

FRANCE MOTORHOME

JUNE 2011

Sunday 29 May 2011



Today is the first day of our motorhome trip and the plan is to drive no more than 3 hours each day and to try and avoid the toll roads as they can get expensive. Hopefully, the updated lorry package for the sat nav should help avoid those tricky situations we got into last time. If possible, we also want to avoid the 25 to 30 euro sites and use the Aires and Passion France sites, many of which are free. Our route today is towards Pre en Pail and through Mayenne, Laval, Chateau Gontier and onto Bouchemarie. Stayed at a municipal site next to the River Loire for only 8euros 40 and parked up next to a group of Tibetan Monks. Cycled 10 kms on the almost level cycle path into Angers. Poor Rick is suffering, bad back, sore knee and bottom, he says we must get some pills for our joints. Angers was buzzing as they were holding a sports festival and there was a bit of everything to watch from gymnastics, fencing, hockey, archery and all the usual stuff like footie. No disasters with the motorhome only that Rick somehow switched the central heating on and it was like an oven when we got back from Angers. It was about 25° today and we are feeling quite pleased with ourselves as we must have cycled at least 30 kms, I hope we are able to stand up tomorrow.

Monday 30 May

We are expected in La Rochelle today to visit in-laws, Maggie and Terry but somehow we miscalculated how long it would take to get there and have had to phone them to postponed our visit until tomorrow. Woke up to some very welcome rain for the locals and wet chairs for us. Set off for Niort passing through Les Pons de-Ce, Doue-la-Fontaine, Thouars and Parthenay. It's hay making time over here but the countryside today is not as beautiful as Normandy. Our Aire was extremely difficult to find as it's in the middle of the town. Rick's gone back to cursing the Tom Tom. We seem to have sorted out the reversing, Rick doesn't let me have anything to do with it even though I stand behind the van waving my arms in all directions. However, we have something new to watch out for; as we were trying to park there was a very loud graunching sound as we hit the bough of a tree. Not tall enough to inspect the damage yet. Going to have to take our shoes off inside as we are bringing in stones that make indentations on the flooring. Got a brilliant, quite old couple from Lockerbie beside us who are the last type of people you would have thought would be running around with a scooter in their van and going to rallies. There is a mad English woman in front of us desperate to speak to some Brits. Take note Julie, they had heard that the French are having purges on weighing the motorhomes, if you are overweight they confiscate the van and put you in prison (so she said). Anyway, they had their motorhome weighed and found they were loads over. That night her husband was banging away and she said he had taken out the safe and taken off all the doors and they were still overweight that's without what they themselves weigh. We walked into Niort and found most of the shops close Mondays. It's not a particularly beautiful town, it does have some narrow old streets but also some very wide ones. They have an indoor market each Thursday in a grand building that

we initially thought was a railway station. Had to do the usual loitering outside cafes and shops for about an hour to try to get free wifi for our phones. This is a useful site with unmetered electricity and it appears to be free outside the peak season. I let Rick take the photos today but the camera was set on video so there are only two reasonable ones and I had to doctor them. Thinking about Niort, is generally a grey town with a concrete edged, muddy looking river and what's missing are the window boxes and avenues of trees.



Tomorrow we are off to La Rochelle and hopefully some sun.

Tuesday 31 May – Charente Maritime region



The bush on the right is in
Maggie & Terry's garden

Took the motorway towards La Rochelle, didn't actually go into the town but stopped at the seaside resort of Chatelaillon-Plage, just to say we had seen the sea. It was quite deserted and too windy to sit out and have our lunch. The sand was golden but the sea was grey with big waves. Rick got in a bit of a panic as it was one way with narrow streets. Then we passed through Rochefort, Saintes and onto St Sorlin de Conac. We had no idea where or what sort of place Maggie and Terry had and it was a lovely surprise when we arrived. Everywhere we go the farmers are worried about the effect of the drought. Terry was no different with his garden as he has lost some trees and some of his seeds hadn't germinated. They are on a hill and have the most wonderful views all the way around them. In the distance you can see the Gironne River and they are surrounded by vines for Cognac. Their 3 bed bungalow was spacious but Rick was completely gobsmacked by the rooms/cellars underneath. That area was bigger than the bungalow as it went underneath the front patio. Apart from the garage there was a workshop, gym, table-tennis room, huge kitchen for jam making etc and the most enormous room that was a walk-in larder – absolutely fantastic. It was too windy to sit outside and Maggie cooked us a lovely supper while Terry plied us with lots of wine and the local aperitif that is a mixture of brandy and wine. They spend 6 months in France and 6 months in Southsea. It seems

they have a very active social life in France with tennis, boules, weekly walks and lunch clubs, they only have Tuesdays free. They have many French friends but still struggle a bit with the language. Maggie has made a few faux pas such as when asked what she had been doing that day she said that she had been making preservatives (condoms in French) and she once said she was hot (that was mistaken for being hot stuff). Rick fell in love with the cellar and I fell in love with the scenery but was put off by the fact that the marsh land attracts the mosquitos. Really enjoyed today, such good company and food.

Wednesday 1 June



We thought we would try out one of the France Passion sites where your hosts are farming, wine-growing or welcoming motorhoming families. They don't charge and have few facilities but you can offer to buy their produce. We chose to stay at Chateau des Mailles in Sainte Croix du Mont which is half an hour from Bordeaux and is in the sweet white wine area. It is a little town built on a hill overlooking the Garonne River. We were greeted by the bull dog (a real boy dog) and Brandy the Labrador and parked up next to their vegetable patch. Once again our view was amazing and Madam who is the 6th generation here gave us a tour of their wine making facilities. Their wine are made with Semillon, Sauvignon and Muscadelle grapes and used as a desert wine or an aperitif. You can store the bottles for up to 40 years. We loved it and ended up spending 60 euros on 6 bottles. Next time we stay French Passion we must choose somewhere that sells honey, cheese or jam! It was all very interesting and the dogs got excited. We then cycled into the town/village where we saw the most amazing caves formed by a fossilized oyster-bed.

Thursday 2 June

Woken up by the crowing Cockerel and Big Boy Boxer who I had to stop Rick trying to feed – bad habits for other campers. It's a jeans and fleece day as it seems to want to rain but just can't manage it. I hear its 24 in London but here we are almost in the south of France and its only 14 degrees.



pavillon Bc Margaux 2007	110 [€] ₁₃₂₀	fleur Petrus 2008	210 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Paul Monton Rothschild 2007	140 [€] ₁₃₂₀
pavillon Bc Margaux 2006	110 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 2007	1370 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 2007	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
pavillon Rg Margaux 2000	210 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 2006	1370 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 2006	590 [€] ₁₃₂₀
pavillon Rg Margaux 1999	170 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 2005	3700 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 2004	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
pavillon Rg Margaux 1998	190 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 2004	1450 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 2002	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
pavillon Rg Margaux 1997	170 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 2003	1700 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 2001	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
pavillon Rg Margaux 1994	170 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 2002	1450 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 2000	1240 [€] ₁₃₂₀
pavillon Rg Margaux 1990	210 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 2001	2100 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1999	450 [€] ₁₃₂₀
pavillon Bc Margaux 1988	110 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 2000	3700 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1998	450 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 2007	380 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1999	1400 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1997	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 2004	380 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1998	2900 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1994	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 2003	680 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1997	1280 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1993	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 2002	380 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1996	1700 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1992	370 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 2000	1270 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1995	1640 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1991	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1999	380 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1994	1450 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1990	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1991	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1993	1450 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1988	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1990	1240 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1992	1450 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1987	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1985	470 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1990	3400 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1985	430 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1984	300 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1989	3200 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1984	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1983	770 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1988	1640 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1983	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1982	1280 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1987	1280 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1981	470 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1980	370 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1986	1400 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1980	380 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1979	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1985	1400 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1978	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1978	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1984	1280 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1977	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1976	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1983	1280 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1976	500 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1975	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1982	5600 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1974	500 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1974	400 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1981	1270 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1970	770 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1971	550 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1981	1270 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1967	890 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1969	1100 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1979	1240 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1964	890 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1966	1100 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1978	1270 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1962	1400 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1964	1100 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1976	1400 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1959	2100 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1963	1400 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1975	1900 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1958	1100 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1962	1100 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1973	1400 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1945	14000 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1961	2100 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1971	2100 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1944	1280 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1959	1900 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1969	1900 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1943	1900 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1948	3700 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1964	2900 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1941	2100 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1941	1190 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1961	10000 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1928	3800 [€] ₁₃₂₀
Margaux 1916	2900 [€] ₁₃₂₀	Petrus 1952	3400 [€] ₁₁₇₀₀	Monton Rothschild 1904	5500 [€] ₁₃₂₀

AUTRES ANNÉES EN MAGASIN SUIVANT STOCK DISPONIBLE

Off to Saint-Emilion, famous for wine, limestone soil, ubiquitous vineyards, beautiful architecture including 200 km of underground galleries and the largest monolithic church in Europe and one more thing that I didn't know about – macaroons. The Saint-Emilion wines are predominately Merlot grapes but the infinite varieties are due to the art of blending different proportions of Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec and Merlot. As there was a width restriction we parked our motorhome at Saint-Emilion railway station and cycled in. It was really worth seeing but very touristy and quite expensive.

Last year was our first go at using the motorhome and we stayed on all the official sites but they cost between 20 and 30 euros a night and we didn't really make use the facilities. The French Aires are great because most are free and the others usually cost between 5 and 8 euros a night. Some have electricity and most have water and emptying facilities. Tonight we are staying for free in Saint Foy La Grande in a car park next to a church and beside La Dordogne. However, all the shops in the town are closed, we just can't understand it as we thought Monday was half day, even the big supermarkets

just outside are closed, perhaps they are on strike as the French do a lot of that. We did manage to find one small supermarket outside the town open and filled up our panniers with supplies and for about the first time ever, no booze. After supper we cycled along the river on a most precarious unkept path with a sheer drop to the river in some places. I was a bit nervous after having had a gin and tonic and some wine so I walked those parts. We came across a walnut tree orchard and thousands of rabbits who had made part of the river bank one enormous rabbit warren. Better finish now as we haven't had electricity for a few days and the computer battery is running down.

Friday 3 June

It was a relief that there were facilities here to empty out as the bathroom was beginning to smell like a Nursing Home. The hectares and hectares of vineyards have been replaced by Walnut Orchards, farmland, woodland, fruit farms, winding roads and the Foies Gras trail. The Aire at the medieval town of Sarlat-la-Caneda was already full so we settled for Roly Poly Pascale and farmer Eric Couderc at Ferme Eyrisou, a France Passion site who offered an evening meal. We parked underneath a bountiful, sweet cherry tree and set off on our bikes on a steep pathway through woodland, farmland and ended up at the village of Salignac that we had passed through this morning. The buildings there are mostly made of mellow sandstone but by the time we arrived everywhere was once more deserted. Lunch seems to be the thing here, I don't know where they all go in the afternoons and hardly anything is open in the evenings. We found out that all the shops were closed yesterday as it was Ascension Day. It was quite hot cycling (the hottest day since our first day in France) and it had been uphill for most of the one and a half hour ride to Salignac. Unfortunately we couldn't stop at a cafe for a drink as Rick had forgotten his wallet. By then a big black cloud came over and it actually started to rain. The journey back was brilliant, all downhill and only took 25 minutes. Our hosts had 3 children, one son about 9 who was watching the tennis and two mischievous daughters of about 4 and 7. They breed cows and grow soft fruit. A French family who were staying in one of the Gites joined us and the farmers' family for supper. The girls couldn't stop laughing every time we spoke and afterwards they were running round the yard saying "thank you, thank you, thank you". It was our first meal out and it was good, wholesome regional food. The farmer managed to serve 9 of us with one bottle of cheap plonk and that included top ups. They were all very impressed with William and Kate's wedding but not so impressed with the IMF chap who is being held in the States or Sarkozy for that matter. Even though we were completely stuffed and exhausted we managed to eat a load more cherries before falling asleep. Just a word of warning, avoid the French public toilets at all costs !!! The one I entered for just a few seconds in Niort was so frightening that I expected to find someone shooting up or dead and the one in the pretty village that Rick tried yesterday had excrement plastered everywhere. Doesn't matter how desperate you are – HOLD ON !!!!!



Saturday 4 June – Cahors



Tried once again to park in Sarlet but even at 9.30 am it was completely packed, it's obviously a major tourist spot. I love this part of France as its busy and there are posers about, loads of bikers and sports cars and the scenery is magnificent with lots of rolling hills and little villages. Never mind we must move on. The Aire at Cahors has only space for 3 spaces for motorhomes and we got lucky and parked next to the River Lot and underneath a tree that was laden with a fruit that looked like a loganberry. Thank god it wasn't August with the wasps. You have to be careful when parking in car parks that you don't bring the stones inside as they make indentations in the soft flooring. The plan was to go to a restaurant that had wifi – no luck there. We did eat out at lunch time after spending ages checking all over for an open network. Cahors didn't do much for me but it did have a launderette. We rode along the river and the only inspiring thing was that they had planted different fruit trees along the bank, what a good idea. The cycle path ended at a campsite which we cycled around. It all looked so nice. There wasn't anywhere we could see where we could buy some milk. After cycling miles out of the town and just as we were about to give up we suddenly saw a wonderful sign “Lidl”. It was just marvellous, we managed to get 3 bottles of wine, 2 fillet steaks(can't be real meat) and a few extras for about 15 euros – wow!!!!

We finally gave in and used the Vodafone Dongle but the laptop battery ran out. Everything needed charging up, including me and my hair was so in need of attention that I thought I may have to have it cut to get the knots out. I was also homesick and kept thinking about all those strawberries and raspberries ready to pick at home and that I was missing the roses and poppies that would be out. The highlight of the day or night as it happened was that a family were fishing beside us and the son caught a 5.5 kilo carp. They were so proud and told us that earlier in the week he had caught a 14 kilo fish. Gosh, I saw how difficult it was for him to bring the 5.5 kilo one in. We are getting irritable with each other. I think we need a couple of days to chill out.

Sunday 5 June

Found a fantastic municipal site in Castres on the River L'Agout at only 12 euros a night to include electricity and internet – oh such bliss, unlimited internet. It was also part of a County Park that had every sport you could think of including a 9 hole golf course. Got to admit I am fed up of sleeping in car parks.

Monday 6 June



Carlisle Matey opposite caught a coach from Middlesborough (I think) with a trailer for the bikes that took them to Bordeaux. He is well travelled on his bike, seemingly to have been all over Europe. In the last 2 weeks he has done over 450 miles on his bike. He spied our laptop and wanted to know what the weather forecast was so he could plan his route. We couldn't see the screen outside so I suggested he and Rick go into the motorhome. I could see that Rick was reluctant but nevertheless he couldn't get out of it. He showed us the <http://www.campingfrance.com/> site which is excellent and also suggested some must see places. I took some photos of his bike as he seems to have it all sorted for travelling. We are social cyclists (walk up the hills) but it was useful to get some tips. We need to sort out the handlebars as our hands go numb and get pins and needles. Rick thought he talked too much and he wouldn't be able to get rid of him. Castres was alright, we would have visited the Goya museum but being a Monday it was closed as was everything else. Yearning for a beach.



The garden by the Goya Museum



Municipal Theatre

Tuesday 7 June

Rick's programmed the Tom Tom to show all the campsites and now also the Lidl stores. He also found that he can access the garage store from underneath our bed and that saves him having to empty everything out each time. Played 9 holes of golf on the Country Park estate next to us, very pleasant. Rick beat me by one hole but I did a fantastic shot across the river, over the trees and onto the green. We couldn't play the other 9 as it was pouring with rain so we decided to move onto the medieval city of Carcassonne. Even though the road was windy and steep and despite the rain some of the views of the valley below were magnificent. I'm a dreadful passenger, so very nervous and I tend to grip the armrests, close my eyes and clench my teeth on these back roads. Our site was just outside the city and as we arrived quite late we weren't able to have electricity or wifi – it cost about 17 euros. The city was wonderful but once again we didn't get the timing right and the main attractions were closed. Even though it's very touristy is definitely worth a visit. As we didn't have the internet we tried watching the television but you need a satellite dish, never mind we will have to make our own entertainment.

Carcassonne is a fortified medieval walled town that lies on the right bank of the River Aude. It has 52 towers and two rings of town walls making a total of 3 kms of battlements. It's quite some city and our first site of Canal du Midi.



Wednesday 8 June

We're not sure where to go and the weather is not too good so we are making our way to the Med and heading for a site in Argeles sur Mer just outside Perpignan and not too far from the Spanish border. On the way we had a peep at Port la Nouvelle but it was very industrial, there were even workers on strike outside a huge cement factory. For many years we have wanted to get to the South of French coast but the nearest we have been is Ville Franche on a cruise stop. Had a big shop at Carrefour where we bought some gloves with pressure pads to help with the cycling. They have an airtex front and I wouldn't be seen dead wearing them near anyone I knew. The sandy beach looks fantastic but we have been completely spoilt by Tenerife. There are even touts outside the restaurants enticing you in. I have been dying for moules and frites so that is what we had. Rick ordered mussels in a saffron and cream sauce. He had a bad senior moment when he stuck his fork into a chip and pushed it into the sauce and upset the dish. Everywhere was covered in a yellow sauce, the table the floor and Rick's jeans. It looked as if he was sitting in a pool of diarrhoea. He's not too worried as we have a washing machine on site but also the sauce on his fingers make him look like a heavy smoker. What with that and his poor breathing and bad back he is in a poor way. We have discovered that the pills for his back and ibuprofen give him asthma. Never mind we are looking forward to some better weather tomorrow and a long bike ride along the beach. Funny thing is that I had always imagined myself in a pretty dress and heels or in a bikini lying on the beach in the South of France. Didn't think I would find myself wearing, jeans, raincoat, trainers and airtex gloves.



Thursday 9 June



Rick is frustrated with his phone as he can't get the campsite wifi and I can, so it's back to factory settings again and ages on the internet trying to get a fix. Managed to get an hour in the sun on the beach before it disappeared once again behind a cloud. There are lots of Brits about. Went for long bike ride and had a look at some other sites. It must be very busy in the summer as most of the sites are geared up for 1000 plus places and there are enormous car parks around. The full season last only 5 months with one month being mid season, two months high season and the rest low season. Another trip to Lidl, to Rick's great delight it is just a few minutes bike ride away. After seeing those other

OUVERT du 23 AVRIL au 24 SEPTEMBRE

TARIFS 2011

Emplacements pour Caravanes et Tentes à la Journée

EMPLACEMENTS Tarif à la nuitée rate per night	23/04 au 11/06 03/09 au 24/09	11/06 au 25/06 27/08 au 03/09	25/06 au 09/07 13/08 au 27/08	09/07 au 13/08
Forfait Confort 2 personnes, voiture branchement électrique 6A 2 people, plot, car, 6 Amps electricity	17 €	20 €	29 €	32 €
Forfait Grand Confort 2 personnes, voiture branchement électrique 10A eau, évacuation 2 people, plot, car, 10 Amps electricity, water, evacuation	19 €	22 €	32 €	35 €
Personne Supplémentaire Extra People	4 €	4 €	6 €	6.5 €
Enfant de moins de 2ans Child under 2 years old	-	-	-	-
Enfant de 2 à 5 ans Child 2 to 5 years old	-	-	3 €	3.5 €
Véhicule Supplémentaire Extra car	-	-	5 €	5 €
Chien - Dog	-	-	3 €	3 €

Taxe de séjour : 0.44€ / jour et campeur de + de 13 ans

enormous sites we realise we have struck it lucky at "Camping du Stade" because it's a more traditional, homely site with lots of different trees and very close to the beach. There's lots of shade but what we really need is sun, Sun, Sun !!!!!.

Friday 10 June

A lot of time is spent preparing our route, because of the weather we have deviated from the original plan and are saving the Auvergne tour and French Riviera for another time. We have several campsite books and different scale maps to refer to and you can bet your life the very place you want is always in the crease of the map or page. Where shall we move onto, we will have to buy a helmet if we want to ride our bikes in Spain and we still fancy the beach. The big decision is made and it's on the motorway (blow the expense) and off to Vias which is on the coast near Beziers and down from Montpellier. Back into the wine region, Fitou and onto Corbieres this time. Stopped for coffee on the way and to empty out the waste water but an embarrassed Rick came back and said it has been running out all the time as he forgot to turn it off. He also forgot to turn off the gas but never mind up to now we have been quite good at preparing for the off. If we are paying out for a site it must be cheap and

have electricity and wifi. Google Maps showed the Vias area as one gigantic camp site but when we arrived we were pleasantly surprised how rural it was. All the deliberation and research almost came to nothing as Campsite Helios had wifi but it was expensive if you were just staying a couple of nights. Rick almost gave in until he found out that you had to pay separately for each piece of equipment. He impressed upon the man how important the internet was to him. The man said “but you (meaning Rick), can go on the computer and then you (meaning me), can then go on. Rick said but we also needed to get the wifi on each of our phones. Well he thought we were mad and he said “how do you say in English – couch potato.” We laughed and then wasted time looking for somewhere else but decided to come back to Helios. It was a good decision because the sun was out and the beach is unspoilt and only 100 metres away with a tiny canal with boats leading up to it. It's proper heat not like the odd bits we have been worshipping over the last couple of weeks. We had an hour on the beach and then cycled into the main town which wasn't far enough for us to say that we had had some exercise. It's back to loitering around all the cafes looking for an open network. The spark on the cooker isn't working and even Rick is nervous about lighting it as it makes a small explosion and you think it is going to blow your head off. Everytime I use the toaster it sets the smoke extractor off, otherwise we are doing well. It's warm enough to sit outside tonight and watch the sun go down and there is a smell of barbecues in the air.

Saturday 11 June



Record breaking day as we have cycled 43.6 kms, I don't suppose we shall be able to move tomorrow but it was all on the level and only a bit of wind against us on the way back. Despite the many camping sites it's still quite rural and not a Brit in site. We cycled along the back roads and it was just lovely. First stop was Tamarissiere, then to Le Graud' Agde and onto Cap D'Agde. We stopped for moules and frites half way. Legs were a bit wobbly when we stopped. On the way back we cycled for a while along the Canal Du Midi. This is what holidays are all about. We need to do a bit of research about the Canal Du Midi.

Sunday 12 June

Another special day for the French – Pentecost. We have to start to make our way to Milhars and it's back to the campsite in Castres as it's half way and really good. We don't ache after our long cycle ride but as we have cycled into the town before we decided to have a walk through the country park adjacent to the campsite. Lidl fillet steak once again.

Monday 13 June

Jen has a very good nose for wine and her favourite that they have at a local restaurant is Duras Cabinet, Cote de Tarn from the Gaillac region. As we are heading for the Tarn area we thought we would do a bit a research. There was a diversion that took us through the centre of Albi and across the River Tarn. Albi has some huge buildings and they use a lot of red brick which is unusual for

France. Once again everything was deserted and all the shops were closed because of the Pentecost celebrations. Rick had programmed for us to stop at an Aire in Gaillac where we could dump our waste water. It was in a car park, in fact the city was full of car parks but we're not quite ready to sleep in car parks again yet. We found the historical part of the town down by the quay which was interesting. Our next plan was to stay on a French Passion site just outside Gaillac. The panoramic view was fantastic, vineyards and farms all around. We parked up in their car park and went into their shop and tried some wine. I think we were spoilt by the first French Passion vineyard where we were given a conducted tour, this was all a bit commercial. It was red hot outside and although the view was fantastic we were at the edge of a big drop and it made me feel giddy so we moved onto Cordes. It looked great, even had a tourist train but we have chosen Camp Redon (21.95 euros) in Livers Cazelles near Cordes as it has wifi. It's run by a couple of Dutch guys, everything is pretty and perfect with a lovely swimming pool and showers. The showers all have a squeegee mops, I kept clashing with the person in the next cubicle, it was a meeting of mops. There are also some very modern, Scandinavian style tents, very Ikea but I think he said they were made in India and built to an African style. It's a lovely time of year as all the oleanders and roses are in full bloom. Rick cooked one of our favourite meals, chicken in a white wine sauce with mushrooms and savoury rice. We stood outside our motorhome and watched the sun go down.



Gaillac Off-Licence



The River Tarn

Tuesday 14 June



Jody



Tin Tin

We're about to spend a couple of days with Alan and Claire who are house and dog sitting for some friends in Milhars. They live in a converted barn up a narrow lane with ditches all over the place. The gates to their drive don't open very far and I nearly had a nervous breakdown watching Rick get through them with the motorhome. We met the dogs, Jody who is quite old and English, she has been a bit poorly and was having to take pills for a pulled muscle in her back. Then there was French Tin Tin who has only been with them for a year. He used to be in poor condition and belonged to a neighbour but was tied up and outside all the time. Now he is a very handsome fellow but still a little insecure and he kept hiding in a corner in a storage area. We walked them down to the river and back through the fields but it was too much for Jody and Rick had to carry her back. We had lunch at a restaurant a 15 minute walk away followed by a lazy afternoon by the swimming pool. Heavy night, it will be hard to get up tomorrow.



Wednesday 15 June

Somehow we all managed to squash into Alan's XJS but had to have to roof down. It was really hot as we made the steep climb to the summit of the fortified city of Cordes where we stopped for lunch. Another afternoon lazing by the pool followed by a late night with lots more food and booze. Rick says he would like a holiday home here as the scenery is fantastic especially the surrounding cliffs and forests. He's visualizing himself fishing in the river and me sitting watching him or reading a book. I am putting my foot down, I do not want any more homes. I'm missing my real home and garden but most of all, although Rick is good company, I am missing people to talk to. In fact a couple of weeks away at a time is enough for me.

Cordes

View from top of city

Thursday 16 June

We're now looking forward to spending some time at the house in St Ellier. Nothing drastic has happened to the motorhome this time, just a few niggly things. The bump from the tree hasn't done any lasting damage, the gas cooker can be fixed, the door mechanism came off but Rick sorted that out. The leisure battery is playing up as last night when we came in from the barn there were no lights or power. Seems alright today, perhaps it was just the effects of having too much to drink the night before. We are both well apart from Rick's bad back. It's now back to the house in the fastest possible time and that means just one more night in the motorhome. Stayed at campsite in Avanton run by a couple from Worthing. Rick set off on his bike to Lidl that was 6 kms away to get some mushrooms. I thought it would be nice for



him to have some time alone and to be able to browse the wine section without me dragging him away. Well, he was gone for ages and when he finally re-appeared he looked absolutely worn out. He had cycled 16.5 kms in the wrong direction, against the wind most of the time and never did find any shops. He presented me with a melon that he had bought off some boys nearby. It's much colder now, in fact quite a chilly 12 degrees. So far we have driven 1792 miles, cycled 157.5 kms and are getting about 28.5 miles to the gallon. Just had a text from Alan, Tin Tin has been sick twice and has crapped on the veranda -he's earning his keep!

Friday 17 June

It's full speed ahead to St Ellier, motorway almost all the way but first stop is Le Clerc to stock up with provisions. It's not that many months ago that we were there and we could not believe the changes. There's now a multi storey car park and a whole new set of shops. It was pouring with rain and we didn't arrive at St Ellier until mid afternoon.