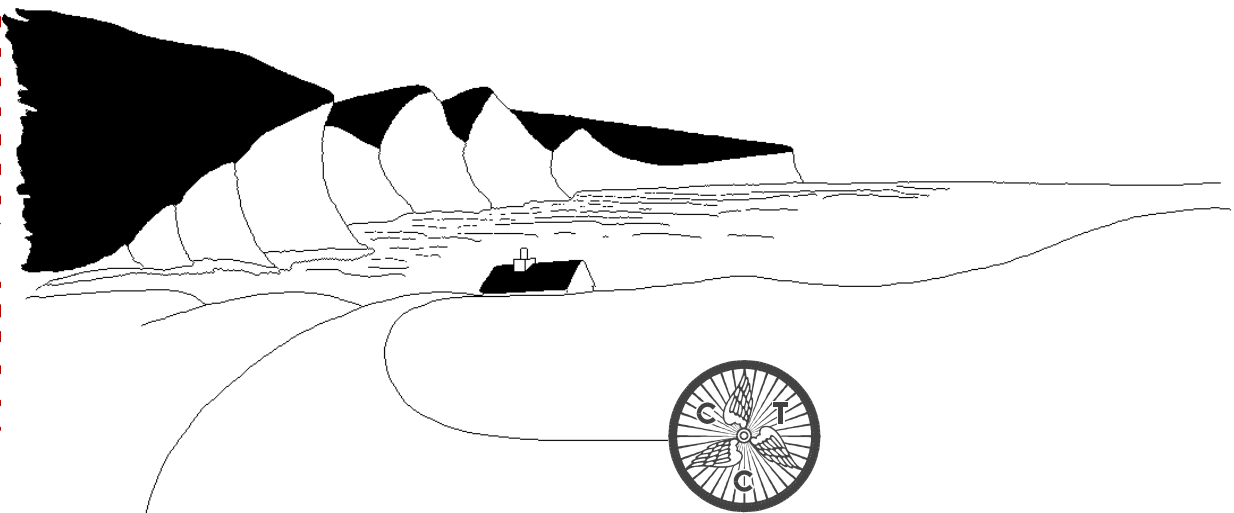


The



Coaster



the magazine of the

**EAST SUSSEX
CYCLISTS' TOURING CLUB**

No. 50 - Christmas 2008

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working for cycling

***East Sussex District Association
Cyclists' Touring Club***

President: John Seviour

***Secretary & Editor: David Rix, 27 Fullwood Avenue,
Newhaven, E. Sussex. BN9 9SP
E-mail: coaster@eastsussexctc.org.uk***



"THE COASTER"

Issue No. 50, Christmas 2008



From the Editor's Desk.

Welcome to the 2008 Christmas edition of "The Coaster". I'm afraid this issue is very much one for the Francophile. For some reason I seem to be getting a quite a few French touring articles - perhaps next time we could have some write-ups on other tours people have done.

I must apologise to Richard Thomas for the delay in printing his report on the 2007 Paris-Brest-Paris. Space was short in the last Christmas issue and then there wasn't enough to put one out for Summer this year. It was going to be split, but I have decided to include it all in this issue.

There are two trips to France from John Regan, one on the Semaine Federale 2008, as well as a bit from Roy James's and some more of his excellent drawings.

There's a bit on the Victorian origins of a lot of our Christmas traditions, a sort of Christmas ghost story and a few other bits and pieces.

So, I hope there's plenty here to keep you interested while you're stuck by the fire this winter on the days when it's too bad to go out on your bike.

Take it easy in the ice and snow and happy cycling.

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:-

C.T.C. National Headquarters,
Parklands, Railton Road,
Guildford, Surrey, GU2 9JX

Tel: 0870 873 0060
e-mail: cycling@ctc.org.uk
website: www.ctc.org.uk

or from the local CTC Secretary or one of the Section Secretaries whose addresses are listed below.

EAST SUSSEX CYCLISTS' TOURING CLUB

(website: <http://www.eastsussexctc.org.uk>)

D.A. Secretary: David Rix, 27 Fullwood Avenue, Newhaven, BN9 9SP
E-mail: cycling@eastsussexctc.org.uk

Section Contacts

Eastbourne & Hailsham: Christine Thomas:
12 Maple Leaf Cottages, School Lane, Blackboys, TN22 5LJ

Hastings & Rother: Marian Shephard:
Anderida, Sea Road, Winchelsea Beach, TN36 4LA

Mid-week Section: Esther Carpenter:
10 Maplehurst Road, Baldslow, St. Leonards on Sea, TN37 7NA

Seaford & Newhaven: Ann Rix:
3 Sutton Drove, Seaford, BN25 3EU

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Contributions on any matters relating, even vaguely, to cycling (or on any subject of interest) are always welcome and should be sent to the Editor at the address on page 1.

BRITTANY REVISITED.

By Roy James

Brittany Ferries have got it about right. Their comfortable overnight boat from Portsmouth arrives with the sun in St Malo's picturesque harbour in good time for petit dejeuner. I had visited Brittany thirty years ago after seeing a Kodak slide show at the Winter Garden. It all looked so wonderful that I knew I had to visit. On that occasion I followed the so called 'Emerald Coast' with its string of bathing resorts like pearls in a necklace that stretch from Dinard to le Val-Andre.

This late summer I wanted to go inland to see a little of that other Brittany that lies beyond the glitter of the tourist beaches. Before turning my back on the coast I followed the beautiful mingling of wind swept rocky cliffs and sheltered sandy bays as far as Cancale, a homely little resort with its famous oyster beds and equally celebrated sea food restaurants. I rested here briefly and took my dejeuner at stand on the sea front. Not, I hasten to add, a dish of assorted shellfish that was proving so popular with the local holiday-makers. My choice was two tissue thin crepes filled with cheese sauce and ham.

Afternoon saw me on the D155 and making tracks for Dol-de-Bretagne, considered by many to be the capital of the marais area, land reclaimed from the sea in Mont-San-Michel Bay. Standing out on this frankly featureless landscape the Dol mound broods over the entire area. This 200 ft high mound is something of a curiosity, but on my first day I was anxious to move on and away from the coast south to Combourg and hopefully a comfortable bed.



I was not to be disappointed. Combourg is indeed a charming old town, dominated as it is by an imposing feudal chateau. Relatively late in the holiday season I was fortunate in finding a bar with rooms pleased to welcome me. It had been a long day and after a scratch meal downstairs in the bar I was soon in bed.

Combourg was at its best in the early morning sunlight and leaving by the main road to Rennes I quickly turned left on a narrow lane that runs along the

south side of the lake facing the chateau and town. Although the Bretons say they have no hills, anyone travelling under their own power on the D794 from Combourg to Dinan quickly discovers that cycling here has its ups and downs as in most places. But the way is pleasant, the traffic scarce and the occasional hill gives one a good excuse for getting out of the saddle and walking. By early afternoon I was high above the river Rance on the outside of Dinan. It was agreeable to visit a busy town after a couple of quiet days. Not that Dinan is without its restful places. Favourite among these is the Jardin Anglaise, a series of terraces and adjoining the Promenade de la Duchesse Anne. From here I discovered what a commanding position the town occupies and the panorama over the Rance valley, with tree covered slopes dropping down to the river and old port. The walk down to the port was steep and here I found what must be the most attractive part of the town. I lingered and watched the afternoon slowly die before searching for a place to stay.

Next day began a long haul (for me) to Mur-de-Bretagne and what proved for me to be the most enchanting region of Bretagne Haute. This had to be the Argoat, for, no longer heavily wooded as it once was, it is still a lonely place of wild heaths and bare, desolate heights. Golden broom and gorse were in bloom and the roadside was a mass of wild flowers as I threaded my way through a

maze of by-roads that by the end of the day brought me to Mur, a lively little Country town beside Lake Guerledan. A noisy game of boule was being played beside the walls of the church and again I was in luck for I found a room at the first bar I enquired.

The following morning I left the town and took the D31 through densely wooded countryside to a viewpoint high above the lake and then continued to les-Forges-des-salles at the far end. So much more to see, but is that not always the case, and my brief visit was coming to an end. The final day would be occupied on the return to St Malo.



SCHOOL ANSWERING MACHINE

This is the message that apparently staff in a Midlands secondary school voted unanimously to record on their school telephone answering machine. This is the actual answering machine message for the school. It came about because they implemented a policy requiring students and parents to be responsible for their children's absences and missing homework.

The school and teachers are now being threatened with legal action by some parents who want their children's failing marks changed to passing marks - even though those children were absent 15-30 times during the term and did not complete enough schoolwork to pass their various key Stages.

The outgoing message:

Hello! You have reached the automated answering service of your school. In order to assist you in connecting to the right member of staff, please listen to all the options before making a selection:

- * To lie about why your child is absent - Press 1
- * To make excuses for why your child did not do his/her work - Press 2
- * To complain about what we do - Press 3
- * To swear at staff members - Press 4
- * To ask why you didn't get information that was already enclosed in your Newsletter and several other letters posted to you - Press 5
- * If you want us to bring up your child - Press 6
- * If you want to reach out and touch, slap or hit someone - Press 7
- * To request another teacher, for the third time this year - Press 8
- * To complain about bus transport - Press 9
- * To complain about school lunches - Press 0

Lastly:

If you realise this is the real world and your child must be accountable and responsible for his/her own behaviour, class work, homework and that it's not the teachers' fault for your child's lack of effort: Hang up and have a really wonderful day.



A VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS



For thousands of years people around the world have enjoyed mid-winter festivals. With the arrival of Christianity, pagan festivals became mixed with Christmas celebrations. One of the leftovers from these pagan days is the custom of bedecking houses and churches with evergreen plants like mistletoe, holly and ivy. Apparently, as well as their magical connection in protecting us from evil spirits, they also encourage the return of spring.

No era in history however, has influenced the way in which we celebrate Christmas, quite as much as the Victorians.

Before Victoria's reign started in 1837 nobody in Britain had heard of Santa Claus or Christmas Crackers. No Christmas cards were sent and most people did not have holidays from work. The wealth and technologies generated by the industrial revolution of the Victorian era changed the face of Christmas forever. Sentimental do-gooders like Charles Dickens wrote books like "Christmas Carol", published in 1843, which actually encouraged rich Victorians to redistribute their wealth by giving money and gifts to the poor - Humbug! These radical middle class ideals eventually spread to the not-quite-so-poor as well.



The holidays - The wealth generated by the new factories and industries of the Victorian age allowed middle class families in England and Wales to take time off work and celebrate over two days, Christmas Day and Boxing Day. Boxing Day, December 26th, earned its name as the day servants and working people opened the boxes in which they had collected gifts of money from the "rich folk". Those new fangled inventions, the railways allowed the country folk who had moved into the towns and cities in search of work to return home for a family Christmas.



Among the working classes religious observation was not so widespread. Even the postmen delivered on Christmas Day! Tradesmen still carried on business - bakers kept their ovens burning in readiness to cook the local families' Christmas goose or turkey.

The Scots have always preferred to postpone the celebrations for a few days to welcome in the New Year, in the style that is Hogmanay. Christmas Day itself did not become a holiday in Scotland

until many years after Victoria's reign and it was only within the last half of the twentieth century that this was extended to include Boxing Day.

The Gifts - At the start of Victoria's reign, children's toys tended to be handmade and hence expensive, generally restricting availability to those "rich folk" again. With factories however came mass production, which brought with it games, dolls, books and clockwork toys all at a more affordable price. Affordable that is to "middle class" children. In a "poor child's" Christmas stocking, which first became popular from around 1870, only an apple, orange and a few nuts could be found.

Father Christmas/Santa Claus - Normally associated with the bringer of the above gifts, is Father Christmas or Santa Claus. The two are in fact two entirely separate stories. Father Christmas was originally part of an old English midwinter festival, normally dressed in green, a sign of the returning spring. The stories of St. Nicholas (Sinter Klaas in Holland) came via Dutch settlers to America in the 17th Century. From the 1870's Sinter Klaas became known in Britain as Santa Claus and with him came his unique gift and toy distribution system - reindeer and sleigh.



Turkey Time - Turkeys had been brought to Britain from America hundreds of years before Victorian times. When Victoria first came to the throne however, both chicken and turkey were too expensive for most people to enjoy. In northern England roast beef was the traditional fayre

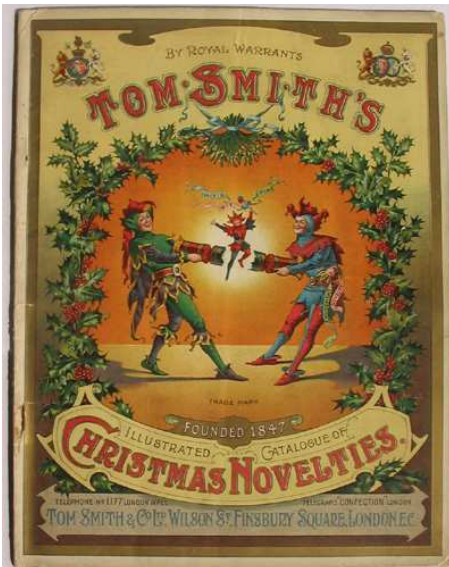


for Christmas dinner while in London and the south, goose was favourite. Many poor people made do with rabbit. On the other hand, the Christmas Day menu for Queen Victoria and family in 1840 included both beef and of course a royal roast swan or two. By the end of the century most people feasted on turkey for their Christmas dinner. The great journey to London started for the turkey sometime in October. Feet clad in fashionable but hardwearing leather the unsuspecting birds would have set out on the 80-mile hike from the Norfolk farms. Arriving obviously a little tired and on the scrawny side they must have thought London hospitality unbeatable as they feasted and fattened on the last few weeks before Christmas!

Christmas Cards - The "Penny Post" was first introduced in Britain in 1840 by Rowland Hill. The idea was simple, a penny stamp paid for the postage of a letter or card to anywhere in Britain. This simple idea paved the way for the sending of the first Christmas cards. Sir Henry Cole tested the water in 1843 by printing a thousand cards for sale in his art shop in London at one shilling each. The popularity of sending cards was helped along when in 1870 a halfpenny postage rate was introduced as a result of the efficiencies brought about by those new fangled railways.



The Tree - Queen Victoria's German husband Prince Albert helped to make the Christmas tree as popular in Britain as they were in his native Germany. In 1841, he began the custom of decorating a large tree in Windsor Castle. In 1848, a print showing the Royal couple with their children was published in the "Illustrated London News." Albert gave trees to Army barracks and imitation followed. From this time onwards, the popularity of decorated fir trees spread beyond Royal circles and throughout society. Even Charles Dickens referred to the Christmas tree as that 'new German toy'.



The Crackers - Christmas crackers or "Cosaques" as they were known in their infancy were invented by Tom Smith, a London sweet maker in 1846.

The original idea was to wrap his sweets in a twist of fancy coloured paper, but this developed and sold much better when he added love notes (motto's - and later the jokes we have today), paper hats, small toys and made them go off BANG! I wonder if he realized that his "novelties" would still be as popular 150 years later.



Carol Singers - Carol Singers and Musicians "The Waits" visited houses singing and playing the new popular carols;

1843 - O Come all ye Faithful

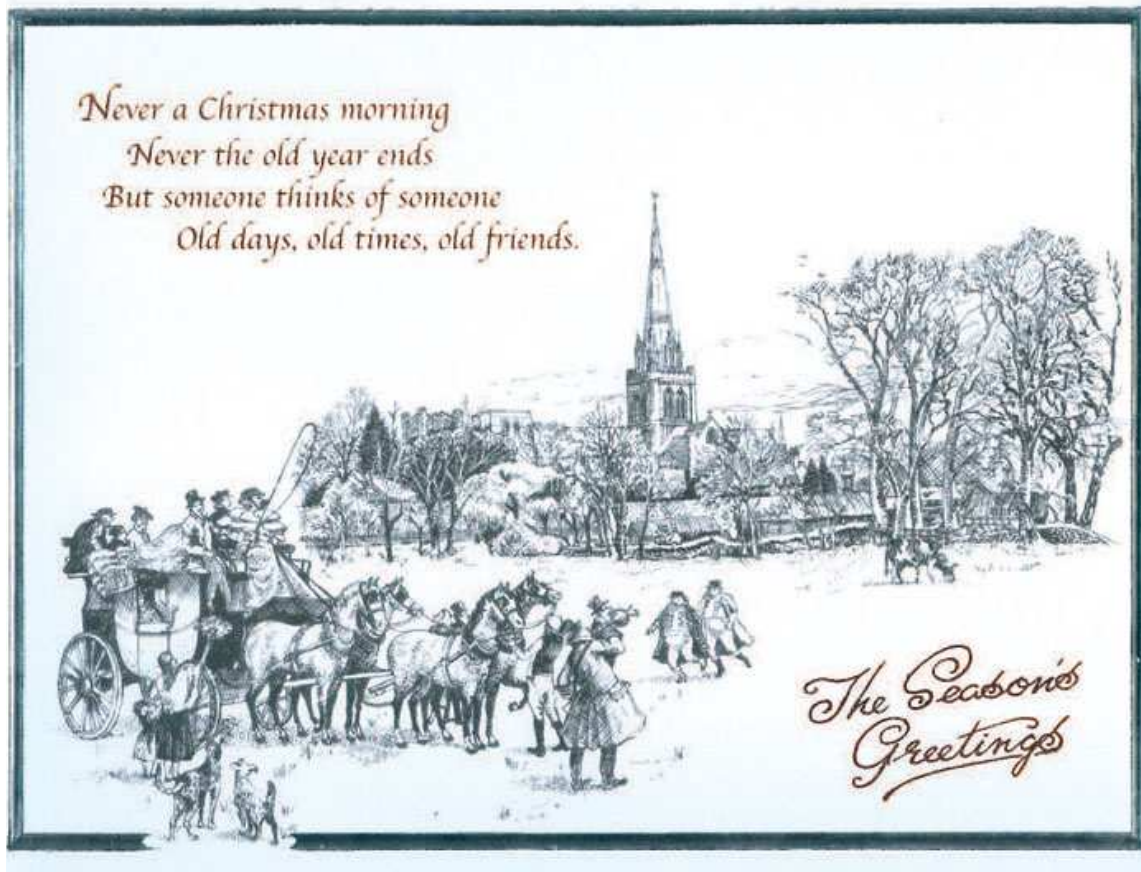
1848 - Once in Royal David's City

1851 - See Amid the Winters Snow

1868 - O Little Town of Bethlehem

1883 - Away in a Manger.

Carol singers were often portrayed struggling through the snow of the countryside with only the light of their lanterns to guide them. The Christmas carol heralds the birth of the anthems and hymns throughout every ensuing year.





A REPORT by Richard Thomas

This was the third time that I had participated in the race, which is held every four years. This year it was held between Monday 20th and Friday 24th August. As in 2003, I rode with our group of Mark Heffer, Martin Malins and Rob Bullyment to Paris before the event, leaving the UK on Friday 17th from Newhaven on the 7am ferry to Dieppe. Dave Hudson, who has organised a lot of Audax events as PBP qualifiers for us this year, was there to send us off.

We were without Chris Tracey, who had to take the 1am ferry (as he booked late and the 7am ferry was full, but I would have thought they had room for one bike and a foot passenger) and we met him at our hotel at Vernon in the evening.

We left UK in sunshine but by the time we reached Dieppe the rain was falling, so we had a wet first few kilometres. It was still raining whilst we ate a few gateaux (tarte au citron, flan etc) at St Saens for lunch, yet it warmed up for the afternoon. We stopped in Vernon for an evening meal before decamping to the Formula 1 hotel on the outskirts of the town where we met Chris and also Gary, who had ridden down with Chris on a recumbent that he built himself! As I also rode down to Newhaven from chez Thomas I did 150km that day.



We left Vernon on Saturday morning for the ride into Paris. The rest of the group were staying at Plaisir but, as usual, I was staying with our family friend, Laurence, in Paris near the Gare Montparnasse, so I had an extra 40km to ride that day

On Sunday I rode to Guyancourt for the bike check, and when I got there I found out that it had been cancelled due to the rain which was falling intermittently all day so I just went into the Gymnasium to collect my documents and my PBP jersey. I also suffered a minor mishap on the way down when a rider from Cheshire, whom I rode with from Versailles, rode into the back of me and broke one of my rear lights, a good start. However, as it still worked I picked up the pieces and taped them together for the event.

On Monday I woke early, had a good breakfast and lunch and in the mid afternoon said my goodbyes to Laurence and headed off once again to Guyancourt to meet our group and go to the pre event meal at the restaurant "Les Quadrants". We then joined the queue to get into the Stadium (Gymnase des Droits de l'Homme) for the start of the event. It had

started to rain! I had already ridden 370 km before the event so I was nicely warmed up (but getting colder standing in the rain!).

This year attracted the biggest field ever, with 5312 riders down to start. Apart from 2294 French riders there were 3018 riders from all over other parts of the world, with 310 British riders taking part. We were to be the last group out of the Gymnasium, having had our lights and reflective garments checked before going through the card stamping control at 11:10 pm, we had been queuing for 2 hours already, we were then held at the gate out of the stadium before being sent round to the start tape on the roundabout outside the stadium on the roundabout (Rond Point des Saules). We were soon to be off, but not before the organisers had indulged in some speeches etc in the typical French manner. Then suddenly up went a rocket with a loud bang and we were off at

11:30pm, with motorcycle accompaniment for the first 20km through red lights and around obstacles to control the pace so accidents did not happen.

Stage 1 Paris to Mortagne (at 140km) and onto the first control at Villaines (222km)

We were near the front of the group of 500 riders and trying to regulate the pace and keep our group together. Some riders came by us and we thought we were on our own until we looked round to see a long line of white lights, we had been towing over 400 riders! We decided to get off the front and pulled over to the left hand side of the road so that we did not

get run into by riders from behind. We then rode in our group and into the rain. Rob suggested stopping at about 80km where a café was open, and we did not need much persuading (see below). We had been riding for 3 hours and had a 20 minute stop. I was planning to do a sub 80 hour ride (as in previous years) but the wet weather soon put paid to that and survival was the order of the day. By the time the first control (food only, no card stamping) was reached at Mortagne at 140km we had to stop for a warming coffee and some food, whereas in previous times I had not stopped there, hence already time was being lost due to the weather. In addition, the heavy rain



Waiting for the start, some of the 2900 riders taking the 90 hour option (tourists)



that night meant that visibility was reduced and speeds were slower.

We had to stop again in the morning at around 9am as we were hungry yet again and we still had not reached Villaines. We reached the first

card stamping control at Villaines at 222km at around 10:15am and stayed for about 45 minutes. We had already been on the road for nearly 11 hours. The control was full of wet and cold riders and already some riders had abandoned the race. The rain had stopped for a moment.



Stage 2 Villaines to Fougères (88km)

The weather did not relent much for this stage with rain on and off yet with some dry spells so occasionally spirits in the group improved. We had to stop for more sustenance at a café just after 1pm and then again at one of the roadside



coffee stops at 2:30pm, as shown left.

We pressed on to Fougères and arrived at 4pm having taken 5 hours for the stage. The skies were rather leaden as shown below.



Stage 3 Fougères to Tinteniac (54.5km)

Having not eaten very much at Fougères (a big mistake) I got a serious attack of “la frangale” on this stage and Paul Outhwaite nursed me through to Tinteniac. Thankfully it did not rain on this stage. On arrival I bought a full meal and then sat and looked at it, I could not eat. This was a serious situation as I had a lot of riding ahead of me. I decided to leave the table for a walk and nearly passed out at the top of the stairs down to the fresh air outside so sat down for a rest and to recover. Fortunately I did recover, did manage to eat something and in the words of Alex Ball, with whom I had ridden on my qualifying 600km and who was now having knee problems and would soon pack, “I have seen Richard like this in the past and he always seems to get through”.

Tinteniac to Loudeac 85km

I cannot remember much about this stage but we did stop for a coffee at St Meen Le Grand at around 9:30pm where Mark (from Pevensey) looks a bit droopy eyed and Chris is trying to keep awake (see below). We arrived at Loudeac (449.5km) at around 11:30pm on Tuesday evening and were ready for a sleep. We came into the control from a different direction to that in 2003 but I cannot recall where the route was different! We all had a snack then joined the queue for a mattress on the floor of the dormitory. And around 1am, after a 30 minute wait, we were in the land of nod for 4 hours much needed sleep. We were woken by the controllers at 5:30am as requested and headed off to the restaurant for a rendezvous with our group as some had not managed to get a mattress and slept elsewhere, some even outside (not for me thanks).

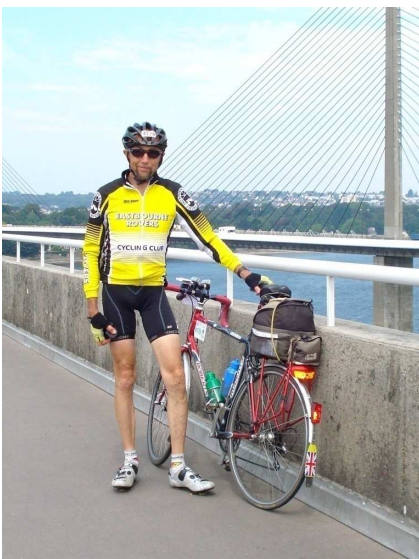


Stage 4 Loudeac to Carhaix (76km)

I cannot remember if I had anything to eat before leaving. I felt that I was not well prepared and in a state as we headed off for Carhaix, where I definitely decided I needed to stop for some serious food intake. It was dark when we left and this is by far the hardest stage of the ride. On this year’s event 365 riders packed on this stage, more than on any other. In addition, on this stage on the return leg 151 riders packed, the second largest on any stage, hence confirming its severity. Somehow I got through this stage, probably encouraged by the fact that it was getting light although there was no sign of the sun, the skies were still very cloudy. I was very thankful to reach Carhaix at about 9:30am and stayed for about an hour to eat some real food. I had tried to eat a Go Bar but it stuck in my throat and I had to wash it down with water. By this stage nearly 700 had packed out of the 5160 who started (there were 152 DNS’s).

Stages 5 & 6 Carhaix to Brest (89km) and back to Carhaix (85km)

By 10:30am we were ready to roll down to Brest, the half way point and things were improving weather wise. The stage to Brest (and the return leg back to Carhaix) were the only stages done in dry conditions. On the way down to Brest I was able to pull back some time despite the long climbs typical of this part of Brittany. I stopped to take off my leg warmers for the first time since leaving Paris and hence lost touch with my group. I caught and passed Martin Malins on the way down to Brest and met Paul Outhwaite on the bridge at Brest, where he said his legs had gone, as he and Chris Tracey had been having a burn up with a girl from Puerto Rico who eventually dropped them both!



My spirits were lifted as, once you see the bridge, there is only 6km to the turn control, even though most of it is uphill! However, to make one realise that you need to be on the alert all the time, I witnessed a tragic sight near the Brest control of a competitor laid out on the grass verge by the roadside with medics frantically trying to revive him. He had been hit by a car (recklessly turning right into a car park and cutting across the cycle lane, throwing the cyclist into the air like a rag doll) and I think he may have subsequently died. It reminded me that I nearly got hit on the roundabout at the top of the climb to Roc Trevezal a couple of hours previously.

Arriving at Brest I made sure that my magnetic card registered (in 1999 it failed here and Graham Lade wondered where I was!) and had something to eat (just bread and sandwiches available here unfortunately) and a drink before heading back to Paris, only 613km to go, c'est du gateau (it's a piece of cake).

The control would shut at 6:45pm for us starting at 11:30pm Monday so we had only 3 ½ hours in hand.

The leg back to Carhaix, which takes a slightly different route and does a loop (to find some more climbs!) was hard as we also had to climb back up the Roc, the "highpoint" of the ride.

I rode some of this return leg with Dave Galle from Horsham Cycling Club, who was finding the hills difficult (yet he gets round Dave Hudson's rides very well) As a footnote he has been featured in the local Horsham paper and is reported as saying "never again". He said he was having difficulty eating and I thought back to how I felt at Tinteniac. Arriving at Carhaix I took on more food, as I did not want to "bonk" again. I also made sure I ate well at each control on the way back, which may have consumed more time than in my previous rides.

Stage 7 Carhaix to Loudeac (76km)

Well, our luck with the weather had run out and on this stage the rain just poured down, bouncing about 25cm off the road. In addition it was dark, oh bliss. Then add the hills and I can understand



Mark, Rob and Chris looking relaxed at Brest control at 3.15pm on Wednesday afternoon.

why over 150 riders called it a day on this leg. We also had to deal with an enclosed recumbent which was slow up the hills but stormed down them and you could hear it rumbling towards you but in the dark did not know where it was and on which side it would pass. Hairy! In the past I have been able to reach Tinteniac before sleeping but this time I would be lucky to reach Loudeac before midnight and then sleep would beckon. I fell off within the barriers at Loudeac due to a rider ahead slowing down, why did I not hold onto the barriers? The mind does let you down sometimes when tired! By this stage news of other AUK riders was filtering through, mainly about those who had abandoned. AUK secretary Richard Phipps fell off at 180km and woke up with a medic looking down at him!, Colin Mildwater abandoned at Tinteniac on the way down as his maximum speed was 10mph and he would not get round, Alex Ball packed after Tinteniac due to knee problems, Norman Lazarus packed at Brest and Tim Wainwright packed near Brest with a lump in an embarrassing place, still can't sit down!

Stage 8 Loudeac to Tinteniac (65km)

We all woke at around 5:45am and Chris, Paul, Martin and I left at 6am, again I cannot remember if I ate anything! Somewhere on the road to Tinteniac I lost contact with them. The second secret control at Illifaut was on this leg and I was with them then. The picture below shows me at this control explaining things to David Galle and shows my swollen face, such was the effects of the ride on my body. It must have been cold and/or wet as I have my waterproof and winter hat on. On reflection now as I write this it must have been hard yet I did not realise how hard it was at the time! This account may deter some of you reading this from coming with me in 2011! The climb up to the Tinteniac control was on minor roads which typically involved some steep climbs, are the organisers masochists! I saw Chris and the rest having a snack at the self service outside the control but I did not join them as I needed a proper meal so went inside to the restaurant.



Stage 9 Tinteniac to Fougères (56.5km)

I cannot remember much about this stage apart from getting involved with some Americans who suggested that I did not know how to ride in a group so I left them to get on with it and rode on my own. I had another good feed at Fougères and caught up with Martin Malins there, as well as Bob Harber of Brighton Excelsior. I also saw the Olsen brothers from America with whom we had ridden on Boston Montreal Boston. I also chatted to some other Americans (not the ones who cast aspersions on my riding) who thought that only 27% of riders did PBP more than once, seems a bit low to me but may have accounted for the larger than normal drop out rate, well that and the weather!

Stage 10 Fougères to Villaines (86km)

I think it was on this stage that Kenton May of the VC Deal caught me up and we rode together for most of the way into Paris. On this stage the rain started again and so by the time we reached Villaines at 9pm we were wet yet the crowds were still standing in the street to welcome the riders and raise their dampened spirits. I had another good feed and prepared to leave at 10pm for a tough night leg.

Stage 11 Villaines to Mortagne (82km)

Thankfully the rain had virtually stopped as we left. Would we find anywhere to sleep? Kenton and I talked about all and everything to try and keep awake but around 1am we were very tired. Fortunately we found a café that was open and we dived in for a coffee and a pain au chocolat.

We were just going to have a 15 minute power nap here but noticed that the owner was offering free mattresses in an anti room so we took advantage and had a good 90 minutes sleep. We left refreshed for the ride to Mortagne and the climbs ahead of us. There is a particularly difficult climb up the control at Mortagne and we arrived at the control at 4:35am, to be met by bikes strewn all over the tarmac outside the control and a similar number of bodies lying all over the restaurant inside. I needed to eat again here and met my companions who had managed to get 4 hours sleep at this control. They left before me.

Stage 12 Mortagne to Dreux (74km)

At this stage of the ride, and as we were down the field, we needed to calculate how much time we had left to do the final two stages of 143km. It was getting light as we covered the first few kilometres and we calculated that we had until 5:30pm to get to Paris. We could not relax as we had only about 3 hours in hand. Somewhere on this leg I lost contact with Kenton and rode on my own. The last few kilometres to the Dreux control are rather convoluted, to such an extent that one UK rider, Julian Williams, was going the wrong way! I called out but to no avail and he eventually arrived at the control some 40 minutes after me. There I met up with Jack Williams (and his wife Sabine, who was not riding) who had managed to get more sleep than me and looked remarkably fresh. I had a baguette, pain au chocolat and coffee and sat with a few other UK riders to exchange tales of the ride so far. Everyone was just looking forward to getting to Paris.

Stage 13 Dreux to Guyancourt (69km)

I left with Kenton and Mark from Pevensey and we were soon caught by Bob Harber who grabbed my arm and encouraged me to join his group but I declined as I was tired. I also let Kenton and Mark go on as we rode across the Forest of Rambouillet. I passed someone who could no longer hold up their head and another who was walking uphill in his socks (hotfoot?) so some people were worse off than me after all. I then passed Mark's bike as he must have dived off for a sleep and then passed Kenton, who had blown up. I kept going as at this stage it is everyone for themselves in my view. They both got back in time as it turned out. I was picked up by a group and a young lady called out, "come on Eastbourne", but I could not catch her up for a chat and did not see her at the finish.



It was good to see the 10km to go sign and I rode in with a large group. We got caught by all the traffic lights at red so it was good to have some time in hand, and as it was just after 2pm a 2:30pm finish should be possible. I got through the final lights before the finish as they went to red and rode into the roundabout finish with a Dane who went straight on at the first exit instead of continuing round to the finish ramp so I finished alone, lots of cheers from the crowds at the roundabout and it was all over, just the ramp to be negotiated and the ride down to the gymnasium control. I stood in the queue, wondering where all these riders had suddenly come from. I handed in my card and had it stamped at 14:27 Friday by the two ladies shown right. I had taken just under 87 hours (if the 11:30pm start is correct).

After a sleep and more food I then rode 30km back to Laurence's flat for a well earned rest. Finally, a strange/sad tale about Julian Williams (remember him from Dreux). He got to within a short distance of the

to be



final control when he rode past the campsite and decided to go for a sleep in his tent before going to the final control. He was awakened by another UK rider who had finished and, as rumour has it, got to the control too late! The mind plays tricks when you are tired as the only focus on the last stage should be to get to the control no matter what else befalls you.

What are my thoughts on this ride?

Less people out on the route due to the worst weather ever on a PBP and a harder route into Tinteniac and Loudeac. I stopped at many more roadside coffee stops due to the weather, tiredness in my upper arms in the last 100km making it difficult to keep the bike upright. I recall rain so hard that I had to take off my glasses and suffer stinging eyes. It was good to see the final two stages in the daylight as I had only previously seen them in the dark. I had about the same amount of sleep but the wet conditions took toll on my body.

The winners did the ride in 44 hours! The drop out rate was over 30% and in my age group (60 to 70 years) the success rate was only 56%. Yet despite everything and my thoughts at 350km that I did not want to suffer this again, yes, I will do it again in 2011. Have I inspired anyone else to join our happy band? One reason is shown below. Drew Buck, a member of Audax UK, did the whole



ride on this old two gear bike, where to engage low gear you had to pedal backwards and continue to pedal backwards all the time you wanted the low gear. Try climbing hills back pedalling, and he got back before me. A fantastic achievement.

After a wonderful night's sleep at Laurence's flat, I then got up early on Saturday morning, packed my panniers, had breakfast, said my goodbyes to Laurence and left to ride back 40km to meet my group at Plaisir, where we rode on to our hotel at Vernon via a good lunch stop (see photo) for savoury and sweet crepes.

Sunday

We rode back to Dieppe on the Sunday and stayed in Dieppe overnight in order to catch the 8am ferry back to Newhaven. Rob then got the train back to Kent and Chris, Mark and I rode to Seaford where Chris left us, Mark and I then rode up Exceat to Friston pond and then to Jevington and Polegate, where I left Mark to ride back to Hastings and I rode home, covering 1875km in the 11 days Friday 17th to Monday 27th August.

I then had only 9 days to prepare for my Pyrenean Traverse CTC holiday, a trip of over 900km and with over 16,000 metres of climbing over 28cols. I must be mad! I will recount my tales of this holiday at some future date. It was the hardest thing that I have ever done! Perhaps I was a bit tired from PBP!

Here is a taster, at the top of the Col du Tourmalet (2115 m. elevation) on 10th September 2007, in my PBP 2007 shirt and with my Merlin Titanium bike.

Richard Thomas 22nd September 2007



A CHRISTMAS STORY



It was Christmas Eve and Emily stood at the window waiting for her great grandson to arrive. She checked her handbag for the third time, purse, keys, shopping list and phone.

Thomas was her first born great grandchild named after her husband. She had two great granddaughters Laura and Sally who she adored, but young Thomas was the one who took her shopping on pension day and texted her every evening from his Nokia Mobile she'd bought him for his birthday in the summer.

A screech of brakes heralded his arrival, two beeps on his quadraphonic horn was her cue and she was on her way. Emily closed and double checked the door then hobbled down the path to the kitted out Punto.

“Wassup Grandma,” chirped Tom (as he liked to be called), “Ready to Rock?” Emily smiled and thought how like his namesake he was. He did not get out to help her into the car, but she expected no less; he was his great granddad's boy so she struggled with her arthritic knees, shut the door and fastened her seatbelt.

Emily was used to Tom's loud music and was quite fond of some of it. Her friends at the Bingo found it hilarious when she sang along to the latest R& B songs during the intervals. Today she was surprised to hear Bing Crosby's White Christmas playing on his state of the art CD Player. She glanced across at Tom, and although her eyes were not as good as they used to be, she could see that there was something very different about him today.

It was his clothes! Gone was the usual backward baseball cap and hoodie; he was wearing the jumper she had knitted him last Christmas.

Tears filled Emily's eyes as the music played and Tom hummed along. “No Tupac today?” Tom looked back at his Nan who he loved with all his teenaged heart. So many Christmases he'd spent with her and gramps, she always knew exactly what to buy him, all the faddy toys when he was younger, Nike Air trainers because all his mates had them, the latest CD's...and then last Christmas...

Oh, he knew that Nan was not herself after gramps had passed away, but to give him a hideous hand knitted jumper with a big T on the back was just so uncool!!! He had hidden it at the bottom of his wardrobe... until last night...

Tom had drifted off to sleep thinking about Lucy, who he'd met at the sixth form Christmas disco. Still dancing to a slow Sade song a chill had filled the air as the music seemed to change, a tinny echo of a Christmas carol he remembered hearing at Nan's. A young man in a soldier's uniform opening a parcel in a bleak cold place. It was Christmas, there were no lights, his belly rumbled.

The heaviness in his heart had turned to utter joy, when he'd opened his parcel and saw that his beloved Emily had knitted him some socks. In the icy



trenches of war their value was immeasurable; in this lonely place her love enveloped him. Love that gave him faith, courage and hope for their future, a future that lasted many years after the war had ended.

Tom awoke and still felt the warmth in his heart. He went to his wardrobe and found the jumper; He slowly traced his finger around the letter T and knew that each stitch had been knitted with love.

Emily reached across and touched Tom's hand. "Thank you Tom, for doing this for me "

"Nan, I always take you to Tesco's," replied Tom

"I wasn't talking to you," said Emily, "I was talking to my number one Tom, your great granddad. A funny thing happened. I had a dream last night that he was here, I could feel his warmth; I dreamed of the love I felt when I knitted him some socks during the war and the letter he wrote to tell me what they meant to him. I didn't want the dream to end, I asked him to let me know that he was still with me, and he has..."

Tom just smiled, knowing that his great granddad was still around; this jumper was not so bad after all. In fact he would wear it on his first date with Lucy...



Everyday Sussex by Roy James

DOMAINE DE LA FOLICOEUR IN UPPER NORMANDY

By John Regan



On Thursday 8th May I drove my car to the Haywards Heath Cyclists club Headquarters in Lewes (The John Harvey Public House) to meet up with John Hurst, Eddy Barrett and Clive Munday. We quenched our thirst and then loaded our four cycles onto the roof-rack and made our way to Newhaven to board the 1 a.m. Transmanche ferry, bound for Dieppe. After a short nights sleep and then a quick shower we disembarked in Dieppe soon after 6a.m. We decided to make full use of the long day and so we travelled to Giverny to see

Monet's gardens, house, studio and many of his works of art. As we were there at opening time we were able to enjoy the house and gardens without the usual crowds of people from all over the World being there. Then we made our way to the delightful Domaine de la Folicoeur which is near to Vernon, south of Rouen. As we were early we sat in their beautiful garden before settling in. The Proprietor, M. Joachim Knitter and his lovely Wife, Claire, occupy the main house with their two daughters who are aged about four years and two years. We occupied the other smaller house which had two double, twin bedded, bedrooms each with en-suite facilities, a lounge, a fully equipped kitchen, a dining room and its own garden. Joachim has an apartment in Paris which he uses when performing there as an opera singer. He is also a garden landscape designer and an excellent chef. As we had booked for dinner, bed and breakfast we had the benefit of Joachim's French culinary cuisine. His soufflés were simply heavenly. Joachim has a great sense of humour and he joined in with our rendition of that famous operetta "Just one Cornetto". He poured everybody a generous glass or two – or was it three – of his home-made liquor Calvados. This loosens up the vocal chords – it s c h eems to anyway! After dinner we explored the locality on our bikes before turning in.

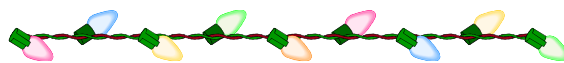
On Saturday the good weather continued and we made use of the map of the Bray and Eure valleys which our friends from Saintry-sur-Seine gave us. Clive did some excellent map reading and after an enjoyable ride northwards through Gaillon and Ecouis we reached Lyons-la-Forêt, a typical French market town. We soaked in the ambiance in lovely sunshine aided with a few drinks, of course. Replenished we crossed over to the other side of the beautiful valley of the River Eure and proceeded through Dangu to Giverny and then westwards for home. Joachim enlisted the help of a beautiful visiting neighbour, Marian, to bring over our sumptuous meal. Eddy and Marian exchanged banter about their similar but separate experiences in New York. On the Sunday morning we set off southwards through Chambray and Pacy-sur-Eure to Anet. With a view of the impressive Anet Chateau across the road we enjoyed our lunch sitting in the sun but sheltered from its 30 degrees by a large sunshade. Clive then guided us back on a different route to complete another days good ride. We all noticed particularly just how courteous all the motorists were towards us. Yes, time to eat again – who could resist one of Joachim's tasty meals accompanied by a bottle or two of wine and followed by a Calvados liquor or two. We all slept well. On the Monday morning bags were packed and the bikes were loaded onto the car. We said our "au revoirs" to our

hosts in the usual French manner but especially to Marian as it was her 42nd birthday that day. We travelled by car to Lyons-la-Forêt where we parked the car. We enjoyed another good ride and were fortunate to find another excellent place for lunch. It was so hot that one of the bottles of Calvados popped its cork. In the interests of equity the bottle was topped up from the other three. The car itself would not have passed a breathalyser test after this event. With the bikes loaded on top we drove up to Dieppe and found a suitable restaurant on the waterfront. After a good meal we left here to board the Ferry. After a short sleep we disembarked soon after 5.30. Clive, John and Eddy decided to enjoy a quiet ride home and so they set off – Clive to Lewes and the other two to Haywards Heath. I managed to unpack the roof-rack and the car just in time to give my Wife a cup of tea in bed. It had been a most successful short visit to Normandy.



The market hall at Lyons-la-Forêt

John Regan



Time Warp

An old timer walks into a branch of Halfords Transport Store and into the cycle department. He says to the spotty faced assistant, “You got Aids?”

Startled youth, “Certainly not sir!”

“How we supposed to know what’s about these days then? What about a Bonk?”

Lady in lycra standing nearby mutters, “I though this was a cycle store, not a sex shop,” and walks out.

The old boy looks surprised, “Whassa matter wiv er, only wanted to know if any of me old mates from the ESCA in the fifties was still around. Freewheels?”

The youth brightens, “Certainly sir, we Sachs or Shimano in 5, 6 or 7 speed or perhaps it was a cassette sir required.”

“Sachs or Shimano, wot you talking about? I want three wheels for me ‘iggins. The doc says I can’t drive me car down the pub any more cos I’m too old, so I need me trike again and the wheels is clapped. Wassa a cassette - sounds like somefing from a camera shop? What about shorts then, summat substantial like cord, not these black pants wiv long legs and seats so thick you ave to put yer saddle down an inch to get on yer bike. People look like fugitives from the ballet these days!”

“But no-one wants cord these days sir, they’re not made.”

“Ain’t it always the same, as soon as you want summat useful you’re told they don’t make it any-more cos nobody wants it.”

The youth stands open mouthed.

Exasperated the old boy gives up and shuffles out of the store muttering, “people dunno wot they’re talking about these days!”

That old timer.



SEMAINE FEDERALE 2008 - SAUMUR, LA LOIRE VALLEY

by John Regan



Saumur is famous for the National Riding School, founded in 1814. The teams are known as the Cadre Noir because of the riders' elegant black and gold ceremonial uniforms. Saumur's storybook chateau is set on a hill high above the town overlooking the beautiful River Loire. This area is renowned today for its sparkling wines and for the button mushrooms which are grown in tufa quarries nearby. These mushrooms are known as *Champignons de Paris*.

John and Joyce enjoyed a month long holiday in France in their motor caravan finishing with their participation in the Semaine Fédérale on their tandem; Andrew and Vanessa arrived from their French residence; John Manville arrived with his French club-mates; Mick and Rose used their favourite camp site near Chênehutte with their caravan; Mike Phillips and I travelled by car. Brian and Margaret stayed in hotels - in fact they broke their journey south by staying at Domaine de la Foliecoeur where they noticed in the Guest Book four familiar names entered in May. The hostess, Clare, remembered "the four charming English cyclists who had stayed here". Eddie Barrett, John Hurst, Clive Munday & John Regan fit that description - according to some people. Many other U.K. cyclists were at the Semaine Fédérale this year as usual; Ken & Iris Stevens with their family, Isobelle, Robert & Heather; Alan & Gillian Else; Pete & Anne Baker & their son, Tom & riders from the Chippenham Wheelers including Mike's ex-school colleague Keith Wright.

South of Le Mans I was forced to park by the side of the road with the hazard warning lights on because there was such a torrential thunderstorm. Other motorists followed suit. On arrival at my accommodation in Saumur Mike decided that he was too tired to look for his accommodation. Fortunately my hosts, Georges and Michelle, were able to offer Mike an evening meal, bed and breakfast. We enjoyed a superb evening meal with our hosts' extended family. They are a lovely family and they made us most welcome. Their house was next to a railway station but that was alright once I had bought my platform ticket and tucked my feet well in. Mike was at the front of the house overlooking the Loire and the road. We both slept well and went into Saumur the next morning. There were decorated bikes in shop windows, on corners and hanging above the streets. There was an air of excitement everywhere: everybody was kind and helpful – such lovely people. After lunch in the town square we registered and collected our numbers, maps and brochures. We then found Mike's accommodation which was about five miles out of town on an island in the middle of the Loire. Fortunately the river was at a low enough ebb to drive the car across and book Mike in. His room was a balcony with only two walls and a ceiling. However, in spite of my pointing out that even the Troglodytiques had three walls, Mike seemed delighted with his accommodation. He was able to observe the wild-life and the birds with a ring-side seat. Mike



did not enjoy sharing his room with mosquitoes but he found the bats fascinating. He was able to utilise the drawing materials which he had purchased in Rouen. His hostess, Marie Débruyne, is a well known artist and her partner Jean-Claude is charming. Mike was always invited to join them for a glass (or two) of wine. That evening Mike enjoyed a good meal at the Permanence in the company of some pleasant French folk. Though I had a ticket for a meal that night I was informed erroneously that there was no meal that evening. However, I enjoyed a sumptuous meal with my hosts, Michelle and Georges together with their grandson, Sylvan. As they spoke no English it was also a good mental exercise. Georges was born and grew up in Madagascar and is very proud of it.

We visited Tours on Saturday and enjoyed a cheese and salad lunch in the centre of town. The medieval old town (Le Vieux Tours) is full of narrow cobbled streets lined with beautiful half-timbered houses. It is a lively area with plenty of little cafés, bars and restaurants which attract locals and visitors alike. Two towers have survived from the medieval Old Basilica of St. Martin and Tour Charlemagne depicts St. Martin in a terracotta relief. Tours derives its name from these two old towers. On the return journey we visited the Chateau de Villandry which dates from the Renaissance (1536) and which is famous for its superb gardens. Working from 16th Century designs the skilful gardeners have mixed flowers and vegetables in strictly geometric patterns. The garden has three levels and we explored the large wooded area on the highest level. Mike enjoyed smelling the roses in the beautiful box-hedged garden. That evening we rode our bikes to the Permanence and joined Joyce and John for a delicious meal.



It was raining on the Sunday morning but we met up with John and Joyce, Andrew and Vanessa on their respective tandems to form 'Team Sussex'. We rode to Saumur Chateau and then along some lovely lanes to Champigny-sur-Veude. Then we returned to Saumur to enjoy coffee after which we purchased some super filled baps (known as foués locally) which we consumed in the Permanence in the company of Ken, Iris, Heather, Isabelle and Robert. We spent a lot of time looking at all the trade stands and sampling a few local wines which were on offer. After another delicious meal at the Permanence we rode to our various abodes. It was still raining on the Monday morning as Team Sussex met up with Mick and Rose and we rode to Gennes where the sun came out and then on to a pretty little village called St. Mawr. With the thousands of cyclists everywhere we had all expected to be standing behind thirsty cyclists to purchase a coffee in a cardboard cup. However, Andrew and Vanessa managed to find a quiet room in a small cafe where just our party were able to drink delicious cups of 'grands cafés crèmes' with some delicious 'eats' which we had purchased in the local boulangerie: very civilised. By now the sun was really shining as Team Sussex travelled to a huge chateau at Mazé where there was music, an antique bikes exhibition, food and drink. Replenished the tandems set a cracking pace on the return journey. Keith Wright and other Chippenham Wheelers riders attempted to follow Team Sussex tandems but Mike soon told them where to get off. Once again we tackled our excellent meal at the Permanence, with wine, of course. Each evening I enjoyed a couple of hours of French conversation

with my French hosts and their grand-son, Sylvan. Wine was always on offer.

Only four kilometres from the start on the Tuesday and all groups were directed into the Parc du bois Savary Maupassant which is a large, beautiful, private park laid out to a symmetrical design. All the trees, bushes, flowers, small lakes and fountains looked glorious in the warm sunshine. We then rode on towards Langeais and Villandry then across the river and on to Chinon and Montsoreau. Surfers and speed boats entertained us as they sped over the water. As Mike was so near to his accommodation he could not resist taking the short cut to enjoy a little rest – which he said was well earned. He enjoyed his evening meal at the Permanence in the company of Keith and Gethin Butler and members of their family. During the night Mike discovered that the open aspect was too good to be true as he was bitten by some mosquitoes - nature at its worst. I was invited up to tea with John and Joyce and it was so comfortable that I too had a little snooze. Then down to the Permanence for another excellent meal in good company before returning home.

Wednesday was hotter than ever and Team Sussex had decided to ride their singles which resulted in some of them really suffering – c'est la vie! They went to a Troglodytique village at Lourdes-Rochemenier. The F.F.C.T. had negotiated a reduced entrance fee for entering the village which was typical of their superb organisation. They continued on to Doué-la-Fontaine through huge caves to a Roman Arena and a medieval barn for lunch. I had opted to go on the walk on this day and so I was in Saumur at 8a.m. to catch the coach to the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud. This is the only place in France where royalty are revered. It was an Abbey from 1101 until 1792, a state prison



from 1804 until 1963 and it is now a cultural meeting centre. The recumbent figures represent Henry 11 (the Plantagenet King of England) his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine, their son Richard the Lion-heart and Henry 11's daughter-in-law, Isabella of Angouleme. The supermarket LeClerc



supplied water and cakes during the morning and then on two occasions during the afternoon more free bottled water. We walked through beautiful countryside to Candes-St.-Martin. Candes is a latin word which denotes confluence and Candes-St.-Martin is situated at the confluence of the rivers La Loire and La Vienne. We were now following the arrows from the previous day's cycle route and because of the hot weather (37 degrees) it seemed to be just as difficult. After the coach ride back to Saumur I attempted to persuade my host, Georges, who was one of the Bénévoles (volunteers) to have a break from his car parking duties to enjoy a beer with me. However, he was so busy that there was no chance of him taking a break. There were more than two hundred Bénévoles in Saumur and more than two thousand involved in this

whole event. This was quite a remarkable effort for these people and all for our benefit. We are most grateful to each and every one of them.

Thursday 7th August was picnic day at the Verrie hippodrome which was thirty kilometres from Saumur. Mike was woken up by the sound of loud thunder at 2a.m. and he sat up and enjoyed the natural fireworks for over an hour from the comfort of his little bed. In the twilight of the morning he was visited by bats followed later by a friendly robin. Then he noticed deer in the garden and he had the constant sound of green wood-peckers – nature at its best. Team Sussex rode out to Chênehutte to visit Mick and Rose on their favourite camp site but this was just the beginning of the meeting of the Sussex clan. Ken, Iris, Isabelle, Heather and Robert, Pete, Anne and Tom Baker all arrived. Rose rose to the occasion and provided coffee all round and lovely warm scones etc. for everybody. Well stoked up we made our way to the picnic. Here we met more people whom we knew including Alan and Gillian Else who used to ride with me in the Sorian R.C. We consumed our picnics amidst the usual fun and games which included our regular accordion player. There was a bicycle to try but the difficulty was that you laid down on your stomach horizontally with one wheel in front and the other behind you and you were just high enough off the ground to pedal – if you could keep your balance. Whether they could manage to cycle or not each lady knew how to scream. I rode back to Saumur with the good company of Tom Baker who is just sixteen and has just begun racing. It seemed to me that he will be as successful as his Father, Pete. I had decided to attend a jazz concert that evening which was to be held on the large terrace and garden of Gratien & Meyer which overlooks this whole area of La Loire. M. Gratien purchased this 10 km long property ('Le Petit Puy') in 1864 to begin his viticulture of sparkling red, rosé and white wines. The whole area had been mined in the twelfth century for limestone (pierre de tuffeau). The miles of cool, underground mining tunnels are perfect for the storage of the beautiful wines in their own cave. The opening of the railway at about the same time also played a great part in the firm's prosperity. It was a most enjoyable evening. There was a short sharp thunder and lightning storm during the evening but as there was plenty of shelter underneath the overhanging roof of the beautiful building the storm simply added to the enjoyment.

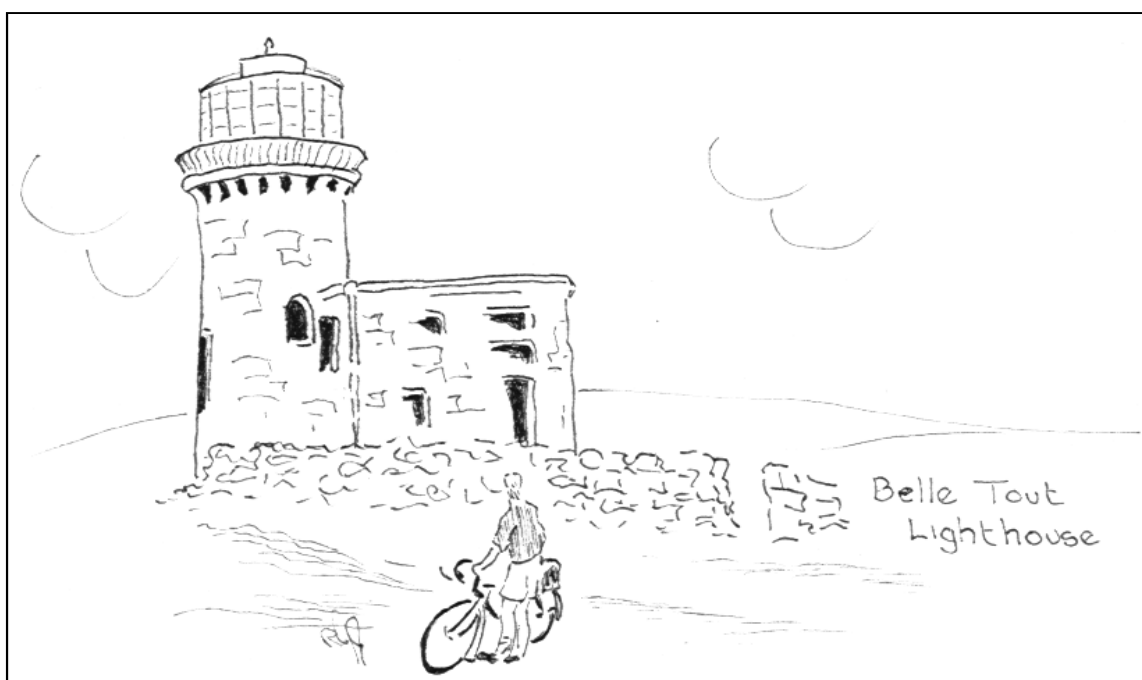


On the Friday as I didn't read a message on my mobile 'phone early enough I missed the Team Sussex departure. However, I did meet up with Mick and Rose on their tandem. The route that day passed a shop called 'Couture Passion' which was run and owned by my hostess, Michelle. Michelle was delighted to see us and she showed us some of the dresses and other objects d'art which she had a passion about producing. During the day I joined up with Brian Barratt and we each took a photograph of ourselves with the large skeletal horse in the background. On my return I joined the others in the Permanence for a beer or two. We would have, could have, even perhaps should have, drunk beer to the value of the tickets which we had purchased earlier on in the week had Brian not pointed out that one could exchange them back for currency – what a spoil sport! I had accepted an invitation to dine with my hosts that evening together with their other



guests who were all French – Daniel and his wife, Marielle, and Henry. It was a most enjoyable evening.

On Saturday Team Sussex rode a short route at a pleasant pace through Brézé, Epieds and Montreuil-Bellay and then back to St. Cyr-en-Bourg where they were diverted into the caves. As it was another very hot day the coolness of the caves was appreciated. Hot foués went so well with the wine tasting. I went on a longer ride and I met up with Ken Stevens at Le Puy Notre Dame. We rode back to Saumur at a good pace and I learnt that it was his 78th birthday that very day. If I reach 78 I will be delighted if I am as fit and well as Ken. He went on to a barbeque birthday party. The routes this year often led right around the particular pretty village which it passed through. In this way we were able to appreciate all the hard work which had been done by everybody concerned and we could appreciate the particular beauty of that village as well as the great welcome which awaited us. As we were waiting at the Permanence for our last very special meal we were talking to Peter Crofts who is one of the C.T.C. Cycling Holidays' tour leaders. He has just completed his 100th overseas tour as a leader. 1400 cyclists sat down for the special meal and it was a really incredible meal with plenty of lovely local wine. On Sunday we set off at about 10a.m. for Deippe and enjoyed a toll free, trouble free journey and made good time to catch an early ferry home. We dined with John and Joyce in their luxurious motor caravan: it was a lovely way to finish a most enjoyable holiday for all of us.



Everyday Sussex by Roy James