

20100817 – Wow The Suns Out

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 Soleil. 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.

20100821 – Wot No Markets

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 Liguel 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 Lguel 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.

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.

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.

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20100828 – Birding

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 🐱.

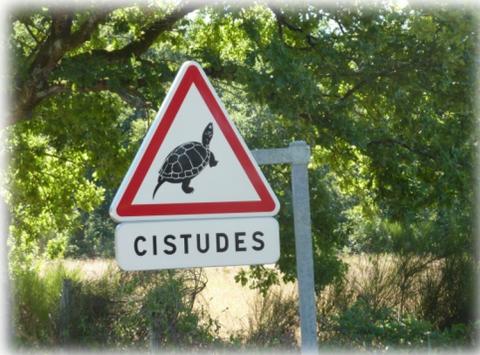
Lovely town with some fine old buildings. All very relaxing but as Wendy points out the markets just aren't up to the standards of the markets in Provence - pity they're not smaller. We were going to visit the chateaux but decide to give it a miss as there doesn't seem much to it.

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 to 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.