

NORMANDY JOURNAL

Jane and Chuck Pivetti Tour Historic Normandy
from Cherbourg to Le Havre
via

Bayeux, Caen, Falaise, Lisieux, Honfleur, Rouen, and Jumièges

Bicycle touring doesn't get any better than in Normandy.

We rode 400 miles in thirteen days on quiet back roads. Some days we would ride all morning and encounter only three or four cars. As we rode, we looked at cattle and horses grazing in lush green pastures. We constantly passed farms whose stone buildings were all grouped around a small courtyard.

When we looked up, across the countryside and off in the distance there was always the steeple of at least one old village church somewhere on the horizon. And often, off in the distance, we would see the lofty spires of the great 12C Gothic cathedrals marking for us the location of one of the historic Norman cities.

Some days we rode along the Norman coast and looked out on long stretches of sandy beach or at rocky headlands and high bluffs. Every few miles we would come on a small seaport or boat basin with its colorful Norman fishing boats.

Several times a day we stopped in some picturesque small village for tea, coffee, beer, or lunch and to take photographs. And each day after riding about thirty miles we would stop for the night in a city. In the two larger cities of Caen and Rouen, we stayed two nights so we would have a day to visit all the sights and attractions.

And what cities! Architecture on a grand scale — huge Gothic cathedrals with soaring flying

buttresses, open work pinnacles, and towering spires. We walked in the narrow cobbled streets of the "old towns" and looked up at the 15C half-timbered houses leaning out over the streets. We walked under arches with 14C clocks that were still telling time and chiming the hours.

In every city center (centre ville) we saw a large, open square surrounded by beautiful flower gardens and impressive municipal buildings that include the Hotel de Ville or Mairie (City Hall). On market days the square serves as the market place, taking on a carnival atmosphere with all the stalls and tents and striped pavilions and people everywhere.

We almost always found, fronting on the square, several restaurants, cafes, and brasseries with white plastic tables and chairs and umbrellas in front of their establishments. The French eat and drink outdoors through the entire Spring, Summer, and Fall in spite of the frequent rain showers. And we joined them in this tradition whenever we could.

The frequent rain showers keep the grass green and the flowers blooming. We saw flowers everywhere. On market day, many of the stalls sell bouquets. Wildflowers grow in the roadside ditches, and garden flowers are cultivated in front of every home.

And there's more. This beautiful country is steeped in history. Normandy is literally the seat of Anglo-Saxon civilization. For

hundreds of years after the battle of Hastings, the English kings were all Normans.

We relived this rich history when we visited the castle in Falaise where William the Conqueror was born in 1027 and again when we toured the castle tower in Rouen in which Joan of Arc was imprisoned and tortured in 1431. In a museum in Bayeux we walked along the eighty-meters of the unforgettable Bayeux tapestry that tells the story of the battle of Hastings in 1066.

In Caen we visited the Museum of Normandy with its beautiful displays that recall the Roman conquest of the Celts in 50 BC, and then the Visigoth conquest of the Romans in the 5th century. After that Normandy was nominally part of the Holy Roman Empire until the Vikings began settling. In 911, a Viking named Rollo became the first Duke of Normandy and he had a great-grandson who became William the Conqueror.

We also visited monuments and museums and cemeteries that commemorated events that took place over a thousand years later when the Allied Forces landed on the D-Day Beaches code-named "Utah," "Omaha," "Gold," "Juno," and "Sword."

The very best way to have seen this beautiful country, to meet its industrious people, and to experience its history, in my opinion, was by bicycle. The bicycle moved at just the right pace to let us appreciate the roadside sights. And when we arrived by

great
great
great
grandson

bicycle, the French treated us as guests.

We found another important advantage of cycling in France. It helped burn off the calories we consumed. The fabulous French foods and wines are irresistible.

So here is our diary.

Wednesday, September 16, 1992

At 11:00 a.m., with panniers and handlebar bags in the trunk, with bikes loaded onto the new Hollywood bike rack attached to the back of our Ford Taurus, our son Phil drove us to Sacramento Metropolitan Airport.

At the airport we carried our bike bags and wheeled our bikes to the American Airlines counter to check in. We were booked on Flight 592 scheduled to depart at 1:47 p.m. and arrive in Dallas at 7:02 p.m., connecting to Flight 78 scheduled to depart Dallas at 8:10 p.m. and arrive at Gatwick at 11:10 a.m. Thursday.

We made sure we were two hours early because we had to get bike boxes and then turn the handlebars and reverse the pedals so the bikes would go in the boxes. For some reason, this operation always takes longer than one would expect.

This time was no exception. The American Airlines agent who started to check us in was totally unfamiliar with bicycles. It took us over half an hour to convince her and her supervisor that we could take the bikes on an international flight as part of our baggage weight allowance.

And then she said she had "bike bags," not bike boxes. So I went to United and bought two bike boxes and brought them back.

When we finally did get the bikes boxed, our helpful agent came out

from behind her counter and very officiously stuck baggage tags on the sides of the boxes. When I said that they had always been put on top before, she said the regulations called for them to be put on the side. (Obviously the wrong place because they cannot be seen when boxes are standing side by side, and they could very easily get stripped off. On our return trip, the agents at Gatwick acted as though bikes were routine, and they put the labels on the tops of the boxes.)

We still had a few minutes to wait at the gate in spite of all the nonsense. The business class seats were nice, and we had poached salmon on real plates and wine in real glasses, salad, butterscotch sundae. Arrival and departure in Dallas were right on schedule.

Thursday, September 17, 1992

The overnight flight was forever. I slept some, but Jane could not sleep.

Arrival at Gatwick was on time. We unboxed and assembled the bikes in the airport terminal, then in turns went to rest rooms and changed into bike riding clothes.

Before leaving the terminal, I spoke with a lovely lady Brit Rail agent at the exit to the trains. She knew a very easy bicycle access to the terminal. Following her directions we went to the southwest corner of the terminal building where there were four "lifts."

Two of the lifts were each big enough for both of us with fully loaded bikes. The lifts went down to ground level where there was an exit directly onto the airport perimeter road. The perimeter road followed along inside the airport fence for about a mile in a southerly direction where it came to a gate that gave access to the roundabout where Gatwick Road intersects the A23.

And Gatwick Road leads south to Crawley and on to Pound Hill and our hotel.

We rode south on Gatwick Road, continuing on after its name changed to Hazelwick Avenue, then east on Worth Park Avenue, then south on Balcombe Road. We arrived at the Barnwood Hotel in Pound Hill at 1:00 p.m. after only 4.4 miles of bike riding! Quite a difference from the last trip (with Marsh and Irene) when the bike ride from Pound Hill to Gatwick was well over ten miles and an hour of riding and asking directions and of always being on the other side of a fence from the airport terminal.

At the Barnwood the hotel manager said, "Ah, Mr. Pivetti?" when I walked in. We had stayed here several years ago, and when I phoned for the reservation the staff remembered us. We are the only cycling American senior citizen tourists they ever see.

After a nap, a shower, and a change of clothes, we rode our bikes to the center of Crawley which is about three miles from Pound Hill. The sky was dark, there was some occasional drizzle, and it was breezy. We looked around for a tea shop, but could not find one. So we went into a pub — the White Hart, what else? — and had a beer. Also went to a stationery store and got some maps of Southern England.

We went back to the Barnwood and rested some more, then went looking for dinner in the dining room. Guess what? The entire south of England was without electricity. The kitchen was out of business; the dining room was closed.

The manager sent us down the road to the Europa Hotel, a three-star hotel with an auxiliary power plant, whose kitchen was still in business. The dinner was okay

she did upgrade us to business class as a way of apologizing for the hassle with the bikes.

— pricey and typically English. Some light rain fell during our half-mile walk back.

Friday, September 18, 1992

We slept very soundly. Jane woke me at 8:00, or I would have slept all morning. The day was beginning rather dark and gloomy. But breakfast in the Barnwood Hotel dining room brightened the day; it was "full English" (juice, cereal, eggs, English bacon, sausage, tomatoes, toast, coffee, marmalade, etc.).

About 9:30 we got our bikes out of the little storage shed in the garden behind the hotel and started off on Balcombe Road (B2036) to Handcross (on B2110). From Handcross we took A279 to Lower Beading and then A281 to Crabtree. The countryside here is southern England at its most beautiful; green fields bordered by trees and rhododendrons. The roadside ditches are full of ferns, nettles, and wild flowers. At Crabtree there was an old manor that had been converted to a very prestigious hotel called South Lodge.

We went into South Lodge and asked at the desk if we could get tea. We were shown into an elegant sitting room, and very soon a waitress brought us a tray with a pot of tea, hot milk, sugar, lemon, etc. After we had our tea, we walked around the spacious grounds which included formal gardens. The carpark was filled with mostly Jaguars and Mercedes.

We then proceeded south from Crabtree toward Cowfold. What had been a light mist turned into a rather steady rain that forced us to reluctantly don our nylon rain suits. Rain gear is awkward, hot, and clammy; so it is always a trade off between getting a little wet and being too hot.

From Cowfold we stayed on A281 to Shermanberry where we turned west on B2116 toward Partridge Green. At Partridge Green we turned south on B2135 toward Steyning. These are very minor roads with practically no traffic that wind through farms, dairies, and nurseries.

At Steyning we stopped in a pub for hot soup and bread. I had a pint of that great English bitter with mine while Jane had hot tea. Several of the patrons were anxious to talk to us about our cycling, and one gentleman was very anxious to describe to us the back roads leading south out of Steyning.

Following our English friend's advice, we took a very minor road through Bramber, Bartolpys, and Coombes to Shoreham-by-Sea. A beautiful ride winding through horse farms, rising over small hills, and dropping down through marshy lowlands. As we neared Shoreham we saw a huge Gothic cathedral sitting on top of a hill; according to our map it was the chapel of Lancing College and around a bend in the road were soccer fields occupied by lots of young men playing soccer.

At Shoreham we took the very busy and high-speed A27 westerly for a mile or so before we could turn toward South Lancing and the A259 which runs along the beaches. This road was still very busy, but traffic was not high speed, and we had views of the ocean and beaches.

We rode into Worthing about 3:30 where we found an i, a tourist information office. A very nice lady there sent us to Acacia House, a B&B in Warwick Gardens, just off Brighton Road (A259) about two blocks away. The B&B was typical, an old brick townhouse with blue and white trim, but the room surprisingly had "en suite" facilities. And the proprietor was a typical B&B landlord, short, rotund,

and talkative. He let us put our bikes in his garage.

My odometer showed exactly 30 miles for the day's riding.

After showering and changing into civilian clothes, we walked four or five blocks to an Indian restaurant, the "Mahaan Tandoori", for curry — yummmmm.

While we were eating a delicious dinner comprised of two different kinds of chicken curry, the couple at the next table struck up a conversation. They lived in Worthing, although he was a Scot, a MacIntosh. They were delightful. Mrs. MacIntosh said Arundel was her favorite village in all of Britain and that we must see it. She described the views of the village and the castle from different approaches. She said, "If I were going to die, Arundel is what I would like to see last."

We walked back to Acacia House in a light drizzle.

Our landlord asked when we would like breakfast and what we would like. We asked if he could do oatmeal. "Porridge, you mean?" he asked. "Yes," he thought he could do porridge.

Saturday, September 19, 1992

But, at 7:30 when we went to breakfast, our host apologized for not having any porridge. So we had to settle for a "full English breakfast," tomatoes and all. Actually, the "full English" is a good start on a day's bike riding. And one can get by on a very light lunch after that big breakfast. (Why aren't the English all very heavy? But most of them are quite lean.)

We departed Acacia House in low, damp fog. As we proceeded out of Worthing we stopped at a Safeway so Jane could get some shampoo.

The store was very busy as was the entire business district. It is a mystery to me how English towns can be overrun with people one minute and deserted the next. The English must have very fixed hours for meals, for shopping, for tea, etc.

As we rode westerly on A259 toward Littlehampton, the fog began to lift. We turned north on A284 and after three miles we turned westerly again, this time back on A27. As soon as we turned on A27, there off to the west on a hill top appearing massive in the fog was Arundel Castle.

At 11:00 a.m. we rode into the village of Arundel, which lies at the foot of the massive walls of Arundel castle. A sign on the castle entrance said it opened at noon, so we looked around the charming little town which was loaded with tourists.

At noon we went back to the castle and waited with a fairly large crowd for the gates to open. But noon came and went without any activity. Finally someone walked up to the gates and read the fine print at the bottom of the sign which said the castle was closed on Saturdays! England.....!!

So we left Arundel and rode west on A27 to Chichester with its Roman, mediaeval and Georgian architecture. At the main cross roads in Chichester sits a 16th Century Market Cross, sort of a Gothic gazebo. Chichester and the surrounding area are dominated by the 277-foot spire of the 13C cathedral.

In the northern part of Chichester we stopped for lunch in a neighborhood pub. It was very crowded and very smokey — everyone in England smokes. We ordered “jackets” stuffed with tuna thinking we would get stuffed baked potatoes. Instead, we got fried potato skins stuffed with generous helpings of tuna.

After lunch we opted to leave Chichester on A269 as an alternative to the busy, high-speed A27 and rode on westerly to Portsmouth. The fog lifted and turned to high overcast in the afternoon. Near Portsmouth we rejoined A27, which soon turned to M27, a motorway. Bicyclists were shunted off onto a parallel road which turned into A2030 running down the east side of the Portsmouth peninsula with an estuary, walkways, and bird sanctuaries on the left to an area called Southsea.

In Southsea we stopped in the Good Companion, a large, well kept pub, and had a glass of beer. It was still early afternoon and our ferry to Cherbourg wasn't going to leave until 10:00 p.m. Sun was peeping through the clouds here and there (no need for sunglasses yet, though).

We decided to go directly to the ferry terminal, check-in, then go somewhere for dinner. At the terminal, a policeman advised that to go to dinner in the neighborhood with the bikes locked outside a restaurant after dark would not be wise.

So we decided to stay at the terminal and eat in the cafeteria there. When we checked in with P&O ferries, I enquired about the possibility of a cancellation on a two person cabin. No luck. But the P&O lady agent suggested “Club Class.”

Club Class turned out to be an excellent choice. The Club Class occupies two large, upper deck compartments near the bow. The compartments are equipped with well spaced, large recliners. Stewards serve non-alcoholic drinks free and alcoholic drinks at a slight charge; they provide each passenger with a pillow and a blanket. As soon as the ship gets under way, the lights are turned down very low. Sleeping was easy and comfortable.

Sunday, September 20, 1992

When breakfast was chimed just before entering port, about 5:00 a.m., the stewards served a French breakfast, coffee, bread, croissant, butter, jam. The croissant cost a little extra, so Jane, who isn't fond of croissants anyway, abstained.

As the ship docked in Cherbourg, automobile passengers were called down to the auto decks to occupy their vehicles and to prepare for off loading. Since the bikes were down on the auto deck, that meant us, too.

We rode our bikes out of the ship into a very dark early morning and into a very complicated maze of lanes and roads intended to queue vehicles before loading. We rode around for ten or fifteen minutes looking for the foot-passenger terminal. During this time antique autos were chugging into the terminal area on their way to somewhere in England.

Finally, after some very circuitous bike riding around barriers and through gates, we got to the back door of the foot-passenger terminal. I went in to cash a travelers' check so we would have a few francs to get us through the weekend, after which we could change more money in a bank at a more favorable rate.

After some more wandering around in the port maze in the dark, we found a very nice hotel that was already open and serving breakfast. Since we had to wait for daylight before we could ride out of Cherbourg, we went in and had the buffet brunch that was being served. It was nice, but très cher (92f, about \$10.00 each)!

Finally, in the early morning light we rode through town toward the east and found D116 that would follow the north coast of the Contentin peninsula and continue to

Barfleur at the eastern extremity of the peninsula.

But we no sooner got on D116 than we came to a road block manned by two very good-natured gendarmes. They waved us on, but we stopped to enquire what the road block was for. They told us there was a bicycle race on D116, but that we could go ahead since we were on "velos."

We had gone no more than half a kilometer when we were overtaken by a gendarme on a motorcycle with lights flashing and siren blaring. He motioned us to stop, but we merely hugged the right edge of the road. Next came a cyclist followed by two horn-honking support vehicles filled with men yelling encouragement to their team member at the tops of their lungs.

This tableau was repeated every two or three minutes for the next ten kilometers, and then the bicycle race took a turn off D116. Then for the next hour or so, the only traffic on D116 was cycling clubs and groups out for their Sunday morning rides. Since this was our third bicycle tour in France, we were quite familiar with the French penchant to go on Sunday morning group rides.

We detoured through several little villages because the "highway" bypassed them. The names of some were Fermanville, Cosqueville, Neville, and Gatteville. The streets were very narrow. Each had a large stone church dating from mediaeval times. Here and there in the fields near the sea was a concrete pillbox reminder of WWII.

After a lovely morning ride on bucolic roads offering occasional seascapes, a morning glowing with sunlight filtered through a thin overcast, we arrived at the very picturesque little fishing port of Barfleur.

Along the quays forming the boat basin were a number of sidewalk

cafes. We stopped at one and had soupe de poisson with garlic croutons and grated cheese.

Right at the end of the seawall was a huge old stone church surrounded by a stone wall, and at the foot of the wall was a little wooden shack whose sign proclaimed it to be an "i." We had seen it before lunch, but there were no lights on, the door was shut, and naturally we expected it to be ferme on Sunday. But as we finished lunch, we noticed a man drive up to it, get out of his car, and go in.

So we followed the man, and discovered a young woman sitting in the dark, dingy little shack among all the maps, brochures, and other trappings of a tourist information office (tourisme). She looked through her materials and discovered for us a chambres d'hôte at Reville, a small village about two kilometers out of St. Vaast-la-Hougue, our planned destination for the day. With a room booked, we felt more comfortable about the rest of the day.

The chambres d'hôte was not easy to find, though. At Reville we rode around on several roads looking for our B&B. We finally asked a lady on a bicycle and she was very helpful. She not only told us how to find our B&B, but she also told us which restaurants in Reville and St. Vaast were good and likely to be open on Sunday evening.

Our hostess was a Madame Fouace. The house was a large, two-story farm house with barns and outbuildings. We were shown to a large second-floor room with a large bathroom next door and were told we would be the only ones upstairs. There was an electric radiator, so we were able to wash and dry our cycling clothes.

After bathing and putting on civilian clothes, we rode our bikes to St. Vaast for dinner, taking our rain jackets with us because the sky

was dark and threatening. This late afternoon condition of the sky was something we were going to become used to because it happened almost every day about mid-afternoon.

We dined in one restaurant on mussels, bread, red wine, and in another restaurant we had ice cream and coffee. At 7:00 p.m. we were back in the B&B where we read for awhile then went to sleep. Not too exciting. The problem with French B&Bs is that they are in the country where there is nothing for a cyclist to do after dark; on the other hand, tourists with cars can easily drive to nearby towns in the evening.

Monday, September 21, 1992

We were up before daylight at 7:00. Went through the morning ritual of stuffing everything in ziploc bags and then squeezing it all back in our panniers. Jane's are always so full that they look like they will explode. I had to carry her bottle of shampoo because she couldn't squeeze it in.

Breakfast was French bread, sweet bread, pound cake, yogurt, fruit, orange juice, cafe-au-lait, butter, jam. The bill for lodging and breakfast was 142 francs (\$28.00).

Jane had a long chat with Mdm. Fouace who had three sons, one nine years old, one 15, and one 19. The 19-year-old was in his first year of pre-med in college.

It was kind of a foggy morning. Between Quettehou and Quineville turnoff there was some traffic. From Quineville to St. Mere Eglise we rode on very minor back roads. No cars. Roadside fields with cows, horses. At a junction we saw a sign that said "Circuit du Dembarquement;" otherwise you would never know that you were on the greatest battlefield of WWII.

In St. Mere Eglise, there is a dummy of a U.S. paratrooper hanging from the steeple of the church by his parachute. Across the street there is an "Airborne Museum," which was closed for lunch when we there.

We were talked into a small hotel/restaurant by the proprietor who assured us he could fix us a light lunch. We asked for cheese sandwiches and sat in the bar. Mrs. Proprietor (we assume) brought in her bare hands and plopped down on the bare tabletop two sandwiches that had been made by slicing half baguettes lengthwise and stuffing them with chunks of brie; no plates, no napkins. Her husband realized this was a rude breach of etiquette and tried to make it up by getting plates, napkins, knives, and by giving us postcards with pictures of his hotel.

After our lunch, we went to a patisserie. The girl there said they did not serve coffee; she suggested we take our pastries across the street to a little cafe. When we did that, the proprietor of the cafe told us to move from a table that was set with paper napkins and silverware to a bare plastic table.

So much for St. Mere Eglise! A total loss.

We rode on to Carentan where we went to the Hotel du Commerce which was recommended in the Michelin Red Guide. Jane went in and looked at the rooms and decided we would go elsewhere. We found the two-star Hotel Vauban which offered a small but nice room for 240 francs — breakfast was an additional 28 francs each which meant the total bill would be about \$60.00.

After taking the room at the Vauban, we walked all over town looking for a place to eat. We learned that French restaurants do not open on Monday. Eventually we found a creperie where we had

calvados before our crepes. Calvados tastes exactly like brandy made from grapes. But this calvados was très cher — 35 francs or \$7.00 for no more than an ounce in the bottom of a snifter!

From time to time there was a light drizzle.

In the centre ville there was an arcade of stone arches dating from the 13C. Also, there was a flamboyant Gothic church from the 12C. Otherwise Carentan is just a stopover.

Tuesday, September 22, 1992

We had the typical French breakfast in a tiny little breakfast room that was crowded with three small tables. At the next table were two men in business suits with briefcases, one French, one Japanese.

They were friendly and struck up a conversation with us. They were in the seaweed business. Apparently Carentan has a seaport in an estuary opening onto the Channel which is a kelp harvesting center. The Japanese said he was a chemist and that his company used colloids from the seaweed in its food products.

Under a very murky sky we rode east out of Carentan on a busy N13 for a kilometer to St. Hilaire where we missed the turnoff for D445 because it was not signed. We went back and took the only road to the north; sure enough, at the village exit there was a D445 marker.

D445 was a quiet, narrow back road through dairy farms. D445 rejoined N13 near Isigny-su-Mer for a little ways, then we turned north on D514 toward Grandcamp-Maisy and Omaha Beach.

At 11:00 we had a pot of tea in a little waterfront bar overlooking the Grandcamp boat basin. The sun came out while we were in the bar,

but as soon as we got back on our bikes the sun disappeared.

At the west end of Omaha beach in front of a monument honoring the U.S. National Guard, a Scot on holiday took our pictures. We rode the length of Omaha beach, stopping to photograph another large monument honoring the American forces that landed there. Just before Coleville we found a marble sign designating the entrance to the Normandy American Cemetery.

The Cemetery was very impressive. It was immaculately kept. There was a large memorial in the center of which was a twenty-foot tall bronze statue of a young man ascending to heaven. From the memorial, white marble crosses extended across lawn covered hills for as far as the eye could see.

At the edge of the bluff overlooking Omaha Beach there was a viewing table with diagrams of the June 6, 1944, landing operation. Several elderly American men were discussing the diagrams and pointing at the beach; I presume they were veterans of the landing that had returned to visit the site.

We had lunch in a little bar in Coleville — little more than a cross-roads — where the proprietor was quite friendly and talked bicycles with us. He said had a mountain bike. *he*

At Port-en-Bassin we took the D60 toward Bayeux. About halfway between the two, it rained hard enough for us to stop and put on rain gear. We rode into Bayeux to find a very busy town with lots of beautiful old buildings. Expecting very heavy rain, instead of sight-seeing, we went directly to the *i* for help with lodging. The *i* was in a beautiful 15C half-timbered house, but photographing it was out of the question due to the weather.

We were told of L'Hotel Notre Dame a half block away, and that's where we headed. It was okay – it had to be, considering the weather – it boasted one star. The room we got was the last one, it was small with a creaky bed, a basin, a bidet, a chair, and an 18" round table. The room was 130 francs. To use the shower down the hall was 10 francs more, and breakfast was an additional 25 francs each. Also to get the room we had to agree to have at least the 82-franc dinner in the hotel dining room.

As we were checking into the hotel, thunder was crashing and rain was cascading down. I left my rain gear on and went out into the storm to buy bread, cheese, and wine for a late afternoon snack. Luckily, all three were available in shops in the same street as the hotel.

Catty-corner from the hotel was the magnificent Notre Dame cathedral. Even in the pouring rain I had to stop and admire it.

Dinner in the hotel was very good. The salad was topped with what we at first thought was cooked red cabbage but turned out to be an egg poached in red wine. The viande was fish and fruits de mer in a rich sauce. This was followed by fromage and then Creme caramel.

Like so many French hotels that we have stayed in, there was no comparison between our sparse little room and the beautifully decorated dining room. It had linen tablecloths, place settings of fine China and crystal, and bowls of fresh cut flowers. The priorities are obviously on a skilled chef and a pleasant dining room.

After dinner the rain let up, so we walked around the cathedral which was beautifully illuminated. I took a half dozen pictures of it using sign posts and the tops of cars to steady my camera for the two- to four-second exposures required.

Wednesday, September 23, 1992

The sky emptied itself of rain during the night. The new day dawned with a clear blue sky. The 20-franc breakfast at 8:00 was bread and cafe-au-lait – no croissant, no juice.

At breakfast in the hotel dining room there was a couple from Seaside, Oregon, who looked to be in their seventies who were traveling by Eurail with backpacks.

After breakfast we went to see the Bayeux Tapestry which tells the story of the events before during and after William's defeat of Harold at Hastings in 1066. It definitely deserved the three stars that the Michelin Guide awarded.

The presentation was very well done. There was a multi-media room with sights and sounds of the Battle of Hastings. Then there was a complete replica of the tapestry with explanations of all the panels. Then there was the tapestry itself, all 230 feet of it, displayed in a serpentine fashion. Viewers were issued earphones through which they heard in the language of their choice an explanation of each panel as they passed in front of it.

The tapestry is embroidered with colored wool on a linen background. Its exact origin is not known. Once it was attributed to Queen Mathilda. Now it is believed to have been done in England soon after the Norman conquest by Saxon embroiderers to adorn a new cathedral built by Odo of Conteville, Count of Kent and Bishop of Bayeux. The tapestry was inventoried in the cathedral treasury of 1476.

After viewing the tapestry, we took D126 towards Caen. Our itinerary called for a longer and more circuitous route back to the coast, but we opted for the shortcut because of the unsettled weather.

Just before noon we visited a chateau called Brecy. Shortly afterward the sky turned black and a light rain began to fall. But by 1:30 the sky brightened up and we had no more rain the rest of the day.

Due to the shortened route, we got into Caen about 2:00. Although our approach was by D126, a minor road, as we neared the city the traffic got very heavy, and we could see highrises across the entire sky line. We eventually got onto a four-lane, one-way street that followed around the walls of the huge citadel of Caen and there were signs pointing the way to "Centre Ville".

In a small cafe across the street from the large and imposing castle, we got sandwiches and beer. The lady who served us heard us discussing the hotels in the Michelin Red Guide. She told us they were "trés cher" and took Jane out her back door and pointed out the Hotel Central just across a tree lined square.

At the Hotel Central we got a room on the fourth floor – and a reminder that in France the ground floor is not "one" but "zero" – with no elevator. The room was nice; it was equipped with a basin and a shower but no toilette or bidet....????

Except for climbing the stairs, the location proved to be fortuitous. It turned out that we were within three blocks of all the things we wanted to see: the castle, the "Abbaye aux Hommes," the Abbaye aux Dames," the old houses, the downtown restaurants, and even the Poste.

After showering and changing we walked through the castle. Its construction was started by William the Conqueror in 1060. In each of the next five centuries it was enlarged and strengthened. So now it is huge; its walls probably encompass an area equal to four or five city blocks.

and William the Conqueror's half-brother

Inside the walls there are two museums, a Gothic church, a playground, gardens, and several other buildings. One garden had many varieties of very showy dahlias. Each of its gates is protected by a barbican.

At 7:30, on the advice of our hotel desk clerk, we went to the Alcide for dinner. It was very busy, very good, and very expensive. My entree was sardines grillee, my viande, coq au vin. Jane had salade and troutte. For desert we both had Isle Flottant.

Thursday, September 24, 1992

After another typical French breakfast we walked over to Abbaye aux Hommes, the Abbey for Men, where the main attraction was the Romanesque St. Stephen's Church (St. Etienne) which was started in 1066 after the battle of Hastings and consecrated in 1077 with William and Matilda in attendance. The cathedral towers were surrounded by scaffolding – always my luck. But across the street was the really old Vieux St. Etienne (the old St. Stephen's).

From the Abbaye aux Hommes, we walked to the Abbaye aux Dames. Here there is another Romanesque cathedral, Eglise de la Trinite (Holy Trinity Church). Although the exterior impression was of a squat, ugly Romanesque church with truncated towers, the interior had thin, graceful engaged columns and equally beautiful pendants. The light from the transept lantern gave the interior a glowing and airy feeling. Once again we encountered scaffolding, this time the front third of the interior was blocked off.

The story of why there is an abbey for men and an abbey for women in Caen goes like this. William, the bastard son of Robert the Devil and the beautiful peasant girl Arlette, fell in love with and married Matilda

of Flanders who was a distant cousin. Because of this relationship, the pope excommunicated them. In 1059, the excommunication was lifted through the efforts of Lanfranc. The Duke and his wife founded the two abbeys as an act of penitence.

We walked back through the castle and through its north gate which opened out into the University which was founded in 1432 but now seems to be all modern buildings.

Dinner at l'Bouef. Chicken salad for Jane, duck salad for me. Good. Topped it off with coffee and caramel sundaes at McDonald's. As we walked back to Hotel Central from McDonald's a light rain started falling and it continued throughout the night.

Friday, September 25, 1992

When we went down to petit déjeuner the rain was letting up.

As we rode out of town to the south toward Ifs on D235, the roads were still very wet from the night's rain. The sky stayed dark most of the morning as we rode through Fontenay and cut across country on an unnumbered road through fields then dropped down into the little valley of the Laize and rode D132 along the river. For five or six miles we rode past farms and little groups of houses without seeing a soul or a vehicle.

In Bretteville we found a little cafe open and went in for tea. Then we found a small Poste, so I went in and mailed a roll of film. The lady wanted about one franc more for the postage than I had been paying. When I tried to ask her why, she called for her supervisor to come over and explain it to me in English. He said the lower rate was for the "slow air mail" and the rate they were charging was for the "fast air mail." Huh??

While we were in Bretteville, the sun came out and stayed out the rest of the day. We went on through Govix, Urville, St. Germain, Fontaine, and Aubigny where there was a chateau which turned out to be not open to the public.

We arrived in Falaise at 1:30 after 29 miles of bike riding. We found a creperie in the central square where we had soupe de poisson and cidre. We found a Hotel Normandie where Jane checked out the room and said okay.

We showered, changed, and looked around the town. The biggest attraction, according to the Michelin Green Guide, was the castle where William the Conqueror was born; the guide book promised that the very room in which he was born was open to the public. Well, the grounds were open, but the castle was under renovation and closed to the public.

William's father, Robert le Diable, when he was seventeen was said to have been attracted to a girl he saw washing clothes in the stream. When Robert let it be known that he desired the beautiful Arlette, her father let her decide. And her decision was to ride into the castle "finely appparelled" and let Robert bed her. Nine months later Arlette bore the son who was named William.

Falaise is a mediaeval walled city. Parts of the walls and a couple of the gates are still intact and worth seeing. Cordelier's Gate is from the 14C. Also there are two interesting cathedrals, Trinity and St. Gervais.

St. Gervais was started in the 11C and completed in the 16C. The south side of the nave is Romanesque, the north side is Gothic. The chancel has wooden vaulted ceilings and wooden pendants.

While walking around Falaise, we met a Dutch couple who were

sightseeing like us. They said that the best thing they had seen so far was Honfleur; they were particularly impressed with its wooden church.

Dinner in Hotel Normandie was excellent and not too expensive. The tables were set with lace tablecloths, and there were several large sprays of gladiolus placed about the room. I had steak and Jane had fish. My dessert was a pistachio pudding, hers was pineapple in kirsch (We were reminded that "ananas" is not "bananas").

Saturday, September 26, 1992

We left Falaise at 8:30 under a light overcast and headed northeasterly to Versainville, Epaney, Perfieres, Vendeuvre, Grisy, and St. Pierre. Near Grisy we rode through some of the prettiest country yet. There were rows of trees reflected in canals that had swans swimming on them.

St. Pierre had a large covered marketplace that was hosting a furniture show. The town was full of people and cars. Across the street from the furniture market we had tea in a sidewalk cafe during a brief period of sunshine.

We went on to St. Julien-le-Faucon where we stopped at a cafe advertising salads and croque monsieurs. We still had sun, so we sat outside and ordered. The proprietor then went to a fruit and vegetable shop to buy the ingredients for Jane's salad and he went to the boulangerie to buy bread for my croque monsieur.

St. Julien had a war memorial in the center of town.

As we continued in a northeasterly direction toward Lisieux, we noticed a marked change in the architecture. More and more of the farm houses are half-timbered with tile roofs

whereas they had been stone with thatched roofs.

As we neared Lisieux on D511, we could see across the valley the great Basilica of St. Teresa dominating the landscape.

We entered town about 3:00 and found it teeming with people. It was market day, and the stalls in the Centreville square were offering flowers, clothing, cheese, fish, and just about everything else.

Thirty-one miles today.

We checked the Michelin Red Guide and went to the centrally located Coupe D'Or Hotel. After showering and putting on our civvies, we walked around town. Near the marketplace we bought tickets on Le Petit Train and rode around the town on the sightseeing elephant train for about an hour.

The train stopped for a few minutes at the incredible basilica. We made up our minds that we would come straight back here after the tour. When we did, we were not disappointed. It was definitely one of the high points of the trip.

The huge Roman-Byzantine church built in the early fifties is breathtaking. It's like first seeing the Grand Canyon. The building contains 150,000 square feet. The dome is 305 feet high. The interior surfaces are all mosaics. Behind the altar is a quadripartite map of the continents of the world.

After a terrific dinner in our hotel, we went out and joined a procession from the convent to the basilica. Thousands of faithful carrying candles and following the reliquary. When the procession arrived at the Basilica, everybody stood in the huge parking lot singing and praying and saying the rosary until after the lumeniere - a light show during which fireworks flow down the face of the bell tower - and then they all proceeded into the basilica.

There were several priests, monsignors, and a bishop. The services were said in Latin, French, and English.

Sunday, September 27

We woke at 7:00, dressed, packed, and then went down to petit déjeuner. The lovely lady who checked us in yesterday afternoon, and who took our dinner order last night in the dining room, was already at work. She told us we were an hour early, that it was only 6:30! The French had set their clocks an hour ahead during the night to start daylight savings time.

After our breakfast and at 8:15 by the new time, we rode north on a very lightly traveled D48 which followed the Touques River through a very pretty pastoral valley. We met several groups of cyclists out for their Sunday rides. Also, there were hunters in the fields and fishermen along the stream.

We came on two men getting their dogs and shotguns out of their car preparing to hunt. We asked them what they were hunting, and, at first, they seemed a little aloof. Apparently it was a language problem. I think they thought we were animal rightists berating them for shooting animals. But when Jane finally got through to them in French that we were only wondering what they were hunting, they smiled and told us, making hopping motions with their hands. I guess they were hunting rabbits.

All the rest of the day, we could hear shotguns being fired off in the woods.

At Pont-l'Eveque we turned onto D118, which was even more pastoral and quiet than D48. The roadside was a tangle of nettles and berry bushes. We passed some big horse farms and several picturesque half-timber houses with thatched

roofs; some of the houses were very large.

At Beaumont-en-Auge, a little village perched on top of a hill, we stopped in a sidewalk cafe named the "Galeria des Arts" for tea. Quite a few people out for a Sunday outing were walking around the square and looking down on the valley from the belvedere.

We rode on to St. Arnoult and then to Deauville. Deauville was mobbed. Bumper to bumper traffic crawling through town. Sidewalks overflowing with pedestrians. The guide book tells us that Deauville is the most popular French resort on the English Channel with its beaches, casinos, hotels, and other tourist attractions.

The Michelin Red Guide lists two hotels in Deauville with rooms costing 2,000 francs per night — \$400.00!

From Deauville, we rode easterly along the coast road, D513, which pretty much followed along the tops of the bluffs and gave frequent views of the Channel and the large port of Le Havre across the mouth of the Seine. The homes along the road were mostly mansions.

The narrow, two-lane D513 was very busy. Fortunately there was so much traffic that it was moving slowly. And there were no trucks.

We arrived in Honfleur at 12:30, having ridden 33 miles on the exact roads planned in our itinerary. And the weather was beautiful! Big fluffy white clouds scudding along; none of the ominous dark gray afternoon thunderheads.

Honfleur is really great! It ranks along with the Bayeux Tapestry and the St. Teresa Basilica as a high point.

In the town center is an old boat basin surrounded by old houses, some six stories high, an old church

and an old governor's palace. All around the boat basin were white plastic tables and chairs under big canvas umbrellas. And almost every chair was occupied.

Men were strolling through the tables playing accordions and violins. Families with children and dogs on leashes were walking along all the sidewalks. Artists were sitting at easels painting.

We regretted taking the time from all this to go look for a hotel and get changed.

We picked the Hotel La Tour out of the Michelin Red Guide. It was very nice, almost modern. Big cars in parking lot and well-dressed guests in lobby. The desk clerk, wearing a dark, three-piece suit, had us wheel our bikes right through the lobby and through the kitchen into a little pantry.

The hotel had typical weird French plumbing, though. The basin, tub, shower, and bidet were all hooked together and there were four sets of knobs for the hot and cold for each. The shower handle did not come loose from the hose this time, but water squirted out of all the fittings.

One of the first things we did was stop in a promising looking restaurant and order soupe de poisson. The soup was good, the service was terrible — it seemed that we were there for hours.

Finally we got to sightsee. ^{near} Found the wooden church that we told to look out for. It seems that during the renaissance all the stone masons were busy building the great Gothic cathedrals. So, the shipbuilders of Honfleur decided they would go ahead and build a church themselves, using wood and shipbuilding techniques.

The interior of the church, St. Catherine, does resemble an upside down ship, but it is not at all unattractive. The wooden belfry, an

interesting structure itself, stands apart from the church.

A little after 4:00 we bought bread and wine and went back to the hotel for a snack and a rest.

About 7:30 we went to Deux Ponts Restaurant, also recommended in the Red Guide, where we had an excellent meal of poached salmon. We were the only customers. None of the other restaurants had any business either. The streets were practically deserted.

After dinner we walked around town. Many of the buildings were lighted, so I tried a few night photos by propping the camera against building corners and posts.

Monday, September 28

After petit déjeuner, we got the bikes out of the pantry, loaded them with our luggage, and rode east on D180 past the construction site of the Pont de Normandie. The Pont's approaches and towers are complete giving the full picture of the size of this bridge which will be cable-stayed and high enough for ocean going ships to pass under as they navigate the Seine up to Rouen.

After another two kilometers, at Ficqueville, we turned off on D139, a small road which follows the Seine. Along this road we saw several thatched farm houses and a strange little chateau with a fortified gate, a pond, and several statues.

Large ships were cruising by, giving the impression that they were traveling across dry pasture land.

We arrived at Pont Audemer at noon to find it bustling with market day activity. The town was very attractive — its canals earning it the nickname of "Venice of Normandy."

We bought fruit, cheese, bread, and beer and had a picnic in the Jardin

Public. The weather was cool and overcast, and as we ate a few drops of rain fell.

Since it was only midday, we decided to stretch our ride for the day. We went in the Tourisme and talked to three young girls about accommodations somewhere between Pont Audemer and Rouen. They finally found a reference to a hotel in Routot. I asked them to phone there and book us a room which they did.

The ride from Pont Audemer to Routot was through what looked like big, corporate farms. We arrived in Routot at 2:30 after a thirty-mile day to find it a big nothing. There were a couple of grain mills, a store and three dingy little bars.

The dingiest of the three bars was our hotel, the Hotel de Rouen. It was closed, as was everything else in the town, but we managed to rouse a woman who had sniffles and a cough and a cigarette dangling from her lip. She showed us our room at the end of a long, creaky, narrow, upper story hallway.

The room was clean, but everything was old and decrepit. The walls and ceiling were red flocked paper, the bedspread was red, the single hanging bulb in the center of the ceiling had a red shade with red tassels. The floor was dark-stained and varnished boards with a fringed throw rug that slid out from under when stepped on.

We were to use an outside stairway whose concrete steps had more rise than run. It was a little like climbing a ladder.

Routot had a small Poste that was open, so I mailed some film. This time I had to fill out a customs declaration. And the cost of postage was different yet. Then we went to an old 15C house that boasted a tea shop which really turned out to be

another dingy bar; two roughly dressed men were drinking pernot.

Ah well, the Red Guide promised a "repas" restaurant in Routot, L'Ecurie. But when we went out looking for dinner, we realized it was Monday when no restaurant in France is open! Luckily, the one little grocery store and a boulangerie were open so we bought bread, poire tarte, fruit, cheese, and a bottle of good Bordeaux and went back to our room to eat dinner.

Tuesday, September 29

For the first night of the trip it turned cold enough for us to sleep with a blanket; just the sheet had been enough till now. The morning dawned clear, but crisp. After paying our coughing landlady and declining her offer to prepare petit déjeuner, we rode to Borg-Achard. It was cold enough that our breath made clouds of steam.

In Borg-Achard we went to a small cafe/bar for petit déjeuner.

From there we rode to Le Chateau de Robert-le-Diable and paid 30 francs to walk around and look at a very ill-kept ruin of an old castle with a few seedy looking displays of wax figures. The castle had a run-down miniature golf course and a small cafe from which emanated loud rock music. The whole operation was operated by two young men who had two big german shepherds running around.

The view of the Seine from the castle towers was supposed to be dramatic, but unlike Routot which had been clear and cold, here it was too foggy to see anything but a rather indistinct village of Molineaux at the foot of the bluff below the castle.

We had a great downhill from the castle to the banks of the Seine. We rode through four or five miles of port/industrial areas named Grand

Couronne, Petit Couronne, le Grand Quivelly, and le Petit Quevilly when the fog started to burn off. We entered Rouen in sunshine.

Rouen itself was a large city with wide, tree-lined boulevards and wide sidewalks – but the French drive on and park on these wide sidewalks. At about 1:00, after a ride of 23 miles, we arrived in the Centre Ville which was dominated by Notre Dame Cathedral with its cast iron spire. The i was closed for lunch, so on our own we looked for the Hotel Ibis which was listed in the Red Guide as a good value hotel.

We searched and searched for Hotel Ibis. We got directions from any number of helpful people, but we never did find it. So we went to Le Viking instead, but it had no rooms and sent us to Hotel Europa with a map of how to find it. But even with the map we never found Europa. All of this searching was within just four city blocks. These hotels are just impossible to find.

During our search we found a Hotel de Paris, inspected and accepted by Jane. The couple managing the hotel were quite proud of their automatic garage door opener and made quite a thing of opening the door to the basement garage so I could take the bikes down and park them.

The room was a pleasant surprise. It was a corner room, very light and airy without any smell of tobacco – rare in France.

After showers and a change to street clothes, we went to the central square and sat at an outdoor table. While we were waiting that interminable time it takes to get served in a French restaurant, the weather got dark, cold, and blustery so we went inside. I had a little steak called a "pave boucher" with pommes frites. The steak, which had a good flavor, was incredibly tough. Jane had assiete de crudités (vegetable salad).

After lunch we walked around the old part of town. Sunshine was intermittent with big black clouds blocking the sun more often than not. Not good for photography. Old Rouen itself is beautiful. A large area is occupied with narrow cobbled streets and old half-timber houses that lean every which way. There is a Gothic cathedral a block in any direction from where ever you are. Besides Notre Dame (12C) there are St. Maclou (15C), St. Ouen (14C), St. Laurent (15C), St. Godard, St. Patrice (16C), St. Vivien (15C), St. Nicaise, St. Eloi, St. Romain.

St. Joan of Arc Church is a modern structure built on the site where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake on May 30, 1431.

Notre Dame gets three stars in the Michelin Green Guide which considers it one of the most beautiful examples of French Gothic architecture. Its facade bristles with openwork, statues, and pinnacles. The cast iron spire over the central transept lantern is the tallest in France, 495 feet.

St. Maclou is Gothic-Flamboyant almost all of which has been preserved. Only the spire over the belfry has been replaced. Up the street a half block is the St. Maclou Cloister, a 16C half-timber agglomeration that was a mediaeval plague charnel house. On the column shafts and friezes are carvings of skulls, bones, and grave diggers' tools. The buildings served as a charnel house until the 18C, and they now house the School of Fine Arts.

St. Ouen is "one of the jewels of French Gothic architecture" with its purity of line and perfect proportions. Its central tower is crowned with a ducal coronet instead of having a spire. When we visited St. Ouen, a group of men were bowling in the churchyard.

About halfway between Notre Dame and St. Joan of Arc Church is a 14C arch and belfry with a large clock, "Le Gros-Horloge," that was moved from the belfry (1382) to its position above the arch in 1527. I decided I would come back in the morning to photograph the clock with direct light on it.

At 5:30 we went back to the hotel room and washed out bike shorts and jerseys and then rested for a while. Jane napped, I wrote in my journal.

At 7:30 we walked down the Rue du Gros-Horloge to the Place du Vieux-Marché which is surrounded by restaurants. We read several menus and decided on La Taverne de Maitre Kanter which specialized in Charcoute Brasserie dishes. Jane had chicken cooked in cider which she liked very much. I had sausages, bacon, and a ton of sauerkraut. The restaurant was very nice; the service was fast and friendly unlike other French restaurants and the price was reasonable.

Wednesday, September 30, 1992

Once again it rained during the night. The streets were wet and the sky was black, but it was not raining in the morning. After petit déjeuner, I took my camera and walked around the town with the primary intent of getting a morning picture of Le Gros-Horloge. The Rue du Gros-Horloge was jammed with delivery trucks, and the light was not good.

At 10:00 I came back to the hotel for Jane, and we then walked to the Museum of Fine Arts and to the Ceramics Museum; both were closed. It seems in Rouen, all the attractions are closed all day Tuesday and Wednesday morning.

So we walked to the Joan of Arc Church. Interestingly, an extension

of the modernistic roof covers a market place which was in full swing. There were flowers, vegetables, fruit, pastry, meat and fish for sale all just outside the beautiful stained glass windows of the church.

The church itself was very different. Its roof, soaring up in great curves on laminated beams, is supposed to suggest an overturned boat. Windows at ground level are shaped like fish and their sail cloth covers have holes representing the eyes of the fish. There are two north walls that are entirely stained glass, and the eye-level portion of each is fitted with 16C stained glass windows that were taken from St. Vincent's church for safekeeping before WWII; St. Vincent's was destroyed in 1944 so the windows were used here.

The Joan of Arc Church sits in the Place du Vieux-Marché along with a 65-foot high monument supposedly on the exact spot where Joan of Arc was burned. The church, the market, and the monument were designed by Louis Arretche, the architect who designed the restoration of St. Malo. In the middle ages, the square was the scene of public mockery and executions.

At lunch time, we went in a little cafe where there were well dressed people sitting at tables set with tablecloths and China, and we were told that all the tables had been reserved.

So we had lunch in a brasserie where Jane ordered a Salade Parisienne that turned out to be piled high with vegetables and was topped with two big slices of turkey breast. I ordered the Plat du Jour, Andouillette au Mustarde. It looked like a small broiled tenderloin of pork, but it turned out to be a neatly rolled and stuffed bunch of chopped up pig tripe. I ate some of it, but its texture was so ghastly that I was nauseated every time I thought of it during the afternoon.

We went back to the two museums when they opened at 2:00. The ceramics museum was terrific; it was housed in a 17C hotel which was worth the visit by itself.

The Museum of Fine Arts was somewhat disappointing. It was in a big, ugly building, and the entire wing containing the impressionist paintings was closed for renovation, although we did see the works of many 16C and 17C Italian, Dutch, Flemish, Spanish, and French masters.

All the time we were visiting the two museums, a steady rain was falling. But when we came out to go back to the hotel, the rain stopped.

So far, we have been very lucky with the weather. On our previous bike trips, we were constantly getting caught out in downpours (with the exception of Portugal).

At 7:30 when we went out to dinner it was cool, but it did not rain. We went back to the same restaurant, La Taverne de Maître Kanter, where I had the chicken cooked in cider — very good — and Jane had trout.

Thursday, October 1, 1992

We had petit déjeuner in the Hotel de Paris' tiny breakfast room, and then a proud Msr. and Mdm. made a big thing of opening the automatic garage door for me to get the bikes out.

We rode through Rouen on very big, busy boulevards until we found D982 to Duclair. There was quite a bit of traffic on D982, but the road went through very pretty forests. Since it was cutting across the loops of the Seine, there were some sweaty uphills and cool downhills. By 10:00 we were out of our jackets and tights.

At Yainville we turned south on D143 headed for Jumièges. My plan was to see the abbey ruins at Jumièges then to cross the Seine by ferry and follow along the south bank of the Seine to Pont de Brotonne where we could cross back to Caudebec on the north bank. But a young man on a bicycle, in response to my enquiry, said bicycles were not allowed to cross Pont de Brotonne. So we learned that we would have to come back to D982 by this same road.

Visiting the ruins at Jumièges was an emotional experience. The soaring towers, romanesque columns and arches, open tribunes, and Gothic galleries were lighted by soft, glowing sunlight as we approached them through the small village. The setting among large trees on the bank of the Seine couldn't be any more beautiful. I wished for a large camera and tripod instead of my 35 mm SLR. This was a place to see under all kinds of lighting and to view from every conceivable angle.

The 10C abbey was rebuilt on the ruins of a 7C abbey and was consecrated in 1067 in the presence of William the Conqueror. As a sight worth seeing, it ranks with the Bayeux Tapestry, Honfleur, and the American Cemetery!

After an hour or so of walking around the ruins and looking at different aspects of them from different angles, we reclaimed our bikes from the entrance gallery where we had locked them.

We rode back to Yainville and tried to find the makings of a picnic lunch. We got bread and sodas, but no fruit or cheese. In the next village, le Trait, we found fruit, cheese, and a park where we could sit on a bench in the sun and eat.

We arrived in Caudebec-en-Caux about 2:00 after riding 27 miles. We took a room in the Hotel Normandie which was probably our

best hotel yet, although it still had weird French plumbing.

Jane got under the shower and couldn't adjust the faucet for less hot water — there was a horizontal lever to control the flow of both hot and cold after they were mixed. A separate knob on the hot water controlled the amount of hot water. Very tricky, and a good way to get scalded.

Caudebec was to be just a stopping point half way between Rouen and Le Havre, but it turned out to have a Gothic-Flamboyant church (Notre Dame, what else?) built between 1425 and 1539. In Caudebec they claim that Henry IV described this church as "the most beautiful chapel in the kingdom."

There were also some notable old houses and a pretty canal.

Friday, October 2, 1992

Dinner in the Hotel Normandie was not a lot for the money, but petit déjeuner had jam in little jars with screw lids instead of the usual plastic containers.

We left Caudebec on D982 about 8:30 and climbed a long, steep hill. There was a very thin overcast that filtered the sunlight so the countryside and farm buildings glowed with a soft light.

At Lillebonne we left D982 and rode on D81.

At 11:00 we stopped in a pretty little village of St. Romain and had lunch on a sidewalk. From St. Romain we took a narrow little back road through dairy farms and through a village named Oudall. From there the road went into a forest and dropped down to the Seine and back to D982. In another couple of kilometers we were in Harfleur, a very old village that is a suburb of Le Havre.

Harfleur had a large Gothic cathedral, several old half-timber buildings, and a canal with reflections of the old buildings and the church spire.

Le Havre was about what we expected, a big, bustling seaport and industrial town. We rode for four or five miles through the port looking for the ferry terminal. After passing through the entire port area without finding the terminal, we asked two men in a car where the P&O Ferry terminal was. They said it was hard to explain, so they led us there in their car. The terminal turned out to be not in the port, but practically in the Centre Ville next to the beaches and esplanades.

After locating the port, we had tea in a little tea shop then we rode our bikes on the esplanade that runs along the beach for several miles. The esplanade was well used by many cyclists, joggers, teenagers, and couples of senior citizens walking their dogs. As it got dark, we went to the ferry terminal waiting room and read for a while. About 8:00 we went to a restaurant two blocks away for dinner. We no sooner got to the restaurant when serious rain started coming down. After dinner when we rode our bikes back to the terminal in the dark, the rain let up.

Other cyclists as well as motorcyclists were in the terminal waiting for the ferry and seeking shelter from the rain. One cyclist was a 25-year-old engineer from Seattle who had been cycling in Europe for two months and was now on his way to cycle through the British Isles. He said he had been riding about 100 miles every day but had been avoiding uphill by following the rivers.

The ship coming in from Portsmouth was late, so we were late in boarding. It still got underway a little after 11:00, though. Again we enjoyed our Club Class seating. The crossing

was rather rough, and Jane said it bothered her stomach.

We put 45 miles on the bikes today. So far they have performed flawlessly. Usually by this time in a trip we have had four or five flat tires and some minor mechanical problem of one kind or another.

Saturday, October 3, 1992

The ship's PA system woke us at 5:00 in preparation for arrival in Portsmouth. The stewards handed out coffee and I paid an extra £1 for a croissant.

When we rode our bikes out of the automobile hold, it was still very dark. We found our way to the foot-passenger terminal where Jane changed \$40 to £22, a sign that the exchange rate was becoming more favorable (when our credit card bills come in at the end of the month, the exchange should be even more favorable).

We rode out of the port into the town of Portsmouth in darkness. There is such a maze of roads and roundabouts coming out of the port that I was completely turned around. I thought if we headed southerly, we would see signs directing us to a train station. After seven or eight blocks there were still no such signs, so we stopped and asked a man who was just opening a small shop. He said we had come the wrong way and sent us back the way we had come on the same street. Eventually we passed through the center of town and came to Fratton Station.

At Fratton we were told that we could not take the train easterly toward Worthing because BritRail was working on the tracks and passengers were being bussed around the work; the busses had no provisions for bikes. So we took a train to the north to Havant.

From there we rode through some very beautiful English countryside, and through the quaint little country villages of Rowland's Castle, Finchdean, and Buriton. Part of the ride was through a national forest. Pheasants flew across the road in front of us. At one point we stopped to take a picture in a tunnel cut through the trees that arched over the road, but the combination of dense trees and overcast sky did not provide enough light.

We rode into Petersfield about 11:30 and it was exactly as I remember it the last time I was there in 1985 – people everywhere. It was market day, bustling with activity and bumper to bumper traffic. We tried to find a tea shop where we could get a light lunch, but ended up getting a couple of pastries in a bakery.

To avoid riding on busy highways, we decided to hop the train to Haselmere and spend the night in a B&B there. While we were on the train there was light rain off and on.

In Haselmere we had lunch in a nice little cafe and then went in search of a B&B. It turned out that all the B&Bs and both hotels were totally booked due to a wedding in the town.

So, we went back to the train station and got tickets to Three Bridges, the station nearest to our Barnwood Guest Hotel in Pound Hill. I phoned Barnwood and asked if there would be a problem with our arriving a day early, and as I expected they were glad to have us. (Business in England is really depressed.) 6263

The train route was rather circuitous. We went north to Guildford, then east to Redhill, then south through Gatwick to Three Bridges. The entire trip with transfers at three stations took only a couple of hours; the British trains really zip between stations. While

we were on the train, a steady, heavy rain was falling.

We got to the Barnwood about 3:00 after riding the two miles or so from Three Bridges in a blustery wind and spitting rain. The bike odometer read 19 miles for the day.

We showered, napped, read, and went to dining room at 7:00 for chicken curry dinner.

Sunday, October 4, 1992

We woke at 8:00 to a gray, blustery day. After an English breakfast in the hotel dining room, we went for a walk around Pound Hill. It was very cold and very windy so we went back to the hotel. Around noon the sky lightened up, so we put on cycling clothes and went out on the bikes.

While having beer at the White Knight pub, we asked who might be serving lunch in Pound Hill. The publican said that the Hillside pub on Balcombe Road served food on Sundays. He said, "Just go to the top of the road, turn left and go to the bottom of the road and you can't miss it."

A man standing at the bar said he was going to the Hillside himself. He gave us a fifteen-minute explanation of how to get there. (Fortunately, I knew where it was, and none of the instructions made any sense. All we had to do was go up Worth Road to Balcombe Road and turn left for about 100 yards.)

When we walked into the Hillside after locking our bicycles to a railing out front, there was our acquaintance from the White Knight standing at the bar. He greeted us as though we were long lost friends and insisted on buying us beers.

We waited twenty minutes for a table and couldn't understand why; there were plenty of empty tables in the dining room. But after we were

seated, we learned why the delay – the service was slow and inept. Lunch was pretty good, though, when it finally did arrive.

The Hillside is a member of the Toby Carving House chain, restaurants specializing in buffet meals with roast beef, roast leg of lamb, and roast turkey. The patronage was largely families enjoying a Sunday brunch, and they were heaping their plates in several passes at the buffet line. Jane had soup and salad while I had fish and chips. My lunch included a fresh raspberry and yogurt sundae.

The check, when it finally came, was added up £7.00 too much. They readily changed it when we pointed it out. We spent almost three hours in the Hillside.

After our very long lunch, we took a nice ride out tree-lined Old Hollow Road to Copthorne Road then to Balcombe Road and back to the hotel for a total of five miles. The dense growth of trees blocked the wind and the ride was very pleasant.

At the Barnwood, one of the woman employees was blowing leaves off the carpark with a motorized backpack leaf blower. She said she enjoyed the work because it made her feel like a "Ghostbuster." We also learned that the Barnwood dining room did not serve dinner on Sunday.

In the hotel room I watched the Buffalo-Miami football game and Jane read. NFL football is very popular in England, and they show two games every Sunday.

At 7:30 we went back to the Hillside, the only restaurant available. Once again the service was terrible but the food was very good. We had "Farm Steak Pie" with all the fresh vegetables we wanted from the buffet. Dessert was strawberries and cream. The coffee was surprisingly good French roast. But once again we were there

forever, and there were practically no other customers.

We walked back to the Barnwood, a distance of about three blocks, in a fierce wind. The trees were blowing about and casting moving shadows from the street lights.

Sunday, October 5, 1992

Well our trip is nearing its end. Today we fly home.

I got up at 7:30 after a restless night. The wind howled all night. Also, anticipation of flying always causes me anxiety. I worry about getting to the airport by bike on time and about getting bike boxes and about getting the bikes boxed and about getting them back in Dallas and about pushing the boxed bikes through the customs lines and about rechecking them with American and about making our connecting flight.

But everything went like clockwork. A very nice and efficient waitress served our English breakfast in the hotel dining room. We checked out, loaded our bikes, and rode north to Gatwick. The gale force wind was directly out of the north, so we had to go slowly in low gear but it was only four miles to the airport. The new access into Gatwick that we learned this trip was simple and direct.

At the American Airlines counter a woman agent went for bike boxes. She returned with them still smiling even though they were dusty and hard to handle, and she said, "Go do what you do with your bikes and come back. By the way, I am supposed to tell you to let the air out of the tires, it's an airline regulation." (Why the airlines persist in this is beyond me. Apparently they think that a depressurization would cause the tires to burst and do damage to the airplane..... I believe the tires

could withstand total vacuum without bursting."

After boxing the bikes and checking in, we went to the departure lounge to shop in the duty-free shops. It turned out that everything was considerably more expensive than what you can buy it for at home. We ended up with a couple of tins of candy for our grandsons.

At Dallas our bike boxes were delivered to the baggage pickup at about the same time that luggage came out on the carousel. We went thru customs and gave our panniers and bike boxes to two AA baggage handlers and took the shuttle to the domestic terminal where we caught Flight 543 for Sacramento. Flight 543 arrived in Sacramento about twenty minutes early, and our son Phil was already there to meet us.

A great trip! The Norman countryside, the farms and villages, the American Cemetery, the Bayeux Tapestry, the St. Teresa Basilica, Honfleur, the streets of Rouen, and so many other things that we will never forget.

The weather cooperated and hardly ever rained on us while we were on the road, and the bikes performed with 100% reliability, not even a flat tire!

And American Airlines excellent service and timeliness the rest of the trip made up for the little episode with the bikes at departure.