

## 20090902 – The Luberon

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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 teaming 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 Controlle, 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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## 20090904 – Arles And Château des Baux

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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 Gaddafi 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 Vaucluse. 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.

## 20090907 – St Rapheal

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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 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 much 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 of 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 allonge - 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.

## 20090921 – Lazy Days

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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.



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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 2<sup>nd</sup> mortgage.

The French seem surly and ignorant but is this a genetic disposition, a cultural thing that is in their upbringing or a disease. What's needed is a nature versus nurture experiment to identify the root cause.

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Then it's a gourmet dinner on the patio tonight – bread and cheese – one of the best meals of the week. I am not saying that wendy isn't a good cook but the bread is so delicious, freshly baked every day and the choice of cheese's well there are so many to choose from Wendy could spend an good 20 mins at the counter trying to make a decision on which to buy.

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 Famille 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 ubung him. Wendy even ventured into the pool adorning arm bands, she said at her age she is not bothered what people think and its much better than drowning, that would be even more embarrassing if the french lifeguard had to jump in and rescue her.

Wendy does the shopping – oh how I miss the cut and thrust of the trolleys down the isles and all those labels to read, and she would much rather do it herself that way she doesn't have to listen to my consent moans and groans of have we finished yet.

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 shet has to make a few stops 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 had our caravanning neighbours round for drinks. They are an English couple who now live in France. It was good to get their + and – points about living in France. They were very positive about the French and their way of life, they just love it. All sounded very tempting. All in all we had a very enjoyable evening.

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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 to 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.

## 20090926 – Quiet At Last

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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. Last night drank a fantastic Cote du Rhone, only E2.25. Now I don't normally rate Cotes du Rhone but this I had to go and get 12 bottles.

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.