

# French Holiday 1998 by Heather Collins

## *The South of France*

### **Thursday 13 August**

We were woken by the alarm clock at 5am. The sky was just beginning to lighten to another glorious summer morning. David bounded out of bed and went to make a pot of tea. Neither of us had slept well - too excited, I expect.

We washed and dressed and I re-made the bed and cleaned the bathroom in preparation for our house-sitter, Claire who would be arriving sometime later in the day.

Katy joined us for a speedy breakfast and after packing the last minute stuff in the car we left the house at 6am and were on our way. The drive to Portsmouth was very pleasant and uneventful. If only the roads were always so clear of traffic!

We checked into the ferry port at 7am and then waited to board the boat at 7.45am. We were surprised that the boat was quite small and only about half full. We had pre-booked seats in the Club Class lounge and went straight there after leaving the car deck. Our seats were extremely roomy and comfortable with lots of leg room. Free tea and coffee was provided as well as newspapers. We ordered sandwiches for lunch from the Club Class hostess and these were brought to our seats. The voyage passed uneventfully and we arrived in Cherbourg at 2.45pm CET - about 15 minutes late.

We disembarked swiftly and were on our way. After a pleasant drive south of about 100 miles we arrived at our first night stop at a Chambre d'Hôte 5 miles south of Flers at la Roculier at 5.30pm. M and Mme Roussel greeted us warmly and showed us to two very nice rooms. Mme Roussel made us a pot of tea and we sat in the garden in the early evening sun and chatted to our hosts. Our rusty French was a bit of a joke - fortunately M Roussel's English was pretty good!

The house was about 500 years old and very pretty. There were chickens and a donkey to admire and a friendly dog called Welcome who was quite interested in the biscuits we had with our tea!

We whiled away the time relaxing and chatting until dinner at 7.30pm. What a meal! Camembert Tart and green salad to start followed by roast Guinea Fowl, French beans, roast potatoes - all home produced - then a selection of Normandy cheese and to finish a very light sponge cake with strawberry jam and custard. Local sparkling pear cider accompanied the meal and we finished with delicious coffee. We were the only guests dining but another couple joined us at the end of the meal. They were French from near Paris and their English was even worse than our French but we all got by somehow!

We went to bed early, before 10pm, as we were tired after our long day. We phoned Claire to check all was well at home - it was - and listened to the cicadas chirping.

## Thursday 14 August

We all slept quite well despite being really full from dinner! Had a good breakfast of croissants, bread and home made jam, tea and coffee, then checked out. David bought a case of pear cider from M Roussel, he was so taken with it the night before. We were on the road by 9.15am and made steady progress south for a couple of hours. The weather was good and getting hotter. We discussed last night's stop and all agreed that although the meal was excellent it was hard work dining "en famille" with our hosts, nice as they were.

We stopped between Le Mans and Tours at a Le Clerc hypermarket and bought some lunch supplies of bread, ham, cheese and fruit and cola and water. We drove on a few miles and stopped for a picnic. After lunch, we continued southwards and picked up the motorway at Tours. The tolls confused us a bit. Some you get a ticket and pay when you exit and some you pay up front. It cost FF32.40, about £3.50, to get from Tours to Châtelleraut (about 40 miles) but was worth the money in saved time. We arrived at our over night stop in Chauvigny at 3.30pm. The house was in the centre of the town and was a very old, large building with huge rooms. It was quite creepy inside - stuffed animal heads in the hallway and lots of old furniture and artifacts. Madame was also a bit creepy!! It was all a bit "Addams Family". Our rooms were fine, though and it was good to cool down with a refreshing shower. Katy had a rest and David went into the town for an explore. He came back full of excitement about the beauty of the medieval part of the town and dragged us out to see for ourselves. After a steep climb up we came to a beautiful square by a castle. We stopped to get our breath back and had a drink sitting outside the "Les Choucas" restaurant where David had booked a table for later that evening. We walked around the ruins of various castles and admired the interesting stonework and Romanesque decoration of the Church of St. Pierre before returning to the restaurant for our meal. Three courses for FF60 each! Katy and I started with tabouleh salad and David had terrine. We all followed with chicken in a light curry sauce with fries and salad. David and I finished with Creme Brulee and Katy had pistachio ice-cream. With wine and beer the bill came to FF210.70 - not bad!! We walked back to the Chambre d'hôte and left Katy there as she was tired and then David and I went to the town square as there was a jazz band performing. We didn't stay long as it wasn't all that good and we were both quite tired.

David 'phoned Andrew and Tracey to check all was well with Tracey as she had been to the hospital for a check up that day. Everything was fine and the baby was growing nicely.

We were all in bed by 10pm

## Saturday 15 August

We woke late after a fretful night's sleep. It was very hot and the "creepy" house had got to us a bit! We washed and dressed and were ready for breakfast by 8am. Basic French style breakfast of bread and jam, juice, tea and coffee. We paid the bill, which was less than we expected at FF430 and were on the road by 8.45am. A long, hot drive south of 214 miles. Some bad hold ups but also some stretches of new motorway. We got to Cahors at about 2pm and stopped at a Le Clerc for lunch supplies which we ate in the car park by the River Lot. We were not aware that 15 August is a religious holiday in France and most of the shops were closed! We drove on to Bouloc, some 20 miles south west of Cahors. We went to the key holders house and followed them by car to our rented house. What a fantastic place!! Far better than we expected although it had cost us £1,150 for two weeks! There were four large double bedrooms, three upstairs and one on the ground floor, lounge, kitchen, bathroom, shower room, breakfast terrace, barbecue terrace, large garage and beautiful pool - all set in a large area of garden surrounded by fields. There was a big bowl of plums and tomatoes in the kitchen and flowers on the tables - very welcoming.

We unloaded the car and went back to the hypermarket in Cahors to stock up on food and essentials like wine and beer. When we got back to the house, David lit the barbecue and I prepared a salad. Katy had a swim! After a wonderful meal of chicken, sausage, steak, salad and French bread followed by pear tart and washed down with a bottle of Cahors red wine, we watched an electric storm flashing in the distance over the Pyrenees. The lightning flashed across the sky in forks but we could barely hear the thunder and there was no rain. We went to bed about 11pm. The storm was all around us by then - intense, bright lightning, crashing thunder and torrential rain.

## **Sunday 16 August**

Woke up early, about 5am. The storm was gone and all was quiet. The birds were just beginning to sing and the cockerels to crow. Dozed until when David got up to make some tea. Laid in bed peacefully chatting and listening to BBC radio 4 and VOA. We were shocked to hear reports of a massive car bomb in Northern Ireland with many people killed and injured. Got up about 9am and had an invigorating swim (16 lengths) before showering and dressing. It was quite cloudy but warm, around 73F. The sun was just coming through the clouds which were breaking up fast.

Spent the morning pottering and sitting by the pool - relaxing! Katy swam and played in the pool. David found various things to mend - a bedside lamp, two curtain poles, a drawer knob and a loose power socket. He also adjusted the fridge door which didn't close properly. He likes mending things!!

We had lunch on the shaded terrace of ham and onion quiche and salad followed by cheese and fruit - delicious.

The day was now very hot - 90F (82F in the shade) so too hot to sunbathe and swim. David took a drive to Lauzerte, the nearby town, to look around, and Katy and I lazed around chatting until 2.30pm when a few clouds came over and the heat wasn't so intense. We moved out to the pool area and spent a pleasant afternoon swimming and sunbathing.. We had great fun with an inflatable beachball in the pool. It was a most relaxing afternoon - just what holidays are all about.

David came back around 3.30pm, full of enthusiasm for the beauties of medieval Lauzerte.

We had another BBQ of various meats and foil wrapped potatoes with sage and rosemary found growing in the garden. We finished off the remains of the pear tart and of course a nice bottle of red wine!

After tidying up and disposing of the rubbish in the bin at the end of the drive, Katy taught me how to play poker. I won, which annoyed her a bit - beginners luck, I expect!

David put the badminton net up and we fooled around for a bit in the semi-darkness.

To cool off, we soaked our feet in the pool and Katy discovered that her flip flops floated., so we had flip flop races across the pool by gentle agitating the water - very silly!

Katy went to bed about 10pm, she was very tired. David and I decided to do a wash load. Very strange top loading machine but it worked OK. It was a lovely warm, still, night. The temperature outside was 82F at 10pm; Gorgeous!

We waited for the washing to finish and went to bed at 11pm. We both had difficulty sleeping - it was hot and moths kept dive bombing us. The light was on and off several times before we had cleared the room of "UFO'S" and finally settled into sleep around 2am.

## **Monday 17 August**

I woke around 7.30am and got up to make tea. It was a lovely morning, clear blue sky and brilliant sunshine. I quickly drank my tea and after listening to the news on a very scratchy radio 4 broadcast from London, I got into my swimsuit and went out to the pool. The water was lovely! I swam 24 lengths and then went for a bath. I was just finishing drying my hair when the 'phone rang. It was Claire in a panic with some problem with David's computer. Oh dear! Not much David could do about it from the South of France! After breakfast of Muesli and juice we drove to Moissac - about 15 miles south. A pretty little town with a large, ornate church dominating the centre. As we parked the car, David's mobile 'phone rang - it was Claire again with more computer problems. Not funny at peak time. The mobile was switched off and left in the car! We looked around Moissac for the rest of the morning but most of the shops were closed - apparently they are on Monday's in France!! We went back to Bouloc after picking up some food supplies and had a simple lunch of bread, pate, cheese and fruit. Spent a restful afternoon by the pool - reading and swimming. It was quite cloudy but hot, around 85f. Katy and I had a good game in the pool with the beachball and then burnt off surplus energy by playing badminton. David went off on one of his jaunts to get some French plugs to put on our hairdryers etc. as we only had 2 travel plugs. We saw a beautiful green and gold lizard in the undergrowth by the terrace. It was quite large, about 10 ins from head to tail. Lots of small lizards around as well climbing the walls and basking in the sun. We watched birds swooping low over the pool to get a drink - can't be very good for them.

The afternoon slipped into evening and the sky cleared to a cloudless blue. David lit the barbecue and we had a good meal of meat and salad sitting outside in the evening sun.

Andrew, Tracey and Max arrived at 9.30pm after a hot drive from Toulouse airport. Max was so excited to see us - he ran around exploring everything. He called the pool the puddle and had great fun throwing the plastic boules into it. Andrew was fine but Tracey looked really tired. We gave them a light meal of salad and ham etc. They weren't too hungry as they had eaten on the 'plane. We left them to get unpacked and sorted out and put Max to bed.

We sat around the pool chatting and looking at the stars until 11.30pm when we all went to bed.

## **Tuesday 18 August**

Woke to the sound of distant thunder at 7.30am. Got up and made some tea and then went for my morning swim. Swam 30 lengths - getting better! Max and Tracey came out to watch me. Max thought it was very funny to see Granny in the "puddle". No-one joined me in the pool after all the brave promises of the night before!!

The thunder continued in the distance so after breakfast we decided to go to Cahors to the hypermarket. It's always good to shop! We got to Carrefour at 11am and wandered around for about an hour picking up things as we went. It was less crowded and the shelves were better stocked than on Saturday. Andrew, Tracey, Max and Katy decided to go straight back to the house with the shopping and David and I went into Cahors town centre. We walked across the famous turreted bridge which is no longer open to traffic and drove around the old part of the

town. The new buildings were sympathetically blended with the old and it was all very picturesque and well cared for.

We drove back to Bouloc about 2.30pm to find Katy, Andrew, Tracey and Max in the pool having fun. The morning storm clouds had gone and the sky was a cloudless blue and a perfect temperature of 82f. David and I had a snack lunch and then joined the rest of the family around the pool. Max loved the water and we all had a great afternoon playing and relaxing. Andrew swam 74 lengths - he had to beat his aged mother!

At about 5.30pm we decided to go to the local supermarket to get some milk. As we all wanted to go, both cars were needed. Unfortunately, Andrew and Tracey didn't hear where we were going to and went in the opposite direction. They went to the Shopi at Montcuq and we went to Lauzerte! We all arrived back at the house at about the same time and had a good laugh about it!

Andrew lit the barbecue and I made the salad. We ate outside in the warm evening sun with a bottle or two of lovely Cahors wine. Max went happily to bed at 8pm and the rest of us sat outside eating a delicious pear tart. Tracey and I sat with our feet in the pool eating ours - cool!

After tidying up, Andrew, Tracey, Katy and I played "Scattergories" at the kitchen table and David was stargazing. Andrew joined him about 11pm with sky charts - serious business!!

We girls went to bed - a good day.

## **Wednesday 19 August**

### Our 31st Wedding Anniversary

I woke up about 7.30am. David was still asleep and the rest of the house was quiet. I lay in bed listening to sounds coming from outside - crowing cockerels - singing birds - someone rotorvating! I got out of bed about 8.15am - still a quiet house - and made tea for David and me. We exchanged cards and greetings and after drinking my tea I went out to the pool for my morning swim. It was very misty and quite cool, 66f. I got into the water which was steaming slightly as the water was warmer than the air temperature. 40 lengths - excellent!

Max and Tracey came out when I was on length 18 and encouraged me. Nice! Had a bath and got dressed and then breakfast of warm croissants. Katy came down with some anniversary cards brought from England - an excellent funny one from her. She didn't feel too well so she went back to bed. Andrew was still in bed catching up on some zzzzzzs so David, Tracey, Max and I went into Lauzerte and had a look around. There was a small market with local produce for sale - very attractive. David bought some wine but I resisted the pot of snails!! We walked up to the old town square - old, cobbled place surrounded on four sides by tall, old buildings - pretty.

Back to the house, stopping at the supermarket for fruit and ice cream. Andrew was up and so was Katy - feeling better. Max and Andrew went in the pool and Katy quickly joined them. She swam 25 lengths today. The sky was clear blue and it was getting hot - 80f. We had lunch of the usual bread, cheese, pate, fruit etc. Andrew, Tracey and Max went off to Cahors for the afternoon. Katy wasn't feeling too good again so went for a lie down in the cool. David and I decided to visit Bourg de Visa, about 15 miles away, where we had stayed 12 years before. The road was extremely bendy but we got there eventually. Bourg de Visa looked vaguely familiar but neither of us really remembered it. However, one road out of town looked familiar. We

drove along for about a mile and found the house we had stayed at. It was called "Flajal" and was down a track by a small lake.

We returned to Bouloc to find Katy much recovered. David and I quickly got changed to go out as we had arranged to meet David's work colleague and family who were staying at a campsite in Cahors on their way down to the Pyrenees. John and son Richard met us at the campsite entrance and guided us to their caravan. We spent an enjoyable evening with John, Doreen and Richard barbecuing and chatting. We returned to Bouloc at 11.30pm to find the house quiet and everyone in bed - as David and I soon were.

### **Thursday 20 August**

I woke up around 7.30am and heard Andrew and Max get up. Max thought I would be in the pool - but I was still in bed! I dragged myself up and went to make some tea. I psyched myself up and went out to the pool - I really didn't want to! I forced myself to get in the water - the weather was cool and misty again. The water felt quite warm and I swam 60 lengths - I was very pleased with myself! Tracey and Katy were up by now but Andrew had gone back to bed!

After breakfast, David, Katy and I decided to drive to Montauban - some 30 miles south. It was a very pleasant drive and the road was good. There were stretches of road with names painted during the Tour de France - mostly on the steep upwards hills - to encourage the cyclists. Montauban was quite an attractive provincial town on the River Tarn. We decided to find a hypermarket, get some lunch and then shop. By chance, we found a Casino with a cafe and had some salad and pate and yummy cakes. Unfortunately, our luck ran out as the Casino shop had closed for the usual long 3 hour lunch break by the time we had finished eating! We saw some signs for a Mammouth but they weren't clear and we got a bit lost. We saw a Le Clerc and went in to cool off - it was hot by now. We bought a few things - Katy got a nice, long sleeved nightshirt. We decided to have one more try at finding the Mammouth - this time we were successful and it was worth it - the best hypermarket so far!! I bought a nice plate with sunflowers on it and a painted terracotta plant pot as well as some food supplies. We drove back to Bouloc and arrived one minute after Andrew, Tracey and Max who had been to Villeneuve sur Lot and had a good lunch there. We all made for the pool to cool off and spent a couple of happy hours messing about and relaxing.

David, Katy and I went into Lauzerte in the evening and had dinner at the Hotel de Quercy. David had steak (of course), Katy had Guinea Fowl with aubergines and tomatoes and I had a mushroom and bacon risotto - washed down with a carafe of Vin Rouge. Too full for pudding so back to the house about 9.30pm. We played Mah Jong with Andrew and Tracey for the rest of the evening.

### **Friday 21 August**

I woke about 7.30am. and the sun was peeping through the shutters. I got up to make some tea and then went for my early morning swim. The sky was quite cloudy and there was a cool breeze. It was not very warm, only 64f. The first 20 lengths were a bit of a struggle but it got easier so I ended up doing 80!!

When I got out of the pool at 9am the rest of the household were up. After a discussion, Andrew, Tracey and Max decided to go to the Mammouth at Montauban and David, Katy and I

to Montcuq about 6 miles away. Montcuq was a very picturesque small town off the main road with a tall tower at the top of a hill. The tower was only open in the afternoon so we decided to go back another day. We stopped at the Shopi on the way back to the house for food supplies. I did some chores - washing etc. and made a snack lunch. Spent the afternoon by the pool writing postcards to the folks back home, reading and swimming. Andrew, Tracey and Max came back about 2.30pm after having an enjoyable time at Montauban. Tracey was tired so went for a rest and Andrew and Max joined me in the pool. It was hot again but quite windy which kept the temperature down to a pleasant 80f. Tracey came down about 5pm but had a headache so wasn't her usual cheerful self. She had had quite a bad night with Max and was suffering from lack of sleep. Andrew decided to go for a nap and Max helped David light the BBQ. We had some delicious pork chops and sausages with salad and bread followed by fruit and ice-cream. Andrew and Tracey had decided to go out for a meal so David and I gave Max a bath - we got nearly as wet as he did!! I put Max to bed and he cried for Mummy and Daddy for about 2 minutes and then went straight to sleep. I tidied up the kitchen and David tidied the pool and BBQ area. We think "someone" is coming very early in the morning to clean the pool so we have left a few "traps" - the pool cleaning pole has been left in a certain position etc! We shall see!!

David, Katy and I had a few hilarious games of "Scattergories" and finished just as Andrew and Tracey returned. They had been to the same restaurant that we had eaten at the night before and had an excellent meal. They had chosen a set menu which was mostly duck in many different ways.

We sat around chatting for about an hour. Andrew and Tracey were on good form - much more cheerful - a night out had done them both good!

## **Saturday 22 August**

My birthday.

I woke up about 7.45am. The house was quiet. I decided against an early swim and had the luxury of tea in bed. David gave me a lovely silver necklet and a painted terracotta wall hanging of a sunflower made locally in France. I got up and went to check the weather. Horrors!! - grey clouds and light rain!

Tracey, Max and Katy came downstairs and gave me more gifts. Pretty silver ear-rings from Katy and sunflower plates to match the one I bought from Andrew and Tracey. (They have another gift for me in the UK.) Max gave me some French biscuits called Grany! Katy had brought other gifts and cards from the UK so it was an exciting start to the day.

After breakfast, we all went into Lauzerte to the Farmers Market. I bought a selection of fresh fruit and vegetables and David bought some local wine and cheese.

We returned to the house by way of the supermarket to pick up meat and bread and then set off for Villeneuve sur Lot, about 20 miles west.

Andrew and Tracey treated us to a delicious meal at a pavement cafe. I had steak au poivre and fries followed by creme caramel. It was still raining on and off but warm enough to wear shorts and T shirts. We strolled around the shops for an hour or two and then drove back to Bouloc. I fell asleep in the car - too much wine at lunch!!

We got back at 5pm and had a reviving cup of tea. David's parents phoned with birthday greetings - nice! The rain had stopped and the sky was clearing so Tracey and I decided to swim. The others thought it was too cold!

I swam 110 lengths in 50 minutes - a total of 1100 metres. I was very pleased with myself. Tracey swam 60 lengths - a personal best - extremely good given her pregnant state!

I wasn't allowed in the kitchen while Tracey and Katy prepared a delicious supper of pizza, quiche, salad, bread and cheese. Andrew and I played badminton which was good fun, particularly as it was quite windy. As we were nearing the end of supper, Graham phoned from the UK to wish me a Happy Birthday. He was back from Moscow and was enjoying his first week-end at home for about 3 months.

I was shut out of the kitchen again while the tidying up was done so played some more badminton - this time with Katy. Max went to bed and then we had a Strawberry Baba cake with candles that wouldn't blow out! Andrew, Tracey, Katy and I played Mah Jong for a couple of hours until bed time. Katy won the final game so was made supreme champion.

### **Sunday 23 August**

Woke up around 7.30am and made some tea. Andrew and Max came downstairs and we breakfasted together. Everyone else was still in bed - asleep. The weather was cloudy and drizzly again. I had a bath and got dressed by which time David was up. Tracey came down about 9am but Katy didn't appear until 10.30am.

Andrew, Tracey and Max decided to drive to Moissac and we went towards Cahors. We stopped on the way at Montcuq and stayed for a couple of hours! There was a lively street market and a band marching through the town centre. I bought some plums and nutmeg from the market and then had some lunch at a small creperie. We left Montcuq and drove to the Grotte de Roland and took a guided tour which lasted about an hour. Our guide spoke in English which was good for us! The rest of our group consisted of Dutch, German and Belgian families and probably didn't understand much of what the guide said! The caves were beautiful with impressive formations of stalagmites and tites. Prehistoric bear and lion bones were on display along with dog, horse and human bones found in an ancient burial site. We left the Grotte and returned to Bouloc - we never made it to Cahors! Andrew Tracey and Max were at the house and had had a good time at Moissac. Tracey was taking a nap so we sat around chatting and playing badminton. The weather was a little better - dry at least - and when the sun broke through it was hot.

I had a swim at about 5pm. The water felt quite cold but I swam for about half an hour. David lit the BBQ and we had a feast of pork, sausages, hachettes, green beans salad and potatoes. We finished with strawberry cake and ice cream.

David, Tracey and I drove to Montcuq and watched the locals street party and enjoyed the band and fairground attractions. Back to Bouloc at 10.30pm to find Andrew and Katy star gazing. The sky was clear and the stars were incredible. We saw Jupiter and its moons and a galaxy - M57 - through the binoculars. The Milky Way was clearly visible with naked eye. The evening was still and warm and we lounged about by the pool until bed time.

### **Monday 24 August**

Another dull and drizzly morning - what has happened to the sun!!



Andrew, Tracey and Max were up early and left for Toulouse about 9.30am. David, Katy and I pottered about slowly and then left for Cahors about 10.30am. We had a look around the old part of the town. Lots of medieval buildings in narrow alleyways with jettied upper floors - very pretty. The cathedral was very impressive with a large central dome and beautiful stained glass windows. We walked across Pont Valentre again and this time saw the stone devil high up on the central turret.

Ate lunch at a pavement cafe near the cathedral. David had veal and I had roast beef - which was nearly raw. Katy had spaghetti carbonara which came with a raw egg yolk in its shell sitting on the top. Katy hates eggs so we had to remove the offensive thing to an ashtray! Not the best lunch of the holiday!!

We had parked the car near the river where there was a modern ball bearing clock on display - quite a feature.

We headed back to the house stopping at the hypermarket to stock up yet again. Where does all the food go!?!

We relaxed for the rest of the afternoon playing badminton, reading and swimming. The weather was warm , 75f and breezy. The sun was trying to break through. We had a snack supper of bread, cheese and pate. Just as we were finishing, Andrew and co. returned from their day in Toulouse. They had a good time but were quite tired. They had bought me a Mah Jong set for my birthday - they had been looking for one in England but hadn't been successful - I was very surprised and pleased. I love playing Mah Jong!! Max went to bed and after tidying up, we spent the evening playing "Scattergories" - good fun!

## **Tuesday 25 August**

We were all up early and we left the house just after 9am. We had decided the night before to go to the Cite de L'Espace - Europe's Space City in Toulouse. As we came off the motorway at Toulouse we could see the imposing sight of the Ariane 5 rocket dominating the skyline. We parked and went into the ticket hall. We paid our entry and hired headsets with an English commentary. They worked by picking up signals at various points as we walked round the exhibits. The same information could be listened to over and over again simply by staying in the same place and pressing the re-set button. Good for technophobics like me!! The exhibition halls were interesting and explained how satellites were used for various purposes. I found the weather station particularly informative. David, Katy and I went into the planetarium for a performance which lasted nearly an hour. Most of it was translated through our headsets but the last 20 minutes or so was in French. The seats were so comfortable and I was so tired I had a little sleep!

After the show was over, we went outside into the park and met up with Andrew, Tracey and Max. Max took me off to see the Ariane rocket which he was very excited about. There was a fantastic replica Mir space station that we walked through. It was a very interesting day out and I would recommend the Cite de L'Espace to anyone visiting the Toulouse area. It was small enough to see everything in a few hours and the displays were easy to understand even by thicko's like me!

We returned to Bouloc by way of Moissac to stock up with more food. I bought an electric waffle maker - something I haven't been able to get in the UK. We got back to the house about 4pm and headed straight for the pool. Yes - the good weather had returned!! I swam 50 lengths and then sat in the sun relaxing for a bit. It was soon time to make supper so David lit the BBQ and Max helped me prepare the salad and in no time we were sitting down on the terrace

tucking into chicken, sausages and salad. After the meal Max went to bed and Andrew, Katy, David and I had a game of knock - out badminton until it was too dark to see the shuttlecock. We then played a few games with my new Mah Jong set - I won the first game!

### **Wednesday 26 August**

We woke to a beautiful day - summer was back! The sky was blue, not a cloud in sight. We were dressed, breakfasted and ready to go by 9.30am. David, Katy and I went first to Lauzerte Market which was smaller than the week before. The jewellery man that Katy wanted to see wasn't there, so we moved on to Montauban. We parked in the town centre and walked to the main square expecting the market to be there - but it wasn't! We went to the Tourist Office and were told the Wednesday market was on the other side of the River Tarn near the railway station. We found it easily but it wasn't very big so only spent about half an hour there. It was mostly food stalls - there were some live chickens and rabbits - destined for the pot!

We went to the Mammouth and spent some more money and then had a good lunch at the adjacent cafe of chicken breast in cream and prune sauce followed by strawberry tart. Got back to Bouloc early afternoon. Andrew, Tracey and Max had been back about 20 minutes and were just finishing lunch. I did some laundry and then spent the afternoon swimming and relaxing by the pool. Andrew and Katy had a great time jumping in the pool on to the inflatable raft - they were like a couple of five year olds!

At 5.30pm David and I decided to drive to Montcuq and climb the tower. We were the only people there and after paying 5F each, we climbed the spiral staircase to the top. The view was amazing. We looked down on the village below and into the far distance all around. It was very clear and we could see the communications tower at Cahors clearly, some 20 miles away. David took some photos and then we descended. I counted the steps - 99 in all. My legs were a bit wobbly by the time I reached the bottom!

We went into Montcuq to buy a postcard of the tower and then went back to Bouloc. I got some supper of pizza, bacon and onion tart, salad and bread and we ate it outside in the still hot evening sun. Andrew and Tracey went out to dinner at the Restaurant in the Park near Montcuq and I put Max to bed after giving him a bath. There were bath bubbles everywhere - up the walls - on the floor - all over me as well as Max. Great fun! He went to bed at 8.20pm and was asleep by 8.25pm - a very tired little boy.

I tidied up the kitchen and then we sat outside in the near darkness watching the stars appear. Andrew and Tracey came back at 10pm and had enjoyed their meal very much. We all sat in the kitchen drinking tea and chatting until we could keep our eyes open no longer.

### **Thursday 27 August**

Another beautiful morning. I was up first - woken by cats having a fight nearby. It reminded me of our two cats back home.

I drove down to Lauzerte at 9am, when the supermarket opened, to buy milk and bread for breakfast. Katy was up when I got back and we fooled around playing badminton for a while. David watched the local parachute club freefalling - something I would never do - through the binoculars.

We all set off for Montcuq around 10.30am and strolled around the market for an hour. Tracey bought some Foie Gras for her Grandad. We made our way to the Creperie which wasn't open when we arrived. We hung around until the owners arrived and then sat in the small garden in

the by now, very hot sun. We ate delicious crepes and drank freshly squeezed orange juice. Max and I both had chocolate fillings in our crepes - Max got slightly more messy than me!!

Andrew and Tracey decided to go on to Cahors and David, Katy and I returned to the house for an afternoon of sun and pool. Andrew and Tracey returned at about 4pm and joined us around the pool. Andrew decided there was enough wind to fly his big kite. In the field in front of the house. Unfortunately, just as he got the kite unpacked and ready to fly, the farmer arrived in the corner of the field with a muck spreader. Andrew had to make a very hast retreat and the kite strings got in a terrible tangle. He spent the whole of the evening, until 12.30am untangling them!! He was not a happy bunny and there was quite a bit of \*\*\*\*\* and ##### .

David, Katy and I went to the Restaurant du Parc for dinner. The meal was delicious but the service was very slow. We all had soup to start. I had stuffed trout, Katy had Salmon in puff pastry and David had steak. We finished with Creme Caramel, Floating Islands and Chocolate Mousse. Back to Bouloc about 10.30pm and straight to bed - very tired.

## **Friday 28 August**

Our last full day at Bouloc.

David and I both woke early, 7am, and David got up and made some tea. The sun was streaming through the shutters and it looked like it was going to be another glorious day. I wandered outside to the pool and was met with an icy blast! It was really cold - only 50f - and a cool wind was blowing.

Tracey and Andrew came downstairs with Max. They had all had a bad night and Max was running a slight temperature. He seemed quite perky and ate some breakfast.

David, Katy and I went for a drive to Beauville and Bourg de Visa and showed Katy the house we had stayed in when she was three years old.

We got back to Bouloc about 11.30am. It was still quite cool at 64f so we did a bit of packing and sorting out until lunch time. Andrew, Tracey and Max were out and returned early afternoon. They had been to Carrefour in Cahors - Tracey loved that store!!

We had a good lunch, finishing up the cheeses, pate and ham in the fridge. We spent the afternoon by the pool. The breeze was still quite cool but the temperature had risen to a pleasant 80f. I had my final swim of 50 lengths. The pool had been excellent and I felt a lot fitter than when we had arrived - the exercise had been very good for me.

David and Max cleaned the BBQ terrace together. Max had a great time with the mop - water was everywhere!

We had a lovely BBQ in the evening of lamb chops, chicken legs and hachettes with salad and bread and an excellent bottle of Cahors wine.

Max had a bath and was in bed by 8.30pm. We played Pictionary for a while and then Scattergories for the rest of the evening.

## **Saturday 29 August**

David and I both slept badly and got up at 7am. We breakfasted and finished packing up and David started to load up the car. Tracey came down about 8am - Max and Andrew were still

asleep. Katy came down shortly after and we set about the business of getting ready to depart. The "pool man" arrived at 8.45am and gave the pool a thorough cleaning. He had been coming early every other morning before we were up, so we had not seen him before. We had all speculated on him and of course, he was nothing like we had thought ( young, good looking, tanned etc.....!!!) He was an old man with a huge white mustache and spoke heavily accented French which we had severe difficulty understanding!

We were all ready to leave at 9.45am. Andrew, Tracey and Max left first because Max was getting bored. We waited for the keyholder to arrive at 10am and inspect the house. We passed inspection and our FF1,000 was returned to us. We left Bouloc and were on our way north again. We stopped after 10 miles at Montague de Quercy at the market and met up with Andrew, Tracey and Max. We left after half an hour and said good-bye to A, T and M and wished them a safe return flight from Toulouse later that day.

We made steady progress north, stopping at Bergerac to buy some bread and then pic-nic'd a few miles further on.

We carried on to Perigeaux and then took another stop. Perigeaux was a beautiful town with an immense white cathedral. It was pretty busy, being Saturday afternoon. We found the Chambre D'Hote a few miles south of Perigeaux. It was a bit disappointing, miles from anywhere and a bit gloomy. We had two adjoining rooms and a tiny, shared shower room. It was a good job we were all slim - it was that small!!

David and Katy had a rest and I caught up on some reading. We were all suffering from "end of holiday fatigue" and just wanted to get home. The effort of trying to speak French and making ourselves understood was taking it's toll.

I had a refreshing shower about 6pm and put on a skirt - I had been living in shorts for the past two weeks - and we got ready to go out in search of food. We drove back towards Perigeaux and found an excellent LeClerc - the best hypermarket of the holiday!! Unfortunately, we couldn't buy much as the car was completely full and we still had wine to buy when we reached Cherbourg. I bought an excellent kitchen knife and a fly swatter - such exciting things!!

We ate at a nearby hotel - Le Chartreuse. It didn't look too promising but the food was excellent - one of the best meals we had had in France.

We returned to the Chambre D'Hote and were in bed by 10pm.

## **Sunday 30 August**

After a good nights sleep, we were dressed and ready for breakfast by 8.30am. It was served in a conservatory attached to the kitchen and was beautifully presented - pretty, embroidered table linen and nice china. We ate a selection of rolls, toast, jam, juice and enormous cups of tea and coffee. We left as soon as breakfast was over and were on the road again by 9.15am.

There was very little traffic and we had a pleasant morning's drive as we headed further north. The weather was warm and sunny and we made steady progress until we reached Poitiers, some 120 miles away, at 12.15pm. We parked in the town centre and walked around for a bit until we found the same square we had lunched in 12 years before. It was an attractive place with the Hotel de Ville ( Town Hall ) dominating one side of the square with fountains and flower beds around the other three sides. The "McDonald's" we had eaten at twelve years ago

was now a "Quick" but was exactly the same! We ordered burgers but didn't realise it was "two for the price of one" so we ended up with twice as many as we could eat!

We left Poitiers and were on the last part of the journey to Angers. I fell asleep for about 45 minutes so the time seemed to pass quickly! The roads were very straight and traffic was light - it reminded us of the USA.

We arrived at the Chambre d'Hote just south of Angers mid afternoon and were shown to two large rooms on the second floor of a small chateau. Both were well equipped and had excellent en-suite bathrooms - the best we had stayed at in France. We rested for an hour or so as we were all feeling travel weary before getting changed and ready to go out for some food. We 'phoned Andrew and Tracey to check they had got home safely - they had, with only a slight flight delay.

We drove into Angers and were pleasantly surprised to find a beautiful city on the banks of the River Loire. In the centre was an enormous castle with 19 round turrets. We parked right next to it and looked over the wall expecting to see a moat but there was a magnificent "parterre" garden running along two sides of the castle. There was also a grass area with grazing deer - weird! Unfortunately, we arrived at 7pm just as the castle was closing. There was also an impressive cathedral and many other attractive old buildings. Angers is definitely a city to return to in the future and spend some real time there.

We went in search of food and ate at a passable Chinese. After the meal we returned to the Chambre d'Hote and had an early night.

## **Monday 31 August**

We left Angers about 9am after the usual breakfast of bread and jam and drove to Cherbourg. After an uneventful journey we arrived on the outskirts of the port at 2pm. We stopped at the Auchan hypermarket and ate a quick lunch in the cafe before stocking up on a few cases of wine. The car was so loaded that the tow-bar grounded every time we went over a bump!!

We boarded the ferry at 5pm and set sail soon after. We had pre booked seats in the Club Class lounge so I spent most of the crossing in there snoozing, reading and drinking tea. We arrived back in Portsmouth about 9pm and were soon through Customs and were on the final part of our journey home. We arrived back in Odiham shortly after 10pm, it was cold and raining!! The cats were pleased to see us and all was well at home.

## **Summary**

An enjoyable, relaxing holiday. The house at Bouloc was extremely good and accommodated two families easily. It was well equipped and was of a very high standard. The pool was fantastic. The weather was excellent most of the time. The drive down would have been more comfortable in a car with air conditioning as we were travelling south and the sun was very hot. The shopping was good but it was irritating that a lot of the shops closed for three hours in the middle of the day and all day Monday. The markets in the Cahors area were disappointing - not as good as the ones we have visited in the north of France.

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