

20090416 – Paris At Last

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.

20090418 – It's Too Big!

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.

20090420 - Limoge

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.

20090421 – The Journey From Hell Continues

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!

20090423 – Cathars Country

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

20090430 – Lazy Days

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.