January 23, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – raining manatees and alligators, but looking on the bright side at least it's warm.



We're all off to Crystal river for a couple of days. Bit of a long drive but at least by the time we get there it's stopped raining but very warm and humid. Set off for a recommended bird walk but hardly see any birds, just a posy Armadillo.

In the evening we dine at crackers. More fish than a cormorant eats in a month. Absolutely giant portions – it's a blobby factory. Good value for money.

Tuesday – grey and warm. I'm up at 06:00, an un-godly hour, in order to get to the dive shop for 07:00 ready for a dive with the Manatees. I can't believe that there will be anyone else daft enough but there about 8 other nutters. Wow what an experience. We ride out to the Manatee sanctuary where we spend 45 minutes

snorkelling with these 3,000 pound gentle giants. They just like affectionate puppies. They swim straight up to you and if you're not careful will kiss you. Then if you don't stroke them they'll give you a gentle nudge. They just love it if you stroke and scratch their backs, get the algae off for them, then they roll over, just like a puppy, and let you rub their bellies.

You just can't move for Manatees.

After the snorkelling we have a dive with them and explore some of the other aquatic life.

Get back to the hotel about 11:30, pick up Wendy, Kevin and Anne. We drive off to Rainbow river where I'm doing a drift dive. They all come along on the boat for a ride up river. I then do a dive down the river while they all follow in the boat.



Underwater it's awesome. A lovely gentle crystal clear river with plenty of fish and best of all you can see the cormorants diving underwater for fish. The rivers fed by warm springs and you can feel the warm water boiling up through the bottom.

Wednesday – warm and sunny. A lazy morning before we have the delight of a visit to the mall.

Mind you it's not too bad as there's an Apple store and Wendy's treating me to a Mac Air for my birthday along with the packet of M&Ms she bought me on the day. Yes I've finally gone over to the dark side. I'm so brassed off with Wintel and there constant craving attention like a spoilt child, along with more failures per day than there are bits in a byte. Yet my – well Wendy's really – iPad has never let us down and needs just minimal love and attention. So I'm going to try a Mac. Yes I know they're ridiculously expensive compared to a Wintel PC, but everyone who has one swears by them. One things for sure they can't be worse than a PC.



The Mac Air's a very sexy looking (only a true nerd could describe a laptop as sexy – sad), thin, aluminium piece of kit and it weighs just over 1 Kilo. Within 3 minutes it's up and running and while the CPU may not be leading edge the solid state disk and the OS produces very responsive results.

After the mall we have a game of crazy golf followed by afternoon tea, Earl Grey of course, and a leisurely stroll around the board walk.

Thursday – sun and cloud.

We all drive down to Myakka river for a couple of days.

This place is just another wonderful state park. We take an air boat ride around the lake and as well as many alligators we're treated to a veritable cornucopia of birds, including a my long sought after green heron.

After that we take a walk along a tree top canopy and up to a 70ft viewing tower. What a pity we've only got half a day. Us birding sados could have easily spent two days here.

Overnight we stay at a great Comfort suites in Sarasota for just \$100, which includes a great breakfast, complete with waffles, and Wendy manages to stagger out of the breakfast room with a cardboard box full of goodies for lunch! How's that for value. Best of all its right next door to World of Beer a lively pub mainly full of young rumpo students, but best of all it sells draft Hofbrau (Hitlers brown shorts got at least one thing right) is this what heaven is like. Everyone else decides to go and sit in a queue at Ruby Tuesday, sad, whilst I suffer a pint of draft Hofbrau – do I really have to leave



Friday – overcast and rainy. We drive up the coast, over the sunshine highway bridge – not very aptly named today – to St Petersburg and then head for home. Manage to clock up a few more birds.

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[20110114 -](#)

January 17, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – sunny but still a bit cool. We set off to the Kennedy Space Centre, while Kevin & Anne plan to have a leisurely day and do some male retail therapy.



Interesting at the space centre but not really Wendy's cup of tea. Glad I've been but certainly wouldn't go again. Did at least get to see a wild alligator sun bathing.

Sounds like K&A had a good day they decided to pass on the retail therapy and visited Bok tower, so they're the second person to recommend it. Will have to try a visit.

Also picked up a map of nature reserves / birding locations here in Polk county. Amazing how many there are within a short distance. Wish we'd had it at the start of the holiday. Must make a note to look for similar on each trip.

Saturday – sunny and warm. Off birding to Merritt Island wildlife refuge, it's right next to the space centre. Yes, I know it sounds sad but it's amazing how many other sados there are – get 4 places ready in the old folks home!

What a fantastic day out. Visited the refuge and then went on what can best be described as a bird safari. Saw some awesome birds and the 6 mile drive took two hours with plenty of photo / binocular opportunities. Wendy thought she saw the black outline of an alligator swimming along but when we got out to investigate – was that wise – it turned out to be an Otter.

On the way back we call in for coffee and gas. Kevin finds a wallet with \$500 dollar and a stack of credit cards. Is this the holiday paid for? No we do the honest thing and decide to hand it in at the nearest police station. An hour and half later; three phone calls; visits to three buildings; getting lost; nearly running out of gas despite having just filled up; pressing non-existent bells and banging on police station doors we finally locate a "constable". He gets two of his buddies, who look like SWAT team members, to deal with this 711. Officers are incredulous that anybody bothered to hand it in, the norm is to take the cash and toss it or rack up a lot of spend on the card as well. Mind you with the amount of paperwork I bet they are cursing us.

For evening entertainment we spend our time trying to identify today's crop of bird. Oh what a rich life we lead!

Fantastic day and our Florida bird count is now up to 58. Best still it hasn't cost us a penny.

Sunday – warm and sunny. Highlight of the week for Anne and Wendy as they tootle off to the supermarket, while Kevin and I have a stroll to the local lake for some birding.

Then in the afternoon we have a Sedgeway experience. Yes they let 4 retirement home escapees loose on Sedgeways. We cross major three lane highways, overtake cyclist, zip along at 12 mile an hour and negotiate our way through crowded pedestrian areas without a single loss of life or major incident. A great guided tour of Disney Celebrity. 90 minutes all for \$36 and a lot of fun. And what's more our route has probably been clearly marked by the tobacco chewing, pavement gobbing, red necked Texan who accompanied us.



But of course the day wouldn't be complete without yet more retail therapy so we go for coffee at downtown Disney.



I pass on the Disney store, drink some coffee, whilst I'm minding my own business people watching I manage to observe what must be the Florida's own "Great Plastic Robbery". I'm sure it was an organised crime gang. First a dodgy looking geezer goes in and comes out and shows, what must be his two co-conspirators, his ill gotten gains – no it's not colourful silk handkerchiefs but colourful plastic Disney Gift cards. Then in true Fagin fashion he points into the store and sends in his two female co-conspirators like ferrets down a rabbit hole. He then lingers outside furtively glancing around. Thirty minutes later the two

ferrets exit and show their ill gotten gains to Fagin. Actually judging by the number of colourful cards they've each got I'm surprised they didn't ask for a plastic carrier bag to carry them in.

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[20110105 – Stroke A Shark, Pet A Stingray](#)

Wednesday – sunny and warm.



Up at the crack of dawn to go for a Disney character breakfast with Tiga and friends. As a birthday treat I'm made to wear a Disney birthday badge – joy. Then we we move over to Epcot by monorail – it's my 2nd birthday treat.

At 16:30 I go off to the Epcot Dive Quest where I do a 40 minute dive in the 230 ft * 25ft deep aquarium. Absolutely fantastic; gears great; aquarium quite warm; even helped on with gear; weighted correctly. The dive is fantastic its a coral reef loads of different sharks and manta rays some of them are massive; turtles; 200 different species of tropical fish. When you first come face to mangy teeth with a shark or one just swims alongside or under you it can be quite intimidating. You're probably wondering how come we didn't get eat.

Well fortunately they're very well fed and not that anybody bothered to tell us before but the Manta's have had their sting removed.

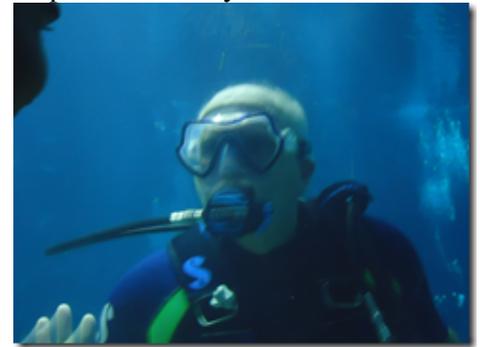
Wendy and the kids were in the observation bay so they could see all my encounters and take photographs. Expensive but well worth every dollar and all the money goes to a wildlife fund, so it makes me feel a bit less guilty. This is my first free dive and if they're all like this I'll certainly be doing a lot more.

As we come out we're handed towels, followed by hot showers and hot chocolate – luxury.

In the evening I meet Wendy and the kids for dinner at the Marrakesh restaurant, complete with belly dancer.

One of the first things you teach kids is how to wash and dry your hands, yet Disney seem to think that either everyone has Alzheimer's or just don't know how. Hence signs over every washbowl explaining how to. Amazing isn't. No signs over the urinals though. Mind you the signs are only in English so the moral of this little digression is don't shake hands with a foreigner!

Thursday – sunny again. Off to Universal Island of Adventure. Kids do all the white knuckle rides. Greedy little b...ards at Universal want \$42 to \$62 for fast pass and it's absolutely useless for the Harry Potter area and most of the other white knuckle rides just don't need it.



Unbelievable, the queue to just to get into Harry Potter Land is 2 hours, then when you're in it's 2 hour queues for the ride and even a 1 hour queue just to get into the shop. Can you believe that there are muppets in the world who are prepared to make these people rich, but of course parents don't want to disappoint their kids. Needless to say we do not become muppets and give Harry Potter a miss. Our kids are disappointed!

Kids rapidly finish Islands of Adventure so we move onto Universal studios and finish that off followed by a reasonably early evening such that everyone can go to sleep watching a DVD.



Friday – sunny and warmish. Off early to Busch gardens. Get there early and low and behold the lazy b..gers don't open until 10:00. Yet again a poor customer experience but what can you expect from a Sea World Company. Kids go off to do the white knuckle rides while we explore the birds and animals.

I lash out and finally get to try a Turkey leg. Actually I'm beginning to wonder whether it's actually a vulture leg. They look pretty red and raw, even more so from behind my sunglasses. By mid afternoon we're on our way home having completed out mission for the day.

In the evening we go to the Electric Light parade at the Magic Kingdom. Will the kids manage to stay awake? Despite the cold – boy does it seem cold when you stand around for an hour – but as usual it's worth it.

What is it with Disney teeth. Are there really that many people with such brilliant white, perfect, tombstone gnashers; or is it an essential requirement in the employment application; or do they have a Disney dentist building where they implant them and at the same time brace the mouth for that permanent smile?

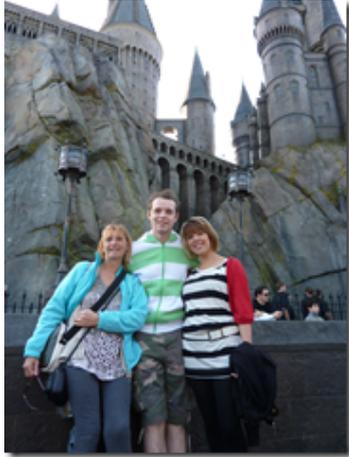
Saturday – sunny but not too warm. Up at the crack of Dawn to get the kids into Harry Potter, you know what kids are like when they don't get their own way!

Get to Islands of Adventure ready for opening time, along with a thousand other muppets, and then have a route march to HP land. Miracles, no queue and the ride queues are only 20 minutes. Kurt and Fiona come off looking green. Very impressive land but certainly would not have been worth a 2 hour queue. Try some Butter Beer – don't ask- just like cream soda.

Still prefer Disney to Universal, they're just so professional compared to the greedy gets at Universal.

I'm flabbergasted as we finally get to speak to someone who speaks English /American – there's hope for America yet, let's hope he's not had a vasectomy.

Once they've got HP out of their system we go for a game of crazy golf.



Easy evening.

Sunday – sunny and warm.

Drop the kids off at the airport and have a pleasant afternoon on the front enjoying the sun and a good book.

Kevin and Anne arrive about 17:30.

Monday – sun and cloud. The ladies have the excitement of the weekly shop at Pubics, while Kevin and I have a walk and do a spot of bird watching. What an amazing number of birds there are on the lake here.

In the afternoon we take a drive down Kissimee old town and then visit Disney Celebration.

Tuesday – sun and cloud and not too warm until sun breaks through.

Drive up to Silver Springs but the lazy b..gers are closed. Never mind resort to plan B and go into Ocala Forest and visit Juniper Springs.

Lovely springs with a great walk along a boardwalk by the river. What a fantastic range of birds we see. Try to see the alligator but no luck although we did consider dangling Wendy's legs in the river from the bridge (she's the lightest). Then in the evening we spend most of the time trying to identify the birds – what an exciting life us golden oldies lead, mind you at least we can stay awake after 21:00.



Wednesday – sunny but not too warm.

Wendy and I go off to animal kingdom to catch the birds and animals we missed last time. After our usual exotic lunch – butties. Then real joy I get to see the "Seeking Nemo" musical – how lucky can anyone get?

Kevin and Anne have a really exciting time visiting the Outlet Stores, makes me appreciate how lucky I was to see Nemo.

Thursday – cold and sunny.

Plan is for Kevin and Anne to finish off the outlet stores. Wendy has a 2 hour merchandising opportunity whilst I suffer starbucks, coffee, netbook and work – blessed relief anything is better than the Mall!

After lunch we escape the Mall and return home for a leisurely afternoon and a stroll to watch the birds – alas no alligators.

With the Americans love of food, the resulting obesity, their hatred of walking anywhere and their tombstone sized, brilliant white gnashers I wonder whether in a 100 years time they will have evolved to fat balls rolling around with

giant gnashers for brakes and and all jabbering away in Spanish?

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[20101231 – Hablan Español](#)

January 5, 2011 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – hotter and sunny with some clouds. Thank god for a leisurely morning. Wendy and the kids go for her weekly fix at Pubic’s supermarket whilst I’m left for some peace, quiet and the opportunity to catch up on a bit of work. Even the works a blessed relieve from pounding the parks.

In the afternoon we go down to Blizzard beach water park. It’s just nice especially when the suns out and amazing the waters quite warm.



The kids want to go to Downtown Disney and see the New Year in but after dinner they decide they’re too tired and it seems a waste to go out – oh dear how sad. We have a leisurely evening in and watch some TV. Looks like the kids are getting like an old married couple. They manage to stay up until 23:00.

Saturday – hot and sunny. After a late start, kids still in bed, we go for a leisurely stroll around the boardwalk and relax on the beach, it’s a no park day.

Then it’s downtown Disney for our picnic lunch, how people gawk at you as they walk past, followed by a visit to Disney Quest. The kids aren’t too impressed with Quest it’s us oldies who like it most. Then we have a stroll

around downtown Disney and they, Wendy and kids, manage to spend half an hour browsing the Disney store. All this way and all they want to do is shop!

Wot no funnel cake, I’ve been promised some but we can’t find it anywhere.

Kids then decide that the plans to go to Downtown Disney this evening seems a waste to come out again, so we go to Fantasia crazy golf. It’s really great.

Then it’s home for dinner and the kids are so tired they have an early night, yet again – no stamina.

It’s amazing isn’t it in the land that gave the world Starbucks you have Disney dishing out nescafe, not a real coffee bean anywhere in site.

Disney is such an amazing cash cow, most of it coming from the blobbies gorging themselves at every “Blobbie Grazing Station” provided by good old Disney. Then they waddle off to the next, how do they survive in the 50 yards in between?

Fantasia golf and then back for an early night and a DVD that everyone falls to sleep over.

Sunday – warm and Sunday.

Joy they all want to go to the Mall. I take my netbook and go to Starbucks for a coffee and do a spot of work. Even work is better than wandering aimlessly around a Mall. Two hours later they come back, how can you spend so much time around a mall, even a theme parks better. Lunch is in the Mall food court. Two trips around all the restaurants and I’ve had enough free samples to feed a family of four for a week.

Then perhaps I should have kept quiet about even a theme park being better.

Just nip to Hollywood studios to finish this park off. As a real treat we go to Fantasmic. Sit and wait for 90 minutes for the show to start. How lucky can anyone get.

Then it’s back home so that the kids can have an early night.





Monday – hot and sunny. Up at 06:30 and out to Seaworld for 08:15, thank god we're on holiday!

No butties allowed in Seaworld – I wonder why? Plus they charge extra for Fast passes and to stroke a dolphin. Just greedy b..tards. But at least the parks not too busy and we get to see all the shows and the kids get to do the white knuckle rides. Dolphin show is very impressive. But why do they have to be so greedy?

Good news is the park closes at 18:00 so we don't end up knackered.

It's amazing I spend weeks learning American – howdy; have a nice day; yawl come back now; gee; awesome; wow; good joob; hey dude – yet there's hardly anyone here who speaks English. Where are they all? Would probably have been better to learn Spanish or even Serbo Croat. What is happening to this country?

Tuesday – warm and cloudy. Up again at 06:30 to get to Islands of Adventure for 09:00.

Now I'm all in favour of security but if they're going to do it then do it properly. bag checks seem to consist of either feeling the bag from the outside or poking the top of it with a wooden chop stick in the hope that it'll turn into a magic wand and identify explosives. Then we have the other classic where they ask for photo Id as you drive in. You could show them anything because of course there's no way a terrorist could get a Blackburn bus pass or a fake Id card. hat is the point of just playing at it other than a vast job creation scheme.

Again greedy b..gers want to charge \$40 to \$60 for a fastpass – legitimised queue jump. What's more it doesn't cover Harry Potter. At 09:30 there's a 2 hour queue and building fast, just to get into Harry Potter Land and then there's queues for every ride. At this rate most people will probably get on their first Harry Potter ride by about 14:00 – unbelievable. Common sense prevails and we give it a miss.



By 11:00 the kids have done all the white knuckle rides so we move over to Universal Studios. By 16:00 we've done all the rides and shows they wanted to cover so after a merchandising opportunity we escape to an early dinner and a DVD.

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[20101225 – Airport](#)

December 31, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – cold and sunny. Presents in bed, no it's not what you think. We've bought that many presents with us we decide to save lugging them into the lounge and open our single presents to each other. Wendy get's her black Radley bag that she's been mithering – I get 500 brownie points for actually listening and a 1,000 for remembering. I get the Kindle, complete with sexy case. Being a luddite I'm a bit sceptical at first but after some research and trying it I'm very impressed, but why oh why didn't they adopt the ePub standard – well we all know the answer to that it's just greed and dam the customer!

Wendy's not feeling so good so we spend all day in and she just keeps nodding off. Joy. But at least we get to catch up on reading.

Sunday – cold and sunny again. Wendy's better and is rearing to get her weekly fix at the Pubic supermarket. Then in the afternoon we go down to Disney Quest. It's heaving. Everyone has the same idea let's go somewhere warm.

Oh and can I suggest they everyone books off May 21st 2011 as the Lord is coming on that day. How do I know? Have I had a revelation when nipping into the forest; was it in the Sun or USA today; was it some graffiti on a wall; was it revealed in a TV science program? No it was on a giant bill board so it must be true.



Have a few rides / games and then we get a call from Kurt, his flight from Philadelphia to Orlando has been cancelled along with every other flight. It's mayhem. Thousands are stranded by the snow storm, all the hotels are full and there's no flights out. It's affecting the whole of the Eastern seaboard.

By 20:00 we hear they're on standby for a flight out; then they're confirmed; then they're on board; then they're taxiing to the runway; then they queue for 2 hours; then they're being de-iced. Is this it. No then the pilots out of hours. Back to the terminal while they try and find another crew. No crew found. Cold, uncomfortable night in the airport.

Meanwhile we're staying up, and what's more sober, ready to pick them up at 02:00 in the morning.

Monday – cold and sunny. We spend the day monitoring the phone and the web to see what progress the kids are making while they are scurrying around Philly airport, using many devious tactics, trying to get on standby on every plane out to anywhere in Florida, as are several thousand others. Get on standby but then there's no crew. Finally get on stand by and get confirmed on the 10:15 but can they get a crew? Finally get a crew and then spend 3 hours taxiing de-icing. Miracles they finally take off and arrive in Orlando at 16:30, somewhat tired, bedraggled and smelly. Mind you they don't know how lucky they are. There's still thousands stranded back in Philly.

In the evening they get fed and watered. Kurt makes detailed plans for the next 12 days park visit – where does he get that from I wonder.

Tuesday – sunny and a bit warmer, fortunately we now have our fleece jackets courtesy of the kids. Well today the onslaught begins. Up at crack of sparrows, breakfast and off to the Magic Kingdom, if you've never been – Fiona's first trip – then you have to start with the Magic kingdom. On the park by 09:30 and it's heaving.

What really amazes me about this place is how many foreigners / aliens there are here. Now they're either all visitors from over seas or as I suspect just Foreigners who live here legally or illegally. But how or why will they ever bother to learn English if Disney continues to make it's announcements in English and Spanish. Just like England the Americans seem to be losing the plot. Perhaps like England they'll wake up to multi-culturism when it's too late!



Wendy's somewhat delusional today as she wanders around committing social fraud with her Happy Birthday Wendy badge on. Manage to see the parade and get on a few rides like thunder mountain, splash mountain. Alien encounters been replaced by some tame fairy tale, not as scary as the original.

Wendy sees a tee shirt "Genius by birth, grumpy by choice" tat for some unexplained reason she wants to buy for me.

By 21:00, blessed relief, we manage to escape the clutches of the crowded park only to have an exciting visit to one of the un-sung theme parks of Orlando, the Pubic supermarket – joy. Kids are truly knackered, no stamina.

Meanwhile as anyone seen my black sock. The sock monster struck in the night and has consumed one of my brand new coordinated black socks. What is it with socks that you always seem to end up with an odd one, where do they all go? Is there an EU sock mountain somewhere?



Wednesday – sunny and a bit warmer. Hollywood Studios today. Still very busy but we manage to get into quite a lot of attractions. The new Lights, Motors, Action was a superb extreme car chase stunt show. As we're going to try and see Fantasmic we have a meal in the park. Select the haut cuisine junk food place, burgers and hot dogs. Needs a second mortgage and much as I love junk food I have to say it wasn't up to much. How come the quality of the food in the parks doesn't match the quality of everything else?

Queue for Fantasmic is fantastic so we bail out and see the Tales of Narnia. What a con it's just a glorious trailer for the film. Not worth a visit even if there was no queue and they gave you free parks tickets.

Escape at 20:00 but sadly there's no Pubic's tonight!

Kids are totally knackered, straight to bed at 21:00 with no need for a bed time story.

Thursday – warm and sunny. Animal Kingdom today. Up at the crack of sparrows again and on the park for 09:00, serious stuff this.

Park's not quite as busy as the rest and we manage to get in most of the rides. I even manage to survive the new Everest ride, it's just below my pewk tolerance limit. 30 seconds longer and I think those behind us would have been a disgruntled.

Wendy and I go to the Flights of Fantasy Bird show, some really awesome birds, whilst the kid do some of their own thing – probably having a quiet kip on a park bench in order to keep up the pace.

Meanwhile in case anyone doubts that I ever completed my PADI dive course the picture on the right should be enough proof!



This park closes at 21:00 but the kids have had enough by 17:00, truth be known I think they're totally knackered. But lets not look a gift horse in the mouth. We escape to an early night and a DVD. Mind you by 20:00 Kurts sloped off to bed and by 20:30 Fiona's given up also. That just leaves Wendy and I to fall asleep through a crap film.

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[Mission Impossible](#)

December 25, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – clear blue sky and sunny. That's a member of our resident Sandhill Crane family, they just stroll around the estate as if they own it.



I've still got the majority of Rainbow River sloshing around in my ears so it's a really quiet day for me. If this keeps up I'll need an ear trumpet.

Start our mission impossible today. Wendy's needs a hot hair curling brush as hers doesn't get hot enough on 110 volts setting in the US, so she's decided to buy a US one. Simple you might think. Little do you know.

We bob up to the winter gardens mall, it's only 30 miles away. Mind you every things 30 miles away over here. Get lost as usual, that's what you get relying on a map in a brochure says the navigator!

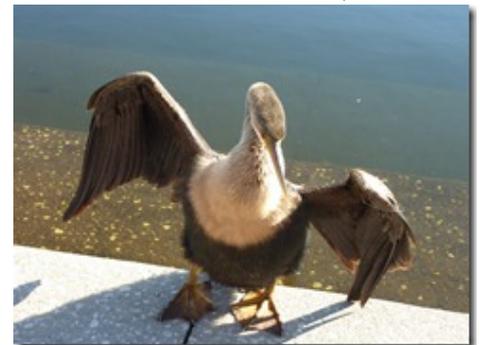
What is it with these malls. Massive but no real provisions to walk around them. In typical US fashion they seem to expect you to drive from shop to shop. At this rate in another hundred years the Americans will have evolved into legless blobs.

Anyway despite all these mega stores, not a hot air brush any where.

In the afternoon Wendy gets her weekly shopping fix at the Pubic supermarket, whilst I have to suffer the sun, coffee and a good book.

Tuesday – same again although temps in mid 60's.

That's it no Malls today. Mission impossible is suspended. We're off to Disney Wildlife Reserve, it's massive. No it's not another theme park, not a ride or even many other visitors in site. Regrettably not even many birds either despite our high expectations. But we have a pleasant walk and then relax in the sun in some rocking chairs whilst we have our picnic lunch. Boy we sure know how to live and it doesn't cost a penny.



Then we pop down to Disney Celebration. A Disney township, fantastic housing and of course a market street complete with lake; christmas tree; rocking chairs to sit around in; ice rink; free parking and of course the obligatory merchandising opportunities. More shops selling more things that nobody really needs. And in true Disney fashion at

18:00, 19:00 and 20:00 it snows from every lamp post – unbelievable, only in the US of A! It's just all too perfect and any moment you expect the Stepford wives to jump out at you. Good news is we see more birds than at the wildlife reserve and this friendly Anhinga just loved posing, I think he was a Disney cast member.

I finally get to try a Latte. Now I'm a real yuppie and am certified to enter any Starbucks with confidence.

Wednesday – hot and sunny mid 70s, just right. Happy birthday Wendy.

Drive 40 miles up to Wekiwa springs for some bird watching, picnic and a walk. Tad disappointing, hardly saw any birds and not much of a walk. Very picturesque though and of course there's my sumptuous picnic of an orange.



On the way back we decide to try and find the Hugs shop for Wendy. We've seen it from the motorway but can we find it without a map?

Then resume our mission impossible and Wendy thinks Walmart are bound to have a good choice of hot air brushes. She's certain she saw one on Monday. 15 miles later we decided it was all in her imagination. No Walmart.

Then I discover my iPhone's satnav can get a location fix without downloading data and bankrupting me. Brilliant as by now we're nearly out of petrol. Wendy has a brain wave and uses it to find a Walmart. Miracle, Walmart sell them. But there's only one make and it's not what she wants. Hair strengtheners there's about 30 different makes, hairdryers there about 20, but only 1 bloody hot air blower.

Never mind says I in my usual calm manner.

As a birthday treat – I'm all heart – we set off to downtown Disney to try and get a Disney character dinner. All booked up. Plan Z by now we decide to go down to Mannies chop house, highly recommended, and it's near our villa – just 10 miles away.

Finally get there and they're even queuing to get on the car park. Only a 90 minute wait for a table.

End to a perfect birthday. Home for corn beef hash!

I dread to think how many miles we must have done today. Probably going on for 200. But it's not the miles that take up the time it's the traffic lights. Every major intersection means you have enough time to get your nails done, if you're so inclined We must have spent at least 2 hours today sat gawking in expectation of a green light or arrow. Wake up America, get some roundabouts!

Thursday – weathers same again. Lazy morning.

Followed by a trip to Disney Board walk for a relaxing walk, picnic and coffee. All very pleasant but then!

Wendy's not to be beaten, "let's pop up to the Florida mall", do a bit of shopping – joy – and finish off mission impossible. Big mistake. This mall is massive. All roads to it are gridlocked and it takes 20 minutes to find a parking space, but who am I to jeopardise this mission?

And guess what? They even have stalls selling nothing but hair strengtheners, but no hot air thingy's. Even have a stall that sell nothing but hair brushes, but no hot air thingy. We try pennies, dillards, sears, Macy's but no hot air thingy.



By now I've twigged it. Wendy has researched this all before hand to identify the most elusive product in th USA. Actually the most elusive item was probably a chocolate fire guard, but the hot air brush must be in the top 10 and at least I wouldn't twig that it's all a ploy to shop at every mall in Orlando.



Meanwhile lets see if we can drive a shoe salesman to despair by trying on all his Hugs and not buying any!

But the good news is Wendy says we can come back again next week, with the kids, when it's not so busy. I'm orgasmic!

Friday – more sun and a pleasant mid 70's. While Wendy gets her shopping fix again I do a spot of work, it's all go, but very pleasant sat out researching in the sunshine with coffee. This is the sort of work I can cope with.

After lunch we set off to Epcot to get in some practice, acclimatisation, orientation and stamina training ready for the parks in the next two weeks. It's busy, but nowhere near as busy as I expected for Christmas Eve. All very festive and really no major changes from our last visit, apart from the Christmas decorations.

After 4 hours of gruelling and intense training we depart. Will this be enough to help us survive the coming fortnight?

Well it's been a very pleasant week so far. Weathers not quite as hot as we expected but actually it's just very pleasant most days, not too hot, but shorts and tee shirt weather. Gets colder than we expected in the evenings so the kids are bringing out a fleecy jacket for us – we hope.

The biggest shock is just how big and spread out it all is. Every things just so far. Too many traffic lights. I suppose we just forgot how big it all is.

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20101215 – Orlando For Christmas

December 20, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – up at the crack of Dawn and off to the airport. Usual crap, queues, queues, queues. Latest ploy to inject more misery into the ordeal is to weigh not just your suitcase, in order to give you the opportunity to spread your underwear all over the floor while you transfer items to the other suitcase, which just so happens to be going on the same plane, but now they do the same for hand luggage. What will happen when they start weighing people? Will we have to urinate on the floor to reduce our weight or merely chop off a leg and hop to the plane. I'm sure there's an airport misery think tank somewhere whose sole purpose is to dream up new ways of increasing the misery.

Anyway good flight with Virgin and free booze.

Arrive in Orlando early to the usual, 1 hour queue through immigration – do they really want tourism – welcome to America!

Arrive at the house ok but it's so cold those bloody penguins are in our pool, still at least they've scared the gators off. It's actually 50, that's Fahrenheit not centigrade, in case your confused. Apparently last night was the coldest on record since 1903 – joy. Still at least it's brilliant sunshine and a lot warmer than belthorn, but that doesn't stop Wendy moaning.

The house is beautiful, comfortable and enormous. We need hiking boots to cope with all the walking we're doing.

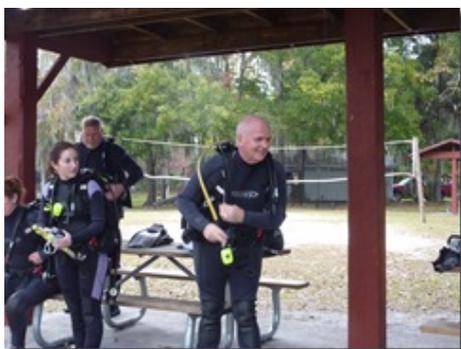
To cheer Wendy up and stop her teeth chattering we go to the local supermarket to buy in – joy.

Thursday – bright and sunny and 70f. Wendy's now happy.

Leisurely day exploring the house and using GPS to map were everything is. I have my Padi scuba course to study. Then after lunch we have a walk around our gated estate. Get invited to afternoon tea by some of our neighbours and give a non-stop monologue on all the sites and restaurants. All very useful. Visit the club house, it has a good gym and nice pool, but it's empty.

Friday – bright blues sky and 75f. More scuba studying. If I don't pass the exam I don't get certified. Some may say I should be certified without the need for an exam!

We have a drive out and explore the area. Then Wendy has her nails done whilst I get some peace, quiet and study time.



Saturday – that’s it we’re going home it’s raining! Moan, moan from Wendy. Not a problem for me as I’m doing my Padi scuba course although it means I’ll get my hair wet.

Out at 07:00 to drive up to crystal river. Class starts at 09:00 and by 11:30 we’re all geared up and into the crystal river with the Manatees and there’s even two dolphins around. All this gear weighs a ton and yet I can’t kneel on the bottom as I need even more weights in order to sink. Finally manage to convince my instructor that yes I am breathing, if I wasn’t I’d probably sink better, and the real problem is I need more weight. There’s supposed to be an exercise where we determine the correct weighting but we seem to have skipped

that with a one size fits all approach.

By lunchtime the suns out and we finish at 14:30. At this rate I fail to see how we can possibly complete the course. Crystal rivers as it names implies is crystal clear but all us muppets stir up the bottom and often spoil the visibility. It’s a major site for the Manatees and has many warm springs bubbling up from the bottom.

Get back to hotel truly knackered. I think I’m six inches shorter with all the weight I’ve been carrying.

In the evening we go out for dinner and some much needed wine. Try the local delicacy – gator bites. Just like chewy chicken. Better to bite them than one of them bite you.

I was asking how come there’s no gators in crystal river. Apparently it’s all due to the Republican party, as the local red necks who live on the shores of the river shoot em and eat em.



Sunday – cloudy and 60f. Pick all our tanks up and drive off to rainbow river for the final day of the course. Get a boat up stream, strap all this gear on, remember to inflate my BCD, put mask on, regulator in my mouth, do a giant stride into the river and pray I’ll come back up. Yes I bob back up to the surface.

The rivers crystal clear with lots of springs bubbling up into it, about 25 feet deep and a steady current – like a Disney lazy river – will take us back to the car park. Along the way we do our various ascents, descents, drowning attempts and see how much water I can get into each ear. It all sounds so easy in the book but like all new skills putting it into practice means a lot to remember – not a good thing when your memories that bad you can’t even remember what you had for tea last night. Waterproof lists, that’s the answer.



Oh that’s me on the left – easily identified by the distinctive hair style – just prior to my descent into the unknown. I’ll be back – I hope. The river’s a nice 72f and on the bottom you can put your fingers in the sand and feel the warm water bubbling up from the springs. The bird life along the river is fantastic, even get to see a bald eagle. Bird watching under water is awesome when you see a Cormorant catch a fish. Loads of fish to see and a great experience.

Well believe it or not I pass and receive my PADI Open Water Divers certification. I can now go anywhere in the world and go diving. Actually it’s all quite worrying because I think we skimmed and missed out lots of basic exercises. To think that after 9 hours I can be let loose on an unsuspecting

undersea world is daunting. Whilst I’m glad I’ve passed and have some confidence I still feel the need for more experience, this is only the beginning. It’s one sport where safety and skills are a matter of life and death.

At least it’s opened up a fantastic new world and completed a childhood dream, yes Lloyd Bridges, Sea Hunt, Hans & Lottie Hass and that French geezer Jacques Cousteau have a lot to answer for. Tick one more off the bucket list.

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[20101207–The Wallace Arnold Med. Muppet Tour Review](#)

December 8, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Featuring

Wendy Edwards as Wallace

Tony Edwards as Arnold

The Muppets as Themselves

Well what do we think to it all and what have we learnt.

The **Star Princess** was no **Celebrity Equinox** and we couldn't help but keep comparing it to our first cruise on the Equinox.

Strengths

Room, sorry stateroom, and balcony were very comfortable.

Good waiter service in restaurants, especially the Horizon buffet.

Films, although to be honest we only watched one.

Having a laundry and iron made Wendy feel at home.

Itinerary was just what I wanted to see.

Weakness

Felt like I was on a sheep farm – herded around and ended up in the shearing parlour every day where they fleece you – just civilised piracy.

Seriously damages your wealth.

Daytime activities were very disappointing and showed a complete lack of imagination, except when it came to extracting money. Too many were chargeable. If the activities were free then there was always a sales push at the end.

Food choice was limited, quality was variable and certainly not cuisine.

Free coffee was absolutely awful. A ploy to encourage you to buy a coffee card for speciality coffees, these were just awful.

Wine was very pricey and poor quality.

Hot water for tea was muddy brown- revolting.

Wore my teeth out having to smile so many times for dam photographs.

Library was closed most of the time and needed a librarian to open it up. I suppose they just didn't trust us cruiser, they're a dodgy lot. Would have been cheaper to leave it open 24 * 7 and save on part time librarian.

Cairo tour to the Pyramids was an ordeal, badly organised, disappointing and a complete rip off.

In summary Star Princess was 3 star and not 5 star like the Celebrity Equinox.

What We've Learnt

Plan ahead, do your own thing and avoid the Wallace Arnold tours. You save a fortune and do exactly what you want at your pace.

Organised tours make you feel ancient.

If it's free there will be a sales drive at the end.

Pay the extra and go Celebrity.

Avoid 3rd World Countries.

Whilst we saw some wondrous places we were not too impressed overall with the Med countries and the weather (time of year).

Avoiding sweets and eating for the sake of it is essential unless you want to waddle off the boat.

Never using the lift helps you keep fit.

Americans are more entertaining and better company than the Canadians or Brits.

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20101202 – Pompeii

December 8, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday – leisurely day at sea.

Wendy attends a cooking demonstration. Apparently it's that basic even I could have done it. Followed by a boring empty galley tour.

Then we attend a talk by Larry Windsor (comedian) on Benny Hill. Gives you a measure of how desperate the daytime activities are.

In the evening it's formal dinner. Supposedly penguin suit and all that stuck up pomp. I resort to open neck shirt and jacket and am not cast overboard. Surprising how many are just not playing the penguin game – we're on holiday. Long talk at the table with some Americans followed by an early night – we sure know how to live.

Friday – sun and clouds with the chance of rain but fortunately we have a dry day with quite a bit of sun.

We're Wallace Arnolding it on a tour to Sorrento followed by Pompeii.

Well Sorrento was ok, mainly shopping after the guide tried to hijack us to a marquetry demonstration – who buys all this stuff. We walked out. Trying to get to the seafront was almost impossible it was so built up and surrounded by Hotels. Not a place we'll be visiting again. Of course the tours full of Americans who keep gasping “wow, never seen anywhere so beautiful” – where have they been all their lives? Then when we come to get off the bus one of the blobbies gets stuck in the bus door exit, how she will get around Pompeii is anybody's guess.

Pompeii was impressive, a good guided talk, very informative. I'm sure glad we went. Mind you at the end of it there was a Cameo factory tour! Always a merchandising opportunity.

Then of course we encounter Italian dock authorities. Half an hour queue to be screened by body scanners so sensitive I'm sure they were being set off by amalgam fillings. Of course there was only one of the two lines working the rest of the idler jobs worth's were stood around. After you come out of the scanner you walk 10 metres and you're on-board ship where you're check and scanned again – at least that was efficient. Are they frightened a bomber will strike in those 10 metres – can't be too careful you know Why don't Princess sort out a deal to do it once, preferably by Princess. It's saying something when even the Egyptians are more efficient than the Italians. Bloody useless job creation scheme.

Can someone please explain the rationale behind it.

From our trip through Naples and down to Sorrento we were not too impressed with Italy. If this is typical and customs are anything to go by I think we might be giving it a miss next year.

Saturday – sunny but cold, quite a shock to the system. Very smooth embarkation and taxi into Rome. Journey in with some Americans, all the women sat next to the driver can say after his every sentence is gee, wow, awesome, fantastic. I'm ready to gag her by the end of the journey. I think even the driver was totally bemused. At one point he asked her if she'd been to Pompeii. “No unfortunately not” she says, then her husband finally proves his vocal chords work and says “but honey we were there yesterday” – it's really not the sort of place you can miss, especially when you've spent a whole afternoon there. What a bubble head, really gives Americans a bad name.

Arrive at our luxury hotel – worse place we've ever stayed says Wendy. No wifi and no tea making facilities. Best that can be said is it's clean.

Fortunately or perhaps it's unfortunate we've got a whole half day in Rome today followed by all day Sunday.

Catch the red bus tour around Rome and get off at that famous Fountain, the one that you're meant to chuck any coins left over after the Somali pirates have fleeced you. Try to pick up email at MacDonalds. It's heaving in MacD's and unbelievable they've no tea; no coffee; no cheese burgers and worse of all no wifi password – only works if you have an Italian SIM / phone – unbelievable. We then wander around looking for a cafe with wifi. No chance. Find an Internet shop but no wifi. Then even struggle just to find a simple cafe. I thought we'd escaped the 3rd world countries when we left Egypt!

In the evening we have an excellent meal at a small restaurant, pizza of course.

Sunday – blue sky but cold. Up bright and early for breakfast then a good walk to pick up the tour bus. Get off at the Vatican. Try to see the Sistine chapel but it's closed, just my luck, so we join the very long queue for the basilica. Of course like all queues there are the usual scum trying to jump in, we watch them from a distance as people let them. Sure enough when we get closer someone tries and get a well deserved mouthful from both of us, but then some idiots behind us let them in.

It's all very grand in there, statues everywhere; cherubs everywhere; haloes everywhere. Then as we come out the popes giving a speech from an obscure side window. I think it's probably his bedroom window and he's only just got up, the main balconies too far away or perhaps it's been declared unsafe. There's a lot of people there. We've decided that it would be a good thing if the Queen or a member of the royal family earned their keep by doing this whenever they're in residence.

After that we take a long stroll through Rome all the way to the Coliseum. Looks very impressive and I think every major city should have one for dealing with the scum that we all have to put up with in our daily lives. No longer bother with a wall to shoot them but have a coliseum and provide free weekly entertainment by feeding to wild animals all the queue jumpers; graffiti artists; dog muck owners; litter louts; chewing gum gobbers; and not forgetting those considerate soles that pinch the disabled parking places.

On the way we encounter a Roman whistle blower, paid for by the city of Rome. No he doesn't blow the whistle on the corruption, there wouldn't be a whistle loud enough. Instead he blows his whistle and waves his arms about if anyone lingers on the steps to the big white war museum.

So what do we think of Rome. Not too impressed, like all big cities it's just too damn busy; too many statues; too many gay statues obsessed with buttocks and male genitalia; too many churches; too much graffiti; spoilt by us tourists. Perhaps it's better when it's warm. Wendy definitely wants to give Italy a miss next year and so far I have to say I agree. She thinks the Italians are even more arrogant than the French!

Monday – grey but a good bit warmer. Picked up too early to get breakfast in our boutique (a euphemism for cheap – no bloody wifi despite the lies on their website). Planes delayed two hours so we get the joy of the airport lounge for longer. At least the booze is free and there's some sort of stuff you might consider to be food.

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[20101128 – Istanbul](#)

December 2, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – warm day with some cloud. We arrive in Khios a small Greek Island. Being a Sunday of course they are closed apart from a few enterprising shops. Amazing isn't it this is Greece the country that the EU's having to bail out, yet when a floating gold mine comes into town they can't be bothered to open. Perhaps that's why they've had to be bailed out.

We could have gone on the Island tour and visited monasteries and a town that produces sticky stuff (mastic), but after Cairo there's no way. Instead we had a low cost wander around town. Much more relaxing and enjoyable.

Anyway a nice little place but nothing to write home about or dash back to.

Sunday night we go to see the show, yet another musical extravaganza with Amanda and the Star Princess dancers yet again, boring, I last all of 4 minutes before escaping to the bar, but unfortunately all the paints dry so I have to watch yet another wine glass empty.

Monday – warm with some cloud again. It's Istanbul, we'd already booked the tour, it's the only way to see the Hagia Sophia as it is closed to everyone but our cruise, so we stick with it and get on the Wallace Arnold bus again. Get down to the departure point and decide I'd better change out of long shorts into trousers – muslim traditions etc –so I dash back up 5 flights to the room. Lost my key. Dash back down 5 flights. Wendy's got my key. Dash back up 5 flights. Get changed. Dash back down 5 flights by which time I'm feeling I've just done 30 minutes in the gym sweating and knackered – that'll teach me to stick with the no lift principle. Get back down just in time for departure.

Visit the Blue Mosque. Very impressive. Of course you're expected to wear long trouser and women remain covered up – respect their traditions, not a problem to me, but why don't Muslims respect our traditions?

After that it's a tour around the Hagia Sofia. This was a christian church, then converted to a mosque and is now a museum. At least you don't have to shuffle around in holey socks. Very impressive from the inside, more so than the Blue mosque, but not so from the outside. I must say our guided tour was excellent; very informative without boring your socks off – not recommended in the Blue mosque; amusing.

Then we've got 4 hours free time, after the obligatory carpet factory tour, we skip it and head into the grand bazaar. Wendy's eyes light up at all those stalls. Pity it's not run by the French, at least then it would have been closed for lunch. Well as usual everyone wants to be your friend and sell you everything from fridge magnets, tat and of course carpets – who the hell buys all these carpets? They're hyper expensive and would seriously damage your wealth.

Istanbul is much cleaner and more cosmopolitan than we imagined. People and shopkeepers are still pushy but a lot more friendly and not a complete pain like in Egypt. This is a city we could come back to and explore some more.

The tour was very well organised and enjoyable, but had it not been for the Hagia Sophia we would have done it ourselves and saved a fortune.

In the evening we go to the comedy juggler show – very entertaining – and of course if you screw up you can always cover it up with some comedy.

Tuesday – warm with some clouds again. Arrive in Khudasi at lunch time and again we've avoided the Wallace Arnold experience. Have lunch on board and then wander into town. This is a Mecca for fakes, or as most of the signs blatantly say “Genuine Fakes”. I'm sure if the EU ever lets Turkey in, this place will go out of business. After much trudging around Wendy buys a fake Channel handbag, and of course yet another original expensive fridge magnet – bloody fridge door will be hanging off it's hinges when we get home. After years of window gazing at the genuine article I finally find a very convincing Omega Constellation watch, without the gay diamonds. Who knows how long it will go for before the little hand drops off. Meanwhile all the shop keepers want to sell you leather jackets.

On the way back to the ship Wendy explains to me how she might buy a fake handbag but would never buy fake perfume. Then two minutes later I'm chatting away to her (quite rare) and she's disappeared. She's been collared by a fake perfume seller. This should be interesting, he'll get short shrift. Ten minutes later she wanders off with a bottle of Channel and Fahrenheit for me, all for \$15!!!!

A very pleasant stroll around a relaxing and clean Turkish town.

Later in the afternoon I manage a trip to the gym.

At dinner of course it's like a hell's angels convention everyone's prancing around in leather jackets; fake Rolex's; fake handbags; glitzy wear; and one fake Omega! The show a comedian who used to write for the Benny Hill – gives you some clue as to his age. Very funny though, mainly by mild insults to the audience.

Wednesday – same weather again. It's Athens today and the Acropolis etc. Again after the Cairo experience we've decided to do it ourselves. Set off at 08:00 and share a taxi into town with a couple of guys from Canada and then do the Parthenon and Acropolis etc. at our own pace. Miss out on the guided narrative, although we could always have ear-wiggled on one of the many other Princess Tours. Then we wander around some of the other sites before shopping and coffee in the Plaka; visit the Parliament building, guarded by troops in skirt, white stockings and pom-pom slippers – worrying; stroll around the main shopping square; have our expensive picnic lunch we've purloined from the ship. Then we encounter the obligatory demonstration. Can't seem to go anywhere these days without coming across one. This one's got loads of students / youngsters marching with banners and flags – although I notice everyone has a flag but the handles are about 2-3” thick, probably make a good Club! Mind you the riot police are out in force with shields and batons just in case. Haven't a clue what it's all about but I expect it's something to do with the austerity measures: I and the rest of the EU obviously haven't doled out a big enough handout.

After lunch we decide we've had enough culture and I think Wendy's even had enough shopping so we decide to catch the Metro back, it's only 1 Euro and it'll be a change. Well change it was, the green line was closed so we had to catch 3 metros instead of one. It was heaving and some stropky Greek get decided to attack my hat as we got on and he got off. Perhaps it was part of a pick pockets distraction ploy, fortunately it didn't work, iPhone and Camera still safe.

Pleasant enough around the Parthenon, but it seems to be a city of too many lazing, big dogs basking in the sun, and of course big dogs create big turds! It also looks like the dustbin men are on strike judging by the piles of rubbish everywhere. So what with demonstrations and crap everywhere we think we're back in France.

A very enjoyable day, doing what we wanted at our pace. Total cost \$48 instead of \$160.

The evening shows more musical so rather than wasting my time by going and walking out, I take my bottle of wine and cull the hundreds of photos we've taken, while Wendy goes to the show.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [1 Comment](#) »

[20101123 – The Pyramids](#)

November 28, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – full day at sea. Great breakfast followed by a talk on Egypt and what to expect – sounds a bit grim. In the afternoon I manage the gym.

After dinner we go and see the comedian. A tad mediocre and like the rest of us who are getting on in life, has a few problems remembering his lines.

Wednesday – another full day at sea. Relaxing by way of a change. After a great breakfast it's another talk on what to expect on the Greek islands we're visiting. Followed by buffet lunch and even Wendy manages to go to the Gym! In the afternoon we go to a talk on how to increase your metabolism. Puts you off eating or drinking anything as they're all full of poisons and damaging to your health, but you need to eat 6 meals a day! Then they try and sell me a detox assessment for \$39 which includes sticking some electrodes on me to tell me my water and body fat content. When I asked him if this was the same thing my bathroom scales did each morning for free he seemed to lose interest. Mind you I could have bought a supply of algae from them, very good for detoxing your body. There seems to be a fundamental guiding principle on this Somalian Pirate ship, most of the activities are chargeable; if it's free they're really trying to sell you something.

Evening meal is another Select dining experience where we meet different people from the first two nights. Actually it's great meeting all these different people although you can get some real weirdoes. One guy was even telling me how safe and crime free Egypt is – I think this was serious propaganda from the Egyptian tourist board.

After the meal it's a musical. I last five minutes before escaping to a bar for a more stimulating experience of watching the wine level go down in my glass. The first bar I encounter is a serious "Wallace Arnold" type place, in just 5 minutes they're doing "Sammy's Old Time Sing long". The second bar is at least playing some live music from the sixties – that'll do.

Thursday – dock in Alexandria. Make the most of this pictures as it's probably the only picture we can afford to post at these extortionate internet rates.



Yes today's the day we become Wallace Arnold freaks – our very first "organised" coach tour. What have we come to? Up at 06:00 (note the use of military time in order to set the tone for the day) for an early breakfast. Meet at 07:15 to hang around for 90 minutes whilst we are herded onto buses. We travel in convoy with armed guard to protect us from Muslim terrorists – joy. After 3 hours down the motorway to Cairo complete with a thousand pot holes and speed bumps – yes speed bumps on a motorway – we arrive at the pyramids. By some miracle I've managed to retain my breakfast but I do believe Universal Studios are in negotiations with the Egyptian government to create a new white knuckle ride called "Alex to Cairo"!

The pyramids are impressive but we're rushed and herded around them like sheep with no time to stop, just enough time for the obligatory photos and a very short camel ride, we pass. Now I thought we'd have problems with lots of flies but the main pests are those trying to sell you something; be your friend; have their picture taken; sit on my camel; take my

picture; or buy my sister!

Meanwhile Wendy's come up with a new conspiracy theory, the pyramids could have been built fairly recently as a tourist attraction. Looking at the chaos in this country not a chance these days, they'd have a problem open a packet of crisps.

Then it's off to lunch at a very nice Hotel for what looks like a very nice lunch. Fortunately they have bananas, a superb food with a great tamper proof packaging. On the basis that there's a 54% chance of being ill in this country we've decided not to eat or drink anything.

After a hurried meal, not a problem when you're only eating bananas, it's off for a shopping expedition. Yes we get taken to a tat store selling more grot than even Reggie Perrin could imagine. Bloody marvellous we get less than 25 minutes to see Sphinx and Pyramid, yet a whole 30 minutes in this tat shop. We manage to resist the temptation of having our name written on Papyrus in Hieroglyphics.

We drive across Cairo to the museum. What a filthy, dirty, chaotic cess pit Cairo is. We'd been told it was a 3rd world country but nothing prepared us for this. Part of the advice was not to drive, We've never seen anything like it mobile dented rust heaps held together by selotape. Absolutely no order, no traffic lights or roundabouts just weird shaped intersections with every man for himself. At the museum we're welcomed by a 30 minute scrum to get in by which time we've got all of one hour. Mind you the Tutankhamen exhibition death mask etc was impressive.

Then it's a 3.5 hour drive back, by which time I've acclimatised to the white knuckle ride. So after 14 hours we get back to the ship – civilisation and a decent meal and cool beer. Yes that's 14 hours travelling to have about an hour around the pyramids and an hour around the museum. That was "The Best of Cairo" tour, better to be renamed as the "Cairo Ordeal", it was no real fun and worse of all has lightened my pockets by \$400. Despite it all we're glad we've seen the pyramid. Moral of this story is do it yourself.

Friday – another lovely sunny day. It's either go on a "Wallace Arnold" tour around Alexandria – no way after yesterday – or have a stroll around Alexandria by ourselves. We opt for the latter. Well what can I say that's good about it; warm; sunny and unlike France there's no dog muck. Then there's the downside; chaotic; filthy; full of feral cats; every man and his child and daughter trying to sell you something, especially rides in a horse drawn buggy; they stalk you down the streets; geezers wailing and croning over the loudspeaker system – prayers. Perhaps when the streets are full of stinking refuse they start to use the bins! Obviously the Muslim religion does not seem to have the credo of "cleanliness is next to Godliness" or if it does then there's a lot of Egyptians who will be seeing God as a mere speck on the desert horizon. As we walk through a bazaar, Wendy clings to me like a two year old. I've never known her walk so fast.

After a couple of hours we escape the stalkers and the filth and return to civilisation. Makes you appreciate how lucky we are in the West.

So now we know what makes up a 3rd world country. We'll pass thank you and stick with our philosophy of travelling in the civilised world and when we've seen all that we'll probably go and see it all again and only when we're desperate visit these 3rd world places.

Afternoon is a leisurely read up on deck. Followed by Egyptian belly dancing and folk dancing show. Well it was more like an arse dancing and un-synchronised amateur dancing night as 2 out of 4 dancers had to watch what the other 2 did – well I suppose they have to learn somehow. However there was a spectacular whirling dervisher dancer.

Then as we get ready for dinner the wailing and the croning starts up again.

After dinner the show is a great Vanesa Mae sound alike, who can sure make a violin talk. This is followed by a Princess Pop Star contest, just cheap entertainment, when they get Muppets to come up on stage and crone.

Saturday – another relaxing day at sea. In the morning we get a talk on Istanbul with a low key sales pitch at the end. Then we both go to the gym – yes Wendy as well – followed by a light lunch and a relaxing read up on the sun deck.

After a reasonable dinner, with yet another photograph, yet another smile – at this rate my teeth will be worn out by the end of this holiday. Then it's a good comedy magic show followed by some Country & Western music in a lounge bar and we pass on the line dancing.

The daytime activities are amazingly bland and completely lacking in imagination except when it comes to money making schemes – disappointing.

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20101122 – Med Cruise

November 23, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – up at 2:15 for a 04:00 check-in at the airport. The only good thing about this hour is that we didn't encounter a single queue at the airport – how refreshing perhaps this is how flying was meant to be! In fact we may go at this time even for a 10:00 flight – it's just so relaxing.

Of course Wendy hits the free brandy in the airport lounge to help her tablets kick in. After 7+ brandies – binge drinking – she has to be helped down the stairs. Will they let her on the plane? Flight on Jet2 is great. Sets off on time' lands on time and we have the emergency exit seats so plenty of leg room. The brandy's really kicked in now and all I'm get is interminable question – worse than Honey. “Why are all these people going to Rome?”, “What time will we fly over Belthorn, Birmingham, London, Paris, Blackpool and Liverpool”. I don't think geographies Wendy's strong point. Fortunately we have 3 seats between the two of us so I move to the window for a bit of peace and quiet. If she keeps this up on the cruise I can see the balcony coming in really handy!!!! By the end of the flight I think she's a lot more understanding of what Kurt and Fiona suffer each weekend!

Taxi from airport to cruise is all very organised and after a very quick and smooth check in we're on board by 12:30. Ship / boat, or whatever it's called is very nice and cabin with balcony is great.

Then I begin to realise that the Somali pirates have taken over the ship when I see the Internet charges at \$0.75 a minute. At these prices there will be no pictures just a text only blog. The whole ships just designed to cast you into poverty by extracting the maximum from you – a lot of chargeable optional extras. By Dinner time I've had to smile another 3 times this year for ship's photos – chargeable extras. Go on a behind the scenes ship tour – hurry limited places – only\$150!

We've chosen flexible dining and have a pleasant dinner with some very entertaining Americans (they're the ones with the single fork – in fact a 3 hour knife and fork usage class could be a good money spinner) and a British couple. Meal was very mediocre and not a patch on Celebrity and wine was very poor for what was a very small and expensive glass – may help me give up.

Mind you Jet2 have more chargeable extras than you can shake a stick at, but I think they're still missing a few tricks. They could for instance charge for the toilet; have a pound slot meter for the reading light; charge for seat cushions; charge for overhead locker space; charge for the bus from the plane to the terminal; and of course charge passengers by their weight. Who knows?

Overall a very relaxing day. First impressions not too bad overall but I have to say so far Celebrity have the edge, especially when it comes to food and wine. By 21:00 we're ready for bed after such an early start and clocks go forward by another hour tonight

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20101008 – Poison Attempt Foiled

October 13, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – lovely sunny day in the Loire. Leisurely morning around the caravan. Takes some photos of the local farmer as



he harvests his maize. He stops his tractor, comes over and shakes hands with us both and has a chat. His English is a bit basic but still better than my French. We have a pleasant little chat. He's French and pleasant – unbelievable! It's enough to send me into a catatonic state in the corner sucking on my security blanket.

Then in the afternoon we have a stroll around a lake / nature reserve complete with hide. Yet more ducks and Grey Herons but still no Purple Heron.

Saturday – yet another sunny day. Big tidy up day we have to get the caravan ready for winter, empty it and fill the car. What I can't understand is why we're

taking more back than we came with.

Then Wendy decides to try and collect on my life insurance. I make a cup of coffee with the water already in the kettle. One mouthful and I'm trying to spit it out – bloody French coffee. Turns out Wendy's put kettle descaler in the kettle in an attempt to poison me. Unbelievable, after nearly 40 years she tries to top me – now some might say not before time! I read the instructions and it's seek medical advice so after drinking pints of water and milk I dash off down to the pharmacy. Pharmacist doesn't speak English so here's a great chance to explain my wife's tried to top me with with this bleach / descaler. She contacts the local sawbones who confirms that I might just survive. So I live to visit another French market.

Wendy even tries to blame me by saying “but you never make yourself a drink, what were you doing using the kettle”. Not true I might add, I seem to recall making one on Wendy's birthday last year! Anyway to be on the safe side I won't risk making anymore drinks.

Sunday – sunny day again. After yet more time emptying the caravan, we finally get to set off to Calais and leave the caravan in the Loire. What a leisurely drive hardly a car or lorry in sight.

Arrive at Calais. The hotel is on the seafront and the French are out in force taking their strolls in the sun but it's a tad cold.

Hotels ok but there's no hot water. Contact reception and then we have a classic example of French service. We're told “try running the tap for 10 minutes and if it doesn't come hot leave it a couple of hours and try again” – yes he was being serious. I point out that “Basil, you've got to be joking”. Can you believe it?

Have a great meal in the hotel, fantastic buffet starter, main course of scallops (whatever they are), great selection of cheeses, great selection of sweets as well as some wine.

Monday – sunny yet again. After a good French breakfast we catch the tunnel back home.

I'm not going to comment on the drive home; the M25; the stop / start; the delays. It's so good to be back! Anyway I loose my bet, when we finally get home to belthorn it's not raining. Mind you it's that dam cold that the lawns haven't been cut since we went away, probably because of all the penguins huddling together on the lawn to try and keep warm – joy!

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[20101002 – Home From Home](#)

October 3, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – nice and sunny again. Joy of joys there's a market on in Sommieres, so we have a leisurely bike ride in and





then in typical French style we have coffee in the market square. Amazing how the place comes to life, they do seem to love their markets. And of course there's the local squire and his mistress poking around the markets (how do I know it's his mistress – simples she's smiling and he's talking to her).

Sunday – overcast but very warm, in fact it was 19C even overnight. Leisurely day around the caravan. Mini marathon run through the cycle path.

Monday – warm sun and cloud. Unfortunately Wendy remembered that she'd seen an Ikea in Montpeiller so we get to go there and buy some wine glasses to replace the ones that someone had broke. Mind you they're great wine glasses as they have no stem; low centre of gravity; when you drop off to sleep there's less risk of a spill.

Then after lunch Wendy did the weekly shop whilst I had to endure coffee and wifi in MacD. Great opportunity to catch up on my consultancy work. at least sharepoint works at MacD. This MacD has to take the grand prize for being the slowest MacD in the world, 15 minutes to get a cup of coffee even when they're not busy – feathers and spit all over their floor! If anyone in MacD Ivory

management tower wants the location, then in exchange for free coffee and burgers for life and a set of Ronald MacDonald felt tips (mine are running a bit dry) I'll gladly rat this place out.

Tuesday – glorious sunny day.

Now I've just observed a new universal law. Yes it's just like those laws of the universe such as gravity, laws of thermodynamics and Heisenbergs uncertainty principle. I'm going to call it the "Law of Delayed Departure" which states that "when leaving a campsite you can be certain that one or more person or persons, who hasn't bothered to speak to you during your entire stay, will engage you in inane conversation such that your departure is delayed in direct relationship to the length of your stay". I expect the Nobel committee will take a few years to recognise and reward the importance of this new universal law.

On the road again up to Clermont Ferrand. About a 5 hour drive to a handy little campsite just 2 miles off the auto-route. Not exactly a site we'd want to stay at for a long, too regimented; claustrophobic and a bit dark with their 12 foot high hedges but good for a stopover. Free wifi on pitch was a bonus but no chance of satellite with those hedges and the trees.

Wednesday – glorious sunny day. Drive into Clermont Ferrand and park up for free at the tram station.

Now here's a little brain teaser. What do the ticket machines on Clermont Ferrand tram station and the car parking ticket machine in Blackburn have in common?

Answer they were positioned by the same half wit. At CF, which has it's fair share of sunshine, they are positioned such that you can't see the screen because of sunlight, when just a few metres away they could be in the shade. At Blackburn, which has it's fair share of rain, they are positioned such that you get soaked if it's raining, when just a few yards away they could be undercover. DOES ANYONE BOTHER TO THINK AND USE COMMON SENSE.

I think it's about time we got rid of all the media studies degrees and replaced them with good old common sense degrees.

It's sweltering in CF. A lovely university city with a nice blend of old and new, and a great transport system. We even go mad and have lunch in a pavement cafe, all very French. I try the local delicacy of Truffade – very tasty, we'll be trying this and Aligot at home.

Thursday – another sunny day. We're on the road again back to our campsite at Ligueil. It's home from home and our caravans winter residence as we're going to store it here – yipee less towing. Arrive at 14:00 but no worries about French lunch hours as the British owners are open and anyway you just park up and get on with it.

It's absolutely scorching, 26C, and the suns rapidly singeing what bit of hair I've got left. However we're going to give the caravan roof a good cleaning, so I don my crampons and climbing gear, risk life and limb, and get totally soaked.



By way of compensation in the evening, and as a well known cure for altitude sickness, I have a lovely red wine (local Samur Champigny – very fruity), so lovely there's no way I'm going to risk oxidation so I make the supreme sacrifice and finish the bottle off.

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20100929 – Bull Petting

October 2, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – more blue sky. Drive down to the Camargue and visit a wildlife sanctuary, fantastic elevated walkways through the marsh, bird hides but alas hardly any new birds just more grey herons.



Then drive down to Saintes Maries de la Mare. A lively little seaside resort. After a bit of driving around finally find a massive, empty free car park. Why is it empty? Well the place is full of French and you have to walk – I leave you to draw your own conclusions. We have a pleasant short stroll along the seafront. Bull ring is teeming with people. No wonder, it's a free bull petting event. Now this is a bit fairer than the bull fight.

Twelve unarmed guys in white versus one bull. The object seems to be to pet the bull on the head without getting gored. Much more entertaining and FREE. You should see these guys jump over the fence around the ring when they've got a bull horn within inches of their backside. Mind you you should see the bull jump the fence too.

What a great day.

Thursday – blue sky and cloud. Have a leisurely bike ride down the old railway line into Sommieres. Pleasant little town but mostly shut.



Friday – more blue sky. Drive down to the Camargue again and visit the bird park. E7 but worth it. Quite a few birds in cages but hundreds of pink flamingos. They're so graceful as they walk / glide through the marshes like skaters, but best of all is when they flap their wings or you see them in full flight – awesome. Loads of other birds seen today. Wendy also gets to release an injured young grey heron back into the wild after it's been rescued and healed – see pictures. We then sit having coffee on a deck watching all these fantastic birds, we're so busy trying to identify them the coffee goes cold.



After that we drive down to Le Grau du Roi, a small fishing port that's nothing much to write home about. Sit having another one of our lavish lunches watching the fishermen land their catch. There's a swing bridge, which in typical French fashion is swung open way before any boat appears to go under it and of course then the bridge operator (who knows what you call them – other than lazy arse) has to finish his leisurely chat before he can bother to close it. Stuff the traffic building up! Never mind perhaps one day in the 23rd century they'll automate it.

Afterward we drive down and around Le Grand Mot. Now some people would call this an architectural paradise of concrete, glass and aluminium window frames from the 1970's. Whilst some, me included, would call it a carbuncle on the landscape. it's a bloody atrocity and just goes to show what a sole less mess you can produce when you let architects fresh out of pampas loose with a few crayons and paper.



Get back to the campsite just in time for a free wine tasting. The sites actually in the middle of 50 Hectares (whatever they are) of vineyard. A charming French girl takes a motley bunch of Dutch (of course), French and English around, explain the process and the 8 different wines and then let us tast them all – FREE. I should add that she doe the whole tour in both French and English. Some lovely reds, especially the E12 one, which I obliged by helping her empty the bottle on the sound principle of waste not want not.

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[20100921 – On The Move Again](#)

September 30, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – nice sunny day again.

Another exciting bird watching day. We have a ride out to the lake at Leon and again encounter yet another previously unidentified duck – it's just amazing. Why don't they all have clearly identifiable breed labels?

Real hardcore this place as there's a proper hide – bit disappointing all this high tech and all we get is a couple of grey herons and a cormorant – how ungrateful can you get?

Wednesday – another sunny day. We're on the move tomorrow so we have a lazy day and get set up ready to hit the road. Wendy even dips out on her weekly shop.

Is it me or has anybody else noticed the demise of Million £ or \$. Since the credit crunch everything seems to be measured in Billion £ or \$. Where have all the millions gone – is this the start of world wide hyper inflation?

Thursday – grey day. Ideal for travelling as long as we can escape without rain. There's nothing worse than setting off in the rain, all soggy and wet for a long drive. Fortunately it remains dry.

It's just a 200 mile drive, should be within our 4 hour travel limit. Actually takes about 5 hours.

Arrive in Pamiers in the Pyrenees about 15:30 and at least by now they've been fed and watered and we can check in. But then alas we've not paid our weekly homage at the shrine of the long queue checkout, so off we trot for a dose of isle crawling complete with that delightful aroma you get from the incense of “whiff of sewage” that they seem to burn at French supermarkets.

Friday – grey day with showers. Never mind the forecasts not too bad so we decide to catch the train to Toulouse. Wendy's right excited, a trip on a train! But alas the rain puts us off.

I download a new game for Wendy's iPad, a treat for missing out on the train trip – keep the children happy. Hopefully that'll keep her quiet for a while. She really needs a few hobbies so that I can work and browse in peace. We've 10,000 photos that need culling, cropping and sorting out so I spend sometime installing Picasa and showing her how to use it.



For a moment lets just consider the mentality of these camp sites and their wifi provisions. They may well be free but they either link up with some weird provider who either allots you so many hours at a time; they install wifi that doesn't work when the wind blows the leaves on the trees, so you have to wait until December to use it, by which time the sites shut; they need you to provide an email address for free access – I wonder what they'll do with that; they only provide access from 10:00 until 22:00 (well actually it's 10:20 until 22:20

because their clocks wrong), perhaps they're concerned about the noise level of all us nerds. To top it all in the case of the part time access the owner spend 20 minutes trying to get it to work, he has no idea of this time limit.

Why don't they keep it cheap and simple like the English owned site in the Loire. Install a few netgear routers and give password free access. Why create a problem when it's free, it's not as if there's hundreds of people close by trying to steal your bandwidth – British common sense triumphs yet again.

It's like most of the French campsite toilets where toilet paper is outside the cubicle. I suppose they think they're saving money, but instead they're wasting it because everyone takes more than they need!!!!

Saturday – another grey showery day.

This camp site is infested with the weirdest collection of chickens – see photos. On top of that each morning we have a mouse like cockerel call from one of the pigeon sized girly looking cockerels.



Meanwhile to stop us feeling sorry for ourselves and the weather we watch the UK weather forecast – that's cheered us up! Makes you appreciate there's always someone worse off than yourself. But you have to laugh when you hear the weather caster say "a rain front enticed towards the Northwest". They've obviously never been to the Northwest or they'd know that rain fronts need no enticing.

In the afternoon the weather picks up so we drive into Pamiers for a stroll around. I'll let you into a tip. Any French town ending in "iers" is a dump. We wondered why everyone was wandering around with their eyes looking down, Is there gold on them there pavements, no this is the dog turd capital of France. Mind you I still think that, despite it's piped music throughout the town, it's not as big a dump as Beziers but yes it's certainly worse than Blackburn.

Sunday – clear blue sky day. Set off down to camping cheque site just outside Montpeiller but when we get there it's a real dump. It may well have individual sanitary facilities for each pitch but some master mind has arranged it such that you have to drive your caravan over a kerb, no room to reverse in and there's no way any mover will get over that kerb – unbelievable! Totally peed off. Identify a site near Sommiers – Domaine de Massereau – complete with it's own vineyard. Turns out to be great Castels site with Wifi on pitch although the pitches are a bit weird.

Have early evening drinks with our neighbours and swap site info.

Monday – blue sky day. This is a great site even if a few too many trees for my liking but has some good facilities. However toilet seats are not one of them. Only in France could a site with no toilet seat be considered 5 star.

I still think we should throw France out of the EU until they have civilised toilets everywhere.

Lazy morning as usual but then I have the pleasure of a trip to the supermarket with Wendy for the weekly shop – joy. Never mind I get to choose some great wines and have a leisurely coffee

Overnight we think we're under attack as olives drop onto the caravan roof – oh the joys of caravanning.

Tuesday – another blue sky day.

Lazy morning by way of a change. Finally finish Dan Browns latest "The Lost Symbol", it's such a crock that it's taken me 3 weeks to read – says it all.



There's a fantastic cycle path runs through the campsite. It's an old train track, goes for miles and miles and much to Wendy's delight is very flat. Have a 2 hour ride down to Cavassilon, great ride but a disappointing town. Pass though some lovely country side and vineyards. Then we get the aroma of wine fermenting as we pass the local wine co-operative, just sit outside there for an hour and I'm sure you'd be legless merely on the aroma – true joy.

Interesting that when you put a Frenchmen on a bike it seems to transform them into nearly normal sociable human beings.

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[20100915 – A Pair Of Great Tits](#)

September 20, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – very sunny.

We set for a ride down to a nature reserve that's claimed to be the major stopping off point for migrants, a bit like a bird travel lodge. On the way we stop off at Hossegor, a very swish surfers town full of expensive shops and joy of joys a market. Even find a café that understands us first time and serves quickly. That's the good bit but unfortunately they deliver the wrong tea, will we ever have a good experience?

The bird sanctuary is a massive lake / marshland. They do get some exotic birds, had we have been there a few days earlier we may have seen an Osprey. A total of 225 different species and we have to settle for a Spoonbill, Little Egret and a Moorhen (very easy to identify as it was dead). We also saw many different ducks but they weren't as still and obliging as the Moorhen. A pleasant walk but boy was it hot.

Thursday – miserable grey Belthorn day. Wendy dipped out on weekly shop yesterday but today she's in luck. I get to spend the afternoon on the net battling with some software and reading while Wendy's off enjoying herself. She struggles back with 12 bottles of an excellent 2008 St Emillion – bless.

Friday – a bit of a grey day so we have a drive out to Bayonne. What a mistake. Firstly we'd been there before and secondly there's nothing to recommend it which is probably why we forgot we'd been there in the first place. Then think we'll drive on to St Jean ..., what a waste that was nothing but traffic jam all the way.

Give up and come home for a compensatory bottle of wine, cheap but not one of the better wines this countries ever produced – never mind poor wines make you appreciate the better ones.

Saturday – hot and sunny. Real excitement today we clean the caravan, sorry no pictures. This sites a real cornucopia of wildlife. I'm sat having a coffee and a rabbit with more balls than sense comes and sits right next to me, whilst a red squirrels jumping from tree to tree. Robins perched on the bikes handlebars and thinks it's a great toilet, then we have tree creepers, wagtails, blackbird dragging grubs out, sparrows, doves, pigeons and a pair of great tits – take that whichever way you want☺.

Sunday – hot and sunny. Spend most of the day working on a Sharepoint site for the Corps, this is real work and I have to admit the nerd in me really enjoyed it. Like most software it doesn't work, quirky, so you have to battle through it. Why isn't software like a wrist watch, works perfectly every time – one day but probably not in my lifetime. Now they reckon they've cracked optical chips and quantum computing's only five years away. Great we'll have software that can screw up and irritate you infinitely fast.

Go for a lovely bike ride down to Vieux Boceau, followed by coffee and a ride around the lake. Spot a load of cormorants and of course the French are out in force stuffing and strolling. Then in the evening I achieve rich new depths in cheap wine – E2.40 – well you never know if you never try. Give it to Wendy to make beef burgeon.

Monday – another blue sky day. After working most of the morning we drive down to this great nature reserve at Etang Noire, it's very well hidden. It consists of a raised walkway about a kilometer long around lake and marshland. Despite being great we hardly get to see any birds and only three new ones, a red breasted flycatcher and two brand new species previously unidentified☺. Yes it's a boring brown pheasant and a black fantail dove / pigeon – I'll be onto the RSPB when we get back. Actually I think we're going to take up plant watching, at least they keep still whilst you identify them!

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[20100913 – Lessons In Customer Service](#)

September 14, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – sunny with a few clouds but nice and warm to sit out.



Well if anyone hasn't guessed what yesterday's bucket list achievement was the photos should reveal all. Yes it was a bloody bull fight. I've always wanted to see one for myself. Quite fortunate to see one, as I expect, and hope, their days are numbered. But once is enough.



If they must try and kill the bull I think there should be a more balanced version. One on one, matador versus the bull, no helpers; no horse riders stabbing it; no sticking 6 barbs into it; no barriers to hide behind. He can try and kill while it's still fresh and frisky, at greater risk, but bear in mind the public will not be too impressed if he kills it too soon, they'll want their money back. Perhaps it might at least come down to skill and stamina.

extension of Frances chauvinistic regime?

Amazing we don't allow circuses to have animals in them because it's considered cruel; we've banned fox hunting because it's considered cruel – never mind what a cruel pest the fox is when you wake up to see all your chickens wantonly slaughtered; yet this barbaric and gratuitously cruel spectacle is allowed to continue within the EU. Yes this is the same EU that pokes its bureaucratic nose into the minutia of every countries business and inflicts mindless rules and laws. Could it have anything to do with my warped view that the EU is in Frances pocket and is merely an



Anyway back to Monday. It's been a birders fiesta over breakfast, with Wendy gawking through binoculars while I browse the news, we've clocked a robin, blackbird, great tit (that's singular not plural), pied wagtail, tree creeper and we think a ring ouzel.

A lazy morning around the caravan catching up on a few things, including my appalling French.

impossible in this country.

Disaster strikes, we're out of wine – unforgivable and nearly

Tuesday – more sun. Wendy's been moaning about an odd cloud in the sky so to help her put it into perspective we've watched the Northwest weather forecast – rain, wind and gales – that should keep her quiet for another week.

Had a great bike ride through the forest down superb cycle tracks, not a car in site. Stop for coffee in Leon, a quaint little village.

I've finally figured out how come a coffee takes over an hour in France. There's 15 minutes waiting to be served by which time you up and take your business elsewhere; then there's 10 minutes waiting to be served in the next cafe; 10 minutes to make a cup of coffee; 5 minutes to drink it; 10 minutes to try and catch the waiters eye for the bill; 10 minutes to prepare the bill and bring it to you table; 10 more minutes to catch the waiters eye again to pay; if you don't have the correct money, 5 minutes to bring the change. Just a mere 75 minutes for a 5 minute coffee break – don't let's rush! No wonder it takes 3 hours to have a lunch.



Meanwhile back at the site I complain about the wifi being up and down like a brides nightie and in return

get an introduction to World Class Customer Service – French style. “Well it’s been alright all summer” – ergo it can’t possibly be faulty now! “No one else has complained” – the sites only 20% full and most of them are silver shufflers, hardly hard core nerds. Now they’ve not had a fire here all summer so heaven forbid there should be one, because by the time enough people have reported it the place will have burnt down. It’s just unbelievable – get the guillotine out.

Just imagine the script if overseas call centres latch onto these techniques:

“Oh your telephone / wifi/ washing machine / fridge.... has stopped working, I’m sorry to hear that” – empathise.

“Has it been alright up to now?” – get them talking about how well it’s worked.

“So why should it be faulty now?” – make them doubt their own senses.

“But no one else has reported it!” – peer pressure, make them feel stupid.

“We’ll get back to you as soon as someone else has a problem with it.” – get them off the line you’ve a target to meet and can’t be doing with wingers.

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[20100912 – Death In The Afternoon](#)

September 13, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – sunny with a few clouds but nice and warm to sit out.

Today I cross off one my bucket list items. But rather than spelling it out directly I’ll give you the flavor of it and save the photos for the next blog – see if you can guess.

All the tickets are sold out. We have to buy two off a ticket tout. £60 and because it doesn’t start until 17:30 we have afternoon tea and cake to sustain ourselves – that’s blown our budget for the rest of the trip☹.

It involves men in pearly queen sequin adorned tights. They ponce around with hands on hips; groin thrust out and back curved; silly hats; it’s all very colourful. There are two bands, god knows why, one would do. The blog title gives the game away to anyone who is into literature. A man paints two red circles. Everybody gets very excited and waves their hankies about. Amazing that there’s nearly as many women in the audience as men, yet no women are involved in the event. The women are more vociferous than the men.

It’s outdoors, but you can buy fans to keep you cool and hire seat cushions to stop your backside aching on the concrete seats.

The basic performance is repeated 6 times. One would have been more than enough.

There are two horse involved and they have a rough time of it. Fortunately they’re blind folded.

It’s 7 against one. The one nearly always loses. The one is male. It consist of gratuitous cruelty to the one. Wendy was in tears and couldn’t watch. It’s amazing that it is tolerated in a civilized country. It’s amazing it has not been banned by the EU. The one dies a slow lingering and bloody death having been killed by the poser in tights and sequins. Once dead the ears are hacked off – perhaps they’re frightened the dead one can hear them all gloating. If the poser has performed well they hack off the dead ones tail as well. The dead and bloody one is then ignobly dragged around for all to see, leaving a bloody trail in the dust, before being sent to the local MacDonalds. The poser then parades around in triumph. The frenzied audience cheers and throws their hats into the arena. The poser throws the dead ones ears into the barbaric and greedy audience. It’s considered a great honour to receive a dead ones ear. God know what they do with the tail!

It was an experience but never again. It’s totally barbaric and inhumane.

Answers on the back of a blood stained postcard please. See pictures tomorrow.

[20100906 – On The Move](#)

September 11, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – in between rain showers we set off down south in search of more sun and warmth.

Drive down to Jonzac – about 150 miles. End up on an overnight campsite in a proper little French enclave. They all come out to watch the Brit maneuver the caravan in with his mover, just like a bunch of natives seeing a mirror for the first time. At least they nod politely and look on in awe. Later on they all shuffle off for a game of bingo – nobody asks us thank god. Then in the morning, in their finest terry toweling dressing gowns and slippers, they're out walking their dogs – you guessed it toy French poodles.

Tuesday – grey skies and showers. Whilst Wendy gets ready I nip off to get some diesel – it's the only way I can keep sane when we're setting off, it just drives me nuts to watch the performance.

Now it's 9:05 in the morning and I arrive at the main supermarket garage. Guess what? Yes they're only just considering opening up to the queue of cars. But first they have to insert the paper towels; install the fire extinguishers; do a stock take of all the gas bottles; then do it again to make sure he's got it right; oh and then they let the CUSTOMERS in. Can you believe it a petrol station missing the mornings passing trade, god only knows what time they close but a betting man would say 17:00. Remember it's France and stop being shocked.

After a 4 hour drive we arrive in brilliant sunshine at Messanges in Des Landes, in the bottom Southwest of France just above Spain.

Get set up on site (free WiFi on pitch☺) in a little German enclave. Yes we're surrounded by Germans. But they're so sociable and helpful, within 30 minutes we've all had a chat and discussed the merits of German Beer and the good old Reinheits Gebot. They can even understand my 40 year old German. This just doesn't happen with the French they merely peer at you like some creatures from another planet and go back into their little huddles – mind you discussing the E numbers in a bottle of French beer is enough to turn anyone sour and autistic.

After a sweltering sunny afternoon the storm predicted by our German neighbours arrives in the evening. Thunder, lightning, a bit of rain and one enormous gust of wind – rips off a French awning, but worst of all interrupts East Enders by blowing the satellite dish over. Then of course the inevitable happens when you're in a third world country, the power keeps dropping out; then it drops out all together. Bear in mind that this is only a minor thunder storm, similar to an everyday occurrence in Belthorn – good to know we get some things right.

Thank god for battery power.

Help Wifi's down! Send aid, along with some toilet seats and a DVD of Tuesday nights East Enders, ASAP.

Wednesday – miserable grey day with rain on and off. Opportunity to do some work and then in the afternoon I have to go to find the supermarkets for Wendy's weekly shop. Turns out quite sunny so I get to drink coffee and do the web thingy.

Thursday – sun and cloud. After lunch set off for a 3 hour bike ride down to the beach. Great cycle tracks round here. Pop into a café to avoid a rain shower and have a coffee (we sure know how to live over here), so slump down into some comfy settees and wait, and wait, and wait, by which time it's stopped raining so we save E4 – bloody lazy.

We cycle into all the campsites around here looking for an alternative, but by the time you've found a spot that is roomy; sunny and not infested with trees; can pick up wifi; can see Astra 2D, aka East Enders – there's probably only about 4 such spots in the whole of France.

Meanwhile wifi on current site is driving me nuts. It's free but they give you a 3 hour ticket, well to be fair

they get so sick of me they give me several 3 hour tickets, but it's just so frustrating, especially when you're booking a flight, you're disconnected and have to start all over again. If it's free why do they even bother? It just creates work and provides a crap experience – bring out the guillotine!

Friday – nice sunny day. We're moving. Wifi's driven me nuts and we're feeling a bit too claustrophobic after our Loire site.

Pack up and drive 3 minutes down the road to a site that seems to tick all the boxes and the pitches are enormous with few people around – anti-French-social.

In the afternoon we have a great 3 hour bike ride to Vieux Bocartes. Cycle round a lovely lake and watch a cormorant dive and come up with an eel in his beak. It's as long as he is. He then spends 5 minutes trying to swallow it without letting go. Eventually gets it down, mind you I notice he didn't chew it 54 times like my Grandad always said you should.

Last of the big spenders we stop for coffee, tea and the pleasure of a surly waitress – my only tip would have been smile.

Visit the tourist info office on our ride. Now of course you'd expect these places to be keen to help tourists and encourage them to see and stay in the area. That's why we stood at the desk for ages whilst they finished their little chat, probably about their sexual exploits last night; then with the same smacked arse of a face of the waitress they serve us; not in the least bit helpful or pleasant; and then to top it all I catch the other two sniggering at my French. Get the guillotine out. Never mind every dog has his day I fill in a satisfaction survey and decide to take it round to the town hall and complain, rather than let those lazy good for nothings tearing it up.

The town halls even worse, we stand at the desk waiting to be served, and wait, and wait, and wait whilst everyone just mills around successfully ignoring us. Why should I be so silly and think that anyone in the town hall cares that their tourist info office is such a waste of space. Never mind I have the email of the regional tourist office; am currently searching for that Sakorsky geezers email; and of course have the time.

Saturday – lovely sunny day. By now I've discovered that when they said they have free wifi on pitch, what they didn't tell you was it drops out every 2-3 minutes. I complain, what a waste of time that is. I am told there's no problem, perhaps it the leaves (probably those pesky British Rail leaves have blown over here) or the wind – perhaps it's just France. But don't despair it works pretty well in the evening if there's no wind or I go and sit around the pool where there's no trees.

After lunch we have a great bike ride down to the lake at Soustons. Cycle paths through the Forest all the way. We're feeling flush again, I lash out on a coffee whilst we sit by the lake and watch two Grey Herons and two big White Egrets. I can see we need to invest in yet another pair of small lightweight binoculars. On the way back we spot a crested tit and great tit, a much more pleasant sight than some of the topless eyesores we've seen in the past two days.

In the evening we dine out with a little wine. God is in his heaven, all is well with the world apart from the French, we can hear the waves crashing onto the beach and there's no wind so the wifi's working. The perfect end to a perfect day.

Meanwhile that nutty pastor in Florida has backed down from burning the Koran. Amazing all that fuss. Is there such a fuss or does anybody kick off or threaten death and mayhem when Muslim fanatics burn flags or bibles?

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[20100902 – Culture Overdose](#)

September 7, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Thursday – another very blue sky day, but at least it's not too hot – just nice as they say.

We're off for our dose of culture. Being in the Loire Valley I suppose we have to make the effort and visit at least one Chateaux. So, it's the nearest big one which is Chenonceau, just 30 miles away. Well it's 3 stories of bedrooms; four poster beds, that the kings of England seem to have done some romping in; big fireplaces; more tapestries than posters on a tube station, I suppose they'd be the flat screen TV's of the day; nude paintings galore – I suppose they'd have been their pornography of

the day – given their obsession with beds, affairs and interbreeding.

The gardens are all very pretty but just a travesty of repetitive geometric shapes. Didn't they realize that nature abhors straight lines, triangle and perfect spheres.

Mind you the kitchen garden farm is very impressive, very colourful and growing a vast range of flowers and vegetables. Wendy thinks she fancies an allotment – more signs of senility creeping up. I've no problem with that though as long as I don't get roped into it and it doesn't increase my daily intake of healthy eating, it's a pity you can't grow junk food. Mind you I suppose we'd only grow weeds as she'd never be there.



Well that's it now we've seen a Chateaux, give us a bird hide any day.

Call at a supermarket on the way back for some wine – amazing how you can run out of wine in France. Massive queues everywhere so I go to the empty aisle for people with scanners – very sophisticated. Our hostess, god knows why they call them that as it conjures up such a smiling welcoming individual, is chatting to someone else and much too busy to serve me. So in my usual friendly style I say hello and she then begrudgingly but at a snails pace she starts to serve me. So I

say hello again, a bit louder and wave my hands about. The hand waving speeds her up a bit but she points out that it's a scanner lane. Then two years of listening to French CD's pays off and the perfect phrase for "but there's no one here" pops out. Fortunately I resist trying to say the word for lazy.

In the evening we have a few drinks on the patio with the last remaining English couple.

Friday – more blue sky. It's real excitement over breakfast as some-one, she'll remain nameless, is scanning the horizon and has seen this really colourful bird with long beak and a crest. It's a Hoopoe – see photo.



Lazy day around the caravan avoiding the heat and the sun. We're the only ones left, the whole place to ourselves. It's a great site.

Saturday – more blue sky. Up and out early, well 10:00. There's the prospect of a market at Loches, which seems to motivate Wendy. So off we troop for more excitement. After the market we visit the Chateaux grounds but I'm not paying 7E to see a crumbling wreck.

I have a leisurely bike ride into the village and buy a little wine and some gundgy sticky pads in the hope of sticking the number plate back on the caravan – god knows why they didn't use screws, they may rust but at least your number plate doesn't drop off.

Then it the usual dinner on the patio and a smidgen of wine. This giant bird disturbs our evening meal, it's either an Albatross or an Osprey©. It's big and black.

Sunday – more heat and sun. Lazy sort of day although in the afternoon we take down the awning, not a swearword uttered and then get packed up ready for moving tomorrow. We're a bit reluctant to move as this is a great site, free wifi on pitch, massive pitch. We've been spoilt here and are going to have a shock when we get to a site with more normal pitch sizes, but need to move on and see other places. Plus the forecast for next weeks not brilliant – as they say "a change is as good as a rest to a one eyed donkey".

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20100828 – Birding

September 3, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – sunny with some fluffy clouds. Up early and off to Saumar, determined to be there before shops shut – unfortunately. To top it all when we get there a market is on, how lucky can you get 😊.

Lovely town with some fine old buildings. All very relaxing but as Wendy points out the markets just aren't up to the standards of the markets in Provence – pity they're not smaller. We were going to visit the chateaux but decide to give it a miss as there doesn't seem much to it.

The streets are busy with shoppers but in true French tradition at 12:00 a lot of the shops shut – why do we continue to be amazed?



Then head off to visit another camp site that is open all year and does storage, it's another little Britain but not as good as our existing site. Watch some kestrels on the way.

After a long day with a lot of driving we arrive back in time for afternoon tea – no cakes or biscuits though. But joy in the evening it's a proper French meal out on the patio, bread, cheese, dry sausage and some French wine to sterilize it all – for those with a weak disposition or delicate stomach skip the photo on the left. Perfect end to a great day.

Sunday – clear blue sky day. Woken up to a different dawn chorus to the usual birds, this time it's baying hounds and a mono-tonal French horn player. It's a French fox and wild boar hunt (now I know where my dried sausage came from). Unlike a British fox hunt there's no bright red coated men on horseback but a ragged motley collection mostly with high visibility jackets on – I suppose it's so that the fox / boar can clearly see them!



Monday – another blue sky day. Lazy day, yet again, around the caravan. By the way the photo on the left is not of me doing a Churchillian salute but me relaxing and practise French expressionism – speak with your hands even if you can't speak the language.

Tuesday – we think. Bluesky and just nice, not too hot with a bit pf a breeze.

Lazy morning as usual but just before lunch time we set off to a local park natural lots of lakes apparently full of turtles – see sign – and birds galore. Mind you not that we saw any turtles.

Now we're somewhat reluctant to own up to this as I'm sure our kids will sense senility and be thinking of having us committed and how to divide up the spoils. Yes we went into a hide; complete with two pairs of binoculars; bird book; iPhone bird application (now surely that's trendy and can at least save me, if not Wendy, from senile oblivion). It was fantastic saw Grey Heron catch and swallow fish (no airs and graces – just down in one), watched by a Great White Egret. Numerous

other birds too many to mention and all for free, if this is senility then bring it on.

Then we get back to the campsite and owner brings round home grown tomatoes. I go off and pick some blackberries and plums to go with breakfast (four a day how bloody healthy can you get) – all very quaint. But best of all this is topped by a superb bottle of 2005 Malbec to go with dinner on the patio. It's so good I have to drink it all rather than risk it going off overnight – oh how I suffer!

Wednesday – yet more blue sky and not too hot.

Now I know people will find this hard to believe but I have been accused of being ignorant at breakfast merely because I browse the news on the Internet. But now my accuser has topped this, and truly qualified herself for incarceration in a home for aged and senile, by bird watching over breakfast – see photo. At least I get to read the news in peace☺.



Real excitement, clean the car 🤨.

It's shopping day but Wendy can't go until after lunch because the supermarket is closed all morning. Now let's try and guess why. Is it due to a fire; a strike; they've run out of food; a saints day; they've lost the keys; an EU directive; or yet another EU offset subsidy that encourages them to stay closed to increase demand? No it's none of the above, it's so that they can do a stock take. Can you believe it? Only in France. The rest of the world manage to either do perpetual stock checks or do the stock checks overnight – heaven forbid the wee mites would have to work unusual hours. But no not here, stuff the customers who pay their wages.

Wendy did battle with the butcher in the supermarket, got the cut of meat she wanted despite his lack of English and apparently he even smiled – must have just finished his lunch. Mind you god help him if he'd crossed her there'd be no mercy. She's fed up with their lazy ways and shops that are never open. This is now just like being at home, I no longer go to the supermarket and have to content my-self with the Internet and a few books – tough really.

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20100821 – Wot No Markets

August 28, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – another very hot, 33c, blue sky day. Wendy's moaning it's too hot☹. All that acclimatisation in Arizona and Utah seems to have been undone by just two weeks in the UK. Never mind rains forecast for tomorrow that should stop the homesickness.



It's so hot we put up a side in the awning so that we can draw the curtain to have some shade.

Actually I'm getting quite worried about Wendy, we've been here 4 days and not a single mention of markets. Perhaps she needs a brain scan to see if the temporal merchandismus lobe of her brain has given up.

After yet another luxurious lunch – fruit, we may be in France but we're not being French – we have a short drive to Descartes. Famous philosopher geezer – "I think therefore I am" – was born there. It's a lovely little sleepy hollow. Sadly all the shops were shut. Came across

a lovely garden. Just like Blackburn (I need an emoticon for sarcasm 😏) it has some lovely roundabouts, one of them even has a windmill in the middle.

By the time we get back to the campsite it's like a ghost town. Most people have left, there's only about 3 caravans / tents remaining. We've now got a whole field to ourselves.

Sunday – hot and sunny. It's a day of rest so we laze around the caravan site.

Overnight we're treated to a free firework display with spectacular thunder and lightning.

Monday – mixed weather day, but at least it's warm. Market day in Ligué so Wendy finally gets her fix.

Of course being market day in a small market town you'd expect all the shops to be making the most of it. Well they do, they stay in bed all day – it's a French thing.

I've got a fragment of contact lens stuck in my eye so I need an optician, but no joy in Ligué so we drive up to Loches. Guess what, it's Monday, shopkeepers other day of rest, so all the shops are shut, but as it's August they're also shut the rest of the week! When do they make any money, or is there an EU offset subsidy for keeping shops shut.

Tuesday – sun, cloud and warm. Drive up to Tours to do the touristy things. After 20 minutes driving around looking for any parking, never mind free parking, we end up PAYING to park – perhaps it's twinned with Blackburn.

Nothing very remarkable about this place but at least the shops are open and we find an optician. Now comes the tricky bit, explaining that I think there is still a fragment of contact lens in my eye that I can't get out. Told to come back in 30 minutes they've summoned an ophthalmologist. 30 minutes later a very tasty young lady takes me upstairs – things are looking good so far☺ – but she only wants to look into my eyes. She can't find any contact lens so at least I know it's not festering away in there. When I ask her how much she tells me no charge☺. Remarkable, good service, nice eye candy and no charge. I think there must either be another EU subsidy for helping English tourists with contact lenses or she just thought my French was so hilarious it was worth a free examination – she'll probably dine out for at least a month on how I crucified the French language.



Wednesday – sun cloud and rain, so it's thoughts of moving on, but at least it's warm. Make the most of it and do some work and have a few very effective free skype conference calls – isn't technology great when it works.

Wendy tootles off to Lidl and E-Leclerc for the weekly shop – two supermarkets side by side for the price of one – what more can she want out of a holiday.

Joy, at last it's bread and cheese night, crack open a fresh bottle of wine. We have a superb selection of lively cheeses; some ready to slither around the plate; some with more veins in them than a 90 year old ballet dancers legs; some goats cheese covered in grey mold, some with blue mold; some

melting. This is the life.

Thursday – warm sun and cloudy day. Off to Saumur but see a market as we drive through Chinon so we stop there for the day.

It's a big market, Wendy's eyes light up like a kid in a sweet shop. At least this time we buy something, 3 dried sausages for E10; wild boar, cheese and even blueberry – oh well try anything once. What I still can't figure out is how these sausages survive for months outside a fridge and yet you assumedly don't die when you eat them – I hope. It's quite a quaint little market town by the river complete with the obligatory castle / fortress. Of course the fortress is on top of a hill so it's quite a climb up, but in keeping with French tradition – laziness – they provide a lift and it's free. We do the manly thing and walk up, but are then too tight to pay a E7 entrance fee.



Exotic lunch in the market square – apple and water – oh how we live.

Friday – clouds and rain, boy oh boy does it rain. It's a quiet day in the caravan, doing a bit of work and listening to the rain.

Nip into the bank in Liguel, nothings changed, most of the shop keepers are still in bed from Monday. How do they make any money.

Well despite some crap weather we end the day sat out in the sun on the patio having dinner.

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[20100817 – Wow The Suns Out](#)

August 21, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – by way of a change it's grey, raining and miserable as we leave Belthorn for the Loire valley. Quite consoling, makes us even happier to be escaping.

At least we've no caravan in tow but we set a new record, 10 minutes before the first hold up.

Then we have our luxury cruise from Portsmouth to St Malo, this is no Celebrity Cruise line but at least it beats driving. Complete with bar and evening entertainment – not quite Cirque de Solei. Wendy's sat there knocking back smuggled in Bacardi and coke out of her handbag like some hard up alchy teenager in a nightclub.

Wednesday – arrive early in St Malo and some bright spark thinks it would be a good idea to save money and not bother with the toll roads. Unfortunately the chauffeurs taken in by gem of an idea and so we head

off enjoying scenic France. Five hours later we've had enough and are sick to death of roundabouts every mile. Next time we'll stick to the auto-routes.

Arrive on site, suns out, caravans been cleaned for us and is ready on the pitch.

Then we, well mainly Wendy, unload 2 tons of food, 2 wardrobes full of clothes and enough shoes to open our own shoe emporium. God know what's happened to all the food we've just unloaded, by dinner time we have to go out for dinner as we have no food in? How the female mind works is a wonder to behold!

Off to the hotel in the local village, it comes highly recommended so hopefully we'll get some traditional French fare. Now I know I may have whined a bit in the past about the lack of entrepreneurial drive of the French but this is just classic. Correct me if I'm wrong, it's August, height of the holiday season I believe, and guess what the Hotels closed. Why? Is it a fire; burst water main; outbreak of typhoid or foot and mouth; some new EU directive. No none of the above. The enterprising owners have gone on holiday to the South of France for two weeks. No wonder the EU and Euros sinking fast, let's abandon the EU, we've enough economic nightmares and scroungers without us having to subsidise this lot.

Never mind we have a gourmet French Pizza.

Thursday – sun again, what a shock to us Belthorners. For a challenge we put the awning up. No divorce and no bad language from Wendy – it's a record☺. Then as a special treat Wendy gets to go to two supermarkets for the weekly shop – god knows what's happened to the two tons of food we unloaded yesterday, perhaps its evaporated with the heat. Meanwhile I have to content myself with a coffee and Wendy's iPad.

Then it's dinner on the patio.

Did anybody see the Dawkins programme on Faith Schools. Very worrying to think that in this country we are effectively leading muslim youngsters to believe that the theory of evolution is not scientific fact and the earth has only been around for several thousand years – unbelievable religious dogma and we're paying for it.

Friday – more sun, we're totally disorientated by now. Start off with breakfast on the patio followed by a lazy day around the caravan reading, relaxing, just a little bit of internet and enjoying all this French peace and tranquility.

It's really too hot for any exertion. Then in the evening we have dinner on the patio and I have to get down to the serious side of this trip and try a bottle of French wine.

PS No pictures so far it's too hot and Wendy's moved the camera.

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[20100730 – South West Retrospect](#)

July 31, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Friday – as we've 16 hours travelling and enough battery life in the netbook I thought we'd review the key points of our trip ready for our next trip:

- House swapping is absolutely great and should be used wherever possible. Thanks to Nat and Paul for a great house swap.
- The South West is an awesome area with lots more areas to see and do, although probably best to avoid the high summer months.
- If we must do the summer months then aim for the mountains as the temperatures are more tolerable.
- 1 month is great but probably better to try 2, minimizes flying and spreads the flight cost. We

could have easily stayed and enjoyed a month in our Sedona house swap.

- Airports continue to be a nightmare and are getting worse.
- If no house swap try and use condos rather than hotels – check out local papers for good deals.
- Zion Park was well worth a week's stay.
- National parks are great. If visiting several consider an annual pass to them all for \$80 rather than \$25 each park for a week.
- In the parks check on "all" activities available. They're usually free, very interesting and entertaining.
- Try and find areas like Zion Park, Sedona where there is plenty to do without travelling far and stay for a minimum of a week rather than moving on every 2 – 4 days. A good indication is plenty of National Parks / Monuments or State Parks in the area.
- All the amazing birds introduced us to bird watching; it's fascinating and somewhat frustrating that they just don't stay still long enough.
- We managed to spot 47 different birds.
- Regrettably we didn't get to spot the Great Roadrunner.
- Take binoculars with you.
- Avoid Las Vegas. If we must fly through there then just stay the absolute minimum.
- Bryce Canyon was worth seeing but not a place to stay for more than 2 days.
- Beware flash floods and mud slides.
- Cheapest small car is more than adequate as long as it has air con. Avoid open tops as it's just too hot.
- Beware that in some hotels wifi access is not allowed via a proxy server, especially if not on port 80.
- Don't bring a coat in summer.
- Don't shop at "Sol Foods" in Zion.
- ALWAYS carry some water with you.
- AM/PM are cheapest for petrol by far.

To paraphrase one of the all action heroes – "We'll be back".

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[20100727 – Las Vegas / Sin City](#)

July 31, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – the sun has soon bleached away all traces of yesterday's storms, although the car is a bit the worse for wear from the stones in yesterday's flash flood waters that have scratched the sides.



We drive down from Cedar City to Las Vegas so it's Utah, Arizona and then Nevada. There's some occasional stunning scenery but it's mainly boring desert with a few Joshua Trees to break the monotony.

Some giant bill boards in the desert offer me a stunning new career opportunity as a porn star, I think I'll pass.

We pass through yet another Indian Reservation. Those poor devils sure got the thin end of the dry and desolate hell holes when they were handing out reservation lands – not even a vulture would want to live there.

We arrive in Sin City pretty early, our rooms not ready so I take Wendy down to Fashion Show Mall – you should see her eyes light up with delight at all the shops. Actually we're going to the Apple Store as I'm treating Wendy to an Apple iPad. Yes I've finally flipped and starting a move towards the dark side. I'm Fed up with waiting for the HP Slate; which has now been rumored to have scrapped Windows Tablet; rumors about using Android; but it sounds as if they're going to go for the Palm OS. That's as proprietary as iPad and god knows when they'll ever get around to delivering it. So iPad it is, if the interface is as good as the iPhone then it should be good and I know Wendy is just dying to try out a tablet PC☺.



Judging by the number of people in the Apple store I think they must be giving iPads away for free, you certainly wouldn't think we're still in recession, although all the other stores still appear to be in the doldrums by comparison.

Meanwhile our hotel is great. It's the Desert Rose again, with plenty of birds to see in the gardens.

Wednesday – we have a lazy day planned. Of course we manage a bit of retail therapy for Wendy but even though we've been to some hot zones we'd forget how hot this place is – best avoided.

Meanwhile we observe the ultimate. Some lazy bimbo with more money than sense parks on a parking meter to save a 25 yard walk from the free car park – unbelievable – no wonder there is an obesity problem, heaven forbid she should use her legs.

Amazing what a little Britain this place is. We've hardly encountered any Brits on our travels but as soon as we get back to Las Vegas they're everywhere.

Interesting how many Americans you meet – of course it's not difficult to get chatting – who come out with the phrase "well thank you for visiting us"☺, usually followed by "we need the money".



Unbelievable that the fruit and veg counters in some supermarket have artificial rain, to keep the veg fresh, along with simulated thunder and lightning. Then we have yet another "only in America" encounter – see picture to the left. What is? Well in case you can't make it out or guess, it's a Hurricane simulation booth of course – only \$2 a go. Perhaps next they'll do a flash flood simulator!

Get everything packed and then in the evening we journey down to Treasure Island for a buffet and to see Cirque du Soleil – Mystere. What a journey it is. We try the Mono Rail, more cost than it's worth. Just too hot to walk and then to top it all when we go to collect our tickets the computer is down – what a shock! Of course they have a backup system – well perhaps not – so we're kept hanging around in a queue for 30 before I manage to initiate some much needed manage intervention followed by the obligatory complaint.

After many years meaning to go we get to see a Cirque de Soleil. It must have been good, I stayed awake throughout.

Thursday – so it's good bye Las Vegas – thank god – although we are sad to be leaving the rest of the US.

It seems that the airline have dreamed up yet another means of making airports a misery. Our suit case is overweight but our total baggage is well under the allowance. So we either pay a \$50 baggage fee or take some items out of our suitcase and put it in the underweight backpack. Remove 1 book and a pair of sandals. How bloody pathetic can you get, it's about time some airline execs were lined up against my wall. **Avoid US Airways greedy pathetic airline.**



Then by way of entertainment in the terminal I have the pleasure of a rather well-endowed young lady sat opposite me with boobs trying to escape, short skirt and legs open – does she not realize I've only just had my breakfast!

You know it's not flying that's the hassle it's the airports, once you're on the plane it's usually pretty comfortable.

Y

Why does the packaging industry seem to think their role is to deny everyone access to the goods they've just purchased? See through plastic containers that cut you to shreds if you attempt to open them; bags that need a pair of garden sheers to open them rather than a simple tear point; labels that won't come off unless sanded off or nitric acid applied. Thank god they don't design cars, you'd need an oxy-acetylene torch just to drive down to the shops.

Let's all rebel and insist on the supermarkets opening them for us and taking away the rubbish.

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[20100725 – Sun, Hale, Lightning, Flash Flood and Mud Slide](#)

July 27, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Sunday – yes we've had it all; patience, read on. After 6 days we leave Zion, it's been great there and we'd gladly come back.

We drive out through the east exit along mud roads, but the scenery is spectacular. Head up scenic bye-ways to Cedar Breaks. Yes it's another National park with stunning Hoodoos – see pictures. Very pleasant nature walk along the rim.

Then drive up to Brian Head ski resort, small and quaint. This is the

only resort in Utah we've not skied, but I won't be driving 4 hours from Park City in order to ski it next time. It's just not that big a resort to justify such a long drive.

Day started off with its usual blue sky but after lunch some clouds came in. Mind you the nice thing is it's 8,000 to 10,000 feet up here so although sunny it's not too hot – mind you we're probably so acclimatized that by the time we get home Wendy will probably want the thermostat up to 30C☺.

Check into a superb Comfort Suite in Cedar City for two nights – more about that later.

Monday – up at the crack of dawn for an early breakfast and then a 90 minute drive to Bryce Canyon, everyone raves about this place and I've so wanted to see it. Amazing though how towns like Cedar City consider themselves local / on the doorstep, even though it's 80 miles away.



The canyon and Hoodoos are stunning, never seen anything like it. We watch the usual and informative video and then drive all the way down the canyon stopping off at all the view points for photo shoots. It may only be 18 mile long but it's 4 hours to complete. It's sunny and warm all the way. I wish we had more time so that we could have a walk down into the canyon – however as it turns out it's a good job we didn't!



On the way back Wendy spots a merchandising opportunity but is aghast at the rip off prices. We then drive back down through Red Rock Canyon. Well the heavens open up; never seen nor heard hale stones like it; Wendy thinks the car roof will be dented; we have to shout to one another to be heard; drive at 2-3 mph; if I got some skis on I could ski down the

road; anyone out there would suffer some serious pain, good job we didn't do the walk.

Then the lorry in front comes to a grinding halt and through the hale we can see why. The road is just blocked off with a mud slide. There is no way we're going to get through that. To turn round I drive to the front of the lorry (he can't get through either and is too big to turn around) – big mistake. Not only is it a mud slide but a raging flash flood is also crossing the road. Then it breaks out towards our car and I have to reverse quickly back as the flash flood swirls around me. We just get out of that and manage to quickly turn car around to go back up the road, meanwhile two more flash floods have breached the side of the road and are blocking our escape. We're trapped in a gap of about 100 yards (100 Metres for those of you who have not had a civilized education) between two flash floods. Not looking good; at least there's no mud and boulders yet; nothing for it but to go for it – which in this car means about a 10 minute warm up before it reaches a trot.



Meanwhile what's Wendy doing during this little interlude. Well apart from screaming at me to get out of there, she's visioning the video footage of the flash floods at Frejus with cars rafting down the flash flood and thinking she'll not be seeing the kids again. And to top it all she's stopped videoing and taking photos – unbelievable! She'll never make news camerawoman of the year.

Oh yes as you've probably realized we survived.

We drive back out of the canyon but I fear that some will still be stuck down there. We've two choices wait until they clear the road, could be hours as they won't be able to do anything until the flash flood subsides or try and find a different route back to Cedar City. Unfortunately this area is not so gifted when it comes to quality roads but we decide to risk a 60 mile detour up some route described as "other road".

Two hours later we get back safe and sound but with no video footage or decent photos☹.

Bryce Canyon was stunning and well worth the hassle but I'm glad we didn't try and spend a week there as it's not got the range of walks (hikes), scenery and things to do that Zion had. Two days would have been great day 1 to drive it and day 2 to do some walks.

Y

Why is common sense in such short supply these days? Let's consider our executive suite at the comfort Suites hotel in Cedar City. It's a beautiful suite complete with settee (sofa / couch), desk and chair, fridge and microwave – obviously it's got free wifi or else I wouldn't be there.

It also has a large flat screen TV, but what is the point of it when you can't see it from the sofa? Sure you can see it from the bed but I'm not yet that infirm. Now had they thought about this then they could move the unit housing the TV just 5 feet and you would be able to see it both from bed and sofa – it's not quantum mechanics just a bit of user focus / testing and common sense.

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[20100723 – Emerald Pool Hike](#)

July 25, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – wifi's down, how unusual☹. Then to make matters worse I reinstall my Wireless network drivers just to make sure it's not my laptop. Then it's high priest of technology time trying to help the hotel diagnose the problem; re-installing drivers; TCP/IP binding; and of course the obvious one of repairing Kaspersky. Don't ask why but eventually after 2 hours of my holiday time and a visit from a Wavecom geezer it's all back to normal. Could it be that their Internet service can't cope with sign up via a proxy server?



Why does it have to be so dammed complicated and require a degree in computer science just to access the Internet. If cars were built like this we'd all need to have served a 3 year apprenticeship as a mechanic just to drive down to the shops.

By way of a change Wendy wants to go round the shops so I escape down to the shooting range to avoid the merchandising opportunity. Unfortunately it's a wasted journey as the clown who runs the place doesn't have access to the gun safe. Still at least I avoid the shops.

After lunch we set off into the park to do the Riverside walk up to the narrows, followed by Weeping Rock. More beautiful scenery but at 105F it's hot enough to fry eggs. Never mind we've got plenty of water, thanks to Nat & Paul advice, we never go anywhere without plenty of water – of course back in the UK it's not such a problem as the water just follows you wherever you are in the form of rain!



Having our new pair of trusty binoculars (yes we've succumbed, Wendy saw a \$99 pair on special for \$30 – they're ideal) to hand, looking like Bill Oddie on his way out of a sauna, we spot a wild Turkey and her chicks – awesome dude☹.

After that we walk up to Weeping Cavern which has ancient water dripping down out of the sandstone. Why ancient, well it's taken 1,200 years to percolate through the sandstone. It's a wonder some enterprising geezer hasn't started bottling it and selling it as vintage water!

Saturday – up early to get out on a walk (sorry hike, English walk, Americans hike). However we get delayed as we phone home and speak to the kids – bless.



Finally get to do the lower, middle and upper Emerald Pools walk. That's Wendy in the picture in the upper Emerald pool, the one you're not supposed to bath in. It's very pleasant and beautiful but even at 10:00 it so hot. Obviously these walks have never had a Health and Safety assessment, mind you I do have a leaflet that advises not to go close to cliff edges. At least when we get to the top pool we can have a cooling paddle – no swimming allowed! Now so far we haven't done Angels Landing, I wonder why? It's a 2,500 feet climb with a spine to cross that's only 34" wide with a drop of 800ft on one side and 1,200ft on the other – if I have to choose I'd go for

the 1,200 and make the most of it.

Then have a well-deserved rest at the Lodge, sat in our rocking chairs watching the World go by, it's so relaxing and such beautiful scenery we could spend the whole day there people watching and rocking. The picture on the right is just a small part of the view from our rocking chairs.



After lunch we set off for a drive up to the Kolob reservoir, the Western and more remote side of the park. At least the reservoir is at about 8,000 feet so it's a lot cooler and greener up there. Our first experience of a UK style climate in 3 weeks and ironically we encounter our first serious rain of the trip.

For about 2 hours there's a thunder storm, complete with a stunning lightning display and of course being America even the rain drops have to be bigger than UK rain. Despite the rain it's still very hot and it's soon back to normal.

Y

Why have American kids lost their manners? When we first started coming to the US we noticed how well-mannered and respectful kids were to their elders. Now it seems to have all gone to pot, a classic example is on the shuttle bus half full of kids and yet not one of them gets up to offer a seat to older adults. Actually we blame the parents because not one parent gave their kids a thick ear and made them stand up. What's gone wrong?

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[20100721 – Cowboys and Cowgirls](#)

July 24, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – drive down to St George for an easy day exploring the city. Arrive just in time for the St George Live tour which is an enactment of the various Mormon settlers all dressed in period costume and talking about their life when they settled St George (1860's). This was followed by a tour of Brigham Young's house complete with a personal guide. All very informative and interesting, it took up the whole morning. Wendy even signed up for a free copy of the book of Mormon, which is delivered to our home for free. Is there a conversion in the offering? I think not but then again perhaps if she were to convert I could have multiple wives – god knows why anyone in their right mind would want more than one 😊.



Then after lunch it's a little retail therapy for Wendy and buy some ammunition from Walmart (can you imagine that in Asda) ready for the shooting range. Again we get chatting to a local at the gun store and within 2 minutes he's bemoaning Obama as being the worse president ever. It seems that even to his followers he promised so much and delivered so little.



We're the only ones at the shooting range but Bob gives me personal shooting lesson with his 45 and his home made ammo. Wow, they have a real kick and it makes you realize what a joke all these movies are. My instructors given me some really good tips (just in case I ever get a gun in England) on shooting a hand gun, but his most memorable advice seems to be "if there's an intruder in your home shoot to kill that way they can't sue you!".



Thursday – continuing with our cowboy theme – we're really into it – we went horse riding in the morning very entertaining. Of course as experienced riders – last time we did this was 40 years ago – we got landed with two dodders Bill and Betty, thankfully. Mind you they did give us each a "motivator", for the horse that is, a euphemism for a whip – how politically

correct can you get. Fortunately our two critters were sure footed enough as some of the drops down the side of the trail could best be described as significant. All very enjoyable, curiously a bit hard on the knees though and Wendy was complaining of a sore bum the next day.



After lunch we did a period dressed ranger talk on life in Springdale followed by a ride up the canyon for some more photo shoots. The park is awesome and beautiful well worth the \$25 and we've extended our stay from 4 nights to 6 as there's so much to see and do. When you consider for \$25 you get 7 days of free transport; excellent and informative talks every day; trails and advice; all this relatively un-spoilt beauty.

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[20100719 – Zion](#)

July 22, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – up early to catch the 09:30 tour of Antelope Canyon. This is a stunning canyon that has been



carved by water rushing through the sandstone over the ages. There are some stunning photo opportunities. Wendy stays at the hotel as she doesn't fancy the closed in canyons. Good job really as the journey over the desert would have probably rattled her spine to driftwood.

Then we drive over to Zion park along some beautiful scenic byways. We enter from the East and pay our \$25 entrance fee (valid for a week and worth every cent) and drive through some stunning scenery, but this is just the appetizer, after driving through the tunnel we come out to the main course – unbelievable and breathtaking.

Hotel is great as usual. Then we encounter "Sol Foods" supermarket – see below.



Tuesday – up early to get into Zion Park before it gets too hot. But as is now becoming a tradition when visiting National Parks when we get off the free bus someone, who shall remain nameless, realizes they have left the park pass in their handbag – joy we get to ride the shuttle all morning. There's no cars allowed in the park, instead they have free shuttle buses every 7 minutes – great.



We start off with the Watchman trail, which is a 2 hour moderate hike with stunning views from the top. Boy is it hot. Amazing how many Americans we seem to meet who hate Obama. It just seems to pop up in conversation when they talk with complete strangers. Do we look like a pair of red necks or true blue Tories? Is there anyone out there who likes him?

After that we have lunch followed by a riverside walk back to the info centre. The scenery is stunning as good as Yosemite but so different.

In the evening we go on a ride with the Park Ranger who explains lots about the park and like lots of the parks over here

it's a free service.

Meanwhile our various informative walks have helped us identify a plant that is great for producing a few hallucinations, just chew on it as the Indians used to, only don't chew on too much of it as it's poisonous.

Don't I just love the restaurants over here who helpfully point out all over their menus that an 18% tip is customary – peer pressure doesn't seem to work with me – then when they produce the bill these kind people work out what an 18%, 20% or 22% tip is just in case you are arithmetically infirm. My tip is "don't work for an employee who pays minimum wage and exploits you".



Y

Why is greed so rampant? Now as anyone knows me they will know that supermarkets are not one of my

fortes. But we've just had the misfortune to go into the "Sol Foods" supermarket in Springfield at Zion park, I'll repeat that's "Sol Foods", and even I was appalled at the prices. Just sheer rampant greed and profiteering. I can understand 10%, 20% even 50% markup because it's in a remote area and they have a monopoly, but two to three times typical supermarket prices leaves me speechless.

Do they still tar and feather people in this country? If so the board of "Sol Foods" would be well deserving candidates. So just remember "Sol Foods" greedy B..tards, avoid them if you know what's good for your wallet. I'm that incensed by the sheer greed I'm tempted to get a can of spray paint and make sure everyone knows that "Sol Foods" are Greedy B..tards – for those of you wondering why I'm repeating Sol Foods so much it's in the hope that the search engines will pick this up as a "Sol Foods" hit.

I'm thinking of selling bottled water from the back of my car on the public car park outside "Sol Foods" for the next few days, it'll probably pay for our holiday and hopefully p.s.s them off big style. Meanwhile if anyone is looking for a great business opportunity get out to Springdale and open up a supermarket, only charge double and you'll rake it in.

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[20100717 – Lake Powell](#)

July 22, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – last day here in Sedona, we'll be sorry to leave after two weeks which have just flown by. I'm up and out at 06:30 to go on a guided bird walk at 07:00. Make the most of it you don't get many places with such stunning scenery and a fantastic collection of birds – boring birds in the UK are going to be banished from our bird table. On the way there I bump into a balloon just landing on the main highway – I always wondered where they came down.



Then it's a short drive up to Page, well at least I thought it was, but man in tourist office spoke with forked tongue. The 90 miles turns out to be 160 – just down the road for your average American. We drive up Oak Creek, it must be one of the most stunning drives you can imagine, followed by 120 mile across the nothingness North of Flagstaff.

Finally arrive in Page to a great suite, complete with balcony overlooking Lake Powell all for £60 a night complete with breakfast. Note the water sprinklers in the picture of lake Powell – no hosepipe bans in this desert!

Then to top it all, as a reward for good behavior, there's a Taco Bell within walking distance of the hotel, but in keeping with American traditions we drive to it. 10 minutes to decide what to have, 5 minutes constantly repeating myself and pointing to items on the menu. It's bloody easier to order a 7 course meal in French than this. Does she speak any English? By some miracle I get exactly what was ordered – this is junk fund heaven, stuff the French and their haut cuisine.





Sunday – hot breakfast with pancakes, I pass on the revolting blue looking porridge, there's being adventurous and then there's just plain stupidity. We have a drive out to Antelope Canyon to see what the drill is, looks like it's best to go on the organized tour in upper canyon. Then drive out to Antelope Point marina, not much there unless you have a boat to launch. We were going to drive out to rainbow arch but fortunately we discovered that you can only get to it from Lake Powell and it's a 4 hour boat ride – not for us.

Visit the excellent Glen Dam visitors centre and watch the video on how they built the dam. After that we drive down to the Waheep Marina. Very

nice but hotel there is very expensive. It's 102 F so we have our fresh fruit lunch under the shade of a tree, luxury. People down on the beach must be frying it's so hot and the sun is so powerful.

After lunch we drive back to the hotel for a quiet read in an air conditioned room and then lounge round the pool.



Y

Why are golfers over here so lazy? They used to say that golf spoils a good walk, but here it just spoils a good buggy ride. None of them walk, they all just drive from tee to tee in their electric carts and then take up this stance as if they've filled their pants and swing that club. Heaven forbid they should get any exercise. Perhaps they should all go out and buy a Wii, then they won't even have to walk to and from the cart.

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[20100715 – Last Days In Sedona](#)

July 18, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday – this morning we have someone coming to view the house at 09:00, it's spick and span and the coffee's on but we've no bread baking – aromas of coffee and fresh baked bread increase chance of a sale. We'll only be charging a small extra commission on top of the realtors if it's a sale 😊.



Mind you if this place came with two greencards I'd be very tempted. But as one shopkeeper said "you don't need to worry about greencards, nobody else seems to bother". Perhaps we'll inflate the illegal immigrant figures to 12,000,002.

On the way to Sedona we visit one of the many viewpoints. I'm sure it must have been one of those vortex sites I'd been so dismissive of. As I walk by an empty car the horn beeps and the engine starts up –

now that's either magic or another optional extra feature on an already over featured vehicle, what ever will they think of next?

Then it's a real lazy day. Wendy wants to go shopping around Sedona fortunately I manage to escape to the Wildflower Bread Coffee shop for coffee and wifi, followed by lunch. It's amazing around here, most supermarkets have free wifi, almost encourages us nerds to shop. All very civilised and perhaps just a taster of how joined up the world could soon be.

For a real change in the afternoon we just sit and read – almost feel guilty. I'm reading a novel on Geronimo, based on oral history of the Apaches, we're also watching the epic "Into The West" from Steven Spielberg. It's facinating and if book and

DVD are to be believed, it's very distrubing to see how the Indian tribes were wiped out. They were turned from an independent race capable of living off the land into dependents on government handouts doled out in concentration camps on marginal land that settlers didn't want – must research this.

Friday – bit overcast today. Off early to visit Dead Horse State Park. What a disappointment. Got totally lost and hardly saw any birds or wildlife. On the way back we visited the two Page Springs nature reserves and had lunch there. Saw and photographed some stunning birds.

Now if anyone ever complains about British TV and all the many programmes they should flick through the US TV

channels. Yes there's repeats so fast that the adverts from the previous ones not finished, but just consider the following TV programmes; "Best Bra Ever" – not as scintillating as it sounds; "Painless Hair Removal"; "Prostrate Health"; and the crowning glory of "Brazillian Butt Lift" – he mind merely boggles. Bear in mind that each one of these somehow manages to last 30 minutes – coming soon to British TV.

Now Sedona and Oak Village is a fantastic place but it does have one major shortcoming – no Taco Bell. Unusual for the US it even has roundabouts but survival rate is not that good as about 10% of Americans seem completely mystified by them and just keep on coming, or another 10% are in total awe and sit there dumbstruck. Perhaps they need to provide information leaflets on "How To Negotiate A Roundabout" as they do in Vail☺.

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[20100713 – Red Rock Crossing](#)

July 15, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Tuesday – early start again by 08:30 we're at the Red Rock Crossing. This is one of the most famous pictures in the US, it featured in some John Wayne and other cowboy movies – whatever happened to the cowboy movies? Where's the Lone Ranger and his faithful Indian scout Tonto, these youngsters don't know what they've missed. Anyway it's a shallow crossing over Oak Creek with the stunning Cathedral rock in the background. In case you can't tell, the person tottering on the wobbly plank is Wendy – my she was brave.

The park is lovely and there's even a so called beach and swimming



hole where the locals go for an early morning dip – best to avoid Monday though as that's ecoli day. Good place for a leisurely read if you can find a shaded spot. We also manage to spot, photograph and even identify some more birds. This is becoming an obsession, we'll be joining the RSPB next.

Well after a hot but stunning day I'm sat on the deck doing the nerdy things like this blog and now watching the colourful birds come and feed – it's just so relaxing

Wednesday – after a breakfast of superb bagels, along with home grown / home made plum jam – this house swap is a real home from home, we're spoilt – we have another early start and up to Sliding Rock state park. As its name

suggests there are rocks you can slide down, similar to Reno but a lot more aggressive on the wallet – \$20 to get in and risk an ecoli mouth wash. We're rewarded with yet another colourful bird to add to our list – Steller's Jay I have to say it's all very pretty, like an ideal Disney natural water park set, by 10:00 it's teeming with families. By 12:00 they normally close the park gates as it's too full.

Isn't evolution a marvellous thing when you see how pot bellies have evolved for the tourist to rest their giant cameras on, complete with those gigantic telephoto / phallus extensions.

After that we do a tour and photo shoot of the various viewpoints – stunning.

In the evening we drive to "Blazin M Ranch" for a cowboy supper and show. Food was basic but pretty good and as usual all you could eat, although why anyone would want to go back for seconds amazes me.

How do you tell an Englishman in a restaurant full of Americans? Answer they're the ones using both knife and fork.

The after dinner music and entertainment is pretty, pretty good.

Today's useful piece of information – did you know that it has been scientifically proven that hand washing helps ease guilt over previous unethical deeds – MacBeth had it right – and erases the tendency to justify past decisions. Moral of this information is always wash your hands after a dastardly deed and important decisions.

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[20100711 – Hiking In A Sauna](#)

July 14, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)





Sunday – overnight we had thunder, lightning and quite a downpour, not that here is any evidence of the rain when we get up. Bit of a late start today. We set off for a short hike around Bell Rock at about 10:00. It's just like walking in a sauna, you even get that burnt wood assault on the back of your nose as you breathe. It's stunning scenery though, but after 90 minutes in this heat we give up. Moral is to go hiking at 07:00 or 08:00 in the morning or evening time.

Interesting listening to a young kid walk by who explains to his Mum that the

strange noise from the rocks is down to the aliens living up there in a place especially built for them by the government – childhood imagination – sounds a bit like our government always ready to go that extra mile to welcome foreigners.

The Bell Rock is supposed to be a vortex site. An Indian spiritual site, certainly had no effect on me or Wendy. Mind you Wendy was just melting again. At least I've found a cure for her hot sweats, it's that hot outside she doesn't notice them, were she to have one it would probably cool her down.

After lunch it's the weekly shop – joy. I select the wine, then do the nerdy thing by disappearing to the coffee shop for coffee, wifi and live music again – a man's got to do...

Meanwhile talking of wine I'm really beginning to wonder whether us silver shufflers are really losing the plot. Bird walks are one thing but now I'm trying white wine – Pinot Grigio – it'll be Horlicks or hot milk at bedtime next. Sadly I have to admit it was excellent.

Monday – it's that worldwide phenomena of bin day today, yes they're all dutifully lined up, one significant difference is that at the end of the day you can't tell they've been, not a scrap of rubbish on the road. I should have taken a photograph for our bin men to prove that it can be done.



We arrive at Montezumas Well by 08:00, we've learnt the lesson. This is a mysterious crater like lake that pumps out at least a million gallons of fresh water every day. By 09:30 the Turkey vultures are out circling us just in case we expire.

Then we go up to Fort Verde, which was built in 1870 to protect the settlers from the Indians. It's not like your typical fort you see in the movies but a series of houses built around a parade ground. Actually they look pretty comfortable and it's amazing to think that it was only 140 years ago that this land

was being "acquired" from the Indians and settled.

After that we drive up to Page Springs nature reserve and fish hatchery. More bird walks, but it's a bit too hot for them, followed by a luxury picnic by the creek. I can see a pair of binoculars being an essential purchase – we are getting truly sad, it'll be a label maker next!

Finally get my stroll down to the coffee shop for my nerdy fix in the afternoon. The coffee shops a real meeting place / community centre, there's us nerds with everything from minute netbooks to giant laptops that must have been brought in by wheelbarrow; women knitting and chatting; couples playing cards – no it's not like Vegas; businesses planning their campaigns; firemen relaxing before the next forest fire; people reading; people just people watching. All so very relaxing. When you talk to the



locals in the coffee shop it's so funny to hear them wanting rain and clouds – send them to Belthorn for a month that'll cure them.

Y

Have you ever wondered why when you're travelling cattle class on an airplane it's a security threat for us plebes in the back to use the toilets in business or first class? I certainly have. Could it be that cattle class passengers have explosive or combustible excrement, unlikely as it would still wreck the plane even in cattle class; could it be that a terrorist bomber is more effective in the toilets closer to the cockpit, but then I assume these terrorists can afford a first class ticket for their last trip; could it be that terrorists need a more spacious toilet to do their dastardly deed, but then first class tick argument applies. Any suggestions as to why?

Why can't they just be honest and announce "will all you plebes in cattle class to keep to your own minuscule toilets and not use the luxury ones paid for by first and business class passengers".

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[20100709 – Bird Spotting](#)

July 13, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – wow a few clouds around today, but mainly hot and sunny.



In the afternoon we do the Verde Canyon railway, all very civilized with running commentary on the valley and the wildlife. It was first class all the way with champagne, nibbles / lunch and comfortable sofas. Even saw a couple of bald eagles and a bald eagles nest. I'd put the picture of the eagle in flight but it's just a spec in the distance – must be all of 10 by 3 pixels.

Met some interesting Americans ranging from "Blackberry man" who couldn't leave his phone alone and had lost the ability to communicate other than by Blackberry; through to "Coors woman" who was having a great time emptying and collecting Coors bottles, I didn't have the heart to tell her they're all the same and probably worthless.

Saturday – we're up at 05:30 to go on the guided bird walk at 07:00 in Red Rock state park. The guide was a real enthusiastic volunteer, great to be doing something you're really passionate about.

Walk was very interesting, with someone who could at least identify the birds, unlike us two who just didn't have a clue. Being virgin birders we turn up with no binoculars, fortunately for us they loan you really good quality binoculars, otherwise it would have been a black dot walk. Saw 19 different birds (fear not I'm not going to name or go into raptures on all of them), 3 deer and 3 Javelina (wild boar) and we now know what birds we have in the garden – well worth the effort. Worrying what us "silver shufflers" find for amusement – could train / plane spotting be next on my Bucket List?



After lunch we walk down to the coffee shop for wifi, coffee and live guitar music – imagine that in a Blackburn café, someone would

probably complain it's against their religion, knowing our loony council they'd take it serious and impose a ban! While I drink coffee and do whatever us nerds do on the net, Wendy wonders off around the shops muttering that it's too hot and there aren't many shops.

Miraculously Wendy's now gone nearly two weeks without Eastenders. There's no signs of withdrawal symptoms – could this be a breakthrough – or is the fact that I'm downloading them at the coffee shop acting a bit like Methadone and helping to calm the shakes and cravings of withdrawal?

Y

This is going to become a new feature of my blog when I come across strange behavior or issues that don't quite qualify for the "Soup of the Day" blog, they've not hacked me off enough, but I feel I need to get it off my chest. There's plenty of material.

Why has a 1 month hose pipe ban been imposed in the Northwest of England? The rain capital of the country, we seem to get more rainy days than any other region in England. Even Noah would feel at home. We should be selling the water to the rest of England and that would give us a GDP like an Arab oil state. When all said and done we have to suffer it.

Consider, here in Sedona it is arid semi- desert. Is there a hose pipe ban here? If there is everyone is ignoring it, the sprinklers come on every evening; a youngster is employed on the building site to spray water, from a hose pipe no less, onto the soil just to keep the dust down; the golf courses are watered daily. How come they can manage in arid semi-desert with only 450 mm rain per annum and so much sun to evaporate any water, yet the Northwest with 1250 mm per annum and no sun can't? Unbelievable!

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[20100707 – Birds Paradise](#)

July 9, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – actually a few clouds around today but still hot.



On the left we have Daddy Quail (California Quail) watching his family.

Have a power walk to the coffee shop and an hour at one with my netbook.

Then set off for a drive into Prescott, home of the world's oldest rodeo and a decent hat shop. On the way we encounter what must have been the lawmen's annual summer get together, 6 police / sheriffs / highway patrol cars within a 20 mile stretch all tensed up and waiting to pounce in order to fill their daily ticket quota. How does Arizona afford it or are they paid commission only on tickets?

At long last I get a new cowboy hat to replace the one Wendy trashed. Up to now I'd been offered one size fits all hats, the mind boggles. Perhaps they ride up with wear or shrink in the sun according to some secret formula!

After Prescott and too many shops we drive back along a switchback road through the mountains to have a

look at Jerome, what was a ghost town with a spirit room saloon. There might be something in it as Wendy had a distinct feeling of deja vue as we drove past. Don't despair we've not turned into some new age hippies, or in our case old age. We'd been through it last time we were here.

On the right we have the cheeky Western Scrub Jay who swoops down, even when you're around, to pick up the peanuts.



Meanwhile the job creation continues by employing people to stand on the pavement holding / waving billboards. Then absurdity takes over as I try to buy some beer and need to provide photo Id or my date of birth – get real do I really look so young.

Thursday – a bit cloudy today but still very hot and plenty of sun. Woken early by the sound of a wood pecker (could it be the Ladder-Backed or Downy Woodpecker). Early morning walk to the coffee shop to battle with the VPN / Proxy server (nerds rule ok) in order to get BBC iPlayer – I wouldn't mind I'm a license payer so why should I have to jump through IP hops.



Back home for coffee and bird watching from the garage. There are so many here and it's taking us ages to identify them. Mind you I think most of them are in disguise so that we can't match them to their wanted posters in the bird book. On the left we have a House Finch – I think.

After lunch we visit some of the galleries and arty shops in town. I'm petrified walking around some of these, just a minor slip and \$10,000 worth of art is broken.

Then we go for coffee at the "Wildflower Bread Company". Last time we were in Sedona we had lunch there and met Nat and Paul, hence our house swap, this time the young guy there gives us free tea and coffee – his good deed for the day. At this rate we'll be going there every day – highly recommend it.



On the right we have the Lesser Spotted Shopper (Belthornicus Shopalot), habitat Asda, Tesco, Next.

Fantastic TV, they have "Curb Your Enthusiasm" on every weekday evening. Just one minor issue with it, they repeat the same programme every night. Really helps you get into it and beats the hell out of UK stingy repeats – unbelievable!

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[20100705 – Relaxed](#)

July 8, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Monday – Nat and Paul our hosts hit the road today, they're off to New Mexico to do two weeks volunteer work (that four letter word again) at a mission there. We're left here in Sedona in their lovely home, just look at those views.

I nip down to the coffee shop in the village, great views of the red rocks of Sedona, an infinitely deep coffee cup and free wifi. Download emails and pick up some Eastenders for Wendy.

By the time we get ready it's lunch time and it's supermarket day – joy. It's so hot we have to take a cool box half full of ice to put meats

in, otherwise the heat will get them. By now I'm really learning, park cars in shade or at least boot to the sun. Got some great bagels.

Tuesday – today we saw a cloud today on the distant horizon.

Walk down to the coffee shop, even at 08:30 it's very hot. Leisurely morning back at "home" sat just inside the garage taking in the stunning views of Courthouse (on the right is the view from the lounge) and Castle rock (on the left view from the dining room); bird watching, blue jay keeps sweeping down and nicking the peanuts, while Daddy quail keeps a watchful eye over his family; coffee;



reading; pick a few fresh plums off just one of the fruit trees in the garden, there is also a peach tree but unfortunately they are not ready to harvest, grapes, strawberries and lots of lettuce.

After lunch we drive into Sedona. The library has books, DVD's and wifi, then it's a walk around Sedona, a merchandising feast you can hardly move for tee shirts.

Now I think we're all aware of the vast open spaces in America and the land of opportunity that encourages small businesses. Two businesses I found fascinating, Santa Land in the middle of the desert – now closed down; adult books and movies (no I didn't nip in to check, but if anyone wants the location just email me). Amazing both of these businesses on the main highway in the middle of nowhere!



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[20100703 – 3rd July Celebrations](#)

July 6, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – CBS day. After a typical Comfort Suites all American "hot" breakfast – fresh waffles of course – we set off for a visit to Flagstaff. Nowhere to park but it soon becomes apparent why.



Now I guess most are a tad confused by the title. No wonder we couldn't park, we'd run into the 4th July parade. I'm confused, isn't it the 3rd? Wendy's not seen Eastenders for 3 days so she's no idea what day it is. Is this an age thing? No it seems that they couldn't wait and decided to have their parade early. Anyway we're lucky and catch about three quarters of it. Boy it's a big one. 2 hours later the last stragglers finish the parade.

It was good to see the Brits (can I say that or is it politically incorrect – am I bothered) in the parade, dressed in old Red Coat uniforms and firing off a real musket every 50 yards – that sure rattled your teeth and woke everyone up. Are we taking this country back? It's a fascinating mix of floats, everything from old tractors; old cars; political protestors; dancers; bands; people touting for political office; judges touting for votes through to the inevitable gay pride.

Then we drive down Oak Creek Canyon, somewhat tortuous but what stunning scenery. This road then opens out to the awesome Red Rocks of Sedona, we'd both forgot how beautiful it is down here –

breathhtaking.

Finally arrive at our house swap. Wow! The place is fantastic, like most things in America it's massive and has everything you could possibly need. There's fresh plums just waiting to be picked and other home grown veg, more colourful birds than you can identify quickly, none of your common birds either. The views from the lounge are awesome. It's a real home from home. Our hosts Nat and Paul are there to greet us, we're instantly made to feel at home and it's as if we've known them for years. If this is house swapping then it's amazing that all us "silver shufflers" aren't doing it.

Sunday – CBS day yet again. From now on I'm not going to bother boring you and wasting ink on the weather, I'll let you know when it's not a hot CBS day.

Paul takes me a drive around the area to point out all the places of interest; the hide aways known only by the locals; best restaurants, especially Mexican; the best bagels; the best sandwich shops; cafes and those all-important wifi cafes.



Then we're all off to the rodeo☺. Have a great lunch on the way and arrive just in time for the start and get plum parking positions. What can I say about the rodeo, it's just action packed, especially the bull riding which is immediately supported by a blood wagon pulling up just in case – didn't notice any ambulance chasing solicitors though. Fortunately there's ONLY one casualty. How these guys survive is a mystery, I bet they can't get health care insurance. The place is packed and the atmosphere is electrifying.



After the rodeo we go to an old saloon for a drink – any minute now Wyatt Earp, John Wayne or Steve McQueen (they actually shot one of his films in her) is going to burst through the swing doors for shot of red eye.

Of course Wendy's managed to sniff out yet another market – joy. Paul and I dutifully follow in Nat and Wendy's wake.

Finding a place for dinner isn't as easy as usual as it is now truly the 4th, but we get to a great US diner "Trader Joes" – fantastic atmosphere, shakes and burgers – beats stingy French gourmet food portions anytime.

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[20100701 – Las Vegas Again](#)

July 5, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday – clear blue sky CBS and very hot 106F. We're up bright and early due to body clock revolt. Breakfast at 06:00, is this a holiday.

Never mind we'll have a relaxing day just a gentle stroll along the top of the strip. Then some genius with more trainers than brains suggest we lunch at the Venetian, it's not much further. Four hours walking later we get back from our leisurely stroll! At 106F Wendy's wilting badly in this heat. At breakfast she was wanting to come back and have 2 full days here ☹; by the end of our marathon she's decided "let's not come here again"☺.

In the evening we take a short leisurely stroll to Mandalay Bay for the all you can eat buffet dinner – gluttons for punishment, never mind the food.

Friday – CBS day. We drive over to Flagstaff, Arizona. A mere 260 miles, takes 5 hours thanks to the Hoover dam security. Now just remember we're in USA, where they never seem to employ 1 person when 2 or more can do; or when a sign or other labour saving device will do. It takes 50 minutes to do the last 4 miles before the Hoover dam. Why because of a so called security check. 50 minutes for someone to smile and say

“have a nice day sir” at least they smiled, or were they laughing? I wouldn’t mind there were two of them. I think the second one must have been a supervisor making sure he said it right. Of course had they split the traffic into two lanes and each stretched their vocal cords to say “have a nice day sir” then the queue could have been halved – another letter to Obama needed.

The rest of the journey is very pleasant even if we do see some clouds and have all of 10 seconds of rain.

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[20100630 – Q, Q, Q, Q, Q, Q](#)

July 2, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – Escape at last, but to be fair the weather in the UK for the last week or so has been pretty, pretty, pretty good.

How can the airports create so many queues. 5 queues to board a plane. It’s just misery. Have they never heard of process re-engineering? They, the growing security check industry, are just screwing flying right back into the dark ages. New threat = new check / inconvenience added. No-one ever removes the check. Look at Manchester airport. Because a car crashed into a Scottish airport they have now put massive barriers in front of the terminal and created drop off hell. Surely there is a simpler solution rather than a knee jerk reaction.

Then you get the silly questions as you board the plane “since you came through security have you purchased anything other than from the airport shops?”! No-one has yet been able to explain to me how you could do such a thing.

Manchester to Philadelphia with US Airways. Kneecaps and elbows in your mouth and for godsake don’t try and read a newspaper – not much leg room – cabin crew especially recruited for their miserable demeanour – heaven forbid they smile. But compared to the airport it’s just sheer heaven.

Then at Philly – cream cheese capital I think, someone buy them a new bell – the queues for customs are worse than then a dole office queue from the 1960’s. The one consolation is that the queues for US residents are just as bad. Yet another letter to Obama – does you want visitors?

Flight to Las Vegas with US Airways is great, plenty of leg room and staff who know how to smile.

Then we have the taxi from the airport. 1.7 miles to the hotel and this jester manages to clock up 4.6 miles. I keep asking why we are circling the airport like a aircraft in the landing stack; Wendy says oh leave it; bill comes to \$23; I suggest we renegotiate or I complain to licensing authority; he accepts \$15; Wendy cringes; grumpy old Brits strike one for customer power; I’m still tempted to rat him out to licensing authorities.

Hotel – Desert Rose Resort – is just great. We’re not to enamoured with our room, not sunny enough. Point out that coming from the UK we’ve not seen the sun for 6 months. No problem change room with sunny balcony and view of the Hooters pool – no they’re not topless☺. Staff all smile and are friendly and 30 minutes into our stay we get a call to check if everything is ok and to our liking. So for £45 a night we get a 1 bedroom suite, with lounge, dining area and full kitchen; free wifi☺; free breakfast; free happy 2 hours each evening☺ and staff who are pleasant and helpful. Perhaps it’s all down to a slogan on their white board “going above and beyond”. If you go to Las Vegas remember Occams razor – “it is vain to do with more than that which you can do with less” – and stay at this place. It’s 1 block off the strip – a real blessing. We’ve stayed at a suite in the Luxor and this place is so much better at a fraction of the price.

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[20100530 – Departure](#)

June 5, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – yet another blue sky day but we’re leaving.

Drive up to just North of Cahors. Once we've left the coast the clouds come in followed by the rain.

In the evening have a great bottle of Cahors wine very rich and heavy, but I'm worried it won't travel so well once opened so I have to finish the bottle off.

I'm starting to worry that I'm a gene missing. I've noticed at home and on all these camp sites that the male of the species seems obsessed with barbecuing. It seems a predominantly male thing that once the sun comes out, guys who don't even know where their kitchen is never mind how to use the cooker, suddenly dash out, fire up the barbecue and then spend hours turning beef burgers and sausage into charcoal, whilst turning themselves into the human equivalent of a smoked kipper. What is this fascination? Is it some long lost caveman thing? Anyway I don't think I've got this gene in my DNA. Should I be worried? Is there some obscure evolutionary stable strategy operating – pity I ever read that “Selfish Gene” book.

Monday – grey skies. Drive up to the Loire Valley site, rain all the way until we get to the Loire valley and then we get the sunshine.

This is a great site just south of Tours. It's a field. Pitch where you want, there's only 18 of them, and none of them are marked out. Good clean facilities. In the middle of nowhere, yet we have the whole of the Loire valley to explore. Very, very relaxing, which coming from someone so relaxed is a massive endorsement. Dinner out on the patio with a glorious end to the day.

Tuesday – grey skies and rain. Sort out and clean the caravan ready for our return to UK. We're leaving it here.

Yet another fault develops, the water heater blows the main circuit breaker on site – worrying thing is it doesn't trip my RCD – so much for protection against electrocution if I stick my fingers in the socket. End of the world, we've no hot water other than 3 amp kettle or use gas – heaven forbid. Fortunately the gypsy caravan engineer (superb idea) is coming our way and should be able to fix it for us whilst we're back in the UK. That's 31 faults in 3 years on the Bailey CARAVAN FROM HELL. Never mind “vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord” nor “the mek shall inherit...”, I want retribution – walls on roundabouts in the South could be useful! Meanwhile I'm working on a standard boiler plate complaint letter to make complaining easier.

Just when I thought I'd escaped all the markets of Southern France – my chosen Mastermind subject – some women with more mouth than sense tells Wendy of a market in the local town tomorrow – joy.

Wednesday – grey skies and drizzle – yes they even have that English curse over here. However worst still is yet another market in the nearest town, Loches. Now this place must be the retirement capital of France. I'm no true market officiating but even I recognized that the clothes stalls seemed to be hawking clothes from the equivalent of a 1920 Oxfam shop. The café is teeming with life, well almost life, just full of silver shufflers and us. Loches is a charming little town.

Then its back to the caravan to prepare it ready for summer storage here. By tea time the weather has yet again picked up, as has the wine with a fantastic Cahors Malbec all for the princely sum of e3.25 a bottle.

Thursday – clear blue sky and to add insult to injury it's forecast for the next 3 days. Meanwhile we leave the caravan and drive up to Boulogne Sur Mer where we seek out some overnight accommodation. We're determined not to stay in a plastic hotel so we seek out somewhere with a bit of French charm – is that an oxymoron. Bring back Basil Fawlty he'd be the Alan Sugar of the French Hotel industry. We find a nice looking place on the coast; price seems good; according to the sign they have vacancies; what they don't have though is staff; the hotel (note the word hotel) is closed until 18:00 – unbelievable, well perhaps not in this thriving hot bed of entrepreneurial vigor.

Finally find a hotel / bar / restaurant that looks ok and is actually open. Book in for the night E42 – not bad eh – it's clean, comfortable and has an onsite restaurant, bar and some character. Although the church bells are a distinct threat to a good nights sleep. The concrete bell tower is the worst eyesore and monstrosity I've ever seen, enough to put even the most devout Christian off religion.

Evening meal is a sanguine reminder that life over here is just not to be rushed. Do they not appreciate that 2 hours is a long while for a couple married 39 years to survive a 3 course meal in one another's company without a laptop, newspaper or iPhone – we even had to talk to one another☹.

French fire regulations are just amazing. It's that busy that we're offered the choice of any table in the restaurant, mind you if we wanted to sit at the table blocking the emergency fire exit we had to be prepared, and fit enough, to remove the table, four chairs and force open the fire door in the event of an emergency.

Friday – yet another blue sky day. After a typical French breakfast of crumbs and jam we're off to the tunnel. What a slick operation it all is.

Arrive to clear blue skies in the UK and of course the usual hell on the roads, 3 major road works; 3 traffic jams; 6 inches off my brake pads coping with the usual stop start. Then by the time we get to Belthorn it's cloudy. If you have to drive the empty, lonely French auto routes are the way to do it. In 8 weeks we've driven over 2,000 miles and not encountered any major hold ups or serious road works. It's so much more relaxing. What a pity my SLK can't tow!

Well it's goodbye to France for 9 weeks. We'll miss it and I'm sure we'll miss the weather, although at least Belthorn does not suffer from the Tremontane or the Mistral. We'll also miss the bread and cheese, but at least I've enough French wine to help me cope with the British weather and roads.

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[20100524 – What A Great Life](#)

May 31, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – another blue sky day.

Lazed around the caravan and then had a bike ride into Argeles. All of France was there. It seems it's another holiday and the place is heaving, another foretaste of France in August – awful.



After 3 attempts I've finally finished the "Selfish Gene", good job really as the book is falling to pieces after so many aborted attempts. Well worth the read. "Universe In a Nutshell" now and then the "Blind Watchmaker".

Meanwhile talking of books our neighbour is avidly reading and making copious notes from a book on Hamster keeping, and I'm reading a book with the imaginative title of "How to Fossilise Your Hamster", complete with picture of fossilised hamster on the front.

Not exactly the best way to improve anglo-european relations – mind you it's not suggesting you murder your hamster, merely use a naturally deceased hamster!

Tuesday – another blue sky day.

Joy of joys there's a market in St Cyprien so we have a nice long bike ride, walk around yet another market with all the stallholders ready to personally greet us, followed by coffee.

Has anyone noticed that all the stalls selling wallets and belts, on all the markets, in all the towns we've visited are always run by very black geezers (can I really say that – who gives a politically correct fig leaf). Is it some sort of Mafia deal? Have they given up being Lookee, Lookee men? Why?

Has anyone noticed the extreme level of incompetence of every organisation that has a call centre. I seem to spend a large percentage of my time chasing up cock-ups created by the call centre myth. I'm just so fed up with it. Of 8 call centres I've dealt with in the past few months 6 of them have screwed up. Nothing ever gets done right first time, it takes at least 2 attempts and quite often 4 or more. I want retribution, never

mind waiting for the Lord to strike the call centres down. No one gives a dam anymore. I'm trying a new ploy of complaining at the highest level possible, asking for compensation, attack their Facebook sites with the facts and exploit their complaints procedure. I think I'll develop a boilerplate complaints letter for those really awkward Companies that insist on putting your complaint in writing – just another ploy to keep down the number of complaints.

Wednesday – another blue sky day.

Gluttons for punishment we give Collioure another try. At least we can park and yet another market. It's a lovely relaxing town – once you manage to park. Have coffee on the beach, complete with free floorshow from the topless bathers.



In the evening we go mad and go out for a meal. Such a rare event for us that we carefully research the best restaurant, but in true French couldn't give a dam style there's a sign saying they can't be bothered to open tonight. Instead we end up at a Michelin recommended place and have probably one of the best 6 course meals we've ever had and not too expensive.

Thursday – sun and cloud. We head into Perpignan to try and buy the elusive Olive Wood cheese board.

It's really my lucky day, the whole of France has decided to come to Perpignan to demonstrate about changes to pension age, anything beats working, typical French. Of course the communists are out in full force, I thought they were obsolete but they must all be living the life of Riley here in France. One demonstrator comes up to me and jabbars away – incomprehensible, obviously never done the Teach Yourself French course – I explain that I'm going to start a counter demonstration for freedom of movement. The whole place is gridlocked. Bloody typical. Freedom of expression and the right to demonstrate, what about my freedom to go about my daily business unobstructed. No wonder they're building so many walls on the roundabouts.



Meanwhile our previous years impression of Perpignan is confirmed, best avoided. We end up walking through one of the more seedy areas, it's a miracle that we didn't get our throats cut, judging by the many Halal meat shops there is plenty of expertise around. For the first time ever Wendy walked at a reasonable, nay even sprightly pace, hopping and skipping over the dog muck whilst clinging to her handbag for all her worth. Apart from Montpeiller most of the towns down here are only marginally better than Blackburn – how bad can that be?

Friday – cloud and rain.

By lunch time the sun has crept through and we drive down to Elne to have a look around. It's claim to fame is that Hanibal stopped off here with his elephants and apart from a few dwindling piles of elephant dung and a very pretty church / cloister which charges to pray, there is nothing to recommend it.



Day ends on a high note with a lovely evening and it's wine and dinner out on the patio.

Have now finished all the "Curb your enthusiasm" programmes. Sad. Really missing them, they take some getting into but by now we're hooked.

Saturday – all back to normal clear blue skies.

Meanwhile Germany's closed, they've all descended on this campsite, there must only be that Merkle woman left single handedly running the country. At the crack of dawn they're all dashing off to the pool; Reinheit Gebot quality beer bellies hanging over and hiding their speedos; get that towel on a sun lounger or die trying, not that they've any intention of using the lounger; it's just the territorial imperative; a special gene developed over millions of years that favours those who can commandeer the most sun loungers, a bit like the alley cat spraying urine over its territory. Seems to me drying towels on a washing line would be so much simpler, what's more you don't have to get up so early.

What is this obsession in France with Speedos. Why? Was it introduced by some French hairy arm pitted lesbian feminist who wants all men to look such dicks? It can't be on decency grounds as the privacy of toilets in France mitigates against that. Allegedly it's on health grounds, so perhaps crunched up, sweaty dicks and goolies are cleaner than free rain appendages! I do hope they realize that keeping goolies cool is essential to good quality, high mobility sperm. Perverse!

Cycle into the market – yes yet another – to try and buy the elusive olive wood cheese board, but not a one in sight.

Take the awning down without a single cross word – marital bliss. Should put the awning up and take it down every day to increase marital harmony.

After lunch we cycle into Argeles to look at the display of Earth photos on the promenade, they are truly fantastic. Then it's dinner on the patio again.

By the way kids it's Mothering Sunday here this weekend, that's two this year – presents and cards can wait until Mum gets home☺.

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[20100518 – Argeles-sur-Mer](#)

May 25, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – waken to a glorious blue sky day and no wind.

It's breakfast on the patio, followed by a lazy morning. After lunch we go for a bike ride into Argeles-sur-Mer. Proper cycle paths all the way, none of your cheap and cheerful dotted white lines. Argeles is a pleasant

seaside town, but I imagine in August it would be teeming and not quite so attractive. We stop for drinks on the sea front. Yes, I have sinned, broke one of the three rules of retirement – drinking alcohol during the day – but it was so hot and a beer was just great. Then after a stroll along the shops we ride back along the beach front – lovely.

Can you believe it, a sun tanning studio on the sea front – mind you it was closed. Now I believe it was George Bush who said the French had no word for entrepreneur, well he may have been wrong about the word but he was right in spirit, they, the French that is, certainly are not a nation of entrepreneurs.



I can now understand why nearly all the campsites around here are shaded with trees, they need it to temper the heat, but it certainly makes getting East Enders difficult on satellite.

Wednesday – another blue sky day but still the ever present Tremontane. Fortunately our pitch is very well sheltered from the wind.

Wendy's really excited as there's a market in the village – joy. We have a pleasant bike ride into the village and wander around yet another market. We sit having a coffee and people watch. Then at 12:00 the church bell sounds its call to the faithful. I don't think we've ever seen the French move en-mass so quickly. Before the bells have finished sounding 12:00 they're all packing up their stalls, just like Rodney and Dell boy when the police are coming. Tough luck for anyone pondering a purchase – they're off for lunch.

In the afternoon we do the weekly shop – two highs in one day, how lucky can one get.

Never mind in the evening I grit my teeth and test another bottle of wine. It's so good I have to finish the bottle just to ensure that the bit at the bottom of the bottle is as good as the top – definitely one for home.

Thursday – blue sky and Tremontane yet again. Not a market in site. Leisurely morning around the caravan.

While talking of national characteristics I'm dismayed at our language skills. Nearly everyone we meet from Europe, apart from the French of course, speak very good English. We really should be embarrassed at our language education.

Friday – yet another blue sky day.

It's breakfast on the patio, then a bike ride down to the port for coffee and people watching. There seems to be two distinct species, the silver shufflers (that's for them that have hair); pensioners who stroll leisurely around; stop for coffee / lunch / rest at every opportunity; dressed in 2nd hand cast offs from an Oxfam shop; casting the ever critical eye on young jobs; watching the world go by and have trouble remembering why the other species are rushing. Then there are the strutting workers; employed, going about their daily bread winning in order to fund our pay as you go pensions; striding around with purpose; laptops on their backs; handbags for both sexes (worrying); phones araldited to their ears.

After lunch we decide to tempt the Tramontane and risk divorce. We put the awning up. All done in record time; not a single curse or swear word; and we're still talking to one another☺. It's my best erection so far!

Dinner and a crap bottle of wine on the patio.

Saturday – yet another blue sky day. But the French geezers in Tourist Info shacks are determined to make my life a misery publishing market details. Yipee there's one in Carnet, how lucky can I get☺.

Carnet is lovely despite the market. At least I manage to track down a dozen bottles of wine I wanted for home☺. Wendy buys a pump action wash brush for the car / caravan, very clever. I suppose that means car /caravan washing may become a topic in the next few days☺.

How come the French have such stunning roundabouts (those you drive around). They are truly fantastic. Everything from floral displays; zen rock gardens; mini-vineyards; fountains; and not to forget a range of different styles of wall – suitable for you know what!



Meanwhile Wendy's doing her Dr Spock impression, chunnering away to herself – modern parents; no idea – as she observes a battle of wits between German parents and their 1 year old who has taken root on the lawn; crying; determined he's not going with them. Parents walk off and leave him, but don't quite have the balls to walk out of site. It's a real showdown. After 15 minutes Kinder rules ok – that's it, he's in control from now.

Sunday – yet another blue sky day.

It's a national holiday today. Yes even though it's Sunday. Amazing that the French always have their bank holidays on the date irrespective of the day, so they miss out on a day off work for 2/7ths of bank holidays –



can you believe it, where were the bloody minded unions when that was agreed?

Drive out to the market at Collioure. Well at least attempt to. Big mistake. The whole of France, complete with rat on lead, is driving into this village and there's no parking. Finally find the last spot in Collioure, squeeze my tank into it only to find that it's a disabled slot. By now the car parks grid locked. I've had enough so we return back to camp. If this is what it's like in May I don't even want to contemplate the hell on earth of August, makes Belthorn seem attractive.



It becomes another lazy day apart from a bike ride into Argeles to watch a display of Catalan dancers. All free and very colourful and entertaining.

This campsite is lovely but it does seem to operate a scorched arse policy. Go to the toilets after midday and you're sure to end up with a circular burn all around your backside as the black toilet seats have been sunbathing, just like a demented Brit. Could this be why there are hardly any toilet seats in France?

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[20100514 – Tramontane](#)

May 18, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – sunny day but Tramontane is blowing 20mph. Ride out to Leucate. Arrive just after the village fete, with stilt walkers, is finishing. Looks like we missed a real treat. Perhaps if we hang around until after lunch – 3 hours – we'll get a repeat showing.

Sit in the village rectangle having a coffee and now getting fruit teas right. Has anyone noticed how when you sit down in a restaurant you suddenly seem to become invisible. All these scientists working on invisibility cloaks need to study the evolution of the eyeball of the average French waiter, I'm sure it holds the answer.

Then we visit Port-La-Nouvelle, what a waste of time. Drive back through Bages, nothing but very narrow hilly streets.

Saturday – clear blue skies yet again but yes you guessed it the Tremontane is still stalking us. But never mind it's market day in Gruissan, the nearest village to us, on the coast, what a relief I was just getting withdrawal symptoms. All very colourful and at last I find a dry sausage seller – yet another great feature of the French way of life. 4 dry sausages for E10, plenty of different flavours, but I give the donkey sausage a miss.

Sunday – sunny with some clouds again and of course the Tremontane is simmering.



Drive down to Argeles sur mer to view the various campsites. I've really set my heart on this place as it seems ideal for the next two weeks and it's the last area down here we've not properly explored. We're so glad we came down to view as out of 10 campsites visited we loose the will to live. Most of the campsites are very shaded / treey, whereas we prefer open / sunny (not surprising as we never seem to see the sun in Belthorn). Not a single one has wifi on pitch – how do people cope? Finally find one on the beach, good mixture of shade and sun, massive pitches but the price, it'd be cheaper to stay at the Ritz, E26 a day – unbelievable.

Monday – same as yesterday. After 2 weeks at Les Mimosa we strike camp and move on. It's been a great site, massive pitches; wifi on pitch; quiet; a bit remote but not a real

problem; great value for money. Just a pity the area suffers with the Tramontane which, makes the Mistral seem like the draft from a butterfly's wings.

Arrive at that expensive site La Soleil – who said I'm tight. Finally grit my teeth and go for it, at least there's free wifi around the purpose built computer room. It seemed a shame to miss out this area and as we only pass this way once – at least until someone puts up a giant wind break to stop the Tramontane.

Arrive to glorious blue skies, the trees on the site seem to tame the Tramontane and what little breeze there is provides a welcome cooling.

After an aborted pitch we finally set up next to the sand dunes. Don't bother with that damn awning as Tramontane is forecast to continue stalking us for the next few days. But it's that warm and sheltered we dine out on our patio.

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[20100506 – We Survived The Tramontane](#)

May 14, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday – cloudy and we've still got the tail end of the Tramontane, but by lunch time we're back to normal and we get some sunshine. But we survived it, 88 MPH winds and all, in fact we're thinking of having Tee Shirts printed. We've also been offered free membership of the Tramontane survivors association. A lot luckier than some, we still have an awning and caravan intact. One poor Brit who I spoke to had to take a Stanley knife to his awning in the middle of the night.

Anyway it's weekly shop day and because Narbonne probably takes the prize for the most confusing city in France I have to go ☹.

Now I don't know whether it's the Tramontane that is lowering my tolerance to the French way to Wendy's level but we encountered some pearls today, worthy of starring in a John Cleese customer service video. Queues while Hostess and Servers prattle around doing a spot of cleaning, or discussing their latest sexual encounters with boyfriends! Pricing errors that still no one had bothered to correct from our last visit. I wanted to vote with my feet and leave a full trolley. In future I think I'll become more vocal, even with my poor French.

Anyone guess what the picture on the right is? It's an ancient sign warning tourists not to bother staying around here as it's too windy. It's not yet been adopted by the EU, nor is it in my European road atlas, but rest assured that unlike fog signs on our motorways this is 100% reliable. Actually it's a common form of bell tower built on top of churches in France where it is either very windy and would cause the tower to fall, or they ran out of stone.



Friday – a sunny day at last.

Spend the morning listening to the crap from back home on the election and sorting out the awning, preferable to listening to the sleazeballs from back home. Good to see Brown is still trying to hang onto power, all in the best public interest of course.



After lunch we have a great bike ride down to Gruissan on the coast. Wendy winging all the way, but she did manage to ride up all of the inclines (note the word, they were not hills no matter what Wendy says). Lovely.

Dog muck, a problem wherever you go in France. They may only have rats on a piece of string, but they seem to produce elephant sized piles of excrement. It's every where. French attitude seems to be why bother with a poop scoop when the soles of shoes do such a good job?

Saturday – sun and cloud start to the day. We have a drive into Narbonne to mooch around and visit the Halles – yes after 6 days withdrawal symptoms have set in and we get to go to a market. Wendy is disappointed as the Halles, indoor market, only sells food.

We also come across the VE day celebrations complete with parade, marching band, army, speeches (not that we could understand much of it) and flags, including the Union flag.

After lunch it's clear blue sky and in the twenties. Big debate on whether to put the awning back up. Check weather forecast for any rumblings of the Tremontane next week and then decide to go for it. Beautiful end to the day with tea on new patio.

Sunday – grey drizzly day. Good to see the French continue to be so focused on customer service. Lets clean the toilet and showers at 08:00 in the morning, busiest time, and let's not bother opening the shop early today. Meanwhile Wendy wants to know how come the French have these special watches, you know the ones that show 12:00 at 11:50 and yet by 15:00 they are showing 14:45? She's no patience, relax – c'est la vie.

Monday – blue sky and clouds despite a crap weather forecast. Thank god we're 600 miles away from the sleaze ball horse trading going on at home.

Nice bike ride around the lake in the afternoon. Lazy sort of day.



Tuesday – another blue sky day despite the adverse weather forecast.

Drive out to Narbonne beach for a stroll along the prom, lunch and watch some fishermen unscramble their catch and nets.

After 2 years I can now order a long coffee with success and today finally managed to crack ordering fruit tea, although I was somewhat disconcerted when he offered banana flavour!

Evening TV comprises more on the election as Brown finally stops clinging onto power and resigns. Wendy's devastated as East Enders is cancelled. What is the country coming to? Is this the

sort of extreme austerity we can come to expect?

Wednesday – a grey but dry day. Weekly shop day again.

Then overnight we're besieged yet again by the bloody Tremontane. 40 mph wind gusts, child's play, but at least there's no rain. Awning survives but not without making enough noise to perforate an eardrum.

Thursday – sun and cloud sort of day, more cloud than sun. See the last of the Tremontane, but the bloody awnings coming down – I prefer a good night's sleep, without noise cancelling headphones, to a bit of shade. A caravan mounted sun shade is looking more attractive with each gust.

Now we all know that marketing people have colourful verbal Diarrhoea and are known to distort the truth somewhat, but what does "100% strong" mean?

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[20100502 – Orange Alert – The Tramontane Strikes With A Vengeance](#)

May 6, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – rain overnight and in the morning but we manage to decamp in between showers. I suppose we can't grumble as it's the first daytime rain in three weeks, almost a welcome change.

Drive from the Vaucluse (3 air kiss region) to Les Mimosas outside Narbonne in the Aude (2 air kiss region). Weather is dry and sunny all the way down. After driving over 5 potatoes fields and 3 Asparagus fields (Yuk – who gives a dam about Asparagus anyway), the satnav finally gets us to this remote site. It has some of the biggest pitches we've seen. Thankfully I have the Satnav to help me find my way around the one we're on. Site also has WiFi on pitch and although it's chargeable at least it's a strong signal and working – so far!

Monday – a grey day. Get the awning set up and settle in for a couple of weeks.

Then a storm hits in the night, torrential rain and gusts of winds up to 75 miles an hour. An Orange alert has been declared for two regions of France for the next 48 hours and we've managed to move to one of them. Apparently it's the Tramontane, similar to the Mistral, a real pain in the arse.



Tuesday – torrential rain and still gusting up to 75 miles an hour. I'd say we woke up to it being even worse than yesterday evening, but that would suggest we managed to sleep through the storm. Floating past our caravan is a big boat full of animals and with a geezer with a long beard. The pitch is totally waterlogged and the awning is giving serious cause for concern as the ground is so waterlogged the pegs are just floating away, but with the strength of the wind there is no way we can take it down. Mind you as I keep tightening the so called storm straps the awning just sinks lower into the waterlogged ground. Good news is we've only another 36 hours of this left☹.

This is the new duck pond, all we need now are some trout and a few ducks and the site can offer fishing as an activity. Now I know I'd said that after 3 weeks of sunshine a bit of rain would seem a pleasant change but this is ridiculous.

Awning finally gives up the ghost; cross polls drop out; pegs drop out; we dash out to try and stop it wrecking itself and caravan; Wendy flashes a wink at two French site geezers and between the four of us we manage to get it down in the pouring rain and gale force winds without any substantial damage – an experience, best not repeated. I've told the awning it's going straight onto eBay as soon as we get home. I'll finally get one of those roll out sun shades that only take minutes to pull out and put away. If only I'd listened to Wendy!

Then to top it all we're out of wine, so it's a trip to the supermarket – at least it's warm in car. See some stunning deals on wine; not so stunning at checkout; argue in French (big mistake really, always argue in your own language and put them on the back foot); get money back.

Thankfully aperitif time arrives and whilst a bottle of wine can't improve the weather at least it can improve your outlook.

Meanwhile Wendy's distraught, it's cold and no East Enders (satellite dish taken down before it becomes a frisbee). Wendy thinks she'll be ill next week. Is that because of the cold or no East Enders? I think it's time for a spot of "Curb Your Enthusiasm".

Wednesday – sunny with clouds, we're still on Orange alert and the Tramontane is still howling but at least it's abated.

We go and explore some of the other campsites East of here, not because we're unhappy with Les Mimosas

but ready for any future visits and possibly for the last two weeks of May. Find 2 other good sites and also nip back to Tamaris, but despite what lies they tell in the CC book they do not have "total cover" wifi like this site.

On the way out we have a very intellectual discussion on languages. Wendy is firmly of the opinion that there should only be one language and quite clearly that should be English – she will be voting BNP tomorrow no doubt. "Why English?" Well she thinks it's the most popular language, even Jesus spoke it all those years ago. "What makes you think Jesus spoke it?". "Well it says so in the bible". "Where in the bible?". "Well the bibles written in English so that's what he must have spoke." Very worrying!

Meanwhile Wendy has now accused me of being sexist. Me! Why? Well all because I gave way to a young girl. I'm totally distraught☹. How could anyone possibly think I'm sexist? It was nothing to do with her being a young girl, I did it because she had big boobs☺.

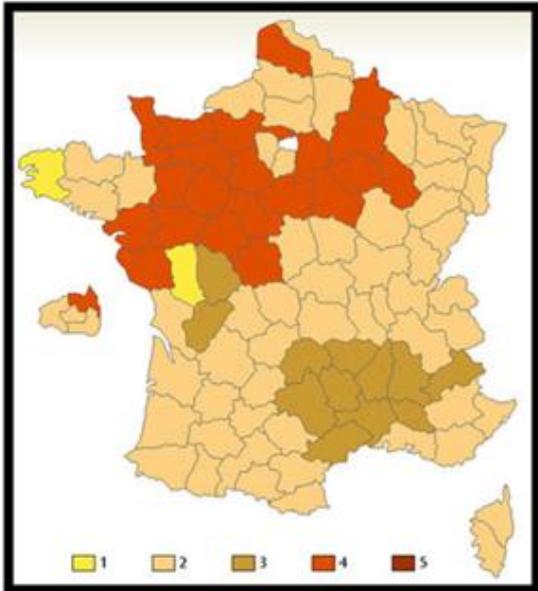
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[20100424 – Sunny Days Are We Dreaming](#)

May 3, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – yet another hot blue sky day.

As a treat for bad behaviour I get to go to another market. Really big one this time. I must admit they are fascinating. I can just see us going around Blackburn market and then sat out at a street cafe, people watching whilst listening to a typical French accordionist – charming.



As I now look like a refugee from a night ransacking a Next store I get to finish off my ensemble with a Panama hat. Keeps the sun off and stops my pate dazzling the natives.

Meanwhile I've been observing and studying this French air kissing lark – not, thank god, that I expect any French bods to have the sudden urge to air kiss me. If you look at the map on the left you can see how many times you are meant to air kiss a cheek. We're in a 3 kisser region – just think how much time is lost. For the avoidance of any doubt – as I know they have some strange customs over here – that's the cheeks on the face. Makes it all very clear but what happens if someone from a 4 kisser region meets a 3 kisser, do they not bother at all; kiss the least; kiss as per the region they're stood in; kiss the most or split the difference and kiss 3.5 times? On top of that how do you know what region they are from. Perhaps they should have the kiss count tattooed on their foreheads or

discreet dots on each cheek. Is there a regional difference with which cheek they start with?

Further complications with all this kissing as it seems there are first class friends (kissed – matter of opinion) and 2nd class (handshake – best not to be on good terms with anybody). Big question is how you know who's who and an even bigger problem for the aged is how do you remember. Perhaps you could have a list tattooed on your arm.

Monday – yet another blue sky day with breakfast on the "patio". Then we're off to visit Mont Ventoux, but as is typical in Provence we don't get more than 10 miles before we're assaulted by yet another market. By way of a change we have a wander around, by now we're on first name terms with most of the stall holders! But these markets are so colourful; with wonderful smells – apart from those dammed olives; plenty of free samples, saves on lunch; eventful and great for people watching. This time we lash out on a street cafe complete with live guitar music whilst people watching.



Finally get up to top of Mont Ventoux but they haven't bothered clearing the snow on the North side, all 40 yards of it, so we can't drive down there. After Mont Ventoux we drive through the lavender fields to Sault – now there's a one bouledrome town if ever there was – dead as a dry sausage. Unfortunately the lavenders not yet in bloom so we don't



get the full visual and nasal affect. Then we drive along the Nesque Gorge. It's stunning, reckoned to be second only to the gorge de Verdon.

What a great day out. Next time we'll see whether we can set a new record and drive more than 10 miles before stumbling across yet another market.

Tuesday – yet another blue sky day. Plan is to have a lazy day with an afternoon bike ride and avoid any markets. 30C on the “patio”. We ride into Montoux. Why? Well like a mountain it was there. For a small town it sure has a lot of sports facilities but not much else to recommend it. I manage to loose Wendy, but given the differences in speeds we cycle at that's not unusual. I end up with a permanent crick

in the neck looking back to see where she is.

Then it's back for afternoon tea on the “patio” and at last I'm within 10 pages of finishing the slowest book ever, “A Man In Full” by Tom Wolfe. I don't know what it is about this book; it's not that bad I abandon it; in fact it's quite good but has taken me nearly 6 weeks to read, even longer than “Seven Pillars Of Wisdom”, now that was a slog.

Our Geranium, mosquito deterrent, is starting to flourish. That's my belated wedding anniversary present to Wendy (3E don't anyone ever think I'm tight). I would have bought it on our anniversary, but out of consideration I didn't want to embarrass her by being the only one to buy a present – truth is the age thing (memory) struck and I think I forgot.

But now it's aperitif time. 3rd bottle of Coteaux D'Aix-En-Provence, all under E4, but regrettably none of them up to the usual standard of this great fruity appellation. Oh well the trials I endure.

Wednesday – yet another BSD.

Now I know I bang on a lot about how fortunate we are, but as we were sat having lunch I really started to sum up in my own mind what I was missing by not working. Yes I could have had the pleasure of the cut and thrust of the monthly board meeting; watching the stilettos slither in between the shoulder blades; listening to the endless sycophantic reiteration of what the MD had just said; 8 hours meeting when 1 would have done; or doing a yet another interactive power point presentation extolling the virtues of our Alarm Receiving Centre to a potential national customer, complete with ARC tour and small talk lunch; or worst still, visiting my largest national customer to explain why someone in the call centre just hadn't bothered to call the police; or trying to debug some program code; or meeting with Human Remains to figure out how to get shut of the operator who couldn't be bothered to call the police; or figuring out how I could screw more out of the 70,000 loyal small customers because the National customers are too big and powerful and want everything for nothing. And yet I used to relish every day!



Instead what am I doing? Well I'm sat on the banks of the river Gard, in the shadow of the 2000 year old Pont Du Gard, having a lunch of fresh fruit considering in minute detail how fortunate I am to have exited the rat race and thinking about the guys who designed this magnificent edifice. Do you think for one moment they ever thought that 2000 years later people would be coming to marvel at it?

Afterwards we go around the museum. What a fantastic display.

Then it's back for a relaxing dinner of bread, cheese and wine on the patio. How fortunate can we be!



Oh and we set a new record today. 28 miles and not a market in site.

Last night the frogs (proper frogs not Napoleons descendents) were in full croaky voice and I'm sure those on the pitches furthest from us would not have got a moments sleep with the row they were making.

Thursday – yet another BSD. Weekly shopping day, fortunately Wendy troupes off on her own, while I do some French, reading the news about Gordon Browns stupid outburst. Just another lazy day, plenty of French and plenty reading. After the midday sun I set off for a bike ride around the region and pick up yet another kilo of fresh strawberries on the way back. The two ladies at the roadside stall were most impressed with my plastic ASDA shopping bag.

For aperitif time we (well actually I) have a St Emilion Grand Cru, way over my usual budget but courtesy of my spendthrift wife – special offer at Lidl. Meanwhile Wendy's screaming. Why? Merely because our tea, a rabbit, still has it's head on and the eye is staring at her and no one bothered to take its false teeth out – modern women! When I was a lad rabbits came complete with a snare around their neck; fur coat; gizzards; teeth; eyes; were free; very tasty and sometimes still warm.

Friday – grey with occasional sun. Drive down to Cavaillon. Well we all make mistakes. No photos, couldn't find anything worth photographing.

Saturday – sun and clouds, but thankfully no rain. Disaster strikes, the free WiFi is down. They try the usual TOTO but to no avail. Told that there is no one on the hotline, it's a bank holiday weekend – yet another – and no one is in☹. Obviously not heard of 24 * 7 support contracts. Have a walk into Pernes... and mooch around the market, followed by coffee and some more people watching.

Take the awning down, no WiFi so we're off. We were going to stay until Tuesday but vote with my feet. Mind you have to say it is a great site, very quite and secluded pitch. Best to avoid the area around reception though as the frogs chorus after dark is deafening.

In the evening we try the restaurant, a good choice but it's all microwave meals reheated. Wendy is not impressed.

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20100419 -Provence

April 24, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – another blue sky day. A pleasant drive down to a site in Graveson, complete with the usual gay lorry drivers who continue with their attempts to get me up their exhaust pipes.

Arrive on site and it's 25c, fantastic. Set up and then nip out to get some bread and cheese. I'm trusted with the mission of buying bread, promotion at last. Then it's bread, cheese and wine for tea – fantastic☺. Now I know we've arrived.

Tuesday – rain overnight but by 10 it's clear blue sky again. Drive up to a site at Pernes les Fontaines. As usual site is closed for a 3 hour lunch. Of course they don't open at 15:00 as stated but shuffle back from lunch around 15:15. Now I know I've arrived as I sat on the balcony; relaxed; playing Soduku; not a swear word in site; no voting with my feet; no suggestion of a line up against the wall. Yes, definitely getting into the French way – where's Victor gone? Of course the real acid test would be to deal with a bwanker.

Back to site for afternoon coffee sat out on the patio and await the French aperitif hour – 17:00 – before starting on yet another excellent bottle.



Wednesday – another blue sky day but today it's spoilt by vapour trails, yes they're flying again. Leisurely French breakfast – croissants etc – and then set off to our next campsite at Pernes les Fontaines, I think there are a lot of fountains in the village (40).

The site has free Wifi everywhere (keeps nerds happy and in touch with the world); beautiful site; open and good sized pitches; very quiet; it all looks fairly new; restaurant and pool open in May. We're set up now after record time with the awning and not a divorce court in site. I think Wendy's here for life, well at least two weeks.

In the evening we sit out on the patio having an aperitif (17:00 hour plus) followed by dinner – very French.

Meanwhile the weather has been just stunning. Mind you coming from the UK we're easily impressed.

Thursday – another warm blue sky day. Have a bike ride into the local town and do the 1 hour walking tour. 40 fountains but the tourist info really are stretched trying to make this place compete with even Blackburn – but at least they've tried. Like most French towns it seems full of flower shops (even open over lunch); hairdressers (always open); bread shops (sometimes open); noisy yobs on motor bikes (escaped from Cote d'azur); dog muck; supermarkets that stink; zebra crossings used as car parks or as pedestrian target practice; but most unusual not a lawn mower shop anywhere.

Well it's bread and cheese yet again – blessed are the poor – but a little wine also helps.

Friday – a grey day but at least it's warm. I've survived nearly two weeks in France without a cross word or; blood boiling, but after just 1 hour online sorting out banks and building societies I'm foaming at the mouth. Why are they so bloody incompetent and annoying? More passwords than my hard disc can store; stupid arbitrary phrases and keywords such as “my favourite film” – god knows, I can't even remember what I watched last night; type in 8th, 4th 3rd etc, mental gymnastics at our age; every other time you log on they change something, move the goalposts or expect you to download megabytes of new code (when I was a lad programs took up 16k); stupid emails that tell you to click on “view statements” and there is no such option. It really is about time there was a day of customer revenge. I'd vote with my feet but they're all so bad.



Meanwhile I've just been observing French workmen in action – is that an oxymoron? They start fitting a new toilet, then at 12:00 promptly down tools, no doubt to stuff themselves with the traditional 3 hour lunch. Leaving the job half done of course and being Friday afternoon do they bother to come back? What do you think – answers to that Apache helicopter geezer at the French government. Oh well “c'est la vie”, let's see what Monday brings – anything is better than bwankers.



Never mind I've got the weekly shop with Wendy to look forward to☺. After the banks, it worries me to say it, but it will seem an absolute pleasure – Lidl here I come☺.

Oh and whilst I'm having a computer rant why is it that in France sending emails from Outlook is always such an issue. Is this some form of tourist censorship because they're frightened we're going to tell the rest of the world how it is. If anyone wants a solution then I have yet another magic incantation that will get your message out over the luminiferous ether.

Saturday – a watery sunny day and 21c at breakfast time. Cycle into Pernes... for the Saturday market; warm; sunny; samples of bread, cheese, sausage and some ground up stuff made from olives – sill tastes disgusting; all very charming. This is the life, no wonder the French shop at their markets. Then in the afternoon we cycle down to the roadside strawberry seller, a kilo of really luscious strawberries for E5 – fantastic. So let's just sum up the day sun; warm; no need for car; relaxing; reading; study a bit of French; drink a little, or a lot, of a great wine; escape election fever; NO WORK – this is the life. How fortunate we are.

20100413 – Escape At Last

April 18, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – set off on the long haul down to Dover, 300 miles at 52 mph it's purgatory. Boring and very stressful; too much traffic; road works everywhere, 8 major and I lost count of the minor. Judging by the number of roadworks in the UK you would think we had no unemployment, but the majority of the roadworks are silent and unmanned, perhaps they are self repairing. Weather is brilliant sunshine but it's freezing and I have to don my North Face fleece.

We've seen the rise of the cones, they're everywhere, but now we seem to be experiencing the obsession with Hi-Vis jackets. Yes they're a good idea where appropriate. But does everyone need one? Of course there's a whole pecking order now. Lowly workers and drivers in Europe don the cheap and cheerful scummy bright yellow, while those higher up the pecking order don bright green and of course the real upper crust / management elite wear bright orange. When will bright blue and regal purple emerge?

Wednesday – early ferry and after a pleasant crossing we are “abroad”. It must be France as there's holes in the ground they call toilets. First blog and first winge about the sanitary arrangements, I'll try to resist any more.

Drive further than we'd planned which saves us a day's overnight. Roads are nearly as boring as UK, but at least there is no stress, so little traffic. Anyway I've come up with a new idea for caravanning. Wendy tows the caravan and I set off a week later in the SLK, with the roof down of course and my Biggles flying helmet and goggles, and catch her up at the final destination ☺.

In the evening we nip to the local supermarket for some wine. When we're parking up this strange geezer with a plastic box full of old batteries in his hand stares at us. Get out the car and he shuffles over, he's either on the scrounge, for more batteries; xenophobic Gaullist and wants us out of his beloved country; or escaped. He starts ranting on in French, as they do, except he's rambling about a friend in England and coupons? Now is a great time to play the Englishmen abroad card “no understandee, no comprehendie”. So off we set through this giant shopping plaza with this madman in tow. Now rambling about “figurer, figurer” and stroking his chin like he wants a shave. Explain I have no razor with me! Meanwhile he's asking everyone he passes if they speak English and they look at this motley crew as if we're all mad. After about 300 yards he finally finds someone who is daft enough to admit to speaking English. He explains to her and she explains to me that I look exactly like a friend of his from England, after which we are allowed to continue our shop in peace, whilst he wanders off with his box of batteries muttering to himself.

Thursday – leisurely start and a 200 mile drive down to just south of Chalon-sur-saone – Burgundy wine country. Again a very relaxing drive but I think those bloody roadworks have managed to swim the channel. The only difference is there is no hold up or congestion. Lovely weather all the way down and gradually gets warmer.

Are all lorry drivers gay? You're pottering along the motorway with your home in tow at a steady 54 mph, well within the 90kph limit, low and behold every lorry driver wants to spend ten minutes overtaking, and then cut in front so close that your nose is up their exhaust pipe. Bugger safe stopping distance.

Arrive on site which is 98% empty, so get to choose a superb pitch; set up and then sit out in the sun for afternoon coffee. Listen to the birds; feed the ducks; watch the squirrels. This is the life, thankfully 700miles away from the hullabaloo surrounding the great debate. A lovely sunny afternoon, just like home!

Friday – a lovely blue sky day, but a bit of wind keeps the temperature down. We're off to Beaune, a lovely medieval town complete with defensive wall around it and more tourist information offices than tourists. Of course it's also famous for its wine, but much too expensive for me. The best of all has to be the Hotel Dieu – the start of what was hoped to be a 14th century hotel chain – somehow the brand name never caught on, mind you I don't think they had the owner permission to use it. The roof is absolutely stunning, made of coloured ceramic tiles. It was founded after the hundred years war – sure knew how to have wars in those days – as a hospital, mainly for NHS patients. The ward in it is splendid and could even put some NHS wards to shame, in fact it was still in use up until 1971. Six euros well spent.

Oh and as usual the skinflints managed to park for free.

Saturday – break out the shorts and get the first UV of the year on them



knees. Drive up to Salon-sur-Saone for a bit of retail therapy. Need to work on the timing though as all the shops were open☺. Never mind Wendy tries on every top in Saone and then goes mad and buys one. Meanwhile she finishes kitting me out with a lightweight jacket, very trendy, I even get a say in it.

Then it's "coffee Long" on a pavement cafe with a spot of French people watching. Is it two cheeks offered (on the face of course) or three. I'm sure there are strict protocols. Even some men do it, mind you in a country where men have handbags are you surprised! This is the life.

In the town square there's a display of very old Citroen CV3's, owners pride and joy – give me a Mercedes SLK anytime, much more comfortable.

Get back to the caravan for a late lunch out on the patio and some duck feeding. Then in true French fashion I wait until 17:00 on the dot for an aperitif – well glass of wine. Meanwhile in sunny Madrid Anna is stuck in the airport because no planes are flying into the volcanic dust over the UK; very little money; all hotels booked; no space on trains; no space on buses; no flight out until Wednesday. She's in despair and very upset. Spend two hours trying to get her some transport but no chance the worlds come to a grinding halt. Man versus nature yet again and nature wins hands down. Hopefully makes us realise how puny we are.

Sunday – another day for displaying the knees. Not a cloud in the sky and not a breeze.

This is the view from our lounge window. Ducks haven't turned up for breakfast yet but the rest of the birds and wildlife are in full voice. Really makes us appreciate how fortunate we are and what a great move early retirement was. Just think I could still be working for the evil empire and be missing all of this. How can you ever put a price on it?

It's a lazy day around the caravan.



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[20100228 – Must We Leave](#)

March 4, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – sunny day so we're off cross country skiing again.

We both seem to be getting into our stride now. For the first time it was not so exhausting, getting a smooth gliding action without getting out of breath and yet seemed to be making good speed. The blue circuit seemed quite easy this time. Next year I really must do more and try skating as well as classic.



After lunch in the clubhouse we managed to watch most of the Canada v USA Olympic Hockey final. What a cracking game.

Monday – a very blue sky day so the ski bunnies out.

It's also so warm 41 F, tee shirt weather but it's not doing the snow any good. We have a good days skiing and I manage to nip off for a few runs on my own while Wendy takes in some sun. Every day up in these mountains, no matter what the weather, it just makes you feel so privileged to be here. Sadly only two more ski days left in heaven before we have to return. This place really is a home from home. Perhaps next year we may stay longer, that way the cost per day of ski passes falls dramatically.

Let's hope for some snow tonight to refresh the snow after all that sun.

Tuesday – blue sky and clouds. On the slopes by 09:00 to catch the early corduroy, worth the effort as it's quiet. By lunch time I'm pretty knackered and the slopes are somewhat the worse for yesterday's sun and heat.

In the evening we venture out to squatters, a typical roadhouse, for dinner. Proper food (quesadilla) and some local brewed beer, I just love these roadhouses and diners, but sadly there's never any pole dancers or other female entertainment like in the movies.

Again let's hope for some snow overnight to repair the slopes.

Wednesday – a mixture of blue sky and snow showers, but the good news is there's 2" of new powder and more falling all morning. Sadly it's the last days skiing, I need to make the most of it, so it's another 09:00 start. Some really great, but exhausting skiing. By 11:00 it's been non-stop skiing and I need a coffee stop. The new snow overnights done the trick, repaired the damage and the intermittent snow showers just make it even better – awesome☺.

It's a snowy day, visibility not brilliant and there lying on the on the slope (not injured just relaxing) in a white suit and white helmet is? I'll leave you to guess.

Meet Wendy for lunch at Payday and then have a few final runs before calling it a year. That's it for another year ☹. Sadly we have to go back to Belthorn. Is a month really long enough?

Just because I've not mentioned scumboarders for several days please don't think I've gone soft on them. In fact to conclude this holiday blog I've distilled down the best expert advice on how to deal with bear and shark encounters into essential advice on how to deal with scumboarders in the wild:

General Precautions when Scumboarders are Around

Avoid surprising snowboarders at close range.

If you are skiing make your presence known, particularly where the terrain makes it hard to see. Make noise, sing, talk loudly, or wear a bell.

Snowboarder may be active at any time of the day, but they tend to be more active in a group or when visibility is poor.

There are several indicators that may alert a skier that snowboarder are in the area. Some of the most easily identifiable are loud scraping noises behind you; deep fresh carved ruts in the snow; rubbish on the slope. Identifying these clues may help to prevent an encounter.

Avoid areas where snowboarders congregate such as narrow runs, steep drop-offs and anywhere where they can't be clearly seen or cause an obstruction.

Most importantly, use common sense, remember that all snowboarders (even ones we consider "harmless") are badly mannered, ignorant, anti-social, out of control louts and there is no way of knowing for sure how they will react. Always err on the side of caution and respect what they are capable of doing.

If you Encounter a Scumboarder:

Remain calm and avoid sudden movements.

Avoid eye contact.

Give the snowboarder plenty of room, allowing it to continue its wild uncontrolled descent undisturbed.

Remember that the very nature of snowboarding means they do not have good all round vision and may not be able to see to one side or even down the slope.

If one or more snowboarders are asleep in the middle of the slope keep quiet and do not wake them.

If you spot a snowboarder and it is unaware of you, detour quickly and quietly away.

A standing snowboarder is usually curious, not threatening.



Some snowboarders will bluff their way out of a threatening situation by aiming straight at you and then hopefully veering off at the last second. Experts generally recommend standing still until they stop and then slowly backing away.

Never try to out ski a snowboarder as it may elicit a chase, and since they have no common sense they can usually ski faster than you.

Although you may think a snowboarder looks like a harmless vagrant in need of a good meal never feed or toss food to them.

Climbing a tree to avoid snowboarders is popular advice but not very practical in many circumstances. However climbing trees in a snowboard is difficult and studies have shown that they are reluctant to take their snowboards off.

Leave photos of snowboarders to professional wildlife photographers. Many clashes have occurred because someone decided to try to snap a photo in snowboarder territory. Snowboarders don't like you, and they don't want their picture taken.

If a snowboarder is bearing down on you, you've got a couple of less-than-desirable options. The first thing you might try is going into the foetal position and playing dead. If you're dealing with a teenage snowboarder, do NOT play dead. They'll be thrilled that the work's been done for them and will just use you as a ramp to do a trick turn off. If you can't tell what kind of [snowboarder](#) you're dealing with, don't try it!

If all else fails and they still carry on aiming for you, your last option is to whack them with your ski stick.

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[20100227 – Bears v Scumboarders](#)

February 27, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Saturday – blue sky day but my season pass doesn't work weekends so I take a break after 12 days skiing.

We have a drive down to Soldier Hollow where they staged the 2002 cross country Olympic events. Quite an impressive course, very hilly but there is hardly anything there and the lodge isn't a patch on Park City. We then visit the Heber Valley train station, followed by a drive through of Heber City, nothing there worth stopping for.

Back in Park City we have a very pleasant lunch sat outside the Silver Star lift in large comfortable armchairs. The picture shows how Wendy would prefer an encounter with one of these to a scumboarder.

Well we've been here nearly 4 weeks now and sadly have only 4 days left before we return to Belthorn – joy ☺. During that time we've paid for nearly everything on credit card; not once have we used a chip and pin; not once has anyone ever checked my signature; quite often a signatures not even required; and on a few occasions I've had to tick a box to confirm it is my signature – incredible. Today one place wanted drivers licence or photo Id. I was quite impressed, so I gave them my UK license which has what is an obvious loose passport photo – anyone could have found

my card with license and put their own passport photo in – yet despite this they still didn't bother checking my signature. No wonder credit card fraud is rife here.

Meanwhile on a lighter note I thought I'd share a few Scumboarder jokes with you:

This guy walks into a bar and says "Hey, you guys wanna hear a snowboarder joke?" The bartender says, "I'm a snowboarder, the guy on your right is a snowboarder, same with the guy on your left, and the guy behind you is a snowboarder." So the guy says, "OK. I'll tell it a little more slowly then..."



There's this skier standing on one side of a mogul slope. "Yoo-hoo!" she shouts to a snowboarder on the other side, "I can't ski moguls, how can I get to the other side?" The snowboarder looks up the slope and then down the slope and shouts back, "You ARE on the other side."

A guy finds out he needs a brain transplant. The doctor proceeds to show him various brains. One brain, which belonged to a skier, cost \$500, the other, which belonged to a boarder, cost \$5000. Perplexed, the guy asks the doctor about the price difference. The doctor replies "Well, the boarder's brain has never been used!"

The skier, says to a snowboarder that he was a telemarker. Snowboarder replies "I used to do that, but I got so sick of making all those phone calls."

Q. How many snow board instructors does it take to change a lightbulb?

A. Three – one to hold it, one to video tape it and the other to say "AWESOME DUDE!"

Q. What do you call a snowboarder with no girlfriend/boyfriend?

A. Homeless

Q. What is the difference between a snowboard instructor and a snowboard student?

A. 3 days!

Q. If you have a car with 3 snowboarders in the back seat, what do you call the driver?

A. The police!

Q. How does a snowboard instructor meet his group?

A. He rides into them!

Q: What's the difference between a snowboard instructor and a bucket of chicken?

A: The bucket of chicken can feed a family of four.

Q: What does a snowboard have in common with a vacuum cleaner?

A: They're both usually attached to dirtbags.

Q: How many snowboarders does it take to change a lightbulb?

A: It's unknown. Never been done.

Or, better yet.

A: Two. One to hold the bulb and one to smoke enough pot to make the room spin.

Q: What do snowboarders use for birth control?

A: Their personalities.

Q: How does a snowboarder introduce himself?

A: "Sorry, dude."

Q: What do ski instructors and snowboard instructors have in common?

A: They both can't snowboard!

Q: What is the last thing a snowboarder ever says?

A: "Dude, watch this!"

Q: What's the hardest thing about being a snowboard instructor?

A: Nothing!

Q: What do you say to a snowboard instructor in summer?

A: A Big Mac and fries please!

Q: How can you tell if the lift is balanced?

A: The snowboarders drool out of both sides of their mouths!

Q: A Cadillac with five snowboarders runs off a cliff, and everybody dies. What's the worst thing?

A: Cadillac seats six!

Q: Why are most skier jokes one liners?

A: So the snowboarders can understand them!

Q: How do you get the snowboard instructor off of your front porch?

A: Pay for the pizza!

Q: "Mommy, mommy, I want to be a snowboard instructor when I grow up!"

A: "Now Johnny, you can't do both!"

Q: What do you say to a snowboarder in a three piece suit?

A: "Will the defendant please rise...."!

Q: What do you call a successful snowboard instructor?

A: A guy who's girlfriend has two jobs.

Q: At a party, how do you tell who the snowboard instructor is?

A: Don't worry. He will tell you.

Q: On a date, what does a snowboard instructor say after the first hour?

A: "That's enough talk about me; now let's talk about snowboarding."

Q: How many snowboard instructors does it take to change a light bulb?

A: 2, one to change the bulb and one to say "Nice turn, nice turn!"

Q: What is the difference between God and a snowboard instructor?

A: God does not think he is a ski instructor!

Q: What do ski instructors and snowboard instructors have in common?

A: They both can't snowboard.

Q: A ski and a snow board instructor were walking around the San Diego Zoo one summer afternoon. Eventually they wandered into the primate house. How do you spot the snow board instructor?

A: He's the one writing an MA on the gorillas knuckle walking technique. 🤪

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[20100224 – The Best Skiing Ever – I think](#)

February 27, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Wednesday – a grey snowy day when all the snow appears flat so your only hope is to ski near the trees, at least then you have a clue to what is vertical. Fortunately it's not a complete whiteout. The sprinkle of new snow makes for great skiing.

As we have no pictures for today I've included a couple of our comfortable home from home, unfortunately the maids not tidied round yet and you can't see the broadband speed, but its impressive!

Today I've made the supreme sacrifice, skied early morning and come off at lunch. Why? Well to take Wendy to the Mall of course for some retail therapy – "homo sapien moderno" that's me! Tea in bed each morning for Wendy, but don't worry it's only on a skiing holiday, but it is a little unnerving for Wendy.

Well I have to admit the Mall is fantastic; big; airy; clean; lovely food court; good choice; massive stores and hardly anyone around – just like the ski slopes. I bet Blackburns new shopping centre will be just like this if not better!!!! I

managed to buy 3 good quality typical US button down shirts for only \$40. Mind you that's after a 40% discount to card holders. No worries sir of course a UK resident can have a card; I don't think so; 15 minutes later after battling with the computer trying to input our zip code, "computer says no"! Floor manager called to authorise 40%; no, above his authority; store manager called, not possible. Finally agree with a kindly Mormon gentleman that he will pay with his new card and I will give him cash – much to the shop assistant and floor managers consternation.



Then joy of joys we spot a Cheesecake Factory, another one of those great American gourmet institutions along-side Taco Bell, Subway and Loco Lizard. Just a pity we don't have them all in the UK or better still France that would shake up those gourmet snobs. But disaster they no longer do a Toblerone Cheesecake like the one that Wendy gobbled up last time, never mind I've located several recipes.

Snow continues to fall, so hopefully great skiing tomorrow.

Thursday – on the slopes for 09:00 to catch the 7" of champagne powder kindly deposited overnight. For those of you who have not skied words just cannot describe how fantastic the skiing is, but I'll try; for those of you who have then I'm sure you'll appreciate what I'm raving about.

Yes 7" inches of champagne powder, light and fluffy; no queues; just ski, ski and ski; pretty S tracks in the virgin snow; skis sunk into the powder and blasting the snow up onto your knees; sunny periods yet another 2" of snow laid down just to keep it fresh; warm and dry in a gortex cocoon; trees laden with snow; just one more run, just one more..., just one..., just... I somewhat belatedly meet Wendy for lunch and then

slip in just a few more runs after lunch. That has to have been the best days skiing I can remember, mind you with memory and the age thing yesterday could have been better!

After skiing we take a ride on the people carrier up to the canyons for a look around the shops up there – yet more of "homo sapien moderno" – hopefully I'll get back to normal when we return to the UK.

Finally to finish the perfect day we drive up the mountain to Deer Valleys Empire Lodge for a Fireside dining meal. All very elegant, Raclet cheese cooked over an open fire with a selection of cooked meats to start; pheasant, quail stew with rossti potatoes; salad, banana squash soup, lamb roasted over an open fire, macaroni cheese, parsnip gratin and veg; finished off with giant strawberries and a selection of fruit and cookies and white and dark chocolate licquer fondues; all very expensive and very fattening but good.



What is it about the waiters it seems they are all foreigners, film star rejects, who speak with highly effected accents and over expressive flamboyant gestures, whilst the US staff seem relegated to clearing tables. Is this what rick folk crave?

Friday – another blue sky day and plenty of snow yesterday so it's early tracks for me. All the powders been groomed down at least it's perfect corduroy and worth the 09:00 start. By 11:00 I've pounded the slopes, just as if skiing with Kurt, so I'm truly cream crackered and ready to meet Wendy for some truly recreational skiing. Yes it's sunny enough for the ski bunny ready to hit the slopes.

We have a pleasant ski and a long lunch – getting in training for France.

What is it with drivers in the US? If they see a pedestrian they immediately slam on the breaks, keep a safe distance of at least 50 feet and become as courteous as a spinster on a church outing, not a bit like



the “they’re fair game, kill them if you can” attitude of the UK. Yet once they’re on the highways they’re like demented psychopaths, overtaking and undertaking whilst trying to bugger every car in front of them, and seem to think that safe stopping distance guidelines are in inches not feet – Jekyll and Hyde.

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[20100220 – The Downhill Racers Last Day](#)

February 24, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Sunday – 5” of fresh powder waiting for us on Kurt’s last day, so we’re out by 8:40 – is this a holiday or not – to catch the early tracks. Luxury today we’re skiing at Deer Valley, aptly named but missing an “a”. When we arrive a young lady chats me up, unfortunately she’s not after my body, but sadly seems more intent upon getting our skies and sticks out of the car for us – a bit of a blow to the ego.

By 10:00 we’ve skied every run on the first mountain and are knackered. The slopes and new snow are awesome – yes I’m slipping into the vernacular – but it is a great word to describe the conditions, some really great runs. To add to the splendour all of the trees are covered with snow. All the lodges up here are spectacular, roaring fires, big settees, great restaurants, superb marble toilets and pristine corduroy runs. But the best of all about Deer Valley is that they do not allow scum boarders on their pristine corduroy. Despite it being Sunday there’s not a queue in site, and the weather starts off with a bit of sun peeping through the clouds, by lunch time the snows back.

It’s Kurt’s last day so we have a hectic non-stop morning. We meet Wendy in the restaurant for lunch, well in my case I resort to a couple of beers for the first time this holiday; I need them after such an exhausting morning. After a long lunch we manage a few runs in the afternoon before quitting for the day.

In the evening we have a long soak in the hot tub while the snow keeps our heads cool. Always an interesting experience in the US as they drink their over strong beers; smoke big cigars; interrogate foreigners on life in the UK and put the world to rights.

Now I know we all have the occasional grumble about repeats on UK TV, but just imagine this, Forrest Gump on every night of the week on the AMC channel; not only on once but running continuously all night long, mind you with the amount of adverts at least that limits it to only two showings per evening. Next week it’s a different movie to run every night – unbelievable!

Monday – up at 04:00 to take Kurt to airport. Fortunately it’s only 35minutes away, but incredibly cold -6 F.

It’s been good skiing with the downhill racer; it’s improved my skiing no-end just keeping pace with him as speeded me up. Less cruising down, more straight down with fewer carved turns, it’s actually easier and less tiring. It’s reminded me that just like life, skiing is all about confidence, when you have the confidence you ski so much better – that’s the philosophy lesson over with for today. Watching Kurt ski is so gratifying, I remember that this is the three year old I taught to ski. I used to tell him to imagine his knees were tied together and now whether he’s skiing blacks or moguls he glides down with effortless style, legs perfectly together, you can tell it’s him at a distance.



It’s a very, very, very ... blue sky day, with 4” powder, but Wendy’s sunbathing outside the restaurant instead of skiing. I have half a day and meet for lunch and sun. It’s so quiet on the mountain, no queues, no crowds and good snow. But I get a stark reminder of how dangerous it can be, as a helicopter flies away with a skier strapped to a spinal board; then 10 minutes later another skier is being dragged down the mountain in a sled; but even more off putting is a skier strapped to spinal board, left waiting in front of the information desk – not a good marketing ploy!



I'm sure the great skiing must be addling my brains, turning me into "modern Man", as I agree to accompany Wendy to the super market. Mind you it's not too bad, a pleasant walk to the video shop; a supermarket with fantastic choice, almost interesting; a Starbucks and nice gas fire to lounge by; and view of the mountains from the car park you could die for; oh and roomy easy parking slots, all on a slant – just like ASDA!

Amazing they sell this stuff called smart water, just normal water in a tarty bottle at a none too smart price of \$1.46 per litre – mindboggling that people are dumb enough to buy it.

For dinner we have the traditional US junk food, hot dogs, yellow mustard and sauerkraut. Gourmet food, we sure know how to live.

Wendy seems obsessed with watching the "Office", why they need to have a US version is a mystery; it's not a patch on the UK version.

Tuesday – another very.....very blue sky day so the ski bunny dons her skies and comes skiing in Park City. It's just a great relaxing days skiing and I think I'm even catching the French disease, one hour lunches. At this rate there'll be no time left for skiing.

After lunch we have a couple of runs and then quit for the day.

Wendy skies very well for a 61 year old ski bunny (she'll kill me for that), she's always in control, no matter what the slope, but lacks the confidence, especially when she hears the screech of the dreaded scum boarder scraping all the snow off the hill behind you.



After a trip to the elusive liquor store – state controlled of course, nearly as bad as prohibition – the ski bunny and I go to the hot tub, where I manage to smuggle a can of US Nats Piss (what I wouldn't give for a quality German lager such as Hofbrau or Lowenbrau) past the duty guard. How can you have a hot tub without a beer – now that is prohibition? Then for dinner there is a US sized T-Bone, that's if we can find a big enough plate for it, and a bottle of Pinot Noir, what a perfect finish to yet another perfect day. Let's hope we can stay awake through East Enders (joy) and our daily DVD.

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[20100217 – Snowy Days](#)

February 21, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

 Wednesday – a grey misty day on the mountain. Kurt's no better so he's having a day off to try and get better. I think if truth be known he just can't keep up the pace with me – age and experience counts.

I set off up the mountain at lunchtime for a half days skiing. Mist hangs over the very top runs so it's that horrible white out experience when you've no idea what's up or down, but I manage to survive.

Wendy goes downtown to the post office and try and gets some new boots, but typical with all the shops over here they never seem to have her size. Never mind she enjoys a 2 hour walk.

Meanwhile Kurt stays in bed, watches UK football and the tripe on US TV, if that doesn't addle his brains nothing will.

Thursday – a snowy day with 2" powder overnight. Kurt's seems to have recovered. I think it's the US TV that's finally

got him screaming out for anything else, even skiing.

It's a fantastic days skiing. The new snow keeps coming down making the runs great. I even manage to keep pace with Kurt, well at least most of the day. Let's hope it keeps coming down overnight in which case tomorrow should be tremendous (cool and awesome avoided).

Wendy has a quite day at home.

After skiing we have a hot tub in the snow – great. The US seems to excel when it comes to hot tubs just a pity no alcohols allowed; but their saunas are so mediocre. You have to give it the Austrians for the best of both; hot Jacuzzis; very hot saunas; waitresses serving alcohol to you in the Jacuzzi; beds in the Jacuzzi; proper ice cold plunge pools to stop your heart; no state law notices banning anything enjoyable; mixed and nude!

Then it's pizza and pinot noire for dinner with another good DVD to watch.

Well Kurt may just have a bit of an edge on the slopes but at least we can stay awake until 23:00, unlike Kurt who is ready for bed by 20:00.



Now you can even buy M&M's with your photo on them – unbelievable!

Friday – another snowy day but at least it improves the skiing. Kurt and I have a mornings skiing in the downpour. We meet Wendy for lunch. Kurt's had enough skiing for the day. I think the colds got to him. I still manage a couple more runs in the afternoon. It seems the older generation are still capable of setting the pace!

In the evening Kurt comes back to life and sets off to Park City to try and find to après ski night life. Meanwhile the snow keeps pouring down, lets hope it keeps it up all night for a good powder day tomorrow. For Wendy and I it's another evening in with a good

DVD, hopefully, and some excellent pinot noire – no I'm not sharing it.

Interesting development on cars, they're advertising automatic crash reporting but in addition some of the cars have a "theft slowdown" facility. If a car is reported stolen then a central service can issue commands to the car to slow down and turn the engine off – smart technology. And of course they now have smaller SUV's – doing there bit for the environment – but of course smaller is a relative word, they still make my Kia Sorrento look like a dinky toy.

Saturday – 4" of fresh powder so it's up early for a 09:00 start to catch the fresh snow. The mountain is shrouded in mist and clouds, but once we get to the top runs we're above the cloud, – described by one colonial as colonial as the epitome of cool (see pictures at the top) – it's clear blue sky. Later on in the morning the snow starts pouring down. What a great (awesome) ski day.

We quit just after lunch time. Kurt wants to go to the Outlet stores for a merchandising opportunity – the "epitome of awesome and cool".

Now lets consider the expensive fashions associated with skiing, you get all sorts of colours and styles – ignore the scum boarders – and some of the colours are unbelievable. Now let's think about what colour would be sensible to wear on a snowy, misty, whiteout sort of day, is it a – Black; b – dark colour; c – bright colours; d – brilliant white. Well I'm sure even none skiers can guess that d – brilliant white is not what you want to be wearing, unless you want to be so well camouflaged that everybody can just crash into you, but of course some fashion gurus wear such expensive gear, usually trimmed with some fur – unbelievable. Then of course you have the latest fashion in ski boots, see through clear plastic with more buckles than scum boarders asleep at the top of the ski lift. They look

very expensive, professional, racy and I'm sure they're so comfortable; that's why they spend all their time in the



restaurant unbuckling and adjusting. Of course if you want to spend even more then you can have heated boots, these have their own rechargeable power supply to keep your feet warm. Meanwhile Wendy and I stick with our 15 year old, rear entry boots that are as comfortable as slippers and about as fashionable as a camel duffel coat.

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[20100215 – Kurt Hits The Slopes](#)

February 17, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – a real snowy day, but Kurt and I are up bright and early, especially Kurt he was awake at 04:00. Kurt gets kitted out with his expensive, top of the range, demo skis and boots; while I manage on my 15 year old boots and 8 year old skis, and we're off up the mountain. Needless to say this is not Wendy's sort of ski day. It's busy today, Presidents Day whatever that's all about, every man and his dog and especially his kids are out. At least after the first lift queue it's not too bad for queues once you're up there and the slopes are amazingly un-crowded.

Well I manage to hold my own with him today but I have to admit it's tough going and I can see that once he gets over his "take it easy day" I'm going to be feeling my age – c'est la vie.

Despite the snow and the pace, a great days skiing. I have to admit Kurt's made me improve my game.



I had one of those "Oh my God – Victor Meldrew" moments today when I'm watching some scum boarders – yes it's them again – there they are baggy pants hanging around their crotch; disgusting underwear; giant vest shirt over it all, even though its pouring down with snow; walking like they've filled their pants; and it suddenly occurred to me these urchins are the same the world over, and they're the generation who we're going to be relying on to fund our state pension – terrify thought!



Tuesday – another very, very blue sky day, must be Wendy's on the piste again. It's quite a bit icy on some of the top blue runs, which is strange after all of yesterday's snow.

We have a lazy lunch together at Payday and then Wendy and I have a last run after lunch.



Back at the condo it's a cross between casualty and a plague ward. Wendy has started with a cold, has a pain in the groin and a dodgy knee; Kurt has a cold, bad cough and a fractured finger; I'm the fittest of the lot as I'm just shaking off a cold. We've more tablets and cures than you can wave an overworked hanker-chief at. Fortunately skiing seems the only temporary respite from the colds. But just to be on the safe side I've a bottle of Pinot Noire to ease the symptoms.

Now we're trying to understand the US stop sign. How come the sign and the solid white line is always placed 10 to 15 feet back from the main road so that you can't see what's coming up or down the main road?

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[20100213 – Valet Parking Decadence](#)

Saturday – another snowy day but my season ski pass only covers weekdays. We go for a walk down to Willow creek; Wendy plays some musical instruments on the way – see picture. Although it's snowing it's a lovely walk and a lot of people are doing it on cross country skis, not a scum boarder in sight.



I forgot to add one of the most important rules to the “Scum Boarders Code”:

Queues do not apply to scum boarders, just ignore them.

In the evening we splash out and go for a Western Evening on the mountain. Arrive at the Marriot Hotel and are accosted by a gang of spotty youths wanting to take my car off me. Are we to become the victims of street crime, no it's valet

parking! \$8 to park it yourself or \$8 for valet parking, not a difficult choice I suppose but I do hate this concept of valet parking, so far we've always managed to avoid it. Out of sheer cussedness I was so tempted to tell them I'd park it myself, I'm sure they'd have had cataleptic fit, and of course I don't expect a tip when I go to get my car. Sheer decadence, but what the heck we give it a go. At this rate I bet 100 years from now Americans will have evolved into a legless species.

Then it's a gondola ride in the dark up to the mountain lodge. There's a western group on and a buffet of the most bizarre combinations of food. But the ribs we're excellent and if you can close your eyes to the bloody slow cooked prime rib (rare) it just melted in your mouth. Unfortunately we seemed to have the stereotype dumb blonde waitress; couldn't tell me which of their 8 beers was an amber; told Wendy they didn't sell bottled water when it was there glaring at you from the cabinet; then finally managed to produce a credit card receipt where their copy differed in value from our copy! I was very cool (one of them awful words) and managed to avoid a Victor Meldrew impression.

Then we get the benefit of that \$8 valet parking, whilst in the time it would have taken us to walk to the car, we wait for our car to be delivered. Is this progress?

Sunday – fabulous blue sky day, happy valentine's day to us both, I'm still waiting on my card from Wendy and unfortunately I think I've left Wendy's in Belthorn.

We're off cross country skiing. We've graduated to the Blue track – big boys loop – it has some hills on it. I thought it was a 5 mile loop but thankfully it was only 5Km. We get our first experience of gliding downhill, the speed seems awesome (sorry but not a sentence goes by over here without that dreaded word or “cool” in it), yet in reality it's even slower than a downhill nursery slope.



Halfway round we can see the ski slopes, those lucky devils on their lifts to take them up and then just glide back down. At the end of it we're knackered and I've not a drop of sweat left in me, it's even worse than those dreaded cross country runs we had to do at school. Wendy quite enjoys this torture, but give me downhill any day it's so much easier. But it's a change, so very quiet, fantastic scenery and quite a feeling of achievement when you look back on it from the comfort of the lodge. Of course they're all svelte young things and not a blobby in site; mind you if I did this on a daily basis I think I too could get to be svelte old thing.



Well two weeks have nearly gone, they've flown by. It's like a home from home here. Our host here tells us we can stay on as long as we like as she has no one else coming in after us. Unfortunately our flights are non transferrable otherwise it would be very tempting, never mind perhaps next year we can push it to the immigration limit of 90 days. I'll have to gradually introduce the concept to Wendy, it could be my 40th Wedding anniversary present to her!

Another late night as we have to pick Kurt up from Salt Lake airport, mind you after 24 hours travelling he'll be more knackered than we are. I need to psyche myself up ready for serious skiing if I'm going to keep up with him.

20100210 – Powder

February 13, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – another blue sky day but not blue enough for Wendy, she's seen a cloud on the horizon.



I get 3 hours skiing in and then go for a walk with Wendy. We explore the whole of Main St, exciting stuff, and then walk up towards the old mine workings. Quite leisurely but it's up hill, I think I'll stick to downhill skiing at least someone takes me up hill and cruising down is no effort. There are some really old timber frame houses up there, well at least old by US standards, and they seem to come in all shapes and sizes to fit into the hillside. They're so colourful as each one is painted, or flaky painted, in a different fairly bright colour.

I've come to the conclusion I have a cold, it's not just the freezing air that's playing hell with my sinuses. That's what you get when you don't drink for a week.

Well I see it's finally happened, software controlling Toyota car brakes has a bug in it and 475,000 cars are being recalled in the US. Am I surprised? Not at all, it is only a matter of time. I feel sorry for the poor guy who wrote the code, but he's not to blame. Firstly blame the geezer who decided to use software to do the job and then look at the testing regimes. After 40 years in the software industry my money is on minimal software in critical areas and KISS – Keep It Simple Stupid.

Thursday – 2" powder over night and it's still snowing on and off. Some good skiing to be had, but Wendy gives it another miss.

I've tried all sorts of medicines to dry up this runny nose, but so far they all seem to make it worse and the only benefit has been to the



pharmacists who've sold these snake oils. Despite medical sciences best efforts I've come up with **a cure for the common cold**. Well at least if not a cure it alleviates the symptoms. It's simple just go skiing, it's so cold your sinuses don't stand a chance, no runny nose. Unfortunately I have to come in when it gets dark and then the taps turned on.

On the left we have a view of the ski jumping hills from the 2002 winter Olympics. For \$200 you can go on a ride down the Olympic bobsleigh run. I'd love to do it but not at that price. I bet you have to spend an hour signing indemnity forms.

As I'm sure you've realised by now I've no time for scum boarders. Yes I know there's good and bad in all, except scum boarders that is – they're all bad. And if you think I'm biased or unreasonable then Wendy makes me look like some liberal softy who loves them. For those of you who've ever been skiing you'll know that there is a "Skiers Code", for those that haven't it is a set of safety rules you're meant to abide by and failure can result in prosecution or civil litigation. Well here's my version of the "Scum Boarders Code":

Always be out of control so that you can't stop or avoid other people.

People ahead of you have no right of way. It's their responsibility to keep out of your way.

When you stop – usually with due to a narcolepsy attack – make sure you obstruct the trail, or are not visible from above.

Whenever starting downhill or merging with another trail do not bother to look uphill or yield to others.

Never use a device to prevent runaway equipment.



Ignore all posted signs or warnings, especially SLOW signs. Closed trails or closed areas do not apply to you.

Prior to using any lift it doesn't matter one jot if you don't have the knowledge or ability to load, ride and unload safely.

Friday – it's snowed overnight and it's still snowing when we get up, so for me it's an early start to try and catch some of that fresh powder. Wendy stays in with a view to going to the Outlet stores.

There's about 5" of fresh snow, fantastic, but it's a lot harder work. Really gets those leg muscle burning.

Apparently I was supposed to meet Wendy down at the Outlets just after lunch, but I got somewhat carried away with all that powder, and didn't get back till late so I'm in the doghouse. Never mind it was worth it, just too good to miss.

Now I know why the scum boarders wear their trousers down around their knees. It's so that when they stand in front of a urinal they don't need to bother unzipping.

Despite an exhausting days skiing we've set our own new world record by staying awake until 23:15 while we watched the Winter Olympics opening ceremony

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[20100208 – A Very, Very, Very Blue Sky Day](#)

February 10, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – it must be a very, very.... blue sky day as Wendy's finally made her debut on the slopes – scum boarders watch out, do not incur her wrath. It's a stunning day but my is it cold 17 F and although we have plenty of snow it would be nice if it could manage to freshen up every night with some new powder. Despite predictions of snow over the weekend hardly any fell.



I don't know what's wrong with my left ski today but it seems to have a mind of its own. They've been repaired waxed and sharpened and are in excellent condition but off it keeps wondering, so it's either not used to skiing on skis without rust on them; yesterdays cross country has ruined my downhill style (what style?); going slower on the greens is harder than cruising the blues; lack of alcohol.

Anyway we have a great leisurely days skiing together, then in the PM I nip off for a bit of blue cruising. Certainly a lot less arduous than yesterdays cross country.

The US may have a 33% obesity problem but you don't tend to see many blobbies around here, having said that I have encountered two noticeable exceptions today. The first was a lady downloading (coming down on the chair rather than skiing – rare) on a 6 seater chairlift with her skis off, as she got to the bottom she failed to lift the safety bar and wrecked the footrest on the chair – pretty dumb really. The second blobby was the classic ski cartoon with skis each side of a post, very painful despite the fact that the post was padded, definitely not a recommended way to stop.

Meanwhile Kurt has decided to come out next weekend and join us for 7 days skiing, so I'd better get in some serious training.

For those nerds out there I saw this saying that, being an ex-high priest of the binary world (nerd), made me chuckle – *“There are only 10 kinds of people in the world. Those that understand the binary system and those that don't”*.

Tuesday – yet another blue sky day but Wendy’s having a rest today. Actually she’s got a more tempting offer than skiing and she’s real excited about it. Yes, it’s supermarket day! Mind you I have to admit the supermarkets here are very impressive, excellent choice; fantastic salads; in store Starbucks with newspapers to read; car parks that you don’t need to do a 10 point turn in order to park your car; fantastic mountain views from the car park – just like ASDA.

I suppose I’ll have to show willing and go skiing again. It’s even quieter on the mountain today than yesterday. At least today my left ski seems to be behaving. I think it might be because these skies prefer the faster blues, not too fast mind, especially today as there is some hard packed snow around, thankfully not quite the sheet ice you get in Europe. Whilst it may be very sunny it’s also very cold. That cold that I’m sneezing icicles and my eyes are watering with the wind chill as I ski down, the tears then form ice on my sun glasses so I can’t see where I’m going, mind you it never seems to bother scum boarders. Yet after lunch – a coffee – you can sit out in the sun quite comfortably. I think I may actually have a cold but my nose is so cold it’s hard to tell.

I’ve already commented on scum boarders and their trousers around their knees, but on top of that they walk as if they’ve filled their pants. What a site.

After skiing we need to go and draw some cash out so we take a stroll across to the bank. Being car less we have to walk around to the drive through ATM machine as they have no facilities for people with legs!

Amongst the 1,000’s of TV channel they also have BBC America. Interesting on the “f Word” they have the sense to bleed it out.

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[20100205 – Dog Sled Races](#)

February 8, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – snow forecast for today, quite looking forward to it but hardly any fell. Bit of a lazy day, didn’t get on the slopes until 10:30, hoping to catch the PM snow but it just didn’t happen. Never mind perhaps we might get a dump tonight and the rest of the weekend. A bit busier today, even experienced the odd queue but still the slopes weren’t crowded.

Now you may recall the trees shrouded in sexless underwear, well today I passed one that Big Bertha must have wanted to express her feminine rights and instead of burning her bra she decided to decorate / hide the tree with it. Wow they must have been something to behold, I’m sure if she went mogul skiing after that she’d have two big black eyes.

Well so far this week we’ve managed to stay awake until 22:00, which is a record for us, mind you Wendy does seem to nod off occasionally. Last night we both survived Quantum Of Solace without missing a single action packed moment, mind you we still didn’t understand the plot.

I’ve also survived 4 days without any alcohol, but have weakened tonight. Went to the clubhouse Jacuzzi complete with can of a quality pilsner beer – somewhat difficult to find amongst the insipid beers over here – but alas the bureaucrats were constantly patrol to ensure no alcohol was consumed. Now talking of bureaucrats I thought we had more laws than was good for you, but apparently it is against Utah state law to have more than 8 people in the Jacuzzi – bizarre. Do these legislators having nothing better to do.

Saturday – dog sled races today, so as my ski pass only covers weekdays we’re off to watch them for a change. I was expecting to see big fur coated Huskies but instead most of the dogs are quite sleek and have a short coat. Apparently these are Alaskan Huskies as opposed to the Siberian Huskies you tend to see in the movies. The Alaskan is a much better dog for the job although it doesn’t have the coat for really severe weather. You should see them on the starting line in the final countdown of “ten, nine……”, I’m sure they can count. They go ballistic jumping forward, just chomping at the bit to be off. The



noise is awesome and it usually takes four handlers to hold them back. Then they're off 0 -20 in no time.



Wendy gets a bit out of her depths here.

Meanwhile as we drive back home we encounter some free roaming Elk in the local Garden Centre. I'm sure the owner will be delighted when he finds most of his stock has been consumed.

Sunday – we're off for a cross country ski lesson. My it's hard work, much more exhausting than downhill, after 2.5 hours we're knackered. But it's good fun, half the price of downhill, including a lesson, and it's less crowded. Ideal for the weekend when the slopes are that bit busier. Meanwhile who says Wendy's no angel!

Now just imagine you're a Ford or GM marketing executive, looking for the latest gimmick or gizmo to increase flagging car sales, what can you come up with? Why what about a power assisted tailgate, heaven forbid anyone should have to lift the tailgate themselves – only in the US. Where will this all end – power assisted doors?.



The Super bowls on in the bar this afternoon, things must be worse over here than we thought. Prime time advertising sales during super bowl must be in dire straits, there's an Obama interview on with some sex starved female interviewer who seems obsessed with trying to touch his knee, obviously some quaint US fetish. Meanwhile I suspect that it was a republican bar as the sound was turned down on all 6 TV's during the interview but once over the sound came back up.

Well I think after the lowest alcohol week for a year I'll be hitting that bottle of Pinot Noir that's been sat on the table tempting me, probably the perfect antidote to the super bowl. Now I don't want to be disparaging about a national sport but this really is an eye opener. They don't do more than 5

seconds activity before stopping for a rest, and even then coaches come running on to give them a drink – poor wee mites. It just never gets going and at every rest they screen yet another advertisement. Half time entertainment was impressive, some English bus pass holders, WHO knows what they're called! I'm only watching it in case Janet Jackson comes on!

The UK's really are missing a trick here, export Rugby matches to prime time US TV, it'll blow their minds, but I suppose it'll never be commercially viable – not enough rest stops for advertisement.

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[20100203 – Who Needs A Caribbean Beach](#)

February 5, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Wednesday – great sunny days skiing. Sat out sunbathing for an extended lunch, it's no Caribbean beach but at least here the sweat is not dripping off the end of my nose.

Today we've seen the extremes of sartorial style. At the over 50's end we've encountered guys skiing in shorts with colourful lycra suits underneath – could they be friends of Dorothy? Then you have the usual under 30's scum boarders complete with baggy pants, crotch hanging down by their knees and their disgusting underwear on display for all to see. Like scum boarders everywhere they also seem to suffer from group narcolepsy when they all sprawl out for a sleep across the slopes, totally oblivious to anyone else.

Meanwhile the Olympic ski team are practising here. I resisted the temptation to give them any tips such as “don't eat yellow snow”.

Then for a real treat we get to go to a whole food store. They have more types of granola and healthy breakfast cereals

than I could try out in a year – too bloody healthy. Let's get back to some good old fashioned junk food.

Chairlift conversations over here often turn to health care reforms or the President, not necessary a good thing as in the event of differences of opinion you can't get off. However I've developed the ultimate tool to identify political bias, just mention "That nice Mr Obama"; any adverse reaction then they're republican (conservative); otherwise they're democrats (labour); seems to work every time.

Thursday – yet another blue sky day and overnight we've had 2" of powder, heaven. I'm on the slopes by 9:30 to try and catch some of the powder, Wendy's still giving it a miss. If there is a heaven and hell, complete with skiing, then I'm sure that heaven will be no scum boarders allowed (Deer Valley), blue sky and a foot of powder every day; whilst hell will be 90% scum boarders, white out, rain and sheet ice (Aviemore – Scotland).



Wendy's credit cards finally been reactivated. It seems the USA is a hot spot for credit card fraud, mainly because they don't use chip and pin. Mind you they have something infinitely more secure, you have to sign your name on an LCD tablet; the shopkeeper doesn't bother checking it to the signature on the card as you have to tick a box to confirm that it is your signature – hello is there anybody there! Probably implemented by the same bright spark that added the question "are you a spy or terrorist?" to the green US visa waiver form.

I've also discovered the scum boarders secret greeting "What's up dude", usually followed by the usual swift attack of group narcolepsy.

Of course no ski resort would be complete without some of the trees at the side of the chair lift being adorned with various items of underwear such as bras and knickers. Sadly very little of the underwear can be described as sexy. What really intrigues me is whether part of the ritual includes removing said bras and knickers whilst sat on the chair lift with scum board on (I'm sure no skier would be involved in such scandalous behaviour) – intriguing!

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[20100201 – A Proper Holiday](#)

February 3, 2010 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – we're on our way at last to the promised land, Park City, Utah, no it's nothing to do with a sudden conversion to Mormonism – one wife is more than enough – but it is to the greatest snow on earth. A months skiing, no miserable Belthorn weather, no bwankers, no depressing news from the British nanny state and its headlong dash to sacrifice everything British on the alter of multiculturalism.

But first we have to get there. Does anyone remember what a joy / treat it used to be to fly? Just turn up at the airport and off you went, no passport; no queue to checkin; no queue to go through security; no security; no removal of belts, shoes, laptops, liquids, ear rings, nail files, sharp objects; no intimate body searches; no sound of the slap of rubber gloves being donned; no queue for a second security search, just in case the first was inadequate; no queue to board; no queue to wait whilst some imbeciles block the gangway whilst trying to fit a 36" suitcase into a 24" locker and can't grasp why it won't go in; no sitting in a seat so cramped that you need to eat with your elbows and kneecaps in your mouth; no delay waiting for an engineer to come and fix the plane; no queue on the runway for a take off slot; no food so disgusting you wouldn't put it in with pigs swill; no circling prior to landing waiting for a landing slot; no queue waiting to disembark because the same imbeciles with the luggage finally managed to get it into the locker and are now struggling to get it out; no queue waiting for Immigration to perform their 18th century green card stamping ritual. Whatever went wrong?

I must admit that this time immigration (also commonly known as ICE) was the fastest it's ever been. I can only put this down to the American Intelligence Agency, who have obviously been eavesdropping on my previous emails and blogs bemoaning what a disgrace ICE was and did they really want tourists. I can only assume they have passed this on and that nice Mr Obama having recognised the imminent danger of me ceasing to visit and has decided to do something about it before the country gets itself into serious financial difficulties.

Whilst suffering a 6 hour stopover in that hell on earth known as Ohare airport we did see the ultimate in birth control. A mother travelling with two of the noisiest 2' 6" high kids, everything was screamed like the sound of a neurotic fish wife; then they decide to use a row of chairs as a climbing frame and trying to run across the tops of the chair arms whilst continuing with their screams. Turn this into a 2 minute video for compulsory viewing in third world countries and it will reduce the population explosion.

After 24 hours we finally get to our condo – home from home.

Tuesday – up bright and early like an excited child on a long awaited trip to the seaside. Nothing in so we have breakfast at a diner. Buttermilk pancakes (so big and fluffy they look like they're about to explode), bacon and eggs with lashing of maple syrup and boysen berry sauce, fantastic, beats any of that tarty French haute cuisine anyway. Who says the Americans don't appreciate gourmet food! The view from the diner is stunning, all the ski runs laid out before me – I can't wait.

Then it's off for a great days skiing. Blue skies, good snow, quiet slopes, no queues. What more could you desire. Meanwhile Wendy has the treat of the American supermarkets, all that choice I can imagine her eyes just lighting up.

Meanwhile I can't seem to escape the daily drudgery of dealing with the problems created by our banks. It seems the purchase of a season ski pass has thrown the Nationwide Credit Card computers into an infinite loop and they've blocked all future transactions. THIS IS A HOLIDAY, THAT MEANS NO BANKING ISSUES. Bloody bwankers.

Now we just love our trips to the US but every time the two things that really wind me up are ICE, not an issue this time, and pricing everything without tax. I get caught everytime, I fish out the correct change for the two dollar coffee only to be told it's \$2.25. I try pointing out that I'll take the one without tax but just get a blank look of miscomprehension. So Mr Obama if you're eavesdropping on this why not bring some long overdue common sense to bear and either insist on quoting the full price you pay with tax, or even both.

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[20091225 – Christmas Again](#)

December 29, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Early start for most today I suppose but at least now that our kids think they are adults we get a lie-in. Mind you, I don't miss working on the Christmas assembly line putting toys together.

Wendy's rampaging around the house looking for a present she's wrapped and hid somewhere, but she's now forgot where – it's an age thing. I'm in the doghouse because the Paris perfume is by YSL and not Chanel. Two Companies name their perfume the same – can you believe it, just like Microsoft and Apple each having an operating system with the same name! Come to think of it I'm sure this house is an extension to the Bermuda triangle. Not a day goes by without something going astray, usually my tools, resulting in me marauding around the house like a bear with a sore head. Then miraculously it turns up where it should be!

Now I did think it would be useful having a 4-wheel drive. We've been able to get in and out when everyone else is snowed in. However, it also means I can become a taxi driver again. Calls in the early hours "can you pick me up the taxis won't bring me up to Belthorn because of the snow" – joy! Bring back my old car with low profile wide tyres that performs like a drunken pond skater, at least it was a stay at home car in the snow.

What's it all about? Why are we here? That's not a metaphysical question just the desperation of yet another Christmas with all it's boring excesses – ba humbug!!!!

That's it, we might as well give up any thoughts of flying after this latest terrorist incident. Not for fear of being pulverised into dust in mid air and adding to global warming, but the frustration of the extra, extra, extra, extra measures imposed and the ever lengthen queues as we are screened at the airport. He had powder strapped to his leg so I suppose now we'll finally have to remove our trousers – masons just roll them up! I wouldn't mind but all these extra measures are cumulative, will they ever be withdrawn? At this rate, it can't be long before flying is a nudist only activity, we will all be sat there for 9 hours stark naked – it certainly conjures up some terrifying thoughts.

This guy has certainly achieved his aim of terrorising people. The terrifying aspect is the lack of intelligence / common sense used by the anti-terrorist industry. He was on a database as “known terrorist connections” but not on a “no fly list”. What do you have to do to get on the “no fly list”? Perhaps successfully blowing up a plane in mid air will finally qualify you to achieve frequent flyer rewards of 70 celestial virgins and the “no fly list”.

Amazing the Americans are claiming to have foiled the attack, yet it was only the bombers ineptitude that avoided a disaster. I bet he didn't tick the “known terrorist” box on his green card visa waiver. Perhaps they should add a further question with yes / no tick box – “Have you answered all of the above question honestly?”.

Profiling seems to be a sensible counter measure but it's talked about in hushed, reverend tones, not quite cricket, not politically correct. Bugger that! Let's have 3 queues at each airport. One for low risk with just simple scanning, over 60's (nothing whatsoever to do with the fact that I will have my bus pass by the time I fly again); families; people travelling with pets or laptops; active nudists. Medium risks – I'm sure we all suspect their ethnic origins and religions – where there are more intensive searches, you'll hear the rubber gloves slapping on at 50 yards. A 3rd for high risks, which is a queue for a free non-stop bus ride to Guantanamo Bay. Heaven forbid we should use common sense or violate any poor soul's human rights, much better to subject everyone to massive queues, misery and inconvenience to say nothing of that ultimate infringement of human rights – mass murder.

Meanwhile I've found the ideal job. It's the snowflake spotter – a Christmas is considered “white” if a single snow flake is observed falling onto the roof of the London Weather Centre in the 24 hours of 25 December, [\[1\]](#) even without a perceivable quantity of snow. One day a year; not too strenuous; unlike being Santa there's no kids involved.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all my 3 readers!

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[2009 – A Year In Retrospect](#)

December 18, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well it's not quite Christmas yet but time to reflect on the year.



January kicked off with a family week at Center Parcs to celebrate Wendy getting her free bus pass (60th birthday). Unfortunately, Grandma did not make it, as Harold was unwell.

February was in theory the highlight of the year. A months skiing in Salt Lake, a proper holiday, all psyched up for it and trained to peak fitness ready, but sadly we had to cut it short after a week as Harold passed away suddenly on February 1st.

Rest of February and March we spent organizing funeral and sorting out Harold's estate. Then at the end of the month, we spent a week

caravanning in the Birmingham.

April saw us setting off to France for 8 weeks to escape the British weather. We spent 3 days in Paris, meandered down to Languedoc Roussillon, with a visit to the fantastic castle at Carcassonne on the way. What a lovely part of France, as usual spoilt only by the French. Montpellier is such a relaxing city, the campsites and beaches were wonderful. Certainly, we will be visiting again next year as there is so much more to see.

Mid June, we got back in time for Honey's 2nd birthday. Meanwhile Tony started using that 4-letter word “work” having joined a small Internet Company as a non-executive director – all of 10 flexible days work a year so it does not interfere with our “Belthorn Evasion Strategy”.

July 1st we set off to the USA for a month's road trip. Started in San Francisco; then visited the wine country and sampled a few; up the East Coast through the avenue of the giants, stunning and ghostly. We spent July 4th in Eureka, grey and cool. Then we drove up the East coast of Oregon to Seattle, what a stunning coastline. Seattle was interesting, especially the Boeing factory tour. From there we drove down to Portland Oregon, what a fantastic city, our favorite city in the US. Then we stayed for a week at a beach house in

Waldport on the Oregon coast, what a great place with fabulous ocean views and a great place to relax after all that driving. Then drove down through Lake Tahoe and Mammoth Mountain followed by a stunning drive across Yosemite. This has to be the most beautiful place in the US. Stunning, words cannot describe it. We finally got to see a black bear, in fact two seconds earlier and it would have come through the windscreen and sat on our laps. Yosemite was truly the highlight of the holiday the only pity was we did not have



longer there. 4,200 miles later, we returned our car back to San Francisco and flew back to sunny England.



After 3 weeks at home in August, we set off for the South of France for 10 weeks. Beautiful weather and being boring we returned to last year's campsite in Frejus for 4 weeks. Also spent 2 weeks in sunny Provence, what a lovely region but that dammed Mistral can get you down. Still anything is better than English weather.

End of October we came back to England and spent 3 days in our caravan in London in order to attend David and Polly's wedding. Then it was back to sunny Belthorn.

After 3 weeks of rain in November, we finally capitulated and booked a 12-day Caribbean cruise on the Butlins cruise HMS Wallace Arnold (Celebrity Equinox), on the theory that nothing can be as bad as the weather in Belthorn. Have to admit that the cruise was spectacular, very elegant and enjoyable, full of interesting Americans and far too much fantastic food.



Kurt finished his LPC in June and after yet another mini-break – only 3 months this time – started work in September as a trainee solicitor. He seems to be really enjoying it.

What of our progress against retirement plans? On the plus side, Tony has started archery; does the occasional yoga; making good progress in reading French, but needs to improve speaking or listening; some digital photography; and maintains our travel blog on our web site at www.4uand.me.uk. However so far he has not made any progress on learning German; Rambling / Famous Footpaths; touring the rest of Europe (too busy with France); ski job; house swap. Wendy has tackled cookery in earnest and loves her Remouska, we have fantastic food in the caravan; but has made no progress on family tree or photo album. We really need to revise our 5-year plan!

Next year as part of our "Belthorn Evasion Strategy", we have a month's skiing in February. From April we spend 10 weeks in France. July somewhere in the USA, if only we can agree upon where. Then back to France for 10 weeks August to October. Finally, if we have any money left, then we will do a cruise in November. With a bit of determined effort we might achieve Tony's target of 26+ weeks away from Belthorn.

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[20091214 – Cruising In Retrospect](#)

December 16, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



We're on our way home today and tomorrow and the day after, so it's a good opportunity to reflect on our first cruise, especially as we were so sceptical.

Downside

Food centric – too much fantastic food, you need a cast-iron will all the time to resist. Perhaps they should charge for food and make the drinks free, that way we'd all be permanently drunk but at least we'd roll off the ship in a drunken stupor rather than waddling off like a stuffed pig. Nevertheless, I survive without a single sweet and Wendy only weakens twice.

Boarding experience was awful – 3 hours corralled in the 2nd story cattle pen at the cruise terminal – but I'm reliably informed that it was an exception. However, compensation claims will be occupying me during December.

Formal evenings – one of my main gripes was being told what I was to wear when. It still irritates but in practice a shirt and jacket even seems to suffice on the formals. There was no mention of a tie so I didn't bother wearing one on our second formal.

All Caribbean Island seem much the same, small, very few attractions and too many jewellery shops.

Entertainment was mediocre but I am not really one for shows with singing and dancing. The Circus Solei and late night comedy was good. At least most of them kept one of us awake and it helped us to stay up way past our usual bedtime.

Wine seemed expensive by the bottle but by the glass was similar to prices at home and there was a good choice.

Upside

It was much better than expected, very elegant, excellent food, excellent service and good accommodation. Everything was 1st class, although most people we've met claim we've started at the top with Celebrity, so it's downhill from here on. Only Holland & America were mentioned as being as good as, if not better.

The staff were amazing. Everyone was pleasant, very helpful and always greeted us with a smile. The recruitment, training and management processes behind the scenes must be phenomenal to achieve such excellence with an internationally diverse staff.



Not the regimented Wallace Arnold or Butlins experience we had feared.

Age profile must have been about 65, so not too depressing and makes you feel young, although ending up on a table with the very old could be a bit depressing. Hardly any children.

Select Dining (flexible) worked well for us. We never queued and met many different and interesting people, mainly Americans. Occasionally you came across an objectionable gob but it was rare. Good thing was we were not rushed out, whereas fixed diners were herded out ready for the next sitting.

Tours we're ok.

Weather was great if a bit too hot.

Inside cabin was perfectly acceptable, especially as we only tended to sleep in it. Whilst it would be nice to try a balcony, I'm not convinced it would be worth a significant extra charge.

Gym was fantastic with great views out to sea but a bit un-nerving on the machines and swaying with the boat. We both managed to walk up and down the stairs, sometime all 12 decks and never used the lifts – not that it'll make much difference to our weights with all that food.

The Acid Test – Would We Do It Again?

Yes.

I'd rank it number 4 in my holiday rankings:

1st is of course skiing (£155 per day, excl. food)

2nd caravanning although value for money / time out of UK it closely challenges skiing (£25 per day, excl. food)

3rd would be our summer months American road trip (£120 per day, excl. food)

4th would be cruising if we've got any money left over from the above (£250 per day including excessive food)

It's especially good for December when we're stuck in the hellhole with the Belthorn weather awaiting a proper holiday, skiing.

Now it's back to reality, the world of mediocrity; poor service; rudeness; failure; excuses; things that just don't work; delays, especially flights; and general mayhem. It hits you like a sledgehammer within hours of disembarking.

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[20091214 – The Trek Home](#)

December 16, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – day starts with the usual spoilt for choice breakfast on board.

Disembarkation is very quick and efficient. We have a four hour wait at the airport and our exec lounge is in a different terminal, never mind we've plenty of time and it's just great to go through security 3 times.

Then joy of joys our flight to Atlanta is delayed 2.5 hours because of rain in Atlanta, good job these guys don't fly in England, they'd never fly. This means we'll miss our Manchester flight – funny how some flights can take off in rain and others can't. Anyway after the usual cock up and mayhem we have a choice of flying to Paris or Amsterdam (oh no not the redlight district yet again) and then Manchester, arriving on Wednesday; or staying over night in Fort Lauderdale and flying to JFK Tuesday PM and then MC.

We opt for staying in F.L. Shouldn't be a problem as Rich and Jackie kindly gave us their address etc and said we're welcome to stay if there's a problem. Well there is a problem, someone who shall remain nameless, has left the address details in their hambag in the suitcase. And where are the suitcases? Well their on their way to Atlanta.

Overnight we stay on in comfort suite and then amble over to the airport, battle through the security and take up residence in the lounge.

Wendy manages to hit the lounges with a vengeance, her little eyes lit up when she saw brandy in the Oasis at JFK. It helps her swallow her tablets, then all she needs is a straw and she's ready for take off.

After setting off Monday at 09:00 we finally arrive in Manchester at 10:00 Wednesday and at least one of our suitcases has caught up with us. The others either been destroyed as punishment for travelling without its owner or is lost in the system.

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[20091213 – Last Day Cruising](#)

December 15, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – sunny with some ominous looking clouds.

It's our last day at sea and judging by the swilling around in my coffee cup I think we must be in a force 8 hurricane!

Actually day turns out very hot and sunny. Morning around the pool, followed by lunch on the back deck and then a bit more time around the pool before retreating indoors. In the midst of this Wendy goes to a cooking demo. Apparently the

audience come up with some stunning questions such as:

What's the main ingredient of that steak tartare?

What times the midnight buffet?

My advanced digital camera lecture also raised some stunningly stupid questions. You really do wonder at times whether people actually bother to listen or they just like engaging their mouth without engaging their brains.

Then around the pool there are some great people watching opportunities. A guy with a half inch diamond engagement ring – worrying; blobbies on scooters everywhere, in fact there are very few on scooters that aren't grossly overweight; some terrifying bikini sites, fortunately not as bad as the French topless beaches; speedos, yet not a French pool for 1'000's of miles; people just larded up and frying in the sun from morning until night – don't they ever get bored?

I must say on days at sea the pool area is quite crowded and if it was a beach on land we would not go to it, but it all works pretty well. It's the older generation, not too much testosterone flowing, much more tolerant and well behaved – apart of course from the "towel layers".

Usual evening meal with good food and good company.

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[20091212 – Day at Sea](#)

December 13, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – sunny with clouds and hot.

A relaxing meal centric day at sea. Finally get some reading done.

Rodeo hat holds me in good stead with one young crew member, could have been my lucky day. Wendy keeps complaining that it's a disgrace and wants to scrap it.

Over lunch we have a visit to our table from the Captain and the Sea Captain. He fancies my netbook, although I think he really coveted my rodeo hat. Bit unfortunate for him really as he had to introduce who he was. Anyway managed to have a chat about how come the ship just doesn't tip over the first time someone breathes on it sideways, bear in mind it's 15 decks high with only 27 feet below the water line. He assured me that they are constantly monitoring the ballast / weight below the waterline – not that I'm worried it just amazes me. Apparently they desalinate on board 500 gallons of seawater an hour.

Of course the Germans have been out holding their 06:00 towel laying ceremony. It's just typical, plenty of loungers for everyone really but the usual scummy people have to be greedy. These are the same people who park in disabled slot and throw their fags and fag packets out their cars. I think there are 3 ways of stopping it.

1st offence photograph them and put their pictures up in "Scums Gallery" for everyone to see.

2nd offence throw all their belongs overboard, never mind save the waves.

3rd offence throw them overboard, that'll finally cure them.

Evening meal we're with the same entertaining crowd as last night. It's a formal but as a seasoned cruiser I've learnt that jacket and open neck shirt is quite acceptable. Certainly if we come again I wouldn't bother with a penguin suit.

I've been told by one colonial that I've got my fork upside down. I was so tempted to point out that no only

that but we're capable of using a knife and fork at the same time, but I resisted. Bring on the forks with a knife sharp edge, of better still why not have food served in bite sized chunks!

No show tonight as it was full, yet another songs from musicals – no great loss.

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20091211 – St Thomas

December 12, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – more sun and heat.

This Island is apparently a US protectorate. I must say it looks one of the nicer islands. We're not doing any tours today, just amble into town for a bit more retail therapy, not that I haven't had my fair share. Yet more jewellery and diamond shops. People are still calling me sweetie so I obviously need to improve my snarl. By way of a change you have the shopkeepers soliciting on one side and taxis on the other. They don't miss an opportunity and ask you if you want a ride as they drive by – god bless the US dollar.

There's one jewellery store that's really done it's market research, they have a bar inside the store for long suffering husbands. Yes you see them, me included, being towed around from jewellery store to store like French poodles.

After a pleasant stroll around, a few pictures and trying on a few dresses – Wendy, I've not become Dorothy's friend yet – we go back to the ship where there is yet another merchandising opportunity. Time to leave Wendy to it.

Evening is another great meal and we share a table yet again with pink neck but no true red necks this time.

Show is jazz, just not for us, so a final drink of the day on the sunset bar deck and an early night.

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20091210 – St Kitts

December 12, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday – hot and sunny again.

Breakfast and leisurely morning – evrything's leisurely even more than in the caravan.

Then lunch time we go on the sugar cane train around the island. We both enjoy the americans and they are such friendly people (obviously no french blood over here), but why o why do you always get one "American Gob" on every tour. Easily recognised by outragous shirt, shorts and the biggest camera / telephoto lense imagineable (phallic extension). Even a blind man could recognise them at 500 yards just by their inane, loud gobby comments, such as:

Gee honey

Is this the only country that produces sugar?

Gee honey how do these folks manage without a 3 car garage?

He's just off to exercise his wife!

Gee you did 500 miles a day for 6 days to get here. How far is it?

Bless! But if you're really unlucky you get two together and then of course ear defenders are essential and the bragging is worse than a couple of 10 year olds.

Meanwhile back to the train that takes you two thirds of the way around the island and then you get the bus. All very interesting and a good commentary on island life, constantly supplemented by the "American Gobs" inane remarks. But really like most of these islands they aren't that big and don't have that many real attractions. Apparently they no longer bother growing sugar cane as the bottom fell out of the UK market. Interesting how despite a great pride in their education system and a very strong emphasis on the importance of it, a lot of them still cling to their old beliefs. If you don't want the jumbies (Jumbies are male ghosts, no ghostly equal rights over here) to get you, then make sure you have a mixture of black sand, salt and lime to keep them away – pity they don't have a concoction that repels "American Gobs".

I leave Wendy at the port to do the shopping and she just manages to get back on board before we dock.

In the evening it's another great meal, complete with good company and our friendly pink neck – I think he's really a red neck but being married to a Democrat has somewhat mellowed him. He warns me that one of the guys on the table is a true red neck so don't mention Obama, I have to restrain myself from asking what they think of that nice Mr Obama, would have been fun! It's all too subtle for us – Fox versus CNN – you think they'd be more obliging and wear a red collar or at least a red tie.

Evening entertainment is some English singer (I'd never heard of her but that's no surprise) from the West End – sang in front of Prince Charles don't you know!

Then later in the evening – yes we manage to stay up past Noddy going past Big Ears – there is an adult comedy show. Great comedian even though it was all American humour.

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[20091209 – Barbados](#)

December 10, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – sunny and very hot yet again.

No lounging around today we're off on a catamaran to swim with turtles, or in Wendy's case sink with them.

Heaven forbid that any cruiser should have to walk anywhere, a bus picks us up for what turns out to be a 250 yard walk. No wonder there are so many blobbies on our catamaran, but at least they won't need life vests with that much blubber to keep them afloat. Meanwhile we're still sticking to our no lifts regime, even if it does mean climbing 10 flights of stairs 3 or 4 times a day.

Turns out to be quite a good tour. First we snorkel with turtles. I'm not sure whether they were on a string and pulled out towards our boat /ship or they were those wind up ones, but turtles we did get to swim with. Then we move on to snorkel over a reef and shipwreck, after which the free drinks bar opens and we sail onto the beach where we have barbecue lunch and an hour on the beach. Wendy just about makes it ashore without drowning. Finally we sail back to the harbour, yet again retirement rule # 2 has been broken, drinking too much rum during the day.

Unbelievable how hot that sun is – just like Belthorn – after a few minutes you're burning. Unfortunately my rodeo hat is no good in the sea, in fact it's rapidly disintegrating, but gains charm, character and comfort. Wendy seems to think it would be more fitting on a scarecrow and is trying to get rid of it.

The colour of the sea is stunning. Wendy thinks they must dye it that colour for the tourists.

Overall a good tour even if we did have the "Equinox gob of America" on board with us. All that's bad about Americans, very ostentatious, very loud and very crude.

For beach entertainment we have some Ocean Village topless bathers with us, obviously I did the gentlemanly thing and didn't stare too much. Apparently the Ocean Village cruise is mainly full of Brits and a few people thought it was a grudging ok.

On the way back of course there's the cruise centre to negotiate. More retail therapy for Wendy whilst I escape back to the ship / boat. Wendy seems to be turning into an alcoholic as she's just smuggled a bottle

of coconut rum on board.

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20091208 – St Lucia

December 9, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – sunny with clouds and some showers – we're coming home.

After a leisurely formal breakfast we set off on the water taxi to explore the town. The taxi runs every 5 Caribbean minutes, but I remained quite calm during the 20 minute wait. The pace of life must be getting to me.

The town can best be described as a market – more retail therapy – and taxi derby. The local courthouse has chickens and one lucky cockerel roaming about its grounds – very laid back.

Today I've been greeted as:

"Sweetie" – obviously my snarling has had no effect;

"My friend" – I've made more friends than I can count, regrettably I forgot to get their addresses so I won't be able to send them a Christmas card – oh dear how sad. I did suggest to a few of them that they came on board our ship because there's a couple of people, Bill and Dorothy, who always seem to be having meetings for friends;

"Big man" – and I wasn't even wearing my French speedos.

Then it's back to the ship for a healthy lunch – personally the only thing healthy in these meals is a glass of zero calorie cold water, in fact if I drink about 100 Litres a day I could offset the damage of these meals, a bit like CO2 offsets. Or as our wine expert suggested "Save water, drink wine".

Followed by a lazy afternoon and another trip to the gym. It's still a mystery where all the time goes as I've hardly read any of the 5 books I bought with me to say nothing of the thousands in the luxurious library on board.

You really do meet some fascinating and very friendly people. So far we've not been blessed with any loud mouthed yanks, although we have had a Canadian (ex Brit I might add) who has made up for them all.

Yet another stunning meal even if it was with a red necked republican – very entertaining. Then joy of joys the evening show was full of dancing and singing, but despite several fantastic wines I could not get off to sleep through it, so I escaped early to a good book – boring.

Meanwhile the ship / boat / or whatever plods on and yet again we can hardly tell we're moving – very clever.

If anyone is wondering why there are no photos on this Caribbean blog, it's not because we've lost the camera but at \$0.65 per minute for Internet access we'd be destitute if we include photos, plus we just don't have the time.

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20091207 – St Maarten

December 8, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – sunny and hot again. 08:00 we dock in St Marteen, so after an early breakfast we set off to explore. Shun all of the tours as there really doesn't seem that much to tour. We take a walk to the boardwalk in Philipsburg. It's only a 20 minute walk but amazing how many catch the water taxi. At this rate

I'm sure in 100's of years time we'll have evolved into legless creatures.

The boardwalk along the beach is very picturesque, with fantastic blue water and white sand. We give the beach chairs a miss and have a walk down the main street. Now it's a change to see a main street with no banks, building societies and opticians but after 10 minutes you've seen more jewellery shops than bobbies around the desserts in the restaurant. Every shop has sales people on the pavements trying to entice you in, worse than time share salesmen in Spain. Just goes to show how sad they are, one even called me sweetie, obviously no judge of character, anyway a quick snarl back at her should cure her of that little foible. Can you imagine what it would be like if our banks / building societies did this street selling.

There are 3 cruise ships docked so it's pretty busy and full of yanks. I notice that one cruise ship has solved the daily problem of knowing the day of the week by fitting all their cruisers with day of the week wrist bands – how insulting.

By lunch time we've had enough and walk back to the cool of the ship for a light lunch. Because it's a 2nd floor (deck) to 14th floor, Wendy tries to cop out of our no use of lifts policy but I shame her into walking up.

Then it's the pool for an hour, that's long enough in this heat.

Toilets – none of my blogs would be complete without at least some reference or moan about toilets – it's a French thing. So how can you tell the toilet in our stateroom was designed by a woman? Easy only a woman would put the flush button behind the seat so that you must put seat and cover down in order to flush. It's a vindictive ploy to satisfy that perverse female obsession and force men to lower the seat.

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[20091206 – Wot No Albatross](#)

December 7, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – we think! No East Enders here so Wendy no longer has the edge when it comes to what day it is. Day 2 at sea, calm, sunny, good visibility and yet again no land in sight, just other cruise ships – there'll be Caribbean congestion charging next.

Wendy goes to a cookery demo whilst I relax in the library, all very civilised. Of course the whole day seems to revolve around meals. Today there's a brunch (yet another bloody Americanism) buffet in the main dining room (canteen). Again it's just unbelievable the presentation and choice of food, but our will power triumphs and we stick to a very sensible light salad. Mind you when you look around we're the exception. It's a wonder that some of them can manage to carry their plates back to the table, judging by their dimensions it's probably the only exercise they get.

After lunch we go out on deck and have an hour relaxing in the sun. There are people who have been frying out there all day, perhaps instead of waiters trying to sell you drinks they should do a turkey basting service. Of course the Germans snook out at 03:00 for their "Laying of Towels" ceremony.

Then it's gym time. It's very unerving on a cross trainer when the sea gets up. It doesn't look all that rough out there but we start to realise we are at sea for the first time. Considering how many bobbies there are on board it's surprising how full the gym is.

Amazing things are a lot less crowded than I imagined. Deck chairs are probably the most crowded but even then you can get one reasonably easily, and there are areas on the ship / boat that are empty. They even have a lawn on board for mini golf and croquet and yet it's never crowded up there.

There's an unoccupied Penthouse suite so it's the first prize in a game of Bingo. Now that's what I call smart, especially when you hear how much the tickets are. \$30 for one card going up to \$75 for 3. Wendy reckons there were about 500 playing. At that rate they're probably better not selling Penthouse tickets up front and just having Bingo on day 1.

Yes, after two days I've not done anything that gets me walking the plank or thrown in the brigg. Nor have

we seen an Albatross yet.

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[20091205 – Captains Log](#)

December 6, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – our first full day at sea. Calm, sunny, good visibility and nothing but sea all around.

Busy day. Lots of things to do. Excellent buffet breakfast. I did an hour in the gym while Wendy went for the less strenuous and more intellectual Motown quiz, followed by a cooking demo and a talk on St Martin – seems it was more a talk about retail therapy. Meanwhile I went to a seminar on Metabolic Rate – nerdy. Buffet lunch on deck followed by a wine tasting lecture, at which they forced me to drink the various wines – including champagne and whites. That's broke my Golden Retirement Rule # 2 – don't drink during the day.

A few facts about HMS Wallace Arnold (Celebrity Equinox). It can accommodate 3,200 passengers with some 1,200 crew. From sharp end to blunt end its just over a 1,000 feet, in proper measurments that's about a fifth of a mile. We must walk at least 5 miles a day, on top of which we have refused to use the lifts – even when staggering back to stateroom (rather a grand term for cabin) after too much wine. From left to right its 121 feet. And the most worrying fact of all is that it is 14 stories high (no deck 13) yet only 27 feet below the waterline. How come it doesn't fall over?

The staff are mainly asian / oriental and perhaps it's a bit racist to say it, but am I bothered, the only two miserable urchins we've encountered so far have been white caucasian on the Silohette Dining room reception. The rest are all extremely polite, friendly, smiling and go out of their way to please you – very impressive.

Food is fantastic and my biggest complaint is that there is too much of it. You really have to be boringly strict and exercise strong will power. Apparently the average cruiser puts on a pound a day – sumo wrestlers watch out. Menus contain things like blue crab, quail, lobster, frogs legs and escargot (cheap and plentiful in our garden) – fortunately not all on the same plate. Last night was a formal evening, in other words you're expected to wear a monkey suit or at least a lounge suit and tie. One of the more disagreeable aspects of cruising. We're on a table with some Americans and Canadians, and of course the American hasn't bothered with either. All pleasant company, but if they supposedly have a objectionable dress code they should enforce it. Having done the wine tasting in the afternoon I finally broke with tradition and even had white wine with dinner – not a mans drink!

Entertainment in the theatre was a Cirque Solei performance, with Captains reception – more free wine and champagne. In fact if you kept going out and back in you could have had a great time with wine and champagne. It was a great show, just a pity I kept nodding off through it, but at least I didn't snore – moral there is don't break Golden Retirement Rule # 2.

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[20091203 – Ship Ahoy](#)

December 5, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday – HMS Wallace Arnold here we come.

As part of the entertainment on our journey we decide to play an I Spy like game. It's "I Spy A Cruiser".

We know there are about 20 cruisers on our flight, but how do you identify one. Well after much scientific observation I set out below a handy formula for identifying a cruiser.

Firstly we start out with a base percentage certainty that someone is a cruiser then to this base percentage we add or substarct a modifier percentage based on certain observed attributes of a cruiser. The base plus modifier percentage results in a percentage certainty that the person is a cruiser.

Base Percentage

Age under 40 – 0%

40 to 50 – 30%

50 to 60 – 40%

60+ – 50%

Modifier

Smartly dressed male with shirt, jacket and possibly tie – +10%

Polished leather shoes co-ordinated with clothes – +10%

Femal wearing dress with lots of gold braiding / gold jewellery – +10%

Wearing faded or holey jeans, trainers – -10%

Mobile in pouch on the waste – +5%

Bare midriff, pierced belly button, thongs showing, low cleavage, short mini-skirt – -20%

Male carrying a handbag with all travel documents in (excluding anyone French) – +10%

Friday – we come all this way for the sun, to the so called sunshine state, and there's a 48 hour flood warning in place with 6 – 8" of rain forecast. On the plus side there's plenty of snow storms forecast for Salt Lake.

Hilton hotel very nice but just a constant rip off for drinks, breakfast etc. This holds the accolade of being the only hotel we've stayed at in the US where they charge for Wifi (\$29 for 24 hours) – unbelievable! Breakfast costs the same as a stay in a comfort suite, with free breakfast. The queue for breakfast as we were leaving was just unbelievable, by the time they get to a table they'll be serving lunch.

Good news on the US TV front there's finally no mention of Micheal Jackson. Instead it's wall to wall Tiger Woods!

Hotel is absolute mayhem. Cases picked up at 10:30 by truck that seems to have disappeared, followed "hopefully" (their words) by a coach at 11:30. By 11:00 it's clear that this mayhem will only get worse so we get a taxi. Cruise centre is impressive; yet more airport security; staff are brilliant, well trained and very friendly but then we have the wait in the 2nd floor cattle shed, fortunately seated. Then it starts "Please remain seated, please remain seated" for 2.5 hours – I'll be mumbling it in my sleep. Finally after customs delays, computer checkin failure – let's hope they're navigating by good old fashioned watch, sextent and dead reckoning – we get to our bilges stateroom after 4 hours. Actually it's on deck 10 of 14. Forget feeling seasick it's vertigo you need to worry about.

The ship is stunning. The stateroom is luxurious. Service so far, apart from one Maitre De (not my words for him), is friendly and impressive. Food and dining is excellent. I think I'll be enrolling in the UK's Olympic Sumo wrestling team when we get back.

Fantastic gym but I wish they wouldn't drag you out of it covered in sweat and on your last legs to go to the "Titanic Drill".

Evening dining produces an interesting mix of an extroverted female accountant, retired professor of political science and a therapist.

Oh and by the way my Cruiser Identification Criteria has been shot to pieces by the Americans. They come in all shapes, sizes (mainly blobby), age, dress, hats (some of which were last seen at Ascot ladies day) and has therefore been renamed the "Brits Cruise Identification Criteria".

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20091128 – Big Fat Geezer Dressed In Bright Red With Long White Beard Terrorizes Kids

December 2, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well we've been back just over a month and it's rained nearly every day – delightful.

Wendy's had the joys of Christmas shopping, usually without me for some reason! Thankfully when I do have to go at least there's a Starbucks around to kill the boredom.

Meanwhile I've got back into pottery. All very therapeutic. Somehow when I'm on the wheel I still seem to come off caked in clay, really makes walking difficult. Then of course I get moaned at from Wendy for making a mess. Meanwhile I'm racking up the pots, we've no room left in our house for any, every time you open a door they tumble out – friends and family watch out. There's nothing like getting your own back on someone whose annoyed you by inflicting a pot on them, everytime you go around they have to drag it out and put it in pride of place – wicked.

After two years of good intent I've finally managed to join an archery club. They have a 3 acre shoot and shed in the back of beyond – Sabden Fold in the shadow of Pendle hill. It's pretty good because I've a key to the shed (no sherry in it) and can go anytime to shoot a few arrows. Mind you I'm a bit out of practise and so far I've got three bent arrows – very expensive. When we get a nice day (not likely) I'll be able to go along and ruin a few more arrows. Perhaps my aim will improve if I attach a picture of some of these bankers / foreign call centre operators / lazy salesmen / and others, too many to mention, who have seriously offended and deserve to be lined up against the proverbial wall.

Sunday – we take Honey on the Father Christmas train. When it comes to a photograph with him they're scared witless – mind you can you blame them – but then kids will gladly accept presents /sweets off him. Worrying isn't it really.

Now these old steam trains may be very nostalgic but they certainly make you appreciate the comfort of a modern 1st class seat on Virgin and at least you don't arrive stinking like an old fireplace. Meanwhile I have the delight of an hours "In The Night Garden", no wonder kids don't speak coherently. It's just full of unintelligible babble that some overpaid psychologist has probably managed to con the BBC into believing is the latest in trendy learning – cynic.

Well only three days left before we escape this grey, wet and windy wasteland on HMS Wallace Arnold. Bring it on (what an awful phrase). We've already received our guide to cruising which tells us what we can and cannot wear. Fortunately black socks with shorts and colour of underpants is entirely at my discretion, but my holy jeans and trainers seem to be persona non gratis – oh well we'll see!

Tuesday is another one of those 4 letter word days. No I'm not installing software or doing DIY, it's WORK again. Up at 06:00, drive to the wilds of Wales – Bangor; 9 hour board meeting; then we have our Xmas do – meal and drinks. All very pleasant.

Wednesday – get home and suitcase is already packed, that saves a load of agro. But Wendy's forgot a few essentials such as yellow souwester to weather the storm; arm bands in case it sinks; stirrup pump to empty the seawater out of our "stateroom" down in the bilges; and of course my iPhone for SatNav to help Captain Pugwash if he gets lost.

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20091116 – Work A 4 Letter Word

November 17, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yes it's back to the rat race. A three day conference in London so it's early train to London; get the suit and ties out; clean shoes; no trainers and jeans. Traffic jams into Preston; hang around a cold station; do a passable imitation of a sardine on the underground; and yet another industry standard plastic hotel bedroom for two nights. Complete with inbuilt sleep deprivation unit, they call it air conditioning, but I'm calling the Health and Safety executive as they haven't issued me with ear defenders.

Oh how I miss it!! It's a good reminder of the rat race I've forsaken and makes me appreciate the freedom of retirement.

Mind you it's not too bad as it's three of my ten days I work each year. Just a pity it has to be in London. Subject of the conference is "Telehealth and Telecare", can be quite depressing, it's a constant reminder of what's in store for us as we get older. But hopefully being involved in the industry might mean we stand a chance of at least getting a free zimmer frame and Wii installed.

I find it amazing how lazy people have become. Most of the things here are on the 2nd or -3rd floor (down in a bunker), but very few people walk to them, they even catch the lift down.

New Netbook is performing great. I easily get 8 hours out of the battery so I can use it to make notes as I sit there enthralled. Mind you I've still not fully configured it yet, no doubt by the time I've completed that they'll have bought out yet another new operating system release.

No one told me the 2nd Gala dinner was black tie, never mind, lounge suit is optional and it'll get me into a rebellious frame of mind ready for our cruise on HMS Wallace Arnold. Still hopefully there's plenty of free wine again.

Really looking forward to the best aspect of any trip to London, getting on the train at Euston and leaving it.

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20091112 – HMS Wallace Arnold

November 13, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

It's just too desperate to contemplate, three months here in this wet frozen wastelands surrounded by political correctness gone mad; apathy; more "do gooders" than are good for you; crap websites; poor service as the norm; foreign call centres that think they speak English but neither listen nor comprehend all topped by a total abandonment of anything resembling common sense. As the lesser of two evils we're escaping on a two week Caribbean cruise (Wallace Arnold ahoy) - it can't be any worse. At least it will prove once and for all that they're not for us! You have to try anything once, even black puddings, tripe, tete de veau and cruising.

We go 3rd December so I'll have to clear some space on my laptop to accommodate the copious cynical blogs

that will be generated. This experience could make even France look reasonable.

Meanwhile the lunacy continues:

Joe Stalin rules OK – it seems that in the UK we still have the lunatics from the police state running the asylum. Some guy complains to a council official and describes it as a f...ing mess. mardy official complains to boss about abuse, poor wee mite. 6 days later the police go round to the house of the complainer at 5:35 in the morning, invade his privacy and that of his wife. Arrest him and drag him off to the cells for 8 hours and serve him with a £80 pound fine. Of course the police say they attended at the earliest opportunity. Suffice to say that the police officers were probably ex KGB émigrés. Meanwhile “real” crime flourishes. Is this the first signs of a lunatic police state.

Wrap around children – I’ve just had a governors presentation on the latest government initiative / interference in schools. What is it? Well it’s opening up the schools to the community and providing 07:00 to 18:00 hour care to the little darlings. Breakfast clubs where we provide them with breakfast and after school clubs, complete with a varied menu of activity and possibly tea. Heaven forbid that parents should bother looking after their children! Why don’t we go the whole hog, before the politicians suggest it, and open a maternity unity. Then parents can come in; have their baby; get a colour Polaroid photo of it for the mantel piece; leave the baby with the school; collect it at 18 when the child becomes a well adjusted adult. It cuts out all that inconvenience of nappies; feeding them; holidays limited to school holidays; dirty finger marks; and dealing with puberty etc.

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[20091106 – Get Me Out Of Here](#)

November 6, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

We’ve been back nearly two weeks now and have suffered nothing but rain and cold miserable weather, with yet more to come. 3 months of this, god help us.

On top of that we have to put up with the lunatic fringes within the country. Let’s just consider a few of the recent acts that beggar believe:

The shop that has banned a woman from wearing a poppy at work!

Councils now require that any racists taunts in schools, even amongst 3 year olds, to be officially reported, with null returns being required and even investigations into low returns. Whatever happened to “stick and stones”. What happens to all this information?

Then we have online insurance company “search the Market” who expect you to note down a 32 character long reference number in order to retrieve your quote. Are they really taking the micky or have the IT nerds been allowed to run rampant.

Whatever happened to common sense?

Mind you it’s not much better in Europe where the EU court has banned crucifixes from all Italian classrooms. Needless to say the Roman Catholic Church and the Italians are incensed. Whilst the decision itself beggars believe. What is equally worrying is that the legal systems allow people – a foreigner – to bring such ludicrous cases.

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[20091019 – Homeward Bound – Unfortunately](#)

October 22, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – yet more blue skies and sun but very cold overnight. I just hope the overnight temperature hasn’t ruined my mobile wine cellar.

We're off to Santenay just South of Beaune, on our first leg home. Motorway nearly all the way; complete with SatNav; detailed handwritten instructions; personal navigator; and of course my own unique sense of direction, so how come we get lost on the motorways around Lyon? I truly despair but I have to say that having two exit 8's does make life a bit complicated!

Our overnight stop at Santenay is lovely. Right in the midst of the vineyards. Lo and behold as we draw up to the site who do we encounter but Gobena 2, who immediately enters into extended irrelevant conversation with Wendy – Gobena 2's been here for two days and doesn't like it. I of course ignore this and set off to identify a suitable pitch. Now I can't blame Wendy for "loose talk" this time, as I kept our next destination on a strictly need to know basis and Wendy wasn't aware of our ultimate destination for the day until she opened a sealed envelope with detailed instructions on how to get lost on the motorways around Lyon.

Bottle of Beaune for dinner. Very expensive at E6.50, but what a disappointment. Weak, insipid, almost a Rose in colour. Never again.

Tuesday – Wake up to blue skies and a very cold and frosty morning, so its porridge with maple syrup for breakfast. A good hearty meal to start the day.

Overnight a German panzer troupe have arrived on site – two very big motorhomes. They pop round to say sorry that they are so close to us as it was dark when they arrived – just like the French would. Don't really know what the problem was as they were well away from our plot, but had a very pleasant conversation in English and German with the two families involved. Yet another example of the friendliness of the rest of Europe (excluding the French). I really am beginning to wonder whether my initial theory is correct (the French are just miserable, resent foreigners in their country and are Xenophobic) or is it their lack of English that limits them?

Drive up to Chalons en champagne without a getting lost or needing a divorce lawyer. Lovely municipal site that would be well worth a few days.

Wednesday – first overcast day we've seen for a while. Set off up to our overnight stop, just South of Calais. Pouring down with rain. I can tell we're getting near to England.

Arrive just after lunch in the pouring rain to waterlogged pitches, oh joy. Try to reverse caravan onto pitch but even in 4 wheel drive it just skids all over. End up needing the mover. You really would think that all pitches around here would be gravel / hard standing but no they are World War 1 mud. Pitches aren't level but I believe we have a great view of the sea, if only we could see it through the rain. I then have to break out some crampons in order to climb a muddy embankment to get to the power. Then joy, it's reverse polarity (I should have known with this site) so I yet again have to risk life and limb to get to the power. 17 bloody Euros a night for this dump and to shower you need a token. Then to add to the joys a TGV line runs straight through the middle of the caravan. Signs on the site should tell you not to lean out the window as you'll get hit by a passing train. There's a gypsy site 400 yards away that's hard standing and is starting to look attractive.

Oh and the WC Chemique is right down the opposite end of the site where there are no caravans. It's just a motorhomehole in the ground and a hosepipe. If you wanted to turn someone off cravanning then take them to this site or take them to any site in the pouring rain, but add the two together and you've got enough for long term commitment to a mental hospital, never mind putting you off cravanning for life.

To summarise, do not go to L'ete Indien. It may be open until late and it may have wifi on pitch (chargeable) but basically it's a dump.

After we dry off we set off to the big Carrefour near the Tunnel in order to top up with some more booze. Unbelievable how difficult it is to find these hypermarkets, they must lose business from people who just give up. There are some good deals on but in future we'll just top up in the local supermarkets, it really isn't worth the hassle.

Thursday – yet another blue sky day. Thank god it's not raining. Great crossing, catch an earlier ferry. As we approach the UK the skies turn to grey, but thankfully it's not raining. We've only travelled 10 miles in the UK

when we encounter two major roadworks; warning that there's a 47 minute delay en-route; M25 closed between two junctions. Welcome home. Can we do a hand brake U-Turn on the motorway?

Eventually get to the Crystal palace caravan site. Up to the usual excellent standard. We're right under the Crystal Palace transmitter, so no doubt we've both been sterilised.

Only In A 35 Hour Week

[Proud To Be British – I know I seem to frequently go on about toilets in France but I must say that generally you don't see much graffiti. That is until you get near Calais where the British yob has left his imprint on Europe. 90% British graffiti, really does make you cringe.](#)

[Room With a View – yes it's another toilet comment. Picture window at ground level, so as you use the urinals you can look out onto the picnic area, what a good idea you may think, relieves the monotony whilst you relieve yourself and of course picnickers can look in – unbelievable! Must be the only country in the world where exposing yourself is the norm.](#)

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[20091015 – Autumn Sets In](#)

October 18, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday – yes it must be Thursday as Wendy's gone shopping. The highlight of her week when she gets to roam the isles at her leisure and terroise the shopkeepers. Meanwhile I have to suffer all on my own back at base camp with a coffee, book and the Internet.

Weather this week seems to have taken a real flip into Autumn. Yes, we're still getting brilliant blue skies everyday but both here in Provence, and back on the Cote d'Azur, the temperatures have dropped from an average of 24c to 16c. Everynight we need the central heating on.

Friday – blue skies and sun but 14c and wind. Visit picturesque village of Seugeret, picturesque but not much there. Then Chateaux Neuf de Pape, not a bit like St Emillion mostly shut. Then Orange what a disappointment, cold and shut. All in all a waste of petrol we should have stayed around Vaison la Romaine, it's lovely.

Found two bottles of wine that look very reasonable and promising. One from Vaison la Romaine and the other from Costieres de Nimes. Unfortunately for me I've got to sample both tonight if I want to buy a couple of cartons tomorrow (yes you may find it hard to believe but the supermarkets are all shut on Sunday) – oh well I'll just have grin and bear it. Good news is it's baked beans to go with these quality wines – oh what fine dining we enjoy.

Saturday – blue skies and sun again but still only 14c. The Mistral set in again overnight, but at least our new awning was still erect in the morning – always a good sign, French for it must be masculine "le auvent"

At least during the day there's no Mistral. After a leisurely morning we have a walk around – actually up would be a more apt phrase – the medieval fortress in Vaison la Romaine. A somewhat steep and rugged climb, but very pleasant. Much better than any of yesterdays visits. Well the campsites still pretty busy, mainly the Dutch – as usual – then Germans and French. Only two GB caravans on the whole site.

PS the wine was very disappointing. One was just ok but the other truly excelled itself and ended up as drain cleaner after I struggled through one glass.

Sunday – blue skies and cool yet again. Thank god for central heating overnight and a 14 tog quilt.

Well so far we've not really named any of our fellow campers, but here goes.

Of course there's "Gobena 2" – a kindly soul but a bit like a stuck record, keeps telling you the same thing over and over again.

Then there's "Sitting Bull", and his squaw "Teas Maid", so called because he wanders around in a very thick brightly coloured Indian shirt and sits out with his squaw on the far side of the field every day drinking tea.

The "Escapees" who shuffle around in his and hers matching yellow dressing gowns (probably given away free to anyone who had the brass balls to wear them) and slippers, you immediately think they're on the run / shuffle from Queens Park Hospital. This site is great but at this time of year it's a bit of Wallace Arnold stopover. Mind you it does make you feel young – no doubt our time will come!

Added to the wine cellar with a couple of 5 litre boxes of Ventoux. Meanwhile I'm just draining the last of the Cotes du Luberon.

When we get home we're going to have to think about where to store my wine collection as I've been told that the garage / frost is not good for wine. It's a choice between the spare bedroom, where will Wendy iron, or throwing Kurt out on the streets – at least that will stop him moaning about having to pay board.

Awning down in record time without the need for a divorce lawyer. Everything packed up and ready to go in the morning. Then in the afternoon sit in the sun and out of the wind reading. Very relaxing last day even if it is somewhat cool.

Only In A 35 Hour Week

Laid Back – yes one of the nice things about France is that it's so laid back, sometimes a little too much so. They saunter across zebra crossings doing the Mediterranean trot; they have their long leisurely lunches; the supermarket checkout girls (yes I know that's sexiest but I've never seen a male on the tills) who leisurely serve you whilst discussing god knows what, but based on the UK experience it's probably their latest sexual encounter last night; nothing is hurried until the French get behind the steering wheel and then of course it's every man (or should that be person) for themselves; aggression; piping; overtaking in the most ludicrous places. If they want to kill themselves that's fine by me – probably stops the gene pool being polluted – just don't do it in front of my car or involve anyone else.

Smell, what smell – do the French have a sense of smell or are they just too laid back and complacent to complain? Why do I ask? Well go into any of the cheaper supermarkets such as Intermarche and SuperU and even occasionally Le Clerc and not to mince words they stink. I'm sure that their head offices insist on a consistent aroma, all part of their branding, and therefore insist they all use "Flash with bouquet of Raw Sewage" to mop their floors with – it's probably so much cheaper. I have a natural dread of Supermarkets but these I especially avoid. They're just revolting.

French Viagra – what is it with all these French Viagra spams, trying to sell "Soft Viagra". At least in the UK they try and sell you the hard stuff. Soft seems too defeat the objective, or is it a special French thing?

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[20091009 – Provence And The Mistral Yet Again](#)

October 15, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – same again. Blogging lessons in McDonalds. Then in the afternoon we go in search of some speed discs for the back of the caravan. Yes, the French have done it again and want caravans and cars over 3.5 ton to have signs on the back displaying the maximum speed 80 / 90 – just like a long distant lorry driver. Just more red tape. But they're really useful because when I forget the maximum speed I can stop on the autoroute; put on my hi vis jacket and Wendy can do hers just in case; put out two emergency triangles and nip round the back of the caravan to see what is my maximum allowed speed.

Anyway we tour around several shops; crucify the French language many times and ultimately after many redirections find a Renault (they have to good for something) truck repairer who has some. Now I'm legit but seriously jealous of all these HGV's who also have a 60 sticker – never mind by next year they'll probably be

mandatory on every vehicle.

Saturday – same again. We we're going for a bike ride but Wendy thinks it'll be too hot. So we drive into St Rapheal and wonder down the front seeking out a restaurant serving fish and chips, complete with Watneys Red Barrel and "Only Fools and Horses" on a big screen. No joy here. Instead we settle for a beach side restaurant serving grilled sardines. In conformance with French eating regulations and in order to pass our first French Immigration test we manage to spend 90 minutes on lunch and wine. But at least I get my grilled sardines, ordering some butter is just another example of the breakdown in communications – why don't they teach the French proper "Teach Yourself French" and then they'd be able to understand proper French like what I speaks.

Anyway a very pleasant, if somewhat expensive lunch.

Sunday – same again. We have to take down the awning ready for departure. All managed without a cross word, swearword and no need for a divorce lawyer – really getting into it. Get everything packed up ready for the off tomorrow. Then in the afternoon we visit our neighbours for a farewell drink (no nick names here – they read our blog). We have a very pleasant farewell do and Wendy staggers back, somewhat the worse or Champagne and Cassis, but she manages dinner without falling over or falling asleep.

Monday – same again but it's howling gale and has been all night, we've both been seasick with the caravan rocking. We've not yet got to Provence and already the Mistral strikes.

Now let's just explain the delights of getting your caravan off our pitch. Firstly we need to ensure that we don't hit the strategically placed olive tree on the right; then if that doesn't get me I have to avoid the embankment on the left; then I have to avoid the pitch number on the left; then I have to avoid the drainage ditch just in front; meanwhile I need to be in 4 wheel drive in order to reach escape velocity. I avoid all that but then a dip in the road gets me and grounds the rear of the caravan – magic. Can't go forward, can't go back. Mess around with jockey wheel, caravan mover, oaths and incantations to finally get caravan out on the road and hitched up. Just typical, rather than spend a bit of money sorting out the pitches they provide free labour to get you off or let you struggle.

Then we drive up to Provence in the Mistral. We feel like a kite in a howling gale. No fun in this, especially when a HGV flashes past, complete with their 60 / 80 /90 stickers, and sucks you into their slipstream. Why is it that every time we go to Provence the Mistral is howling. On this sample I assume that the Mistral is always blowing in Provence. I really cannot understand why anyway with money and half a brain, other than a miller, would want live in Provence.

Anyway we finally get to our new campsite – Carpe Diem. Yes all the rejects and escapees from Colombier (Twin Axle and Dutch) are here, apart from the twins (sadly missed) and Monseur Poo. We're quite remote from the rest, how sad. Interesting how Twin Axle (AKA Gobena 2) is on a small pitch in the crowded part and has ignored some of the larger pitches

Lovely site, good sized pitch and best of all free wifi on pitch – oh yes there is a god after all.

Tuesday – clear blue sky but we're freezing to death its only 17c. Had the heating on overnight for the first time.

Pleasant stroll into Vaison la Romaine. But dam me we've missed the weekly market, how unlucky can you get. Usual tourist shops selling a range of nice new Provencal ready-made bric-a-brac, could put them straight in the boot ready for a car boot sale. Why do people buy so much expensive tat, things they don't need? How do these shops survive other than by having a massive markup. Remember Occam's Razor!

Then for a bit of a challenge, when we get back to the site we decide to put the awning up in the Mistral. Best described as an interesting experience, we survived it without resorting to divorce lawyers. Mind you help from our Danish neighbours did really save our bacon. I know I'm somewhat jaundiced about the French but in our "vast" experience of caravanning I can recall frequent help from Brits, Dutch, Germans, Swiss and even Brits living in France, but not once can I recall help from the French – they really have never forgiven us for Agincourt, Waterloo and frequently saving their skin in two world wars. Or is it the language barrier in that a lot of the older French people don't speak English and are therefore reluctant to engage.

Perhaps their lack of English that makes it difficult for them to wave or nod a thank you?

Wednesday – sun and a few clouds only 16c. After lunch – gives the shops time to open – we drive through the Cotes du Rhone vineyards to Carpentas. Then spend 20 minutes trying to find somewhere to park. Judging by the number of parked cars this place must be good – wrong again. Marginally better than the worst town in France, Beziers. After a walk around looking for a sunny street café for coffee we give up and head back down the tourist routes through the vineyards.

Mind you we have encountered three French drivers today who will lose the French citizenship if the government find out they have been courteous and given a wave of thanks – it's really a bit unnerving.

Then it's bread and cheese for dinner – hooray.

In the evening we improve International relations by having our Danish neighbours (Knud and Uda) around for drinks – he looks Danish – and of course they speak excellent English. Like a lot of people on the European Caravanning circuit they're out SKIing (Spending the Kids Inheritance). Their goal is "that if there's 3 bottles of wine left for the kids when we kick the bucket they'll be lucky". It's really interesting talking to people from different countries and amazing how similar we all are in views and prejudices – perhaps it's an age thing.

Only In A 35 Hour Week

Priorite a Droite (loony system which gives priority to traffic joining a main road from the right) – yes here we are in the 21st Century in the heart of the EU and they have small villages where Priorite a Droite (PAD) exists. I've been doing some research to find out what the rational reason for this is. Some seem to think it down to Napoleon, you remember that French geezer who we gave a good trouncing and then sent to a Club Mediterranean Holiday Camp with a free lifetime membership. Anyway back to PAD, it seems he had a thing about slow Ox drawn carts having to stop.

Other feeble arguments are that it forces drivers on the 'main' road to be more attentive than they maybe would be otherwise, and it prevents long queues on minor roads where there's a heavy traffic flow on the main road being joined. It achieves the same effect as traffic lights or a roundabout without the expense of installing either of those things, also argued that it is a traffic calming measure, long before they were thought of.

The French don't seem to have realised that if you have to put up large warning notices (some places do) for a system that isn't instinctive then there must be something basically wrong with that system. Because PAD has been abolished in nearly all of France every roundabout entrance still has a sign "Vous N'avez pas la Priorite" to remind everyone they need to "Give Way". Amazing in Sablet, yet another PAD ridden village, the roundabout has "Give Way" signs, how's that for confusion!

In essence there isn't any point, and a mixed system is not only downright dangerous but completely bonkers as well. I think this is another case of a letter to the EU asking them to issue an edict giving the French 6 months to either install PAD everywhere – yes I do mean everywhere, including motorways – or



abolish it everywhere. Failure to comply will result in expulsion from the EU. Let them take PAD and their holes in the ground and join some third world organization.

Forget the letter to the EU apparently the lunatics in Brussels have already given a grant to a town in Germany to do away with all its road signs and introduce priority from the right as a road safety measure. Unbelievable! Is this the lunacy that we will succumb to if we sign up to Lisbon and more EU madness.

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20091002 – Very Lazy Days

October 9, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – same again. Now the problem is remembering what we did. Take the suit to the cleaners – all part of this obsession Wendy has about scrubbing me up for the wedding (good news is no new green shirt has been seen yet). Anyway back to the cleaners. No English there and she wants to know more details than a Santander Bank account application. After I manage to crucify the French numbering system, she gives up the ghost and lets me key the details into the computer for her. I think it should be ready by Saturday evening, which I find hard to believe as surely it contravenes the sacred 35 hour week. Rest of the day seems like a basically lazy day again around the caravan, French studies, lunch (it's a contagious French disease this obsession with eating), pool in the afternoon with a good book (really cracking through them at a rate of knots) followed by quality bit of Reinheits Gebot in the evening and a not so quality French wine.

Saturday – same blue sky and sun yet again although it's not quite so hot, down to 26. Time for action. Long bike ride into St Aygulf. Loose Wendy on the way as she smells out a market and disappears. Give up looking for her and sit on a rock playing Sudoku (thank god for the iPhone, how laid back can you get), eventually she turns up. Then it's coffee on the beach at St Aygulf – I think the dept. of health over here has invested in universal hearing aids for all, or Teach Yourself French lessons, so that they can speak and listen to proper French – yes my request for an elongated / stretched coffee produces the correct beverage.

Sunday – same again. Yes it must be Sunday there's yet another Jane Austen series on TV – obsessive.

I try to rustle up enthusiasm for a long bike ride to the Honey Festival at Roquebrune, but Wendy's having none of it – too far. I take a bike ride down to the local supermarket, which obligingly and in conformance with the 35 hour week is closed. Interesting that the last hope of keeping the word enterprise alive in the French language is open. Yes, you guessed it, the bakers, open and selling bread like they're giving it away – I have to join the queue. Mind you the lawn mower shops and florists come a close joint 2nd and in the enterprise stakes, yes they're always open for business too. Then it's yet another lazy day reading, French studies and pool.

Monday – same again. Drove down to Hyeres to look to look at our next camp sites. Well you can forget hyeres, lovely location but all the sites are crap. Then we look around Lavandou, again similar story very expensive and cramped sites, really makes us appreciate the site we are one. Then we have to drive back along that road from St Tropez to Frejus. Never again, if I ever suggest it then please send me into a 1900 nuthouse for a full frontal lobotomy. Why would anyone with money want to come and live here.

Well after having looked at lots lots of sites around Cote d'Azur then, with a few exceptions, compared to the rest of France they are crap. The whole place is just greedy. If I think of all the sites we have visited in France, I cannot think of any that are as bad as around here. Sure our existing site is nice and perhaps two others but the rest are just examples of rampant greed. Very disappointing, just a pity they have the very good weather, which draws people here.

Tuesday – same again. Lazy day around the caravan and pool. Meanwhile the twins (see below) apparently had a major row yesterday that all the campsite heard, we missed out, and now the sacred bond has been broken and they go to the showers on their own.

Wednesday – same again. Wifi is down as there was a power cut overnight. 3 trips to reception and more promises than you can bank. Afternoon tea and cakes on the patio with neighbours Al and Shelia – actually beer for me and Al, followed by wine. Then after a bottle of wine and Wifi still not working I make my final assault on reception to hear the latest promises. Demain, demain, always demain, just another mediterranean word for manjara. Receptionist gets most upset when I tell her the service is crap; all the usual excuses and denials, but at 29 Euros a week this is an expensive service and I expect it to work. In the end, as an act of desperation, she gives me my money back for the whole week. Why, oh why does life have to be like this. You don't mind paying for a good service, but why do you have to complain and fight to get your rights. Whatever happened to the concept of quiet enjoyment. The meek may well inherit the earth, but they won't get their money back on crap wifi. We had the same problem last year with Passman Wifi and I have had two other instances of major problems with this service. Don't use PASSSMAN wifi.

Thursday – same again, although there are a few clouds and it's a little bit cooler – 24. I know it's Thursday because Wendy's all excited it's shopping day. I'm dropped off at McD's for coffee and Wifi whilst Wendy goes out to enjoy herself. Free Wifi for only the cost of a good cup of coffee. Meanwhile back at the campsite we've been infested with men (I use the word lightly) in bright coloured lycra suits – like downhill racers in condoms – complete with expensive cycle helmets (not like our £5 Argos ones) and mountain bikes with that many gears you need a calculator. It must be "tour de Frejus" again – all the cycle tracks will be closed to us lesser mortals. Better not go cycling this weekend someone will most likely stick a number onto our shirts.

Talk to some more of our Dutch neighbours. Amazing that within 2 sentences of conversations with Dutch people they all seem to bemoan the number of immigrants. They all seem quite racist. When I pointed out that there cannot be anybody left in Holland as all the Dutch are here, they immediately retort "no it's full of bloody immigrants and foreigners living off the state".

Only In A 35 Hour Week

French army Maneuvers – we seem to be in the midst of a battle zone. Tanks, armoured personnel carriers (mind you if you work in personnel you probably need an armored vehicle to protect you from the rest of the real world), and not to forget enough helicopters to compete with the dragon flies. All well and good but it 28c and these guys are that nesh (good old word means winging about the cold weather – being married to Wendy, and living in Belthorn, I use this word daily) they're going round with scarves on.

Bread gropers – yes Wendy's joined the legion of French women in the supermarkets that spend their time going round groping the French baguettes. I leave you to conjure up the image and consider the Freudian implications!

Meanwhile I'm glad to say that the French have excellent black puddings, no big globules of fat, very lean. And in a somewhat perverted twist they also do them with apples, onions or nuts in!

Well let's talk about some of our neighbours, we give them all nicknames, part of the childish way we pass the time. Hopefully none of them ever read this.

On the corner there's "the twins", so named because they go absolutely everywhere together, including the toilet and have extended conversations in the showers about the quality of Female razors – if you'd seen them you wouldn't want to ask or contemplate it.

Then there's "gobby 2" so called because she's on the same pitch as "gobby" was and can be heard all over the site.

"Satellite man" who roams about the camp site bemoaning the fact that his small satellite dish can't get East Enders – lucky blighter – told him he needs to get a big one, size matters.

Then there's our new French neighbours, "Monseur Poo", carries his rat like French dog over to a spare pitch in order that it can crap somewhere – disgusting!

Then there's "deaf jock" who as well as being hard of hearing seems to lose track halfway through a sentence. No we're not really on a Wallace Arnold site but at times it seems like it. The average age does worry us, but at least it makes us feel young – no doubt it'll all come to us in the fullness of time. Meanwhile we're here sat watching the world go by from our patio.

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[20090926 – Quiet At Last](#)

October 2, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – same again, clear blue sky, sunny and hot. Looks like it's getting quieter, a lot are leaving, so we will start to do some touring around. Lazy day around the caravan and the pool in the afternoon.

Sunday – same again. Set off early, well 10:30, for a bike ride down to yet another market, this one's on the beach. Not that we buy anything. We could buy hot Paella, but watching someone buy some with their rat in their arms – nothing like a dog sneezing all over your Paella.

On the way back we get yet another French bike puncture, dam French roads, full of nails etc. Afternoon tootle off down to the pool for my daily swim and read.

Monday – same again. Busy morning cleaning the car and fixing puncture. Not easy car cleaning when you only with just a bucket and a sponge. As fast as you put the soap on the sun dries it off. Afternoon around the pool to relax.

Tuesday – same again. Set off to St Paul de Vence. It's only 40 miles away but what with windy roads, aggressive French drivers, scooter and congestion in the small towns it takes 90 mins. When we get there the greedy little onion growers charge a fortune for parking. The village is yet another hilltop village with art shops than you can shake a paint brush at. Not one of the nicer villages and the cafes are so greedy – won't serve coffee only you have to have a meal. Anyway we sit on the village wall with a grand panoramic view down to thesea and eat our sumptuous lunch in peace and quiet. On the way back we try and visit one of the many marinas, but after driving round in ever decreasing circles following obscure and confusing signs we give up. Back home via the auto-route only 40 minutes – sanity!

In the evening we go out for French style aperitifs with our English neighbours, who now live in France, and a Dutch couple. Very cosmopolitan, we might yet become good Europeans. You'll be glad to know that French style aperitifs degrades into plenty of drinking, champagne and wine. Being aperitifs it should have finished about 19:00 but about 23:00 we all staggered back to our caravans.

Wednesday – same again. Wake up to count how many bites we got from sitting out all yesterday evening. Carpet cleaning day. This is worse than being at home. Escape to the pool in the afternoon.

Thursday – a bit cloudy in the morning. Is it really Thursday again. Shopping day so I get left in peace and quiet outside and do some research while Wendy enjoys herself down the isles. By lunch time it's back to clear blue skys again. Wendy discovers French ants (not a bit like the British ants who know their place and keep out in the garden) in the caravan so it's ant attack most of the afternoon. Looks like they snuck in on the carpets. Mind you one can of fly spray later there's none left, mind you I'm not sure we'll survive the spray either.

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[20090921 – Lazy Days](#)

September 26, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – the rains and clouds have departed and we look set for a week of pretty good weather, so it's back to another blue sky day. But what did we do? Life here is so relaxing you just forget. I seem to think it was another laze around the caravan day, learn some French and then in the afternoon a short drive down the slow road to St Tropez to look at another potential caravan sight. How do I manage to cope with all this excitement – well the wine does help.

Tuesday – yet another blue sky day. Short bike ride and then back for an afternoon around the pool. Bit of a blow to the youthful feeling today we've been invited to join the Saga Zone, the largest social networking site for the over 50s was launched in October 2007. So is this good bye Facebook and hello Wallace Arnold.

Wednesday – same again. Good 4 hour bike ride into Frejus and then down to the beach for lunch. Wendy's knackered by the time we get back, mind you it was hot. Some pleasant beach activities provides lunchtime entertainment, amazing the impact cold water can have on the human anatomy. In general when we're out and about we hardly see any British cars or people, but as soon as Wendy sniffs out a market then it's nothing but British voices everywhere – sad really. On the way down we see lots of young storks, with their gangly legs, but unfortunately you tend not to get close to them as they are very nervous.

Sad isn't it when the pace of life is so hectic that you spend 5 minutes arguing about what day of the week it is and the only way you figure it out is by what was on the box last night. Wendy got it right. I really used to wonder what sort of confused half wit would want one of those watches that tells you the day of the week. Now I know.

Then it's a gourmet dinner on the patio tonight – bread and cheese – one of the best meals of the week.

Thursday – same again. Lazy day around caravan and pool. Now in general it's very rare to see many obese French people, but our pool seems to attract more than it's fair share. Today there was Familie Francais Obese, a terrifying site. So fat that one of them even got stuck in the water slide and one of the other blobbies had to go down in an attempt to unbug him.

Wendy does the shopping – oh how I miss the cut and thrust of the trolleys down the aisles and all those labels to read.

Friday – same again. Bike ride down to St Rapheal. Coffee and free wifi at McDonalds. Always the best, cheapest and most reliable coffee in town – God bless America. Wendy gets so hot she just has to rest and cool down for a while before we can continue. Then in the afternoon it's a trip down to the pool. It really makes you think at times like this, how I could be in the office working, rather than enjoying this fantastic weather and pleasing myself.

Just found a fantastic 2003 St Emillion for about £4, so buy a dozen bottles whilst available. Then in the evening we are entertaining an English couple who now live in France. They are very positive about the French and their way of life, they just love it.

Today's Useless Information

Winners wear red – scientific studies show that wearing red is perceived as dominant. Football teams whose first choice kit is red win more games. Women wearing red are considered more attractive.

Only In A 35 Hour Week

Racial Discrimination – now I know the French are not too well disposed to foreigners and even less well disposed to the "Roast Beefs" – it's all down to Agincourt. But now I have positive proof of discrimination that needs taking to the European courts. Coach tours described in both French and English reveal that the French get their lunch included in the cost whereas anyone who speaks English doesn't – perhaps they feel that all the English speakers will bring their butties rather than cope with foreign food!

The Charms of a Lambretta – somehow having a female copper riding a police Lambretta (no blue flashing light though) doesn't do much for credibility. Even less credible when the same has an over populated silver charm bracelet that is so heavy she needs to carry her gun on her other hip!

Aerated Disc Brakes – why on earth would a child's push chair need aerated disc brakes. Has the world gone speed crazy, do they enter their children into under 3's drag races, or is it just another ploy to extract more money from those with more money than sense? Whatever happened to the simple, lightweight aluminum push chair that was a doddle to operate and didn't require a 2nd mortgage.

Minor irritations – I need to buy a ruled notebook for my French. Can you find one anywhere. Not a chance they are all ruled vertically and horizontally in varying ways. Is this just another symptom of French life and why? Any answers on a postcard.....

Meanwhile the post office workers are on strike yet again. I think it's some sort of annual celebration they have. Mind you I see it's spread to the UK.

Wifi speed – on site the wifi speed has been appalling. Anyway after much moaning a nice young lady turned up to tell me that she'd been onto the Company for over an hour and yes there was a problem, due to the rain!!!! Now this is the second time in France I've heard this pathetic excuse. Does it not embarrass them to even use it, and to think that the French consider themselves a technologically advanced nation – unbelievable. At least they offer me a free weeks wifi which is reasonable.

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[20090907 – St Rapheal](#)

September 22, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – yet another sunny day. We set off to drive to St Raphael and our new campsite. Unfortunately, the maps and driving instructions when you get into St Rafael leaves a lot to be desired. You would think that the campsites would take the trouble to check out their instructions, but alas, no.

The new campsite is very disappointing. Although it's got all the facilities you could ever want including on-site wi-fi and a gymnasium. The size of the pitches leave a lot to be desired. On top of that. It's very regimented all pitches are just in rows, and very close to one another. Reminds me very much of a the refugee camps in Sudan.

Monday evening, we drive down to Frejus and arrange to go to our old campsite Domaine du Colombier on Saturday.

Tuesday – yet another glorious sunny day. By way of a change it is a lazy day around the pool.

Wednesday – yet another glorious sunny day. Feeling energetic today. So we take a bike ride down to the beach at Agay. A pleasant little beach town, but sadly by the time we arrive the market is just packing up – oh dear how sad. The ride into Agay was all down hill so much to Wendy's to delight the ride back was all uphill. However, to be fair, she did do quite well and only walked a few hundred yards.

Thursday – is getting boring now yet another sunny day. Of course being Thursday, it's shopping day. Oh joy of joys, why am I so lucky. First we're off to Lidl, get all the bargains. That's if you can find the damn place. They spend a fortune on a massive sign, allegedly telling you where it is. But then, can you find it. We give up looking as they obviously don't deserve the business, and then lo and behold it's in front of us. After that we go to LeClerc, which fortunately has a McDonald's right next to it. So it's a cheap coffee and free WiFi for me, whilst Wendy marauders around the Isles. Life here is just so exciting.

Friday – yes it's the same weather yet again. We drive out to the small town of Roquebourn and Le Muy to visit some alternative campsites for later on this trip and next year. We find three good alternatives two of them, run by helpful French staff – now there's a first. The third one has no staff around and is proper little Dutch enclave, not a Frenchman insight. This has to be a strong possibility for our next visit.

Saturday move onto our new site and pitch up in 37c. I must have lost a stone. After uch difficulty finally manage to get caravan level and awning up. But pegs just do not go into the solid rock. At least we have wifi on site and the pitch is massive.

Sunday – yes more sun and a lazy day around pool.

Monday – it's getting boring now just more brilliant sunshine and lazy day.

Tuesday – by way of a change it's raining so we have a quiet day in the caravan and I get some People Planner research done. Mind you with the speed of this Internet connection it would be faster to get some carrier pigeons.

Wednesday – rain forecast so we drive down the coast to explore new sites ready for later in October. Boy o boy does it rain while we're out. See some awful campsites with a few good ones. Also benefit from the joys of the road to St Tropez. God knows why the rich and famous would want to live around here it takes you hours to get anywhere – 90 minutes to do just 20 miles.

Thursday – back to brilliant sunshine again so lazy day around the pool to recuperate from our two days of rain.

Friday – yet another rainy day. It wouldn't be so bad if the rainy days were spaced out, it would be a welcome break, but coming all together you get to feel like it's Belthorn – at least it's hot. Anyway not so bad I have the Internet and manage to get some more research done. Friday night we have the mother of all thunder storms, an absolutely spectacular light show, and rain like we've never seen before – it seems like all the weather here, rain or shine, excels that in England. Miraculously we don't get washed away, although a large wooden boat full of animals with a long bearded man at the prow was seen sailing past the site.

Saturday – over cast but not a problem as it's retail therapy day so we don't really notice it.

Sunday – back to the brilliant sunshine again. Pleasant ride down to the beach. Miraculously Wendy manages to sniffout a street market, she seems to be able to detect them miles away. I nearly fall off my bike with shock at one stage, ride up to a zebra crossing (now I know full well that they carry no special significance here and not to risk crossing on one) but a car pulls to a halt for me, not just any car but a French car. I'm so shocked I nearly fall off my bike. I can only assume the driver of the French car was either not French, was seriously ill or had a faulty "French gene".

Only In A 35 Hour Week

Café allongé – good news on the language front. After 18 months I've finally managed to order a big coffee, not espresso, without getting served the most expensive cocktail on the menu. Of course in the civilized world it would be a coffee American but they get upset with phrases like that.

Black socks – now for years I have been setting the fashion with my black socks, shorts and trainers and have treated the mockery with disdain knowing that it often takes a while for a fashion guru to be recognized. But finally the fashion world has caught up with me, imitation being the highest form of flattery. Yes, that bloody overpaid footballer who's married to the anorexic pop star was seen copying my style and then a team of formation dancers down on the beach were also following my lead, mind you no shorts but the black socks did go quite well with their tutu's. I'm just waiting now for the knotted hanky to catch on.

Meanwhile Sarkosky has come up with the brilliant idea of a happiness quotient to be added to the country's GDP figures. Now you're probably thinking this is great news because they are going to get the French to be happy, smile and have good manners. None of it. Apparently their GDP figures are pretty poor and the deluded soul thinks that they are all so happy that if they come up with a measure it can be used to fudge their GDP to look better. Actually he's confusing happiness, smiling and good manners with quality of life; 35 hours; lots of holidays and how much they spend on the welfare state – no bad thing when you're retired and benefitting from it rather than shelling out for it.

Interesting that the French word for holiday does not exist in the singular.

Now one of the things that France seems to lack is any entrepreneurial flair, there all too tied up with social contracts, 35 hour weeks and strong unions. But they do have the ultimate self employed entrepreneurs in every village and small community. Yes it's the village baker. Up at the crack of dawn to prepare fresh bread and croissants, open all hours and a key part of every community. Not replaced by the supermarkets and regrettably something that we seem to have lost in the UK.

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[20090904 – Arles And Château des Baux](#)

September 8, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – cloudy start but by lunch time we're back to scorching weather again, by the evening the Mistral returns.

It's another day of culture and tourism. We set off to visit Arles to see the Roman Arena there, but at 6 Euros each to go in and see a roman stadium, surrounded by scaffolding and full of modern day bleachers we give a visit a pass and just walk round the outside. Arles is quite disappointing, seedy and I don't think we ever really found the centre. Despite having found the Marie and Office of Tourism.

Then it's off to Chateaux des Baux. Now this place is stunning. Pity we didn't give Arles a miss and spend a full day here. it's a hilltop village with an old castle perched on a rocky outcrop. The village is very relaxing, an up market version of Eze. The castle is fantastic and worth every Euro, despite not being able

to qualify for a reduced rate. As we are retired, we are therefore not employed, that is, unemployed and should therefore in my opinion qualify for the unemployed rate. Alas I'm wasting my breath on them.

Inside the castle we get free self guided audio tour and there are live demonstrations of the sword fights and firing of a full sized catapults, very impressive, they must have been awesome machines of war in the. Then we explore this fantastic castle mainly built into the rock. You could easily spend a day here.

By the time we get back it's 19:00 and the Mistral has kicked in again. But it's still very warm so we are sat on our patio (awning) when our Swiss neighbours literally come marching over with Peter Mayles book Hotel Pastis and ask if we know it. We then have a very entertaining hour discussing, Peter Mayle, Provence, the French in general (always a dodgy subject but I get the impression the Swiss aren't all that enamored with them), problems with Gadafi and the Swiss banking system. All in a mixture of French and German. Very entertaining and a excellent opportunity to try out my French, and very rusty German, without igniting world war 3 or a race riot.



Overnight we once again have the benefit of the Mistral, just like the Belthorn winds.

Saturday – starts as another clear blue sky day but with yet more of the Mistral.

It's a lazy day around the caravan, followed in the afternoon by a walk down the river bank into Isle de Sorgue. We take a tour around the town with the aid of an excellent tourist brochure. If I see another water wheel I think I'm going to throw up, the town is just full of them and there usually covered with a disgusting green slime.

Sunday – thankfully the Mistral disappeared overnight and we awake to glorious sunshine, clear blue sky and no wind.



We set off on a pleasant 3 hour bike ride to Fontaine de Vacluse. A quaint little village in a gorge that is famous for the largest underground spring in Europe and is the source of the Sorgue river. Unfortunately most of the ride is one way and of course we're going the wrong way. But in true French fashion it really doesn't seem to matter as the one way system seems to be optional – now there's a novel idea – even the gendarmes can't be bothered.

The village, gorge and river are very picturesque but the spring / fountain are a bit disappointing. I had visions of water gushing out the ground just like a mains burst, but alas it just seems like a very deep pool. At least there isn't a giant water bottling plant. The French are out in force, complete with rats on

leads.

We get back in time for a late lunch and relax around the caravan while I psych myself up ready for the taking down of the awning and packing up ready for our move down to Frejus. It really is too hot for anything strenuous.

Only In A 35 Hour Week

I know we've covered the generalities of French being a miserable lot, but just as annoying is their complete lack of manners. In general holding a door for them or any other gesture of common decency is never rewarded by as much as a nod never mind a thank you – no matter what language it's expressed in. Why are they so bloody ignorant? Do the schools not teach good manners? The kids certainly won't learn it from the parents as they are the worst offenders – pig ignorant.

Letter to Sarkosky get manners on the school syllabus and perhaps in 50 years time you may have a society ready to integrate with the rest of the civilized world, although you'll still have to get them to smile occasionally. Problem will be in finding anyone I France who can teach manners.

Provence – well it's lovely around here, very hot and very sunny. Property prices certainly reflect it. Although personally I find it hard to understand why anyone would want to come and live in this area given that the Mistral is as bad as the winds in Belthorn!

Another letter to Sarkorsky. After careful observation I've come up with a method of stopping the French being such a miserable bunch. Ask yourself when are the French happy? Possibly when they're having sex, but I've no direct evidence to support that and besides I don't think it's practical to have them wander around all the time having sex. But wander past any French restaurant and what do you see but happy smiling faces, even laughter – yet all credit to the French it is not a nation of blobbies. So there you have answer, provide them with a constant source of food during their waking hours and voila you have a happy nation. Now all you have to do is to figure out how to feed them constantly. Well there I have a simple solution, even though the average Frenchmen holds it in disdain. Yes it's the much hated English sandwich. Pack them off each morning with plenty of sandwiches for the day and you end up with a happy nation. Might give you an obesity problem but it's a small price to pay to overcome the miserable grumpiness that current pervades the nation.

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[20090902 – The Luberon](#)

September 5, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – a bit of rain overnight and it's a cloudy. Really cold today only 29 thankfully.



It's a tour of Provence, or more specifically the Luberon. Start off at Gourdes. Picturesque hilltop village with more shops selling ready made bric a brac than you can get round in a morning. Expensive here as you have to pay for parking, just like Blackburn, but there the comparison ends.

Then it's off to Rossilon. Yet another hilltop village with paid parking. This one is famous for it's Ochre and coloured gorges but it's too hot to go on a tour of the gorges.

We visit Apt but that's a bit disappointing so we give it a miss.

Then it's Bonnieux the main village on the Luberon, after that we visit Menerbes the village famous for "A Year In Provence". Doesn't seem a bit like the programme but this area is very elegant and relaxed. Property prices are high and there's not a Brit in sight. It's obviously teeming with French very closely followed by Germans and a sprinkling of Dutch. There are stunning views over the Luberon and an excess of small vineyards. Unlike other regions the small vineyards seem to be preminent and each one is unique in character.

Couldn't resist trying a bottle of appellation Luberon Controlee, never heard of it before, but it is the best bottle of wine I've drunk this year. Too good to put down or risk half of it going off so I did the decent thing and drank it all – mind

you I did let Wendy have a sip. Fantastic! I think we may be driving down to Apt to do our weekly shop and maybe pick up a dozen more bottles.

Last night was sweltering, at 21:00 it was 25.

Thursday – a mixture of sun and cloud but it's still too hot.

We have a pleasant bike ride into Isle De Sorgue to attend the local market, it's won prizes – how does a market win a prize, perhaps supermarkets may be next. It's a lovely relaxing little town on the river Sorgue.

People ask what the hell we do with ourselves when we're away. Well a typical day usually starts around 8:00 with breakfast, emails, Internet and coffee. Quickly followed by about an hours French and then some more coffee, research / reading. About 12:00 – sometimes we really bust a gut and get off out about 09:00 – we manage to set off out preferably on a bike ride or a drive if there are any distant places we want to see. Normally get back around 17:00 when we relax, read, drink coffee and of course access the Internet. As it's usually so hot we tend to have dinner around 19:30 and as France is an hour ahead of the UK we don't usually watch any TV until around 21:00. A really stressful life!



Answer to the last question: A typical papal feast at Avignon would consume 90,000 loafs of bread along with 1,000's of other meats and dishes – they sure knew how to eat in those days. But how did they manage the logistics of such vast quantities and how did the sewage systems cope?

Only In A 35 Hour Week

I know we've probably had this theme before but why are the French generally so bloody miserable and unsociable. The Americans speak to everyone and perhaps the problem is stopping them; even the Dutch and the Germans are relatively sociable, but not the bloody French. I think it would be a really good idea if they wore French flags badges – seeing as how they are so chauvinistic – and then we'd know to not even bother with any of the social niceties.

Bad Web Sites – what is it about websites that Companies can just lash them together and not even bother testing them. I've just used a famous stockbrokers site, it's riddled with errors, bad design and just lack of common sense. I email them and get an email back saying that they have their own in-house testing and it's an award winning site. Well they need to sack their testers and if this is award winning then it just goes to confirm my views on how bad web sites are. Companies wouldn't print their literature with so many basic errors, yet when it comes to a website anything goes. The most extreme example is completely ignoring legibility. What idiot would ever have print brochure brown on black – I rest my case.

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[20090830 – The Lazy Days Begin – We Hope](#)

September 5, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – yet another blue sky day. Some real excitement today we get to set up our new awning. I've got the divorce lawyers on standby.

Instruction manual, as usual, is pretty useless as there are no diagrams and none of the pieces are named or identified – still helps keep the brain agile. It only takes two hours, which does include coffee breaks and many minor tweaks. Miraculously we don't need the divorce lawyers and hardly a swear word to disturb the peace. Hopefully next time it'll take less than an hour, as now we know the ropes.

It was such good fun that I suggested that we take it down and set it up again as practice but that was ignored.

I have to admit that I was a bit skeptical about it, but now it's up it makes one hell of a difference. We've got it set up as a sun canopy, open all the way along the front, that way it's much cooler. Perhaps tomorrow

we'll push the limits even further and remove the sides as well – such excitement.

Then get the satellite and on pitch wifi set up, it's great this back to nature basics life. All we need now is air conditioning.

So much for a lazy day, it's all go. Anyway we have a lazy afternoon admiring our handy work and trying to keep cool.

Wendy's really excited as we've recorded the East Enders Omnibus so she can catch up on life's essentials.

In the evening we dine Al Fresco, just like a typical Belthorn evening!

Monday – wake to yet another blue sky day and breakfast outside. Now that's something we've never tried in Belthorn, mind you rain and mist tends to make your toast go soggy.

The Wallace Arnold Tour de France has just left the campsite. There all in their multi-coloured condoms / lycra. I'm surprised there are no zimmer frames attached to their bikes, but good of them getting out there and doing something. Perhaps after coffee we might follow their lead.

Well it's no bike ride for us it's just too dammed hot (36 in the shade) and we're not acclimatised yet so we're taking refuge in the caravan where it's a bit cooler. At the moment Belthorn's cold weather has some fleeting appeal, but don't worry we'll soon come to our senses.

We just about manage a short walk down by the river.

Meanwhile I understand that everyone in Blackburn is either in a rubber dingy or sat on their roof waving to Mr and Mrs Noah.

Now the 1.5 avid readers of this blog may be wondering why we've been in France for 5 days and yet not a single acrid remark about the French. Is it because I'm becoming more mellow in my dotage; is that I'm beginning to like the French; or is it because I've had no real contact with them so far, apart from the cretin on a motorbike who seems to think queues aren't for him (mind you the world over motorbikers and cyclists seem to think that the highway code and any form of civilized behavior is not for them).

How can anyone say that East Enders is just a pathetic soap when it comes out with pearls of wisdom like "Too much thinking makes you ill"?

Tuesday – yet another Blue sky day and it's still too hot. Never mind we brave the elements and venture into Avignon. City of papal palace and crap roads and road signs.



However following Wendy's navigational inspiration I go with the traffic flow and bump into a free park and ride. Something well worth advertising yet one of Avignons best kept secrets, perhaps Blackburn has a similar secret location to encourage the tourists!

We get our over dose of culture with a tour of the papal palace. Now these guys really knew how to live, drink and eat. Mean while can anyone tell me what the "massacre de Glaciers" is all about? Yes I know a lot of people were killed but according to my French this is the massacre of the ice cream man / cool box / cool bag / glacier. You take your pick but none of them seem to make sense unless of course there were about 90 mafia styled ice cream men about that needed topping.

21:00 and its still 28 degrees. I think in keeping with our back to nature approach and foregoing all trappings of the consumer society we treat ourselves to a fan tomorrow.

Question of the day: How many loafs of bread were used in a papal feast, was it 120, 2,400, 41,000 or 95,000.

Only In A 35 Hour Week

We decide to have a coffee in the papal grounds and are served by a young French geezer in a pink tee shirt with "No f#cking dress code" on the front – fancy letting any man wear a pink tee shirt – unbelievable.

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[20090826 – Escape from the Hell Hole](#)

August 30, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – we set off at nine o'clock and by way of a change it's miserable, grey, overcast and raining and only 12°. Still, what can you expect it's only August height of the British summer.

The journey to Dover is not too bad. To avoid the Dartford tunnel and the usual traffic jams we thought we would go counter clockwise round the M25, but in what must now be an established tradition, it's closed. How unusual! So we have to brave Dartford and as usual it doesn't let us down there is a 30 minute traffic jam. How come this bloody country tolerates charging for a toll crossing that actually creates the a traffic jam. It's just another unbelievable aspect of the road network in the UK. Whilst I'm on a road rage rant let's consider a minor traffic jam on the way down, caused by a wide load occupying 1.5 lanes and traveling at 25 miles an hour. Given the pathetic state of our roads has nobody the wit to say wide loads should only be allowed to travel between midnight and six o'clock!

We arrive on the campsite and as usual it is very good although like all caravan club sites it is very regimented and organized. The caravans are organized on the site in time sequence such that those leaving early on are nearer the gate and those are leaving later are further away. Heaven help anybody who bucks that arrangement. But you do have to admit that Caravan club campsites all excellent despite the regimentation and excessive trivia notices everywhere.

Thursday morning we're up bright and early ready to catch the ferry. By way of the changes spitting with rain despite a good weather forecast. P&O Ferry crossing was excellent as usual and we arrived on time. But to our utter dismay it was raining in Calais. However as we drove down France towards our overnight stop **the weather** gradually picked up and lo and behold by the time we arrived the sun was out and it was 28°. BREAK OUT THE SHORTS AND SUNGLASSES – can anyone remember where we put them way back when? For the first time since we returned from America we were actually able to sit down in the sun with a drink, nonalcoholic I might add, and have a good read in the sun.

The camp site is a municipal site run by the local council. It's absolutely lovely and only cost €13 for the night. Showers and toilets are clean but in truth French tradition or the toilet seats have been stolen – don't get me going on that again – and of course they have two or three Third World hole in the ground toilets. Overall it's a great site and will certainly use it again.

The village where it is located is quaint and has benefit of a church the rings it's bells every hour – do the faithful really go to church that often or is it just marketing gone mad. Let's hope that in truth French fashion they honour the 35 hour week and knock off early evening.

By the way the journey down France was up to his usual standard hardly any traffic, certainly no traffic jams and just a very relaxing driving experience.

Wendy is somewhat devastated as it is Thursday and there is no East Enders to watch. Given that there are no East Enders I'm amazed at how she knows it is Thursday. With a bit of luck we may have a satellite dish up by Sunday and she can catch all missed editions.

Whilst the roads in France are excellent, signs can at times be a little confusing. The road down to the caravan site has a sign graphically displaying no caravans allowed. It's only on closer inspection that you notice that the forbidden caravans are actually twin axles but it confuses and a lot of people.

Great news on the cost front, diesel is cheaper than petrol and works out at £0.88 per liter as opposed to 1 pound and five pence in the UK – very civilised.

Friday morning starts off sunny with a few clouds so we set off down to our next stop, it's a 6 Hour drive. The weather gets gradually better. By the time we arrive at our next site, just North of Macon, it's a gorgeous 28° clear blue sky and yet again we can sit out and enjoy the weather. The campsite is quite busy but it's very nice and is well worth a stopover, another one to make a note of. The site also contains a very rare breed, a Frenchman with a sense of humour.

Saturday morning starts off yet again sunny and it's only a 220 mile drive. However we now know not to travel on a Saturday in August. For the first time we've encountered traffic jams especially around Lyon. The good news is it's even worse for those traveling North, their traffic jams are horrendous. Anyway after six hours we finally arrive at our campsite just outside Avignon and after more messing around than I care to remember we finally find a pitch to our liking.

Just like the last time we visited this area the mistral is blowing a gale even though it's clear blue skies and 27°. After a relaxing cup of tea I finally get to realize we're in France as I find myself wandering around yet another supermarket. Whilst I resisted drinking wine all week I finally give in to temptation when I see two excellent bottles on the shelves. It would be so much better if I didn't have to go into these places.

For now we're sat in our caravan eating bread and cheese while the mistral howls around us and the conkers blown off the trees are bouncing off the roof. It's almost like listening to the slates being blown off the roof in Belthorn, hopefully not as expensive.

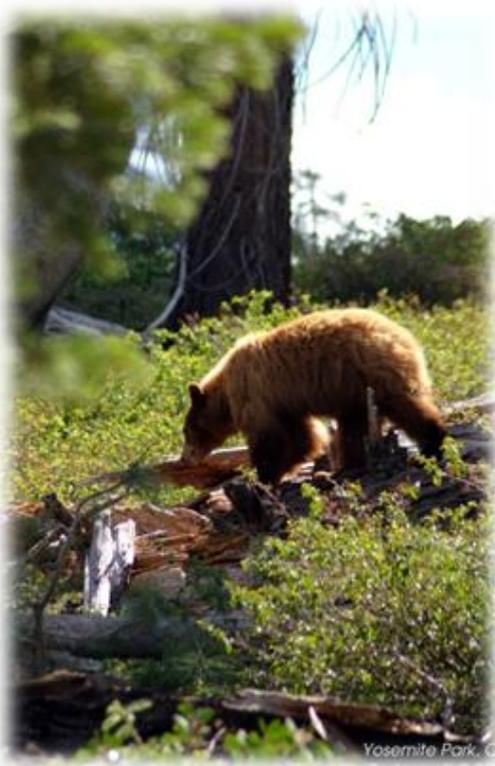
Anyway our long haul is over for a week whilst we stay here and explore the area around Avignon.

Let battle with the French commence.

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[20090728 – Homeward Bound Unfortunately](#)

July 30, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Tuesday – we set off towards San Francisco. Weathers clear blue sky and in the 90's.

On the way to our hotel we call in at Berkley and have a pleasant stroll around the university. Stunning grounds and buildings, definitely wasted on the young.

By the time we get to our hotel at 17:00 the weather in SF is cloudy and mid 60's. That dam sea fog again. In the evening we go down to Fishermans Wharf – yet again – to but some tee-shirts and have a final lobster tails dinner on the wharf. San alcohol I might add as I have to drive back to the hotel.

Wednesday – it's up early to catch our flight. Everything in /out of Newark is delayed because of rain. But the good news is we get on an earlier flight. Wendy was downing pills and brandy as we ran the gate. To top it all she spilt brandy

down herself and stunk of brandy. Much good did it do us as the flight to Manchester was 3 hours late. Oh the joys of travel.

What have we learnt then:

America is still as big and bold as ever.

Over 32% of the people are obese. We are talking seriously fat.

Cost of hotels, food and clothes is cheaper and with a better choice than at home. Petrol still remains as cheap as chips.

Everyone is very friendly and the place is so much nicer than home.

The lack of any form of lane discipline makes driving on the Freeways fast and furious. A nightmare.

The west coast from SF all the way up through Oregon is plagued with sea fog.

Portland is a fantastic city.

Reno is an impressive little town despite the casinos.

Yosemite is awesome. Words cannot describe it.

We finally got to see a black bear.

They're full of confidence and bluster with a belief that they're the best in the world, yet the airports are still bought to a standstill because of a rag head that lives in a cave.

Yet despite it all, including the sea fog, it's been a great month. We're glad we did it. I don't

think we'll ever visit the Pacific Northwest again, including SF, but it was all worth it. We've driven 4,500 mile, seen a lot and enjoyed it, but next summer I think we'll do somewhere warmer. I really fancy Utah and Colorado but Wendy thinks we've seen enough with our skiing there. Perhaps it'll be the deep south, but certainly not in summer.

Answer to the previous question is: The majority of rock in Yosemite is granite.

It's good bye from us for now. We've got to survive a month in the Belthorn – someone has to live there. Then it's back to France at the end of August, no doubt we'll have some comments to add to our blog then.

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20090726 – YOSMITE HAS BLACK BEARS

July 28, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday – another clear blue sky day and very hot. After breakfast we take a stroll down to the beach on Lake Tahoe. Just want to take a few pictures before we set off for Mammoth Mountain. The greedy little fast buck merchants want to charge us \$5 each just to go on the beach – not likely.



We set off across several mountain passes and drive down to Mammoth Mountain, it's only about 200 miles but has some stunning scenery. Mammoth is a ski resort so I can't resist going up to the ski base just to see what it's like in summer. It's full of mountain bikers and has some stunning scenery. But it's just the one mountain and the skiing looks limited. We nearly skied here one year but I'm glad we didn't, after 3 days you'd be bored with it and there's no local alternatives.

In the evening we go in search of a pub for a spot of people watching as the weather is brilliant yet again. Now the ski complex downtown is lovely, there's a free movie on tonight in ski town square and there are people sat outside cafes having a good time but there is only one very soulless street bar?



Monday – clear blue sky. Today's one of the highlights of the holiday, a day in Yosemite. We're staying on the Eastern side so first we have to drive across it to the valley on the West side. On the way over we finally get our holiday wish and see an American black bear (or not always black but sometimes brown or even gold). This one was cinnamon coloured and came lumbering across the road, no green cross code but at least he had the sense to move fast. Just two seconds sooner and he'd have bounced through the windscreen and sat on our laps. A fantastic site, but sadly no time for a photo as he scampered off into the woods.



The vistas going across the park are fantastic, but we ain't seen nothing yet. It's a good job we stayed on the East side as we got to drive all the way across Yosemite, whereas most people just get to visit the valley. You could easily spend the day just on exploring some of the key sites on the drive across.

The valley has all the famous world heritage sites, it's truly awesome. Words do not do it justice and despite being peak season it's not too

crowded or spoilt. Of course if you really want to get away from it all then you can walk off into the wilderness. The valley has a great visitors centre, free parking and free shuttle bus. We set off for a short walk up to the Yosemite Creek waterfalls and then do a walk up to mirror lake where we get stunning views of half dome. There we have our picnic lunch by the lake complete with woodpeckers, squirrels, deer and other tourists. A well needed rest, as it's 103 degrees.

After that it's the village centre shops, coffee and then the visitors centre for a tour of the exhibits, an Indian village and a excellent film about Yosemite.



Then after a 10 hour day it's a sightseeing drive out down to our Hotel in Merced.

Answer to the previous question is: The popular long running American TV series was Bonanza based around the Cartwright family on the Ponderosa ranch just outside Virginia City.

Today's question is: "What type of rock forms the basis of the majority of Yosemite?"

Only In The USA

Road Signs –

they are mad when it comes to road signs. You have a four way dual carriage, with a 3rd turn left lane, Stop with traffic lights flashing red to warn you but not actually in use. You have to remember which one of 3 * 3 = 9 vehicles came 1st, 2nd 3rd etc. Get a round about, they're much simpler.

Then you have speed signs changing every 100 yards 70, 65, 60, 55, 50, 45.

But the classic is when you come out of town and it says "End of 25 MPH", rather than a simple sign saying 55 MPH. Oh no that usually come half a mile later.

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[20090724 – Reno And Virginia City](#)

July 28, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – its 80 degrees clear blue sky at 08:00 in the morning. After the crapest hotel breakfast so far we set off for downtown Reno, with expectations of a mini Las Vegas. How wrong we we're. Yes there are the dens of inequity where people withh more money than sense are throwing money into slot machines as if there is no tomorrow, but the town is centred around the lovely Truckee River. There are parks complete with a free live lunchtime jazz concert; town squares / stages and the river is just like a Disney lazy river with rapids to swim and ride in. It's full of kids and adults enjoying it and bathing; canoeists testing themselves against the rapids; people body surfing down the rapids; people lazing on the banks of the river. It's such an amazing and ideal river experience that I wonder whether it was artificially created.

The many foot bridges are adorned with flowers, there's free parking everywhere and it's immaculately clean. I suppose one note of worry is female Sherrifes and they're armed!

After lunch by the river we set off to the largest den of inequity – Circus Circus – it's massive complete with it's own mono rail system, but generally the casinos here are not on the Las Vegas scale. At least this place has fun fair type booths for the kids and families with free hourly entertainment and shows such as juggling etc.

Saturday – same clear blue sky weather. Having learnt our lesson from yesterday we nip dow for a \$9.99 buffet breakfast at Circus Circus. Great value you can get almost anything and as usual it's eat as much as you want. However there are that many blobbies that eating puts the fear of god into you. \$9.99 for two letuuce leaves and a coffee!



Now I've come up with another invention to help blobbies out. I'm going to call it the BraBell, it's a combined bra (bust support) and belly support. It cannot be comfortable for these grossly obese people to have their bellies bouncing around. And before any femminists point out that men don't have busts I suggest they look at next blobby to waddle past. I'm sure viriginas secrets will snap up exclusive rights to it.



Then we're off to Virginia City which has been preserved with all the buildings from the Gold Rush. More casinos and saloons than is good for you. Most of the other building have been turned into ready made bric a brac shops, almost the bubble factory transported back to the 1850's. It's a great morning just browsing around in the heat, all very interesting.

Excellent example of customer service seen on a sign in a 1850's Virginia City brothel "Customers come first". Even in those days they had the right approach.

Then we're off to Carson City, allegedly another cowboy town, but I think the marketing people have run riot here. Not a bit like the brochures. The hotel is yet another Days Inn let down so we get our money back and travel over the scenic mountain pass to South Lake Tahoe. Last time we were here was about 18 years ago and it was great skiing. All the hotels are expensive here but I bite the bullet and get us in a very nice Quality Inn on the main street. We have a very relaxing evening, walking down the main drag and then sit at a bar people watching. Again a lovely setting, with live music and a very relaxing example of how they lead the good life. It's hell of a lot warmer than the last time we were here.

Meanwhile the who killed MJ saga continues over here.

Answer to the previous question is: Las Vegas is in Nevada, along with all the other casinos.

Today's question is: "What long running and popular American TV series featured Virginia City?"

Only In The USA

Marketing Excess – I've frequently gone on about the excesses of the US marketing industry but I think I have to applaud them for this. Interstate 50 across Nevada has been described as the loneliest road in America, 150 miles of nothing. So how have the marketers turned this to an advantage? Well, call in at each of the small towns along the way and get a card stamped and at the end of the drive you get a "Lonely Road" certificate and badge. They advertise it in all the tourist info literature – creative eh.

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[20090722 – The Sedgeway Experience](#)

July 25, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – we finally depart the coast and leave the fog behind us. We're off down to Medford in Southern Oregon and after 100 miles we're into clear blue skies and soaring temperatures. It takes about 4 hours so we get there at lunch time, unlike the French everywhere is open. After checking in we set off to Jacksonville – thankfully nothing to do with the late and constantly on our TV screens, Micheal.



Jacksonville is an old gold mining town with lots of historic – that word again but at least it is historic on a US scale, right back to 1850's – old buildings and some stunning new homes built in keeping with the place. They rent Segways out here and like a child I've been mythering too go on one, so we finally do it. If you don't know what they are then the photograph should help. We get a 20 minute

induction and some crash helmets. Then we're off on our own to tour the town. We start off by visiting the cemetery and then once we're confident we're off downtown. They're fantastic, they just manage to stay upright and the slightest tilt on your toes backwards or forwards moves you forwards or backwards. Backwards is the only way to stop them.

It's absolutely sweltering 100 degrees.

Thursday – we set off down to Reno. It's just glorious clear blue skies all the way and then when we get to Reno it 96 but half the hotel car park is under a black cloud and our half is in clear blue sky. The drive down was fantastic through some fabulous scenery and the rest area we stopped at was unbelievable, right out in the wilds, but no bears.



Answer to the previous question is: Salt water taffy is a soft [toffy](#) originally produced and marketed in the [Atlantic City, New Jersey](#), area beginning in the late 19th century. Despite the name it does not contain salt water.

Today's question is: "What state is Las Vegas in?"

Only In The USA

[Job Creation US Style](#) – let's consider road works that reduce traffic from two lanes to one how many people does it require. Well you need a person to stand about 500 yards out to wave a flag at traffic to slow them down – the flagger. Then you need someone to stop the traffic – the stopper. But of course you need two of each as the traffic is two ways. Then on some of the road works you need a pilot car with "Follow Me" on the back to lead you through the road works, and on some road works you'd better have two pilot cars. In case your math is not too good that 5 – 6 people doing a mind shattering boring job, and that's 24 hours a day. Now I know the average American may not be the brightest navigator in the wagon train. But come on, two sets of warning lights and traffic lights and trust that they can navigate down a single lane without getting lost.

Letter to Arnold

Now I now you've had your hands full rustling up a few dollars to keep the state from going under but I've got a little job for you. Pop down to the Home Depot and buy a pot of white paint and a quarter inch paint brush. Then drive down I5 to the Reno turn off, it's the one with the Mcloud sign, and add the word Reno to the sign. Then for good measure I suggest you drive the rest of the way and add the word Reno to all the signs.

While you're at it paint out all those signs to Klamouth Falls. Just how much are they paying to have every road sign in a 200 mile radius point to them?

Oh and why does California have border control, with those very nice and friendly people, stopping every

vehicle to see if they have any plants or produce. Other states don't bother but then perhaps they understand what "United" States mean. Even bloody Europe has abolished border controls – except of course for the UK but then we're not, or never will really be part, of that rabble. So improve all the signs to Reno and those nice border control people won't need to waste time explaining how to get to Reno because the signs are crap. You could save a few salaries and reduce carbon emissions from the queues into California.

Regards

Tony

PS

If you nip over to the UK we have some wonderful portable traffic lights and warning signs that operate 24 * 7 without any employees – yet more savings to help with the deficit.

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[20090720 – Marys Peak](#)

July 22, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday starts off foggy but we know it's sunny inland so after yet another very relaxing morning we set off inland to ascend Mary's peak – the highest point on the West coast of Oregon.



It's amazing as you travel inland the temperature rises almost 1 degree per mile. When we leave sleepy hollow it's 56 and when we get to the base of the peak it's 87. It's still very hot and sunny at the top of the peak where we have lunch and enjoy the views. You can see the mountains inland and the fog rolling in and out of the coastal valleys.

We're in bear country here but not a one in sight. The best we manage is a turkey vulture, a friendly grasshopper and butterflies galore. Unfortunately what we didn't realise was how far inland it was, yet again fooled by the distances on the US maps.

I've been giving this bear problem some thought and come up with a new invention – The Edwards Bear Scarer – very simple a giant balloon in the shape of a Michelin Man, deflated of course, and a small compressed air gas cylinder attached. On encountering a bear you press a button to release the compressed air into the Michelin Man, that inflates to full 10 foot high in under 2 seconds and shrieks. The Bear is scared witless, defecates and exits stage left at a rate of knots. If it doesn't, and you live to tell the story, then you get your money back on purchase.

Then we have a pleasant evening in, spoilt only by East Enders, but at least we get to watch the last of the "Year In Provence" videos – gearing us up for our September French trip.





Tuesday is foggy again but we're off to Florence come what may.

Visit the historic (that deformed word again) old town. Rather quaint but more expensive new bric a brac shops than you can shake a coloured glass walking stick at. Even includes a dog boutique.

Call in at several bays and yet more state parks on the way back. See and smell the seals basking on the rocks and frolicking in the sea.

Well it's our last day here in Waldport. The house is a real home from home. It's just so relaxing here; watching the wildlife; hoping to see a whale pass by (I think they

sneak by in the night); even watching the fog roll in and out over the sea. All very enchanting. Yet despite the fog and it being a tad cooler than we'd hoped for, we've had pretty good weather, only one day when there was no sunshine and not a spot of rain.

Sadly we did not get to see the bear – perhaps some smoked salmon left on the decking might have helped.

But it's back on the road tomorrow and living out of a suitcase, but at least we should be heading into the higher temperatures.

Answer to the previous question is: A cord of wood is chopped wood loosely stacked 4ft wide by 4ft high and 8ft deep – 128 cubic feet. Costs about \$150 and if you relied on it for your heating you would probably need about 5 cords a year – or if you live with Wendy then at least 10 cords per year.

Today's question is: "What is Salt Water Taffy?".

Only In The USA

Dog Lovers – I've already had my rant about shops selling expensive new bric a brac and other items that we don't really need but in the nation of dog lovers there is yet another, more money than sense, excess. Yes it's the excesses they go to for their dogs. We have dog boutiques that sell everything a dog couldn't possibly want including clothes, nappies, goggles, shoes and dresses. Then we have organic dog food. Self clean dog wash parlors a bit like a do it yourself car wash. But the one that takes the dog biscuit has to be the holistic dog day care centre, where you can drop your pouch off whilst you go to work. I haven't worked out yet whether they actually have a range of these catering for the different ages; from the dog nursery for puppies; day care for the adult dog; through to elderly dog day centres, complete with basket weaving and even catering for drooling boxers. What a way to make a fast buck.

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[20090718 – What Rodeo!](#)

July 21, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – another sunny day with sea fog hovering out at sea. Lazy morning yet again and then off to Newport to explore the town and visit the Lincoln County Fair and Rodeo. Except that the rodeo doesn't exist despite being advertised on the web. Of course when challenged as to why there is no rodeo I just get the apathy answer – see Soup Of The Day Blog.

Instead we visit Newport historic waterfront, not really all that historic, but a pleasant stroll. Seems to consist mainly of shops selling lots of things that no one would really needs but might look nice, but that seems to be common to most seaside shops worldwide – we really do buy a lot of useless stuff.

We give the undersea gardens a miss and it's too late in the day to visit the Aquarium and get our money's worth. Instead we visit Oregon State University Marine Science Centre, it's free, and worth every penny. It's full of interactive exhibits, fish tanks and tide pools full of creature you can grope and stroke if you're that





way inclined.

We call in at seal rock, although no evidence of seals, and then browse the beach in Waldport (sleepy hollow).

Sunday yet another clear blue sky day, no sea fog but temperatures only in the 60's. Yet another lazy morning – well it is Sunday after all. Still no sign of the bear or whales, but at least Wendy, allegedly, saw a bald eagle.

We're off touring lighthouses today so we call in at Yaquina Bay Lighthouse which is a quaint little house at the top of the bay with a light on it. One of the most comfortable lighthouses I've seen, just like a normal home. It's all been preserved and you can wander round all the rooms for free. It's manned by volunteers, just like the Science centre and all of the interpretative centres we visit; they're delighted to answer any questions and just love to explain things.



We have lunch in the park there and despite a howling northerly wind we find some sheltered picnic tables. Now I don't know what's happening here at Newport but either there's a blobbiness epidemic of worrying proportions, let's hope it's not too contagious; or it's the Newport Blobby Society picnic. There's blobbies everywhere, we've never seen so many. Based on this sample you would assume that the US has a 80% obesity rate. It's just frightening.



Then we drive out to Yaquina head lighthouse, a proper traditional style one. It's in yet another state park and \$10 buys us a 5 day pass for all the parks, good value. There's a really good interpretative centre, full of interesting exhibits. Then we head out to the lighthouse. You can even go up to the top but the queues just too long. The views are stunning but the cold Alaskan breeze stops you loitering. The rocks out in the sea are just teeming with gulls and seals. Volunteers have

set up telescopes so you get a better view and they explain about the geology and all the different birds and seals. Wendy managed to see some flying penguins, she still hasn't got to grips with the habitat and now the flight capabilities of penguins – I really wonder whether that bald eagle she saw was a pigeon.

The beach here is all large black pebbles – very tempted to bring some back for the zen garden – but it is strictly forbidden, they're all shiny black after 1,000's years being pounded by the sea. It's very difficult to walk on.

Finally we call in at historic NYE beach – the local tourist board have really managed to corrupt the usage of the word historic with this place, it's not just poetic license it's literary rape.

Then joy of joy we have to go to the supermarket to get something for dinner. This isn't just any old supermarket, this is Fred Meyers, they sell absolutely everything and they could do with some park rangers in there to guide you around and help you find the way out. Wendy's eyes just light up, will we ever escape.

In the evening it's an excellent bottle of Pinot Noir, very fruity. I even have to hide it from Wendy. These Californian Pinot Noirs even beat the French wines. To end the day we watch, from our lounge, the sun setting over the Pacific – how romantic.



Answer to the previous question is: The Peregrine Falcon, the air to air missile of the bird world, can swoop down at 200 miles per hour. Currently listed as an endangered species.

Today's question is: "How much is a cord of wood?".

Only In The USA

Prescription Medicine – adverts on TV are just a nightmare but none more so than the adverts for prescription medicines. Yes they advertise medicines that only the doctor can prescribe so that your average Joe can wander into his doctors and tell him what treatment he requires – just think at this rate they can probably reduce doctor training down from 6 years to 6 months.

But of course American society being so litigious, the real sting in the tail on these adverts is how much time they spend telling you of every side effect; suitability; contra-indications; test results. As a result the advert spends about 10% of the time on the drug and what it's for and 90% on caveats and warnings. Your average drug advert can go on for two minutes, by which time voluntary euthanasia via an over dose on their product seems like a great alternative.

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[20090717 – No Fog In The Garden](#)

July 19, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Yesterday (Thursday) we awoke to a sunny day with the dreaded sea mist rolling in and out on the ocean, fortunately it refused to come as far as our garden, so at times we could see right out to sea – still didn't see any whales though; at other times we couldn't even see the beach; but the good news is that the sun was out in our garden. The effect of this sea fog and temperature is amazing. We walked just 100 yards further inland when we went to Waldport and you could feel the temperature rising.

Waldport is our local seafront town. It's a right little sleepy hollow, all very pristine and quaint. Just one supermarket so I don't know how Wendy will cope.

Anyway we had a really lazy day, explored Waldport and then Wendy did her weekly shop at sleepy hollow supermarket while I had a coffee and communed with my iPhone.



Pictures are of the house, garden and sea views. This place is really great. A real home from home, it has about everything you can possibly think of and is very spacious. I have a desk in the master bedroom where I can play on my laptop and whale watch at the same time.



The place is teeming with birds and other wildlife, although so far we've not seen the black bears, bald eagle, deer, elk or whales (they're in the

sea). We have seen loads of birds and we've the US equivalent of an Eye Spy Oregon Birds. Even seen a humming bird, they're so small, fast and beautiful, their wings beat so fast you can't see them.



Friday – another sunny day but again temperature is only in the mid 60's.



We have a lazy morning and then set off to Cape Perpetua where we get a free and personalized guided ecology tour through the forest with a park ranger – just the two of us to one ranger, now there's service. We then take a walk down to the tide pools and visit the devils churn, but the sea's not choppy enough to really be churning. After that we have another personalized presentation on endangered species.

The coast here is stunning with spruce forests and white sandy beaches, but the sea, so I'm told, is very cold as it's just flowed down from Alaska.

We then call in at Yachats – don't even ask how its pronounced – another sleepy little seaside hollow. Fortunately the weather's kind to us again with sun all day and the sea fog keeps itself to the sea.

Answer to the previous question is: The Black Bear. Oh and by the way if one charges at you, don't worry too much, it may be that he is only trying to intimidate you!

Today's question is: "What is the fastest bird in the world?".

Only In The USA

The Smile – Yes the smile of perfect teeth is everywhere it's quite disconcerting at times, especially when on a blobby. How do they get them teeth so white? Perhaps they paint them with Dulux brilliant white each morning. Then how come they show so much teeth, do they have their lips pruned. Other than being a lawyer, the two guaranteed highly paid careers must be dentistry and obesity specialist.

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20090715 – Sea Fog

July 16, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – a fantastically hot blue sky day. We're off to our house on the coast. On the way we stop off at the Oregon Trails End Visitors centre in Oregon City. The exhibits are a bit weak but there are 4-5 fascinating presentations on the Oregon trail and life back then. All told by actors in period dress. There's also a free downtown trolley ride around Oregon City but after a hasty fruit lunch – yet more cherries – we have to set off to Waldport. In case you're confused about the two pictures the one on the left is of Wendy just off on a prairie schooner for the 200 mile trip to the nearest supermarket, while on the right she's just washing her smalls with the latest in 1810 washing machines – scrub a dub dub that make her appreciate her washing machine.



The weather's been sweltering, 87 degrees, clear blue skies all day until we get to within a mile of our house on the beach. Then we encounter that bloody sea fog and the

temperature is down to 65 degrees. Drive back just a mile inland and it's clear blue sky – how bloody depressing. Fortunately the house is just great. It has two bedrooms; very well equipped; stunning views – if the fog ever lifts; internet access of course; massive windows in the lounge overlooking the sea; desk in the master bedroom with another panoramic sea view, laptop fits on it just great; pine paneled rooms; deck – so we can sun bathe and barbeque in the fog.

Now as the sea fog seems to be the most annoying aspect of this place I thought I'd improve my physics and share it with you.

Sea fog forms when a parcel of warm air passes over the cold Sea – in this case the Pacific which has just flowed down from Alaska and is hence very cold.

The warm air at the bottom of the parcel is cooled by the cold air below, until it can no longer hold the moisture that was previously contained within. Therefore, it releases some of the moisture in the form of liquid water through condensation. Add an onshore component like a wind of 5-20 mph, and the cooling in the bottom of the warm parcel of air is spread upwards and generates a fog; sea fog. Which depending upon direction and speed can spread further inland.



A number of factors determine the location and extent of sea fog and whether it will disperse quickly or linger throughout the day. For instance, if the land is warm when the fog rolls in from the sea, it will readily disperse. This is due to a smaller temperature difference between the surface of the earth and the bottom of the parcel of air.

During the night, when temperatures on land drop, the sea fog can penetrate a long way inland and linger till the next morning. Should there be a blanket of fog greeting you in the morning, then sunshine is needed to burn it back to the coast. But if the sea fog is very thick, sunshine is unlikely to burn through it. And if the wind is blowing steadily in from the sea, any sea fog that is dispersed will be quickly replaced with a fresh batch.

So all in all, sea fog is usually an unwelcome guest. The length of its stay is determined by wind speed and direction, sea temperatures and humidity levels in the bottom few thousand feet of the atmosphere. All of which makes forecasting its dispersal complex.

Answer to yesterday's question is: The Dalles on the Columbia River is home to Google – any self respecting nerd should know this.

Today's question is: "The welcome book in our house give us some serious advice about a certain animal in the area, namely; keep the bins in the garage; if there's fish or meat in the bin move it to the back of the garage; be alert if you go out late at night; keep a close eye on children and small pets; if you encounter one don't look it in the eye or stare – it's rude; if all else fails don't turn your back on it or run, make yourself as large as possible – we're all going around with an inflatable emergency Michelin blow up man. What animal are they warning us about?"

Only In The USA

Supermarket layout – an unfortunate daily aspect of our life on the road so far is the daily visit to the supermarket – yes I'm now an authority. Fortunately the one good thing about US supermarkets is they all seem to have a de-facto standard for layout so you don't have to wander around locating things. It almost makes me want to take up a trolley and browse down the isles reading labels and sell by dates – just like a trip to a good bookshop!

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[20090714 –Portland and Columbia River Gorge](#)

July 16, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday (12/7/9) – we're in Portland still and it's forecast rain for the day so we have a well deserved lazy morning after all our fervent sight-seeing and then after lunch drive down to the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry.

It's a great museum with loads of hands-on activities. Even us oldies can get our hands dirty. They have a CSI crime scene exhibit where you get to solve a crime scene. A really great way to find out about some of the technology involved – fantastic – us kids learned a lot. We've never watched CSI but I suppose we'll have to start watching it now.

A very wet afternoon but it's the first time we've had rain so I suppose we can't grumble – but we will – what can you expect, we're really starting to understand that Oregon and Washington weather is similar to North West England.



Monday (13/7/9) – a long day planned as we're off down the Columbia River Gorge. It's only about 70 miles but there are so many things to see and do. We start off by driving down I84 to Dalles – the views from the Interstate are stunning. Stop there for coffee but the town has very little to offer and is somewhat run down. Then we set off back along the old road which is higher up from the interstate and has many viewpoints, they are breathtaking. We stop for lunch at Hood River and sit on the banks of the Columbia River eating a sumptuous feast of cherries, watching the wind and kite surfing. Then drive down to Cascade Locks and "The Bridge of the Gods", apparently it was full of Indian folk lore but fell down thousands of years ago – typical American

hype, no real history so lets hype up something that may have existed. Then we call in at the Bonneville Dam visitors centre, it's fascinating, free and it's just a pity we didn't arrive earlier as I could have done a tour of Hydro Generators – I know all very nerdy. Anyway we watch a video on the Lewis and Clark mission; explore the exhibits and view, via the underwater viewing windows, the salmon and other fish swimming up the fish ladder – it seems a lot of hard work just to have sex! Someone even has a full time job counting how many of each type of fish pass each day – yet more US job creation, helps keep the unemployment down to 12%.

Then we pick up the old road again and visit the Multnomah Falls, spectacular. But this road has lots of different waterfalls along its 20 mile stretch – the highest density in the US (more useless information). On top of this there are more stunning views of the gorge, especially from Vista Point.

We finally get back at 19:00 after a 9 hour sightseeing tour, but we could really have done with longer. What an awesome day.

Tuesday (14/7/9) – a rather laid back day planned.

Catch the tram down to Washington park which has a zoo, rose garden and a Japanese garden. We pass on the zoo (queues too long); we're not yet old enough for the rose garden; but no way can I miss the Japanese garden. It's massive with many different areas and themes, not all rock and stones, there are even real waterfalls and ponds. At every turn there are new vistas opening up. Photo on the right shows a raked garden. As I'm sure you've already guessed the grassy areas represent a sake bottle being poured into a glass.



Then we catch the tram back into downtown Portland and I finish the day in Pioneer Square sat in the sun with a Starbucks coffee; free wifi and my ever faithful iphone; just enjoying the ambiance of the place while Wendy goes fridge magnet shopping. We missed a free lunchtime concert, they have them every Tuesday and Friday.

This is truly the best city we've ever visited in the US, just a pity that the weather can be so grey – too much like England in that respect.



Answer to the previous question is: Lewis and Clark discovered and pioneered the Oregon trail.

Today's question is: "The Dalles on the Columbia river is home to what World famous Internet and software company?".

Only In The USA

Hostess / Meeters and Greeters – for some reason nearly all restaurants / cafes / diners have these hostess / meter greeters, from here on in they will be called wasters. You arrive, the place is virtually empty and over in the far corner chatting to her mates about last nights sexual exploiters is the waster. Finally she saunters over and asks the two of you for "how many". Then if the place is 90% empty she takes you over to the table and tells you the name of the waitress she was chatting to – who will of course be with you shortly. If the place is over 10% full then she puts your name on a waiting list, tells you it'll be about 30 minutes before a table is ready and she'll call you – just a power trip. Now if these wasters didn't exist what would be the impact; you'd walk in and sit yourself down at a table of your choice; you wouldn't walk out because the waster takes too long; the place would save a salary; everyone would save time. Then of course they try and maximize table utilization and in the process minimize customers, this is a real killer. You arrive the place is full of tables ready set for 4 or more and there all empty, but there are two tables set for two and they are full. Heaven forbid she should waste a table for 4 on us two, no she puts you on a waiting list, about 30 minutes – followed by a few choice words from me and a swift exit.

In case you think I've been a tad sexist in the above – not at all like me – I have never encountered a male waster, they're all female and usually the best piece of eye candy in the place.

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20090711 – Portland

July 12, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yesterday we had a lazy drive down from Seattle to Portland. Great weather all the way – typical when you're in the car – and freeway all the way. Arrive at our next Hotel mid-afternoon. Great suite complete with settee and wet bar.

Saturday we take it easy and set off mid morning to explore Portland.



Take the tram in, it's just outside our Hotel, \$4.75 gives us free travel into Portland and all around for the day.

Start off with the Saturday market in the Old Town, actually in true make a buck fashion it runs all day Saturday and Sunday. Have a short stroll around the old town, not really all that old and disappointingly it's a bit seedy.

Then catch the tram down to pioneer square and do a grand walking tour all around Downtown Portland. Where do I start it's just such an amazing and relaxing city. Tree lined boulevards; more concert halls and theatres than you can shake a stick at; fantastic parks and waterfront parks; yet more farmers markets. All public

transport in the city is free, very light traffic. We visit the Keller fountain outside the concert hall / opera house, the photos just do not do it justice. Along the waterfront they have fountains and the world smallest park – all 425 square inches of it. The building and skyline are impressive and then we visit the shopping Mall, fountains; airy atrium; large isles; plenty of seating; clean and pleasant and an Apple store to relieve the boredom whilst Wendy browses around.



Then the highlight is Pioneer Square, a large open square like an amphitheatre. Lots of free entertainment; free wifi; mid-day concerts and even films on a giant screen some nights. Starbucks, chess players and people just relaxing and enjoying the day. This City has to be the nicest we've ever visited in America, just so clean, relaxing and open – just like Blackburn!!!!

This is my second time here. First time was on business when I only got to see a fraction of it, but the second trip lived up to and exceeded expectations.



After a great 6 hours strolling around and exploring we set off back on the tram for a well earned rest, a steak and chicken teriyaki take away and for me an excellent bottle of American Merlot.

Answer to yesterday's question is: White paint on a Boeing 747 weighs 300 pounds whilst red or black paint weighs 800 pounds.

Today's question is: "Who discovered and pioneered the Oregon trail?"

Only In The USA

Respect – nearly all the youngsters (excepting scumboarders of course) are always very polite and respectful. Please, thank you, pardon me sir / mam are the norm.

Friendly – of course most Americans are so friendly. Mind you after France even a psychopathic serial killer seems friendly. And for some reason they all seem to love our accents.

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[20090709 – Dreamliners and Seattle](#)

July 11, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday – can this really be Seattle, the sun is out.

To start our day we set off to the Boeing plant to do the factory tour, where we watch 747's and the new Dreamliner being assembled in the world's largest building. This building is so big that you could fit the Magic Kingdom in it and still have room to spare. It's a two hour tour and is all a very impressive display of man's ingenuity, it's just awesome to see a production line building planes, even if it does only move at 1.5 inches a minute. A really good tour and of course there is a merchandising opportunity at the end. Amazingly there

did not seem to be much furious activity. Most were working on PC's and laptops. One item of concern for us flyers though is the 4 employees who were asleep with their feet on the desk – just ponder what they should have been doing next time you're getting ready for take-off. Unfortunately there's no cameras allowed so no pictures.

Then in the afternoon we catch the express bus down to Seattle. Riding the bus today is a big Negro woman with attitude.

How do I know she had attitude? Well it's a calculated guess as her right arm was tattooed with the word Fuck. I was too timid to



ask her what was on her left arm but the mind boggles.

We have a monorail ride down to Seattle Centre – big park created for the World’s Fair. We give the fun fair a miss but the Space Needle is a must, at least for me. Wendy does not fancy the external glass lifts. There’s a great view from the top but a tad expensive at \$16. Then like two kids we go round the science museum, with loads of hands on activities. I manage to have a ride on the high wire bike – see picture – without having a brown stain down my trouser leg – but I was shaking like a wobbly jelly.



Finally we get back to Everett where there is a free music in the park down at the marina, all very relaxing after a really hectic day.

Answer to yesterdays question is: Paul Allen co-founded Microsoft with Bill Gates.

Today’s question is: “Why are most commercial aero-planes painted white?”.

Only In The USA

Navigation

– finding your way around is made so much easier by some simple but effective measures. Firstly exit numbers on the Freeways correspond to the mileage distance for a known point. Easy to follow and what’s more gives you an easy measure of how far it is to your turn off. Then in towns they have streets numbered and cross streets named. While some totally unimaginative towns, like Eureka, have cross streets lettered. All makes finding your way around so easy.

Tax - I know I’ve probably ranted about this before but it probably is the most inanely stupid aspect of this country. Why, oh why don’t you quote the price including tax? Instead I have to carry my slide rule with me everywhere in order to guess how much it will cost after tax.

Blobbies – today we’ve seen the ultimate in security guards. The blobby guard, all he can do is waddle around the supermarket. He wouldn’t even be able to waddle fast enough to catch a geriatric thief, complete with Zimmer frame. Mind you I bet junk and fatty food takings have taken a nose dive since they employed him – what a deterrent effect he must have. Meanwhile on TV they’re featuring a programme about a 650 pound virgin, he’s that fat he couldn’t get off the settee never mind have sex!

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20090708 – Seattle

July 11, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday – dry but cloudy – what do you expect for Seattle.

Well I’ve certainly found a cure for “sleepless in Seattle”. A bottle of Pinot Noir, not only is it a fantastic grape, but it can even anesthetize you to the MichaelJ drivel.

We’re off down to Seattle, it’s about 18 miles away. Rather than drive in we drive down to the local park and ride station where we pick up an express bus into Seattle. Just 30 minutes down the freeway in the bus / car pool lane, pass all the traffic and it’s only \$2.50 each return. Fantastic value and a sure fired way of reducing congestion.

We wander around Seattle for about 5 hours, exploring on foot the various areas. Regrettably I have to say that the Pike Place Market is the most fascinating and lively. Like up a supped up bubble factory. Throw a

few wild salmon around and it's sure to draw in the crowds. I make a pilgrimage to visit the original Starbucks coffee shop (established 1971), but it's so small that there is no seating so regrettably I pass on a coffee, but judging by the number of people in there you'd think they were giving it away.

Mind you, you can't go 20 yards in this town without coming across a Starbucks.

For a snack we try a Piroshki, some Russian pastry, very tasty.

Whilst we're here I'd love to go and give Bill a piece of my mind, after all these years of putting up with his crap software. Sadly there's no Microsoft factory tour – us nerds like our fix. Just imagine the sweat shops, massive factories full of programmers glued to their PC's on row upon row of workbenches. Having visited a Microsoft Campus it's not a bit like that at all.



Although the sun doesn't quite make it at least it doesn't rain.

Then to spoil the day we have to visit the supermarket to pick up our dinner. Yes it's another supermarket. Before you know it an hour's gone by wandering the isles and the trolleys that full it's just uncontrollable. I've lost the will to live, get me out of here.

At last they've buried him but still the drivel continues and now they can't find the coffin! They're interviewing his plastic surgeon who's revealing all the gory details – whatever happened to confidentiality or doesn't it matter when you're dead.

Answer to yesterdays question is: Boeing.

Today's question is: "We all know that Bill Gates was a founder of Microsoft but who was his co-founder of Microsoft?".

Only In The USA

Free Training – unbelievable but on the bus they are advertising a free program to learn basic skills needed to ride the transit buses. Now I know that they're not the brightest of nations, but come on!

The Malls and WiFi – yes I know I hate the supermarkets but I have to say they do try their best to reduce the pain. Most have free WiFi and a coffee shop / sitting area for those of us who just don't want to become trolley charioteers. The malls even go one step further and provide really comfortable leather settees – sorry couches – and free WiFi. At least if you can't avoid going then it's a good second best.



The Blobbies – given the choice of foods in the supermarkets and cafes it's no wonder that they have a 31%, and rapidly rising, obesity rate. They're waddling around everywhere, some so fat they even need an electric wheelchair to get around. Amazingly you usually get the "family obese", every one in the family is obese and is permanently stuffing themselves. It's enough to put you off eating for life. Perhaps this photograph epitomizes it all.

Extreme Coffee – whilst in the coffee capital of the world let's just comment on coffee in the USA. In the main it seems to be insipid dishwater, with the only similarities to real coffee being that it is brown and hot. But then if you venture into the world of Starbucks, and their ilk, you experience the other extreme, coffee so strong that it takes your head off and will probably give you a severe dose of insomnia for two weeks. There seems to be no happy medium.

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[20090707 – Washington](#)

July 8, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday – cloudy day but what can you expect we're off to Everett, just outside Seattle – rain capital of the US. It's 200 miles but mainly on 5 lane freeways so it doesn't take all day.



The Hotel here is really nice and our suite even has a separate sitting room. In the afternoon we have a drive to downtown Everett. Nothing much here really apart from the Boeing factory, but there's a tour around the factory which looks interesting and hopefully we'll have time to go around it whilst we're here.

We did call in at the main transit centre to see if we can get a train / bus into Seattle. Directions and signs there are totally misleading. When we finally find the info centre there's one of those classic signs "Back In 20 Minutes". Fortunately just as I'm walking away, spitting feathers, the errant employee turns up. Of course I have to ask her why not put the time you're coming back – that's information. No she can't comprehend this. They – assumedly that's management, even more worrying – have given her the back in 20 minute sign. When we suggest writing a note of the time she's dumbstruck. You do wonder about their intelligence!

Meanwhile the media are now feeding on the Michael Jackson funeral. Amazing the average profile of all these mourners. Mainly seem to be women who you would think were old enough and wise enough not to behave like dumb struck teenagers. A minor item on the news was Obamas visit to Moscow, as soon as that came on Wendy turned over to another news channel – worrying!

Answer to yesterdays question is: Columbia river.

Today's question is: "What famous aero planes are manufactured in Seattle and Everett?"

Only In The USA

Turn Right on Red – a bit un-nerving at first but once you get over being honked at from behind you get used to it. In fact it makes a lot of sense. However not recommended in the UK.

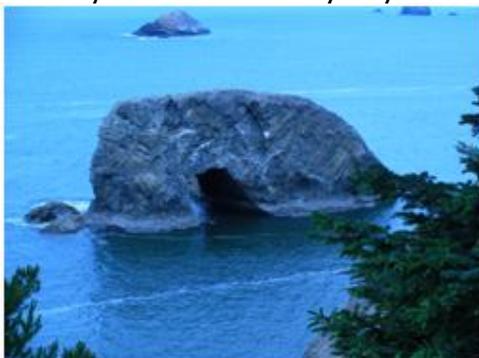
Diagonal Parking Lots – yes they have massive cars; yes they have massive car parks; yes they have plenty of room but they still take the trouble to have the parking slots on a diagonal so it's even easier to get in. Now in the poxy UK car parks, where we could really do with diagonal slots, no one seems to bother.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [1 Comment](#) »

[20090706 – More Oregon Coast](#)

July 8, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – another cloudy day but at least we seem to have lost the sea fog. It's a 240 mile drive up to Astoria, on the way we pass the house where we'll be staying next week as well as lots of quaint little seaside towns and picturesque beaches with weird shaped rocks in the sea. But Highway 101 is single lane up here and we average 35 miles an hour so it takes some 7 hours.



Stop off in Warrendon, just south of Astoria, at a Shilo Inn. Not stayed in these before but for \$69 we get a suite, complete with settee (couch) and basic cooking facilities. Real good value and excellent quality, we'll look out for these in future. Nip into Astoria in the evening but it really is nothing to blog about, but at least they do have a roundabout, the first one we've seen on this coast. But there are no leaflets advising them

how to use it.

Now we have a difficult decision ahead of us. Do we change our plans and dash down to LA for Michael Jackson's funeral or go into the forest and watch a giant redwood grow? Tough call, but I guess the redwood wins! Hurry up and bury him so that the media can get back to reporting random trivia, rather than all this drivel.

Answer to yesterday's question is: Odd numbered highways denote a North South route and even numbered denote an East West route.

Today's question is: "What is the biggest river in Oregon?"

Only In The USA

Pumpin Gas – yes they still have petrol station where they fill it up for you and automatically clean your windows. Even if you have to fill up yourself their pumps have that sensible clip / ratchet on them that allows you to leave it running, whilst you have a coffee, and of course it auto cuts off.

Bicycles on Bridge / Tunnel – yes they have flashing lights to warn you. Cyclist has a button they push before going on bridge / tunnel. Neat eh.

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[20090705 – Oregon Coast](#)

July 7, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Sunday – grey, sea fog day, as is traditional in Arcata. We set off up the west coast to Oregon. Interesting drive along the coast with some great beaches.

Drive about 200 miles to arrive in Coos bay / North Bend. Not the most exciting of places but ideal breakpoint in our drive North. It does have a casino run by some unpronounceable Indian tribe, which probably means they don't sell firewater. I know it's not politically correct but how can Indian reservations run a casino without a liquor license? We give staying at the

casino hotel a miss. Instead we stop at yet another Comfort Inn which provides a comfortable suite but breakfast is yet again dissappointing.

Meanwhile Jackson fever continues. Lets hope that once they bury him the media can get back to it'

Answer to yesterday's question is: July 4 1776. Not really a trick question but the resolution for independence was actually voted on and passed on the 2nd July, just took them a long while to sign the declaration.

Today's question is: "What is the significance of odd and even numbered highways?"

Only In The USA

Do Not Pass – these signs appear frequently and whilst I appreciate that what they really mean is "No Overtaking" but the child in me just wants to stop the car and sit there until the Sheriff comes along to remove me. Why do they come up with such abuse of the language we gave them.

Pedestrians Rule – no matter where they are pedestrians rule. Not just on zebra crossing or crosswalks but even jay walkers are given priority.

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[20090704 – Independence Day](#)

July 6, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday – in true Arcata form the day starts off grey with sea fog. But never mind it's Independence day and everyone is out to enjoy. God knows why we ever allowed this country to slip away. I think we should take it back.



We start off with a visit to Arcata celebrations which consists of a party in the park type arrangement around the town square. There are different bands on every hour from 10:00 to 22:00. Plus in true money making style, around the square are stalls selling everything from hand thrown pottery to shredded pork butties – well they don't call them that. Then in the afternoon there is a baseball game followed by free fireworks as soon as it gets dark.



After Arcata we drive down to Eureka which has similar celebrations except the stalls are down main street with fireworks in the evening. There are some truly weird sites.

Never mind shirt pocket cameras, how about shirt pocket dogs, complete with sun goggles. Dogs in haversack are two a penny around here. Then there's a team of belly dancers – bellies being the operative word.

In the evening we drive to the Samoa Cookhouse. It's an old lumber jack camps cookhouse we're they serve very basic food, set menu, on oil cloth covered trestle tables, a bit like school meals. Full five course meal, as much as you can eat. They keep coming back to offer you more and more and more, and still the blobbies eat up lashings of bread and butter with jam. It's a disgusting feat of human endurance to watch, and amazingly they manage to waddle out without the need of a gurney. Quite an experience and the food is pretty good.



Meanwhile the media are still obsessed with all the minor details of Michael Jackson life complete with reruns of any video he ever made. I can hardly wait for tonight's installment when to celebrate July 4th they'll probably reveal the contents

of his fridge!

Answer to yesterdays question is: 10,000,000 seeds per year. Good job hardly any of them grow up or else there'd be no room left over here.

Today's question is: "When was the American declaration of independence signed?".

Only In The USA

Tsunami Hazard Zone – now if you were of a nervous disposition you wouldn't stop in a Tsunami hazard zone. How do we know it's THZ well you just can't miss the number of signs on the highways. They even quite kindly advise you when you are leaving a THZ. Now bear in mind that the last Tsunami was 300 years ago and although there is a 10% chance of one in the next 50 years it does seem a tad excessive. But they were all good boy scouts and like to "be prepared".

Antiseptic An Ice Topping – very popular on Independence Day. Also known as Root Beer Floats, just in case you're ever tempted, take my advice, don't bother. They taste disgusting, I'm sure it's some American trick to stop kids ever mythering again for a drink.

Spell Checker – today's most useless discovery revolves around Microsoft's reverence for Independence day. Unbelievable but the spell checker in Office gets upset if the d in day is not a capital D. It doesn't give a dam about the d in Christmas day or any other day, but don't you dare treat the capitalization of this important day with disdain – what nerdy programmer dreamed that up!

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20090703 – Tree Hugging

July 4, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday – Clear blue sky and we're off up North to Arcata in Humbolt county.

We drive up the famous costal highway 1 for a good part of the way – reckoned to be the most dangerous highway in the US. Probably all the stunning coastal views cause drivers to be distracted. We witness a two car pile up when two cars coming in the opposite direction to us smash into one another. Fortunately they both swerve off to the right, otherwise they would have swerved straight into our path and the kids would have been dusting off our will – a lucky escape. They certainly made a mess of one another.

Stop off for coffee at a quaint little one street town called Mendocino. There's enough gift and arty shops to last a life time.



It's then some very picturesque motoring up Freeway 101 before we turn off down the "Avenue of the Giants". This is a 40 mile drive through a Giant Redwood forest. Temperature up here is 95. It is yet again stunning scenery and we stop off for a lavish picnic amongst the giant trees. They grow to about 360 feet tall, 20 feet in diameter and can be some 2,000 years old. A walk in the forest gives off an eerie and yet tranquil silence. These trees are truly awesome.

along. Apparently it's the same as poison ivy; it doesn't sting immediately but later on the skin blisters and you may need to visit the ER – yes we're getting into the language now.

Anyway back to the trees, unfortunately none of the photos really do them justice as you can't get far enough back to get them all in.

Then it's a short drive up to our hotel in Arcata. Being on the coast it's cloudy and the temperature is only 60. It's that dam San Francisco sea fog again. Go a mile inland and it's clear blue sky. Why can't Lancashire be like that, fog and clouds in Southport and clear blue sky in Belthorn!

Answer to yesterdays question is: "Agoston Haraszthy" a name that I'm sure was on the tip of everyone's tongue.

And today's question is: Approximately how many seeds does the Giant Redwood produce in a year, is it 100,000,000, 10,000,000, 1,000,000, 100,000, 10,000, 1,000, 100, 10 or 1. Bear in mind that even though their roots intertwine underground there's no sex!

Today I start with my "Only In The USA" section of all those [endearing](#) and [annoying](#) aspects of the USA.

Only In The USA

Marketing abuse – when you see a sign saying "Santa Rosa Town Center" then you'd expect it to lead to the town centre, just like a sign for Marie or Hotel de Ville in France. Wrong, some smart arsed marketer has just arranged for the shopping mall to be called "Santa Rosa Town Center".

Bigger and better motor homes – yes they're so dam big and they even tow a car. Not a little car I might add. Today one was towing a Humvee!

Free wifi – nearly all hotels and a lot of cafes have free wifi. It's just so dammed civilized. It can't be long before more towns take Philadelphia's lead and wire up the whole town. I'm sure that Blackburn will be keen to take the initiative in the UK – perhaps then we'll get a Starbucks!

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[20090702 – A Global Pandemic](#)

July 4, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday – starts of grey and cloudy but by 10:00 we're into clear blue skies. Set off to tour wine country, down Sonoma valley then across to Napa valley for a circular tour. Whilst the Sonoma valley is very picturesque, Napa valley is absolutely stunning. The vineyards are so much more grand and elegant than most of the French vineyards. Wine tasting at everyone, but unlike in France you mostly have to pay. The Sterling vineyard for instance even has a gondola up to the tasting rooms. It's just unbelievable here, one of the nicest places we've been to. The road over the hills from Sonoma to Napa valley is a fantastic tree covered switchback ride, worse than any mountain pass, but well worth the effort.

One tip though if you're thinking of visiting, don't visit on a Thursday. Why? Thursday is bin day and the wheelie bins are out in force. It's truly a global pandemic, wheelie bins are getting everywhere in the world – Belthorn, France, Cyprus, Spain and now the US. Multi-coloured, multi-sized, they just breed and multiply. No doubt there's a wheelie bin museum somewhere.

Wendy has now come up with a whole new theory on navigation. Forget GPS, forget maps, forget compass. It's just simple go with the majority. Just go in the direction that has the most traffic! Stunning eh!

On our tour we visit Colistaga a quaint little market town with covered side-walks and Napa a modern little





town with a "historic down town". Fortunately the word "historic" has no EC or International standard applied to it so the burger masters of Napa can get away with that appellation. Even so it's a lovely little town. I achieve my 5 a day target with a great fruit smoothie, just what you need when the temperatures in the mid 80's.

But the crowning glory of the paradise that's the two wine valleys has to be Sonoma. It actually has some real history – well at least in American terms – stemming back to the early 1800's. It's built around a central square that's a green park complete with town hall; surrounded with an old barracks, a church mission, quaint shops, coffee shops, old style hotel and an old picture house. Just so relaxing and picturesque and

despite it being quite small you could easily spend all day here. Of course parking is free. In fact it's so like Blackburn I think I'll be getting onto Blackburn council to consider twinning with it. Yet another great day, but one that really reminds you of what a hell hole Blackburn is.

Meanwhile the country's still gripped with Michael fever. On the TV, in the newspapers, in the streets and the media are just delving into the minutia of every aspect of his life and death – bloody sickening!

Oh and for those who have been dying to know the answer to yesterdays blog question. Bodega school house (in the picture) was used by Alfred Hitchcock in the film "The Birds". It was also shot around Bodega bay – about 5 miles away – but in the film both Bodega and Bodega bay appear as the one town.

For today the question is: who is considered Father of California Viticulture?

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[20090701 – Coyotes, Bobcats and Killer Whales](#)

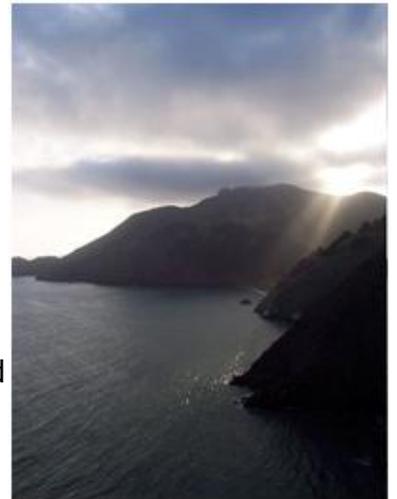
July 2, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Tuesday – starts off grey and misty in San Francisco. We're off up highway 101 to Santa Rosa, it's only about 50 miles but we have to drive across San Francisco – more about that later – and then go over the Golden Gate Bridge. The fog and mist are still hanging over the bay, a common feature of SF especially in the summer months.

Once over the bridge we call in at Sausalito, a small town on the bay, allegedly like a Mediterranean village. Very quaint but not very Mediterranean like. Then it's off to the Marin headlands and a walk around the wild life reserve, it's very famous for its birds – feathered kind that is (it's a 1960's thing). They have a quaint visitors info centre in an old church. It has lots of displays, helpful and informative park rangers and more importantly coffee. The walk takes us around a tide water lake which is supposedly teeming with wild birds – perhaps they were waiting for the sun to come out! Unfortunately this is no Martin Mere, but at least we did get to see a brown pelican and white egret, but without our Eye Spy Bird book we're pretty useless at identifying them.

Apparently the lake is teeming with Tidewater Goby's, which we used to keep when we had an aquarium – now isn't that interesting!



Then we go visit an old nuclear missile site that has been turned into a marine wildlife sanctuary – RSPCA for seals. You get to wander round, see the rescued animals and on a good day get to see them performing autopsies – Wendy was gutted that she didn't get to see the blood and gore.

Then it's back to Highway 101 and up to Santa Rosa. Amazing only 2 miles North of the bridge and the grey



skies and bay fog just disappears to reveal clear blue skies.

After checking in at the Hotel we drive out to Bodega and Bodega Bay to



watch the fishing boats come in with their daily catch – more fiction from the local tourist board – and do a bit of Whale watching from the Headland. Now for the older members of our audience you're probably thinking I've heard of that place before. Well today's little quiz is "what is Bodega and Bodega Bay famous for"? The picture may give you a clue. No consulting

the web. Answer in my next blog.

You may well be wondering what the title of this blog is all about, so are we! These are the 3 animals we were warned about and unfortunately didn't get to see. The signs at Marin said don't feed or approach the coyotes – as if. The wardens at Marin told us there been a Bobcat seen on the walk, if you see it don't turn your backs on it – apparently it's very rude and they get upset – just make yourselves look big. The sign at Bodega Bay said if you spot any Killer Whales report it and don't approach them – on foot!

Oh well just one of those days! Overall we've seen a lot, very interesting, and it didn't cost a penny. And by way of a change – actually we just couldn't find a supermarket – we topped the day off with that greatest delicacy of the junk food junky a Taco Bell! And to think the French think they have the best cuisine in the world.

Letter to Arnold (Terminator)

How come Highway 101 / Freeway ends up going through the back streets of San Francisco? With traffic lights every 50 yards and best of all some of them only stay on green long enough for most drivers to get their handbrakes off! For a main route North – unbelievable. Perhaps you could spend some of your excess millions on a bypass or ring road.

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[20090629 – Back To The Good Old USA](#)

July 1, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday – the journey begins. I hope the USA and Obama are ready for the critical onslaught.



Terminal 2 at Manchester has now been refurbished. The only way to the gates is through duty free, a cynic would think this is yet another opportunity for merchandising exploitation!

Must say I'm impressed with the free lounge access, helps you cope with the airports. Really makes the credit card seem real good value, especially as Wendy has found the free brandy bottle! Woops there's another empty bottle for recycling. They really do need to get some pint glasses. Never mind at least she's getting her moneys worth.

My 1st encounter with our American cousins is sat next to me, a 25 stone Pilsbury Doughboy. After a major struggle I manage to get the armrest down but no respite he just oozes over the armrest like a rampant jelly. Thankfully after failing to con me into giving up

my isle seat he decides to go elsewhere.

Just 20 minutes into the flight I have my 2nd encounter with an American and already I need a translator. Now I know my spoken French is pretty crap but I did think I could get by with American. Fool! Since when does tomato juice sound like orange juice?

Anyway when we land at Newark and immigration is a breeze, plenty of staff and hardly any queues. But everyone is totally disorientated, the yellow standee line has been replaced by a shorter red standee line. Whatever happened to tradition?

It's good to see that the green immigration cards still have to be filled in despite the ESTA – more bureaucracy! Mind you the computer system had remembered me from our February visit, including my thumb prints and left hand fingers, but for some mysterious reason (bloody programmers probably don't know how to spell right) it hadn't remembered my right hand finger prints so I had to donate them yet again.

Glad to say that both continental flights were good; reasonable leg room; on time; good service.

Well after 24 hours we're here at last so that's over for another month. Travelling just ain't what it used to be. Why don't they sack 50% of those employed in security and spend the funds on fighting terrorism. You'd think the combined might and intellect of the greatest democracy on earth could eliminate a few fanatical ragheads (can you say that these days).

Tuesday – up bright and early ready for a fantastic breakfast. Yes it's waffles with strawberries and topped off with spicy sausages. Who says our American cousins don't appreciate good cuisine? Beats good old Tete de Veau (calfs head).

Then we pick up the car. Times are hard for us pensioners so it's no open top Mustang sports but a compact Suzuki, allegedly a sports model but it's pretty ugly!

Drive into San Francisco to finally go to Alcatraz. But we're gutted there's no availability until Friday. Of course you can always risk the street traders; there are more of these than you can shake a stick at, who claim to have tickets. Anyway we have a very pleasant sunny day around Fishermen's Wharf.

Michael, Michael who? All the TV programmes are obsessed with his death. I'm sick of it, get him buried and move on to some crap US TV – better remove my contact details otherwise I'll incur the wrath of millions of his sickly dotting fans.

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[20090520 – Sete and Frontignan](#)

May 25, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday yet another sunny day but with some clouds, very hot and close. It weekly shop day yet again, but most of the shops are shut ready for tomorrows bank holiday – they only work a 35 hour week and then have more bank holidays

than they know what to do with. Generally a very lazy day. Have some people round in the evening for drinks, nice to hear an English voice – what a social life these caravanners lead.

The campsite is full, so this is what it must be like in August, mind you it's probably 10 degrees hotter then. I really don't think I could cope with the temperature then.



Friday just very hot and sunny yet again. Fix Wendy's 3rd puncture and finally get to the route cause, a very small thorn. It's just so hot. Starts the day off at 22 at 08:00 – yes we do get up that early.

Saturday more of the same heat and sun. But despite we go a bike ride into Frontignan for the market. I don't know why we bother because we never buy anything. This one was a seething mass of French, in narrow street. It's truly amazing how much these folks buy from markets, mind you they are a bit more appealing than Blackburn market. After the market we ride on further to Sete. It's a mini Venice with lots of wide canals. Very elegant and relaxing. Time for a well deserved beer in a street cafe with some French geezer playing typical

French sounding organ music.

After 5.5 hours, no punctures and lots of moans from Wendy, we finally get back. In the evening we go round to our next door neighbours for drinks.

As I've said many times the cycle paths over here are incredible. A good example is one that goes over a narrow bridge. The bridge would be just about wide enough for two cars, but what do they do here – well they certainly don't paint a white dotted line. They actually make the bridge one car lane controlled by traffic lights and give the remaining width a cycle / footpath – I can see Blackburn doing that! Not only that they create an underpass so that you don't have to cross the road at all – perhaps at their own expense we should send Blackburn council here for a day to learn what a cycle path looks like.



Sunday starts off yet again as another scorching blue sky day. We planned to go to the Grand Mot – big word? Then we remembered it was a bank holiday weekend and as we'd never dream of going to the seaside at home on a bank holiday we thought better of it. So yet another relaxing day.

Well unfortunately we set off back home on Tuesday. Dare I say I'm looking forward to some cooler weather, and I'm sure Blackburn won't disappoint me – never satisfied! But what I'm really yearning for is a hot curry. Food over here is great but they just don't do curry, probably another case of not invented here.

Wendy's decided we need a big awning instead of this porch awning. With this sort of weather it would be great. We eat outside / in awning most days as it is so hot, it also provides some welcome shade.

Well Wendy's donned her bikini and smeared herself with some slime to stop the sun, so I'd better go and join her. What a pity they don't do laptops that you can use in sunlight – now that would be really nerdy.

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[20090519 – Montpellier](#)

May 22, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday yet another blue sky day and very warm so we start with breakfast outside. Leisurely start to the day and

then we set off to Montpellier, which is just 13 miles away. Park up at a park and ride and catch the tram into the city centre, all very elegant and efficient for just 2EUR each. The trams are all very brightly painted and decorated, the one we travelled on was bright yellow with red and orange flowers.

Montpellier is one of the nicest cities we've been to. Especially if you don't have to drive around it. It's a very young thriving city and we visit a place in the centre named the Egg its full of fancy French style cafe's, we sit having a coffee it's opposite the Comedy Opera. Of course it's MacDonalds, an excellent cup of coffee all for E1.30 and a front row seat for people watching. We have lunch in the park outside the Corum and watched a drug bust. Two plain clothes coppers drive up in a brand new Ford and swoop on three black kids and proceed to search them and sniff everything they find. Talk about undercover, they're in shorts, trainers and Oakley's, the only clue to them being coppers is the brand new car and the handguns hanging in their handbags.

Then we have the fright of our lives as this obese walrus – no she wasn't topless on the street – walks up the street in a white gown and metal foil sticking all out of her hair. Just like a Dr Who monster. Turns out she's having her hair done and has nipped out for a fag.

When we get back to our caravan it's still sweltering 36c inside and 24c outside. Never mind bread, cheese and wine Al Fresco.

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[20090516 – Walrus Sunbathers](#)

May 22, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday blue sky day and very hot so we laze around the caravan.

Sunday sunny and hot with the occasional cloud so we have a bike ride down to Frontignan beach and port. Nothing much there apart from a very nice marina and beach. So we sit by the marina and have our sumptuous lunch – a banana, still haven't caught the French lunch disease.

More examples of creative parenting and how they can pollute the gene pool. Mother with 3 young tots, all less than 2' 6" tall, Wendy tells me 2, 3 and 4 years old. Each has been equipped with a fishing net to encourage them to go near the water. Nothing wrong with that you may think, even a school trip could probably get H&S clearance to go dipping in rock pools on a beach. Problem is that Mummy – she's French by the way – has got them wandering around the port; reaching over the edge; any minute now you can see one of them over reaching straight into deep water; she's not even watching or holding their hands. Fortunately they survive but if she had a parents license it should be revoked.

Monday – or at least I think it's Monday – is a glorious blue sky day, so hot we even start with breakfast on the patio. A real lazy and decadent day lazing around the caravan, strolling down the beach and a swim in the pool.

Now I've been reading a bit about Darwin's escapades so when we set off down the beach I'm really in tune with Mother Nature, a keen observer and by very careful observation I manage to identify a new law of nature. So remember you heard it here first – “Edwards Walrus Sunbathing Rules” – which states that:

1 The propensity towards topless sunbathing among the female of the species is directly proportional to the degree of obesity.

2 The proportion of female topless sunbathers lying on their back is directly proportional to the degree of obesity multiplied by their age.

Or I suppose more crudely put the fatter, older women, seem to prefer topless sunbathing on their backs – ugh!

Thankfully I don't suppose this new law of nature is going to win any prizes for political correctness, but I'm having real problems deciding on which learned society to present my findings to – some of you may say don't bother.

After tea we go for a stroll around the campsite. This really is Holland on Sea. It must be 70% Dutch; 20% German; 5% Brits and oh dear how sad only 5% French. I think this countries tourist industry would sink if it wasn't for the Dutch.

Tuesday another blue sky, very hot day, so its porridge on the patio – stuff the croissants. We need some meat for tea –

I'm may be totally relaxed over here but I still need blood on my plate – so after lunch we set off for a ride into Frontignan. 3 hours later Wendy gets her 3rd puncture this year, fortunately we have the meat by now. Wouldn't you think that in this day and age we could have solid puncture proof tyres – I really can't believe the tour de France competitors put up with this many punctures.

When we get back I have to sort out accounts, credit cards and download statements. Now I'm really relaxed over here until I have to deal with the UK finance industry, it's just a nightmare of stupid password rules; stupid favourites rather than absolutes; inconsistent methods to extract / download statements; poor presentation (who the hell displays the Balance B/F at the bottom of a statement); inconsistent phrases (why don't they all say login / logout). It's just unbelievable and the annoying thing is that even if you take the trouble to complain no one gives a dam. Even if you vote with your feet they don't care. I really want some consumer retribution!

Fortunately a nice bottle of French wine is at least some compensation.

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20090513 – Unbelievable There Is Somewhere Worse Than Blackburn

May 16, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wednesday starts off grey and miserable with some very light rain. I get to treat bad attitudes as they deserve and vote with my feet, not only that the place is infested with mosquitoes, there's that many of them they're even feeding on one another. We drive up the coast 30 miles to Frontignan, just outside Sete.

Our new site is right on the beach, we're just 25 yards from the sea. The site itself must be just below sea level, the only thing stopping the sea is a small sand dune. All we need is a good storm or another ice berg to melt and Wendy will be having a crash course in learning to swim. Amazing the site is quite busy, must be nearly 60% full compared to the 10% at the last one. Free Wifi here but not on the pitch so it's a real tough time you have to go and sit around the pool / bar. It's a really nice site, with a great pitch, quite secluded and we just feel right at home. Not too many French here, mainly Dutch, German and some Brits. By the time we get there the sun is breaking through so I also get the delight of setting the awning up, not a divorce lawyer or swear box in site, and we set a new world speed record.

We even manage to wash our breathable ground sheet in the sea. I'm sure people thought we were trawling for fish.

Thursday sees an overcast start but later on the sun breaks through and just like yesterday it's very warm. It's the dreaded weekly shop day but Lidl speeds this up and cuts the cost yet again.

Amazing isn't it, to drive a car you need a license; to prepare food you need a food handling certificate; to make pots of money you need to be qualified as a lawyer; to teach children you need a qualification. But any old numpties can have children, quite often by accident, and can then go on to raise them or abuse them. Why this philosophical musing you might ask? Well there in the middle of the road are three 2ft high children playing with big long sticks, complete with parents blessing. Any minute you can see this slipping into a sword fight and eyes and blood everywhere, that's if a car doesn't get them. Then 30 minutes later we see two of the tiny tots sauntering down towards the beach complete with bucket and spades, no parents. Perhaps there following but no not a parent in site, they probably think they're still duelling and playing chicken. It's just unbelievable that anyone, neither mind two adults, can be so bloody stupid.



Thursday afternoon I fix yet another puncture in Wendy's bike and then mid afternoon the forecasted rain arrives. This is in for the night.

Friday starts off overcast but soon clears up. We're off to a place that turns out to be scruffier and more depressing than Blackburn and it's a nightmare to drive around. Now I know this is the bit you've all been dying to know about but I'm keeping it until last to encourage you to read it all. It has a cathedral with fine sculptures, stained glass and frescoes, but it's surrounded by scaffolding and anyway it's closed for the most sacred ceremony – lunch. We get to walk through the Muslim quarter, free parking but will the car be there when we get back, very depressing. Not much character, the best bit is the flower market – how it all made us yearn for Blackburn! A few more clues to the place, they're keen on

Rugby and bullfights. It's most famous citizen is Paul Riquet – now that's given it away.

Then we drive back through Peznas. This is a quaint old town with a lovely historic quarter, just look at this staircase in the old Hotel. All very relaxing to walk around with some magnificent old buildings, street cafes and shops, plus free parking. After the previous dump we'd been around this place made the day.

Oh and the name of the dump in case you're ever out this way? Beziers. Just give it a miss, unless of course you're a loyal Blackburn fan.



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[20090510 – Moving On](#)

May 16, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday lazy day around the caravan. Wendy cleaning up so I keep a low profile with a good book.

Then in the afternoon we take the awning down and manage it without coming to blows or divorce, but it is a pain. As a reward I down an excellent bottle of a local wine.

Monday we're moving on after two weeks just outside Perpignan. Great site with Wifi on the pitch. Nice area with fantastic cycle paths, good weather and even a nudist beach, definitely a place to come back to. Before we set off I nip to Lidl for some more bottles of a local wine I downed last night. It was lovely (so good and effective that it's killed off the 20 brain cells that contained it's name) and fruity and sets me back E1.99 a bottle – unbelievable. Yet another example of Lidl value for money, they also do 2 excellent German Pilsener brewed to the good old Reinheits Gebot for all of E0.39 for 0.5 litres, none of this French or Spanish muck full of every E number in the periodic table.

Then we're off up the coast to a new campsite just outside Beziers. Of course we arrive during the sacred time – lunch – so have to hang around while they all come back from lunch. I know I shouldn't complain, it's part of what makes France so laid back, but why can't they be laid back and at least give a jot for customers service – letter to SirCaustic about the concept of staggered lunch times.

Nice camp site with lots of activities and facilities but they managed to wind me up by not being flexible over the various pricing options. Just unbelievable when you consider the place is only about 10% full, you'd think they would treat every customer like Royalty. Also has a lot of Mosquitoes and I'm just fed up of being a free lunch every day. One of the few plus points of Blackburn, no mosquitoes – letter to Blackburn Tourist Information Office advising them that this could be a major theme for a Blackburn rejuvenation campaign.

Tuesday starts of dull and grey. I really want to vote with my feet from this place – bad customer service and sheer stupidity should not be rewarded – so we drive up the coast to a campsite just outside Montpeiller. It's right on the beach and the reception are so helpful there is no way they can be French. It looks a great little site, is almost 30% full at this time of year and has free WiFi. What's more it's got more Brits on site than we've seen all of this trip – mind you that's not something to recommend it.

On the way back we visit Cap d'Agde. The beaches shown in the guide book are not a bit like the dark volcanic beaches at the actual Cap – more like Tennerife.

Anyway tomorrow we drive up there and vote with our feet on this place – whilst it won't bankrupt them, every little helps.

Posted in [France](#), [Travel](#) | [Leave a Comment »](#)

[20090507 – Allies To The Rescue](#)

May 9, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday sunny and very hot again. Highlight of the week we do our weekly shop. Great news though Wendy has finally discovered the value of Lidl. New philosophy is make a list, and stick to it; get what you can at Lidl, very cheap; go to Carrefour or wherever for what you can't get. Brilliant not only saves a fortune with no real loss of quality, but as Lidl is so much smaller it only takes an hour to get round it.

Let's hope this becomes the norm in France as well as back in England.

Then in the afternoon we laze around the caravan, yet again.

Friday starts off a bit overcast but by lunchtime the sun is back out. We set off for a bike ride down the coast to Carnet where there is a load of entertainment laid on – oh yes yet another bank holiday. There we are in this lovely small seaside town on the promenade. There's a parade on of US World War 2 vehicles and tanks, laid on by a load of French geezers who dress up in US uniforms, complete with guns. They also set up a US camp on the promenade and then do parades of their various vehicles which are kept in immaculate condition. It would be nice to think that they (the French that is) were grateful for all the blood shed in WWII by allied forces, but when you consider their general manner and look at their attitude towards the US and GB you really doubt it.

After the parade there is a Glen Miller tribute band on the promenade playing, complete with singers. The French were dancing but I manage to resist the urge to dance. The dance band was going on all night, but we left around tea time. All very relaxing, good weather, pleasant and free – just like your average bank holiday in Blackburn.

When we finally get back to the caravan I sit out in the sunny evening with a great German Pilsner, courtesy of Lidl at £0.35 for half a litre, and ponder the meaning of life and the choices we make. I could have been at work today; earning money; dealing with the day to day crap that came my way; and putting up with the rat race and political infighting; and really not knowing any better. Instead I've learnt some French; read a few books; had a great bike ride, down proper cycle paths; great weather; parade; lovely promenade setting; live band; relaxing, no stress; and I sat enjoying the evening with a great lager followed by some pleasant wine. So was this retirement a great idea? This really is the life.



Saturday a bit over cast to start off but by lunch time the sun's out so we set off for a short drive up the coast and then visit Salses to see this magnificent 12 century fort. This is one formidable looking fort, but then there's more castles and Abbeys around here than you can shake a stick at. Supposedly it was built to stop the Spanish invading, but I would have thought they'd just go round. Have our lunch in the fort grounds.

Strange goings on at the campsite this weekend. It all started with a few single German speaking women, complete with big dogs, staying here. By Saturday teatime we're inundated with large dogs, complete with mainly female owners. I think it must be the German Big Dog Owners Association's annual get together as they all go off on a mass dog walk. Let's hope they have plenty of dog poop bags with them.

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[20090505 – The Bouledrome](#)

May 7, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday another blue sky day complete with a breeze. After the usual lazy morning and lunch around the caravan we set off for a bike ride down to Bacares.

It's cycle paths all the way. Proper EU funded paths. Not those jokes we have in Blackburn, you know those various coloured lines, sometimes white, sometimes even vermilion, painted down the side or middle of the road to stop the cars hitting the cyclist! These are paths completely separate from the main road, properly surfaced and with stunning flowers and borders and they're everywhere.

Unfortunately yet again my timing is out and we arrive when all the shops are shut, but not to despair the Bouledrome is a hive of activity and a major tournament is about to kick off. Now this isn't just old men, but it's a complete cross section of society; all meet up; shaking hands; kissing – a bit dodgy some of that; and taking it all very seriously. No they don't all have regulation whites on and the Bouledrome is a bit rough but it's obviously an important social event.



After watching this for half an hour I still can't understand how they decide who goes when. The only certainty seems to be that they all have three steel balls – best not to get hit by one.

Bacares itself is a lovely little seaside town with lashings of free parking – Blackburn council take note – street cafes and a lovely beach and of course the Med.



Wednesday yet another BSD but this time no wind, no breeze. By lunch time we're wishing there was a breeze, it's 27c in the shade. I dread to think what it's like here in August. It's too hot to sit round the pool so we take a drive down to St Cyprien which is quite a big seaside town. Yet more free parking, all very clean with fantastic beaches and promenade – not a bit like Blackpool.

Then it's back to the caravan for a few beers in the shade.

Meanwhile a few comments that should really be on Soup Of The Day.

Now I know the world has truly gone mad:

1. We have a 5 blade razor, yes that's five blades, and what's more that just to shave some tarts legs. 5 blades, how can it be justified. Does anyone ever stop and think! You can buy 25 perfect adequate two blade razors plus the razor for about £2 from Lidl– that's two years shaving for £2 and god knows how many years leg shaving.
2. We now have a reality TV programme where idiots try to be a particular animal, pig and the latest is a dog etc. Supposedly to experience what it is like being this animal. Just who watches this crap and I can only assume that the participants are only Big Brother rejects. Where will it all end?

Just what is the world coming to. It's just unbelievable, enough to make you dash for the off switch or better still a sledge hammer. Are we really in the final days before Armageddon? The marketing and media men need putting back in their boxes, preferably along with Schrödinger's cat!

Posted in [France](#), [Travel](#) | [Leave a Comment »](#)

[20090503 – They've Got No Clothes On!](#)

May 7, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunday yet another blue sky complete with obligatory but welcome wind. We set off for a bike ride to St Marie Sur Mer, a pleasant little seaside resort. Cycle path all the way so it's all very relaxing.



Now the picture on the right may make you think I need to go on a photography course, but if you look carefully you'll see that it epitomise the French and their dogs. Yes there all really rats on leads and if there not dressing them up, carrying them, letting them sit at the table then they carry them in their bike baskets. Heaven forbid they should walk!

On the way back we come across a nudist beach – time for lunch. Thankfully my French is improving so we don't miss opportunities like this. Actually all very disappointing for me, of more interest to Wendy. Turns out this beach is only about half a mile from our camp site.

When we arrive back at site our German neighbour and the only other English couple (they work for Eurocamp) are sat having a boozy afternoon so they invite us to join them. Table is just full of different drinks and they methodically working their way through them. Try a little Pastiche and even Wendy gets into the Sangre and Armagnac. In the evening there is a barbecue, but by then we've had enough so we make our excuses. Our German neighbour is quite a character, works down here in the sun each year with a small white dog called Playboy that follows him everywhere. Friday morning for no apparent reason, other than it was May day, he comes over with a nice bottle of French wine for us – well I say us but I suppose I'll have to help Wendy out by drinking her share.



Monday yet another blue sky day so when we finally get ready we set off along the coast to the Spanish border. Obviously we don't cross the border as there is a whole swarm of mosquitos hovering just waiting for Wendy. I think it's all part of the Spanish border controls, they've got Wendy marked down on their most wanted list for making derogatory remarks about their country, she's just persona non gratia. We call off at Port Vendre, Collioure, Banyuls sur Mere and a few others. Supposedly this is the Vermilion coast – although neither of us knew what colour vermilion was and it certainly isn't evident from the coast line – so now we know. Whatever, the drive along the Corniche – posh word for dangerous coastal road over here, with lots off bends and few safety barriers – is all very scenic, unless of course you're the driver trying to avoid the Harley Davidsons or taking your car for a dip in the ocean.

Wendy discovers a French Bidet in Port Vendre, I'll let Wendy tell the tale.

CAUGHT WITH MY PANTS DOWN.

No it's not what you are all thinking, whilst in Port Vendre I desperately needed the loo, all the water I had been drinking, anyway we finally find one of the French contraptions that look like a small tin cabin so I put my money in and enter the tardis, which is making a beeping noise. (I half expected being transported to another Dimension). I had asked Tony to hold the door slightly ajar as I am always worried I will get locked in one of these damn things. Anyway I start to do the deed when suddenly I begin to hear a whirring sound and water flowing, then I realise what's about to happen OH NO!!! The self cleaning disinfectant procedure is about to commence so I quickly have to abandon my mission and dash out the toilet, knickers around my ankles OH WHAT A SITE!!! Good job there wasn't a queue for the Loo it would have been very embarrassing. You will be glad to hear I got out just in time before getting a dousing, thank goodness that Tony was holding the door open for me, otherwise it would be quite a different ending. Why can't they have proper loos like the English? But on the plus side it did smell clean and fresh afterwards. The moral of this story KEEP OUT OF BEEPING FRENCH CONTRACTIONS OR YOU MAY TRIP OVER YOUR KNICKERS.

Then it's back for another lavish meal of bread and cheese, and of course a little wine!

Posted in [France](#), [Travel](#) | [2 Comments](#) »

[20090501 – May Day Supermarkets](#)

May 1, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Friday and the forecast was for rain but as usual they got it wrong. It rained overnight and we awake to glorious blue sky and sun yet again. Mind you it ain't half windy. Weather in this area is really weird most days now we seem to be getting clear blue sky but when you look to the North, East and South of us it's cloudy and overcast – mind you we're not complaining, well Wendy is moaning about the breeze (gale force wind according to Wendy).

Forecasts for this area are very unreliable. We have 4 forecasts and they usually all contradict one another, which with 4 is quite difficult to do as you run of options – they all exclude snow! Anyway best solution seems to be take the average.

As Wendy has not been too well we didn't make our weekly shop yesterday – I was desolated. Set off this morning to make up for it, but lo and behold even the giant supermarket (staff glide round on roller skates) was closed – believable over here, any bloody excuse to avoid work! I guess May day comes early here and all the communists (I would say workers but they don't like work over here) are out dancing round a Maypole somewhere – probably in the middle of the Autoroute in order to cause maximum disruption.

Anyway fortunately I have enough wine and beer to last for another day, but if the lazy sods are closed tomorrow then we're doomed – beans on toast every night – yipee.

Fortunately not everyone is so lazy and in search of a bakers – remember bakers, hairdressers, flower shops and lawn mower shops are always open – we come across a village fete. Being Mayday no doubt you would be forgiven for thinking it's a May Pole, workers parade, complete with portable guillotine or even a display of military might complete with tanks and missiles. Wrong. It's a fete celebrating the humble Artichoke – yes I know my French is a bit ropy but with a giant stall piled high with them and everyone wandering around eating them you cannot be mistaken. They even had a stall selling little tubs of fried artichoke which seemed to be very popular with the locals. So we have a wander round, have a few free samples of cheese and cooked sausages. You would have thought they were giving these Artichokes away. Wendy mission now is to find a recipe for Artichokes as they do seem very popular over here.

Anyway we get some bread, in fact quite a lot of bread for our money, so at least it's wine, bread and cheese for tonight.

Get back for another lazy afternoon around the caravan and then before our feast I nip out for a bike ride down the beach, through a lovely nature reserve and even manage to find my way back home. Amazing that despite the breeze / gale the sea is so calm.

Wendy says I have to say a bit about the site, especially as we have decided to stay for a 2nd week – too lazy to move and given that Wendy has not been too good there's a whole raft of places sites still to be seen. The site we are on is very nice, not many people here at the moment although there are quite a few families with children, maybe the French don't bother about taking their kids out of school. It has two outdoor pools, tennis courts, football pitches, restaurant / bar, shop and of course a bakers and hairdressers but no lawnmower shops. Allegedly there is also Archery and a giant inflatable giraffe, but best of all it has WiFi on each pitch.

Posted in [France](#), [Travel](#) | [Leave a Comment](#) »

20090430 – Lazy Days

April 30, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Monday a nice sunny day but Wendy is still not so good.

Lazy day around the caravan. Set to work washing and waxing the caravan as it's so nice.

Tuesday sees Wendy a little bit better so we set off for the afternoon to visit Perpignan. Well after Cathars country this place is a disappointing dump. Certain parts are best visited in an armoured car – don't get out. Finally find a safe place to park and visit the old city, what there is of it.

Wednesday another sunny day, although a bit windy. Wendy still not 100% so we take a short trip down the coast to Le Bacares and Port Leucate. There's some fantastic windsurfing and wind kiting going on. Some great resorts along the coast very up market with great beaches and free parking. Fortunately it's bread and cheese for tea so I don't need to go to the pub.

Thursday and it's a really sunny day again and not as windy. Wendy still not right so we have a lazy day around the caravan and I get to wash and wax the car. At this rate I'll be starting a new wash and wax business.

At least the weather has picked up and is in line with our expectations. Bloody French have decided to spray the hedges

with fertiliser, unfortunately they can't distinguish between hedges and caravans. So I expect the caravan will be a floral delight by the end of the week. We really should have kicked the French out of this country, it's wasted on these miserable specimens. It's an age profile, the kids are friendly and respectful and chat every time they go past and then you have the elderly French who walk around with faces like a smacked arse and never speak.

Fortunately the wine, cheese and breads are reasonable compensation for putting up with the French. The regional wines down here are unknown to me but so far they are great and a snip at less than E4.

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[20090423 – Cathars Country](#)

April 27, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Thursday and it's bright blue sky and sunshine.

We set off for Limoux, best described as a quaint little market town in the midst of Cathars country, more castles and abbeys (usually fortified) than you can shake a stick at. Nothing exceptional. We also call in at St Hillaire one of the many abbeys.



A scorching day, this is what we expect.

Friday another sunny day, we strike camp and set off for Perpignan. Fortunately only a 2 hour drive.

Of course we arrive during the sacred lunch break, difficult not to with the length of their lunches, and of course there is no one about. Parking our caravan in the main entrance – I still don't do reversing – eventually gets a response and someone opens the barriers and leaves us to choose a pitch. Really nice site next to the beach, you can hear the sea. Set up camp, including the

porch. It's a complete mystery how it all goes together as it's over a year since we used it. Fortunately it's good weather so we finally figure it out. Site has Wifi on each pitch, but it's E24 a week – piracy, about time the EU looked into these charges. Get the bikes out and have a brief ride around the site and beach.

Saturday a warm but overcast day with some sunny spells. We have a leisurely breakfast / morning and then I set to cleaning and waxing the caravan. After that it's the bi-weekly (as the fridge isn't that big we get the pleasure of two supermarket trips per week – what unsurpassed joy) shop at a giant Carrefour just down the road. Fortunately they have a good wine department complete with free tasting, it all helps while away the time whilst Wendy gets her bi-weekly fix. There's a whole range of regional appellations I've never heard of or tried so I invest in a selection. Very reasonably priced –E3 to E4 – who knows what they taste like.

Sunday it is forecast to rain and for once they get it right, although it starts to clear up after lunch, so it's a lazy day in the caravan reading, browsing the net and some French. But then disaster, the Internet stops working – no DNS server. Girl on reception says this happens when it rains, of course nobody ever bothers doing anything about it. She tries her best and even rings up the ISP but they don't have anyone to help – how silly of me it's Sunday! Funny how they still charge on Sundays and in the rain – get a grip Tony and remember it's France. By tea time it's clear blue sky and brilliant sunshine, let's hope it stays that way – who knows perhaps the Internet may start working!

Wendy not very well, she has been asleep most of the day hopefully she will feel better tomorrow. Does this mean I'll have to go out for tea?

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[20090421 – The Journey From Hell Continues](#)

April 27, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Tuesday morning up bright and early ready for a 5 hour drive down to Carcassonne.

Pleasant drive down even though the weather is fairly overcast. We seem to be following this miserable weather down France. Today is forecast to be beautiful in Limoge yet miserable in Carcassonne, whilst tomorrow is forecast sunny in Carcassonne.

We get to our campsite, pre-booked I might add, only to be told that we can only stay one night as they are doing works on the site. I show them our email, sent only 10 days ago. Then the French Basil Faulty appears, somewhat more rotund and squat, gives a gallic shrug and say "sai le vie" – obviously the customer services manager! He doesn't even have the decency to apologise or mention that there is a site 3 miles away that can take us. Tells us that the nearest site is 80 miles away. Like a red rag to a bull after a five hour journey. Forget any attempt at French just resort to English, complain and treat them with contempt. There is no way we are driving any more so we stay the one night and arrange to move to a site down the road the next day.

That night the heavens open up, nearly as bad as Blackbrun!

That forecast had better be right for tomorrow.

Wednesday get up early to move to a decent campsite just down the road – goodbye Basil!



The morning starts off very grey but by 11:00 the suns out and thankfully it's about 19c, so I get to go to Carcassonne. Quite exciting really, but Wendy wouldn't buy me a sword and shield. What an impressive first sight. The whole place is impressive, you can just imagine them defending the ramparts. A double walled city with a castle complete with moat and drawbridge. I think it's probably the best and biggest castle we have seen. Stays sunny most of the day but up on the ramparts there is a cool breeze blowing down from the mountains.

But as usual stupidity and apathy rule. We watch a video – in French for some reason – but don't despair there are subtitles, suitably hidden by the barrier at the front of the cinema. As usual I have a word about the problem to try and get things improved in future. "Yes I know" says the nice French lady, "it's been like that since the new film was introduced 2 years ago". Of course I ask the obvious question as to why someone doesn't do something about it. "Ah well it's them in Paris, you know what they're like. It's very difficult to get anything changed you know". I point out that they only have to move the barrier a few feet, but to no avail! I can feel an email to UNESCO coming on!

After the enjoyment of the castle comes the penance of the supermarket, but at least they have a great selection of regional wines that I've never tried.

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[20090420 – Limoge](#)

April 21, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

We've a day's break in order to tour Limoge, but first I need to get onto Internet. I buy my Internet card – daylight robbery E8 for 24 hours access. Surprise, surprise it doesn't work. Campsite owner is hovering and cannot help. Finally get to speak to the Internet Company and then spend 30 minutes reconfiguring their DNS server settings – just like being back at work. Unbelievable guy says this happens a lot because they change server settings and then when campsites open up after winter it doesn't work; normally have to send a technician out. Having got it working for them and saved them a technician's visit I point out that they could at least give me some free access, but no luck.

Campsite is very nice. In the grounds of an old chateau in the forest. All very relaxing. Owner doesn't speak too much English but we seem to get by and I can even understand some of the words he uses.

Then we're off into Limoge. Well it's nothing to write a blog about, two very disappointing old parts of the town and some churches with the stolen spires. I suppose it didn't help being a Monday and mainly during the lunch hour – most shops were shut, how sad. Whilst it's 19c the sun can't quite make it. Still it's better than driving and at least we know not to bother visiting Limoge again.

The French seem to have this obsession with small dogs – rats on leads – but today we saw the ultimate, a tiny dog in a pouch on the front of a motor bike and the dam thing even had a pair of goggles on. It's just a pity they don't know how to pick their dog muck up.

Tried to get a cheap Pay As You Go data SIM but no luck, they do them now but the rates are extortionate. At least something's are cheaper in England. Fortunately diesel is about 20% cheaper than UK, but petrol is about 20% dearer.

What strange folk these caravanners are. We've just watched a guy struggle to get his bike down off a high rack, fit a basket, load it up with his pots etc., and then peddle 50 yards to wash his pots up – perhaps he's not married! Mind you he was Dutch.

Well we're off down to Carcassonne tomorrow – unfortunately another 5 hour drive. After Limoge let's hope it lives up to expectations.

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20090418 – It's Too Big!

April 21, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday, our 2nd day in Paris, we were going to Versailles but it's raining so we don't bother. Have a lazy day around the caravan and nip to the supermarket for petrol and supplies.

Just in case any of you are wondering about the title it refers to the Carrefour supermarket. At long last I've heard Wendy complain that the supermarket is just too big and she's given up on completing her mission – now there's a first!

Sunday we depart Paris for Limoges. It's a nightmare escaping the suburbs, complete with caravan in tow, but we manage it without incident, although came very close to filing divorce papers – fortunately the SatNav was on form. Then it's a 5 hour drive to Limoge, well that's if you don't end up in a 1 hour traffic jam. Having praised the French auto-routes, this was just like being in England, although I have to admit it was a free section. So far we have never encountered a traffic jam on the Peage.

Anyway arrive at site about 16:00, and sit in the sun with a well deserved cup of tea I have an even weller deserved glass or two or more of wine.

Well I think that Paris done to death for us. We've covered most of the touristy sites and we're not really a great fan of big cities. Certainly won't go near it with a caravan in tow.

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20090416 – Paris At Last

April 21, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

After a pleasant 2.5 hour drive down the auto-route (this is how our motorways should be) we arrive in Paris. The streets to the camp site are so narrow we barely keep the paint on our caravan, so after a hair raising drive of the last mile we arrive at our Island campsite on the Seine. Of course the site is closed for lunch until 14:00, they really can't get their head around the concept of customer service and staggered lunch times when it comes to the sacred French lunch.

Weather is good so we have a leisurely afternoon setting up and then have a stroll into Maison Laffitte area. I fancy a wine so call in at a local supermarket and buy one of the most expensive wines in the shop. A 2006

Bordeaux Superieur all for E2.95, I guess if its no good I can at least use it to strip paint, Wow what a wine all for E2.95.

Friday Morning we're up early and off into Paris. Mobilis card for E9.60 gives us all day travel anywhere in Paris. Great value. Visit the church of the Sacre Couer and the artist quarter. Free entrance to church, fantastic, with good views of Paris. Being lazy we catch the funicular to get up to it.

Then we visit yet another church – Notre Dame – no Quasimodo but free entrance and fantastic stained glass etc, not as impressive though as Sacre Couer though. Being in the gourmet capital of Europe we call in MacD for lunch and of course free Wifi to pick up emails etc. Campsite has Wifi but greedy frogs (hopefully politically incorrect) want E2 for 2 minutes – highway robbery. Then it's a look at the Pompeidou centre – ugly mess. Finally we get to the Louvre and of course the Mona Lisa. You could spend all day in there, it's massive, but you can only have so much culture per day so after more religious paintings than you can shake a stick at, along with some fine pottery, we escape to Starbucks for a well earned rest. By now we're totally knackered – 8 hours walking and on the go.

But still enough energy to call in at La defens, quite spectacular with some great architecture, but I'm dammed if I'm paying E10 to go up in a lift, see a view and a small exhibition. Scandalous when you consider that the Louvre is cheaper.

Achieved all our objectives for the day, and some, just got the science museum left now, but I think we've had enough of culture and big cities. Fortunately the weather was pretty good, although not brilliant sunshine as promised – seems that French weather forecasters are as incompetent as ours.

Metro system is impressive, never have to wait more than a few minutes for a train.

I understand that the French government have caved in to the fishermen and given them some compensation rather than blasting them out the way, so no doubt they'll be back again for more in the future. Rumour has it that the we're going to seek compensation off the French government under EU law – let's hope they go for the throat.

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[20090414 – Bring Back The Gunboats](#)

April 21, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well we're off to France at last, but it's the journey from hell!

M6 closed because the police (that's them who think fraud is a civil matter these days) have decided to treat the M6 as a crime scene due to an accident. We divert and get the benefit of another traffic Jam, M1 North closed due to accident but of course every ones rubber necking – tried speeding up but it's a waste. Just typical.

Then we hear that the Kent police are about to turn the motorway we're travelling along into a giant lorry park. Yes, the bloody French fishermen have decided to blockade Calais, so all ferries are cancelled. I thought this Sarcaustic guy was going to sort the bloody unions out. A few gunboats, with some shots across the fishermen's bows might solve the problem and if they ignore that sink em –at least they won't do it again. Or we could fit cannons to all P&O ferries.

Anyway we monitor their website and are advised that the fishermen have gone home to bed and it's ok to sail on Wednesday – lets hope their teas burnt.

Wednesday up bright and early and off to the port. Join a short queue to check-in and are told they're at it again – obviously they're getting no solace at home so it's back to the high seas. But don't worry those nice people “who you can trust” tell us to go to the ticket office where we can get a voucher for a free tunnel crossing.

Join a very long queue at ticket office to be given a voucher to come back at 09:00 – 40 minutes away – when we can join a very long queue again and get our tunnel ticket. Don't ask! Yet more crap! Management – what management. 45 minute queues and tannoys are going off warning everyone they'll be clamped if they park for over 15 minutes – don't ask. Big TV announcement boards are saying everything is normal. Neither tannoys or announcement boards keeping passengers informed and only 2 staff manning the desks! Utter chaos – yet more crap to be followed up. Miraculously

remained very calm but I will have my vengeance.

Anyway at least we get a trip on the tunnel. Very impressive, quick, smooth and efficient. It'll end in tears.

Decide to give the drive to Paris a miss. Certainly don't fancy their ring road in the rush hour so we stop at a site in the Somme. Very nice. Plenty of sun 23 c, pool, free wifi of course, free welcoming drink and even free archery. Yes it seems they didn't get enough practice at Agincourt, mind you they let us Brits have a go and we didn't lose two fingers. Wendy refused to put an apple on her head though.

All very relaxing so perhaps tomorrow we get to Paris.

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20090131 – The Supreme Sacrifice

February 1, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Glorious blue sky, sun, forecast in the 30's, good snow and what did we do today? We went to Salt Lake for a mooch around the Gateway centre. Computer said ski but I made the supreme sacrifice and gave up a days skiing.

Good news is I've got rid of the gas guzzler and picked up a smaller car – Ford Ease. It was quite a battle at Hertz as their definition of a smaller car was a Ford Explorer or a Toyota Highlander. Anyway the Ease is less of an SUV and has permanent 4 wheel drive – trusting my life to a computer yet again! And of course being much smaller it will have better MPG – all of 18.3 MPG – much nicer to drive.

The Gateway centre in Salt Lake is very similar to Blackburn shopping precinct at least in one respect, it has shops in it, and that's where the similarity ends. Being the lavish travellers that we are we'd taken a fruit lunch with us, so there we are sat by a roaring outdoor fire – it's only in the 30's – eating our lunch, listening to some excellent music all co-ordinated to a fantastic water fountain. It's clean, it's virtually traffic free, there are no mounds of chewing gum to climb over, there's piped music everywhere, it's not crowded, there's no graffiti, there's no litter, there's no marauding gangs of youths. It's just very pleasant and relaxing and to put yet some more nails in Blackburn's coffin, not that they need any more, it's all free and you can park on the streets for free.

One of the shops has a massive indoor climbing wall. Must be about 200ft high and it's \$5 a go. To top it all there is a women doing a climb. Nothing unusual about that you might think as they have equality and the vote. However she was 7.5 months pregnant and looked ready to pop – somewhat irresponsible in our opinion, but you give all this equality and it comes with the territory. Mind she did make it 90% of the way up without a fall. Only in the US.

Most of the shops were very quiet, however the Apple store was heaving. Full of nerds – so I blended in quite well – all playing on the computers, Ipad and having hands on live tutorials. Their new ultra thin laptop is very impressive and light, but who'd pay these prices. Well judging by the crowds in there quite a lot.

Well having made the supreme sacrifice, and won some brownie points, hopefully it's back to the grind of skiing tomorrow. And to make just a perfect end to the day we've 4 East Enders to watch tonight – oh joy.

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20090130 – Blue Sky Blobbies

January 30, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yet another glorious blue sky day, still not quite 71F, but we're both out on the slopes. It's even warmer than yesterday so all the blobbies are out. Originally I thought that the average ski population were more svelte than the average US population, but I had been conned by the padded anoraks hiding the true state of affairs. When you're in the restaurants then you get a truer picture and the situation is just as dire as the rest of the US, mind you given the size of the food portions it's not surprising.

Any avid readers of our travel blog (rumour has it there is 1) will notice the absence of any comments about the state of toilets since we've left France. Well that's because in general US toilets are excellent, even at the top of the mountain they are generally better than most in the UK. However I do notice a disturbing trend with a fetish for the hands free everything. For hands free read electric with automatic sensors, this now extends to toilet flushers, taps, paper towel dispensers and even soap dispensers – all very good but too much complexity and potential for faults. They now have water free urinals that save 40,000 gallons of water a year. Where will it all end? Thankfully no one has tackled hands free toilet paper dispenser and heaven forbid hands free wipes.

The economic news over here is full of job losses. However, given the excess labour used to tackle even the simplest of tasks it is not surprising. Perhaps US companies are starting to turn their backs on job creation schemes. An example of the job creation schemes over here is the ski parking lot this morning. The car park must hold about 500 cars and there are three parking attendants directing you where to park. One could have done the job quite easily and for the previous 3 days there has been no one doing the job and with no apparent detrimental effect.

Well another great days skiing. Stepping the pace up a bit onto the harder runs and Wendy's now moving from the greens onto the blues. Also the mystery of the runs I'd never done has been solved, they're just new runs they carved out this year.

Letter to Obama:

1 Whilst it's a good idea having laws that expect people to behave safely on ski slopes why not at least insist on one ski run at each resort being called "Idiots Plunge" or "Lunatics Revenge" and then all the idiots can go on their and do their thing (skiing backwards at break neck speed; leaping out of the tree line into the path of downhill skiers; not to mention anything done on a scumboard) without endangering the rest of the population.

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[20090129 – Protective Antioxidants](#)

January 30, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Glorious blue sky day not quite 71F, currently nearer 4F on the mountain (forgot to mention this to Wendy), but the promise of blue skies and maybe the fresh powder has persuaded Wendy to forsake the supermarkets for the slopes.

Fantastic skiing, whilst it's still only 30F, with the sun out and no wind it's almost tropical and no mosquitoes. Wendy gets her ski legs and we have a very leisurely cruising (nothing to do with P&O) days skiing. Over lunch I nip out for a few extra runs while Wendy relaxes in the ambiance of the ski lodge. I can't believe it but after 4 years coming here to ski I have come across 4 runs I've never tried – the excitement just keeps coming on.

Meanwhile the gas guzzler continues to consume petrol at a rate of knots – you can watch the gauge go down.

I think I truly qualify for US Citizenship, I've passed the ultimate in Americaness, I'm eating Granola and smothering my food with A1 sauce (breakfast excepted). The supermarkets are just packed out with Granola, a whole isle devoted to just Granola – breakfast cereals are elsewhere! Yes, I'm becoming quite a supermarket aficionado . Amazingly you can even buy a mortgage or insurance, don't they remember mortgages are the thing that got the world into it's current financial state. Perhaps we should have an International Financial Crimes Tribunal and then we could take the US bankers to Nuremburg. I notice that China and Russia at the Davos conference are almost of a similar mind as they castigate the US government for the worldwide financial crisis.

We're also into drinking "protective antioxidants", no that's not red wine but teabags to us Brits. Why can't they keep it simple in line with their IQ's.

Well our 100+ TV channels reveal nothing worth watching, even if you do find something the adverts turn a 90 minute film into 180 minutes, so we've signed up to Blockbuster for a months as many videos as you want deal. The only problem is we have to start watching a film before 18:00 to stand any chance of watching it without falling to sleep.

I've finally managed to use BBC iPlayer so Wendy can get her East Enders – there's no escaping it.

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[20090128 – Powder and a Heat Wave](#)

January 29, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Bad news it's snowing, but then every cloud has a silver lining; the skiing is just great with 3" of new powder (well worth putting up with the snow); temperatures 30 F (a heat wave compared to yesterdays 2 F); slopes are very quiet, most of the blobbies are tucked up in front of the fire, the snow and winds put them off – don't know what they're missing.

Wendy spends the afternoon in the cafe reading. She's just waiting for the temperature to top 71F with clear blue sky and then she'll ski. Lots of moans from her this year about the cold it, must be that bus pass that's made her nesh (good old word).

Letter to Obama

1. Why don't you make it illegal to quote prices without the tax included. It's just ridiculous. But then perhaps it's a cunning plan to increase the numeracy of US citizens.

Update on the gas guzzler it seats 8 not 7, but every time you clamber into it you end up decapitating yourself as the roof is so low. Unbelievable, you just have to crawl sideways into it!

Wifi here is stunning, 8 megs, how will I cope with 1 meg at home!

Rumour has it we're – that means me as well – going into Salt Lake for the day on Saturday. I've pointed out to Wendy that "computer says" – Outlook calendar – skiing for the day, and we should stick to the plan.

Somebody's finally snaffled up the deer, or perhaps unlike Belthorn, they have diligent dustbin men (is it politically correct to call them that?) over here.

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[20090127 – Is This Heaven](#)

January 29, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

No time wasted today we're out on the slopes for breakfast by 08:00. The big breakfast, usual hearty US fare, pancakes with fruit, apples, maple syrup and hash browns – don't you just love the mixture of sweet and savoury! There's that much apple in Wendy's pancake that I help her out and then we take the rest home in a doggy bag to make an apple crumple – unbelievable.

Well it's a gorgeous day bright blue sky, but it's 2 degrees (that's degrees Fahrenheit for those that can remember) that's cold, but we had snow overnight so all the trees are covered in snow, it looks just fantastic and the skiing is great. Is this heaven? If it is then you need to wear long Johns and goggles. I just wore sunglasses but my eyeballs were freezing up. Wendy stayed in, unpacked, sorted out the condo and had an easy day.

Great days skiing, just perfect. I've lashed out on a season pass, it works out a lot cheaper as long as I ski more than 10 days, so I guess I'll just have to ski every day to get the most out of it – it's a tough life.

Pity I didn't have a bowie knife with me there's a bloody great deer on the road side, could just slice off a haunch of venison. It's just goes to show how far we've come from living off the land – no ones snapped it up. Mind you I bet it made a mess of the car that hit it. It's not called Deer Valley for nothing.

I wonder whether they have supermarkets in heaven – that would spoil it. Anyway they have them here and just so that I don't get to enjoy myself too much I'm treated to a trip around the supermarket with Wendy – her eyes light up at the size and choice.

[20090126 – Letter to Obama](#)

January 27, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Easy and pleasant check in at Manchester, no queues. Wendy was a bit concerned about a middle eastern looking geezer in track suit, trainers and no luggage – definite terrorist material. If she'd had her way he wouldn't have been allowed on the flight, mind you he did look suspicious. Of course I drew the short straw and was sat next to him on the flight. Any trouble from him and he have had a tomato juice with Worcester sauce in his face. Great flight, good leg room and seat back TV's complete with Films on demand, all courtesy of Linux operating system.

Welcome to JFK the sauna – the airport that is – no sign of Bruce Willis though. But beware of the low flying pigeons, the ceilings only 8ft high so when they come batting down the corridor you have to duck and dive.

First US encounter is stimulating to say the least. Yes we're in the land of the blobbies and there to welcome us is a blobby with the job of directing "US citizens to the right, non US to the left" – in these economic fraught times it's good to see that the US is still creating jobs rather than employing an automated announcement. Mind you what a boring job and I'm sure she was writing down what she had to say!

Forget the ESTA (web sign up for your Visa) they still dish out the Green cards that you have to fill in along with the white customs declaration. Now they want all your fingerprints and thumbs as well as a photo – but I'm dammed if I'll smile for it. Surprised I didn't have to give them a DNA sample – whatever happened to civil rights. Can you believe it! Not only that our cheerful, armed, customs geezer says that there probably going to have to keep the green forms as well the ESTA because they need some means of identifying if you've left the country – it's surreal, you really couldn't make it up. He was amazed that you could go skiing in Salt Lake, Utah – he must have slept through the winter Olympics in Utah – just another example of the low standard of education and general awareness.

Want to buy an Ipod? No problem you can get them out of drink vending machines here. Mind you when they drop down the chute it can't do them much good.

So Mr Obama some tips for you:

1. Turn down the heating at JFK and you'll cut US greenhouse emissions by 10%.
2. Improve the education of the nation.
3. Put the country on a diet – latest scientific findings show that starving older people improves their memory.
4. Get someone with half a brain (I'll lend you a spaniel if you're struggling) to look at the ESTA and that disastrous form that asks so many daft questions.

Anyway better be careful with words like terrorist, civil rights, Obama and ESTA in an email, the NSA / FBI / CIA will be swooping down on me.

And to top it all there's a laughing geezer on TV here rattling on about economic collapse in Iceland / Europe as if it never originated here.

Good news the flight to Salt Lake has a negative delay of -5 minutes – how can you go 5 minutes early?

Pickup the car at Hertz. You need step ladders to get in it. Seven seater, four wheel drive. I dread to think how many gallons it needs per mile – they've no chance of going green. Ask for something a bit smaller and the woman looks at me like I'm some simpering idiot, she just cannot comprehend why anyone would want a smaller car. Anyway that's the smallest they've got for now but we can pop in after the film festival and they'll swap it for us.

Drive up to the condo is only about 30 minutes but it's snowing and there are skidded cars and lorries strewn over the interstate – mind you at least the world doesn't come to a grinding halt.

Having got that lot off my chest I must admit it's good to be back in the land of the free braves.

[20090105 – Center Parcs](#)

January 22, 2009 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

It's a pity they can't spell, but it was a good break.

To celebrate Wendy getting her bus pass the kids (excluding Brett of course) had arranged a Monday to Friday trip to Centre Parks (that's better). Somewhat of a coincidence that the best time when we could all make it was my birthday – ah well never mind. We had a 4 bedrooms exec lodge and Ross, Sussie, Honey and Kurt, Grandma was supposed to come but couldn't make it as Harold wasn't so well.

Tuesday we had a family meal in the Chinese restaurant and after decorating her face with ice cream Honey tried to chat up some of the young talent. She also seemed to think the chef was Santa Clause for some reason – perhaps it was the white hat!

Weather was glorious but very cold and we even had 4" of snow. Very pleasant, relaxing and good great accommodation. Honey went swimming everyday and even Wendy went in one day, the pool there is great and it's all very warm. Took the bikes and had a few spins around the site, it's massive. Unfortunately Wendy had a puncture so she didn't make it but given the hills it was probably a good job.

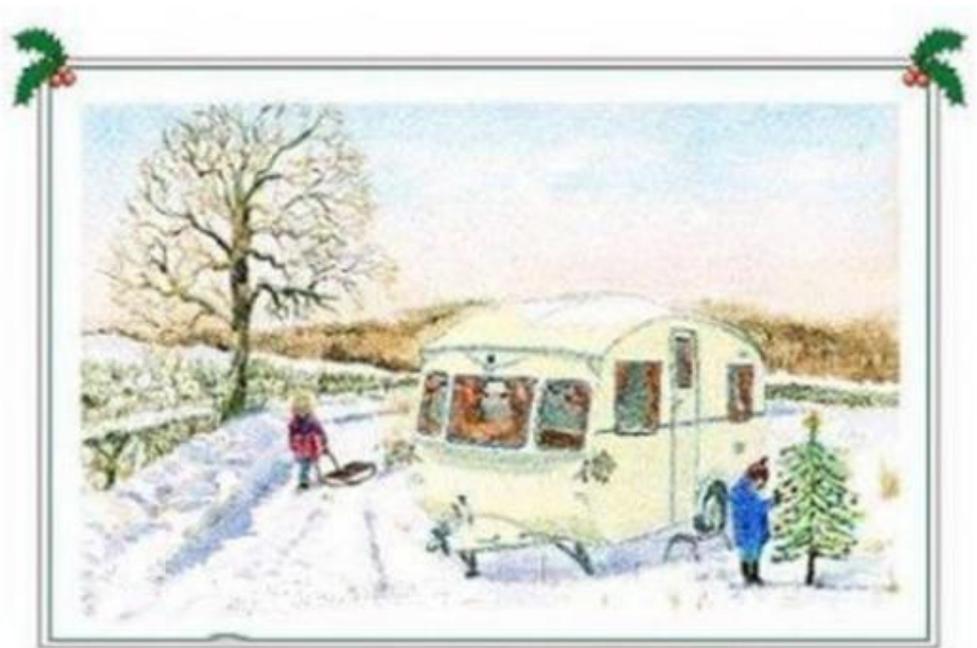
Unfortunately there are not many free activities, apart from the pool there nearly all chargeable. Mind you there wasn't much we wanted to do at that time of year and I certainly wasn't paying £15 for a gym pass that consisted of more mirrors than a gay Narcissus could shake a stick at and few machines.

Three more weeks to go and we're off on a proper holiday.

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[2008 In Retrospect](#)

December 14, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Merry Christmas

I know this is the missive you've all been waiting for! It's an epic this year as it serves not just as an update to friends and family, but also us, via our blog, as a diary and reminder – it's that age and memory thing – just add 4 Oz flour and bring to the boil!!!! So if you're ever bored out of your skull over Christmas then get yourself comfy, with plenty to drink to sustain you – you'll need it – and battle your way through it!



The year started with Tony's first day of retirement, Wendy had already skived off at the end of last September and had time to psyche herself up ready for surviving Tony 24 * 7. How would Tony cope? What's more how would Wendy cope with Tony? Would we get bored?

We didn't get bored and we did cope, at least we're both still alive to tell the tale. We don't know how we ever found the time to work, there never seems enough hours in the day to do everything, and the best thing is that every day is a Saturday.

Our Travels



Early January (by way of a change!) we went skiing to Keystone in Colorado for 3 weeks. It was the first time we had been back there for about five years; we wanted to see how it compared to Utah these days. Well although it's great, it's not as great as Utah. We had a brilliant time though and skied about 8 different resorts and for a change we did some cross country skiing and snowshoeing – exhausting. Kurt and Emma joined us for a week and Kevin and Rosemary came out for 2 weeks. It was a bitterly cold 3 weeks and at one stage Tony just escaped getting frost bite on his cheek.

A great start to the year but next year it's back to Utah.



After 2 weeks in the UK we set off for a fortnight in Cyprus. We rented a great apartment in a small village outside Pathos. The weather was good and we really enjoyed Cyprus, very relaxing and so much to see. Tony even found some ski slopes, but unfortunately we never tracked down the elusive Moufflon. Only downside was a rock hard bed, not very good for the old back.

In April we set off, with caravan in tow, for our first foray into France. Yes Tony went to France, even though it was full of French. We spent 3 weeks in Brittany on 3 different sites. It was great, although the weather wasn't all that warm, but what can you expect for April. It was certainly better than UK weather.



Leaving the caravan in France we came back to the UK for 3 weeks, before setting off back to France again to pick up the caravan and drive down to St Emillion for 2 weeks of free wine tasting. Then it was off down to Soustons in South West France for a week followed by a week in the Pyrenees, complete with trip to Lourds. By now we're really getting into the swing of this caravanning and even Tony loves it in France. Cheese, freshly baked bread with a bottle of wine goes down really well. Wendy has got to grips the French supermarkets, she soon sussed out the ones to shop at, although for the first few months Tony had to go to translate – of course he moaned constantly and frequently lost the will to live. The only problem (well really there are quite a few) with the French is they tend to have these long lunch breaks of 2 to 3 hours; no Sunday openings; closed all day Monday – except for hairdressers, flower shops and lawn mower shops that always seem to be in abundant supply and always open! Wendy really could not cope with this – “they're just lazy”. But you certainly have to get into the French way of life, a bit like England in the 1960's. Tony quite liked the lunch time closing as it usually meant when we arrived in a town all the shops were shut – saved a fortune, oh dear how sad!

It was our granddaughter Honey's 1st birthday in June, there was no way we were going to miss that, so we left the caravan in Cognac and came back for another 3 week dose of miserable weather. Plus Wendy was the chief cake maker. Then we escaped again for 4 weeks in the Cognac (had to make do with Brandy tasting) and Vendee region. By now we had bought bikes and had some great rides, despite Wendy constantly complaining of a sore bum. Stayed on some fantastic camp sites and had really great weather.

Then we brought the caravan back to the UK for 3 weeks of miserable weather before being stupid enough to take the caravan down to Devon and Dorset for 3 weeks of more miserable English weather. Never again will we holiday in the UK, the weather is just too unpredictable.



Early September we're off to the South of France for 6 weeks with the caravan. It's a long drive and we make 3 stopovers, but The South of France is the highlight of our French sourjons, well worth the trip it's just a pity it wasn't for longer. We just can't wait to go back there, this is the place to go, fantastic weather and place, with great campsites.



At the end of October it's back to the frozen wasteland, boy oh boy was it frozen, we drove through the Midlands in a snow blizzard with our caravan in tow. Welcome back!

After suffering 3 weeks of the UK we set off to Lanzarote for a fortnight, or should we say Lanzargrotty. Great apartment, views and location, complete with WiFi and satellite TV, but there really isn't that much there and after the first week we've seen most of it. Best thing about it was we've now seen it and it makes us appreciate France even more. Typical Spanish pavements, a complete mess, plus loads of English pubs all advertising football, strictly come dancing on the big screen and of course the all day big breakfast, complete with pints of Worthington E.

Then it's 8 weeks back in the grey frozen wastelands of the UK over Christmas before we can escape to Utah for 31 days. Just enough time for Tony to get fit for skiing.

December 22nd sees Wendy awarded her free bus pass and heating allowance – she certainly needs that as unless it's 28c she's cold. Tony's too young for this! Mind you who would want a free ride into Blackburn, it's enough to turn anyone into a manic depressive!

Our Retirement Plans

Like any good project we started the year off with a set of retirement plans, even though we didn't use Microsoft Project, so how have we measured up against those plans?

Tour France – spent 16 weeks in France and enjoyed them all. Even survived the horse meat, donkey sausage and Tete De Veau (it's better not knowing what it is) – that which doesn't kill you only strengthens you. Tony has certainly overcome his Franco phobia and has now become a Francophile.

Travel – Keystone, Cyprus and Lanzarote.

Learn French – Tony continues to learn French and is satisfied with his daily progress. Reading is ok but listening and speaking certainly needs more attention especially when a “cafe allonger” is misunderstood as “Irish coffee” – must try harder!



Japanese Garden – after 20 years in the planning – no wonder he never got anything done at work – the front garden was finally replaced with the Zen Garden of Tony's dreams. He is now learning to rake the garden – it only takes a Zen Buddhist monk 10 years to perfect the skills.

Cookery – Wendy really got into cooking but unfortunately with our travels has not been able to do any formal cookery courses – not that the gourmets at Blackburn College have cooked up any courses. Tony has been the major beneficiary of this project.

Pottery – Tony resumed pottery classes and has thrown that many pots there's no shelf space left – all very therapeutic. Come Armageddon it should come in useful.

Woodwork – Tony built and fully equipped his workshop in the garage and has regular woodworking projects on the go. It's just a pity he doesn't have the same enthusiasm for decorating.

Web site – only 50% success on this project. Developed a basic web (www.4uand.me.uk) site with a simple web creation tool, but did not develop his Dreamweaver and Photoshop skills as planned.

Literature – Tony always enjoys a good read. Anything to escape decorating.

Family Tree – Wendy has not started this project.

House Swap – deferred this as we have spent so much time abroad and who would want to swap with Kurt still in residence.

Rambling – some progress on this, apart from the ramblings in our blogs. We usually have a good walk or bike ride most days when we are abroad but not really got into this when at home. Mind you on a long walk Wendy does a great impression of a donkey when she just stops – needs a stick and carrot. Then when she's on her bike she's always getting off to walk, due to her sore bum and hills – should have bought her some hiking boots instead of a bike.

Yoga – Tony has attended a few classes at the gym, mind you it's full of women!

Ross and Susie



They are both well and are enjoying parenthood. Ross was recently promoted to marketing and sales manager which he deserved after all the hard work he has done over the last year, with it came a company car which is a great help to them. Susie is still studying hard to gain her degree in Spanish and French. We see them on a regular basis and thoroughly enjoy looking after Honey when needed, and taking her on days out. (Nana's & Grandpa's special

time)

Our Granddaughter Honey



Honey is thriving and doing all the things an 18 month year old should, she gives us so much joy and happiness and we love her so much.



In June she celebrated her first birthday with toybox made by Tony and decorated by Kurt, whilst Wendy made and decorated the cake . Honey of course proceeded to decorate her face with cake.



Then in November Honey met up with her cousin molly, that's Wendy sister's Tricia's

granddaughter.

Kurt's Year



Kurt and his girlfriend Emma,(who he met whilst on his gap year in Australia) all the way from down under (yes another one of those colonies that we gave away), joined us for a week's skiing in Keystone. Then at the end of February Emma returned to her home in Australia. In March Kurt started working for Forbes Solicitors, where he has a training contract. His first 6 months were spent in the criminal law department where he had the opportunity of meeting some of the more salubrious members of society, usually in jail. Some of his clients would make your hair curl. But it was all good experience and it

certainly put hairs on his chest.



In September he started on his year at Manchester doing his Law Practitioner Certificate. I don't think he fully appreciates yet what a license to print money this opportunity is. It's our pension fund! Once Kurt has finished his LPC he will return to Forbes to continue his training for another 18 months and hopefully become a fully fledged Solicitor.

In October Emma returned to stay with us for 3 months to learn the Queens English and study our attitudes to race relations – no Aborigines here cobber. Sadly she is going home on December 23rd as she starts university next year plus she wants to be with her family over the Christmas period as she dipped out last year. What will happen to their relationship we will just have to wait and see?

Brett

We still have no contact with Brett and his family. Its three years since we last spoke, but this was our choice because we were fed up with the hurt and upset we were experiencing through their lack of communication, involvement and behaviour towards us and the rest of this family. It was one of the hardest decisions we had to make but at least we have no expectations now. We will never give up hope that one day this will be resolved and that all the past can be forgotten and start anew. We love and miss Brett and His family being a part of our family circle very much, only time will tell.

2008 Overview

We survived our first year of retirement, including 6 weeks in a caravan, without killing one another, quite an achievement.

Retirement has been the best thing ever for both of us. Surprisingly Tony doesn't miss work one bit, not the least bit bored and struggles to find the time to do all of his planned projects. It's just a pity that we couldn't have afforded to do it at the age of 21! The freedom to do what you want when you want is great, with no one to answer to. Why would anyone in their right minds ever want to work once they've experienced the freedom of retirement.

The caravan, a real home from home, and the trips to France have been fantastic.

Plans For 2009

More time in France, especially the South of France, with longer stays and fewer trips back to the UK. Tony will continue with his French studies, hopefully he will improve his speaking and listening skills.

Rather than waste time and money on trips to hot places for a few weeks at a time we will extend our skiing holiday to the maximum we can afford. Compared to a holiday lazing in the sun, skiing is the ideal holiday with plenty of activity and exercise. Of course it also has the advantage of being in the USA.

Tony also wants to develop his web design skills. He does miss the mental challenge and frustrations of software development, although he still has the daily frustration of his PC to contend with.

Wendy wants Tony to do some decorating, but as it's not in our project plans Tony is not so highly motivated – you really can't rush these things.

If you're ever that desperate for up to date news on our travels go to the blog page on our website www.4uand.me.uk/travel.html.

If you made it this far without going to sleep, losing the will to live or just skipping to the end – well done!

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [Leave a Comment](#) »

[20081202 – Playa Blanca](#)

December 2, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Another cloudy morning but clears up in the afternoon.

Early start to catch the 10:20 bus to Playa Blanca. Typical free for all at the bus stop. Why? Well if I tell you that there are about 60% Germans here does that give you a clue? Yes it's just like the ski queues in Austria. What is it with this

German death wish that they have to be at the front of the queue – so bloody ignorant.

Well Playa Blanca is out on a limb but relatively nicely laid out, quite pleasant, but glad we're not staying there. There really isn't much there.

Well back to the free for all for the bus. Not a bad service and reasonably cheap – I'll have to be careful finding something positive to say about this place.

Well one last chance on the Spanish plonk front – KevinA I'm hoping you're right, but I'm not optimistic.

For more travel blogs or “Soup of the Day” rants and raves see our Blogs at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[20081201 – Puerto Del Carmen Again](#)

December 2, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Cloudy morning but brightens up at lunchtime as usual – still I suppose we should be grateful it's not snowing.

Catch the bus into Puerto Del Carmen and then walk back to Matagorda in the sun – really exciting.

Still at least we have to go by the German Cafe so we pop in for a beer and do a little people watching.

For more travel blogs or “Soup of the Day” rants and raves see our Blogs at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[20081130 – The Roar Of The Crowd And The Smell Of Chips](#)

November 30, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Cloudy morning but the sun comes out in full force after lunch.

After lounging around we go for a walk down the front to race the Wallace Arnold shufflers and pop into the German cafe for a decent beer and a hot chocolate for Wendy. Walking back you get a distinct feeling of pride as you appreciate what the British Empire has given to the world, yes it's the roar of the crowd from Football games being played in every bar and the smell of chips.

Whilst we're on the subject of gifts to the world lets contemplate the multi-blade razor. When they first launched to dual blade razor you could almost believe that there was some sense in it. Then the 3 blade was launched who would believe it. Surely it would end there. No one would be daft enough to launch a 4 blade. Well they did and I got one given me free. A good job really when you see the price of these things. Well what a load of crap, they cost a fortune; they clog up; totally useless after one shave. Who buys these things? The good old single blade razor costs a fraction, doesn't clog up and can give you as close a shave as you want.

So how long before the 5 blade, or what about the ultimate infinity mobius blade razor.

For more travel blogs or “Soup of the Day” rants and raves see our Blogs at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[20081129 – Beggars Paradise](#)

November 29, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Cloudy but warm so we set off to visit Arrecife, the capital. We were going to bus in and walk back to Matagorda but being so overcast we just caught the bus.

Well what can you say about It? Not really a lot. The Lanzarote marathon was on so you would have thought it would have been teeming with folk and judging by the number of runners we saw there must have only been 20 people running.

The town was all very seedy and more beggars than you could shake a stick at. To give you an idea of how bad it was, Blackburn is better! On the positive side we did find a patisserie.

So its a bus back to the apartment for a read.

Pavements in Lanzarote continue to amaze me. The amount of excess cement that's been slapped on them, rather than anybody clearing up, it ends up like a major hill walk going up and down the concrete lumps. Lamposts are also unbelievable, I defy anyone to find one that isn't held together by white tape.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [1 Comment](#) »

[20081128 – I'm Too Young Get Me Out of Here](#)

November 28, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Clear blue sky and hot. Today's objective is to walk down the coast to Playa Honda and back.

Well we achieve our goal in about 4 hours, despite several go slows from Wendy, and as a reward we go to the German cafe for some proper beer. Sat there drinking a quality beer watching the Wallace Arnolds shuffle by makes you think. What are we doing here? British bars are offering Barrow Versus Brentford on the big screen tonight; tomorrow strictly come dancing. Time for another German beer (how decadent can you get drinking in the afternoon), time for a proper holiday, skiing!

I've made my mind up no more Holidays to the Med, instead we should go on a longer skiing holiday and stick with the caravan in France. I really can't see us venturing to Spain with the caravan, I'm sure it will be a total waste of diesel.

By the way I may have mislead you into believing that Rioja is the worst wine in the world. Well I can assure you it's not, the local Lanzarote wine beats it by a mile.

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[20081127 – Wot No Footpaths](#)

November 28, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Another hot sunny day to start with although the BBC forecast says rain.

We returning the car today as there is so little left to see it hardly seems worth keeping it for a 2nd week.

First it's off to the supermarket for our last big shop. Then after lunch we drive back to the airport to drop the car off. The airports only about a mile away as the crow flies and there is a footpath all along the front so my aim is to have a pleasant walk back. Doing my bit to reduce my carbon footprint. But it is not to be, the only way to get to the seafront is either to run across the runway and climb a 6 foot barbed wire fence; catch a bus to playa Honduras and then walk back; walk down the motorway – not advisable with the way they drive over here.

We decide to catch a bus to Playa Honduras and walk back from there, but give up after 20 minutes, just like the waiters the buses don't bother. By now the clouds are looking formidable so it's a taxi back.

Well the BBC did get the forecast right it spotted with rain for about 5 minutes.

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[20081126 – Lazy Day](#)

November 28, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Glorious sunny day so we have a lazy day around pool and balcony.

Time to give some comments on Lanzarote in general.

Good points:

It's hot and sunny.

Petrol is cheap – E0.75.

Good taxis – no Ladas or Datsuns.

It's making us appreciate France more.

Not so Good:

Spanish beer is full of E numbers and the best that can be said about it is that it's wet. With the number of chemicals it is probably good for cleaning toilets.

There coffee is awful. Supermarket choice is very limited. We have no coffee machine and they don't sell proper coffee bags or plastic filters. But never mind the intrepid caravanner came up with a solution, the wisdom of which I will impart to my children in case they are ever in such a desparater situation. Take a 1 litre plastic water bottle and cut off the top about 3 inches below the top. You now have the basics of a cup top filter. Buy some filter papers and ground coffee, invert plastic top over cup, insert filter paper and coffee, pour on hot water and you're away.

Supermarkets are very basic and they have not yet got to grips with credit cards never mind chip and pin.

Food is expensive compared to France and UK.

Unlike France there are no bakers, delicatessens or wine shops, they've probably all been squeezed out by grot shops and English pubs.

If you want to give up drinking wine then this is the place to come. They only tend to sell Spanish and Lanzarote plonk – I've yet to find a good one. It's certainly put me off drinking wine.

Late afternoon we set off for a stroll along the front with the Wallace Arnold crew (worrying isn't it) – although to be fair there are quite a lot of younger people here. Great news we find an authentic German Konditori, full of Germans and all signs in German, but best of all it sells draught Konig Pilsner, a proper beer; served in a proper glass; no chemicals and brewed to the Reinheits Gebot. And unlike our aborted trip to a Spanish cafe it was served within minutes. The highlight of the week at this place is Thursday evening when they have a cards evening and everyone comes to drink and play cards. We'll definitely be back.

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[20081125 – The Volcano](#)

November 27, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Another warm sunny day so we're off to Timanfaya National Park to the volcano. Hopefully this time we'll find it.

Interesting demo of how hot the ground is at the top, just 3 feet below ground and brush wood catches fire – saves on the old matches. Then they pour some water down holes to have a burst of steam / water geaser emerge 3 seconds later. After this there is a bus tour around the volcano and then of course the obligatory merchandising opportunity – yet more tat.

The roads are a complete mystery. Road signs are either non-existent or distinctly misleading.

Then it's back to the apartment for a bit of sun and a read. Followed by a stroll down to the beach and somewhat reluctantly we pop into a seafront bar for a beer, at least that's what we planned but after 15 minutes there's no sign of beer or waiter. Now I know things are a bit laid back but this is ridiculous, we give up - fortunately it was Spanish beer

so it's no great loss.

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[20081124 – Northern Island](#)

November 27, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

We meet up with Kevin and Anne at Costa Teguisse and set off to explore the North of the Island. Thankfully they've been here before so they are our guides for the day.

First stop is Jameos Del Agua which is an intriguing cave formed by the volcanic eruptions, complete with Albino crabs, beautiful pool, gardens and vistas with interesting displays in the museum. A lot of the gardens and pool have been created by Cesar Manrique (CM), more of him later, as his influence is everywhere.

Sorry no photos on this blog as someone forgot to pack the card reader.

Then we drive up to the Northern tip of the island to Mirador Del Rio which is another CM creation of a unique cafe with a fantastic view over the small island of Graciosa. A sheer drop down to the sea. Quick lunch and tea (I've given up trying to drink the local coffee it's a lot like Arabic coffee but gritty and worse) and then it's off down the Island with some fantastic views to Nazaret. Where hidden up a side road is an impressive house designed by this CM geezer for Omar Sharif – who apparently lost it in a game of cards before he even moved in – c'est la vie.

We then go to CM's house which is incredible. Basically he has built a house underground, in the middle of a lava field, and the rooms are formed out of caves / bubbles created by the lava. It's very impressive and even has an underground pool. The house also has some stunning views across a lava field and as CM is dead is now the CM Foundation. It also hosts a load of his pictures, unlike his architecture and mobiles, they do nothing for me.

Then it's back to Matagorda for bread and cheese and wine. Unfortunately neither the bread, cheese or wine are a patch on the French version.

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[20081123 – Lava Fields](#)

November 27, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

A sunny day with clouds and temperature is about 22c. We set off to visit the Volcano, drive through lava fields to the visitors centre. Interesting video on the island and the volcanoes, but in typical Spanish fashion its half cocked – do they ever think it through? Bear in mind the majority of the people there were English with a smattering of Germans and some Spanish. The First film has multi-lingual sub titles – now there's a bit of sense. The second longer film needs headphones, on sale at the shop, mind you they don't tell you that until the film has started – so everyone watches the film in silence and their money making racket failed. Mind you the whole film and interesting visitors centre was free.

We then set off to go up the volcano, it's so well sign posted we miss the turning completely. By now its become a bit overcast so we leave this for another day. Instead we call at El Golfo, a small village with some stunning rock formations and a green pond! They really isn't that much on this Island so they have to make the best of what they've got.

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[20081122 – Puerto Del Carmen \(Blackpool\)](#)

November 26, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

A warm sunny day with some clouds. We set off for a walk down the front all the way from Matagorda to the harbour at Puerto Del Carmen – well that's the goal. Despite much moaning from Wendy and at one stage a good impression of a donkey refusing to go any further, we finally make it to the harbour. Must be about 5 miles so now we have 5 miles

back.

Good news is you can walk all the way along the front, bad news is that PDC is full of English bars; Worthing E; Live football; big screen come dancing and X Factor (whatever happened to Only Fools And Horses). And of course they're digging up the main road. Pavements here are of the classical Spanish school of architecture – unfinished, falling to pieces and of course full of piles of waste cement.

Overall a good 5 hour walk and we've explored the coastline.

Thankfully we're staying in Matagorda, which is very pleasant and not so spoilt.

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[20081121 – Oh No Not Another Supermarket](#)

November 26, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wake up to a sunny morning and about 23c. Apartment is on a small estate around the pools. We have a 1st floor apartment South facing with pool and sea views.

Find the obligatory supermarket. Fortunately it has a pleasant cafe outside so I have to sit in the sun with a book and a coffee – thankfully. When we come to pay they need to see our passport even though they have chip and pin – bloody 3rd world country. So where are our passport – well we're British and don't need to carry ID. We're ready to walk off and leave them with the trolley full of food, but it will mean another 2 hours so we go to the bank and get some more cash – unbelievable.

Choice of wine is dire. They've only got Spanish plonk – rough and ready. Anyway I give a Rioja a last chance.

Driving over here is a nightmare the signs and road layouts are so poor and counter intuitive.

At least the Rioja is up to its usual standard – bloody awful.

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[20081120 – Escape From The Frozen Wasteland](#)

November 26, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

We're Lanzarote bound for 2 weeks. That's the good news, the bad news is we're flying with Monarch – allegedly the worst British airline. Anyway I've been practising reading with my kneecaps in my mouth, ready for the cramped seats.

I spread some honey on my kneecaps and set off with the view that if we get there before the midday tomorrow it'll be a miracle.

Oh yea cynic of little faith. No queues at check in; take off more or less on time; good legroom; modern and clean plane; pleasant aircrew; and we arrive early. Great flight.

Arrive in the dark. Pick up the manual rental car and do battle with the pudding stirrer in the middle of the car and that bloody third peddle – it's archaic, might as well advance and retard the spark and provide a man with a red flag. Oh and the car's a Renault Clitoris, surprisingly roomy.

Miraculously find the apartment without getting lost.

Apartment is very pleasant, modern and clean if somewhat sparse, but at least the WiFi and Satellite TV works.

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[20081029 – Back To The Frozen Wastelands](#)

October 29, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Saturday in Lyon turns out a nice sunny autumn day so we're off to see some of the villages of Beaujolais. All very picturesque with lots of facilities and useful village shops – just like Belthorn!!!! Mind you if you wanted to buy a drum you'd struggle. Unfortunately there's not much free wine flowing at this time of the year.

Sunday is a glorious sunny day but we're traveling up North to Calons En Champagne. A bit of an industrial wasteland but a very handy municipal campsite. I'd always thought that municipal sites were a bit questionable, full of travelers – I think that's the politically correct term for them (just in case you're confused they tend to sell heather, pegs and collect scrap metal) but then again aren't we all travelers?

Monday starts off with rain and we're off up to a stopover at Calais. Site is unattended and really only half open. Initially no electricity but wangling the supply box open I manage to turn it back on – intrepid caravanners strike again.

Anyway we arrive just after lunch so we nip into Calais to have a look at the Drinks Hyper Markets. These places are massive but extremely well hidden – unbelievable! Wendy's little eyes light up with delight. A massive shopping mall complete with Tesco and a giant Carrefour. The whole place is just teeming with Brits who must have come over on a Wallace Arnold bus tour to stock up with booze. World travelers who revel in foreign cultures, they're all there with their shopping trolleys full of crates of lager – bloody sad and an indication of what we're coming back to! Tesco is unbelievable. How can you go into a wine hypermarket, in France, that hardly sells any French wine – incredible!

Tuesday morning and due to an oversight by the catering manageress we have no milk. Never mind Tony to the rescue, so I organise breakfast, yes that's right **Tony does breakfast** - I've obviously been paying attention during these interminable cooking programmes. It's off to the local bakers for croissants – unbelievable – what is the world coming to. Then we break out the long johns, thermal vests and liberty bodices ready for England. Bloody good job really as there's a full blown arctic blizzard as we drive through the Midlands. We start to wonder whether we'll make it home tonight. Anyway after the journey from hell we finally make it home in time for Wendy to watch East Enders – bless.

Wednesday we wake up to freezing temperatures and snow.



What the hell are we doing in this hell hole. It's at least 20c lower than the south of France. The roads are crap! The weather's miserable. Actually given how miserable the weather is it is amazing how pleasant the English are – notice the Welsh are not mentioned. I think the EC should arrange for all the French to be moved to England and the English occupy France – we had our chance at Agincourt and we bailed them out in two world wars, what missed opportunities.

Anyway I can't wait to get out of here and next year will see us return to France for longer.

Meanwhile for a rant about the delights and sophistication of Blackburn living go to my latest rant at <http://s254708968.websitehome.co.uk/>.

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[20081024 – Lyon](#)

October 25, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Friday we set off to Lyon for the day. Catch the bus just outside the campsite and for E4.40 get a one day Lyon pass. Then catch the metro and then catch a funicular up to the cathedral – smart move this as it means we then walk downhill into Lyon old town rather than the long trek up. Views over the city are spectacular. We then stroll around the old town, more cathedrals and churches than you can shake a stick at. Then we cross the river Saone into the main centre which is on an island between the Rivers Saone and Rhone.

Shopping areas of Lyon are very relaxing – in so far as shopping can be – with wide open, traffic free boulevards.

We go to one of the many street restaurant areas for lunch. Wendy has a massive Plat de Jour, a full 3 course meal that I have to help out with. Every time I've eat in Lyon I've always meant to try Tete de Veau (that's the head of the veal – very cheeky) but never quite had the nerve. But I put on a blindfold and get on with it. It arrives very pink and fortunately for there are no photographs. At least I didn't have a problem with Wendy pinching it. Well I manage to get through it, can't say as the taste was anything spectacular, and as long as you closed your eyes and think of Belthorn weather it's not too bad. But if it's on the menu at the Grey Mare I don't think I'd bother again.



After 2 hours (nearly achieving the French state minimum of 3 hours) we stagger out the restaurant and I want to find a park bench, newspapers and cardboard boxes to sleep on. How do they work after that assault on your stomach – not for us.

We then finish off our stroll around Lyon, including yet another visit to a street market. Here Wendy is propositioned by an exceedingly fat French geezer (unusual for the French – being fat that is), he offers her a taste of his snails and is most insistent on trying to get her to try one. But Wendy's having none of it, where's the Tete de Veau spirit?

We then catch the metro back to the bus station and the bus back to the caravan. I must say the transport system is phenomenal; all joined up; never more than a 3 minute wait for metro, bus or funicular; very clean and modern and all for E4.40 – just like the UK!

The weathers been sunny most of the day but it's certainly not shorts weather.

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[20081023 – Bloody Cold](#)

October 25, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

It's forecast rain for Wednesday and Thursday down here so we decide to move on up to Lyon early. Might as well travel in the rain.

True to form Wednesday morning just as I start to pack up the caravan the weather forecast comes to fruition. Nothing worse than departing in the rain. Anyway it's quite a shock for us as it rains all day and it's the first real rain we've seen for weeks. At least when we get to Lyon it stops so we can set up. But my is it cold especially as we are still wandering around in shorts.

Thursdays weekly shop day and big caravan clean up ready for winter – I make myself scarce, best out the way when vacuums and cupboard cleaning. Wendy thinks the weather is awful, it's not raining but is only 16c. I remind her that we're going home to worse, including daily rain. Bit of a boring day really, especially as the WiFi connection here is as fast as an arthritic escargot – more about that later – but I suppose it's the chores you have to do.

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[20081021 – Le Castellet](#)

October 25, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Another sunny day but not quite the clear blue skies of Frejus.

After a leisurely morning around the caravan we set off to visit the medieval village of Le Castellet. Very picturesque and of course plenty of merchandising opportunities to buy soap and lavender etc. We just managed to complete our stroll round the village before a German Wallace Arnold bus tour descends on the place.

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[20081020 – Contradictions & Extremes](#)

October 25, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yesterday we left Frejus after nearly 4 weeks and moved onto Sanary Sur Mer. Frejus was great and I’m sure we’ll be back.



We moved about 80 miles West, yes that’s 80 miles on the way home.

It’s a very French site – I suppose it would be in France – hardly any English, but what a site of contradictions and extremes:

French receptionist who is pleasant, friendly and helpful. Plus she speaks good French. I can actually understand her some of the time, unlike most French people who seem to be speaking a foreign language and need to go on a Teach Yourself French course to learn how to speak it proper like I do.

French people on site who are actually friendly and try to communicate even though they don’t speak English.

Swiss precision. Anyone who has been caravanning will appreciate how you have to level your van or motor home, to which end most people have a small spirit level. Well not this Swiss Motor home driver, he spends 20 minutes driving backwards and forwards to get in the best position and level – mind he did have his wife giving him grief. Then he came out and set up his table ready for dinner and all was revealed, a 2 foot long spirit level to even level his table!



But the best of all goes to the toilets. It’s been a while since I made any derogatory remarks about the 3rd world toilets in this country and I notice that the EU have not taken any steps to get the situation resolved. This campsite however has obviously felt that it needs to seize the initiative and fly the flag and put matters right. They’ve installed electric Hygiseats – see attached photos. When you’ve finished you wave your hand and the seat rotates and is automatically disinfected. So here we have a country that goes from one extreme to another, holes in the ground to rotating electric seats. Now I don’t want to pee on anyones rotating seats, but whilst a major improvement in hygiene, I dread to think what they will be like in the near future; too complicated and too many things to go wrong.

So Monday we get the bikes out and ride along the coast to Sanary and then onto Six-Fours. Lovely coastal roads and views, with cycle paths but very hilly. Not Wendy’s cup of tea.

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[20081018 – Going Native](#)

October 19, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wake up to a few clouds and Wendy is convinced it's going to rain.

We move on tomorrow so it's our last chance to go into St Raphael – Wendy wants to explore it.

So its bikes down to St Raphael, dinner in a beach front restaurant and then go shopping. Yes we've finally succumbed to the French way of life. Moules Frites and half a litre of wine, all ordered in French without being corrected. Mind you we do rush it somewhat, it only takes 90 minutes not the more normal 180 minutes. Yes there all there stuffing themselves, it's packed. Haven't a clue how you eat these. Don't you have to remove beards or something. Anyway watched the locals and soon get the hang of it. You use an empty shell to tease out the mussel – clever. Don't ask how you tease out the first one! Now for those of you who have noticed that I'm not smiling I did say we we're going native – when in France.....



You'll have to wait until tomorrows exciting episode to see whether I survive the mussels.

It's alright this stuffing yourself at lunch but not good to then cycle back on – I wonder whether you can be done for being drunk in charge of a bike. Not for me I prefer a piece of fruit, at least it doesn't put you to sleep.

By the way Wendy was wrong, weather turns out brilliant yet again.

Well we've been here nearly 4 weeks. Hardly seen any rain, every day has just been blue sky and pleasant temperature. Campsite is great with fabulous pool. Shower temperatures are a bit erratic, so we shower in the van. Pitch is good with great views. Frejus area is great. Lovely beaches and great cycling, very flat. Yes we'll certainly be coming back.

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[20081017 – Grimaud](#)

October 19, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yet another brilliant day so its off to yet another market at St Aygulf – what a waste of time.



We then drive onto Grimaud village, it's a small mountain top village complete with castle and great views over the coast. Interesting place; free parking (reminds us of Blackburn) and plenty of it; free toilets; free access to castle; pleasant walks; ancient and picturesque windmill; lovely little village with plenty of restaurants – just like Belthorn. Well worth the visit.

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[20081016 – Donkey Lovers Beware](#)

October 19, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well yet another stunning day, unfortunately it's Thursday – super market day. Fortunately I've found the ideal supermarket. Next door to McDonalds who not only serve the best and most reasonably priced cup of coffee in Frejus but also give free high speed internet access all for the cost of a cup of coffee E1.20 – god bless America!

Anyway as Wendy slagged me off on Facebook for “playing on my laptop at McDonalds whilst she shopped” – I know

that those who know me will doubt this – I see she got the last laugh!

If you have ever given to one of those nutcases who used to come round the office raising money for Donkey Sanctuaries (I know that's not terribly politically correct but it really used to get up my nostrils when there are millions starving and dying – enough said) then stop reading now.

Wendy decided to treat me to some dried sausage – bless – to go with our bread and cheese tea – and nearly forgot – wine. It's one of those dry sausages you hang up by a piece of string in your hallway to greet your guests. She says it was only half the price of the others so as per Martins Money saving site she thought she try it. Now it contains “ane” and as I'm sure everyone knows, apart from Wendy, that's French for donkey. Well that'll teach me to avoid the supermarket. Actually it's quite tasty and as it's only 25% donkey it is very difficult to tell any difference between it and normal pork based dried sausage – perhaps this should be one for Martins Money Saving forum.

Well after the supermarket it's just more stress as we head off to the pool.

More pots for rags stories – what does space smell of? Well apparently the ultimate in vacuums can smell of fried steak. Should we really bother coming back!

Whilst I'm doing the grumpy old man thing why is it that every other programme on TV is about cooking, could it be cost related. Instead of Master chef, in it's many guises, we could at least have master carpenter, master potter, master banker – don't be ridiculous?

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[20081014 – Swim In The Med](#)

October 19, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Despite the forecast of clouds it turns out another spectacular day so we cycle down to the beach for lunch and a swim in the med. You can cycle most places around here on traffic free paths and with very few hills, so far we've managed 3 weeks, including trips out, on one tank.

Despite it being as scorching day the seas not that warm so I chicken out and have a paddle instead. These French must be a more hardy lot judging by the number swimming, not for me though, I'll stick to the heated pool back at the site.

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[20081013 – Cannes](#)

October 14, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

We won't bother with a blog for yesterday. It was just another very hot, sunny and very lazy day. Although we did manage a grand promenade around the site here to identify the best pitches for next year – must be coming back.

Anyway Monday dawns with cloudy skies – wot no sun! We abandon our plans to go to the beach and have a swim in the med and instead head off to Cannes.

The drive along the coast road is spectacular, albeit a little bit hair raising for the passenger as the French – here we go again – have a nasty habit – one of many – of cutting off the corners on bends. Anyway we survived it, truly stunning and the sun has finally woken up. We park up in Cannes for free. French towns seem to have this charge in the centre rule but on the outskirts it is free, so we have lunch in a pleasant park overlooking the marina and then set off for the

centre of Cannes.

Now I'm sure you're all aware of what Cannes is famous for; film stars – well we didn't see any of them; film festivals – well there was an expo selling TV programs, but my trainers, black socks and shorts did not gain me free entry, although we did manage to walk the red carpet; topless bathing – well yes there was some evidence of this but in the main it was enough to make you believe in the benefits of the burka! But what most people don't appreciate is that the pigeons of Cannes should also merit some fame. They have some really colourful pigeons, not just your run of the mill grey. Sad isn't it, we've finally flipped, sat having lunch and feeding these colourful pigeons (Wendy not me) – mind you they don't seem too keen on fruit!

Anyway back to Cannes, a vibrant place, lovely sea front and the town behind it is very pleasant. Well worth the visit and so much nicer than Nice.

We end the day sat in the sun with coffee on the beach. Up to now I was quite pleased with my progress in French vocabulary. Admittedly listening and speaking was not my forte, but I have started trying to speak it. However, after ordering a “café allongé” and being offered an “Irish coffee” I really think it's time to call it a day and resort to English rules!

French Detection Rule 9 – if you're on the middle of a zebra crossing and a police motorcycle cop roars around the corner, missing you by just 6 inches, then there is a 100% certainty they're French. A bit obvious really but as Wendy summarized it – “you don't stand much chance if the coppers don't stop for you”.

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20081011 – Mountains, well big Hills

October 12, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yet another stunning day and very hot.



Despite Wendy's moaning we set off to go for a walk in the forest. Wendy drowns herself in Deet as she is convinced she is going to be ravished, not by the French but by French mosquitoes, despite the fact that we've not seen any. Anyway we go for a pleasant but brief walk in the hills of the something or other Massif, followed by yet another exotic lunch – an apple. Yet more mountain bikers up here but at least it's the right place for them.

The flora and fauna are fantastic. But without the intrepid “Eye Spy” we are clueless – bring them back. All you seem to be able to get these days are giant toms that require a fork lift truck to carry – hardly pocket sized. We see very little wildlife though, but perhaps that because there is a big party of Frenchmen,

resplendent in combat fatigues and with truck loads of hunting dogs. They've probably shot it all and are now proceeding to consume it in their extended lunch hour. Obviously the namby pamby state hasn't banned it yet. Then again they may well have done but in true French fashion they just ignore it.

After lunch it's back to the pool. Boy are we getting some reading done. For those of you who enjoy the delights, and snails pace of Facebook, Tony is not just reading while Wendy does the housework, he is studying!

Meanwhile I attach a photo of Wendy busy at the housework.

French Detection Rule 8 – if you're taking a picture with no one around and someone walks in front of you, without so much as a by your leave, then there is a 100% certainty they're French.



Yes they (the French) are so bloody ignorant it's unbelievable. I think this calls for a missive to the EU recommending the introduction of a “Manners Hour” every day in French schools, complete with a “Manners coordinator”. As for adults they should all have to attend manners lessons in their lunch hours until they can pass a basic manners test,

evidenced by a “European Manners License” which must be carried at all times, especially if they attempt to leave the country. Rant over!

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20081010 – McDonalds

October 12, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well Internet still not fixed! I know our kids will be totally distraught and constantly checking their emails for the latest news, so it's off to McDonalds to get the latest out to the World. Free unlimited access and good speed all for the cost of a good cup of coffee (E1.20), none of this French Nescafe muck. What more can you want, trust the yanks to get it right. Just a pity I can't take my caravan on a ferry to the US – well you can actually but it's about £3,000 each way. I can see if this carries on I'll be eating here daily. Plus Wendy can trot off to this massive supermarket, surrounded by shops – bigger and nicer than Blackburn centre.

Anyway enough longing for a US trip we'll have to make do with France.

Weather is fantastic again, it's 29c.

Wendy wants to improve her market knowledge, no that's not the stock market but street market, so we set off on the bikes to a village along the coast that has a Friday market. It's traffic free all the way and the last one third is along a proper cycle path. Very civilized you might think, but of course we are in France and should learn to expect the ridiculous. No we can't ride on the cycle path, the police are there directing everyone to risk life and limb by riding on the road! Sounds crazy, but remember it is France. Apparently it's the mountain bike equivalent of tour de France this weekend so the public are banned from cycle paths. Mind you I always thought mountain bikes were for riding up and down Everest whilst us more timid types stuck to the safety of a cycle path. But never mind I'm sure the police will be directing traffic to make it as safe as possible? Silly really remember we are in France – there having none of that, much better to just stand around chatting whilst joe public are being slaughtered by traffic!



We abandon the market and nip into Frejus via the Roman Amphitheater – I wonder how the Romans coped with the French? Meanwhile Wendy is still working down her long list of local markets ready for her appearance on Master Mind – specialist subject “Markets and Supermarkets of France”.

On the way back in the site we see the van of the Internet repair man. It must be his 4th attempt this week. I'm so tempted to park my car behind his so that he can't leave until he's fixed it to my satisfaction – if only – but I don't think the French could cope with that!

Yet another relaxing day and the good news is that they finally fix the Internet – only 5 days! But the really good news is that the German guy on reception gives me a E20 card for the next weeks Internet access free – note he is German not French. In all it's not worked out too bad, I got my E20 back on the last access card even though I'd had 6 days use of it, then a free one for the following week, so its cost just E20 for 3 weeks Internet access – that of course assumes it can continue to work for a whole week.

French Detection Rule 7 – if the police just stand around chatting and ignoring public safety then there is a 60% chance they're French.

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20081009 – Oh Good Another Supermarket!

October 10, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well it's forecast rain again today but the clouds have all scurried away and it's just clear blue skies and very hot. It was 20c at 9:00 and it ends up at 27c.

Anyway it's Thursday, supermarket day- oh joyous. This one is enormous, Wendy will never come out. Even the shops around it are as big as Blackburn shopping precinct – always thinking of it see how we miss it! Thankfully I have a good paperback and my Ipod, and when I finally find a café that doesn't sel Nescafe I settle down for a good long read and a big coffee.

Sorry no photos today, I'm sure a picture of the supermarket won't be missed.

Internet still not fixed – oh well c'est la vie!

French Detection Rule 6 – if the men are carrying a handbag then there is a 60% chance they're French – the remaining 40% are probably gay. I wonder whether that's politically correct – not to worry they'll probably never get the Internet fixed so it won't get published.

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20081008 – Lavendou

October 10, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Clouds today and its forecast rain. After nearly 2 weeks of constant blue sky and sunshine its almost a relieve to have a change, but then we think back to Belthorn and rescind that thought.

We have a 50 mile drive down the coast to have a look at Lavendou and Cavalier Sur Mer. We explore a few campsites ready for next year as I'm sure we'll be coming back to this area, but to be quite honest Frejus and our current site takes some beating.

Well the rain manages to keep off until tea time.

Internet still not fixed. 3 bloody days and we're no further on except that the campsite office have now lost connection. But there's just no drive or umphh to get anything done. This is France at its worse, they just resort to that gallic shrug, at the least the Dutch and especially the Germans have some drive and concept of service. As long as this lot are in the EU then we're better off keeping it at a distance.

French Detection Rule 5 – if they shrug their shoulders and say something like “it's not my problem”, “what can I do?” or “what do you want me to do?” then there is a 100% chance they're French.

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20081007 – Agay

October 10, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Yet another sunny day so we have the morning around the van reading etc., have lunch and then drive off to Agay for the afternoon. Cunning plan here. By the time we arrive, for once the shops will be open. Lo and behold we've got it right, there are 3 shops open!

Agay is yet another small village in a stunning bay with red rock hills (Massif de l'Estérel) in the background. It even has a train station but the TGV doesn't stop. Sand on the beach is a bit course but Wendy is adventurous enough to paddle in the Med, amazing it's not too cold for her.

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[20081006 – St Aygulf](#)

October 10, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yet another stunning day, so it's off on the bikes down the canal to the coast and then ride along the coast to St Aygulf. It's proper cycle paths all the way, none of the Blackburn dotted white line paths. St Aygulf is a quiet little village with great beaches and a very small harbor – no room for big showy yachts. We have a pleasant walk round the headland, stunning view. Then into the village where of course all the shops are shut because it's Monday.

We dine on the beach watching the local school having sailing lessons – perhaps we could have that at St Thomas's, one week sailing and the next week skiing.

French Detection Rule 4 – if they let the door go in your face or don't say thank you when you hold the door for them then there is a 95% chance they're French.

Disaster has beset us – we're coming home from this heathen land – the internets down. Poor French girl on reception just can't cope with the stress of English and Dutch complaints about the internet. Finally get told that they – being the internet provider who have screwed me in the past – will have to send someone out. Anyway I get my E20 back for the weeks card even though there is only a day left on it. This does not bode well. They have no idea when they are going to fix it – typical but believable!

Settle down for the evening to watch Casino Royal complete with French subtitle when this English geezer knocks on my door and asks if I have reversed polarity – just a typical every day question for us caravanners. I tell him no and then go off with him, complete with my magic volt detector, to see if I can help! He and his wife have just arrived and their motor home is beeping and flashing because it thinks there is reversed polarity. He has one of these plugs that also checks the mains out but this says the earth is live and causes more problems and confusion. They don't have a clue about anything electrical. Finally prove to them that it's not reversed polarity and the earth isn't live – why isn't physics a compulsory subject (not that there would be any time to fit it into the curriculum).

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[20081005 – Honey Festival](#)

October 5, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Well yet another stunning day. After a laze around the caravan we venture out to the Honey Festival in one of the local villages.

I didn't know there were so many honey producers and so many different varieties. It was crowded out and full of the usual rats on leads. But just because they're miniscule doesn't mean they can't walk for themselves, instead most of them are being carried around – what is the point of having a dog and then carrying it everywhere – I bet these people even end up barking at visitors.

French Detection Rule 3 – if they don't bother to let on to you or say hello in any language then there is a 80% chance they are French.

Nearly got flattened on a zebra crossing – must remember rule 2.

Amazing how often they have 2 zebra crossings within 20 feet of one another. Especially as everybody ignores them anyway.

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[20081004 – Market Day Again](#)

October 5, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well another hot sunny day but we are sworn off the car today to avoid weekend traffic. However some idiot produced a list of every market within a 50 mile radius (must have been a women) and joy of joys there are 2 within Frejus so its off on the bikes to the Roman Amphitheatre where there is a local market – have times really changed?

After lunch we decide to have a change around. With a caravan you can't easily change the furniture or move the settee around but you can at least move it around the pitch to better get the sun – sad. Then by way of a change it's a lazy day around the caravan reading and learning French. Followed by a very pleasant bottle of French wine for less than E5 – I think this one qualifies for buying a dozen off.

Anyway we were talking about rats on leads and I think this photograph just about sums it up. In case you can't make it out it's a market stall selling jumpers stinking of dog sweat – charming. Yes it does have a ribbon in its hair, had did the owner. But I think the best of all goes to the young women with a rat sized poodle on a lead who dragged it out of the bakers shop, most embarrassed she was as she tried desperately to calm the ardor of what I can best described as a rampant rat – it was just hilarious. Did the gentlemanly thing and didn't take a photograph.



Thought for the day – will the Large Hadron Collider create planet eating Black Holes?

French Detection Rule 2 (this one could save your life so pay attention) – if they don't stop for you on a zebra crossing then there is a 90% chance they are French. Therefore learn how to identify French number plates. Perhaps I should petition the EC to ensure that all front French number plates carry a suitable government health warning!

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[20081003 – Port Grimaud](#)

October 3, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well the winds still blowing but after a few clouds early morning it clears to clear blue skies and despite the wind 23c.



Active day today we're off to St Maxine, 15 miles along the coast, where we park up for free, get the bikes out and have a very pleasant ride into Port Grimaud. Now while most houses have a parking slot PG goes one better in that as well as a parking slot each house has a dock for their boat or yacht, except of course for the real show offs whose yachts are so big they won't fit. It's a very pleasant place, gated type community, no rif-raff, the security we're on lunch when we pedaled in.

After PG we ride back into St Maime, a pleasant little town with plenty of street cafes and the obligatory marina. It even has a post office hidden away. But what ever you do don't ask the local road sweepers or follow the signs. Anyway we finally find it only to discover that French post offices are just like English ones, massive queues – at least they're not on strike today. Anyway I soon loose the will to live so we nip and buy a large envelope and then weigh it and stamp it via the automatic machine. It's quicker and I don't have to do battle with anyone in French.

It's a sad fact but so many things are now becoming automated / DIY that striking employees will soon be a thing of the past. Plus of course the machines are multi-lingual. What jobs will there be left?

I think I've already said it before, but in case you weren't paying attention or haven't troubled to read previous missives, the colours of the sea here are stunning. They range though so many fantastic shades of blues and differ with the both the sunlight and even the wind.



Anyway we have a coffee on the sea front and observe the world going by. All these posy people with their rats on leads, complete with ribbons in their hair – both the dogs and the people. I start to develop my French detection criteria, that is, a set of rules and guideline that will help you when on holiday in Europe detect person or persons of French origin.

French Detection Rule 1 – if they smile there is only a 10% chance they are French.

After a 5 hour bike ride we return to a caravan in an alarmed state. Looks like the wind has set it off. No doubt this has

made us extremely popular with our cosmopolitan neighbors. Never mind it's a nice Lowenbrau and a green thai curry for dinner – typical French fare!

It's been a while since I made any derogatory comments on third world toilets. Oh yes they're still out there and France has not yet been expelled from the EU because of them, but I'm working on it. Anyway today sees the other extreme, a toilet seat painted with a vivid and lifelike tiger – unbelievable. Still shouldn't complain at least there was a toilet seat.

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[20081002 – Has The Mistral Got Lost](#)

October 3, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yet another blue sky day but the wind has really got up just like the Mistral. But it's still very warm, 25c, and at least the wind cools you down.

After yesterday's tourist day we decided on another lazy day, and then in the afternoon we have the highlight of the week. Yes the supermarket trip, at least it has a restaurant for a good coffee and a read. The only way to survive a supermarket. I think Wendy is finally sold on the idea of a mid week shop, it's so much less crowded.

Went to buy a birthday card. Can you believe cheapest ones are E3.30, unbelievable. There must be an opportunity here to export them from the UK and make a fortune. Anyway at that price I think it'll be either a post card or home made!

Wendy comes out seething. Yet again the French have surpassed themselves. Despite a long queue girl on the checkout seemed to be spending most of her time discussing last night's conquest with her mates. It's not just a UK problem then.

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[20081001 – Fat Perfume Factory](#)

October 3, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well it's yet another sunny day so we set off early (10 its almost a record for us) to visit Grasse, centre for the perfume industry down here.

Being tight I decide to avoid the toll roads and end up driving over mountain passes – what no edges, don't look down! Fortunately manage to avoid two police spot checks. It's just like Blackburn when the suns out the police want to get a bit of sub so they pick on motorists.

Finally get to Grasse. What a disappointing place, not a bit like we expected. Just an industrial town on a hillside. Only plus point is free perfume factory tour, in some sort of English. All very interesting. Of course at the end of it, in true Walt Disney fashion, there is a merchandising opportunity at the end of the tour. Very expensive. Apparently the town is named after the fat (Grasse in French) that they use to extract the perfume oils from flowers such as Jasmin – now there's a job. On day 1 you take a dollop of fat and spread it out on a 24" square tray and proceed to put jasmine flowers face down in the fat. On day 2 you remove all of the Jasmin flowers from the fat, the Jasmin oils being left, and then place the next lot of Jasmin flowers face down in the fat. Repeat this until you have got through 3 tons of Jasmin flowers (relax it's only metric tons). Then take the fat, mix with alcohol and extract 1 litre of Jasmin perfume oil – a tad labour intensive, even the chins aren't interested. But progress has an answer, they develop chemical solvents to extract the Jasmin oil. What ever happened to the Jasmin flower putters and pluckers, probably being paid by the EC to stay at home and play boules.

Today's useless piece of information – they don't do perfume for Men as their skin is too acidic, we only get Eau de Cologne.

I'm beginning to wonder whether this place is the gay (part of my political incorrect campaign) centre of the South of France. Too many men going around kissing one another – very worrying – perhaps another French thing. Then whilst I'm sat outside a supermarket, losing the will to live, I see more evidence of Gay France. Guy comes out with a Burberry handbag round his neck and struggles to mount a giant motor bike and then rides off with a deafening roar – the motor bike that is.

Driving back I stumble into Cannes, another nightmare of traffic and kami-kazee scooters. And to top it all the road with traffic lights from hell, yes every 10 yards, and at least 20 of them. Of course in true French fashion the pedestrians ignore them and just Jay walk; drivers are consistent and ignore them as well! I even get pipped for stopping at a zebra crossings – is that politically correct as they have black and white, not coloured, stripes.

Latest newsflash is that it's snowing on Mars – could this be the ultimate ski resort of the future.

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20080930 – (Sunny + Lazy Day) * Again

October 3, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Morning around the caravan sat in the sun, coffee, learning French and reading.

Then to tempt the clouds out Wendy dons her bikini and we head off to the pool. But no clouds.

Wendy gets blasted by the pool attendant for eating around the pool, tut, tut.... He didn't see me. Then of course in typical French fashion we see the attendant drinking, also banned, and to add insult to injury eating. Then of course they turn on the radio so that we can all listen to music that we don't like or understand. I'm sure the attendants just can't understand the childlike pictures of a banned radio. I feel a bout of retaliatory action coming on but Wendy talks me out of any confrontation. It's just one of those French moments.

Well that's it for today, just too relaxing. A bottle of wine sat admiring the sunset puts it all into perspective. Thank god for retirement, just think of every one beavering away.

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20080929 – Sunny Again

September 29, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Another sunny day so it's on the bikes for a ride down to the beach at Frejus and then along the front to St Rapheal. We ride down the canal / runoff slipway (just like LA) and it avoids any traffic.

The front in Frejus is great so we have lunch on the beach and they have a big nature reserve. The bay looks very safe for swimming and lots of people are in for a swim, along with windsurfing and sailing. It's a pleasant 24c. The front then continues along to St Rapheal, another great location very pleasant. Of course both locations have their marinas and the boats are a more realistic size, not so ostentatious. Why would anyone want to go to Nice, Monaco or Monte Carlo when there are great quiet places like these. It even puts St Tropez in the shade. There seems to be a lot of other smallish resorts along this coast for us to explore

Rats on leads seem very popular here. You see them exercise their so called dogs, usually by carrying them clutched to their breasts; in shopping bags; in cycle baskets and occasionally on leads, heaven forbid they should walk for themselves. They even allow them to sit on forms. The plants, flowers and birds are interesting but we don't have our I Spy Books (anyone remember them) with us.

We're out riding for about 4 hours, it's so relaxing and a great way to explore. Most of the roads have proper cycle paths. Wendy's done really well in her cycle shorts surviving that long, she's even been seen riding up small hills. Then it's back to the caravan for a spot of DIY and a great sunny evening.

See political correctness on “Soup of The Day”.

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[20080928 – Lazy Day – Again](#)

September 29, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

It's another sunny day and the forecast is good so after a touristy day it's lazy day. Morning in and around the van. Finally getting some reading done and thank god for the Internet. Just read Scott Turow's Presumed Innocent, fantastic book. I'd always got him pegged as James Patterson North but this was excellent, gripping with a real twist.

Wendy dons her bikini and we head to the pool. Sure enough after 30 minutes the black clouds come zooming in and we retreat from the pool. I'm sure it's that bikini, seems to attract the clouds. Anyway after an hour of black clouds they all go away and the sun comes out to play again with a stunning end to the day.

The news from back home seems ever more depressing, best avoided. B & B look like they are going to be Nationalised. Thankfully I have wifi in the caravan so I can arrange to transfer money around. What is going on all these so called experts paid a kings ransom and bloated bonuses yet the financial systems are in chaos.

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[20080927 – St Tropez](#)

September 29, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Powers gone off overnight to our pitch and two others, so I report it to one of the female staff passing on her cart. You'll have to go to reception she tells me. Of course I ask her if it's not her problem and she should deal with it. I might as well be speaking serbo-croat she has no concept of basic customer service – typical! Anyway it's quickly fixed once I've been to reception. John Cleese should really have done Defectueuse Tours and not Fawltly Towers, they would have been spoilt for choice.

I had one of my finely tuned prejudices confirmed for me though. You may recall I was really impressed by the guy on reception he smiled, he joked, he was friendly and helpful so I couldn't believe he was French. Anyway it turns out he was and still is German.



Beautiful sunny day so we set off to the market at St Tropez. It's a nightmare parking but we finally find a place.

By the time we've got up, had breakfast etc and driven there it's 12:00, at least there is only an hour of the market left. It's a big bustling market. Quite interesting really. There's a feast of different languages – everything from French, Dutch, German, English and the odd American; there's a whole gamut of smells from cheese stalls, meats, soaps, perfumes with lavender at every turn and not forgetting fantastic open spice stalls just like a middle Eastern bazaar; plenty of free food samples from dry sausages, cheese and those awful olives and of course there are stalls selling all kinds of tat.

Wendy costs me a fortune with a selection of 5 different honeys.

Then we have an extravagant lunch on the harbor wall consisting of fruit and a fattening Tart Tropazine – a very tasty local delicacy.

Well ST T is full of expensive clothes shops and lots of restaurants. No topless beaches and not really a lot of posy people. There is a harbor but nothing compared to Monaco, this must be where the poor come to tie up their somewhat smaller yachts. And the even poorer are too tight to come into the harbor and moor up in the bay, a bit like us looking for free parking. A couple of curious sights though. Firstly a man raking the roof of his house, but more unbelievable was the couple sat at a restaurant with their Yorkshire terrier sat on its own chair with its feet on the table – unbelievable. I wanted to take a photograph but thought the better of it.



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[20080926 – Frejus](#)

September 26, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

 It's another gorgeous day – 25c – although rain showers are forecast for later on.

On the left is the view from our balcony / front parlor window

Wendy's just been shown a portable washing machine and tumble drier for us caravanners. She wants one. At this rate we'll need a pantechnicon in order to tow complete with all the junk, not to forget the rising tide of post it notes. Best thing is to keep away from other caravanners that way she gets no ideas. Anyway after escaping lengthy discussion on everything from free parking overnight at Calais to the depth of flood waters we get away on our bikes and set off to explore Frejus.

Fortunately there are a lot of cycle paths and where there aren't any then we improvise by riding on the pavement, pedestrians are in short supply but I'm sure the local gendarme won't be very understanding.

Frejus is quaint, with a fabulous beach and port, complete with the obligatory yacht basin. We have lunch on the beach in gorgeous sunshine. Of course the town is closed apart from the usual flower shops and hairdresser – so far not seen any lawn mower shops!



On the left we have Wendy on the beach at Frejus, complete with sexy cycle shorts – just in case you thought she was wearing a pair of black cami-knickers.

Another French observation. Here we are on a very cosmopolitan site, nearly everyone is very friendly but you can inevitably tell the French pitches they never smile, they never let on, they never say good day in any language, they're such a surly lot. Unlike the Brits and the Dutch who are very friendly, even our token German nods his earring shod head.

And on the pitch next to us we have the epitome of an ex-wing commander, I'm sure he has a fresh supply of plums provided every day just to keep his accent pure.

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[20080925 – The Sun Comes Out to Play](#)

September 26, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yesterday was a lazing around the pitch day and today's not much different. We moved to our new pitch which has superb views. This site is great it has WiFi on the pitch, 16amps, great views and a fantastic pool. We were only going to stay here 2 weeks and then move on but it's so good and the next place is only 25 miles (yes we still use miles instead of Kilometers even though I have to do a conversion) so we are planning on staying here for 3 weeks. It's 25c and clear blue skies so in the afternoon we go and laze around the heated outdoor pool.

Then at the end of the day as recompense we go to the supermarket. It's taken me all day to persuade Wendy to go on Thursday rather than Friday or Saturday. Why so keen, do I need a fix as well? It's just that Fridays and Saturdays are so busy so why not avoid them. Boy has this caused some confusion to Wendy. Anyway we make it to the supermarket where Wendy proceeds to play hide and seek – I've had enough of these places. Our baton – French bread stick – somehow manages to get broken, perhaps it's me lobbing goods into the trolley when I finally track Wendy down. Now this may seem like a trivial incident but of course to the French their daily bread is sacred. Certainly the women on the checkout (so called hostess) didn't look too impressed.

Interesting comment on TV on the problems with the French.... "the French language, French cooking, under arm hair and being French" ... I'd add their laziness and surliness.

We thought we were here for a long time but the place has a lot of people who staying for 5 – 6 weeks. Mind you it is a great 4* site all for £12 a night. It's very cosmopolitan, mainly Brits, Dutch and French with the token German. It's interesting in supermarkets and the camp commandants office where, even the Dutch and Germans speak English to communicate with the French.

The rise of the motorhome is very much in evidence over here. I would say nearly every other pitch is a motorhome.

It's interesting looking at the weather. Nice and Monte Carlo region seems to be consistently more overcast than this area. There is obviously a rain front hanging around, but it seems to be further east. Frejus area so far seems to escape it.

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[20080923 – Escape From The Mountains](#)

September 24, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well that's enough of our campsite in the hills. Since we've been there we've seen some rain every day yet once we get to the coast it's OK. Originally we were going to stay there a week but their attitude on arrival – closed for lunch etc. – put me off and we've only stayed 3 days to do the Eastern end of the Cote d'Azur. It's some consolation that they suffer financially for poor service, not that they'll notice it.

Anyway we have a 1 hour drive West to Frejus, the suns come out and it's looking more like what we expected. We arrive at the new site in glorious sunshine, 25 C, the world looks a better place.

Receptionist at the new site is excellent, very friendly and speaks perfect English – I suspect he's Dutch – it's just unnatural for a Frenchman to be this pleasant, most unnerving. He tells us that the weather this summer has been very sunny with only a few days rain, apart from the past 2-3 days when it has rained – bloody typical – specially arranged for his British guests. It's a big site with shops, restaurant, fantastic big pool, hundreds of sunbeds and not a German towel in site. It has the best children's play area we've ever seen – the climbing frames look great but I'm not allowed on. Honey would love the toddlers section. There's Wifi on every pitch but the price is a bit steep – 20E for a week – but probably worth it when compared with 5E for a day at the last site and 10E for an hour at a café in Eze (unbelievable). Anyway at least you will get emails and blogs – I know you kids can hardly wait for the latest riveting missive / blog. Plus we'll sign up to Skype for cheap calls.

Very pleasant afternoon sat around the caravan reading and just taking in the sun.

Facilities here look good but the showers run hot and cold, or at least Wendy's did, I could here the screams as it turned cold on her – will she ever stop moaning about it?

Get signed up to Skype Pay As You Go and we can then phone home – I know the kids will be desperate to hear from us! Just over a penny a minute and quality is not too bad.

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[20080922 – Monte Carlo or Bust](#)

September 24, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



It starts raining this morning but then again we're in the hills and it seems to be the pattern.

Never mind it's tourist day, we're off to Monaco and possibly Monte Carlo. It's a lovely drive along the coast and the rain peters out. Finally get to Monaco – blink and you'd miss it – but the traffic is horrendous and it takes three trips around the town – it's not that big – before we finally get parked at the casino in Monte Carlo. I drove up and hope to just drop my car off at the casino door like James Bond does but none of the attendants dashed out to oblige, so we had to make do with the underground car park and a mortgage application to pay for it.

We walk down to the harbor at Monaco for lunch, not I may add in some swish restaurant, but on a bench overlooking the harbor. The sun manages an occasional appearance but at least it's shirt sleeve weather. This place is unreal. I think the size of the boats is just a phallic extension. Any yacht under 100 foot and you're a nobody. Anyway for the sake of completeness I've included a photo – but the best is yet to come.

Not all that impressed with Monaco. It is the worst place I've ever had to drive in; narrow streets; too much traffic and kame-Kazee scooter drivers. Before the days out I'll get one, at least it'll reduce gene pool pollution. It's the sort of place you're glad you've seen but never again.

The Casino at Monte Carlo is very nice with some great gardens and views, but the saving grace of the whole day is the Japanese Garden at Monte Carlo. An absolute haven of tranquility amongst the hustle and bustle and flagrant wealth. It's got two fabulous Zen sections plus tea house, pavilions and ponds etc., and what is so unbelievable is that it is FREE! So take my advice if you want to see Monaco don't bother, see the casino at Monte Carlo, view the yacht basin but don't miss the Japanese Garden it's fantastic. I've picked up some tips for crowd control ready for the visitors to my Zen garden. Of course you can always see the Belthorn Zen Garden for free.



Could this be an inspiration for the water feature Wendy has mithered about?



And I definitely want one of these full sized pavilions in the back garden. We can sit in it cross legged, drinking green tea, obviously served by Wendy in a Geisha costume, and then contemplate the view of Pendle.



On the way back we called in at a small village called Eze. It's perched up on the hills and stands up like a rock pinnacle with yet another garden at the top – unfortunately not Japanese – but the views are fantastic over the Cote D'Azur.

On the way back we have the pleasure of driving through downtown Nice in the rush hour. Yet more death wish scooter drivers – it's a nightmare. Also interesting how the Promenade is the façade but 200 feet back and your into the real grubby Nice.

Well that's enough of the tourist traps for at least a week. Looking forward to some quiet and simple days.

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20080921 – Nice is quite nice

September 24, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well the heavens opened up overnight, complete with thunder and lighting. Obviously the English weather has managed to track us down.

But by 10:00 it's all stopped and the camp site springs to life – mainly Dutch.



It's Nice today so we park up at West end and have a grand walk down the good old Promenade de Anglais – might as well we paid for it back in the 1900's. Miraculously the parking at that end was free, probably because nobody wants to walk that far. Anyway we have a good 3 hour walk around Nice. Not exactly brilliant sunshine but plenty warm enough and the sun kept coming through.

Didn't see any sign of lights along the Prom, nor any chip or rock shops, and no candy floss – this is no Blackpool. Of course the sea and the beaches are clean and the sea is such a wonderful colour.

So where's all this topless bathing? That's it we're off back home, all this way and hardly a topless bather in sight!

I notice that we're in the grape picking season when the vineyards have bus loads of people out picking the harvest. Could this be a Wallace Arnold opportunity? Sell grape picking tours and exploit the aged for their free labour!

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20080920 – The French Workers!!!!

September 24, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Last night was a classic example of one of those senior moments. We're sat in the van enjoying a glass of wine; it's 20 degrees outside and the Mistral is blowing a gale; the sweats just dripping off me, it's 27 C and raising. Wendy is in her element, "it's just nice". Temperature keeps rising so I turn off the spotlights thinking there the cause. 29 C and still rising. Open the window and let the Mistral work it's magic. 30 C and still rising. I know it's not the wine. Get up to open the door and notice it's even hotter near the cooker. Lo and behold Wendy has left the oven on full tilt. So there we are we've used a bottle of calor gas to heat the place and had the Mistral cooling the place.

Wendy has a solution – yes it's yet another post it note. At this rate by the time we're 70 – that's if Wendy hasn't bankrupted me by then – we won't be able to move in this van for post it notes.

Wake up to a lovely sunny day and the Mistral has, as predicted, died down. We're off on the last stretch just 130 mile towards Nice.

Arrive at the campsite at 12:45 where there is a sign informing us that office and barrier does not open until 15:00 – yes it's that famous French lunch hour again. Anyway we wonder around the site and all the employees are sat having lunch / sun-bathing and inform us that office opens 15:00. Now I know that lunch is sacred, but what about customer service – I wonder whether they even have a word for it? Dare one suggest staggered lunch hours! No, much too flexible! Much as I like it here you do wonder how this country will survive! I suspect that EC grants are just shoring up their lazy attitudes.

Anyway we have a pleasant read sat around the pool and then we get set up. At least it's warm and sunny.

Of course the highlight of the day is a trip to the supermarket!

Despite the French it's really, really, really good to be back!

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20080919 – The Mistral

September 19, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Wake to a sunny day again and have a very pleasant drive down through Lyon to Salon de Provence which is just on the edge of the Camargue. It's sunny all the way down with temperatures in the 25's, We'll need some new sun glasses at this rate. It must be hot Wendy's even taken her cardigan off.

The auto route is called the Route of the English, but judging by the number of birds of prey (begin to think they're plastic) sat on fence posts I think it should be renamed to the route of birds of prey. Not having an "I Spy Birds" book we're not sure whether they're hawks or falcons or whatever, but they are very elegant.

As we get nearer to our campsite the wind gets up, and when we arrive it is blowing nearly a gale (poetic license). This is the famous Mistral, fortunately it's very hot and sunny with clear blue skys so it's quite welcome.

Campsite is ok, very well shaded with tall trees but I imagine when there is no wind they are very welcome. Well let's hope this weather keeps up, I'm sure as we move towards Nice there will be no Mistral. They also have WiFi here so hopefully we get to pick up email and send of Blogs.

It's really, really good to be back!

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20080918 – Beaune or Thereabouts

September 19, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yes its out again – the sun that is and apart from a brief shower on the way down it's very pleasant all the way. After a long drive, breaking the 5 hour rule, we arrive at a camp site in the quaint village of Santenay right in the midst of wine growing region.

Being 15:00 the campsite is closed for lunch which seems to last until 17:30, now there's a record. But we pitch up (highly technical caravanners term) and then have a drive into Beaune to get some cheap diesel and look around. Also manage to find a reasonable priced bottle of Beaune. Next time we must stop over for two nights so that we can visit Beaune and Mersault, plus do some free wine tasting.

By the time we get back the site is open and miraculously I manage to complete the whole transaction in French along with a discussion on WiFi problems. I thought she didn't speak any English but then at the end she did drop into good English. It's just so much nicer when they let you have a go at French rather than dropping into English as soon as you've got the first syllable out.

Pleasant evening and we set a new record in that we both stay awake all the way through an "Inspector Morse" episode. I can't quite figure out whether it's Morse or the wine that puts me to sleep. Never mind I'll have to experiment tomorrow night by drinking some more wine.

It's really good to be back.

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[20080917 – Quest For The Sun](#)

September 19, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Up early this morning to catch the Ferry. Used Sea France this time, not only a lot cheaper than PO, but also a more spacious and up market interior. Despite setting off late he (being a tad chauvinist I assume it's a male captain) made up plenty of lost time. We burned off at least one PO ferry in the channel.

Then we have a relatively short drive down to Saint Quentin (there's no prison). As usual the auto-routes are very quiet and fast, not that it's much use to us caravanners pottering along.

Anyway arrive at campsite at Seraucourt Le Grand mid afternoon. Now I hope you're all sat down for this but we observed this bright yellow thing in the South Western sky. It stirred a vague memory of something we'd seen before and after consulting my weather book (yes I've decided to study weather forecasting – can't make a worse job of it than the professionals) I discover that it's the sun – yipee. Hastily get the deck chairs out and have afternoon tea out on the lawn.

Today's useless piece of information, marginally less useless than this blog – apparently if you assume tomorrows weather will be the same as today then you will on average achieve a higher degree of accuracy than the professionals.

Then take a leisurely stroll into the village. What's it famous for I ask. Well nothing much but then I notice evidence of a master craftsmen at work. You've probably all heard of finger painting and I'm sure you know what pointing is. Well Seraucourt Le Grand obviously has a "Finger Pointer", and no he doesn't go around pointing at things. Whoever he is he has obviously conned most of the inhabitants into having their properties pointed by him, or being fair to the fairer sex, could be her. Most of the properties look like they have been pointed by some "craftsmen" who uses his bare hands, and fingers, to point the brickwork. Just to finish off the effect he doesn't bother brushing off any excess mortar, and believe you me it is excessive. Even the quaint old stone church has been suitably ruined by this master craftsmen or one of his acolytes.

Somewhat of a mystery to us but the streets here are also strewn with potatoes. We could not figure this one out and thought that perhaps it was some pagan harvest festival. But then on our way back from the walk all was revealed. The local farmer seems to spend most of his time driving up and down the main street with a cart full to the brim of potatoes. Yes he drives up and then 5 minutes later he drives back down with the same load of potatoes – I'm sure it's some creative scheme for one of those famous French EC farm subsidy.

Anyway enough for one day, lets crack open another bottle of le vin rouge.

It's good to be back.

For more travel blogs or "Soup of the Day" rants and raves see our Blogs at www.4uand.me.uk.

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20080916 – Folkestone

September 19, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

16/9/8 After a 6 hours drive (miraculously no hold ups) arrive in Folkestone at Caravan Club Site – Black Horse Farm – very nice and well organized. They have special ferry pitches suitable for just a single nights stay for people catching a ferry or just coming off the ferry. Must join again next year as their sites are well organized and restore a little bit of faith back in UK caravanning – pity they can't organise the weather.

Why is it that HGV driver have no understanding of "Safe Stopping Distance" and the Dept of Transport – or whatever they are currently called – have wasted an absolute fortune on electronic overhead signs that give you no information? For observations and rants on UK motorway travel see my "Soup of the Day" blog at www.4uand.me.uk.

Anyway with the state of Sterling compared to the Euro we decide to do a major shop on UK soil. Joy of joys a trip to Sainsbury, we'll need a 2nd mortgage – I hear Lehman's are offering good deals!

Fortunately they, Sainsbury that is, have a decent café with good 3G reception so like any good nerd I can get onto the net whilst Wendy enjoys herself reading all the food labels in Sainsbury's.

For more travel blogs or "Soup of the Day" rants and raves see our Blog at www.4uand.me.uk.

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19/08/2008 Melpesh, Dorset

August 27, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Arrive on our last site of our 3 week trip in the UK. Driving in Devon was a nightmare with a caravan in tow but Dorset roads are a good bit better. New site is an adults only site and is excellent. Fantastic shower rooms; great pitches; even a pub and restaurant on site; yet not too big.

20/8/2008

Weather a bit overcast but at least it's not raining. Have a pleasant walk around Bridport and the market. It's a great market town, not too big yet has everything you need. Even a café that sells Hofbrau, unfortunately it's on draught and not in bottles. We then set off for a pleasant walk down to West Bay on the coast. Pleasant little seaport with harbor. Walk back to the car in Bridport but get caught by the rain in the last mile.

21/8/2008

Off to Portland and go for a great walk along the coastal path around the Island all the way up to Portland Bill – he even waved to us from the coastal observation post. We're out for a total of 4.5 hours, Wendy is exhausted. Overall a great walk and the weather was sunny all the way and fortunately not too hot.

22/8/2008

Well at long last it's a blue sky day although quite windy. Finally we get a lazy day around the caravan. Very relaxing and I even get a bike ride around the Dorset country lanes. Nice quiet lanes but there are plenty of hills. Still it's good exercise and not as boring as the Gym bikes.

23/8/8

Reasonable looking day so we set off for a walk around Dorchester and to make us feel better they have laid on a French market. Quaint little town populated by wasps – I think they've come for the French market.

Then it's dinner around the caravan followed by a walk into Bridport. Wendy does the window shopping whilst I go to Morrisons. No I've not quite lost it yet, but you can sit in their café all day and play on your computer and nobody bothers you. Mind you really swelled their profits and bought a cup of coffee – no wonder retail sales are up.

Then to finish a great day we have Thai curry for dinner.

24/8/8



Over cast sort of day but we're off to Lyme Regis – sounds rather grand – and planning on doing the coastal path to Charmouth. But bad news the coastal path is closed and there is a massive diversion inland all due to landslides. Instead we fully explore Lyme Regis. It being bank holiday Sunday it is heaving. Every man and his dog – despite sign forbidding them – is on the beach trying to enjoy themselves. Ice creams, fish and chips and mobile phones are in abundance.

One enterprising individual is balancing rocks on the beach. Eh! And you can take a photograph if you buy a £2.50 post card. There's a lot to be said for telephoto lenses! Could this be an addition to my Japanese Garden or would it attract too many tourists to the narrow streets of Belthorn – I've already tipped off the Council that there's going to be an opportunity to put

parking meters up in Belthorn ready for the number of tourists that will be coming to view my Japanese Garden!

Not the best of days but at least it stays dry.

And tonight it's candles on the Cob – 5000 candles lit on the cob (harbor wall) – you can even buy one to remember somebody by. Only £2.50 – do you get your money back if it gets blown out? Don't these people care about global warming?

25/8/8

Well it's our last day, how sad. Tomorrow we can return to even drearier weather in Belthorn.

Day is overcast but dry as forecast – they seem to be good at forecasting miserable weather. It's either be kind to Wendy day or the early signs of senility are setting in we're off to an open air market – joy of joys. I suppose it's better than a supermarket at least you don't freeze down the arctic isles. Was hoping for a walk down to Charmouth but it just didn't happen.

Summary

Well this will be the last time we holiday in the UK for any length of time. The weather has been crap. Out of 3 weeks we get only one day suitable for lazing around the caravan. We make the most of it though and get out most days but it's far from ideal. And of course everywhere is very busy, roads are crowded and campsites are full. On top of that Devon is a money grabbing area, everyone has their hand out, no free parking and everything expensive. There are hardly any traffic free cycle routes and if you want walks then the money grabbing tourist information offices sell you books, no



free leaflets. They've just got it too easy. Not a bit like the Dumfries area where they want to encourage tourism. Camp sites in the UK are disappointing, not as good as French sites and the roads are appalling.

Next year we'll stay at home for August, at least if the weather's bad it won't be such a waste, or if we're really desperate risk some obscure area of France that is not so busy.

And next year I must look out for and avoid bank holidays – Outlook Calendar doesn't seem to bother – but too many times this year we have been travelling on or around a bank holiday.

Good news is only 3 weeks in the UK then we plan on going to the South of France for 6 weeks!

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[13/08/2008 Kingsbridge](#)

August 13, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Overnight it's a howling gale but we are warm and dry. Overcast morning but by lunchtime the sun comes out even if it is still very windy.



After yet another exotic lunch – 2 tangerines – we set off to Kingsbridge for a wander around and to do the weekly shop. Bit of a supermarket disaster; no 3G signal and no coffee shop so have to go around the supermarket with Wendy. Shop is completed in record time, just goes to show that smaller supermarkets with less choice have a lot going for them.

Get back late in the afternoon and sit out for a coffee. Then whilst Wendy does dinner I take a bike ride down to Beesands beach where I see the Fish Gallows. Steep ride back up but good exercise.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[12/08/2008 To South Devon](#)

August 12, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Sunny day, but as look would have it we have to move on.

What a shame to have to leave the DIY SOS site. After leisurely breakfast – everything's leisurely these days – we set off to our next site near Kingsbridge. Not a bad trip apart from one minor mistake which takes us down one of these wonderful Devon country lanes – just about room for a racing bike.

Get to site and thanks to a misleading and obscure sign end up turning into farm track that is too tight for a caravan. Then have the joy of trying to back up and extricate a caravan from a narrow Devon country lane. Proper turning is 50 yards further on. Complain about the misleading sign and then get set up. This is followed by arrogant owner getting stroppy because I've had the temerity to complain. If it wasn't so late in the day we would have moved on. Never mind every dog has his day.

Despite the problems it is a great site and they even have free WiFi.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[11/08/2008 The Tarka Trail](#)

August 11, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Very overcast day.

Drive down to Braunton to pick up the Tarka Trail from Braunton into Barnstaple. The trail is an old railway line that has been tarmac over to create a great flat cycle and walking path.

Get to Barnstaple for a walk around the town and our luxurious lunch of a banana and apple, but the rain starts to come down. After a coffee in the most expensive coffee shop in the world and its aptly named – Costa. I leave Wendy to explore the shops whilst I have a fast ride back to Braunton to pick up the car.

Then disaster strikes. I have to use almost a minute on my Orange Pay as you go phone in order to locate Wendy – this is the kids inheritance being squandered away all because Wendy's phone has a poor signal.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[10/8/2008 Wallace Arnold Village](#)

August 10, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Another blustery day with showers forecast.

We decide to make the most of it and set off for a walk down the Tarka trail to Ilfracombe (Wallace Arnold capital of the UK). This must be where all those Wallace Arnold coaches full of pensioners (yes I know where one of them) come. Over 60% of the inhabitants are pensioners complete with zimmer frames, walking sticks, plastic macs and giant handbags. At least they don't walk around the place with mobile phones glued to their ears and the remaining 40% of the population are too busy walking around with ice creams, chips or homemade fudge in their hands. Typical English seaside resort complete with crap weather to go with it.

As to Ilfracombe what can we say. Well we've never been there before; it has a harbor but hardly any beach; ferry to Lundy goes from there. But the piece de resistance is municipal gardens complete with genuine brass band playing – are we on the slippery slope to the Wallace Arnold booking office?

Fortunately we escape any showers until the walk back and then the monsoon begins and I start to understand why you shouldn't go walking in jeans. The Tarka trail is along an old railway line which has been tarmaced over. Whilst a very easy walk there we hadn't realized it was all downhill so it was a long steady uphill slog back. Overall a pleasant 4 hour walk.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[09/08/2008 DIY SOS](#)

August 9, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

The weather is that good they've issued a severe weather warning. There's a howling gale, lashing down with rain and cold – lets get back to France it was never this bad.

So it's a day in the caravan. Reading, playing on computer, relaxing and watching the DIY genius of our host.

This has to be the worst site we've ever stayed on. Showers and toilets are basic but the whole place is just a load of botched workmanship. Tiles all out of line; glue daubed everywhere to make up for the screws that haven't worked; wiring that looks like one of those steady hand games, snaking everywhere; holes plastered over with dollops of pollyfilla; no sign or understanding of a spirit level.

We also spent an entertaining hour watching mine host lay some chippings (could be handy for the Japanese garden!). Well this was a masterstroke. He turns up with his ex PO van full of stone chippings and a wheel barrow. Then proceeds to dig up mud; put it in the wheel barrow; wheel it to the van 25 yards away; put mud in van; put chippings in wheel barrow and then wheel chippings 25 yards to soak up the mud. Having discharged the chippings onto the mud he then proceeds to ignore his spade and use his foot to spread out the chippings. And to top it all never once did he think to move the van to save the 25 yard trek. Now I know why this place is such a botch.

Well the toilets and showers are not a problem as we can use the ones in the caravan, but the real disaster is that there is no Internet and my 3G modem does not work here. All well I suppose at least I can console myself that its cheap and we'd been wanting to try some certified locations. All we really need is water supply mains hook up and chemical waste disposal.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[08/08/2008 Woolacombe](#)

August 8, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well it's a good forecast for today so we set off on a bike ride down to Woolacombe.



Pleasant day and we end up riding along the coast. Stop for a gourmet picnic on the cliff tops, all very pleasant. The beaches are teeming with people and thankfully we're not amongst them. Sea is full of bathers and budding surfers, while the sky is teeming with hang gliders and parachutists. Woolacombe has very little to offer but is heaving with holiday makers. Great thing about the bikes is there is no parking fees – can you believe it £5 to park a car.

Unfortunately the rolling Devon hills get the worst of Wendy and she ends up

walking a lot of the way. Then to avoid a busy road we take the longer route home, what they don't tell you is that it's also the longest hill ever. You just think you've got to the top and there can't be any more and lo and behold there is more. At one stage it's left to me to push two bikes up a hill. I quite enjoy the hills as it gets the old heart pumping and gives you some real exercise – not boring like the gym – but then I end up waiting around for Wendy to walk up. Finally Wendy gives up. We still haven't seen the top of this hill, so she goes off to a campsite to get a drink and I cycle home to pick up the car and get her.



A good weather day and good bike ride. But they still play at cycle paths in this country, there are too many stretches on busy narrow roads. Looking forward to South Devon with fewer hills.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[7/8/2008 Lynton & Lynmouth](#)

August 7, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Days starts off overcast and we've no idea of the weather forecast so we set off to explore Lynton and Lynmouth.

Get there and purchase our exorbitant parking ticket and the heavens open up. Opportunity to dine Alfresco in the car whilst the rain passes. Weather then brightens up so we have a walk around Lynton and then drive up to Lynmouth to explore. We did try walking up but as the couple we encountered coming down we're covered in mud from slipping and sliding down the path we decided to give it a miss and use the car.

Railway down the cliff top is very eco friendly. There are two trains on a steel cable and the one at the top is filled up with water

so that it is heavy enough to descend and pull the other one up. Now ain't that smart. As to how they get the water up to the top well that's another matter. It's a toss up between pixies ferrying loads of buckets of water back up the cliff over or just using water from a local stream at the top?

Sit in a local café drinking coffee and people watching. Is this the obese capital of Europe? So many people are obese it just puts you off eating, it's nearly as bad as the USA. How do the French manage to stay so thin?

Overall a very pleasant afternoon and the weather remains good.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.



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[06/08/2008 Supermarket Highlights](#)

August 6, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well it's day one and the weather is pretty cloudy with the odd rain shower.

After a leisurely morning we set off to the inevitable supermarket. At least it's stopped raining.

First a quick trip into Barnstaple to the Tourist Info office – suitably well hidden to avoid having to deal with too many tourists. And for some obscure reason we need a butchers, so being logical sorts we set off down butcher's row – you guessed it not a butchers shop in site.

Then the highlight of the day a trip to Tesco. Fortunately I'm armed with my trusty laptop and 3G modem so I get to spend a pleasant 2 hours on the Internet. Great this 3G modem it's even faster than being at home, just a pity that there is no free coffee.

Well that's enough excitement for one day.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[Trip to Devon and Dorset August 2008](#)

August 5, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Taking our life in our hands we risk a 3 week holiday in Devon and Dorset. It's a choice of risking British Summer weather versus French crowds. Will we survive the experience?

New to this holiday we launch Tony & Wendy's Travel Blog, so that reading long emails can be avoided and we have a more permanent archive of our travels. Although the way the weather is in the UK we may not want to remember it! Reading the Met Office weather report ..."The unseasonably unsettled weather is set to continue across for much of the period, courtesy of low pressure systems..." and it almost makes it sound like the weather systems are doing us a favour.

Well we shall see.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[19/6/8 France Yet Again](#)

June 19, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Well it's our 3rd trip to France. Fortunately this time it's for 4 weeks and then escape before Bastille day and the notorious French holidays.

We're off to Cognac region for 10 days and then spend the rest of the time near the coast in the Vendee. We also have our new bikes with us so we should get in some decent rides and spend less time driving around.

Thursday 19/6/8

Pleasant trip to Dover, arrived early and those kind people at P&O let us catch the earlier ferry. Good crossing and then drove down as far as Rouen before looking for an Inn for the night. SatNav recommended a Formula1, only E31, however toilet was not en-suite, I suspect it was in a shed around the back – bring your own newspaper – what do you expect for E31!

Anyway after many no room at the Inn messages SatNav finally comes up with an Etap for E43. Bit basic but clean and had en-suite, just what you need for the night. Then a problem with toilet not flushing. But within 30 seconds a "Monsieur Fixer" was there to put the problem right – fantastic service I can think of many 4 and 5 stars where it would be hours if not days before someone turns up.

We decide to go out for dinner. What an experience "Wendy du Belthorn" decides to have steak. After a mouthful of the first steak she needs major dental work as her teeth have been ground down by 0.5" and her jaw is aching. So I explain the problem and we try another. That reduces her teeth to mere stubs, and her jaw aches that much she can't moan for days. So we send that back and try the ham, at least that's tolerable – more muttering from "wendy du Belthorn" about the French; young kids who have no idea how to cook and the final accolade of the worst meal of her life – even worse than the Spread Eagle last week!!!

Important tips when complaining in a foreign country – remain calm; stick to English it puts them on a back foot; wave hands around a lot (they seem to understand that better) and don't give in.

Friday 20/6/8

Long drive down France. Being tight we decide to try avoiding the auto-route. Not too bad speed wise although the large towns are a nightmare. After 4 hours we desperately search for toilets / lunch. But it's lunch time and all the supermarkets are closed. So it's either go to the hairdresser and have your hair done or buy a lawn mower, in order to use the toilets. Now this may seem a bit weird and obscure but to those of you that have been paying attention during my epic rants you will know that the only shops that are always open are hairdresser (1 per 20 inhabitants) or lawnmower shops.

We finally come across an open supermarket, but they have no public toilets. However the kind lady at reception, who doesn't speak a word of English, kindly whisks Wendy off to the staff toilets – don't let me hear any of you calling the

French Xenophobic, lazy or arrogant!!!!

Finally arrive at site and it's glorious sunshine and 26c. Fortunately I have a bottle of wine so I can sit and relax.

Saturday 21/6/8

Wendy has done battle with a mosquito in the night and it's bit her just under the eye so she looks like she has done a round with Mike Tyson. Kurt – you'll be pleased to know the New Scientist is not only a good read but it also is a great mosquito killer.

We have the whole campsite and swimming pool to ourselves. It is probably one of the nicest and most relaxing sites we have been to. No noise apart from birds, toads and cockerels'.

Lazy day. Clear blue sky, temperature 32c. Sit around and in the pool. It's too hot – typical English always moaning about the weather.

Today is music day in France so most of the towns / villages have a music concert of sorts on in the evening.

After a lazy day in which we become almost comatose we go to the local village for their rendition. Unfortunately it's a bit like amateur night down at the "wheel Tappers and Shunters Social Club". There's even a lunatic from England reading a poem out in English – very embarrassing. But an interesting experience.

Sunday 22/6/8

Wake up to another sunny day hot and heavy. Off for an early morning bike ride and then we sit around the pool. More reading, computers, dipping in the pool to keep cool and just generally relaxing. At long last I'm getting time for reading.

Wendy's decided it's too hot and is struggling to cope. You just can't win. Anyway we hear it's rain and storms in England so that should make her feel better.

Can we cope with this much relaxation?

Monday (I think) 23/6/8

It's a bit cold today, only 26c! Clear blue sky but at least there is a breeze and it's not muggy. We've decided that it's best to do things early morning or evening so it's off to Matha (local) town on the bikes. It takes an hour there and an hour back. Of course being Monday most of the shops are shut but we manage to get what we went for. I'm thinking of selling Wendy's bike and replacing it with a pair of walking boots as she seems to get off and walk more than she rides. But at least we made it back in the grueling heat.

Now we're sat around the pool having lunch. Wendy is getting into this French stuff yourself at lunch philosophy, I'm sticking to an apple or orange. I'm dressed like something out of the foreign legion, well covered up against the sun. But we both keep dipping in the pool to keep cool – yes even Wendy. Outdoor life is great, starting to take all meals outside now as it is so warm.

This evening we may go into "St Jean something French or other" and try and pick up emails etc at the local McDonalds. Then again we may not.

Dire news on the wine front, Wendy actually enjoyed a glass of Red. Anyway I've made a note of it – Cote de Blayes – and will avoid it in future.

Tuesday 24/6/8

It's forecast to be cloudy today so we head off to Cognac to visit the town but more importantly to visit the cognac

houses (water of life they call it). It turns out to be a really hot but heavy day – 33c.

After lunch in the park around the town hall – not quite Blackburn – we head off to Martell for a tour of a Cognac House. All very interesting, especially the samples at the end. I even coughed up to sample one of their expensive Cognacs, it was so smooth but by the end of the tasting the roof of my mouth was so anesthetized I could have had a filling no problem – letter to the EU recommending top quality brandy to be used at all dentists in place of the needle. I didn't try the very top of the range but I can only imagine how smooth that was.



Picture on the left is the 17th Century equivalent of a French Laptop as used by Mr Cognac on his travels.

And on the right is just some of the many types of Cognac Martell have produced over the centuries – funny though they didn't offer us a tasting of these.

Cognac is an interesting little town, very pleasant, with a nice shopping area. Wendy by now has twigged that going to the shops between 12 and 15:00 or anytime Monday or Sunday doesn't work, so after the Martell tour its off to the shopping area. But the gods are with me. Most of the clothes shops are shut in order to prepare for the sales the following day – how lucky can you get. Suffice it to say that Wendy had a few words to say about the French being lazy.



Wednesday 25/6/8

Another blue sky day and very warm. Lazy day, yes I know they all seem to become lazy days. Laptop and books around the pool. It's great finally getting some books read. Then later on, once it's cooled down a bit we went for a bike ride.

Thursday 26/6/8

Yet another blue sky day. Went to Saintes today – you need the patience of one to put up with the retail therapy park there. Very quaint town with a roman amphi-theatre. It was about 33c and nothing but blue sky.

Friday 27/6/8

Yet another blue sky day. Pack up and leave what has been the best site so far, although it got a bit crowded as a second caravan came on Wednesday. It's off to the Vendee where they claim to have as much sunshine as the south of France. We shall see!

It's only 140 miles but for simplicity we take the auto-route. No point in rushing as we know they will be on lunch until 14:00 so we have a leisurely morning packing up and drinking coffee.

When we arrive they've allocated us a pitch, unusual when the site is so empty, but being British we want to see it first. We wander off for a walk around and decide we don't like the pitch. After much wandering and debate with the booking clerk we get a massive pitch with the view on the right.

As its driving day I reward myself with a bottle of wine to relax with. So it's dinner outside in great sunshine and a pleasant bottle of wine, I can see we'll be doing this every evening in Belthorn!



Saturday 28/6/8

Yet another BSD except that now the sky is even bluer. Relaxing day today exploring the site and unfortunately it's supermarket day. I think next time Wendy can go on her own, I find it too expensive ringing the Samaritans all the way from France!

Pool on site is great, just what you need in 31c. It even has a lazy river and they don't have any crazy rule about wearing skin tight swimming trunks. I still can't understand that rule. It can't be on modesty grounds as the toilets are so out in the open over here, and it certainly can't be on hygiene grounds in a 3rd world country where holes in the ground serve as toilets – yes I know I'm banging on about that again but it is somewhat barbaric.

Anyway another very pleasant day apart from having to battle with their WiFi, but at least it's free it's just so dam slow. No mobile reception here so can't ring home. Kurt – I know you'll be devastated!

Yet another book completed, at this rate I'll run out before the end of our stay (notice the word stay and not holiday).

In the evening we go to the bar for a drink with our neighbors – well you know what these caravanning types are like.

Sunday 29/6/8

Yet another BSD. It really does make a difference waking up to this and a dawn chorus from the birds.

Finally cracked the WiFi problem. Sit outside their office and log onto the main wireless router for great speed, unlike in the bar where it runs like a knackered Moufflon.

It's all go today. Long bike ride to the coast to visit a local market – more retail therapy – but at least the street café sells Paulaner. Anyway it's a good ride there and back and Wendy only gets off and walks twice, she's improving.

Then dash off to the local village there is some folk dancing on at 15:00 so off we go to see it. A proper village fete, but unfortunately there is no Morris Dancers. Mind you some French bird in typical

costume and clogs (yes that's her on the right with her skirt hitched up) did try and get me up to dance with her on the stag. Two words of my French soon put her off. Typical French though they do use sticks and of course there sticks have to be longer than those used by our Morris dancers. I think they've still got a chip on their shoulder over Agincourt! But overall very entertaining and it did liven things up as per Wendy's suggestion.

It's just all so hot but we are becoming acclimatised.

Dining al fresco yet again tonight so I'm just going to crack open a bottle of wine. Unfortunately it must be Sunday as we're having meat and 3 veg, there's no escaping it. I can see that once we get back to Belthorn we'll be down to B&Q



for a garden table!!

France In Summary

Well France has been really great. Hopefully we'll be back in September for 6 weeks this time. We're aiming for the South of France which should have great weather for this time of year. It's a 700+ mile drive so we will take several days to get there. We now have a 5 hour rule that says limit any travelling with the caravan to a maximum of 5 hours. We've plenty of time so why rush. Also we will stay for 6 weeks to minimize travelling backwards and forwards.

Feel a lot more relaxed about driving in France, the roads are great and generally have no language problems – as long as I don't have to speak it or understand it when spoken at break neck speed.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[05/05/2008 2nd Invasion of France](#)

May 5, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yes it's back to France again, essential if we want to pick up our caravan. Three weeks again.

Spend the first couple of days on the site near Concernau where we left the caravan and then set off to a site near St Emillion for 10 days. Great site and of course the advantage of St Emillion. What wine!

After 10 days we drive down to the South West of France just near the coast where we spend a week on a large site near the coast. All very relaxing and a lovely area.

Then it's off to the Pyrenees, near Pau, for a week. Weather not too good with quite a few rainy days but at least it's warm and yet another different area of France.

We then drive up to the Cognac region and spend 2 days on a great little site – only 10 pitches – complete with pool which we have to ourselves. Leave our caravan on this site whilst we drive back to the UK for 3 weeks before coming back to the Cognac region.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[24/03/2008 French Invasion](#)

March 24, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

Yes believe it or not we finally make what will hopefully be the first of many trips to France. Yes I know it's full of French people.

This one is for just over 3 weeks in Brittany. We set sail from Portsmouth to St Malo and then have the whole of 17 miles to drive to our campsite. Being the first experience of French roads and not speaking French we want to minimize the distance. But believe it or not Wendy and SatNav still manage to get it wrong – fortunately it's not a major disaster and we soon arrive on site. We have the honour of being the first on site this year.

After a week we move onto another excellent site in North West Brittany, near the coast. Weather here is a lot kinder but it is still early in the year.

After another week we move onto a site near Concernau in the South West of Brittany. Another excellent site and weather improves somewhat.

Well after just over 3 weeks we leave our caravan on site and return to the UK via the St Malo ferry.

Well we've really enjoyed it and the weather hasn't been too bad but fortunately in future we should be able to go down

to the South Of France this time of year where the temperatures are even better. French life is very laid back, like the UK in the 1960, but the extended lunch and lunch time closing drives Wendy mad. Then again that's part of the laid back life. I think we've both enjoyed it more than we thought even though it is full of French people.

I've started learning French and I'm quite enjoying it. Fortunately it's helped us avoid horse meat.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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20/2/2008 Cyprus

February 20, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)

20/2/2008 Cyprus

Well the journey started good. Hardly any queue at check in, despite expectations. Boarded on time, but then sat waiting for air traffic control as they only had one runway operational. After 40 minutes delay trundled off down the runway only to turn back with a technical problem – computer problem does not sound good. After an hour engineer said it was ok – turned it on and turned it off and no blue screen of death. 45 minutes wait to top up fuel, then another 30 minutes air traffic control wait. No bloody forward planning here.

Anyway finally got off and arrived 2 hours late. Had my legs amputated so that I could get in my seat. Eat my sandwiches with my elbows in my mouth as there was no room and tore my book in half so that I could read it. Thank god I didn't have a newspaper – no chance of opening that. Like being on a Wallace Arnold holiday full of coffin dodgers – worrying that we were on it; better get used to it.



Landed ok. 1st through immigration – he was asleep and couldn't give a dam. Collect luggage from carousel 2. 1st initiative test which is carousel 2 – no numbers – but then again it is a Mediterranean country. Dash to car hire. We only choose the one with biggest queue. Finally get served – no rush here. Upgrade to a 4 wheel drive jeep for an extra £20, yes that's right only £20 for two weeks – what's the catch.

Nightmare journey in manual 4 wheel drive, in the dark, with page upon page of instructions and Mum navigating – not yet divorced. Finally get there and walk into this very nice fridge. Apartment is great, brand new, nicely furnished, but bloody freezing – warmer in Keystone. Finally get air con operating in reverse to warm the place up, but we had to wear ear plugs and ignore the draft. Nice touch in a welcome pack with all the basic foods we need for breakfast etc, including a bottle of red wine – a mans drink – very welcome after that drive.

21/2/2008 Cyprus

Woke up Thursday to glorious sunshine and a football pitch sized balcony with 2 dinning tables, 16 chairs, gas barbi and fantastic ocean views.

Thursday is penance day, 3 hours in the supermarket with her indoors trying to read all the Greek labels – joy of joys. Get free samples of all the cheeses but I pass on the olives – yuck. Rest of day- what's left of it – lounge on balcony and have a walk into the local village and back. Mum finds yet another supermarket. But apart from the merchandising opportunities all very relaxing.



22/2/2008 Cyprus

Friday – ready and rearing to go skiing on mount Olympus, but there are a few clouds on the horizon so we swap to a trip to Pathos. Finally find the harbour and have a Cyprus coffee (never again – I'd rather drink grit or Nescafe) and do some people watching – too bloody relaxing. Weather is fantastic by now. Clear blue skies and I'm ready to dash back for my shorts. Then some culture, Roman ruins at Kato Pathos, world heritage site (another one to cross off the list – perhaps Liverpool next). Mosaic floors galore. All very uplifting. Mum can't understand why these Romans got everywhere, a bit like Mosquitoes.



Then lunch at coral bay beach. Tonight we've just been down into the village to the local taverna for a Mezza (mixed grill with loads of humus etc, etc) and of course some house wine. All very good but followed by Mum driving, thank god for the wine.

Amazing the place is full of Brits, yet when it comes to the culture, the Roman site and long walks not a one to be heard. Walking tours of Germans, French and even some Eastern Europeans around the Roman villas, but no Brits. The Brits are too busy supping Lager by the harbour at 11:00 am. Still never mind we've given so much culture to the Med. – pubs, Worthington E, fish and chips, football on the big screen, daily mirror, bingo; but so far no re-runs of "Only Fools and Horses".

Apartment now warm and we're settled in. So far very impressed with Cyprus; friendly people; clean, including toilets – always a good

sign. Plenty to see and do. Weather seems good so far and the village we are in is well off the beaten track from tourists. Having said that even Pathos was very nice. I suppose the only downside is the Mediterranean thing with half finished pavements, I'm sure it's part of their planning laws. Apart from that it is all very British – even sell Heinz baked beans, but I did make Mum put them back and buy the cheaper local ones. No TV, other than DVDs – no loss there then. But major crisis as there is no Internet. Never mind we've plenty of books to read.

Found an Internet café so you may get this. Tomorrow we go into their national park –needs a 4 wheel drive – in search of the Moufflon. Then Monday hopefully I get to go skiing.

23/2/2008 Cyprus

Saturday – congratulations to Honey on first tooth, hope it wasn't too painful. Have dashed to the chemist and bought you a toothbrush and toothpaste ready; what about some floss?

Set off to Akamas pensinsula and Aphrodites (apparently some Greek nymphomaniac goddess) bathing pool, anyway she wasn't there so just a pool and waterfall. Then went down a coastal walk – Aphrodites (yes her again) nature trail in search of the Moufflon. Fantastic coastal walk with clear blue / turquoise Mediterranean sea. Hunters were out shooting something, maybe it was the Moufflon we never got to see. On the way back we heard the sound of Donkey bells and assumed there was a few Donkeys coming in our direction. Turned out to be a massive heard of goats – but no Moufflon. Avoided getting trampled in the stampede and fortunately none of them attacked us with their horns.



Then had a drive around some quaint villages and saw a few beaches, several churches (monasteries next week) and harbours.

Amazing all the car parks are free, no greedy little Cornishmen with their hands out. It certainly makes a difference in so far as you can keep stopping at interesting places without having to stump up for a parking fee.

Still no Internet. How do these Cypriots cope?

Hopefully Pizza tonight.

24/2/2008 Cyprus

Sunday – Still no Moufflon! But at least I have found Internet access. And yes we did get Pizza at last.

Mum says it Mothering Sunday today so she's opened all her cards and I've rung Grandma on her advice. Lo and behold its next week – she really is loosing the plot, it's an age thing. Anyway at least she gets the benefits of the cards for an extra week.

Lazy day today. Up to the Kamas Peninsula in search of the sea turtles, but wrong time of year for them. Walk down some Gorge or other on the way to the last Castle. The roads over here leave a lot to the imagination, thankfully we have the 4 wheel drive Suzuki thingy so it should at least take the punishment. Gorgeous hot day, Back to apartment and sit on balcony reading the Dawkins book – good so far.



This evening we watch the 3rd of our DVD's. Yet more Bo Derek from 1992. So boring makes you want to read a book. Only 2 more crap DVD's to go and then we throw the TV off the balcony. What no East Enders!

25/2/2008 Cyprus

Monday – early start today, off to Limmosol (not going to bother how you spell it as the Cypriots change the spelling by the mile – Lemosul). Well LemonS was a bit of a disappointment, typical large city, more like something from Spain – the darker side of Cyprus. The first car park we've had to pay for. Visited yet more Roman ruins on the way back. Very cheap entrance fee for a stunning hilltop site. Well worth the money and no sign of the nymphomaniac goddess. However we did visit the nymphomaniac goddess birthplace on the way back. All the infertile / lonely hearts supposedly tie a white cloth onto a tree there in hope of pregnancy / meeting the heart throb of their dreams – interestingly though the tree had loads of old plastic bags attached. If the nympho was listening what sort of response could you really expect. Very picturesque though.



Still no Moufflon! But at long last we found a card for Honey with a Moufflon (Cypriot Giraffe) on it.

Must have upset the nympho goddess today, we ended up on the way home, in that place again – reading Greek labels. Perhaps a 5 Euro note attached to the tree might save me from further supermarket visits. Anyway just exploring a cheap bottle of Cyprus Merlot, going down very well.

Well tomorrow we set off in a serious search for the Moufflon. Needs the 4 wheel drive to get to the Moufflon sanctuary where hopefully we can photograph them

So far the weather has been great. Today was forecast to be colder and cloudy but turned out beautiful blue sky, sunny but a tad windy – still a lot warmer than Colorado.

We've decided what the Cypriots add to World culture other than Nympho goddess (perhaps that's enough), it's the cement mixer. I kid you not they are everywhere. Every piece of derelict land (there are plenty of those around) has one and several of the older houses has several, one in the village has 4.

Well it's time for bed now. Wendy is complaining about me having drunk an excellent bottle of the local red wine (mans drink) and I need to consider getting up early to shoot the local cockerel before it starts.

26/2/2008 Cyprus

Tuesday – Moufflon hunt abandoned. Hot, blue sky day. Visit old town of Pathos. Yet another merchandising opportunity. Get hopelessly lost several times.

Visit Neolithic settlement for lunch – very interesting! Then back to a restful late afternoon on the balcony. All very relaxing.

27/2/2008 Cyprus

Wednesday – off to the Troudoos mountains. Finally get to see the Moufflon, I think – see attached. In fact we nearly ran it over.

I don't think we'll be giving up skiing in the US for mount Olympus. They seem to have all of 4 very short lifts (T Bars – haven't seen them for a while) and runs. Runs very similar to Xscape except that its very hot and sunny, like skiing on a slush puppy.

Then off to a monastery, icons, icons, paintings, mosaics and crosses. I think we've had our fill for this holiday – "God Delusion" in the morning (nearly finished) and monastery all afternoon. Having said that it was a very beautiful, tranquil and peaceful place in a fabulous setting. Why are all the virgin Mary depictions in Greek Orthodox church with a 5 to 6 year old Jesus on her knee?



Yet more Germans in the Monastery and hardly any English. What I want to know is where do they all sleep? You never encounter them out and about – less than 1% – yet come to a cultural site and they are there in there hundreds.

Whilst it wasn't far probably 150 miles all told it was a lot of tiring driving on mountain roads, some single track and of course Moufflon jumping out at you! All told it was 6 hours driving in a manual Suzuki, not the best of gearboxes, bit like stirring a Christmas pudding. Give me an automatic any day especially on those roads.

Anyway meal at Taverna tonight. Anything rather than the DVD's left in the apartment – at least we've exhausted the Bo Derek collection. Still only 1 DVD left and then its real desperation for Mum.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[10/1/2008 Ski Colorado](#)

January 10, 2008 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



A glorious 3 weeks skiing in Colorado. Sheer luxury we're staying in a condo at River Run, Keystone we can walk to the gondola. It's the closest to ski in ski out you get and its very reasonable at less than \$100 a night.

Kurt and Emma have come along with us for the first week. On top of that Kevin and Rosemary, along with David and Polly come out for a fortnight a few days into our stay.

It's at least 5 years since we were last in this part of the Colorado and we're keen to see how it compares to Salt Lake thee days.

We ski all the different resorts of Keystone, Breckenridge, Copper

Mountain, Loveland, Vail and Beaver Creek. We give A Basin a miss.

Breck is greatly improved, they've opened up another mountain and have a great Gondola up to it. Some really great skiing on the new mountain. Kurt and Emma get to ski most of the resorts. A real eye opener for Emma and great improvement on skiing in Mount Hoffham. Have a few days skiing with the Breslins, but we tend to go out to different resorts every day. I think the Breslins are now sold on the US for skiing and apparently it's not much more expensive than France, plus there are no French.



Really good snow but the weather is really cold, never known it so bad. It's -15, that's Fahrenheit, one day and so cold that you have to keep all skin covered up to avoid frost bite. I notice a hard patch on my cheek and loo and behold it's the start of frost bite where the skin actually freezes up. Despite the cold we get some great sunny days skiing.



Wendy and I also discover cross country skiing. We've always meant to try it but somehow never found the time. Anyway this time we take the plunge and for \$30 hire all the gear, get access to all the trails and even get a 1 hour introductory lesson – just the two of us and one instructor. How's that for value. It's hard work, great exercise and good fun. We're only beginners so we stick to the green runs – yes they even grade them like downhill chussing. Plus we choose two really sunny days at two different resorts. The lodges are great, really comfy with big settees, open fires and no crowds or queues. For our \$30 we also get to hire snow shoes so we try that as well. This is something we'll certainly be doing next time. It's a

great alternative and ideal for once a week, probably on the busiest downhill days to avoid any crowds.



Condo is great, especially if there are just 2 of you. Has all the facilities and includes wifi.

Skiing in Colorado is good but not as good as Utah. It's much busier, yes we even have to queue for the lift some days, although once you get to the top it's no problem. But without a doubt it'll be back to Utah next year even if the liquor stores are hard to find.

For more details see our website at www.4uand.me.uk.

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[2007 In Retrospect](#)

December 20, 2007 by [tonyedwards](#) | [Edit](#)



Christmas 2006 Tony and I went on our annual ski holiday to Montana, boy was it vast and cold. We then went onto to Idaho – nothing but potato fields and some great skiing and finally ended up back in the Canyons in Utah – that's three years in a row now we've been there but the skiing is awesome.

World tour; his gap year before starting work as a trainee solicitor (he got a 2.1 law degree at Bristol in 2006) in March 2008 – will he ever actually do any work! The house is very quiet without him and we've even had to speak to one another! Kurt got a temporary job in the law courts in Melbourne and spent three months there.

April saw us buying a touring caravan in readiness for retirement. Tony had already started digging his tunnel to escape but ending up deferring it until later due to the Company being sold. We plan to



travel around Europe in our caravan once we've retired. To get into the swing of things we started off on some caravan holidays in England, Scotland and even Wales. It's great, very comfortable, a home away from home; very relaxing but it's just a pity about the towing - a bit of a pain – but it's worth it. In all we managed to get 6 weeks away plus some long weekends and are now geared up for our grand European tour next year.

May saw Kurt move onto Mount Hotham where he got a 6 month temporary job in an Australian ski resort – Tony was green with envy – never mind perhaps next year he can become a ski bum.

In June we became grandparents. Ross and Susie had a baby girl, Honey Jane, on June 11th 2007. She is absolutely gorgeous and we are looking forward to being involved in her growing up. It is a great feeling being a proper Nana and Grandpa.



September saw Kurt continue his tour up the East coast of Australia.



At the end of September I retired from work and became a lady of leisure. It's great not having to get up at 6:30 each morning and to be able to do anything I want.

Tony has finished his escape tunnel and takes early retirement at the end of December, he is really looking forward to it and it has come at just the right time. The Company takeover by Chubb is in full swing and he certainly does not fancy the big Company involvement and the politics that go with it.



We will be spending Christmas day this year with Ross and Susie along with Tony's Mum.

Kurt flies from Australia to New York and will spend Christmas in New York and Boston and then returns home on January 3rd complete with his new girlfriend a "Sheila" from "Wangaratta". Kurt and girlfriend will then be coming out skiing with us on January the 10th when we all fly off to Colorado for 3 weeks skiing.

If all goes to plan then we return from skiing in early February and then set off to Cyprus for two weeks at the end of February – Tony has always fancied Cyprus and the weather will hopefully be just right – not too hot. I think he is also hoping he might even get in a couple of days skiing in the mountains on Cyprus.

Then in April we plan to start touring France – yes Tony knows it's full of French people – he's even started learning French. Hopefully we will spend a lot of time next year touring France in our caravan for 3 – 4 weeks at a time..

As for Brett he has lived in London for the last 15years with His wife Suzanne and his two daughters Melissa aged 11 and Georgina aged 6, but unfortunately for us he chooses not to keep in touch.(it's a long story). Its upsetting for us but we have just had to come to terms with them not being part of our lives, we live in hope that one day things will change for the better.

You can see more at our website <http://www.4uand.me.uk> and on Facebook as [tonyedwards@btinternet.com](https://www.facebook.com/tonyedwards@btinternet.com).

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• Archives

- [June 2011](#) (3)
- [May 2011](#) (6)
- [April 2011](#) (1)
- [March 2011](#) (1)
- [February 2011](#) (6)
- [January 2011](#) (4)
- [December 2010](#) (6)
- [November 2010](#) (2)
- [October 2010](#) (3)
- [September 2010](#) (7)
- [August 2010](#) (2)
- [July 2010](#) (16)

- [June 2010](#) (1)
- [May 2010](#) (6)
- [April 2010](#) (2)
- [March 2010](#) (1)
- [February 2010](#) (11)
- [December 2009](#) (15)
- [November 2009](#) (3)
- [October 2009](#) (5)
- [September 2009](#) (5)
- [August 2009](#) (1)
- [July 2009](#) (20)
- [May 2009](#) (9)
- [April 2009](#) (7)
- [February 2009](#) (1)
- [January 2009](#) (6)
- [December 2008](#) (3)
- [November 2008](#) (11)
- [October 2008](#) (22)
- [September 2008](#) (13)
- [August 2008](#) (10)
- [June 2008](#) (1)
- [May 2008](#) (1)
- [March 2008](#) (1)
- [February 2008](#) (1)
- [January 2008](#) (1)
- [December 2007](#) (1)

• Categories

- [France](#) (16)
- [Travel](#) (16)
- [Uncategorized](#) (199)

• Pages

- [About](#)

• Blogroll

- [Tony](#)
- [WordPress.com](#)
- [WordPress.org](#)

• Meta

- [Site Admin](#)
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