

20090826 – Escape from the Hell Hole

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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20090830 – The Lazy Days Begin – We Hope

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 Fresoe, 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.