

FRENCH HOUSE & CAMPING Aug 09

Saturday 29 August

9.30 am ferry from Newhaven to Dieppe, not sure if we will have a speeding ticket waiting for us back home as Rick was distracted trying to figure out where he had put the key to the box on top of the car. It was a pleasant journey from Dieppe to St. Ellier. Carrouges was absolutely packed as they had some sort of fete with bumper cars and a kiddies ride set up in the square. It was like a huge Car Boot Sale with stalls set up all over the town selling absolute rubbish like old toys, clothes, books, records. Shopped at the local supermarket for a few essentials, most things were out of date. All looks well at the house in St Ellier except that the kitchen floor has dropped a lot and the back door at the top of the staircase has also dropped making it difficult to shut. After unpacking we headed off back to Carrouges for a meal, unfortunately Madam Vidu seems to have retired and they haven't managed to sell the restaurant yet. The only half decent place to eat was at the hotel opposite La Poste where we had the set meal for 16 euros each. Got back to the car and disaster, no lights!!! Rick thought it was no good calling out the AA late on a Saturday night as the garages wouldn't be open until Monday morning. We had a bit of a scary journey back through the windy road to St Ellier with Rick well over the limit and driving on his hazard lights only.

Sunday 30 August

We were at a bit of a loose end as it wasn't worth starting any jobs until we get back from our camping trip. Nothing seems to be going right with this holiday. Decided to have a lazy day. The garden is looking OK and has some scabby pears and lots of hazelnuts that aren't quite ready. Stuffed ourselves with cheese and pate and then had roast chicken and lots to drink in the evening.

Monday 31 August

The AA chap couldn't fix the lights and as soon as we settled Sarah and Nick in we headed for the Landrover dealer in Lisieux. They couldn't trace the fault either and the AA organised a taxi to take us into the Best Western very near the cathedral in Lisieux. Had a quick look around the town, stopped for a drink and after freshening up opted for a meal in the restaurant next to the hotel. There's a circus in town with lions, tigers, horses and elephants. I would have loved to have gone but all those animals would have started Rick's asthma off.



Tuesday 1 September

The town is devoted to Saint Therese of Lisieux who was canonized in 1925. We followed the blue line that led us to all the historical sites. The Basilica was most impressive and Saint Therese's family home was interesting. It was well after lunch, chilly and had started to rain and still no news from the garage. We were feeling a bit miserable and at a loose end as we had done all the sights and were without transport. Late afternoon the call we had been waiting for came in and we were taxied once again to the garage, we got away fairly lightly as the repair only cost 115 euros. We were off on our camping expedition at last!! Our first night was spent at a municipal site by the canal in Courville s-Eure, it was only 7.3 euros. We had an ok meal in one of the restaurants, it

seems as at home, none of the restaurants are very busy and in a small town only one or two of them are open in the evening.



Basilica at Lisieux

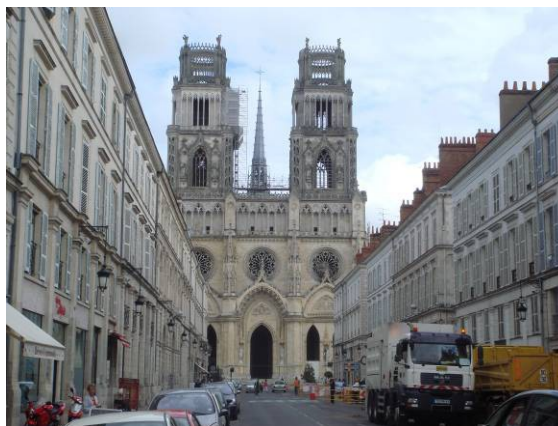


This area is famous for its half timbered buildings

Wednesday 2 September



Chartres Cathedral



Orleans Cathedral

It rained in the night and it was almost 11am before we set off for Chartres as Rick wanted to dry the tent before he set about wrestling with it whilst trying to put it away. The main tent pole has cracked already which is a bit much have we have only used it twice in the garden, once in Bridham and one other night. I suppose all Rick's practicing at getting the twisting right when putting it away couldn't have helped much. He had a panic attack in the night when he open the car and an alarm bleeping sound started up but he managed to stop it before waking the whole campsite up. Chartres Cathedral was just as impressive as I had imagined with a glorious collection of stain glass that is world renowned. On to Orleans and another cathedral and busy town. I have come to the conclusion I don't like big towns, they are too noisy and busy and not at all relaxing, also there is the hassle of trying to find somewhere to park. We needed to find a campsite nearby and settled on the municipal site at Briare (11 euros), very similar to the previous night, next to a canal and a pretty town. Once again nothing much was open, the holiday season seems to conclude at the end of August but the campsites are open until mid September.



Thursday 3 September



It rained again during the night and although the tent didn't leak and there wasn't that awful tent smell and all the insects that go with it I have to admit I am a bit fed up with the camping lark. We can't seem to set off much before 11am each morning and today we headed for Pouilly-s Loire which didn't seem very exciting so straight across the river to Sancerre. The scenery was more of what I was expecting and Sancerre was just lovely. We did a bit of wine tasting and bought a few bottles for Rick's birthday in November. Then we had the most enjoyable meal so far as all we have been offered in other towns is steak or pizza and chips. A goat's cheese salad with a wonderful dressing hit the mark and of course it was helped by all the Sancerre wine I guzzled. Just outside Sancerre I saw the best thing ever, a field of summer annual flowers. For years I have been trying to do that at home but without success. Rick took my photo but I am getting middle aged and fat and didn't do justice to all the beautiful colours.



Next stop the fantastic Chateau de Chambord, the Loire's largest Chateau and the brainchild of the extravagant Francois I and thought to have been designed by Leonardo da Vinci. This is what France is all about. We stayed at a campsite nearby at Bracieux (15 euros), very nice but once again it rained during the night. As we arrived at the campsite quite late Rick only had time to pop the tent up. Big, big panic when we returned from the restaurant as he couldn't find the key to the box on

top of the car where our sleeping mattresses, bags and pillows were. He tried the usual one of trying to blame me but he is slow getting going in the mornings, and I frustrate him by wanting to get off, so he insists I keep well away from the packing up routine. I surprised myself by keeping calm and thinking perhaps we may have to sleep in the car. Lucky, lucky Rick he eventually found them under a box in the car. The sleeping bit in the tent is okay but I don't like having to get undressed in the shower blocks. It's basic and there are spiders everywhere and the toilets don't have seats or toilet paper.



The fabulous Chateau du Chambord

Friday 4 September



Rick was determined not to be put off by the rain

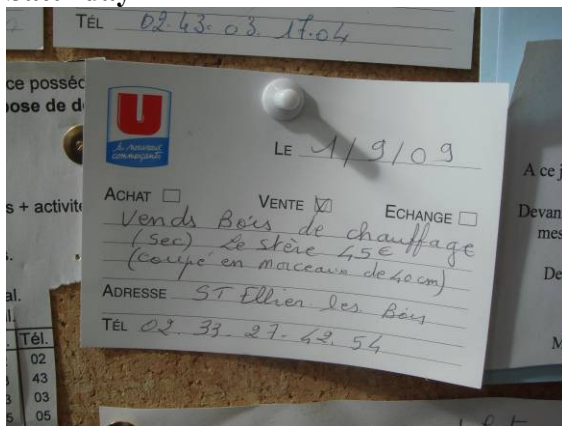


Le Mont St Michel

It rained in the night again and Rick has been using one of our towels to wipe up the wet to shorten the drying time. I have had enough of camping and Nick and Sarah mentioned that as they had an early crossing Saturday morning they thought they might stay the final night in Cherbourg, so perhaps we could head for home. I pestered Rick to text them to find out what they were doing. Their reply didn't come until after lunch and they decided they were going to have a lazy day as they had an early start the next morning. Damn, I wanted to go back to the house even though it's a bit like camping there at least its dry. I was really pissed off but Rick was trying to remain positive and said lets head for Le Mont St Michel. Well that's miles away and if he is prepared to drive that far then I will go along with it. I have to say that our first view of Le Mont was very impressive. We couldn't stay long as the tide was due to come in at 6.30 pm and flood the car park. Gosh it was windy, my hair blew all over the place and I couldn't see a thing. It was very touristy but I loved it and was secretly hoping that Rick would say "let's blow our money and stay the night here and eat in a lovely restaurant" but he didn't. I had a real craving for Fruits de Mer and we looked for a campsite nearby but couldn't decide what to do. Rick had been driving nearly all day but we looked at the map and thought we would head for Antrain but when we arrived there was a diversion out of the town and it was yet another dead place. Rick found the municipal campsite, it was windy, cold and on a slope with no hot water and I would have had to share the shower block with the men although we would have been the only ones on the site. Carry on driving Rick and he

did and ended up at the town of Fougères that had a castle and Chateau. The municipal campsite warden booked us into his favourite restaurant. I had been persuaded by Rick to camp and spend the hotel money on a lovely meal instead. The restaurant was empty when we arrived but the toilets were fantastic all black sparkling marble, very modern and best of all they had a toilet seat and soft paper. I could have sat there all night but didn't want to miss my gastronomic feast.

Saturday



It actually didn't rain in the night but it was chilly and I didn't like the shower block as I had to share with the men and they were peeing in those funny looking sinks as I passed by onto my way to the showers. I have definitely had enough of camping, I have a sore throat and four of my nails have broken. I asked Rick what he would like to do and surprisingly he said "lets get back to St Ellier". Never have I been so pleased to see the house. Nick and Sarah left a lovely note of thanks, a DVD and lots of goodies in the fridge. The bed is not good as the struts keep giving away. I don't mind too much as I like to sleep in the foetus position and fit into the dip nicely. Rick thinks he can fix it by covering the base with plywood. The tent is up in the lounge drying out. He loves it here especially as it is so quiet although the couple with the black wife have a baby who cries quite a lot. Our English neighbour Gaby who is married to Yves has lost a bit of weight and started to dress a bit more trendy. They now have the internet 25 euros a month (ours is about £12) and her daughter Mel using Skype to contact her boyfriend in Brisbane.

Sunday



Gaby has a bad tummy and Yves says that the chap selling the wood will only sell a minimum of 6 cubic metres (45 euros cm x 6 = 170 euros less 90 euros from Gaby) that's still a lot of wood and a lot of money. Where will we store it all, however, it ensured that I cleaned out the garage. Rick was busy cleaning and clearing out Le cave, not much of that beetle infested wood left thank

goodness. I am also making use of the new washing machine and washing everything in sight, the floor is vibrating like mad. George and Caroline have bought a new iron and ironing board so we are well equipped in the laundry department. Rick cut the grass on the plot in the village as the couple who were renting Susan and Louis place have scarpered and everything is all overgrown. We went to the Brico Depot and bought some Acro Props to help sort out the kitchen floor.

I made a scrumptious beef stew and we had a night off the booze resulting in Rick suddenly coming to life and doing all sorts of jobs. Someone had broken the plug in the bathroom and although Rick had replaced the broken part he thought he should replace the bit further down but this lead to all sorts of complications. Watched episode 1 of Black Adder.

Monday



The sunrise was just amazing. We think the church warden has died or moved on as his house is empty. There are quite a few children in the village now but nothing else, we don't even think that the bread van comes now. Missing breakfast TV a bit but am reading loads. Rick only had to replace the plug but now the bathroom is full of kitchen towel some of which is covered in his blood. Now the sink is having to be dismantled and what was a simple job has turned into something major. Spent ages in Le Cave positioning the Acro Props, it's quite exciting seeing the floor rise.

It got really hot, really hot when we went to Alencon stopping first at McDonalds to sort out our internet then onto Brico Depot to buy some more Acro Props and wood etc. We had salmon and salad with loads to drink again, did a Codeword together and watched another Black Adder episode. Another slat in my bed gave way so we will have to do something about it fairly soon.

Tuesday



It's a hot, hot day Gaby says it is to be the hottest day of the year and most of it was spent in Le Cave. Gaby is soon going to have to say goodbye to a gorgeous Retriever dog that she has looked

after for two years as it is to become a guide dog for a needy person. Rick spent ages greasing the acro props and then we had to re-site them balanced on a piece of wood as he thought it would make it easier to adjust them. As the floor rose so did the tiles by the front door and when Rick removed them he found that the beam below was rotten. Unfortunately, so were the stairs to Le Cave, I kept saying he would have to do something about them as someone was bound to break their neck. Fortunately, when the stairs gave way Rick managed to save himself but it could have been a very different story. One job leads to another!!!! Now Rick has to re tile the bit by the back door and sort out the front door and rebuild the staircase. Went to the Tresorerie Alencon to once again try to sort out the direct debits for the taxes. Success at last, the problem has been that they have an incorrect bank account number for us. There is only one bill now not on DD and that is the Consummation (waste) and it's not possible to do that yet. Another trip to Brico Depot and stopped at the supermarket on the way to buy a few extras, like a clothes dryer, chopping board, garlic crusher, potato peeler, knife sharpener, tray – this is beginning to sound like The Generation Game. I am feeling completely useless, everything I try to do needs Rick's input and that is why I am catching up with my diary,

Wednesday



Rick got going early as he was anxious to start rebuilding the stairs. Everything he touches is rotten, he propped the kitchen cupboard up and now those doors don't shut either. We keep thinking how lucky we were that the stairs gave way whilst we were here and someone didn't have a nasty accident. I've come over all domestic and have washed the bedroom curtains and finished labelling up the linen. The pine coffee table I bought has gone all mouldy so I gave that a scrub and moved it into the kitchen and Rick repaired the leg on the other coffee table. I raked up all the hay in the garden further down the village. I have set up a table and chairs either side of the house and we use the one by the garage in the morning and the other by the kitchen in the afternoons. Made another beef stew and started watching Dans La Vallee D'Elah DVD.

Thursday



What's this, another 'ole

Ze 'ole is getting bigger I am not sure if I 'ave ze right tool

Rick's battery has run out of his screwdriver and he didn't bring the charger with him. He found an old battery drill of Don's and spent most of the morning taking it apart and trying to fix it. He finished off repairing the stairs and I scraped about 100 years of dirt and grime off the old ones. I filled in the kitchen door and had another go at taking the paint off one of the bedroom windows. I felt a mess so had a shower, washed my hair, cut my remaining nails, put some make-up on and finished off with a clean set of clothes. Can't do anything for the rest of the day now as I don't want to get dirty again. We took all the rubbish to the tip and after lunch went to Alencon to look at Point P, a building materials supplier (not very good), fill up with petrol, got a few essentials and paid another visit to Brico Depot for more bits. Rick went with Yves to have a look at the wood and then we cooked veal in a cream and mushroom sauce and finished watching the film. It's one of those where you can't quite make out what they are saying and it was difficult to follow.

Friday



All boarded up and ready to be levelled



Can you spot Rick at the back of the new woodpile?

Gaby and Yves have the same problem as us with a dipping floor, Yves said that one fix is to take up all the tiles and fill the floor with concrete but I am not sure if the rotten wood is strong enough to support that sort of weight. Four trailer loads of wood arrived and we stacked it in the garage. The first was the hardest to unload as we had to bend down to stack it. It's quite dry and will probably burn quickly but it's cut into decent lengths and we don't have time to sort out an alternative supplier. It's a fantastic woodpile but we need to burn the rest of the beetle infested wood first. Rick's been busy replacing the step to the cellar and levelling the floor under the tiles by the front door. I cleared all the briars along the wall in the garden after which I had to wash my hair again and lay on the bed with pure exhaustion. Went to Pre en Pail to check out the restaurants. Just missed the supermarket as it closed at 7pm. We were a bit disappointed with the restaurant, not too much choice and it was 35 euros for steak and chips, salmon and chips and half a carafe of house wine. We have been spoilt cooking at the house and I think its back to Carrouges and the set meal in the hotel. Another slat in my bed has given way, I am having to sleep almost curled up in a ball. Vodafone's summer promotion of free roaming ended at the end of August but Rick received a strange text which made him think they were extending the promotion, however after a call to customer services this didn't seem so. I have started to need contact with the outside world and have been in full flow with calls to England. Another slat on my bed gave way, Rick really must do something about it or I will have to bring some divans with us next time.

Saturday



We have agreed to call this the “back door” and the one in the kitchen the “front door”

I can't believe that my arms aren't dropping off after all that wood stacking yesterday. I've washed the inside of the windows and all the paintwork and rubbed down the paintwork in the toilet. Rick screwed a bit of plywood to the back door to hold it together and we can now open and shut it without too much trouble. I filled it in and gave it an undercoat, it doesn't look too bad. Rick took some tiles from under the kitchen units to make up for the ones that had broken by the back door. The dreaded woodworm has found its way into Don's sawbench. What has happened with the floor by the door in the kitchen is that the steps outside have holes in them and have been letting in water which over the years has made the beam in Le Cave rotten, hence the floor sinking. As usual we are going to run out of time but perhaps we will come again for a few nights in October and Rick can fill in all along the bottom of the building and cement the gulley's to stop the water running into Le Cave. Rick ran out of tile cement with 4 tiles to go and it was back to Alencon for more supplies, not so bad as it did include beer. Gaby and Yves had invited us round for aperitifs at 6.30pm. Rick just finished the tiling at 6.45pm and got ready in record time but guess what they weren't in!!! She disappeared the other night when Rick went with Yves to look at the wood and they had to ask Melissa, the daughter to translate. Had a brilliant meal, who needs to eat out: prawns in garlic and steak with garlic mushroom and baked potato and of course finished off with loads of smelly French cheese, oh I forgot much too much gin, wine and Crème de Cassis. Rick's fixed my bed, I'll let you know if it holds out.

Sunday



Someone shared my bed last night and it wasn't Rick, I woke up this morning with a rash around my middle and under my boobs. I am still sleeping in the dip as Rick's fix on my bed didn't last out the night. Le Cave is drying out nicely. We bought a huge tin of woodworm killer, 73 euros worth but it's different from the last tin as it is more of a gel and not so easy to spray. Today Rick is spraying the linen cupboard, the stairs and a few odd bits including his ladder that the worm has burrowed into. You have to spray each area three times with an hour in-between each go. I wanted him to repair the bit of ceiling at the top of the cellar stairs. We went into the loft to see if he could reach it from there and had a good look at the effect of the movement on the roof. Rick is thinking

of a way to stop it going any further, perhaps some steel brackets. It's not really practical to replace the windows up there until we stop the movement. The loft floor is terrible, it would cost about £550 to replace the floor boards with chipboard, and we would also need some insulation. On reflection replacing the floor may not be a bad idea as is such a large area that it would cost quite a lot for the woodworm treatment. Rick is finding that it doesn't go very far. I gave the front door two coats of stain, gave the back door a second coat and cleaned up the cellar and the workshop. Monsieur next door to Gaby who drives the school bus is very friendly but doesn't make any allowance for our lack of the language. I met him when I was getting rid of the bottles and rubbish and he prattled on at a rate of knots, kept smiling then shook my hand. I was relieved he didn't kiss me as like most French men he has bad teeth. It's not cheap in France anymore, I can't think of anything we have found cheaper than at home, more like the other way round. Had aperitif round Gaby and Yves and looked at some old photos of St. Ellier, in 1811 the population was nearly 1000 and now it is 290 with 50 children under 12. There used to be two schools, one for the girls and another for the boys. There was a post office, a notary, numerous cafes, bakers, electricians, Epicerie and a Tabac. Gaby's house was two houses, one for notary and the other for his secretary. Martin and Sue's was once an inn and then a tabac. We looked at some books on Carrouges and the surrounding villages but unfortunately there weren't any photos of our house but a couple of Sue and Martins. The property next to our garden has been sold. For a while it wasn't popular to live in the French countryside but that now seems to be changing. The vicar or church warden who lived opposite is now in a Rest Home as he fell over and wasn't looking after himself properly. He is 97 and what we would call the vicarage has been very neglected over the past few years. He tended to live in a few rooms and everything was piled up with books and cobwebs, The vicarage is owned by the village and they are considering making it into two apartments (apparently there is a demand for them) or a Gite. The village already own a Gite and it is very popular. Gaby doesn't seem too keen on Martine whose brother lives in the house next to Gaby, he's the one that drives the school bus, shakes hands, bad teeth but good neighbour. Martine doesn't get on with him and according to Gaby didn't visit her mother very often, if at all whilst she was living with him. On the other hand we know that Daniel is very sick and in a wheelchair and must take a lot of looking after. Unfortunately, just after Madam Vidu retired she contracted cancer and has recently died which is such a great shame as like many others she didn't get a chance to enjoy her retirement. If we die tomorrow I can honestly say we have done as much as we can although Rick will probably say that I keep giving him too many jobs and he still hasn't any time to relax. Another great meal, pork chops, courgettes, tomatoes and baked potato. The grill is too fiddly so we resorted to the George Foreman. Back home tomorrow and the start of a big, big diet.

Monday

We are hoping to come to the house again from Thursday October 15th until Monday 19th. I have done a price and time comparison from Climping. We will probably take the Newhaven/Dieppe route again, however, the Dover/Boulogne route looks interesting but that is taking the fast boat and that may not run in October. There are no ferries from Portsmouth to Cherbourg in the winter starting from October.

Climping to	No of Miles	Journey Time	Ferry Time	To St Ellier	No of Kms	Journey Time	Total Time	Cost £
Dover	118	2.10	1.5	Calais	379	3.50	7.4	£65
Dover	118	2.10	1.0	Boulogne	347	3.33	6.43	£55
Newhaven	37	.54	4.0	Dieppe	226	2.37	7.31	£78
Portsmouth	30	.42	6.0	Caen	101	1.31	8.13	£140
Portsmouth	30	.42	3.15	Le Havre	104	2.15	5.5	£88.2

Rick thinks he has sussed the problem with the roof and he can't wait to try it out. I hope you have

enjoyed our trip to France.