



HOBBY TIMES

I.A.H. Newsletter No. 35

April 2010

Letter from the Editor

Apologies to those who received their last newsletter in the post – should have been No. 34 not 35!

This is my second attempt to write this newsletter – the first one (which was complete) got lost in the ether somewhere and refused to open so all that time and effort to no avail – so here we go again! As I didn't do a draft and I cannot remember what I wrote about having had time away since then, I will try and scrape the barrel once more. I am sure all you Hobby people have been doing lots of interesting things since Christmas and I do wish some of you would let us in on the news of your escapades and let me have a few items for the newsletter – when is it going to happen???

I see from the website that we have quite a number of new members and look forward to meeting you all at some of our forthcoming rallies. We do have a lot of fun when we all meet up and it is a great time for seeing new places, exchanging ideas and solving problems. Our last rally was at the Roseberry Campsite (10 miles from Cambridge) in February – yes, it did snow! However, 7 vans turned up and we were all able to congregate in a large static caravan which had been transformed into a clubhouse, with TV, heating, comfy settees, and kitchen facilities. It was a good place to meet up after going off in different directions during the day, to compare experiences and generally put the world to rights. The site is spacious and well laid out with plenty of hard-standings and excellent facilities, the only downside was that the promised bus service was not in operation at that time which meant either a long walk to the next village, or relying on others for transport. The warden was very helpful and made our stay a pleasant one. We visited Cambridge and its colleges, Ely and its magnificent Cathedral, and explored the flat, watery landscape of this county. On Sunday, 14th February, being Valentine's Day, we went for a group meal at The Old Riverview Hotel, at Earith, the village closest to the campsite. We enjoyed an excellent meal and a very jolly evening. Christine insisted that each couple have a Valentine's kiss which she recorded on camera and can be seen on the website. (I included these photos in the first edition but I think that contributed to its downfall!) I will just give you a sample:



The Old Riverview Hotel, Earith – Valentine's Day



David and Christine setting scene!

I had baked a Valentine's cake which some of you liked enough to want the recipe. I took it from a magazine and quote as follows: *'For many of us Valentine's Day is a bright spot in the gloomy month of February and a perfect excuse to make a fuss of the one you love.'*

'Its origins are obscure but it became associated with romantic love in the Middle Ages but it was not until the mid-19th century that people began to send Valentine cards, whereas sending flowers and chocolates is a 20th century development. We often associate doves with romance, but many birds are considered romantic symbols. In the words of Geoffrey Chaucer: *'it was on Volantynys day when euvery byrd comyth there to chose his mate.'* 'The Aztecs wore hummingbird talismans as emblems of sexual potency and this delicious sweet cake named after the glorious little bird is an American favourite – maybe you will hum with delight when you eat it!'

'Originating in the Southern States, it resembles a carrot cake but made with bananas and pineapple – a perfect treat for your valentine'.

HUMMINGBIRD CAKE – serves 8-10 people (large 3-layer cake)

Ingredients:

300g unrefined caster sugar; 3 eggs; 300ml sunflower oil; 275g ripe bananas, mashed; 300g plain flour + 1 tsp ground cinnamon; 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda + pinch salt; 100g tinned pineapple, drained & chopped; 125g pecan nuts, chopped.

For the icing:

600g unrefined icing sugar; 100g unsalted butter, softened; 250g cream cheese (*I used marscapone*)

Preheat the oven to 180 deg.C/Gas mark 4. Line the base of three 20cm cake tins with greaseproof paper. Whisk together the sugar, eggs, oil and banana until well combined. Sift in flour, cinnamon, bicarbonate of soda and salt, gently mix to combine, then stir in the pineapple and nuts. Divide the mixture between the three prepared tins and smooth the surface of each. Bake for 25 minutes until golden and cooked through, then leave to cool for 10 minutes in the tins before turning out onto a rack to cool completely.

To make the icing, sift the sugar into a large bowl and beat together with the butter until smooth. Then beat in the cream cheese and continue to beat for five minutes until light and fluffy. Place the first cake on a serving plate or stand and spread the top with a quarter of the icing, top with the second cake and repeat, topping with the third cake. Spread the remaining icing over the top.

After icing the cake decorate it as you please – with rose petals, white chocolate curls, chopped nuts, or small chocolate hearts.



Forthcoming Rallies for 2010:

May 5-12 Weymouth – Contact Toni Browning on her mobile for further details (07938687045)

May 12-19 Cheddar - (as above)

June 16-23 Ambleside – Contact Vera Watson (01539 432177)

June 19 Hobby AGM will take place at this venue

June 23-30 Doe Park, Cotherstone, Teesdale – Contact Christine Lawson (07845 961115)

July 14-21 Chainbridge, Usk, S. Wales – Contact Toni Browning

September 19-26 – Greenway Farm Caravan & Camping Site, Puddlebrook Road, Drybrook, Gloucestershire, GL17 9HW
Tel. 01594 544877 Mobile: 07791 690239 www.greenwayfarm.org

Greenway Farm is on the border of the Forest of Dean and Herefordshire, nearest town being Ross-on-Wye. Full details can be seen on their website. This is a beautiful area where you can explore the Wye Valley and the Forest of Dean or even the Cotswolds. Please contact Pat Miller (01594 860261) if you intend to join us on this rally as the owner, Lorraine, is anxious to know how many vans are likely to arrive and need electric hook-ups. This is a relatively small site so it is a case of first come, first serve. There is a café on site which serves light meals all day.



The winner of the motor-home caption will be announced at the AGM at Ambleside, 19th June 2010

Some of the entries received so far:-

‘Are you sure this is the MV waste disposal point?’

‘I’m never again going to arrive on site after dark’

‘Can we move back just a little further dear, the Sky TV reception is still a bit fuzzy?’

‘Excuse me sir, is that your wife inside the van?’ ‘No that’s the dog, I dropped the wife off earlier!’

‘Darling, jump out and join me’

‘Keep coming darling, there’s nothing behind us’

‘Jump out the back love and wind down the legs!’

If you wish to add to the list, and maybe win a prize, it is not too late! Please let me have any further entries by the end of May – email Pat Miller: pat.ericmiller@ukonline.co.uk

Tony Charity followed up Eric Miller's contact with Hobby Motorhomes at the Dusseldorf exhibition, meeting up with representatives at the Birmingham Motorhome Show. It is hoped that the Hobby representative will attend the AGM at Ambleside. He has also supplied the following information:

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Ripley Road Ambergate Derbyshire DE56 2EP Telephone 01773 853900 Fax 01773 857060

Registered in England and Wales Co. Registration No.: 03880080 www.hobbycaravansuk.co.uk info@hobbycaravansuk.co.uk

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Fax: 01803 522691

www.alankerrleisure.co.uk

alankerrltd@aol.com

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Mappleborough Green

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Warwickshire B80 7DR

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www.go-european.co.uk

goeuropeanltd@aol.com

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Fax: 01227 370710

www.bcsmotorhomes.com

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Ludlow Business Park

Ludlow

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info@moranmotorhomes.com

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Lincoln, LN6 3QY

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Fax: 01522 698555

www.camperuk.co.uk

enquiries@camperuk.co.uk

Hampshire & Dorset Motorcaravans,

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Christchurch, Dorset BH23 2QA

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Fax: 01202 474247 www.hdmc.net

info@hdmc.net

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www.capeldewicars.net

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Glamorgan CF31 3UZ

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Fax: 01656 645568

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Bradford BD3 8QD

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E S Hartley (Leisure) Ltd.

Ings, Kendal

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www.eshartleygroup.co.uk

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Simpson's Motorcaravan Centre

Suffolk Road

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Norfolk NR31 0LN

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Fax: 01493 657447

www.simpsonsmc.com

sales@simpsonsmc.com

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North Western Caravans Ltd

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**Due to demand and build schedules,
please ring dealers before travelling
to avoid disappointment.**

Travels with a Hobby – a Burstner – and a Frankia : Part 2

Trip to Slovenia – and back – continued

There had been rain in the night, but the sun was there to greet us in the morning as we set off for a walk around Lake Bled (5 km for the entire circuit), It was amazingly beautiful, with views of the island from every angle. We stopped for a coffee en route, next to a swimming area, although we only saw one person sunning themselves, there were other hardy souls in the lake itself – it seems to be the thing to do to swim to the island and back to the shore. We reached the town of Bled by lunchtime, coinciding with a large group of Harley Davidson bikers (about 50 of them at least) all clad in black leathers decorated with a variety of slogans. After a lunch of toasted ham & cheese sandwiches, followed by the famous Bled cake, a kind of custard cream pastry, very light and lemony - delicious! We continued on to the next place where we hired two rowing boats (one with canopy) to take us across to the island.



John in Bled hat!



Bled Cake



Landing on the island

There was a long flight of steps up to the little church where we could ring the bell but, at a cost of 3 euros each to do so, we thought better of it, having spent 20 euros for each boat for an hour which was quite enough. We peered through the church windows to see the ornate gold interior, bought some cards from the shop, then went back down to the landing stage where a wedding party had just arrived. The bride had a short white lace dress and very high heels and obviously could not get up the steps, so the bridegroom hoisted her over his shoulder and carried her up to the top. We had plenty of time to spare so paddled slowly back to shore enjoying the peace and tranquillity. There was to be a Slovenian folk band at the camp restaurant that night so, on our return, we tidied ourselves up and went down to have a meal, sitting outside under the stars, enjoying a lively musical evening. Then the rain came down!

The weather was fine next morning, and we hoped it would stay that way, as we planned to walk to the Vintgar Gorge, taking a packed lunch as it was proving very expensive to eat out. The skies clouded over as we made our way along the road towards the start of the gorge, passing through alpine-looking villages on the way. We had our food in a small picnic area before entering the gorge – a cleft between the mountains with 1-1/2 miles of rushing glacial water and waterfalls between rocky tree-clad boulders – very beautiful. We were able to exit the gorge at the other end, climbing back up through a wood to reach the road which would take us back to Bled. It seemed a very long way back indeed and felt quite exhausted and hungry by the time we reached the campsite. The plan was to move on the next day to see some caves, before returning through Italy and the south of France. A decision was made not to go on to Croatia as there was not enough time.

We set off next morning towards Postojnska Jama Caves, experiencing some problems with the Sat-Nav as the roads had changed, but, after a stop for coffee and cake at a service station, we finally made it to our destination. We were able to stay in a special motor-home park next to the caves all night for 14 euros, including water, electricity etc. It was a short walk up to the entrance to the caves, where we joined a long queue for the train ride through the underground passages, followed by an hour's walk through the various caverns, which were quite spectacular. By the time we emerged from the 'journey to the centre of the earth' most of the tourist cafes were closed – there didn't seem to be anywhere to get a drink or anything to eat – so there was no alternative but to go back to the vans.

We left Slovenia next morning, travelling south west towards the Italian border, past Trieste, to Venice and Camping Fusina. The weather was boiling hot and we were lucky to get a good position overlooking the lagoon and the romantic outline of Venice on the skyline. We sat around for the rest of the day, eating, drinking, watching the boats go past and generally relaxing, having a pizza in the camp restaurant at night, then bed, as we had planned an early start in the morning to catch the ferry to Venice. There had been strong winds and heavy rain in the night but the morning was fine if somewhat windy. Barbara worried about being seasick on the ferry so dosed herself before we set off to catch the 9.30 am ferry to Venice. We hadn't been there very long when it started to rain, followed by thunder and lightning and a torrential storm. It couldn't have been worse! We sheltered under a canopy for what seemed like ages, watching people scurrying about under a colourful array of umbrellas. It gradually eased off but didn't stop, and two coffee stops later it was still raining as we traipsed up and down steps, over little bridges crossing the canals, in and out of numerous shops selling Murano glass and Venetian masks.

The last coffee shop – Café del Doge – was very expensive, our coffees came on a tray with 3 little sweetmeats, a jug and glass of water, for which we paid 11 euros each! By 4 pm we had enough of wandering, took a last look at St Mark's which, in spite of the rain, looked magnificent now that the scaffolding has finally been removed and the ornate painted façade could be seen in all its glory. The Bridge of Sighs was now covered in a huge hoarding so nothing could be seen there. We walked (twice) over the Pont de Vecchio from where there are good views of the Grand Canal and then made our way back to the ferry where we had nearly an hour to wait. The ferry was absolutely packed, mainly with young Americans, we were lucky to get a seat. It was a relief to be back inside the van to change out of our wet things, have a nice cup of tea, and spend the rest of the evening relaxing.

The next morning the rain had stopped and the sun shone as we prepared to leave the campsite. The road to Lake Garda was busy with heavy lorries and every service area was 'choc-a-bloc' – luckily, it wasn't too far to Camping Cisano – which was also pretty full and, after much deliberation, 3 spaces were found more or less together. (the difficulty is always finding room for John and Mike's vans which are so big!). We all felt a bit tired, but after a few hours rest, it was decided to walk to Cisano for a meal that evening. We set off at 7 pm to walk along the edge of the lake which turned out to be quite a long way, we were glad to find a small restaurant, 'El Rustico', which was cosy and atmospheric, but the meal was rather mediocre. John had been looking forward to having a steak but it was nearly raw and very tough, he just couldn't eat it. Mike and I had Sea Bass which was small and over-cooked. The others had Lasagne which again were very small portions and not very tasty. The meals were quite expensive so didn't stop for a sweet or coffee, preferring to buy an ice-cream from a stall in the street – it was just on the point of closing so we were lucky! It started to spit with rain again on the way back so, as it was late anyway, we called it a night.

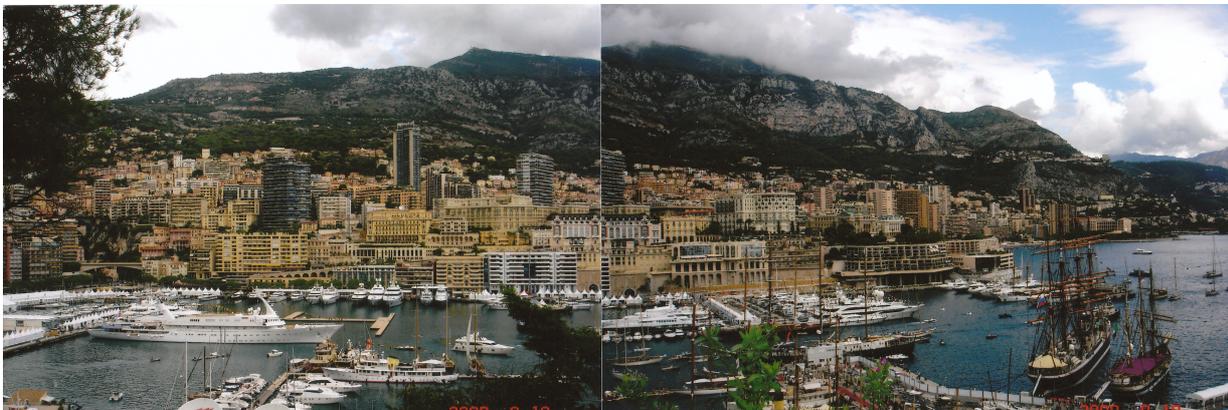
It rained heavily all night and again in the morning. We were prepared to stay put in the van but John came knocking on the door and said he was fed up with being inside the van, suggesting we all get togged up in our waterproofs and walk to Bardolino (opposite direction to Cisano). So, kitted out in mackintoshes, waterproof trousers, walking shoes and umbrellas, we set off but, as the rain was torrential, we were soon soaked through – John made the mistake of putting his hand in the lake to see how cold it was and got his shoes waterlogged, although he did say the water was quite warm! Most of the restaurants along the lakeside were closed, but in the main street there were several to choose from, and quite a lot of people about considering the dreadful weather. After our lunch of pizzas, (I think this is the only dish the Italians know how to cook!) we went to retrieve our umbrellas from the stand only to discover someone had taken Barbara's umbrella and left a tatty one in its place, so she was not happy, and promptly went across the road to buy another one. We looked in a few shop windows and then trudged back along the flooded waterfront – the manholes were spurting water everywhere as they couldn't take the onslaught of all the heavy rain. We stopped at the camp shop for supplies before returning to the vans to dry off – our shoes would take at least a week!

Sunshine! The rain had finally stopped. We set off early for the long drive to the coast. As we drove south through Liguria, which is quite a pretty region, the countryside changed dramatically from the flat agricultural plains bordered by motorways and industrial buildings, to a tranquil landscape of forested mountains, and terraced hillsides. The road passed through a series of tunnels, with glimpses of the deep blue sea beyond. We reached our campsite for the night at Ceriale, where we booked into a family-run site crammed with vans, caravans, statics, etc. in fact, every space was occupied except for a corner where we managed to manoeuvre all three vans in close proximity to each other. We felt a bit dubious at first, but the 'natives' were friendly, the toilet block was spotless, and there was a lovely swimming pool. After a couple of glasses of wine, Barbara and I felt brave enough to go for a swim – the water was icy!! However, the sun was warm as we lay on the sun-beds to dry off – not for long though as Eric soon appeared to see what we were doing, then John and Mike turned up, so we gave up trying to relax and came to the conclusion it was dinner-time! Amazingly, Eric had already started to cook the steak, so by the time I had dried and dressed and hung the towel and costume out to dry on a washing line strung between two trees, he had cooked the potatoes, onions, and courgettes. It was lovely to be able to sit outside for once. John and Barbara joined us and Mike and Margaret came out with their coffee. As there was a Lidl nearby we hurriedly washed up and set off to buy supplies – it was already dark so couldn't see much of the locality – we sat outside to have a nightcap but had to turn in for bed as the bugs were starting to bite!

It was a fine and sunny morning as we set off towards the Cote d'Azur, but it wasn't long before the rain set in again and we couldn't see the sea for rain clouds and mist – and all the tunnels! The area was very built up with houses dotted all over the hillsides and industrial buildings in the valleys – this beautiful terrain has been blighted forever. We stopped for a coffee break just over the border into France – not far from Monaco – then into France and the Vielle Ferme campsite near Biot. It was raining heavily by this time so, once settled in, we made lunch and prepared to sit in the van for the rest of the day. However, John and Mike appeared at the door wanting to go for a walk – we said we would join them in an hour – then we all walked around the campsite, explored the indoor/outdoor pool which looked great, then out through the gates to find the sea. There was no access to the beach – just a high wire fence and a railway line – so continued along the roadside towards Antibes which we could see in the distance with its huge fort overlooking the harbour. It was supposed to be 1 km away but by the time we got there it felt more like 3 km at least. It was still raining as we trudged along – there was no pavement and the potholes were filling up with muddy water – the whole area was very scruffy, not how I imagined the Cote d'Azur!! As we reached the harbour at

Antibes, the sun came out briefly and we spent some time looking at all the magnificent yachts before entering the walled town with its narrow streets, bars, and restaurants. We were tired and thirsty after our walk so stopped at an Irish Bar to have a coffee (drinks were horrendously expensive), then wandered around the town looking for a place to eat at a reasonable price. We found one in the main square offering Moules & Frites for 10 euros but had to wait about an hour for the chef to return. The moules smelt very peculiar but tasted alright, cooked in cream and white wine, and served with a large bowl of chips. John and Eric had omelettes but John couldn't stand the smell of the moules and it put him off his food! I asked the waiter where the bus station was as we didn't feel like walking back in the dark and the rain along such a busy road. When we got to the bus stop we discovered that we had missed the last bus, so asked our way to the train station where we had a very long wait as the train was delayed by about 40 minutes. Then a wet walk back to the campsite from Biot – we were so glad to be back and went straight to bed!

It was a bit of a scramble to get ready to catch the train from the station at Biot at 10.20 am next morning as the thunderstorm had kept us awake half the night. We made sandwiches to take with us for lunch as we expected the prices to be high in Monaco. The trains are double-deckers so they can transport more people along this popular route. The station at Monaco is very modern and up-market as you would expect – from the upstairs level there is a magnificent view of the city – situated within easy walking distance of the sea-front. The whole area is very hilly with lots of steps and steep roads. The bay was filled with boats of all descriptions as there was a Classic Yacht Show on that weekend. There were a couple of large sailing ships in the bay together with yachts of all sizes, steam boats etc. – plenty to see!



Just as we arrived, a wedding party in all their finery were making their way up towards the Casino in a number of veteran cars and were having difficulty in reaching the top, one of them shouted to us to give them a push! The perimeter of the bay was enclosed with large tent-like structures to do with the Show which rather spoiled the views. However, we climbed up to the gardens surrounding the Royal Palace from where there were excellent views of the harbour and all that was going on. We had just reached the summit when it started to rain again so we found a seat under a kind of bower facing an ornate pond and waterfall, where we ate our sandwiches whilst various tours of Japanese marched past taking photos of the pond. Everywhere there are reminders of the famous Monte Carlo rallies with statues of their heroes.



The rain finally stopped and we continued on our way, first of all to see the Cathedral and then to the Palace where we watched the Changing of the Guard from the Palace Square. From there we entered the narrow streets of the old town and had a coffee whilst the rain poured down again, made our way back down the hill to the bay, then climbed up the steep road the other side to look at the Casino of Monte Carlo, surrounded by very expensive cars. There were crowds of people there but didn't see anyone rich and famous. There were lots of designer shops so we contented ourselves by looking in some of the windows at the glittering diamond necklaces, expensive bags and clothes – no prices of course! If you have to ask the price – you cannot afford it!. The weather was definitely more settled, in fact, very warm and humid so, as we also wanted to see the artisan village of Eze, we headed for the train station. It

was on time and we were there very quickly as it was only two stops down the line, then we had a bit of a wait for the bus to take us up the tortuous route to the old village on the top of a mountain. The young bus driver managed to swing the bus around each bend with just one hand on the wheel! We only had an hour and a half before the last bus back so lost no time in climbing up to the tightly enclosed walled town, with its narrow alleyways and tiny shops selling all kinds of arts and crafts. We ran out of time before we had seen it all unfortunately, so made our way back to the bus stop to catch the last bus back to the station. As we waited for the train to take us back to Biot we were frightened by a rough-looking couple who were having a row on the platform – he was punching the woman and she was screaming and pulling his hair. He picked something up from the platform – we thought it was a knife, shouting “murder, murder” - everyone was looking scared as to the outcome. Then the woman came up to us pointing at her bruises, and then the man, who had a scarred face, came after her shouting, he showed us a fancy watch with a broken strap and started talking to us about it but, as we couldn’t understand a word he was saying we all got up and walked away. Fortunately, the train came along just then so we hurriedly got on board and hoped they wouldn’t be getting on with us – luckily, we didn’t see them again. There was a bit of a commotion on the train as a member of a group of young people seemed to have got stuck in the toilet and they had to get someone to try and open the door to let her out – it was causing quite a lot of hilarity. We all thought the journey had been quite exciting one way and another! Once again it was a relief to be back at the campsite and, after some deliberation as to whether we would eat at the camp café, we settled for a bag of chips and had them with some tinned meat balls, followed by fresh peaches.

A trip to Cannes was planned for the following day, so when we awoke to blue skies and, as we were not catching the train until 11.08, there was time for a leisurely breakfast – in fact two - because John appeared at our door with a baguette he had just bought from the camp shop. Although we had eaten our cereal, we were tempted by the smell of fresh bread so went off and bought one so that we could eat a lump of it while it was still warm. We all set off in good time for the walk along the main road to the train station to catch the train to Cannes. The forecast was rain but the skies were blue and cloudless. As soon as we arrived we saw a carousel on the waterfront surrounded by a small fair. The beach looked lovely – golden sands – we wished we had brought our swimming things. We could see the large yachts in the marina around the bend in the bay but the way through was blocked by some kind of building work. We could also see a castle on top of the hillside and made towards it through the old town. On the way we stopped to look at the building where the Cannes Film Festival is held – there are hand prints of famous stars set in floor tiles here. Then we browsed around an outdoor market and looked at paintings by local artists, then stopped to eat our sandwiches in a little park area which was shaded by trees and watched the world go by. Then, slowly, (we decided this was not going to be a rushing about day) made our way to a café for a coffee which was adjacent to a building covered in scenes of films from the 1930s era – that kept us occupied working out which characters were in which film. We were served by a huge fat guy (most of the clients seemed to be middle eastern men who greeted each other by kissing each other four times on both cheeks). After all this coffee drinking we had to ask the bartender for a key to use the toilet which was a bit embarrassing – and it was filthy – not an experience I would want to repeat!



We wandered up a steep winding alleyway with little shops and restaurants all the way to the top of the hill, then walking at a leisurely pace, made our way back to the station, with the intention of going on to have a look at Nice. However, on arriving at the platform we found that all the trains were running late – if at all – so were quite worried in case there was a strike and we wouldn’t be able to get back. A posse of police were stopping various people and we began to wonder if there was a bomb scare. Suddenly, our local train came on the TV screen due to arrive at 3.05, instead of the one we were going to get at 3.15, so we decided to skip the trip to Nice if there was any likelihood of not being able to get back, and go back to the campsite and relax (for a change!). I suggested we might go for a swim in the camp pool and it was agreed we would have a drink and relax a bit first, then go for a swim. Barbara, Margaret, and I, set off for the indoor pool, the water was warm and we felt refreshed afterwards. John had contacted Gordon and Jenny Sinclair to say we were planning to visit them at their campsite in Provence in two days time, he sent a text back to say there was room for our three vans and looked forward to our arrival.

We planned to head for the hills avoiding the motorways and stay overnight at a France Passion site on the way there, so, next morning we left the ‘Vielle Ferme’ campsite – Mike leading – but it took John and Eric so long to get out onto the main road we had lost all sight of Mike’s van. We followed John but his Sat-Nav was taking him on quite the wrong road – we ended up going on a ‘white’ road which led up a twisting mountainous route with overhanging cliffs. At a very narrow point on a bend, a VW camper van clashed wing mirrors with John’s van, knocking the cover off John’s and smashing the VW mirror completely. We all stopped while John retrieved his cover from the

road, but the Belgian driver of the other van was spattered in blood as the mirror had shattered and covered his arm with broken glass. Barbara invited him and his wife into their van to clean him up and exchange names and addresses. The man, although considerably shaken, spoke good English which was a blessing, however, he seemed loathe to let John go without getting something sorted out. After about an hour we finally got away and tried to find a place wide enough to turn the van round in order to go back the way we had come and find the right road. Eventually, we were back on track heading towards Grasse on the Napoleon Route. The road took us through some amazing scenery – high rugged mountains with sheer cliffs – we even had to drive through a hole in a rock which was a bit scary! We took a short cut to avoid Digne Le Bains and came to an abrupt halt before a low bridge as John wasn't sure he could get under it. However, a French motorhome behind us said it was OK - and so it was, thank goodness – or it would have been a long drive back to the main road. We arrived at the France Passion site at Les Mees in the late afternoon and were greeted by an elderly man (presumably the owner) who didn't speak a word of English so I had to do my best to converse with him and find out where we had to park the vans. This turned out to be amongst a grove of olive trees, next to a Belgian van, parked neatly in one corner. They were very friendly considering we had shattered their peace and quiet. The owner's wife then came out and told them off for parking the wrong way round which upset them no end! Two more vans had arrived and had to park among the olive trees as there was no more room in the allotted area. Mike and Margaret turned up at the same time and managed to squeeze in beside us at an awkward angle. It had been quite a stressful day and we were all tired, so needed a cup of tea before walking over to the house to meet our hosts. There was a large room given over to the display of local produce e.g. olive oil in a variety of different types of containers, jars of olives, olive mustards, etc., plus apple juices and other products, all very expensive. As we were allowed to park up for the night for free, we felt morally bound to buy something and also make peace with the farmer's wife.

We set off with Mike leading again – but this time he kept stopping to make sure we were following so there could be no more mishaps – with frequent stops to re-coordinate their Sat-Navs - to make sure we were on the right road to St. Romaine and the campsite 'Le Soleil de Provence', where Gordon and Jenny were staying until the end of October. The scenery was magnificent all the way there – huge mountains, rocky gorges, tumbling rivers – reminded me of the Languedoc region - although I think we were in the Haute Provence area. Gordon and Jenny were there to meet us and help us with checking in and place our order for chicken & chips to eat at the café at 7 pm. The weather was gorgeous – so hot - we spent the rest of the day relaxing in the sunshine until it was time to eat. It was good to have a few days respite from the travelling and it was agreed we should go for a bike ride to St Romaine the next day.

Gordon and John went off to fetch some bread for breakfast and then we set off on the bikes to see the Roman remains, reputed to be the largest archaeological site in France – but as it was 8.50 euros each to go in we just looked at what we could see through the railings. We locked the bikes to a post and went off to explore the little town – at the far end we discovered a Roman bridge leading to a walled medieval village, which was fascinating. For a change there were no touristy shops and all the houses looked very peaceful behind shuttered windows. There was one pizza place at the entrance to the village where we thought we might have lunch after looking at the chateau at the top of the hill. However, by the time we had struggled up the steep, stony path to the pile of ruins and admired the view, we returned to find they had finished for the day, so had to make our way back over the bridge where we were welcomed in to a terraced café overlooking the river and the medieval village towering above us. The set meal was 15 euros so as we were all starving by this time we decided to go for it – it was excellent! We had melon and parma ham with salad for a starter, followed by pork casserole and new potatoes, then, even though there was a choice of desserts we chose ice cream to finish which was delicious. We were so full of food and wine it was hard going cycling back up all those hills and negotiating the traffic at the roundabouts was scary! We were so hot by the time we got back to Le Soleil de Provence it would have been nice to have a swim but were too tired to have any more exercise in spite of the gorgeous looking pool. We relaxed until the sun went down and then we joined Gordon, Jenny and their relatives for a drink beside their van.



It was to be another very hot day – the mountains shimmering in the heat haze – Gordon, Jenny and the relations came by later to say 'goodbye' as we were planning to leave that morning. Margaret and Mike walked up to Reception with us where we said our goodbyes, they would be staying on for a while, then returning to the UK at a later date.

It was a long hard slog in the heat towards Lyons – a huge city and so much traffic! We had several glimpses of the wide river Rhone on our way to Lyons but once we had left the motorway we headed into leafy countryside to find the France Passion site at Pommiers (St. Cyr). We did a circuitous route over the vine covered hills before finding the sign we wanted. There are so many vineyards here as it is Beaujolais country. We parked up in the farmyard and were just beginning to wonder if the place was closed when a young man on a tractor came past – fortunately he spoke good English – he was the son of the owner, and showed us where to park and told us to go down to the shop where we could have a free wine tasting. We waited there for a while before his mother came and offered us tastes (half glasses) of two sorts of white wine, a rose, and two sorts of red Beaujolais. We all liked the first white wine best, maybe because we were so thirsty! We each bought two bottles, then went back to the van to eat – we were starving – it had been a long day. Afterwards, we took a walk up to the nearby village and back. It was a clear starlit night and the lights in the distance looked very pretty against the distant mountains - a French couple had arrived next to us in their little van together with a Jack Russell – they were sitting outside also looking at the stars. The two donkeys in the field opposite were gazing in our direction - they were also very quiet and we hoped they would stay that way!

The skies were cloudy as we set off northwards, the sun breaking through by midday. Our next destination was in the Bourgogne region at a campsite in Arnay-le-Duc – a small town with a large lake and a huge campsite ‘Etang du Fouche’. The plots were spacious - plenty of room for John’s van - but too much choice!! We parked by the lake and settled down to have our lunch and then explore the town to find somewhere to eat in the evening. We stopped at a supermarket for supplies, wandered around the town, discovering an ancient turreted building in the centre, but no eating places appeared to be open. After making enquiries we were directed to an hotel called ‘Chef de Camille’ but the basic price of 22 euros for a meal seemed a bit steep, so we decided to head back and cook eggs and bacon. Eric had vanished - we found him talking to a Dutch couple outside another place which had a ‘For Sale’ sign outside – they recommended this place as a good place to eat if we waited until 7 pm when they opened. In the meantime we could go into the bar and have a bottle of the local Bourgogne white wine, which was very good. The chef was drinking in the bar, so, when he disappeared into the kitchen, we went into the restaurant, which looked very nice in spite of the rather off-putting exterior. We ended up paying 17 euros each for a set 4-course meal on the Dutchman’s recommendation, plus another bottle of wine, so it wasn’t a very cheap evening! However, it exceeded all expectations so did not complain. It was called Hotel Dauphine, in case you go there.

I awoke to views of swirling mists over the lake – very atmospheric - so beautiful I had to jump out of bed, with the camera, out onto the path by the lakeside to take some photos, much to the surprise of a lone fisherman, not expecting to see some mad old woman in her pyjamas!. After breakfast we all went for a walk around the lake, which was full of flora and fauna – water-lilies, ducks, dragonflies, buzzards, etc – it took about an hour to do the circuit, then back to sorting out the vans ready for our next leg of the journey and a ‘France Passion’ site at another vineyard - ‘Domaine de Flavigny-Alesia. The nearby village of Flavigny being one of the oldest in France, famous for its Anis bonbons – there is still a factory making them there – and also for the location of the film ‘Chocolat’, although, strangely, they haven’t made anything of it and the old shop used in the film looks empty and neglected (the word ‘chocolat’ had been scrawled in the dust on the window) and we only managed to find it by asking a local woman in the post office, who also pointed out other various landmarks portrayed in the film. We sat at the local hostelry and chatted to an American couple, the topics ranged from places they had visited in the UK, and making comparisons between our two countries such as politics, the immigration and health care afflicting society, until their food arrived and put an end to the discussion. We managed to finish our litre of red wine and wended our wobbly way down the old mule track back to the campsite.

A cold night, but next morning the sun was shining once more - it promised to be another hot day. Barbara and I went over to the vineyard shop to say ‘goodbye’ to Ida Nel, the owner, and buy a couple of bottles as a ‘thank-you’ for letting us stay free of charge (it is actually working out more expensive this way!). She seemed quite a sophisticated person and was obviously busy with her viticulture business, so we weren’t offered a wine tasting. It was getting very hot by the time we left, taking a cross-country route through rolling countryside until we reached the motorway. We finally reached the campsite at St Hilaire de Romilly sur Seine – ‘La Noue de Rois’ – a campsite surrounded by lakes – where we parked on the general ‘play’ area next to a Boules park, picnic tables, table tennis, etc. We brought out the chairs and sat overlooking the lake, relaxing after a long day’s drive. A couple of vans from Finland were parked alongside – they were a long way from home. There was a Creperie restaurant on site, so after a walk around the campsite, which comprises mostly static bungalows, we enjoyed an excellent meal of Galettes ‘Forestier’ – Mushroom, Ham, Cheese & herbs, with a pile of fresh lettuce doused in a very nice dressing. We were overlooked by a large boar’s head attached to the wall, gazing down on us with a doleful expression, which was a bit off-putting. A discussion ensued about the next destination, but we couldn’t concentrate. The next morning, it was time to move on, but the Passion site the men had chosen was closed, so that meant a bit more re-organising of the Sat-Navs to adopt a different route, then a walk around the lake, stopping to talk to some horses and watch a large furry caterpillar who nearly ‘copped it’ when two tractors passed over it – amazingly it was still there in the road curled into a ball.

We had a pleasant drive through Champagne country following the ‘Wine Route’ – the earth is pale with smooth

rounded hills interspersed with chalky white tracks. As we passed through the towns with their ‘Village Fleuri’ signs, there would be evidence of vineyards on the slopes - the larger buildings indicating the makers of Champagne, together with the occasional chateau. There had been a last minute decision to make for the campsite at Epernay, a pleasant location next to a river, but the town itself was rather grim, so we turned around and headed for another ‘Passion’ site in a village called ‘Bouzy’ – very apt considering every other building was a wine producing place! We pulled in through the gates of the Galichet winery and were greeted by a young French woman coming out of the office. She showed us where to park in a large tarmac area in front of the factory, then she directed us to the supermarket on the edge of the town so we could stock up on a few essentials. On our way back we met an English couple who were the owners of the Hobby van we had seen already parked in the yard. They had been caravan owners until they purchased their Hobby motorhome as a result of turning their caravan over on a mountain pass! They told us they had been given a tour of the factory and a tasting of Champagne so, once the shopping was put away, we wandered over to the big shed where a man was busy hosing down the crates. He called out to the girl we had seen before and she came out and gave us a bit of a tour around, showing us the huge cylinders where the wine was fermented before it became Champagne and describing the different sorts of grapes used in the process. Then she took us into a bar area where we tasted two of the Champagnes produced by the company. There were about six in all plus a red wine called ‘Bouzy Red’ which she said was similar to a Beaujolais, but we didn’t get to taste that. There was no sign of a restaurant in the town, in fact, no shops either it seemed apart from the supermarket, and a hairdressers, plus a large church and a bakery (which was shut) so we sat outside on the tarmac and chatted to the other Hobby owners, then went inside to cook our supper - there was definitely an autumnal feel to the air.

We were woken early by the sound of the huge metal gates opening and the sound of lorries coming and going. We set off just after 10 am heading across country through field upon field of vines as far as the eye could see – the name of Moet-et-Chandon signifying the owners – in fact the factory had been opposite where we had stayed the previous night. After several miles of vineyards, the terrain became more agricultural, light gold-coloured earth undulating into the distance. We passed through several villages and towns advertising their connection to Champagne wines until we joined the motorway and headed north towards Maubeuge, We pulled in at the Municipal site ‘Clair de Lune’ not far from the Belgian border. It was warm and sunny and we were starving – it was 3 pm and we were desperate for our lunch - so this was the first priority as soon as we were settled in. The men wanted to explore the town but Barbara and I both wanted to relax, we had had enough of rushing about so we all had a game of boules – the pitch was just behind our van – it was good fun and we enjoyed ourselves.



It was our last day before catching the ferry back to the UK and a 100-mile drive to Dunkirk, arriving in warm sunshine at ‘Camping des Dunes’, it was a pleasant site surrounded by static bungalows with the odd motorhome squeezed in here and there. There was a large ‘aire; just up the road where we could have stayed for free but it is just a large car park with facilities for motorhomes and caravans in the centre of a housing estate. We set off for a walk across the dunes to the huge sandy beach – the sea was just about visible as a thin blue line on the horizon. There were a number of sand yachts racing about which looked quite colourful, all handled by youngsters who were part of an organised group. We left the beach and wandered along the little promenade beside the river and found the Café ‘Le 116’ where we had an enjoyable meal and an excellent bottle of wine – a pleasant finale to our 3,000+ mile trip. The next morning we caught the 8 am ferry back to Dover and made our separate ways home.

List of Campsites:

Germany:	Rudesheim – Campingplatz am Rhein	Cost for 2 people
Bavaria:	Kipfenberg – Azur Camping Altmuhtal	21.30 euros per night
Slovenia:	Camping Bled – Lake Bled	47.60 euros for 2 nights
	(Caves) Autocamp Jama	20 euros per night + 3 euros tourist fee
Austria:	Salzburg - Panorama Camping	14 euros per night + 2.02 tourist fee
Italy:	Venice – Camping Fusina	26 euros per night
	Lake Garda – Camping Cisano	55.80 euros for 2 nights
	Liguria - Camping Baciccia	15.00 euros per night
France:	Cote d’Azur – Les Castells ‘ La Vielle Ferme Camping’	20 euros per night
	Provence – Le Soleil de Provence (Saint Romaine en Viennois)	38.78 euros for 2 nights
	Arnay Le Duc – Camping d’Etang de Fouche	35.60 euros for 2 nights
	Maubeuge – Camping Municipal de ‘Clair de Lune’	15.60 euros per night
	Gravelines (nr Dunkirk) – Camping des Dunes	14.55 euros per night
		???
<u>France Passion Sites:</u> (Free)	Les Mees (Olive Farm), Haute Provence; Vineyards:Saint Cyr & Domaine de Flavigny, Alesia, Remy Galichet, (Champagne), Bouzy	