

## 20100502 – Orange Alert - The Tramontane Strikes With A Vengeance

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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☺.

## 20100506 – We Survived The Tramontane

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Thursday – cloudy and we've still got the tail end of the Tramontane, but by luck 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 prattles 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 sleezeballs 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 Tramontane. 40 mph wind gusts, child's play, but at least there's no rain. Awnings survive 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 Tramontane, 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?

## 20100514 - Tramontane

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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 Tramontane 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 Tramontane 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 Tremontane which, makes the Mistral seem like the draft from a butterflies 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 Tremontane.

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 dam awning as Tremontane 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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## 20100518 – Argeles-sur-Mer

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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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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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## 20100524 – What A Great Life

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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 – awfull.

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 lounge; 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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## 20100530 - Departure

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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 barbequing. 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 barbeque 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 officiano 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 €3.25 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.