

Wine-ding Down Through France

. . . . an extract

The tale of a two-week journey, from Calais on the Channel coast
of France, to the Mediterranean coast, at Montpellier.
Cycling and raising funds for Macmillan Cancer Support

Rob Gullen from Stratford-upon-Avon
& Jon Porteous from Redditch
Foreword by Edward Enfield

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The full version of this Journal, complete with a marked, fully-
detailed, 74-page route map is available as a professionally printed
book or on a DVD.

See www.cycle-endoend.org.uk for details and online ordering

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Through the text there are some passages indented and in italics - these are technical information or factual detail - skipping past them will not affect your understanding of the story.

At the end of each day there is table with the day's statistics and a diagram showing the route profile together with "Rob's Recollections" box with very brief comments, the food consumed that day and a "lamb-shank rating" for the hotel.

Acknowledgements - Jon

When undertaking a trip of this length and duration there are, of course, numerous people to mention and thank. I should like to thank all the well-wishers, sponsors, friends and family who were extremely supportive. I am very grateful to all the members of the public in England and France who gave their best wishes and on occasion directions.

Special mention must be made of members of CTC-Heart of England (formerly known as Birmingham Southern Wheelers) for all their advice, support and indeed envy. Huge thanks go to Rob for his enthusiasm, planning expertise, map-reading skills, technical knowledge and, most of all, for his unstinting patience and companionship before, during and after this journey.

My final thanks go to my wife for her support, patience, love and permission.

Acknowledgements - Rob

This “dream trip” - and the subsequent preparation of this Journal can’t pass without mentioning the encouragement (and envy) from the members of the cycling clubs I ride with - CTC-Heart of England and Shakespokes - along with numerous other cycling chums, friends and family.

For editorial direction and guidance to turn the draft into a presentable and hopefully coherent tome, we are indebted to my daughter Zoe Gullen for using the skills employed in her day job.

And finally, there’s always a “finally” - to my wife Philippa for her love, encouragement and support for my, sometimes madcap, cycling exploits (as well as permission for the next *Boys’ Outing*)

Foreword

by Edward Enfield - the inspiration for the trip

The kind words about one of my books which Rob and Jon have included in their journal certainly ought to disqualify me from writing anything at all about them. Mutual back-scratching among authors is far from uncommon, but is not usually as blatant as it will seem to be here. Nevertheless, braving all criticism I will say that I think this is a very good – but good what? They sent it to me in printed form so I think of it as a book, but it is not a book at present. From what I make out it is lurking somewhere in cyberspace and by paying a bit and pressing the right buttons you can get it as a CD, or something like that - as well as in book form.

Anyway, whatever it is, it is a very good one. I enjoyed reading it because they enjoyed making the trip and this comes through. There is a certain amount of nuts-and-bolts stuff at the start, to do with why and how they set off, but once in France they bowl along briskly and, like Jon's legs, it gathers strength as it goes. It is well sprinkled with anecdotes, such as the account of the French couple on "lightweight, frolicsome machines", the wife being frolicsome on her account as she slipped Jon a wink and her phone number. Jon has an agreeable way of indulging his peculiar interests, such as train spotting, bird spotting, and firing off terrible jokes at the long-suffering Rob at 9.50 am precisely.

Towns and villages, rivers and power stations, restaurants the coffee shops, buzzards and flamingos all come and go, carrying you along nicely, and there are good brief historical notes on the most important places.

It is pretty inspirational and, if you are inspired, it is useful as well, as they tell you exactly how you could do it yourself. I was much intrigued by the European Bike Express, which sounds as if it would set any rider and cycle down in any number of desirable places. I could see from the appendices that Rob and Jon are the

sort of cyclists who would not venture into France without knowing the French for a brake pad or a bottle cage, whereas for me “*Ça ne marche pas*” was enough to get me to the Mediterranean. Also they took all sorts of electronic gear with them, such as a Garmin. Goodness knows what a Garmin is, and it doesn’t get a mention in the text, but it is in an appendix and I suspect that every self-respecting cyclist ought to have one.

This account of a couple of jolly fellows having a splendid time riding through the wine-lands of France is something that I recommend.

Edward Enfield,
Billingshurst, Sussex, February 2009

We are immensely grateful to Edward Enfield for the Foreword - as is mentioned, his book chronicling a cycle ride from the Channel to the Mediterranean was the inspiration for the trip.

One day during our ride, it must have been about Day 9, as we pedalled along the topic of “the book” came up in conversation and I suddenly thought what a good idea it would be to ask Mr Enfield to write a foreword ... when we got home I wrote to him, via his agent, with the request. A prompt reply confirmed that “. . . provided it wasn’t boring. . .” he would be delighted to do so.*

Rob

** it may have been at about 0950, I can’t recall*

Preface

Jon - the writer

First of all dear reader you must understand that I am no writer. I have put this book together from the notes I made on the trip, prodigious use of reference books and websites on my return and from a little of my own knowledge. I take full responsibility for any errors.

The aim of this book is to provide a resource for any other cyclist foolhardy enough to want to follow our route. A route that did not take the most direct path: rather we chose to enjoy certain parts of the wine-producing areas of France.

There is an outside possibility that non-cyclists may inadvertently stumble upon this volume – if this is you, I apologise for all the references to cycling but I hope you enjoy some of the descriptions of the places, sights, food and drink that Rob and I encountered.

The inspiration for this trip came from the book, *Downhill All the Way* (Bloomsbury 1994) by Mr Edward Enfield. In the event that you enjoy this book, or if you would like to read one better written, I would urge you to sample Mr Enfield's.

There are of course a number of acknowledgements. We should like to thank our wives for granting us permission to go on this Boys' Outing; all the kind and generous sponsors (we raised money through *MacRide* - www.macride.org.uk for *Macmillan Cancer Support*) and well-wishers; the friendly hoteliers, other cyclists and members of the public we met on the way.

*Jon Porteous
Redditch*

Rob - A dream fulfilled!

In 2002, I cycled the Sustrans Coast-to-Coast route, 140 miles from Whitehaven to Sunderland - and got the taste for cycle touring adventures, the following couple of years saw two more cycle tours in England.

These trips were enjoyable but nibbling at the back of my mind was “the big one” - the End-to-End - a thousand or so miles from Land’s End to John O’Groats, or the version that I did with Joe, John O’Groats to Land’s End (it’s downhill on the map!). That ride in 2005 has been documented in *Rob & Joe’s JOGLE* - a journal that to our amazement has attracted a lot of interest and “sales” of approaching a hundred copies of the CD version, which raise funds for Macmillan Cancer Support.

Not only was I riding these journeys, but also reading about other people’s cycling adventures ... which led me to Edward Enfield’s book, *Downhill All The Way*. Edward set out at the age of sixty to cycle from the Channel coast of France to the Mediterranean. Having enjoyed many holidays in France, including some cycling, and being of similar age to Edward - when he made his journey - the thought of a similar trip was stored in my mind from about 2004 ... with a steady route research process and gradual negotiations for a “kitchen pass” from my wife.

Readers of the JOGLE and other journals¹ will recollect that my previous afterwords have finished with “*Where next?*” and have mentioned, “*The French Ride*”: 2008 was to see it happen.

Our introduction to the velodrome in November 2007– as detailed in Jon’s Prologue – was indeed the start of the process. (By the way, we were also bitten by the track riding bug and have been back five or six times for sessions riding the boards - and I’ve bought myself a track bike)

A winter of planning the route, hotel stops and the

¹ See www.beevee.org.uk Rob’s Cycling, and other, trivia website

Eurotunnel and European Bike Express bookings followed ... with the excitement building (more for Jon than me!) over the summer. In addition, we decided that we would add a slight twist to the ride, and use it to try to raise money for the *MacRide* - a fund-raising cycle ride that I organise in September each year for *Macmillan Cancer Support*²

What follows is our - well, Jon's really - he did most of the writing - recollection of a superb cycling trip ... read on, I will be making a few comments along the way and be back at the end with an afterword.

Rob Gullen
Stratford-upon-Avon

² See www.macride.org.uk

Who are we?

Jon Porteous

I was born and educated in Worcester. I attended university in Portsmouth where I qualified as a pharmacist. Married with two children, I live in Redditch, Worcestershire and ran my own pharmacy business for over twenty years.

I am a qualified rugby union referee and hold a private pilot's licence. Apart from cycling, my hobbies include rugby, photography, real ale, wine-drinking and ornithology as well as a love of, crosswords word games, linguistics and trivia.

Rob Gullen

I'm a keen cyclist (and bike fettler), living in Stratford-upon-Avon - married with three grown-up daughters and one grandson (as of 12 February 2009).

My early years were spent in Essex/London working in the printing industry before moving into the IT industry and onto running my own interim management and marketing research business.

Voluntary work includes being a *Prince's Trust* Business Mentor and organising the annual *MacRide* cycle event which raises funds for *Macmillan Cancer Support*.

My time is now spent working, some of the time, and generally trying to enjoy life.

Prologue

The Prologue is, as one might guess, the first part of the world-famous cycle race *Le Tour de France*, otherwise known in France as *la boucle* - the loop. It is traditionally a short (by their standards) individual time-trial. The winner receives the honour of wearing the famous leader's yellow jersey on the first day of the race proper. Our prologue began at my first ever time-trial, of sorts.

It started in Manchester in November 2007. We were looking down upon the vertiginous slope of the banked track inside the Manchester Velodrome where Rob's daughters had booked the track for an hour of riding as his belated significant-birthday present.

One of Rob's friends, Jenni, although paling at the thought of riding up the banking, was suggesting doing the End-to-End in the summer of 2008. This would entail cycling from Land's End to John O'Groats (LEJOG) or the reverse route (JOGLE). The classic challenge attempted by cyclists of all abilities every year, and many of them raise large amounts of money for charity along the way. It was something that had been in the dark recesses of my mind for a while and which needed bringing into the daylight.

Rob and his pal Joe had ridden JOGLE in 2005 and afterwards they had produced a wonderful resource in the shape of a Journal and map book which was made available for a donation to *Macmillan Cancer Support*. He was not too keen to re-do the ride but half thought that LEJOG might be a possibility.

A couple of days later an e-mail arrived that galvanised me into action. Rob sent some photos and the time-trial results from the velodrome and signed off with a suggestion that rather than do the British End-to-End, why not try the French version? From the Channel to the Mediterranean: specifically, Calais to Montpellier. He had been planning it for a couple of years and had pencilled in a route. Would I be interested?

Wow! What an idea, were my immediate thoughts; would our wives give us their permission? How long would it take? How many miles would we ride each day? How much luggage would I need to take? Half a nanosecond later excitement took over, planning ideas flooded my poor synapses and I started searching the internet. Rob's unusual idea was not to go in a straight line - far too boring - but to detour through the Champagne, Burgundy and Rhone regions. It was not something with which I had a problem.

A look through a hastily purchased, French road atlas and prodigious use of Google Earth gave a route through France that read like a wine list. Some of the towns and villages were Macon, Beaune, Fleurie, Château-Neuf-du-Pape, Nuits-St-George, and Aloxe-Corton: mouth-watering.

Cycling tourists often say that a lot of the enjoyment of a long tour is in the planning. We pored over maps, satellite imagery and accommodation websites, working out optimum routes for scenery, topography and wine-tastings. Rob set up a *justgiving.com* website for on-line sponsorship. I started thinking about what to take, worrying obsessively about weight - especially with the chargers needed for all my electrical gadgets. I bought new panniers to go with my new bike.

I had taken delivery of a custom-fit Mercian from Derby in November. It was their King of Mercia touring-bike model in flamboyant, pearlescent green – she's a beauty. I had visited their shop in May and was placed on a jig, with adjustable tubes and angles, so that the measurements for the tubing could be taken that were exact for my body geometry. I decided on gears, pedals and wheels – in fact, everything was to my own specifications. I just had to pay a deposit and wait. In the end, it took over six months before they rang me, in November, to arrange collection. I was looking forward to seeing out how it would perform in comparison with my old Dawes Galaxy.

Many, many e-mails later we had finalised the a route, booked our accommodation and arranged the return journey from Montpellier back to the UK with the wonderful people at *European Bike Express* (the Bike Bus) All we needed to do now was concentrate on fund-raising for *Macmillan* - we were, of course, paying the costs ourselves.

This was to be my first long tour; I had only been riding with a cycling club for a couple of years. Before that I had been thinking about joining a club for a long time; but unfortunately, the one nearest to me seemed to be obsessed with racing and cyclo-cross rather than the social rides that I was after. I had met Roy, some years ago and from time to time he nagged me about joining his club, the (then) CTC Southern Wheelers. He told me about the coffee meet they have on alternate Wednesdays which was with a shorter ride of only twenty miles or so. I thought about this for some time and, with a degree of trepidation, decided to give it a whirl.

My first coffee meet was, luckily, only a few miles from home and I arrived there early, misjudging the adrenaline in my system! I was introduced to everyone, including two riders who had been members of the club for over thirty years: I thought this was encouraging. I was amazed how friendly they all were and humbled by the extent to which they took a genuine interest in me and what I was hoping to get out of the club.

After the coffee and cake we set off. At that stage, I had no idea how hard it was going to be! We had been going only a couple of minutes when we reached a slight incline; I heard the reassuring sound of lower gears being engaged and I knew then that I was going to be able to keep up!

I had forgotten how enjoyable it is to cycle in a small group, chatting as we rode along, swapping stories and ideas. We reached what appeared to me to be quite a hill - I followed a rider who just pedalled at the same pace all the way to the top. I was huffing and puffing but made it - just! It made me determined to get more bike-

fit. I cycled home and realised that although a little saddle-sore I had really enjoyed myself.

I decided to make Wednesday rides a regular event and arranged work cover so I could take the day off. At my next ride people remembered my name and even more amazingly, I remembered theirs! If I recollect this was the first time that I met Rob, a member of a couple of years' standing. The ride this time was about 45 miles and, apart from nearly falling asleep in the bath afterwards, it was getting easier ... I have been a regular Wednesday rider since.

Since joining the club I had been on mini-tours for three days or so based at youth hostels or guest houses on which I had not needed to carry any luggage but had never been on a cycle expedition that required panniers.

These are purpose-designed bags that fit onto the front or rear racks on bicycles. I bought two rear-panniers and wrote extensive lists of what to take, concentrating on allowing for the minimum possible while still being warm, clean and prepared for as many contingencies as possible, or at least likely.

For the French Ride, as it was originally dubbed, I prepared a list of items to take, swapped ideas with Rob and loaded the bags, trying to keep the weight balanced. Each weighed eleven kilos and I thought it would be a good idea to go for a quick spin with them on the bike. The bike seemed to handle the same on the road but was much harder to manoeuvre when I was not on it - it seemed to weigh a ton and was very light at the front. I had to use much lower gears on my familiar hills, although the descents seemed no different; I suppose the added weight was negated by the increased drag. Cyclists worry about frame shimmy on laden-bikes - the rather disconcerting effect of the frame vibrating above a certain speed, often the speed required is only achieved on descents and

was the reason why Rob (who has a very large-framed bike) would grip the top-tube with his knees on fast descents! I appeared to have no problem with my Mercian; it felt stable all the time – it was almost worth spending all that money just for that!

I felt that machine at least was ready even if the body was not.

Day One - Friday 12 September 2008

Stratford-upon-Avon to Guïnes, via London, the English Channel and Calais

The night before we started our journey Kate, my wife, took me, my bike and my kit to Rob's house at Stratford-upon-Avon. We were to catch the train for the first leg of the trip the following morning. The four of us - that is Kate and I, Rob and his wife Philippa - went into town for a farewell meal at, appropriately, Café Rouge. I knew I was not going to be able to drink English ale for a couple of weeks so I decided to get used to the "Eurofizz", in this instance Leffe (which became the official beer of the trip) The beer flowed, the wine was drunk and the conversation inevitably gravitated towards the trip ahead - the eyes of the ladies glazing over by then. Back to Rob's house, where our bikes and kit were shown to our partners: more glazed expressions. Eventually goodbyes were said as Kate went home and we riders turned in for an early night.

Day 1 should have seen us travelling by train from Stratford-on-Avon to London Marylebone, cycling across London to Charing Cross, catching the train to Folkestone, and using the Channel Tunnel to cross to France.

For cyclists - you ride to the Eurotunnel offices, the bikes are loaded onto a trailer behind a mini-bus which carries the riders. The vehicle is then driven onto the train for the short hop to France.

Unfortunately disaster had struck: the Tunnel had caught fire the day before and the cyclists' shuttle service was suspended. Eurotunnel did make contact to tell us to continue on the train to Dover and take the ferry. I have to say I was disappointed, as I had never used the tunnel before.

After a good night's sleep and breakfast, we double-checked the kit, including money and passports and rode the short distance to the station where Jenni, another cycling club member, was waiting to wish us *bon voyage*, and take the first of many photographs³

If you have been to Stratford-upon-Avon station you will know that it's at the end of the line - trains arrive and then "turn round" (the driver walks to the other end of the train) to depart - this does tend to confuse the tourists. The train to London Marylebone was supposed to arrive on the far platform which would have meant heaving the bikes and luggage over the footbridge. Rob, with local knowledge, suggested that as there is often a platform change we should hang on just in case: the train duly arrived on the platform on which we were waiting.

This was a trip of many firsts for me, this one being the first time I had taken a bicycle on a train. It was a painless process and at no extra charge. The journey was yet another chance to go over the itinerary especially now that we would be using the ferry, arriving in France later and having to cycle a little further. At London Marylebone the Ticket Collector had to open the gate for the bikes - we were obviously going to present a challenge to the automatic ticket gates with laden bikes.

Rob had worked in London and knew the area pretty well so the route to Charing Cross was easy for him. However, nothing quite prepares you for the traffic in London, although since the success of Britain's cyclists in the Olympic Games I have noticed a marked improvement in motorists' behaviour towards bikes - long may it last. Bus lanes also help enormously when riding in London although one of the main problems is the number of traffic lights (not to mention the taxis making lane changes and U-turns) you

³ Jenni is from New Zealand and caused much mirth on one ride when she shouted out what we all took to be "Nick's Lift" ...as you may image we riders were perplexed by this "instruction" The penny then dropped - it was "Next left" - the Kiwi accent being in full flood! The expression has entered in to club lore and was to be used many times on our ride.

never seem to get chance to get going. The advance stop areas for cyclists, which mean we get to go to the front of the queuing traffic at the traffic lights, do help - we, of course, stopped for all red lights.

Being conscious of the delay caused by the change from tunnel to ferry we pressed arriving at Charing Cross half an hour early and just in time to catch the before the one we had scheduled to take. This train was much busier than the one from Stratford and had no dedicated cycle space so the bikes had to go in the door area. We worked out which the side most station platforms would be and put the bikes by the other door so as to cause minimal disruption to passengers getting on and off. This earlier train, and the fact that it stopped at fewer stations let us to catch up some of the time we'd need later, sadly at the expense of lunch.

A speedy ride from Dover Priory Station took us to the ferry port and the sight of long queues of cars, lorries and people trying to buy tickets, get transfers from Eurotunnel and board the ferries - having been diverted from the now-closed Channel tunnel. We tried for just a transfer but it proved simpler to buy new tickets and sort out a refund later - a frustrating process in the ongoing chaos. We made visits to three separate huts but finally we had the right sort of ticket - namely as foot passengers with bicycles. The ferry timetables were wildly disrupted; ours was re-scheduled forty-five minutes later than advertised - but at least we could ride to the head of the queue as bikes are loaded first. Once on the ship we were directed to the rusty bike rack. It looked a potential wheel-breaker so we lashed them to a bulkhead next to the motorbikes instead.

Being first on meant we were first to the restaurant and settled down for a snack and some beer. The crossing was just short of eighty minutes with about twelve miles to cycle to our accommodation - we were still behind time but not disastrously so.

The ferry docked at Calais and then we were supposed to wait on the car deck until all the vehicles had disembarked. This

was for safety reasons, not unreasonable but we were running late. We pleaded with the disembarkation officer, eventually he said, “Well don’t come running back and moaning at me if you get killed!”

We assured him that we would not and pedalled for all we were worth heading for the gate. He must have kept the lorries back for a minute or two because we had nearly reached the dock exit before the first ones passed us. They went on to the motorway but we headed for Calais centre. Rob had used the crossings, both tunnel and ferry, before and knew the route from there to Guînes.

Calais is in the département of Pas-de-Calais and has a magnificent Hôtel de Ville or Town Hall, complete with Rodin’s Burghers of Calais bronze in the gardens. France is divided into départements these are generally bigger than the UK’s counties and tend to be more autonomous. They have a two-digit code that is used, among other ways, as part of the post-code and to identify a car-owner’s registered address as the final two digits on the number plate. Most of the départements have a population between 250,000 and one million. The largest in terms of area is Gironde, while the smallest is the city of Paris. The most populous is Nord and the least populous Lozère. Pas-de-Calais has the number 62 for its identifier. The old part of the town, Calais proper (or Calais-Nord), is situated on an artificial island surrounded by canals and harbours. The modern part of the town, St-Pierre, lies to the south and southeast. Calais is twinned, unsurprisingly, with Dover. The area around the ferry port is dominated by hypermarkets catering for the cross-Channel, alcohol purchases; there are even UK supermarket stores.

We remembered to ride on the right-hand side of the road and to go around roundabouts in an anti-clockwise direction.

Passing swans and ducks on the roadside canal we raced along the quiet roads, conscious of the fact that we were running late. Arriving at Guines at half-past seven we missed the turn to the hotel as Rob had not recognised the rear entrance as we cycled past it. Not to worry, it was only a couple of hundred yards (that should be metres, we're in France now).

Guines has one particular claim to fame: Henry VIII stayed in Guines, the border town of what was then English Calais; François I stayed in French Ardres. Lavish tents were set up in a field in "no man's land" in the middle – the celebrated "Field of the Cloth of Gold". Here they met – and showed off – for several days near the village of Guines. Negotiations were fruitless and they never became allies.

There was no time to change so went straight into the restaurant in our shorts and cycling jerseys to meet Rob's two brothers, Dick and Roger, along Roger's wife, Mary. They had come to see us off as they were in France on holiday.

We enjoyed an excellent meal with Rob eating the most enormous plate of lamb shank I had ever seen. I tucked into to what was to become the first of many succulent steaks before Dick persuaded me to try the cheese in beer. It was rather un-appetising to look at - shiny lumps of cheese floating in beer, but it had a wonderful hoppy taste. A few pre-trip photographs were taken, influenced by the imbibing of the local *vino colapso*, kindly supplied by Dick (by repute he only buys the cheap stuff)

After the meal we found our rooms before going to Roger's caravan (it's a strange hotel, with both a gourmet restaurant and a camping site) for more wine after which we went back to the very spacious rooms to rest and be ready for our first full day of cycling. I was still trying to remember what was in each pannier - having intended to compile a list of the contents, but I could not decide

whether the list would have to have the list listed – so in the end I didn't bother.

I was surprised how normal it had felt cycling in France after just our initial few miles, riding on the “wrong” side of the road, going round roundabouts anti-clockwise and trying to read French signs, I suppose the many times I had driven in France helped.

I rang Kate to let her know all was well and that the ferry had been relatively stress-free.

Was tomorrow going to be OK? Would the bikes be OK? Would we find somewhere to eat and drink? Would I be able to manage the language all right? What about the hills with the weight of the luggage? We would soon know.

Putting my various gadgets on charge and loading the next day's route into the GPS I looked at the map for the ride ahead. The tour was composed of daily stages, all very achievable on their own but which, when added up, made quite a long trip - somewhere around nine-hundred miles by our route-planning estimates. It all looked straightforward enough but we would soon see how good our planning had been.

Rob's Recollections	
The day	An exciting dash across London, no lunch and some frustration with the cross-channel arrangements
The food	No lunch - but a splendid dinner including lamb shank and an excellent cheese course
The hotel	3 Lamb Shanks : No surprises as I had stayed there probably a dozen times.

Statistics					
Miles	Ave Speed	Max Speed	Climbed	Max Height	Cumul. Miles
13.5	14 mph	21 mph	200 ft	65 ft	13.5

Day Two - Saturday 13 September 2009

Guines to Arras

A great night's sleep but I woke early.

After a help-yourself-to-whatever-you-fancy breakfast, we said our goodbyes to Roger and Mary (Dick having departed very early to get ahead of the cross-channel chaos) and took a few, last-minute photographs before setting off on our first, full day of cycling in France.

Calais is obviously at sea-level so we knew we would have to climb a little today but I was quite surprised how quickly we reached the first of the hills that lead to a series of plateaux, each one a little higher than the last. The first climb really brought home to me how much difference the extra weight of my luggage meant. The speed bled off very quickly at the first hint of an upward slope but I was determined not to use my inner, chain-wheel on the first day, I was sure I would need it later on in the tour.

My bike had three chain-wheels (the ones at the front with the pedals) - generally the smaller the ring the easier it is to climb. I paused halfway up a hill to catch my breath and looked round on hearing what sounded like a jet engine. It was the first of many sightings of the TGV (*train à grande vitesse*)

This is the pride and joy of the French Railways and rightly so. It holds the record for the fastest wheeled train, having reached 357 mph on 3 April 2007, and also holds the world's highest average speed for a regular passenger service. The high speed of the TGV is made possible through the use of specially-designed LGVs (lignes à grande vitesse, high-speed lines) without sharp curves. The trains are equipped with high-powered electric motors, enlarged wheels, low axle weights, articulated carriages and in-cab signalling (eliminating the need for drivers to view line-side

signals at high speed). We would come across these lines and trains frequently on our journey south.

When Rob and Joe had produced their journal after the JOGLE ride, one frequent occurrence was of Rob waiting in bus-shelters for Joe to arrive after an arduous climb. I had gone ahead of Rob on the first hill and saw a bus-shelter just after the summit, on the opposite side of the road. Rob didn't see me until he was almost level, then he laughed and said,

"I'm not going to rise to the bait!"

We descended to Licques and had our first navigational quandary. The route ahead was blocked; we didn't know why so we made a detour. Sometimes you can get through on a bike when you can't in a car but as the alternative path was just as flat we didn't bother trying. We passed through Journy, Journy's end already? Seeing some brown and white cows I greeted them the only French palindrome I know,

"Eh ça va la vache?"

The gardens of the houses we passed were very varied: sometimes a real effort had been made with fuchsias, sunflowers, hydrangeas and geraniums; at others no effort had been made at all. Lots of rooks were cawing and I was surprised, I'm not sure why, by the number of pigeons I saw. We nearly went on the *autoroute* at Harlettes but luckily neither of us had enough change for the *péage*.

At Lumbres we had a coffee with the owner of the café who managed to understand our French, which augured well. We were asked where we were cycling to by a couple of old boys in the café which was the first outing for the joke that we were to repeat all the way down France: in response to the frequent question one of us would reply,

"Nous allons aller à Montpellier"

"Montpellier?" They would say, incredulously, to which we replied,

"Oui, mais pas aujourd'hui"

This always brought guffaws and much head shaking.

Rob is very picky about his coffee. Me too, as I never drink tea. The quality in France was always high, right up until the last day when we were forced to have one from the “Golden Arches” (perhaps that should be *les arcs d’Or*) while waiting for the bus home.

We were looking for the D192 to carry on with our route but were not sure this would still be the correct road number as France has undergone a major road renumbering process. Rob suggested: “*Perhaps the D192 is now the D118118*”.

In Dohem we saw cars bedecked in white lace, a sign of a wedding taking place nearby. Sure enough we saw signs proclaiming the wedding reception of Christophe and Vanessa, appropriately in the *Rue de Paradis*.

The towns and villages were very quiet with few bars or restaurants so spotting a bar that doubled as the village shop at Fléchin we decided to have something to eat. The place had no menu but the man behind the counter was doing a roaring trade with his version of fast-food. Lunch was ham, cut off the bone, right in front of us on one of those old, ham slicers that I remember from my childhood, and a huge plate of chips. *Monsieur le patron* asked if we were Belgian; I suppose that was a compliment on my French accent, although the French think that Belgians speak strangely so I’m not so sure.

The villages we passed through were almost devoid of human life. It was definitely lunchtime - and *dejeuner* really does last for two hours in rural France -or else the experiment at CERN had misfired slightly.

CERN is the huge laboratory in Geneva where the ‘large hadron collider’ had been fired up for the first time a few days before our trip - some sceptics had postulated that a black-hole would be created and wipe off the entire planet.

The wildlife was good though; with buzzards, kestrels, donkeys, goats and a bull. I saw the flower known as sub-acute, periorbital haematoma Susan, otherwise known as black-eyed Susan - I think the altitude was getting to me - and I also saw a gyrocopter for the first time in my life. There were the ubiquitous fields of maize and huge, flat fields of sugar beet, some of which were being harvested using a type of combine and two trailers. There were also lots of the huge galvanised irrigation machines which had long arms with nozzles on, each arm braced for strength and looking, for all the world, like the skeleton of a brontosaurus. Although there seemed to be lots of pasture we saw very few animals - sheep were noticeably absent (perhaps they had heard about the lamb shank Rob had eaten the night before and were hiding)

The hills kept appearing, none of them really steep but more than we had expected. To take my mind off the lactic acid building up in my thigh muscles, I started counting, in French, the number of wind turbines that I could see on the surrounding hills; at one point there were thirty-seven in view at the same time.

We decided to make an alteration to our planned route; we thought it wise to avoid Mont-St-Eloi, the name giving away the reason why. Our alternative followed a railway line which would, naturally, be fairly flat. However, we missed a turning although our alternate, alternate was fantastic, being rewarded with a 20mph (wind-assisted) cycle along the N39 that gave us a chance to try out the busier roads and check on how the traffic behaved towards cyclists. We were suitably impressed by the amount of room that drivers gave us.

The next detour was just a small one to take a look at the immaculately kept British cemetery at Duisans. As we were leaving the cemetery I noticed that my bike had developed an annoying rattle somewhere, I tracked it down to a loose bolt on one of the two bottle cages, and it took just a few seconds to tighten it up. It's amazing how in tune one becomes with one's bike and how noticeable even the smallest rattles become.

For the last few miles we had been riding towards darkening skies as it became progressively more overcast. We zoomed along to try to arrive in Arras ahead of the rain but just failed. The last ten minutes were in the rain; not too heavy and not enough to bother to stop to put on waterproof jackets or the pannier covers. As it turned out this was to be the only rain of our entire trip.

We entered the cobbled-streets of our day's end - the town of Arras.

The capital of the Pas-de-Calais département. The historic centre of the Artois region, its local speech is characterised as a Picard dialect. Unlike many French words, the final "s" in the name should be pronounced.

Rob stopped off in a couple of mobile-phone shops, having realised that he had packed the wrong phone charger. Being a bit of a gadget-freak, not unlike myself, he doesn't have an ordinary, phone - he has a Smartphone with fancy PC connections - and therefore had no real chance in finding the right charger. We followed the signs for all the hotels until ours was the only one listed on the roadside signage, and then nearly missed it but Rob spied the hotel's logo on the wall through a stone archway. The hotel was an old building but with a modern interior, just off the enormous cobbled *place*.

I used a hastily-learnt-before-hand phrase to ask if there was somewhere that we could store the bikes securely. The receptionist booked us in and showed us a small courtyard where we could leave the bikes before went to our rooms.

A couple of hours later, showered and refreshed we met up in the lobby, Rob had already started on a *Leffe*. Rob does not eat spicy food. In fact nothing from east of Venice is his usual line, but fortunately Arras has plenty of restaurants and we found a busy *crêperie* and ordered *galettes* (savoury *crêpes*) and a large bottle of cider each. The fact that we ordered a bottle each seemed to throw

the waitress and we had to repeat our order - they were only 75cl bottles, we couldn't see the problem. The quantity of alcohol obviously had an effect later - I received a text at one o'clock in the morning but the cider made me think it was my alarm going off. I got up, shaved, showered and dressed before checking outside and thinking that it was very quiet for a morning. Then I realised.

I had two sets of cycling clothes, and at the end of each day I washed my shorts, shirt and socks and always tried to dry them in time to pack them away in the morning. I had been given a tip on how to deal with my laundry: washing, rinsing and wringing thoroughly; rolling the wet clothes in two towels; then sitting on the resulting parcel while writing up the day's notes before hanging them on my travel washing line. This worked very well. In fact, it became an obsession to find a heat source to hang the clothes around each night. The first thing I did in each hotel room was to check which, if any, of the heaters were working. It became noticeable that the further south we went the less well they functioned, but I always managed to dry my clothes.

Rob's Recollections	
The day	Started by realising I had packed the wrong phone charger. Rolling countryside and drags of hills; lots of wind turbines; wildlife highlight : donkey with a very new foal.
The food	Bread with cheese, ham & jam for breakfast; lunch of superb ham and chips; pizza washed down with cider for dinner.
The hotel	3 Lamb Shanks : An old building in the centre of Arras that had been "modernised" by IBIS with extensive use of plastic sheet materials.

Statistics					
Miles	Ave Speed	Max Speed	Climbed	Max Height	Cumul. Miles
72.3	13.1 mph	35.5 mph	2142 ft	632 ft	85.8

Days 3 - 7 are in the complete version

Day Eight - Friday 19 September 2008

St-Seine-l'Abbaye to Nuits-St-Georges

What a strange beginning to the day; the weather was noticeably warmer but incredibly damp with low cloud reducing the visibility to only fifty yards. The small roads we had chosen from the comfort of our armchairs some months earlier were so underused that they even had grass growing up the middle. We had to climb for over an hour from the valley where we had stayed the night before. The damp silence was broken only by a collection of seven different police vehicles and three unmarked vans with blue lights on their roofs, coming out of the fog, on their way down the hill.

The village of Panges appeared out of the mist, the first building was the former, communal washhouse. The village road sign and a trilingual noticeboard in the square announced that we were in the highest village in the department of the Côte d'Or and that we were at 1830 feet. A couple of dejected looking kestrels could not be bothered to fly off as we neared; they were content just to look down on us rather haughtily.

We passed a very isolated holiday home, a *gîte de France*, with a British car in the drive before, finally, we could freewheel and enjoy a long descent. The wind-chill factor made it very cold so we zipped up our outer layers; unfortunately, we had not invested in copies of *L'Equipe*. The slope was fairly shallow to start with but soon steepened and our speed shot up, clocking over 35mph - I wondered how much faster I could have gone if I had pedalled from the top in top gear for a while, rather than letting gravity do all the work. I had not had to turn the cranks for three miles - bliss. We had passed a lone cyclist toiling his way upwards who had given us a look that seemed to say "I will get my reward, eventually". In Pasques, a coach driver stopped us to ask directions, I showed him the map and he smiled with the relief of knowing where he was and,

I think, with the absurdity of the role reversal with an English cyclist. We lost over a thousand feet in height and arrived in Plombières-les-Dijon almost too numb to speak. It was time for coffee - a large one this time we thought.

The route had to cross an *autoroute*, the A38 - its number strangely evocative, as it is the same number as a road in the Midlands with which I am very familiar. We were searching for a tunnel that led under the road when we saw a cyclist using the cycle path - *piste cyclable* - alongside a river. Checking our maps, GPS and the position of the sun that had at last broken through the clouds, we decided to take a gamble and follow the bike rider towards Dijon. It turned out to be a good move, quieter than the roads, a flat surface and well signposted. It was not a shared-use path - the pedestrians had their own track. This was such a good idea; I am not a fan of mixing cyclists and walkers on the same, narrow path.

We came into the outskirts of Dijon from the west; but we wanted to avoid as much of the city as possible. Once again using the GPS, we threaded our way through residential areas, along alleyways, and through a supermarket car park until we found the road we wanted that was the former main road but which now sat higher up the valley and looked down on its newer alternative.

Almost as soon as we passed the sign telling us we were leaving Dijon the vineyards reappeared. We were on the *routes des grands vins* - Burgundy at last!

France has very strict but rather complicated laws governing its wine labelling. Appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC), which translates as "controlled term of origin" is the French certification granted to certain French geographical indications for wines, cheeses, butters, and other agricultural products, all under the auspices of the government bureau Institut National des Appellations d'Origine (INAO). The origins of AOC date back to the 15th

century, when Roquefort was regulated by a parliamentary decree. The first modern law was set on 6th May 1919, when the Law for the Protection of the Place of Origin was passed, specifying the region and commune that a given product must be manufactured in, and has been revised on many occasions since then. On 30th July 30 1935, the INAO, a branch of the French Ministry of Agriculture, was created to manage the administration of the process for wines. In the Rhône wine region Baron Pierre Le Roy Boiseaumarié, a trained lawyer and winegrower from Châteauneuf-du-Pape, successfully obtained legal recognition of the Côtes du Rhône appellation of origin in 1937.

The names of the villages were like reading a wine list; I had been looking forward to this day. We passed fields of vines often with walls around them and with manor houses or chapels inside the enclosures. Large signs depicted an idealised representation of the property; this was often the same picture that appeared on the bottle labels. In Gevrey-Chambertin, we decided we were warm enough to take our coats off and that here would be a good opportunity to buy lunch for later on, the kindly woman in the *boulangerie* sold us individual quiches.

Rob had started a conversation with four German cyclists sitting drinking coffees and beers who insisted that we mention that they were from Hamburg. They were touring around Burgundy, sampling the wines. They usually only cycled about fifteen miles a day and were wearing jeans so I reckoned that that would have been enough. Their English was excellent; they teased me about my German, although a couple of lines from a German poem curtailed the leg-pulling. One of them who had lived in London for a while said,

“I love English idioms for example “raining cats and dogs” is great.”

I replied,

“Hailing taxis is also a good one.”

He looked puzzled then with comprehension dawning on his face smiled and wagged his finger at me saying,
“I thought you were serious for a moment.”

It seemed that not only our intentions and efforts but also our clothing impressed the group - we certainly felt that our Lycra shorts and wicking cycling jerseys were a better option than jeans and, for one of the chaps, a leather waistcoat.

The names of the villages were so evocative, Gevrey, Fixey, Vougeot, Vosne-Romanée, Aloxe-Corton; all lovely wines on the way to our day's end in Nuits-St-Georges, or as an American acquaintance of Rob once pronounced it, “Newts Saint Jawdige.” I do love to hear Americans speaking French; they always seem to get the stress on the wrong syllable. I once heard one pronouncing *petit château* as, ‘piddy shadow’ and we were to hear some more absolute crackers before our journey's end.

I wondered why the birds did not eat the grapes - we saw many sparrow-like birds with orange tails ignoring bunches of purple-coloured grapes. In Vosne-Romanée, we ate our quiches and decided that they made an ideal lunchtime snack. In fact, these quiches were to be the first of many, and became one of the ‘quality measures’ for our tour.

In the bus shelter where we rested for a quick drink, and yet another banana, was a map of the local area with all the names of the wine growers on it. Wine making must be the life-blood of the area - but then, why shouldn't it be? They are so good at it after all.

We cycled into Nuits-St-Georges⁴ to find our hotel. It was an *Étap*, a bit basic again but excellent value at €45 for bed and breakfast. The receptionist said that there was nowhere for us to leave our bikes but then changed our room allocation to two large rooms on the ground floor, which were normally reserved for wheelchair users. That was bike parking solved as we could keep

⁴ Which is, somewhat incongruously, twinned with Hitchin in Hertfordshire.

them in the rooms with us. My room was huge and had two, fully-functioning radiators. I switched these on and had a quick shower by which time the room was like a sauna - fantastic. We walked back into town for a look around and as far as I was concerned, it was time for a wine tasting.

There were signs everywhere announcing *dégustation*, or wine-tastings. I tasted two red wines, the one a two-year old Nuits-St-Georges, the other a recent Vosne-Romanée. The Vosne seemed light and tasted a little of blackberries, the other was much fuller, with more tannin and a taste, or finish, that lasted for over twenty seconds. It also reminded me a little of the smell of cigars. I was trying to tell this to the proprietor in French, but he kept replying, "*Tout a fait.*"

This means he was kind enough to agree with me. He obviously had not realised we were on bikes and thus would not be buying anything. However, if I am ever back that way in a car I will return to his cellar and purchase a few bottles to reward him for his generosity. It was certainly interesting that two wines made from vineyards so close together and from the same variety of grapes could taste so different.

We drank a few beers in the main square and fell into conversation with four Britons who were on an organised rambling holiday. They had walked eight miles that day and were tired but elated. We said that we had done only thirty-six miles that morning - fewer miles in fact than we originally thought - in about five hours including our lengthy bar stops. They agreed that cycling was a very efficient form of transport but thought that their knees wouldn't stand it.

It was while we were drinking coffee half-an-hour later that I received two telephone calls. The first call was from Kate telling me about the "credit crunch" that was hitting Britain and the run on some of the banks. We agreed to move some of our savings into a more secure account. I was explaining all this to Rob when the phone rang again.

This call was from the boyfriend of a girl who used to work for me. He rang to say that she had died after a short, intense battle with cancer. She had endured operations and chemotherapy only for the tumour to return. She had suddenly become a lot worse, lost consciousness and had died. She was only twenty-five and a good friend, a charming, beautiful and amusing girl who left most people she met better for having known her. What a terrible waste of life for someone so loved. If nothing else this brought home to me the reason for our trip and that the old adage that, ‘life is not a dress-rehearsal’ was perfectly true. Cancer is a disease that will be beaten: probably type by type and until then, and to speed up the finding of cures, we must continue to support the efforts of those fighting it and also those caring for the sufferers.

Dinner was in a restaurant just off the main square which was under new management. *M. le patron* was arguing with an old man about the price of a glass of something. Exasperated, the chef, barman and owner (that is to say the same man), gave the old boy a few cents and came to our table, shaking his head and muttering to himself. He took a deep breath, fixed a smile and asked whether we had chosen our meal. We got chatting, talking about cycling and then we found that we both played rugby. He told me that he was a winger, I raised my eyebrows at this revelation as he was well over six feet and quite broad. He smiled patted his stomach and said that he used to be much slimmer and a great deal faster and fitter. Weren’t we all?

It had been a day of many highs and lows, both physically and metaphorically. Certainly, it was a day I would never forget.

Rob’s Recollections	
The day	A misty start and some steep hills before dropping down to the edge of Dijon and into the REAL wine country. A noticeable increase in temperature from noon onwards.
The food	Better than usual breakfast; quiche, pastry and a couple of oranges for lunch; dinner of charcuterie,

	andouillette (a sausage - French waiters always check with English people that they know what they are ordering ... it's an acquired taste - which I have acquired!), creme brulee.
The hotel	2 Lamb Shanks : A functional Etap at the edge of an industrial area and close to the Autoroute junction.

Statistics					
Miles	Ave Speed	Max Speed	Climbed	Max Height	Cumul. Miles
36.5	10.7 mph	35.4 mph	1637 ft	1915 ft	424.1

Days 9 - 17 are in the complete version

Day 18 - Monday 29 September 2008

The Journey Home

I awoke up as the coach was passing along the *périphérique*, Paris's infamous ring road. It was about four in the morning and the city was quiet, I managed to get a glimpse of the Eiffel Tower in the distance. Having slept in two reasonably long chunks of about two-and-a-half hours I was reasonably refreshed but looking forward to breakfast, a shave and a wash.

We arrived at the terminal in Calais in good time to catch our ferry. Rob and I nipped off to the loos but found them pretty crowded as everyone on the coach had had the same idea. While chatting to people outside we found out that our story had been circulated among the other passengers and as a consequence, we were given another donation. We also discovered that we had cycled more miles than any of the others in the last two weeks - this had not pleased one cyclist who had held that distinction up until we boarded the bus at Montpellier.

We were back on the coach again and waiting for the woman from immigration to check our passports when one of the drivers returning from an early breakfast noticed that we were leaking diesel. The embarkation people would not let us on board in that state so the three crew members tried to repair the leak coming from the front of the bus. They had just cured the problem when the traffic lights on the ramp for our ferry turned red, meaning that we would have to wait another hour for the next ferry: things might get a little tight with train connections on the other side of the Channel.

At last we were on the ferry with lots of other coaches and passenger, with a mad scramble to get to the loos - most of the other coaches' passengers had had the same idea though so a little patience was required. It felt much better though to be clean and

shaved and strangely comforting to be back in cycling clothes. At the gates of the port at Dover - scenes of the chaos of two weeks earlier - some of the cyclists alighted to catch trains or to cycle on from there. We had decided to get off at the next stop which was Gravesend and the best option to get to Charing Cross and then across to Marylebone for the final train journey to Stratford-upon-Avon.

We got off the coach saying our farewells and collected our bikes once more, attached the panniers, and rode off in the direction of the station. It was immediately noticeable how bumpy and potholed the roads were and how more impatient the car drivers were.

Rob had rather sadly but nonetheless usefully, brought along a train timetable; this showed that we would have a mad rush through London's streets and traffic in order to catch the Stratford train or that if we missed the first one we would have to kick our heels for another two hours.

As we left Charing Cross we had twenty-two minutes to get to Marylebone - a dash through the platform barriers, into the Strand, Trafalgar Square and up Regent Street. Again, I was really glad of Rob's local knowledge although I did recognise some of the roads and buildings from two weeks before.

We caught up with a cyclist at some traffic lights by the BBC. He looked us up and down but said nothing. The lights changed and we hared off, the other cyclist looking quite surprised when he caught us up later. There were we were, older and more heavily laden yet quicker and fitter than him – what was going on?

“Where have you guys been?”, he asked.

“We have cycled from Calais to the Med”

“How far was that?”

“About nine-hundred miles”

“Wow. How many punctures?”

“None”

“Unbelievable”

The lights changed again and we were off - it was quite amusing to see him having to work quite hard to keep on our tails. At Marylebone with two minutes before our train was due to leave - we ran and scooted along the platform - with an announcement over the tannoy for the two cyclists on Platform 5 to dismount immediately. That couldn't be us surely? We dived in through an open door and sat down; the train whistled and pulled away. Phew!

We chatted away on the trip back to Stratford, and also fell into conversation with a "trade-plater", those souls who try to scrounge lifts at motorway junctions, clutching their red and white number plates to their chests. He travelled all over the country delivering and picking up lorries using free public transport with his pensioner's pass whenever possible. Perhaps there is hope for Britain after all.

Back in familiar cycling territory at last we rode the short distance from the station to Rob's house where in front of his garage where we had set off two weeks earlier we shook hands and hugged. It had been a truly memorable, once-in-a-lifetime experience. One I thought I would never do, or be fit enough to undertake. We had experienced fantastic weather, great food, good roads with courteous drivers, some interesting accommodation and superb scenery, while raising money for a good cause. I had managed to cycle almost nine-hundred miles, and up many hills on a laden bike without using my inner chain ring. Rob and I had obviously missed our friends and families but we had become firm friends, the sort of friendship that comes only from such shared experience.

Kate arrived, took a last photograph of the two of us - we were obviously leaner and fitter than when we set off, and Rob was wearing black socks, rather than the yellow ones⁵ he was wearing when we set off. Kate drove me the fifteen miles or so home,

⁵ That other cyclist, Lance Armstrong, always wore black socks for the last day of his Tour de France winning rides!

listening to my incessant chatter as I tried to tell her about everything that had happened in the last two weeks. It was good to be home, to have more than one night in the same bed, to not dream about cycling, to eat a curry and to drink proper beer. For many months afterwards a memory of the ride would be triggered and then I would be off talking about it again.

Rob's Recollections	
The day	<p>The overnight coach trip was very well organised - but best described as "being in a propeller-driven plane that drives along a runway but never takes off!"</p> <p>A mirror-smooth Channel for an uneventful crossing - on a ship that seemed to be completely loaded with coaches.</p> <p>A train ride and a re-run of the original dash across London at even greater speed than on the outward journey.</p> <p>An evening spent recounting the highlights of the trip to my wife - and sowing the seeds for the next Boys' Outing!</p>
The food	Minimal lunch from the station shop at Gravesend - but a splendid home-cooked dinner.
The hotel	Not a hotel, but I'm sometimes accused of treating it as such.

oOo

Overall Statistics				
Miles	Average Speed	Maximum Speed	Height Climbed	Highest Point
881	11.9 mph	40.2 mph	28,979 ft	1915 ft

Epilogue

The day after the trip was something of a reality check; it was the day of the funeral for my friend who had died while I was away. It was a very moving, quietly dignified event. I had never been to a service of mourning for anyone younger than myself and it is not something that I want to repeat.

My new level of fitness was manifest in two ways: my jeans were much tighter in the thigh area, although as I had not changed weight at all I had obviously swapped body fat for muscle helped along, no doubt, by all the steaks. I had also acquired a most ridiculous tan line, the arms were not too bad it just looked like very noticeable T-shirt line but the tan from three inches above my knee to one inch above my ankle looked particularly silly. I also knew I was fitter when a week later, I went on a club ride. There is one hill about five miles from my house that I rather dislike - it is not steep or long, but it comes at a time when I am not really warmed up. I flew up this hill in five gears higher than usual, proving that there is no substitute for miles when it comes to getting bike fit.

We found out that entries, sponsorship and donations for the *MacRide*, which had been held on the Sunday before we left, had already topped £20,000 (*it reached £39,000*) - a figure that included the £1,600 or so that we had raised,. We would like to say a huge thank-you to all the supporters and donors that have helped Macmillan Cancer Support.

I hope that Rob no longer flinches as the time approaches ten o'clock; he can now be assured that there will be no more trivia shouted at him from two feet behind as he tries to cycle away.

If there are people - potential cyclists - out there who quite fancy the idea of starting cycling or even of undertaking a long trip we have put together a set of appendices that may be of some assistance. I would certainly recommend contacting the *Cyclists' Touring Club*; they have oodles of useful information. Make friends with your local cycle shop, their advice and support will be

invaluable. Perhaps start in Britain with full day trips or long weekends.

However, I can thoroughly endorse the notion of cycling and drinking wine, though not at the same time, as you wind down and indeed wine down, through France.

Rob's Afterword

I'll start with the usual question I ask myself: "Was it fun?"
"Yes" Actually, it's **"YES"**

Like most of the days on the previous rides the weather was good and it was again fascinating to see the changes in countryside, agriculture, viniculture, architecture and industry during the journey - and we even started to appreciate different provincial accents.

After the minor inconvenience of the Channel Tunnel catching fire the actual travelling/cycling bit all went to plan. No mechanicals - save for my bike losing a brake block pad and putting a bit of air in the tyres at Avignon.

We went from the rolling hills of northern France through a few mildly lumpy bits as we approached Champagne and then back onto what seemed to be an endless plateau towards Burgundy (I believe on one day we rode about sixty miles and probably only changed gear a couple of times). The wonderful *Voie Verte* through Burgundy led us out to the Rhône Valley and pleasant days tootling along the river, in and around the hydroelectric "barrages" and past a plethora of nuclear power stations - all of which led us to the Camargue and the sea. To use the well-worn expression from my previous journals: all unrolling in front of the handlebars of the bike over hundreds of miles.

I suppose I must also ask myself the same questions as I did after the JOGLE in 2005:

How tough was it?

Some steep hills but nothing daunting, or requiring the 24-inch gear (two feet - walking) A few of the mornings were pretty cold, one day I rode along (on a cycleway, I hasten to add) with my hands in the handlebar bag to keep them warm! The good old Mistral blew for a couple of days, blasting us along the Rhone riverside.

What would I have done differently?

Not a lot.

As usual, I travelled with minimal luggage - though I did take a spare pair of shoes this time! The daily ritual of “check in at hotel, wash kit, work out how to get it dry” became a conversation piece - comparing notes over dinner on the efficacy of strip lights over bathroom mirrors for shorts (gentle heat, overnight) and hair-driers (for socks)

What was different for this adventure?

Apart from being in France, very little. That’s a bit of an understatement really - previous tours had been on established routes. This one was inspired by Edward Enfield but only followed his general direction once we were into Burgundy - about half-way. The route was worked out with the splendid IGN maps and apart from a couple of blips in the mileage calculations it worked. I used the same bike and other equipment as for most of the previous trips - though I think I had fitted new tyres.

Spending the two weeks or so with Jon was great - sharing jokes and stories etc - it was really like an extension of the regular club runs we do on Wednesdays most weeks, just rather further than we usually cycle.

What’s the next adventure?

The idea of riding the length of the River Loire has some attractions, as does something through Spain - a ride to Gibraltar perhaps⁶

I must make mention of a few things:

For several weeks after our return my mental clock chimed at 0950 each morning, bracing me for Jon’s trivia piece of the day ... and the need to kick down on those pedals to escape!

⁶ This question has now been answered with a PLAN - with Jon, I am going to complete the double with the LEJOG (Land’s End to John O’Groats) version of the UK End-to-End - Sunday 6 June 2010 is D-Day in both senses of the word. See www.cycle-endoend.org.uk - possibly the definitive resource.

The generosity of the many people that contributed sponsorship and donations - we raised something over £1,600 which was added to the MacRide funds for Macmillan Cancer Support.

Thanks to my wife who managed without me for a couple of weeks (she did go off to Champneys for the weekend while we were away, but that's another story)

And finally, I was deeply touched by Jon's generosity: when we had photographed the Montpellier sign and started to cycle towards the Bike Bus pick-up point ...there was a modest hill. As we approached it I was in front, and heard,

"You can have the honour of getting to the top of this one first"

With a strong emphasis on the word "first" ... it being the first time on the trip. But then I'm older and heavier than him, and at least he didn't have to wait in any bus shelters for me.

Appendices

1 : Bicycles

	Jon	Rob
Frame	Custom-built Mercian King of Mercia Reynolds 731 Chrome-Moly Pearlescent Flamboyant Green	1975 Dawes Galaxy, with Reynolds 531 tubing, stripped and powder-coated in 2004. Red
Wheels	Mavic A719 36 DT S/S Spokes	Mavic A719 black rims - 36 DT S/S Spokes
Hubs	Shimano Ultegra	Shimano Deore LX
Tyres	Schwalbe Marathon 700x28 100psi	Schwalbe Marathon 700x32, 105psi
Handlebars & Stem	Dynamic with Look black carbon fibre tape	Original 1975 GB stem, ITM 44cm wide bars, Velox tape with additional layer at pressure points
Headset	Shimano Ultegra	Dunno - it does have ball bearings in it
Brakes	Shimano Super Dual Pivot Shimano blocks	Alhonga, dual pivot, deep drop (to accommodate wheel change from original 27" to 700c)
Brake Levers/Gear Shifters	Shimano Ultegra Flightdeck STI	Shimano Exage Aero, Ultegra bar-end shifters
Cranks	Shimano 105	Shimano Deore LX 175mm
Chainrings	Shimano 105 30-38-50	Shimano Deore 24-34-44
Chain	Shimano HG	SRAM
Cassette	Shimano Ultegra 11-34	Shimano 12-34
Derailleurs	Front Shimano 105 Triple; Rear Shimano Deore XT	Front Shimano Deore triple Rear Shimano Deore

Pedals	Shimano XTR SPD	Shimano M520 SPD
Bottom bracket	Shimano Road	Shimano
Saddle	Brooks B17 Titanium Tan	Specialized BG
Rack	Blackburn	Blackburn
Bottle cages	Topeak	Cheapest I could find!
Mudguards	SKS	SKS
Panniers	Altura Arran 23 litre each	Karrimor (front sized, but used on the rear)
Pannier covers	Altura	Halfords finest
Saddle Bag	Carradice Barley Bag	Wedge-pack with spare tubes. Tools and spares in a third bottle cage below the down tube
Bar bag		Altura
Computer	Cateye V2C	Specialized Comp

Rob also had the additional benefit of an “inclinometer” (or little spirit level thing) on the bars!

2 : Jon's Cycling Luggage

Bike Clothing	Normal Clothing
Cycling tops x 2 Cycling shorts x 2 Gloves x 2 Helmet & Cap Sunglasses Waterproof top Cycling socks x 3 prs Cycling shoes Arm warmers	Shorts x 2 Swimming Trunks Shoes T-shirts x 2 Underwear x 2 Socks x 2 Zip-off trousers
Equipment (electrical)	Equipment (bike)
Garmin GPS Phone & charger iPod & charger Battery charger Plug converter Head torch Camera & charger	Tools & Leatherman Puncture repair kit & tubes Pump Cycle computer Panniers, covers & bungees Locks (panniers & bike) Bottles x 2 Latex gloves, rag & lube Saddle cover
Personal Items	Miscellaneous
First Aid Kit Wash bag containing: Razor Shampoo/Conditioner sachets Shaving oil - it's lighter Deodorant Dental floss Toothbrush & paste Face cloth Shower gel Moisturiser Sun tan lotion Towel Comb Sleeping mask & ear plugs	Passport & Euros French cycling vocabulary Insurance documents Insulation tape Washing line & pegs Metal mirror Plastic ties Travel wash Note book & pencils Bubble wrap Maps Wallet!

3 : Rob's Cycling Luggage

<p>Wearing</p> <p>Cycle jersey (MacRide) Cycling shorts Cycling undershorts Cycling undershirt Yellow socks Shoes Gilet Cap Gloves Helmet Sunglasses</p>	<p>Checklist</p> <p>Passport Driving licence E111 Card Pills Travel Insurance details Senior Railcard Bike Bus Tickets Credit cards Cash</p>
<p>Tools/Spares</p> <p>Saddle cover Tubes x 2 Pump CO2 Pump + 3 cartridges Tyre levers Puncture kit Park Multi-tool Chain tool Cables (1 each brake & gear, rear) Mini pliers/cutters Tape Cable ties and wire Straps Nuts/bolts Chain links + 3 magic links Plastic gloves Chain oil Silicone lube spray Tyre boot</p>	<p>Accessible</p> <p>Shell jacket Sunglasses - spare lenses PVC rain cape Arm & leg warmers Cycle helmet raincover Spare gloves, pr Spare cap Rainlegs Covers for panniers & barbag</p> <p>Packed</p> <p>Cycling jersey - MacRide Cycling jersey - Soreen Cycling shorts - Specialized Cycling undershorts Yellow socks & black socks Cycling undershirt Rohan shirts (l/s & s/s) Rohan zip-off trousers Lightweight deck shoes</p>

<p>Brake blocks Degreaser Rag 9 + 10mm spanners Lock + wire loop for helmet</p>	<p>Pants Handkerchief Swimming shorts Magic towel Washing kit Travel wash Contact lens kit + solution Camera + card Camera charger Smartphone but no charger (see text) New French phone (cheapest found) MP3 player Drink mix powder Bicycle bears⁷</p>
	<p>Misc in Barbag/on bike Map book + IGN maps Hotel bookings & bus tickets Notebook Swiss Army knife Toilet paper Wet wipes Hand sanitiser Mini torch First Aid kit Nylon shopping bag Pen x 2 Water bottles (Silver + Green)</p>

⁷ Two very small bears that accompany Rob on cycle tours

4 : French Bicycle Vocabulary

Allen key	Une clé allen
Bike shop	Un magasin de vélo
Bottle cage	port bidon
Bottom bracket	boitier de pédalier
Brake	frein
Brake pad	un patin de frein
Cable	câble
Chain	chaîne
Chainring	plateau
Cliplless pedal	pédale automatique
Cogs	pignons
Crank	manivelle
Fork	fourche
Freewheel	roué libre
Front derailleur	dérailleur avant
Handlebars	guidons
Headset	jeu de direction
Hub	moyeu
Inner tube	chambre à air
Mudguard	garde boue
Nut	écrou
Pannier	sacoche
Rack	porte-bagages
Rear derailleur	dérailleur arrière
Rim	jante
Rim tape	un fond de jante
Saddle	selle
Screw	une vis
Seat-post bolt	serrage de selle
Spoke	rayon
Tyre	pneu
Valve	valve

Water bottle	bidon
I have a flat tyre	J'ai une crevaison
I have broken a spoke	J'ai un rayon cassé
Could you adjust the gears?	Réglez le dérailleur SVP?
Could you true the wheel?	Redressez la roue SVP?
Is it hilly?	C'est vallonné?
Is there a cycle path near?	Il est une piste cyclable près d'ici ?
Is there somewhere secure ?	Y-a-t'il quelque part en sécurité pour laisser les vélos ?

Don't blame me if they don't understand !

Photographs



Jon's Mercian, ready to go



*Rob (l) & Jon - le depart
(Stratford-upon-Avon)*



*Rob & Jon - le depart
(Guines - with Rob's sister-in-law, Mary, holding the map)*



Arras



Typical road in N France



Near Nuits St Georges

Wine-ding Down Through France



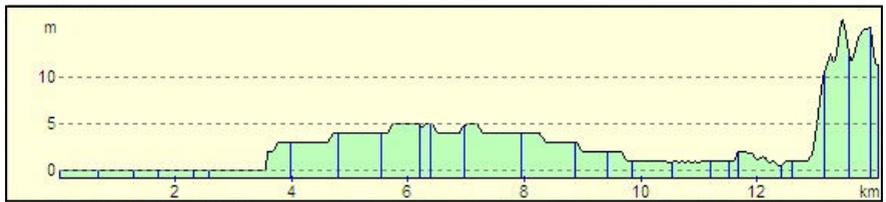
Bikes being loaded onto the trailer of the European Bike Express coach



*Journey's end - we did it!
Note : Rob is wearing black socks in this photograph*

Profiles

The profiles are NOT TO SCALE but are indicative of the terrain



Calais - Guines

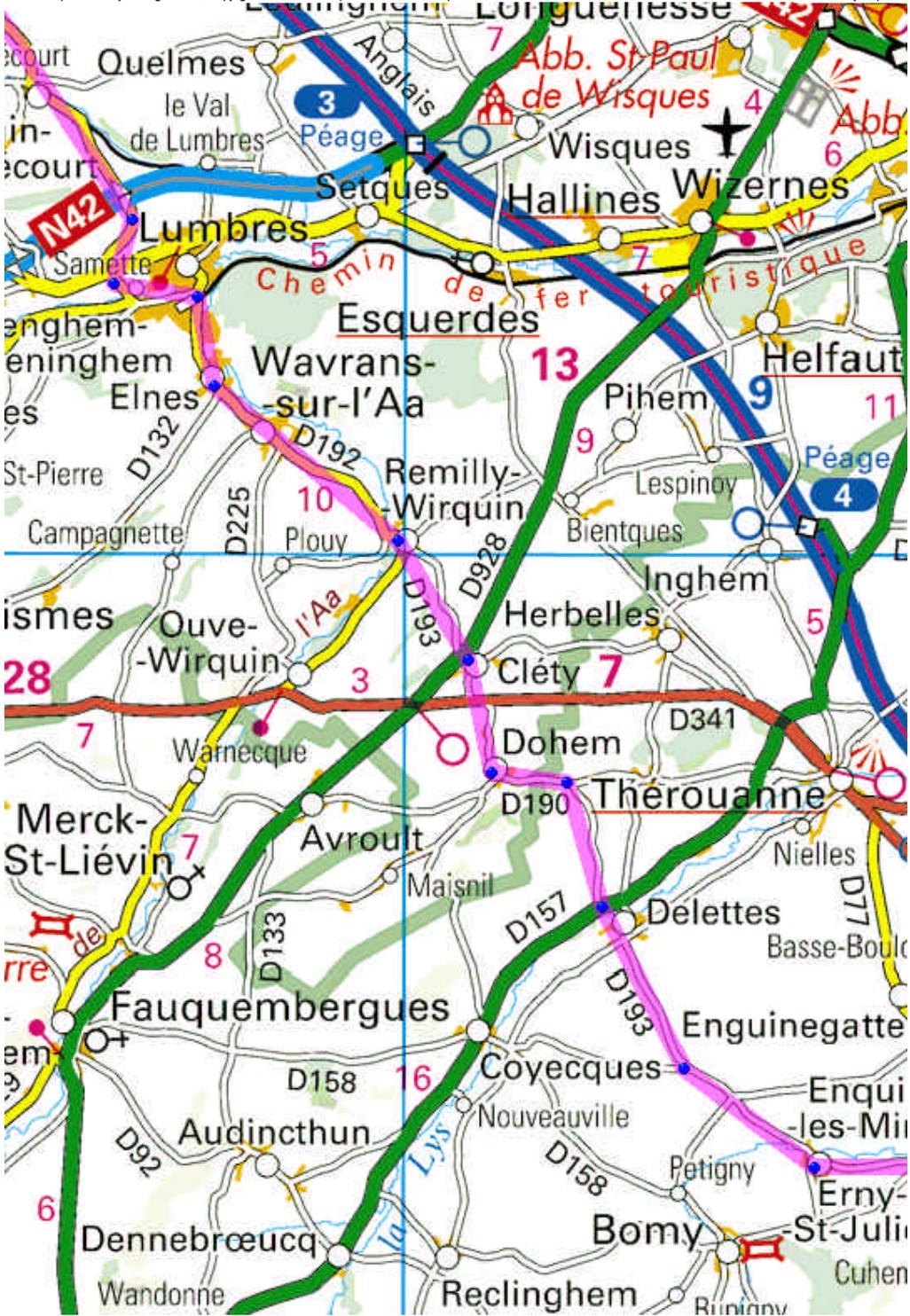


Guines - Arras

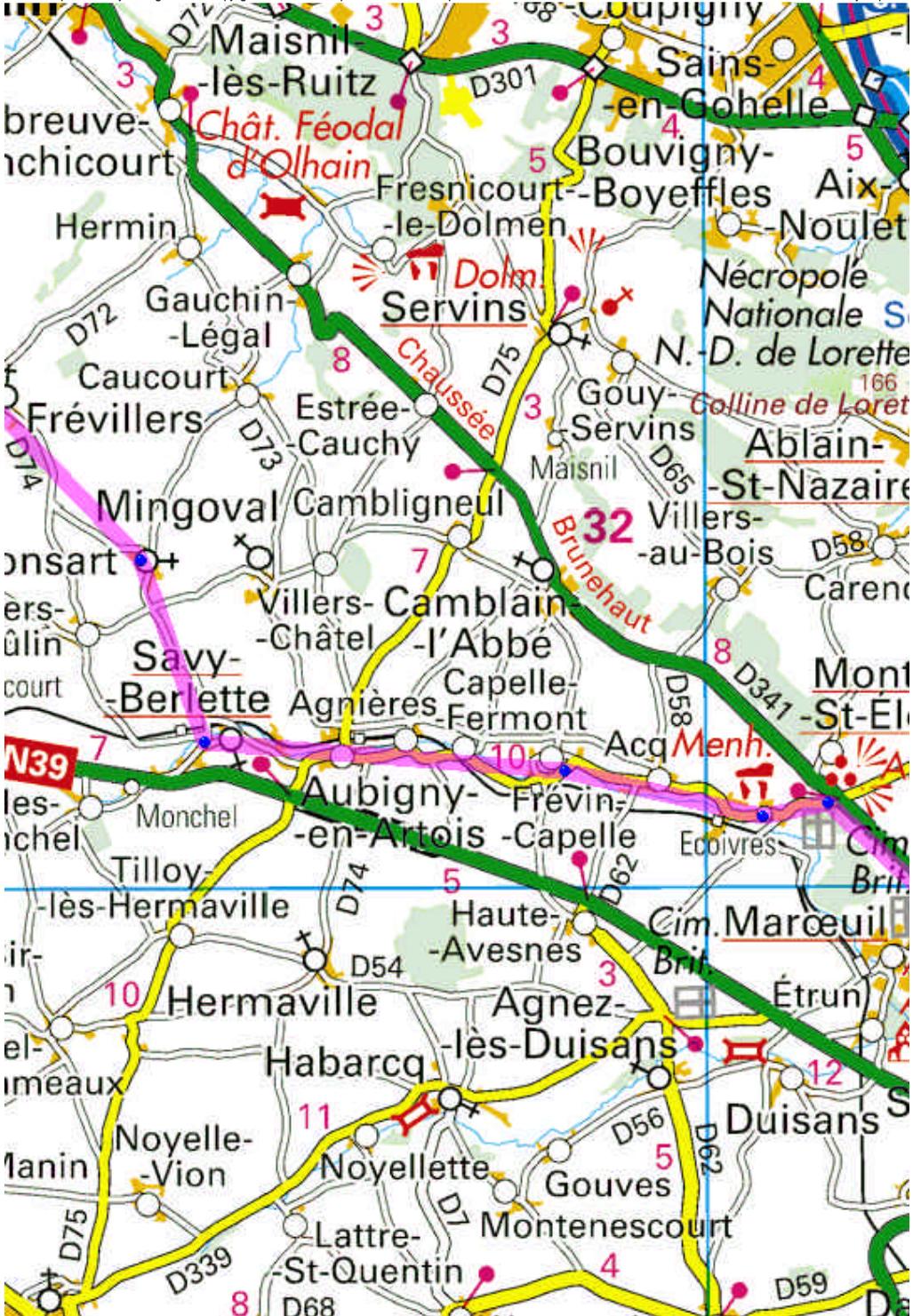


St Seine l'Abbaye - Nuits St Georges

Map :
Calais - Arras









Map :
St Seine l'Abbaye - Nuits St Georges

