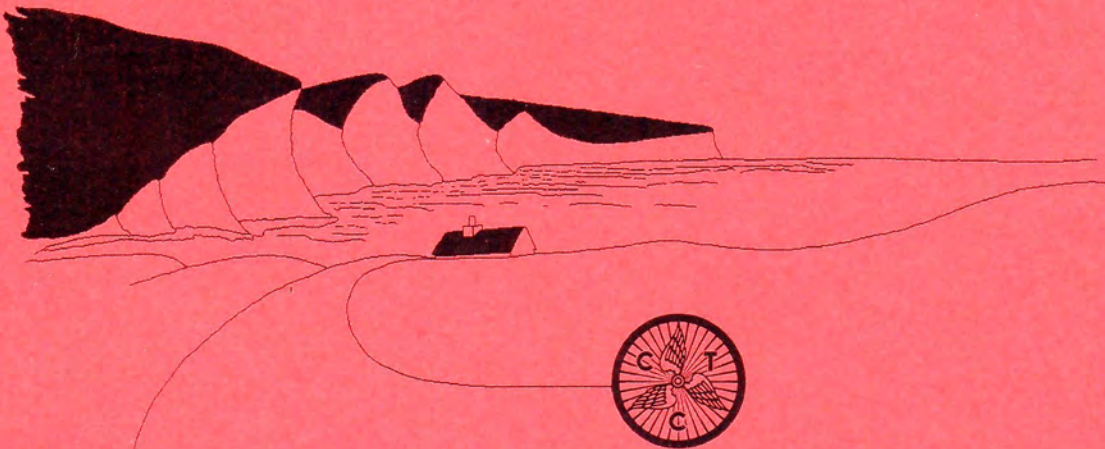




The

Coaster



the magazine of the

East Sussex

Cyclists' Touring Club

No. 49 - Christmas 2007

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**East Sussex
Cyclists' Touring Club**

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"The Coaster"

Issue No. 49, Christmas 2007



From the Editor's Desk.

Welcome to the Christmas 2007 edition of "The Coaster". This time we seem to have a very Francophile issue, with 3 articles on France. There are also a few bits from Roy James, plus his usual excellent drawings and a report from Ann Rix on her Churches Trust sponsored ride. Hopefully there's something to interest everyone.

David.

THE CYCLISTS' TOURING CLUB

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

The Cyclists' Touring Club (originally known as the Bicycle Touring Club, the present title being adopted in 1883) was founded at Harrogate in Yorkshire on August 5th 1878 by Stanley Cotterell. It is Britain's national cyclists' association, devoted to the encouragement of cycling for recreation and as a means of transport, and to the protection of cyclists' interests.

The C.T.C. was the first Touring Club to be formed in the world. Membership details may be obtained from:-

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Cycling With Lawrence of Arabia. Roy James



The bicycle was important to the young T.E. Lawrence. As a youth in 1904 he made many cycling trips with his friend Cyril Beeson in pursuit of their interest in churches and brass rubbing. He was later to write, “We made excursions by bicycle to nearly every village in three counties and many places further afield. Few churches escaped our attention”

When he was 18 he made a cycling tour around the Cotes du Nord, again with Cyril Beeson. A new bicycle was ordered from the Morris Company, “Specially made,” he said, “by Lord Nuffield when he was just Henry Morris.”

Certainly this was possible as Nuffield made cycles in his workshop in Oxford High Street until 1908. The two friends remained in France for a month, staying in modest hotels and lingering among great cathedrals, churches and ancient chateaux. Returning home to Oxford, flushed with the success of their adventure, Lawrence was determined to go back to France as soon as he was able.

Lawrence was to make a further eight tours in France, but his most memorable seems to be the one he made in 1908 when he cycled alone from Le Havre to the Mediterranean. He gives a brief account of the journey in his celebrated book ‘The Seven Pillars of Wisdom’ in which he describes the pleasure of what may have been his final bicycle tour.

He writes.

”I arrived Le Havre in mid-July and battled in violent hailstorms to Compiègne and Paris, living on bread and milk, peaches and apricots. On then to Champagne, where the weather became fearfully hot. The Champagne country is stunningly beautiful and I felt myself filling with energy as I cycled through cherry orchards and across sparkling streams; past fields of ripe golden barley and wheat. I watched peasants advancing to the harvest in cohorts, their sickles flashing like swords in the sun, the great wains of hay being drawn by bilious-white oxen. Steadily I made my way south, beneath the volcanic plugs of the Auvergne, past gardens enclosed with massive dry—stone walls. Toiling up thousands of feet and then the 4000 foot free wheel descent into the Rhone valley. On through Provence and the lovely but mosquito infested marshland of the Camargue, where I contracted my first dose of malaria which would plague me for much of my life. At last I arrived at Les Baux, from where I looked down a precipice and far across a plain. Suddenly, the sun leapt from behind a cloud, illuminating a silvery shimmer. It was the most thrilling moment of my life and I cried out “The sea. The sea” ”

In a few short years he was to be drawn into the web of Middle East intrigue, but I like to think that memories of his cycling days always remained with him.

* Source material drawn from ‘Lawrence. The uncrowned king of Arabia’ by Michael Asher.



FRENCH TRIP Rose & Mick Hills

We set off to Dover on Fri. 27th July with a very smooth mid-day crossing and a drive to Crevacoeur en Brie for a weeks camping at a lovely old orchard site.

Next day we sussed out the route as we were going by train from Tournan into the capital to watch the last day of “Le Tour”.

Lovely rolling countryside and each day when we were on the tandem we covered more miles than originally planned as it was such easy riding. We woke up on the Sunday to light rain and weren't sure whether to go to Paris to see the end of the Tour or not, but decided it was perhaps better than getting wet on the bike. It was quite a subdued gathering due to the previous weeks drug scandals and we easily found a spot on the Champs Elysees to watch, but when the cavalcade came through it lifted the atmosphere to nearly normal. A great day out and the rain held off. The rest of that week was spent visiting old towns and castles, notably Provins which is an old walled city and then raiding the Decathlon store at Meux for new cycling shoes and other bargains.



By the following Saturday we were ready for our trip further south and the Semaine Federal. We tend to book our campsites separately as we know from past experience the Semaine Federal sites are somewhat overcrowded and lack good facilities. Unfortunately this year I messed up big time and found we were a good 20 miles away from the main site that has all the trade stands etc. We went into Perigueux and with rather poor signs managed to find the “Permanence” on



the Monday but as it was raining did not see any of our East Sussex associates. On the Tuesday we decided to cycle to Le Chateau de Puymartin as this is the one that is partly lived in, it does mean some of the rooms are not open to the public, but the Grand Salon was though it is used when the residents have extra guests. The castle was built approx. 1270 and destroyed in 1358 then rebuilt in 1450, so today it has family furniture, tapestries and paintings.

We then cycled on to Sarlat and took a roundabout route back to our campsite - 42 miles that day. On Wednesday we decided to go to the caves. La Madeline was the nearest to our campsite and was built into the rock face including a little chapel, abattoir and shops from prehistoric man till quite modern times. We then headed eastwards to the most famous of the rock villages at La Roque St. Christophe and spent nearly the whole day exploring, only 8 miles cycled.



Thursday was the “Pique nique” and this is where we DID meet some of our East Sussex friends and some from Lewes Wanderers. John Taylor had been suffering from earache so we had a cup of tea (back at the Permacence) in his motor home, then he along with Mike Phillips showed us the way to Ken and Iris’s camp for aperitifs and to celebrate Ken’s birthday. Very nice too! whilst John went to the Doctors.

On the Friday the ride was going right past our entrance to the campsite so joined it there and rode part of their route to Rouffignac, which was about 5 miles of steady climbing, left them there and cycled back via Les Eyzies and to our camp for a well deserved swim.

Next day we went to Montignac and bought the inevitable souvenirs and Sunday we headed north to break the journey at Louviers, where we met other riders who had been to Semaine Federal and had used this camp site on former trips to France. The swimming pool wasn’t open, a bit disappointing, but will use this site another time and so back to Calais and the trip home.



Cycle Tourist seen at
Fife Cycle Show.
2005.

Experimental Seaplane Station at Newhaven David Rix

The little known Royal Naval Airstation at Newhaven was built in 1917 between Tidemills and Newhaven. The base was used by seaplanes to carry out anti U-boat patrols and escort convoys moving in the Channel. Newhaven and Littlehampton were the main ports for stores and munitions during World War 1 and likely targets for German attacks. The base had a concrete ramp running down into the sea, this was storm damaged between the wars but the floor of the hangars, complete with door tracks, still remain.

Some 190 people lived and worked there and huts and accommodation were built on stilts to reduce the risk of flooding and later a number of old Stroudley railway coaches built in 1880/1 were sited there as well. The foundations of these, made of railway sleepers still survive. These were taken over as holiday homes after the first war and lasted until 1939 when the site was cleared for defence purposes. The wooden Hangar (built 1917 - 120ft x 50ft) was moved to East quay and used as a bonded warehouse until it was destroyed by fire in the 1960s. The metal one (built in 1918 - 180ft x 60ft) was transported to the Railway yard at Wimbledon around 1923 and is still stand-



Aerial photograph of the air station, note the seaplane approaching the slipway



Wooden hangar built in 1917 and later used as a bonded warehouse on the East Quay

ing, now a scheduled building. Prior to being re-sited it was used as a factory to make concrete hexagonal piles to repair the East Pier, one of these dated 1920 is still on site.

No 242 Squadron RAF was formed on August 15th 1918 from no's 408, 409 and 514 Flights RNAS at the seaplane station at Newhaven. Operating from there and the nearby airfield at Telscombe Cliffs, it was equipped with Short 184 seaplanes and carried out anti-submarine patrols

over the English Channel until the end of World War 1. On 15 May 1919, the squadron was disbanded and the Station closed down and sold off.



Short 184 bombed up ready for convoy escort

Surveys carried out in 2006 have exposed part of the slipway, concrete aprons to both hangars, with door tracks and several large slabs presumed to be workshops. Sussex Archaeological Society started a dig in April 2006 to catalogue the entire East Beach site.



SUSSEX HISTORIC CHURCHES TRUST
RIDE & STRIDE – SEPTEMBER 2007

Ann Rix

I started at St Peter's, East Blatchington, at 9am, down to St Leonard's in Seaford and a chat with David Paul the Parish Organiser, then it was through the churchyard and on to St Thomas More and Anita Fish, Parish Organiser. Up to Chyngton and St Luke's where Marian Cliff the Parish Organiser was waiting.

Down to the Cuckmere Valley and along and up to West Dean – another chat, back and along to Litlington, unmanned. Over the hill and across the white bridge to Alfriston and a welcome from two checkers there. Around by road to Berwick and a welcome there - it was leaving here I had trouble with the left pedal, the axle was stiff. I managed to get to Alciston, along the Old Coach road, for a pit stop, luckily John Anderson the Parish Organiser had some WD40 which solved the problem. After a drink and biscuit and a chat with the group of walkers from Bishopstone, who had left their cars at Berwick and were following me (footpaths though) to Ripe for Lunch, I was on my way to Selmeston. Next was Chalvington then Ripe where I was told to take a seat, have a drink and biscuit and rest a while.



Ringmer Parish Church

A longer stretch through the lanes to Laughton, where a welcome and lovely cake there kept me going to Ringmer to find it was their Flower Festival. A greeting from Mothers' Union friends there and then on again, over the hill and down into Lewes to take the rough track to South Malling where the Deanery Barbeque was getting going. Being a 'Veggie' I kept going after a chat with Ian Rothery the Lay Chairman, but saw the Bishop heading for the Barbeque. Back up the track, down the twitten, then along to walk over the Ouse

Bridge to the Pells, where I considered having lunch watching the ducks but decided to ride the steep hill to St John Sub Casto first. This was a wise decision as two ladies welcomed me there with a cup of tea and large Free Trade chocolate biscuit. A rest and chat helped on the next stage up and down and up to Christ Church, the URC in Prince Henry Road. I caught up with Rosemary Cutbush our MU Diocesan Marketing person here, she had been to Arlington for the Deanery Breakfast then visited churches on her way to the Barbeque and was ahead of me all our way back as she had gone the other way around Lewes.

I was now at the top of the town so could drop down to St Anne's where there were two ladies and two sheets to sign, one for St Anne's and one for St Pancras the RC across the road. On down to Westgate Chapel to find it closed, so over the road to St Michaels where I asked him to sign for that too. On down to South Street Baptist and a welcome there. Along to St Thomas at Cliffe another welcome, back and round and into Friars Walk to the Friends Meeting House where two greeted me.

I continued on round to Southover where I met David and Esther Reynolds from Denton, we were all treated to drink and biscuits then went different ways. I headed out on the cycle track to the playing fields then by road to Kingston, a biscuit here then back and on to Iford for another welcome, next was Rodmell with a chat and biscuit. Southease was a change as,

on the small green, apple crushing was in full swing, judging by the amount of bottles of apple juice they had been going all day. I had to wait till one of them could sign.



Piddinghoe village & church 1903

I popped in to the Village Hall at Piddinghoe where they had an exhibition of village records, there was no-one at the church so I had it signed at the hall. Along and up the hills into Newhaven and the steps up to St Michael's where a cup of tea and another biscuit was most welcome, as was the rest. Down to the Baptist, which was unmanned. Over the bridge and along the main road to Tarring Neville, a great welcome here as they hadn't had many all day so I had to have a biscuit! Back along to Denton where I found one of their MU plus their Rector to greet me.

Finally, it was along the main road to take the lane to Bishopstone by 5.40pm where my relative Gladys Pople had been on duty all day. She had been sponsored as a recorder and reckoned it worked out at £18 an hour. Well done Gladys. My last sit and chat for my nine and a half hour ride saw me home by 6.15pm, after a lovely day out, thirty-five churches visited in about forty miles, the weather was good and so were all the folk I met.

Thank you to all those who supported me, when I have collected my sponsorship money it will be £300, which will be divided between our Church and the Trust.



SEMAINE FEDERALE 2007 PERIGUEUX, DORDOGNE

John Regan

Dordogne is a region of great natural variety and splendour. To the east lies the Perigord Noir, with its forests and old oaks, broken by pine and chestnut woods and bleak moorland. To the west around Bergerac lies a gentler land of vineyards, fruit orchards, strawberry and tobacco fields. To the north lie the forest of La Double and the Perigord Vert with its meadows and woods. Few other areas of France can offer such a panoply of changing scenery as that which lies between the river Lot to the south and the Vezere to the north. During the Middle Ages this was a frontier region between the English possession of Guyenne and the royal domain of the kings of France. The local nobility often found itself on one side or the other, according to the fortunes of war. It only ended up in French occupation after the 100 years war. There are many fortified castles and chateaux with hundreds of fortified villages, the *bastides*, which were laid out to serve both military and civil purposes, their streets and alleyways all running at right-angles to each other.



John Seviour (left), John Regan (right) & friends

Fifteen thousand cyclists were making their way to Perigueux for this cycling festival. Our President, John Seviour, his son Andy, his grand-son Alex and John Regan travelled by car to Perigueux, breaking their journey at Argenton for two nights and enjoyed exploring the beautiful Charente region on their bikes. John Taylor and Mike Phillips sailed from Newhaven early on the morning of Thursday 19th July as they wished to see some of the Tour de France. Their first stop was Limoges where they enjoyed an art exhibition and they found the beautiful Cathedral well worth a visit. They then spent a

night sleeping alongside the cemetery – quiet neighbours. They saw Vincourof win the time trial at Albi and saw him win the mountain stage at Luchon. They also saw Rasmussen win over the Col Soulor (1474m.) and then a further 235m. to the top of the Col d'Aubisque. Soon after these stages these two riders were dropped from the Tour on account of their drug-related offences.

Rose and Mick Hills were parked some 25 miles away from the Semaine Federale H.Q. but they enjoyed themselves as usual. They visited Ken and Iris Stephens and went to their caravan which was parked much nearer to the centre of the Semaine Federale near the golf course alongside the River. They enjoyed the party which was held to celebrate Ken's birthday. John Manville travelled down from his French property with members of his local club, Le cyclo club de St. Valerie in Picardy.

The Seviour party found their apartment in the centre of town where they had hoped to stay 'en famille' but as soon as they arrived 'la famille' departed – parents and three children ! This did give them the opportunity to re-arrange the furniture to suit their own purposes. They enjoyed a meal in the centre of Perigueux – a Turkish pizza! So on Saturday 4th August, John S. and John R. decided to follow the proposed route for the following Monday. This route went in a North Easterly direction through the Forest of Lanmary. Then south-

wards after lunch to Hautefort (High Fort) which is a magnificent sight on the top of a natural spur in the mountains. The village is inhabited by many artists and there were two exhibitions of local work in the Fort itself.

John Taylor and Mike Phillips decided on the Monday to take part in the V.T.T. event (cross country) in this area – this was tough going.

On Sunday Andy and Alex toured in and around Perigueux and in doing so they discovered a more pleasant 45 minutes cycle route along the river bank to La Permanence where the meals were served. Instead of attending the opening ceremony, the Johns, S. and R., enjoyed a fast ride westwards to Riberac for elevenses. In Riberac a man called Peter who owned accommodation there was asking after Alan and Gillian Else (ex Sorian R.C. riders) The route then explored some interesting lanes in the south before returning to Perigueux for a most welcome meal in the large dining hall at ‘la Permanence.’

On Monday 6th August John R travelled by coach to Monbazillac to participate in a fourteen km. walk with a picnic lunch. This was followed by a tasting of the delicious local Monbazillac wine. An interesting guided tour of the 16th Century Chateau followed. John S. and Alex visited Lascaux II in the heart of Perigord Noir by coach. On the Tuesday Andy and John R were climbing out of town on the same route to Monbazillac but not in such great comfort – on their bikes. The route was 200 km in length with 2000m of climbing. On the same day John S and Alex rode 100 km and it was the first time that Alex had ridden this distance on his own. He had ridden that far before but on the back of a tandem. This was an excellent way to celebrate his 14th birthday.



Wednesday 8th and Johns S and R had elevenses at Riberac. At a ‘boulangerie’ they purchased two quiches, two beautiful fresh fruit ‘tarte au fraise’ (strawberry tart) and a drink each and still had some change out of ten euros. Just the memory of this little feast is the sort of event which helped them to finish the 100 km. ride that day. Thursday was the day for the official picnic at the Chateau at Brantome by the River Dronne. Thousands of cyclists converging on the Chateau and the picnic certainly caused a ‘cycle jam’ and a few vehicles, including an ambulance, found a way through at no more than about 4 m.p.h. Everybody enjoyed an excellent picnic in brilliant sunshine. Much merriment was added by the English accordionist who is now an established tradition of the Semaine Federale. Strolling in the grounds after the picnic everybody was so surprised to meet Alan and Gillian Else – so much so that Gillian treated everybody to a delicious ice-cream. They were surprised that we had met Peter in Riberac by chance – it’s a small world.

The two Johns, Andy and Alex set off together on the Friday in sunny weather again for elevenses at Montignac, which is quite near to Lascaux. They were just about to leave Montignac so disappointed because all the food had been consumed by cyclists who had arrived there earlier. However, Alex spotted a delivery van just arriving. They were able to obtain



Alex, Andy & John Seviour

fresh cakes and drinks from this van and so they set off again fully refreshed. By this time everybody was taking the good weather, the excellent road surfaces and the beautiful countryside for granted as they enjoyed the rest of the day. The Saturday evening meal began with a large glass of brandy followed by a delicious four course meal. This was accompanied by Monbazillac wine – both red and white and bottled water. Fresh bottles were supplied when an empty bottle was simply held aloft – whilst one could!

The Seviour party left Perigueux at 11.30 on the Sunday morning and arrived at Dieppe in good time to book themselves onto the late night ferry. John and Mike remained for the closing ceremony but still managed to catch the same ferry. After a good night's sleep in the cabins followed by a shower and an early morning short drive from Newhaven to home. It had been another successful Semaine Federale.



Born Again Bicycle.

Roy James.

After remaining unloved and unwanted for twenty years, the time had finally come to do something with the old Carlton bicycle our son left with us when he moved away from home into his first flat.

“It’s only temporary,” he said, “ I’ll collect it as soon as I get sorted out.” But the years raced by. He married, became the father of two children, a boy and a girl, while the Carlton continued to languish in our garage under two and sometimes three other cycles. So it came as a shock to me to discover that our grandson would soon be twelve years of age and big enough to ride his father’s old bike.

Andrew asked if I would “give it a bit of a clean and oil” before the summer months and I readily agreed. On a wet morning a few days later and at a bit of a loose end I went into the garage and tentatively removed the cover from it and discovered to my dismay that time had not been kind to his once pride and joy. The tyres had perished, many sections of the frame were covered with a smattering of rust eating into the paintwork, loose wiring hung from the front dynamo lamp and a pair of Bluemels mudguards clung desperately to the frame by one or two nuts and bolts.

Thus began the journey back for an almost forgotten member of the family. Many cycling colleagues are already aware of my almost complete lack of cycle maintenance skills, so it was with some trepidation that I realised that “a hit of a clean and oil” would not suffice. Rather more dedicated work was going to be necessary. To strip the frame was frankly beyond my limited competence but I was able to remove successfully most of its components, leaving only the headset and bottom bracket in place. How much more complicated bicycles have become in just two decades for, after looking at modern gears and brakes, I was delighted to find the Weinman centre—pulls and Huret three speed gears surprisingly easy to dismantle, clean and reassemble. The 27 inch wheels had withstood the ravages of time very well, once again a good clean made all the difference. The mudguards had to go and as I surveyed the now almost bare frame I began to have misgivings. A re-spray would be nice but that in turn would take the job out of my hands and by now it was becoming personal. Nothing for it. A hand-painted attempt it would have to be. Much sand papering now began until all the rust was removed. Then, two coats of Hammerite rust proof paint in light green, with the lug work picked out inexpertly in gold and the worst was over. New mudguards, new tyres, the dynamo not replaced and with new Carlton transfers fitted the bike was ready for its first outing in many years.

Rather pleased with myself I took it to display on a club run. David Rix took some photos of it for me. But ‘Pride cometh before destruction’. A pedal fell off. Will my grandson use the Carlton after riding mountain bikes? Who knows? But the bike has been returned to life and can always find refuge in the garage again.



October in Normandy

David Rix

After several years of saying that we would, we finally got round to contacting Mary Simmons, from the Midweek Section, and booking a week at the cottage at St. Hellier in Normandy that she and husband Paul have a half share in. So, on Saturday Oct. 20th 2007, the



Leaving Newhaven

four of us (myself, wife Susan and children Martin and Emma) were up at 5.30 a.m. for breakfast before loading the bikes with the bags we had packed the night before and riding down to the port for 6.45 a.m. We had a quick check-in and were on board by 7.00 a.m. where we bumped into Wendy Nicholl and daughter Nancy, who were also off to France for the week. We sailed at 8.00 and played games to while away the four hour crossing, we also had coffee on board but with doughnuts we had brought with us – we know how expensive it can be on the ferry!

We docked in Dieppe at 1.00 p.m. (French time) and were almost the first off the boat, making our way across the town and heading out on the D154 towards Arques le Battaille. We found a patisserie on the edge of Dieppe, where we bought baguettes and croissants, before continuing against a coldish wind to Arques where we ate a late lunch in the square. The D154 south out of Arques was closed for repairs, so we tried detouring along the valley by some fishing lakes, but couldn't get through and had to retrace and go up hill and round the top. Eventually we were back on the D154 to Martigny, just after which we turned off on a little no-through road that took us down to a little narrow stone slab footbridge over the Varenne river. Crossing here we continued along back lanes, through little villages to Torcy le Petit, where we rejoined the D154 to Torcy le Grand.



The little bridge over the Varenne

It was now nearly 4.00 p.m. and we were glad to find an alimentation (general store) open, where we were able to buy some food for the evening meal. As we came out a group of about 10 cyclists arrived, who turned out to be from Brighton – they were on the way back to Dieppe with the wind behind them. Feeling hungry we bought cakes from the nearby patisserie and ate them by the Marie, before continuing. The next section of back road was closed (“route barree”), so we continued on the D154 to Muchedent, where loads of cars were stopped and people were standing by the roadside at the “Rives de Bison” – a Bison farm and restaurant, where there were wigwams on the hillside. We weren't sure what was happening but we could hear lots of dogs and there were bison in one of the far fields.

We turned off here to cross the river and look for the “chemin de le girafe” (route of the giraffe), a short-cut track recommended by Paul Simmons. We found the start but after a short climb it turned to a grass track and we decided not to attempt it with loaded panniers,

so returned and followed the D154 to St. Hellier. We turned off through the village and up past the church to find the cottage just past the village school.



“Le Petit Maison” is small and simple, just right for four people, and has three main rooms - the living room/dining room/kitchen with a large open fireplace, and two bedrooms, one with a double bed and the other with two singles. The small bathroom is simple with just a washbasin, toilet and shower. The location is lovely, in a quiet village with views of along the Varenne valley and across the Forêt d’Eawy. The roads are quiet, just right for a peaceful weeks cycling. The only drawback if

you’re on bikes is that the nearest shop is at Bellencombres three miles away – a bit far for the morning bread run every day.

Arriving about 5.30 we soon sorted our stuff out and then, after scavenging for kindling, Emma and I had a go at lighting the fire. Our first attempt wasn’t that successful, but we got it going. Supper was tinned cassoulet with fresh vegetables, though none of us were that keen on the cassoulet. The children, having explored the cupboards and found the games, got us all playing a board game called “Reminiscing”, which kept us occupied till bedtime.

We woke the next morning at about 8.00 a.m. to find it cold and frosty. Breakfast was warmed up croissants from the day before and we finally left for a ride just after 10.00 a.m., heading down the back lane and out onto the D 154 to Saint Saens. It was cold, but sunny and just warm enough to sit and have coffee and cake outside a bar by the main square. We bought meat for a few days from a boucherie by the square and had a wander round before heading on, up hill, to Maucombe for lunch. Then we headed into the Forêt d’Eawy, still climbing, until we reached the Allee de Limousins, a long straight route right through the middle of the forest. The walkers route follows an almost straight line, but in the middle the road drops down and up in several hairpins and, though it was cold, we’d certainly warmed up by the time we’d climbed back up. Soon after this we turned off the Allee to visit the Val-Ygot V1 missile site, which is right in the middle of the forest. A very haunting place,



even on a bright day, with a memorial near the entrance to all the victims of the war. Heading back across the Allee we descended out of the forest straight down to Bellencombres, where we bought some cakes to eat and then had drinks in the local bar. We had a little

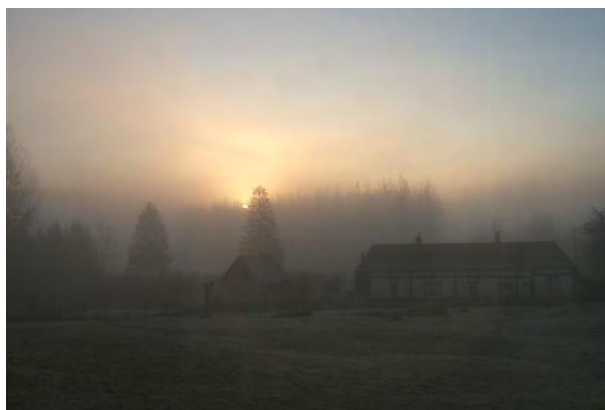
wander around the village before heading back along the valley to St. Hellier. Having found plenty more kindling on our travels we had much more success with the fire this evening and were lovely and warm.

Monday morning Emma woke us at 8.10 to find it was still cold, although without a frost. We were out on the road by 9.30 a.m. heading up the back roads out of the Varenne valley and across to St. Victor l'Abbaye for coffee at a bar, where we also bought baguettes for lunch. Then it was on across open farmland and over the A98 (a very quiet autoroute), before descending into Cleres where we ate cakes from the local patisserie and bought provisions in the small supermarket, before visiting the Parc Zoologique de Cleres. The park is



unusual in that nearly all the animals are wandering freely within the chateau grounds. Peacocks, flamingos, ducks, geese, cranes, deer, wallabies and antelope all wander around with the visitors. Also more exotic birds and gibbons can be viewed in caged off areas near the chateau. There was also an unusual sculpture display as well as some old ruins beside the main buildings. We ate our lunch overlooking the lake and, strangely, were not bothered by any of the birds or animals. Leaving Cleres we climbed gently back up to the plateau and across to Beaumont le Hareng, where we sat and ate kitkat and snickers by the church, before heading back via Le Crique to descend once again to St Hellier. A lovely meal of French sausage was followed by another game of “Reminiscing”, and we got a good roaring fire going this time.

Tuesday was frosty again, but not too bad, and today we headed West to Auffay, a largish town with plenty of shops and bars. Cakes first and then a bar for drinks, before a wander round. The church was interesting, with little automatons that struck the chimes before the hour. Continuing on we ate our lunch in bright, warm sunshine, out of the wind, in the



View from the cottage window on Wednesday morning

Mairie garden beside the local school. It was cold riding when we moved off and we had to put our gloves back on. We rode across open farmland via Cottevrard to descend into Saint Saens, where we found the Champion Super Marche and stocked up for the rest of the week. The after drinks and cakes we rode back up the valley to St. Hellier.

Wednesday dawned cold and with a heavy frost and when we set off at 9.30 it was very cold. We headed North up the valley then

East up into the Foret d'Eawy and across to Les Grandes Ventes. Good views, but bitterly cold. There was a funeral just finishing as we arrived and they all disappeared into the bar we had first spotted, so decided another might be quieter. Afterwards we bought cakes and just managed to find a spot in the sun out of the wind to eat them. We continued East across the top and descended into the Bethune valley at St. Vaast to join the Avenue Verte. We rode along here for several miles, without seeing another person, to stop and have our lunch in the sunshine overlooking Bures en Bray. We then left the Avenue Verte and climbed slowly via Fresles to Pommerval and across to the Foret d'Eawy again. It was warm climbing in the sun with the wind behind, but on the top we felt the cold again as we crossed through the forest and dropped back down, heading to Saint Saens for afternoon drinks. I took us on a little side road out of Saint Saens, which took us over two little footbridges across the Varenne back to the D154, before heading back to the cottage. It was getting very cold again as we arrived back and we soon got a roaring fire going to warm the place up. We'd bought a large pack of beef chunks, half of which we had fried for dinner though it was bit tough, and then played cheat till bedtime.



Footbridge near Saint Saens

Thursday we followed all the little back lanes down to Saint Saens for the market – though it was very quiet and not as good as we had hoped. Then we followed a winding route up and across the top to St.Martin-Osmonville for lunch, then back via Bosc Berenger and Rosay to Bellencombres, where we bought cakes which we had with tea back at the cottage.

After breakfast on Friday we rode across to Auffay again for market day. This was a much bigger and better market than Saint Saens, with 40 or 50 stalls selling almost everything. We had a look around part of the market and then had coffee in a bar before seeing the rest. Susan and Emma bought nice warm hats and I bought a sweater, after which we got cakes in a patisserie and ate them by the church, seeing the automatons ring the bells again. Leaving Auffay we headed North up the valley on the D3 and then turned off and climbed through the trees to Les Cent Acres, which Martin called “hundred acre wood”. We crossed the top via St Foy, where lunch was had in a bus shelter, to Petit Arques, before descending to Martigny and then crossing the little footbridge again and following the back routes down the valley to Torcy le Petit for afternoon cake. Then we continued to Muchedent and finally got to do the “chemin de le Girafe”, which turned out to be fairly good but a bit slow going due to leaves and twigs all over it. Back at the cottage we had the rest of the beef stewed for dinner, which turned out much better.



Our last day in France saw us up a bit earlier than usual, due to the need to clean and tidy up before we left. We got away before 10.00 a.m. and after the back lane to Muchedent decided to just follow the D154 all the way. Reaching the edge of Arques le Bataille we found the road still closed, but managed to walk through anyway. We found a bar for drinks, bought cakes to eat and then continued into Dieppe. After a wander down the main street and through the market we decided to eat at a restaurant on the quay and save our picnic to eat on the ferry. Then with plenty of time to waste we had a ride along the front and then went to visit the new Cite de la Mer exhibition, an interesting new museum about the history of Dieppe, its association with the sea and boat building, etc. Eventually we headed out to the ferry port, only to find that the ferry was delayed by two hours. Rather than spend longer than necessary sitting in the terminal we rode back into Dieppe and sat on the quay and ate our picnic and watched the boats. Finally we returned to the terminal and checked in, then waited for well over an hour before we were told we could board. The return crossing actually took six hours instead of four, meaning we got back four hours later than expected, at about 3.30 a.m. local time.

Luckily for us the weather stayed dry all week and despite the problems getting home, and the fact that it had been very cold, we had thoroughly enjoyed our little holiday and hope to return again at a warmer time of year.



Susan and Martin on the Allee de Limousins



Commentary On The Joys Of Camping By David Bellamy. O.B.E.

The best camping holiday I ever spent was with my young family travelling around Iceland. Halfway up an extinct volcano, sleet coming in sideways, we brewed hot chocolate in a billycan in a hot spring and sang “Underneath the Spreading Chestnut Tree” and “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” with actions to keep us warm. As I tucked my youngest son into his sleeping bag he said “I think I would rather be at school”.

Well you can’t win them all.

A STORY OF A TREE AT CHRISTMAS

Author unknown

It was Christmas 1944 in a middle-sized town in the middle of England where it was so flat, people would go for a day out to admire the modest height of Croft Hill, five miles away. They had few cars and little petrol. Bicycles were enjoying a surge of popularity so that demand far exceeded supply. The exercise and the food rationing had produced one of the few benefits of this miserable war: better general health for those the bombs missed. The town was thriving on the manufacture of footwear and hosiery. These were useful commodities and socks make an ever-popular gift. Not, though, for Roger, a small boy who really wanted a bicycle for Christmas when bicycles were almost impossible to get. Reg and Nora, his parents, were at their wits' ends.

"G'night, Reg". The local home Guard were gathering in their hall.

"That's a cold one, George."

"At least it's a clear moon and we can see what we're aiming at."

"And so can Jerry."

Mordant humour helped keep up their spirits. These were men who, though unable to join the regular forces because of age or impaired health, nevertheless worked all day at their ordinary jobs and used their spare time to firewatch and train for war. By this time Dad's Army was a real force, prepared to take on the enemy face to face should it be necessary.

Reg had honed his firearm skills with, first, a Tommy gun, then a rifle and now a Sten gun. He was also the company medical corporal. So far, in this war, he had healed rather than wounded. The men came from all walks of life and had forged close links of friendship and support. Also, a useful exchange and mart for all sorts of things.

"How did Vivien's blackberry wine go down?" asked a teetotaller.

The soldiers looked about: Vivien was absent.

"Sarr as varges". The local dialect was almost another language.

"Really bitter, I'm afraid, yes."

"It was grand with a spoon or two of honey."

"Honey? You have honey?"

"By the way" said George Featherstone, "D'ye know anyone would want a junior size bike? My son's outgrown his." Reg had snapped it up before the town surveyor had finished speaking. "Talk about a Christmas blooming miracle!"

Then, where to hide it? Roger would be exploring his house, his granny's and his auntie's trying to outwit Santa. The solution: Mr Featherstone would keep the bicycle and deliver it on Christmas Eve.

Christmas Eve was moonless. There were no streetlights and blackout was strict, not even a bicycle lamp was permitted. Mr. Featherstone was confident enough to cycle the distance to the Wykes' home. He was the town surveyor, after all, and knew every inch of every road and pavement. He hopped on to the junior-sized bike and set off along the pavement, carefully. There was no traffic and few people about. George could hear an occasional footstep, easily voided. He whistled softly to warn any quiet footed pedestrians of his approach. He enjoyed cycling through the velvety darkness to the hiss of tyres. His confidence grew.

Reg answered the knock on the door and drew in the visitor before turning on the light. Before him stood Mr Featherstone, blood dripping down his face and over his greatcoat. Reg stared at him, aghast. Nora came to the door of the living room.

“Good Heavens, what happened to you?”

Reg immediately moved. “Come into the kitchen and I’ll fix you up.”

He brought the slightly stunned Surveyor over to the sink and gave him a chair. Nora darted over to the bike to examine the damage. Reg quickly stopped the bleeding and mopped up. He wielded his small torch, “Pupils equal and reacting”, he murmured with satisfaction.

Mr. Featherstone held a cold compress to his swollen, throbbing nose.

“It was that tree, the big elm tree in the middle of the pavement at the Grammar School playing field. I clean forgot it was there and slammed straight into it. Do you think I’ll have a black eye for Christmas?”

“Not necessarily, all that bleeding will have helped,” comforted Reg, pushing thoughtfully at Mr. Featherstone’s poor bruised nose, “thank goodness, there should be no real damage.”

“No, indeed,” said Nora, coming in from her inspection of the bike’s handlebars. “All it needs is to be straightened out. You could do it, Reg, you’ve got pliers!”



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