

FRENCH HOUSE/MOTORHOME OCTOBER 2012

Tuesday 16 October 2012

Our LD Lines Newhaven Ferry didn't depart our waters until 10am which gave us a somewhat leisurely start from usual. It was a beautiful, chilly, sunny day but the crossing was little choppy. The motorway toll was just over 20 euros and we got to the house about 6pm French time. Donald, Helen and some friends had only been there a week before to celebrate Paula's 60th birthday so everything was spick and span. I made a spaghetti bolognese and we toasted our well earned break from Rick's pond and my wooding.

Wednesday 17 October 2012

It rained all day. The heated towel rail is well and truly knackered which is disappointing as we have had ours at home for years with no problems. We decided that it's a priority to have warm, dry towels and set off to Alencon for a replacement. Rick spent ages fixing it, mainly because he didn't have the right tools and it was difficult to get a fixing on the hollow wall. There was a great deal of swearing, huffing and puffing. I escaped by weeding the gravel front and back and got completely covered in mud and soaked. The trouble is that as we haven't been earlier in the year it has had a chance to seed and really needs some weedkiller. The heavy rain was frustrating as we really wanted to cut the grass on the patch down the road. Rick was really grumpy, I suggested he just rest as he has been working very hard at home but no, he then decides to try to sort the satellite out. He had the dish propped up on a ledge in the attic and was in the lounge fiddling with the television when there was a crash followed by more swearing, huffing and puffing. The dish had fallen out of the window and the plastic parts had broken off. Another really annoying thing is that Gaby has secured her internet which also frustrated Rick no end. We had a lovely supper of chicken with mushrooms in a cream sauce with savoury rice. Rick's worried that the towel rail is much more powerful than the last one and will use too much electricity. It has a two hour cut off button and if you put it on when you get up it should last to warm the towels, for the showers and to dry the wet towels.

Thursday 18 October 2012



It was still raining as we set off towards the Midi Pyrenees and Alan. We took the fast route and paid just over 20 euros from Alencon to Tours and then 2 euros a short while later. Drove 300 kms and found a site open in Chateauroux. It seems most of the sites close mid October but we knew there was a Aire for 5 motorhomes next to Camping du Rochat. Fortunately the main site was open so we had electric and internet for 20 euros. The rain had stopped and it was a pleasant 21 degrees as we walked around the marvellous park and lake. Parts of it were for fishing but there was also a man made beach where you could swim. Rick's mood had improved a lot despite when changing his calendar view on his phone he lost all his text messages. Perhaps it is because we were enjoying prawns, followed by salmon washed down with a bottle of Sancerre. Spent the rest of the evening booking flights to Tenerife.

Friday 19 October 2012

Woke up in the middle of the night in a dreadful panic, I think I have double booked our November flight to Tenerife but the trouble is I can't check as all the paperwork and emails are at home. Woke Rick up to tell him which didn't go down too well but the frustrating thing is that I really can't remember if I had booked it before. I do remember complaining to Jen when I Face-Timed her last evening that we had missed the Monarch sale and that the flights had gone up quite a bit since I last looked. She did say that surely I would have booked the

November flights by now. Then it came to me that I was supposed to be booking the January flights. We emailed Monarch when we got up and will have to wait and see what happens, I may have also double-booked the car park.

After feeding the ducks we set off about 10.30 am and did a quick stop at the local Le Clerc. It was a long, long journey 370 kms with one stop for lunch, most of it was motorway with 16.10 euros in tolls. The weather is much improved and was quite warm by the time we arrived at Milhars. Alan has settled in well. The evening was spent in Saint Antonin at a quaint little cinema watching "The Campaign". There were only a handful of others there but it was an enjoyable comedy and Rick didn't fall asleep once. Before the film we had quick walk around the town but will have a better look on Sunday. We were a bit put off by the enormous dollop of dog poo just outside the cinema entrance.

Saturday 20 October 2012



Even though showers were forecasted we set off on our bicycles to the market at Baren passing through the village of Lexos where there was a grand but disused railway station. We're a bit out of practice and the legs and bums were feeling the strain. Baren is a small village with a Post Office, Boulangerie, Pharmacy, Epicerie and Doctors. We had a look around the Saturday market where Alan bought a few supplies and then we sat in a cafe and had a coffee and brandy. During lunch we sat on Alan's porch admiring the view.. When he moved in during July he was surrounded by field of sunflowers and sweetcorn. He looks across the fields down to the river and has mountains in the background. Then it was off to see Bruno at the local vineyard for a bit of wine tasting and to top up the supplies. It was a bit of a day for exercise because later we walked off the brandies, lunchtime drinks and wine tasting by going for an hour and a half in the woods near Alan's. That evening we met up with Marion and Digby, two ex-police officers who Alan bought his house from. We went to the local cafe/restaurant, La Segelar which was busy. It's great to see places busy, a bit different from Carrouges. We had a great day and I even managed to forget about my Monarch double booking for while.



The disused Railway Station at Lexos



Rick outside Alan's

Sunday 21 October 2012

Lovely warm weather for exploring Saint Antonin's bustling market. Rick was very curious about the small oak barrels that were for sale and thought it was something he would like to make. He googled it when we got back - *"Take a 5 foot girth tree at least one hundred years old"*, not too sure that he will fulfil that ambition. Had a

long lunch and wasn't much good for anything after but we did manage a walk around the field. Alan has about 3 acres which includes part of a field that he lets a local farmer cultivate. Most of the garden around his house is lawn but really dandelions, it's difficult to get a decent lawn here as the soil is stony and it gets very hot in the summer. His first major purchases have been a sit on mower and gas barbecue. His house is a converted stone barn and he has some local English builders re-pointing it although it has never been pointed and it was a bit draughty when he stayed there last winter. The barn has been converted nicely with two bedrooms with en-suites, a utility room and a lounge/office on the ground floor. You go up some wooden steps to the Veranda where he sits most of the time and into the lounge/kitchen. He also has the main bedroom and bathroom on this floor. There are high ceilings with beams and wooden or tiled floors everywhere. He has digital television so we were able to watch the results shows for Strictly Come Dancing, XFactor and we were also able to enjoy another episode of Downton Abbey. Once again we have been lucky with the weather as it got quite hot late afternoon.



Saint Antonin



The cat seems to know that Rick is allergic

Monday 22 October 2012



Capitoleum (Toulouse Town Hall)



Cathedral

It was my turn to be grumpy today as I am still trying to get to the bottom of why our French Taxes have doubled. Rick tried my patience; I snapped and put him in a bad mood all day. We took the train at Lexos to Toulouse. Alan has a Senior Rail Card which also entitled us to 25% off and I think we paid about 29 euros each for the hour train journey. I don't know if you can get it cheaper by booking ahead like we do at home but generally everything apart from houses seems more expensive here. The station at Toulouse is a grand building and just outside we watched a boat on the canal-de-midi coming through the lock. The mist cleared and it turned out quite warm again so we sat in the main square opposite the Capitoleum and had a lovely lunch while we people watched. There was a looney directing traffic and gesticulating to everyone who passed. He seemed to be well known and accepted by most passers by. When we got back Alan showed us around the house opposite him. It is a holiday home for a British family and it was really interesting as there were similarities with our Normandy house. Marion and Digby originally bought that house, Alan's barn and the land that came with it for about £180K. At first they lived in the house while the barn was being converted. Nothing has been done to the ground floor which is where the animals would have lived in days gone past. The electric wasn't on and the shutters were closed so it was difficult to see much on the first floor but this was where the kitchen and bedrooms were. It had been converted quite basically but the interesting thing was that they had a staircase exactly the same as we are hoping to put in that led to the loft. Their loft was about the same size as ours and

they were using it as a lounge with a wooden floor and log burner. Central heating had been installed downstairs. The loft didn't have as much light as ours. The garden was on the side of a hill with pathways leading to the top where they had an above ground swimming pool.

Tuesday 23 October 2012



Had a brilliant result with Monarch, they refunded my duplicate booking in full and didn't even take off an admin charge. I can now sleep again at night. Rick was chatting to the men working on Alan's pointing and they said that they go on fishing holidays and last time they caught a 57 pound carp! We were back on A20 heading for an Aire in the fortified town of Uzerche which is perched on the top of a hill. Throughout the 16th to 18th centuries local nobility built their grand houses with turrets and towers so there was lots to see as it has an exceptional historic heritage. The Aire was by the river next to "Le Petit Gare" where there were toilets. It must be the best free Aire we have seen as there was even free electricity, fantastic scenery and it was really warm, 22.5 degrees late afternoon. After exploring the town we walked for an hour along one side of the river where they had a small beach for launching the canoes and then over a bridge and through the woods on the other side of the river back to the motorhome. As there were quite a few restaurants we thought we would eat out. The first restaurant was full and they directed us to another a couple of minutes away. We got a table but eventually this one was full too, being off season who would have thought that. Uzerche is definitely worth a visit.



Wednesday 24 October 2012

Rick decided to take the motorway for our two hour drive through the Auvergne region. We drove over some enormous viaducts that were so high that it made you feel giddy looking down into the valleys below. It appeared much drier than the Midi Pyrenees as the grass was yellow and the trees were more advanced in their Autumn colours. It was a definite change of scenery as we could see the extinct volcanoes in the distance. We had opted for an Aire in St Pardoux that was in a remote, rural location by a lake. For some reason Rick was reluctant to buy his pain in Uzerche before we left as he said there would be plenty of places to stop on the way. Most Boulangerie's close at 12.30 and I don't see too many on the motorways! We enjoyed our lunch sitting in the sun by the lake with Rick having to make do with my rice cakes. A man and his small son came along to fish but otherwise there was just the sounds of nature. After lunch we cycled into the village, it was mostly an

uphill struggle and we were left breathless at times. We had to wait half an hour for the Boulangerie to open at 4.30pm and there wasn't really much to see in the village. A Frenchman with an American accent invited us to a meeting of ex pats in nearby Clermont-Ferrand but they are held on Tuesdays. We had bypassed Clermont-Ferrand which is the principal town and only 15 kms from the Plateau de Gergovie and where we could have also visited Vulcanian a centre that helps explain the awe inspiring landscape of the volcanic park. We will have to make sure we do that on our next visit. Quite a bit of time was spent today on consulting our Aire book to plan our journey back to St Ellier. We think we may try to avoid the motorway tomorrow to give us a more interesting, although longer drive to the next Aire.



Another motor home arrived with a British couple who won't be returning home until March. I am hoping Rick won't get any ideas of doing something similar. He is making us camp "au naturelle" as it is when there is electric to be had here for only two euros! This is forcing us to slow down, no Internet, computers or television; it's also a no drinking day for me. However, Rick is wishing he had brought some cigars and his painting equipment with him. He is occupying himself by using his mobile phone to do Sudoku's so not much has changed.

Thursday 25 October 2012



We couldn't believe it but another van arrived about 9pm last night, they must have known about the site as it's so remote being up a 1.5 km track. He turned out to be a Dutch Maths, Physics and Chemistry teacher and they were visiting one of his students. Rick was impressed as they had LPG adapters for every European country - boys talk. It was so much more interesting avoiding the motorways. Rick had a dodgy tummy though. Alistair sent us shocking news that Ian West died yesterday. Today we are staying in Bourges, unfortunately still no electricity. A funny Frenchman on a bike kept asking us questions, how old are we, something about the Queen. I couldn't understand a word he said but he was insistent and kept laughing all the time. We cycled into the historic part of the town; it was really good with lots of interesting shops and an amazing Cathedral. It had an astronomic clock that was designed in 1424, it's intricate mechanism was a scientific marvel of the 15 century and had a margin or error of only one second per 150 years!. Apart from telling the time it included the rising and setting of the sun, the phases of the moon and the current monthly zodiac sign. We then cycled along the canal and round a huge lake, about 10 kms in total. Had an email from Tony to say that Ian had died of

Pancreatic Cancer after a very short illness. The details were not good and we shall miss him calling in for coffee and a good gossip. Had a chat to the girl next to us staying in a 60 year old Carson caravan, she sells traditional nugget at the markets and, tomorrow she is off to Toulouse.

Friday 26 October 2012



Weather has cooled down to 12 degrees. Drove to Amboise which is near Tours. On the way there were lots of black, life size silhouettes of men along the verges. At first we thought they were warnings about the verges, and then there was a notice that said how many people had been killed along that stretch of road, very sobering. We are not sure whether to stay on the chosen site as it looked a little bleak with only one other motorhome and it's such a grey day and cost 10 euros. Quite a few Aires now take a 2euro token for 4 hours electricity. This was an automated municipal site with unlimited electricity next to a pay site with lots of facilities that was closed for the winter. Everything needed charging up so we decided to stay as it was on an island in the middle of the town. We cycled over the bridge spanning the River Loire and visited the royal chateau, quite good but have seen better. Once again the town was surprising as it had lots of restaurants and interesting shops, it's obviously very busy during the tourist season. Earlier Rick had bought a bottle of Saint-Croix-Du-Mont for 5 euros 50 whereas as a couple of years ago we stayed at the vineyard and paid 10 euros and it didn't travel well as some of it was off. I personally think that the wine tasting at the vineyards is a con. Anyway back to the campsite, it had started to fill up. We played cards and had intended to eat out but it was chilly outside but lovely and cosy in the motorhome. We could rustle up something to eat and had plenty to drink and could also save ourselves about 60 euros so it was a done deal to stay in. We have these tins of corned beef hash bought from the pound shop a couple of years ago to use up. The Saint-Croix is a desert wine but we found a bottle of Chateau Peyrabon 2000 in the drawer which will suit us nicely. Rick thrashed me at almost every game of rummy and said his Corn Beef Hash was a little below standard !!!

Saturday 27 October 2012



It was a bright, cold morning as we left Amboise for St Ellier but it changed to heavy rain as we approached the village. Oh dear, we wanted Julie and Douglas to see the house in the sunshine even if it might be freezing cold. Just as we were approaching the house we passed a tractor that covered the motorhome in mud, there was mud everywhere. Julie, Douglas and Beenie had settled in but were looking a bit cold and said they couldn't believe it but it had actually snowed that morning. It was strange as Julie hadn't straightened her hair and it looked just like mine. Then I started to pack away my shopping and Julie and I had done an almost identical shop. Rick thought he would have another go at fixing the satellite ariel and after giving up with the loft he tried it out

across the road by the Epicerie. Meanwhile Douglas was given the job of shouting out the signal strength. It would have been a bit much if it had worked and someone had to stand in the road holding the dish while the others enjoyed watching the television! Julie cooked supper and we taught them how to play Bridge. They picked it up quickly and will soon be beating us.

Sunday 28 October

Much brighter and not so cold. Rick was busy vacuuming the loft before unveiling it to Julie and Douglas. They thought it looked fantastic with wonderful views but after reflecting for a while they came to a similar conclusion as us. It would cost a lot to do the conversion, would cost a fortune to heat and would make a lot more work clearing and cleaning on departure. We are back to the idea of dividing the lounge into a lounge, bedroom and shower room. Rather than bricking up the church door we could cover it with a removable panel. We would still have a good size lounge and smaller rooms which are easier to heat. The Waite's got into full French house planning mode. There is nothing like actually being here to get ideas. Julie even moved the furniture around to see how it would look. More fiddling with the satellite dish, this time Rick managed to get a signal by balancing it on the railings on top of the steps by the front door.



After lunch Julie and Douglas set off for the pretty village of St Ceneri to take Beanie for a long walk. Rick was determined to get the satellite working before they got back. He rigged up a stand using the rake and wow it worked! He then set about making the lounge warm enough for us to sit in, in fact the house is now quite comfortable. Like a man possessed he then tackled the very long grass in the garden by the Granary. The Waite's were suitably impressed with the warm lounge and being able to have a choice of loads of television stations. On the way back from seeing how Rick was progressing with the grass we got talking to Benoit and his friend Alan with his two sons. He said that his brother could give us a quote for repairing the Granary roof. Douglas and I went into his house which used to be the Electrician's for a drink. Both he and his friend are divorced; he has four children that live with his ex wife. The house was very French and cosy and has a huge garden and five bedrooms. We really struggled without a French dictionary, I need to get into it again but it's surprising how a few gesticulations help. Rick actually managed to finish the grass but was completely covered in wet cuttings.



Whilst we were playing Bridge, Benoit came round with my camera that I had left at his house. With the help of few glasses of wine and the dictionary conversation flowed a little easier. He mentioned the dog with one big eye, he said it wasn't made of glass and it turned out she belonged to him. On a previous visit Rick had

befriended her until one day she must have been facing the wrong way and he saw the enormous eye close up and it put him off but she is such a sweetie. He ended up staying for supper and there was lots of hilarious laughter when knowing that he keeps rabbits, chickens and ducks I asked him if he eats his rabbits as most French do. He nearly wet himself as it seems that the French for rabbit and penis sound very similar. I had asked if he eats his penis!

Monday 29 October 2012



We waved goodbye to Julie, Douglas and Beanie who are off to the tunnel and home. Still a bit chilly. Rick decided to install the dish in its proper place so I was back to calling out the signal strength in-between sorting out the linen cupboard and glasses, weed killing back and front and writing up my diary. I popped round to see Gaby but she is in England visiting her parents. After a trip to Pre en Pail Rick started to chop out the wall for the television cable. He's back to huffing, puffing and swearing. Went for drinks up the hill to Kerrie and Phillip and their children Darcy and Alfie at Le Petit Maison, they are both teachers and spend most of the school holidays here. They always come New Year and when they came in February half term this year it was minus 17 degrees, too cold to stay. Can you believe it all those channels and not a thing worth watching.

Tuesday 30 October 2012



Kerrie and Phillip called round to view our progress since their last visit about 5 years ago. They thought the loft with its views was amazing and said if it were them they would have a couple of bedrooms one end and a summer lounge in the other half with maybe a table tennis table. However, they were keen to get back into the warm kitchen as their feet were starting to stiffen up. They suggested that if we were frequent users of the toll roads in France we should google "www.saneftolling.co.uk" where if you register you are given a disc to display on your windscreen which enables you to just drive through the toll booths and the toll charge is automatically deducted from your bank account.

After hearing that temperatures went down to minus 17 last winter Rick decided to drain the water out of the hot water tank and all the pipes in the house. It took a lot longer than expected and we had to leave the final trickle from the hot water tank going into the bin while we set off to the ferry.

The first visitors in the summer next year will have to ensure that the system is fully topped up before switching on the electric hot water heater. A note has been left on the electric panel to explain this. Once the final tax bill comes in I will know how we stand money wise and will call a meeting.

Well that's France over for this year and I feel sure that after our French House Meeting we will all be motivated to enjoy it again in 2013. Just a parting shot, the woodpile is making lots of clicking noises!

Electric reading 7941

Water 184