

PROVENCE DIARY

September 29, 1993 through October 20, 1994

Thursday, September 29

7:00 A.M.! Jane dropped me, my bike, and my panniers off at the airport. She had to pick up our grandson and take him to school. I had plenty of time to get a bike box, box my bike, check in, and wait for my flight to leave at 9:42.

There were the usual few tense moments when the ticket agent insisted that I had to pay to take the bike, and I explained that it went free on overseas flights. Sacramento is the only airport where this ever happens.)

Arrival in Chicago was right on schedule at 3:42 P.M. with nothing to do but wait for Joe to arrive at 7:36 P.M.

I read my book and drank espresso until I was sloshing.

Joe arrived right on time, and we went to our international departure gate and checked in for our 8:40 P.M. flight to London.

Friday, September 30 London's Heathrow Airport to Amsterdam and Leyden

We landed at Heathrow on time and sort of bumbled our way through the old-fashioned airport to the right bus to take us to another terminal for our British Midlands flight to Amsterdam. We

landed in Amsterdam at 2:00 P.M., about 30 minutes late.

Our bike boxes and luggage showed up very quickly. By 2:30 we had the bikes assembled, went through customs, and went out into the terminal where Joy Kearney was waiting for us.

Joy turned out to be very lovely. She is also very Irish with her long red hair and an Irish lilt in her voice. Of course she thought we were the ones with the accent.

We went directly to the train station in the airport (Schiphol Airport) and took the train to Leyden where we went to Roodenburgerstraat 29.

Number 29 is a brick row exactly like all the other houses on the block. It has three floors each about 18' by 36'. The steep staircases each have a 180° twist.

The ground floor consists of an entry, a small kitchen, a living-dining room, and a toilet stall. Second floor is 3 bedrooms, toilet stall, and a bath that contains only a shower and a basin. Top floor is laundry area, two bedrooms, and a room with a wash basin.

The weather was cool and overcast. Too dark for photos. As it later turned out, I never did get a photo of number 29.

Joy wanted to fix our dinner, so she went shopping while we showered and rested.

Dinner was salmon, potatoes, and salad with a Bordeaux I found in a neighborhood shop.

Saturday, October 1 Leyden to Amsterdam and back to Leyden

I didn't wake up until 9:00. Joe continued to sleep while I showered and dressed. I think he and Joy sat up talking most of the night.

Joy made coffee and put out cereal and milk.

After breakfast we walked to Lemmonschan Station where we got a local into Leyden.

At Leyden Station we talked to the ladies at the NS International RR ticket counter about traveling to Provence with our bikes. They said that bikes are welcome on trains in Holland and Belgium, "but the French have a problem with bicycles."

They suggested we go to a bike shop and get boxes in which we could put our disassembled bikes. We walked around Leyden until we found a bike shop. The

young man was very helpful. He gave us two boxes and suggested we gift wrap them to get them onto a French train.

We took the boxes back to the NS International RR Office and showed them to the ladies at the counter. They called a man who was in charge of baggage to come and look at the boxes. In his opinion, the French would not allow the boxes on a train.

We went to the tourist office in the Leyden station and asked about flying to Marseilles. The lady at the travel office desk seemed harried and short of patience. She said we would have to fly to Nice, but because Monday was a holiday reservations could not be made until Tuesday. Therefore, if space was available, Wednesday would be the earliest we could leave. She did not know if the plane would carry the bikes. She was not much help.

We ripped up the boxes and put them in the garbage. Then we took a train to Amsterdam where we found a Hertz office fifteen minutes after it had closed at 4:00 P.M. But a very nice man named Hans was willing to stay and talk to us. He said he would try to find us a French car that we could drive to France on Monday without a drop-off charge.

We tried to go to the Van Gogh Museum and the Rijksmuseum, but both were closed.

So we took a canal boat ride. It was very nice, even if there was a light drizzle

falling. At dusk the lights were coming on. The old houses lining the canals and the reflections in the water were beautiful.

From the canal boat we had seen a large floating restaurant with strings of lights and a festive look. So about 7:00 when we got off the boat we walked to the restaurant. It turned out to be a huge Chinese restaurant called the "Sea Palace", but we could not go in. The whole place was booked for the night by zoo patrons and docents.

So we went to a "Venezia Ristorante" for a good Italian meal. After dinner we took the train back to Leyden getting there about 11:30. The place was jumping. It was carnival. The streets were mobbed. There were stands selling food, beer, candy, clothes - you name it. There was a ferris wheel and other rides

We walked all the way from Leyden Station through the festivities and on to 29 Roodenburgerstraat.

Sunday, October 2 Leyden to Amsterdam and back to Leyden

We all got up early this morning. At 6:45 Joy was making coffee. After breakfast we walked to Lammenschans Station and just missed the 9:14. We waited for the 9:44 train and got to Amsterdam Central Station at 11:00.

We took a trolley to the vicinity of the Van Gogh museum and walked along the canals with their old

houses on our way to the museum.

The Van Gogh is housed in a very modern building built about 1965. Although it contains mostly Van Goghs, there are some Gauguins, L'Hermittes, Monets, Pissaros, etc.

The Van Gogh sketches were wonderful. There were also about thirty self portraits.

After lunch in the Van Gogh cafeteria, we phoned "Hans" at Hertz. He said he had a car for us and we could pick it up in the morning.

We then went to the Rijksmuseum. Just incredible! Many Rembrandts. The huge Nightwatch is breathtaking.

Lots of other Dutch painters are represented. We found Melchior D'Hondecoeter's "Pelican with Ornamental Birds in Parkland Setting" (commonly called "Floating Feather").

D'Hondecoeter is Joy Kearney's specialization. She authenticated one for Sotheby's.

We left Amsterdam about 4:30 returning to Leyden Central Station. From there we joined the carnival crowds again. We went to an elegant little restaurant called "Jill's" on the advice of a Dutch couple that were sitting at a sidewalk cafe. They said it had good food and was inexpensive; if this is their definition of inexpensive, the Dutch must be very affluent.

We walked back to Roodenburgerstraat 29 in a

light rain getting there about 9:00.

Monday, October 3 Leyden to Amsterdam to Leyden and on to Nancy

There was heavy rainfall during the night. We awoke early, had coffee and cereal, and then Joe and I took the train to Amsterdam where we picked up our "French" Fiat from Hans at Hertz.

We drove back to Leyden in about half an hour including a stop to photograph a windmill. We loaded the bikes and our gear in the little hatchback, said good-bye to Joy, and headed out on the A4.

We drove past Rotterdam, Antwerp, and Brussels, mostly in very heavy rain. We went into Luxembourg for a look and saw a big, bustling city full of tall buildings.

We topped up the diesel tank in Luxembourg where we were told fuel was cheap because there was no tax on it.

With the weather improving as we drove south we continued on to Nancy where we had decided to stop because it looked about halfway to Provence. We arrived at 6:30 after driving 550 kilometers from Amsterdam. (All the time we were on the autoway we maintained 130 kilometers per hour.)

Our car was a Fiat Punto 4-door with a turbo diesel engine. It handled the high speeds with no strain.

We drove around Nancy for fifteen or twenty minutes looking for the Hotel Arcade listed in the Red Guide. Streets were always one-way the wrong way, but we found the hotel, checked in, and parked in the basement garage.

After dinner in the hotel dining room, we walked around old Nancy - a three star attraction in the Green Guide - where we saw a gothic cathedral, a beautiful Hotel de Ville, and the historic Place Stanislas.

Monday, October 4 Nancy to Aix-en-Provence

We got up at 7:00, had petit dejeuner in hotel dining room, then spent an hour walking around Place Stanislas, Ducal Palace, and old cathedral.

There were lots of youngsters out in the chilly morning air waiting for busses to go to school. The temperature was 8°C - our breath came out in steamy clouds.

We left Nancy about 9:30. We drove through Dijon and on to three-star Lyon where we stopped for lunch and French money (we thought 5.22 FF. for a dollar was a poor exchange rate but it turned out to be as good as we were going to get).

We parked the little car in a high tech underground garage that had seven levels underneath the Place de Republique in the middle of the city. The ramps were such tight, steep spirals and the light so poor that it was not easy to negotiate.

Lunch in a sidewalk cafe was made interesting by a steady stream of pedestrians. Weather was a little warmer than Nancy, too.

After lunch it was back to 130 kph on the autoway until 6:00 when we got to Aix-en-Provence (where we had decided to start our bike trip rather than Marseilles to eliminate even more driving).

Finding the Hertz Office on the first pass down Avenue Victor Hugo was impossible. And getting back to Victor Hugo took fifteen minutes of circling around on one-way streets in bumper-tobumper, stop-and-go congestion.

Finally we double-parked in front of the while the girl at the counter phoned Hertz to ask where they were located. Not much help because the location they claimed was where we had already looked.

Since we might be a while, I had the girl in the t make a reservation at Hotel St. Christophe (a red guide listing) which turned out to be right next door. The reservation required a down payment of 50 FF. which we were to get back but never did.

Joe was driving, and the next time we went down Victor Hugo I caught a glimpse of a little Hertz decal on a window on the other side of the street from where we had been looking.

I had Joe pull across three lanes of traffic and double park while I went in. Their entrance was around a corner and down half a block!

We made an illegal left turn and got there.

By the time we got unloaded and had the bikes reassembled, it was 7:00 and the Hertz girls wanted to close up. So they did not want to spend much time reserving us a car in Avignon for the trip north to Paris on the fifteenth, but they did.

Our hotel was only a couple of blocks away on a one-way street the other way, so we rode our bikes on sidewalks to St. Christophe.

Here we are on a "bicycle tour" and on our sixth day away from home we finally ride the bikes two blocks!

The hotel turned out to be more expensive than the Red Guide indicated.

We had bouillabaisse and then walked around Aix. Many beautiful buildings. Lots of people out and around. The weather was little warmer than it had been in Nancy. But still, most of the sidewalk cafes had their outdoor gas heaters lit up.

Wednesday, October Aix-en-Provence

After petit déjeuner in Christophe we took our first bike ride! It was about a fifteen mile loop in the countryside around Aix.

We rode east on D17 and then south through Tholonet, Beaufort, Meyreux, Le Plan and back to Aix.

We met four young Englishmen on D17 near

Montagne St. Victoire who were on a bike tour.

We kept leapfrogging them. We were stopping frequently to make minor adjustments to our bikes (for example, my new handlebar bag rubbed on my front tire until I used a steel roadside post to tweak it a little).

The Englishmen seemed to be doing the same thing, although they said they had started in Nice a couple of days before. At one point it appeared that one of their bikes had developed a very serious problem that would require shop work. We didn't see them anymore after that.

Joe and I stopped at a little roadside stand and bought fruit and wine for our lunch. We had a long chat with the owner and a friend of his who was Spanish and did the French-English interpretation for the owner.

We rode on to Le Plan where we found an epicene that had cheese and fresh bread and where we talked for a while with an Italian customer. The Italian had been a stevedore and his union retired him at age 50 with full pay, 20,000 FF. per month.

Lunch was on a mountain top overlooking a huge power plant. The plant had the big cooling towers that people associate with nuclear plants, but this power plant was coal fired.

We got back to Aix about 3:00 and spent the rest of the day looking at the town. Dinner was in a little Indian restaurant.

Miles of cycling today - 16.

Thursday, October 6 Aix-en-Provence to Salon-de-Provence

After petit déjeuner, we checked out of Hotel Christophe and rode our bikes to Les Mules where had trouble finding our little D65. After riding around for about fifteen minutes, we stopped a local man who got us pointed in the right direction - toward Equilles.

We found the Aqueduc de Roquefavour in a beautiful setting. The aqueduct crossed a deep gorge where there was a waterfall, white rock outcroppings, and big trees. A young woman named Carole was taking photos for postcards, and she agreed to take a photo of the two of us with the aqueduct in the background - very touristy!

After leaving the aqueduct, we climbed about 500 feet to Ventabren, a picturesque little village perched on a mountainside with a beautiful view to the north.

A few miles further on, in Coudoux, we bought bread, cheese, fruit, and wine. Then we climbed another summit about the same height as the previous one. On top we stopped and had our picnic lunch. Joe said it was pretty hard to beat lunch on a mountain top everyday.

Further on we turned off on a little farm road and found Le Barben Castle nestled in

- canyon with a stream and
- park like setting. We took
- tour of the castle which is
- mixture of 11C, 15C, and

17C construction. Very few rooms were open to the public because it is occupied by a family, but the rooms we saw had ornate Luis XV furnishings.

At 4:00 we got to Salon-de-Provence. The showed us the way to the Hotel Vendome in the centre ville. After checking in and changing to street clothes, we walked to Empéri Castle and around the town.

Dinner was in a little Italian restaurant - pizza, spaghetti, salad. After dinner we walked up to St. Laurent cathedral which the green guide said was an excellent example of southern French Gothic. I thought it was ugly with its solid stone buttresses that looked like they should be on the front face of a dam. It was also lighted in a very garish pattern.

Miles of cycling today - 38

Friday, October 7 Salon-de-Provence to St. Remy-de-Provence

Breakfast was cafe au lait, half baguette, and a croissant, period, for 28 FF.

We rode to Eyguieres, Mourie, Maussone, and Les Baux. We reached Les Baux at about 11:00 after two pretty good climbs.

Les Baux is a ruined castle and a medieval town perched on top of a mountain. Very picturesque. Very touristy. There were two groups of bus supported touring cyclists. In each group the bikes were all identical with little orange

road pennants on tall fiber-glass poles.

There were also a couple of tour busses.

In spite of the cold, overcast weather there were quite a few people walking the narrow little streets and shopping in the stores and galleries.

We paid to enter the castle ruins and walked around for about an hour. Then we found a little restaurant with a reasonably priced plat de jour (65 FF.) and with a nice view of the village's tiled roofs and of the Fontaine Valley below.

After another hour or so in Les Baux, we coasted back down to the D road then climbed a third summit of about 300 feet. After that it was down hill into St. Remy. The road entering the town was lined on both sides with large plane trees.

Just before entering town we came upon the "Antiquities," an old Roman mausoleum and an arch from 30 BC.

There was in a little park as we entered town. We went in and got directed to the Hotel Van Gogh (St. Remy is where Van Gogh spent his last year in an asylum), and then watched some older men at le boule.

When we got to the hotel, the cute little gal in charge discovered that she had no more double rooms. So she put us in the "annex" - a duplex outside the wall but adjoining the hotel property.

We walked around the town which was not very big. Joe went into a shop and bought

bread and cheese which we ate with Guinness at a sidewalk cafe.

After walking around a little more, we had an excellent French dinner in a small, quaint cafe with an archway in the middle.

After dinner we were both tired and sleepy so we went back to the Hotel Van Gogh and went to bed about 9:30.

It got very cold during the night. In the morning we discovered that all we had to do was turn on the radiators for heat. We could have been warm, and we could have dried our laundry, too.

We hung our damp clothes on the radiators while we were at breakfast and they got somewhat dry.

Miles of cycling today - 28.

Saturday, October 8 St. Remy-de-Provence to Aries

We left the Hotel Van Gogh at about 8:30. I led us toward the west for about a mile looking for road to north, but I was wrong. We had to double back and go to the north end of town to find the D5E to Eyragues and Chateaufort.

In Chateaufort we went up to the twin towers of the ruined castle perched on a hill overlooking the town.

From Chateaufort we rode southwest to Tarascon via Maillane. The castle in Tarascon was magnificent - very medieval - very large - very well maintained. But it was closed until 2:00 for lunch.

We went to a creperie across the street where I had a small pizza and Joe had a crepe Provençal - a crepe folded over ratatouille with an egg on top.

Two couples on loaded touring bikes rode up to the creperie and stopped for lunch. They turned out to be from Alaska.

Rather than wait for the castle to open, we headed out for Aries right after our lunch.

Two or three miles before we got to Aries we came upon the huge, castle-like Abbaye de Montmajour. The abbey was originally built in the 10C by Benedictine monks. Its history is much like that of Jumieges; sold to a junk dealer who took out all the timberwork and much of the stonework before it eventually became public property.

In Arles we went to the and booked a room at the Hotel St. Trophime in the center of the old town. We walked around the Roman amphitheater and then visited the Roman theater. It was interesting to see a modern stage, seating, and complete theater lighting amongst Roman columns and pediments when we got inside. We got hungry and thirsty, so we went to McDonald's and had beer and French fries in their sidewalk cafe.

After walking around and looking at restaurants, we decided to go for paella in a little Spanish restaurant right next door to the hotel.

After dinner we walked along the bank of the Rhone River enjoying the lights re-

flected in the water. But we got cold and sleepy and returned to the hotel.

We decided it would take most of the next day to see the sights in Aries, so we told the hotel desk clerk that we would stay another night.

Miles of cycling today - 37.

Sunday, October 9 Aries

We finished petit déjeuner about 9:00 and went to the Roman amphitheater. After looking at the entire outside with its ancient Roman stonework, we bought tickets and went inside. From the top of one of the towers (the amphitheater had been converted to a fortress during the middle ages) we could see the Abbaye of Montmajour dominating the skyline to the northeast.

The amphitheater of Aries has no top story to the stonework. It was probably quarried at one time or another. But its still in use as an arena with metal bleachers extending up from the stone lower levels.

Like the theater, the amphitheater is in regular use. It appears to be used for bullfights and sporting events. There are metal bleachers extending up from the stone aisles. The sections and seats are numbered and lettered like an American football stadium and there are stadium lights on tall poles.

After seeing the arena, we went in search of the St. Trophime cloister, the most famous cloister in Provence according to the Green

Guide.

We went around the block and found only a sign in a back alley that said the entrance was to the left of the cathedral entrance. Finally we found that we had to go through the college next door to the cathedral to enter the cloister.

Part of the cloister is Romanesque from the early 12C and part is Gothic from the 14C. The carvings on the marble corner pillars and capitals were outstanding.

Off the north cloister is a chapter house with beautiful 17C tapestries.

The cloister was nice, but not as beautiful as the Certosa de Pavia or any of several Jane and I had seen in Portugal.

About 11:00 we went back for our bikes and riding shorts and rode out to the Carmogues Regional Nature Park.

The ride was through beautiful marsh land in the Rhone River delta where dapple gray horses and black bulls (raised for bullfights) grazed between the ponds. Herons and egrets everywhere.

We had lunch in a classy little restaurant at a crossroads named Gageron. Joe had two little red fish cooked whole in olive oil. I had a hundred tiny fish each less than an inch long that had been pan fried crisp.

We had ridden a loop of 36 miles when we got back to the hotel. We showered,

dressed, and went for early dinner at McDonald's - Big Macs, fries, and cokes. I topped mine off with a caramel sundae and coffee.

We were back at the hotel before 8:00. But Joe went right to sleep and slept until 7:00 the next morning.

Miles of cycling today - 36

Monday, October 10 Aries to Nimes

After petit déjeuner we rode to St. Gilles in cool overcast weather. All the way to St. Gilles the road was similar to those in the Carmogues - narrow, untraveled, through marsh land. We saw horses wading in the marshes with egrets perched on their backs. Lots of the fierce little black bulls.

As we entered St. Gilles we crossed a river or canal with lots of waterfowl and interesting boats moored along both sides

In St. Gilles we visited the 11-12C abbey with its Romanesque facade containing three doorways with arched pediments and columns. Across the lintels are carvings depicting the stages in the life of Christ. Well worth seeing.

Behind the abbey church is the famous Screw of St. Gilles, a spiral staircase in a bell tower built in 1142. The Brotherhood of Stonemasons hold it up as an example of the best of their work due to the quality of the cutting and joining of stone.

Just as we left the abbey, it started to rain. So we went in a little cafe and had tea

and a whole basket full of croissants.

At the next table two ladies were drinking wine and carrying on a lively conversation in King's English - at 10:00 in the morning. I asked them if the sun was over the yardarm, and they laughed, knowing exactly what I meant.

They said in France it was okay to drink wine after 10:00 in the morning. We had a long conversation with them. One, Minnie, had lived in St. Gilles for over twenty years. The other also lived there, but was a more recent arrival.

They gave us advice on changing money in France. They said always change money at the post office because there is no exchange commission charged and the exchange rate is better than at the banks.

We tried to follow up on this, but the one line in the local post office that handled exchange was tied up with a large, pushy lady who was taking all the clerk's time. After twenty minutes, I gave up and went across the street to a bank.

Apparently the French conduct much of their financial business at post offices. There seemed to be a lot of investing in government securities, cashing or purchasing of money orders, and other transactions that were a mystery since we couldn't understand the language.

At the bank I didn't fare any better. At the guichet that had a "change" sign I got behind a man who was depositing about a million francs in

cash in about a dozen different accounts. He took bundles of money from all his coat pockets, and the clerk tore the tape from each bundle, counted the bills twice, and then retaped them into bundles.

By the time I got some francs the rain was coming down at a good, steady rate.

We put on our rain gear and rode directly to Nimes without any further stops.

Nimes turned out to be about twice as large as Arles. It also appeared to be a very attractive city. The boulevards were lined with big plain trees, and there were parks, statues, and fountains everywhere.

We rode into town until we came to the Roman amphitheater, got our bearings, and headed for the: where we booked a room in the Hotel Majestic.

We were soaked and dripping all over everything, but our landlord was very friendly and helpful. We wheeled our bikes through his entry and into the courtyard, then got very welcome hot showers.

We went to a cafeteria, but most of their service was already ended. So we went to a Quick hamburger stand across the street.

After lunch, I bought a little folding umbrella (paraplu) in a department store, and then we walked around town in a steady, light rain. Saw the Maison Carrée, a Roman forum that was still in tact. We had beer in a sidewalk cafe and dinner in a Thai-Vietnamese restaurant.

At 9:30 we were back at the hotel tired and damp and ready to sleep.

Miles of cycling today - 29.

Tuesday, October 11

Nimes

No rain! At petit déjeuner we noticed a replica of the Bayeux Tapestry on the wall. I asked our host about it, and he said that his mother had made it years before.

His English was very good. He explained that the tapestry was a "digest" of the real thing, but that it told the whole story of William conquering Harold at the Battle of Hastings.

He also told us the history of the original Bayeux tapestry. He described how it came to be made and how it was taken during the Revolution and used for the canvas on horse-drawn wagons until spotted by a cleric who recognized and salvaged it.

Our landlord had a very well behaved Lakeland Terrier named "Gadget" who was his constant companion.

Our host was very knowledgeable about many things. He told us a lot about the history of Nimes, and he told us about the oppidum at Nages and explained exactly how to get out of Nimes to find the route to Nages and exactly how to find the trail up the hill from Nages to the oppidum, a fortified town-ship occupied by Gauls from 300 to 30 BC.

First, though, we went to the beautiful and huge Jardin de

la Fontaine where we saw the Roman ruins of the 2C Temple de Diane and of the 15 BC Tour Magne.

We walked through a three-story shopping mall with very trendy shops on the upper floors and a typical European market on the ground floor where everything from fish and pigs to flowers and candy were being sold in the stalls.

Back at the hotel we changed into cycling clothes, got out bikes out of the courtyard, and headed out for Nages.

At Nages we locked our bikes to a fence and climbed a pretty steep, talus littered trail through brush and scrub oak to the top of Les Castels Hill where the Nages-et-Solorgues oppidum was located.

There were the remains of rows of small houses, narrow streets, and round forts. I was reminded of the ring fortresses built by ancient Celts in Ireland. Or of the stone houses of the Azizi in northern Arizona.

The only other visitors were a lady and two boys from the village having a picnic at the mountain top ruins.

Back in Nimes we locked up the bikes, changed, and walked around the beautiful town. There were lots of people out and about shopping and sipping drinks in sidewalk cafes.

We got hopelessly lost in the maze of narrow, twisting alleyways. So we had beer at one sidewalk cafe, coffee at another.

We went to the Restaurant Nicolas in Rue Poise that was recommended by our landlord. We stuffed ourselves on sope de poisson, gigot d'agneau, and ile flot-tante. Joe thought the fish soup was a rip-off because there were no chunks of fish in it.

Miles of cycling today - 23.

Wednesday, October 12

Nimes to Avignon

A muffin and a sweet roll were included in our continental breakfast this morning; daringly cosmopolitan for France.

As suggested by our host, we rode to Pont du Gard via Pont St. Nicolas, a beautiful old bridge built in the 13C with nine tall arches spanning the Gardon River six or seven miles downstream from the Pont du Gard. There was a very large and apparently deserted stone building at the east end of the bridge.

From Pont St. Nicolas to Pont du Gard, we rode on a very quiet farm road that passed through two very small villages, Sanilhac and Collias.

At Pont du Gard there are restaurants and parking lots for tour busses and lots of tourists. The Green Guide says the aqueduct is one of the wonders of Ancient Times and gives it a three-star rating as an attraction.

The bridge spans the Gardon Valley. It is 900 feet long and it rises to 160 feet above the river. It has six arches on its lower level, eleven on

the middle level, and 35 on its upper level.

The bridge supports a 19 BC Roman aqueduct that carried water from Uzès to Nîmes, a distance of 31 miles. Two thousand years ago the aqueduct carried 44 million gallons of water per day to Nîmes.

During the 4 C maintenance of the aqueduct ceased and by the 9 C it had fallen into disuse. But what do we build that we use for 900 years?

While photographing this magnificent aqueduct, I realized that my camera lens was not autofocus. Examining it, I found it jammed on infinity. I was able to force it to other settings, but it obviously could not be used without damaging the focusing system in the camera. I left the camera in manual focus, left the power switch on when attaching the lens and found I could with some difficulty get a few pictures. Damn!

We stopped in the nearby town of Remoulin, found a nice little restaurant on the main highway through town, and had a great plat de jour consisting of a pork chop and potatoes au gratin. for 45 FF.

During lunch we had a nice conversation with the couple at the next table who were from Toronto.

A little while later in Aramon we stopped and talked to a French cyclist (a senior citizen like me), and he described for us the 'jolie' route into Avignon. We took his advice and detoured over

to the bank of the Rhone and followed it into Avignon.

As we crossed the Pont Edouard Daladier into Avignon the view of the city was fabulous. Steeples, crosses, turrets, towers, and crenellated walls dominated the skyline.

This walled city and the fortress-palace-church built by the popes is truly magnificent. And here I am with a malfunctioning camera lens.

We proceeded directly to the location of the shown on the map in the Green Guide, but the ladies there said they did not handle hotel reservations. They said there was another at the other end of town that handled hotels.

We went next door to a ticket booth for the chateau tower and the old bridge, the Pont St. Bénézet, and asked the lady there what there was to see. She turned out to be English and very nice.

She said not to buy a ticket because, "How can you see bridge when you are standing on it?" She also said that the "Hotel Medieval" was nice, centrally located, and inexpensive, and she drew the location on a map she gave us.

We went to the hotel through a maze of beautiful little streets, some carved from solid rock supporting the foundation of the palais.

The hotel was in a little alleyway named Rue de Petite Saunerie. It had a small garage around the corner where we put the bikes. We were given room #35 which turned out to be at the top of

three flights of narrow, winding stairways. (In Europe the ground floor is always floor "0" and floor "1" is up one flight.

Avignon is dominated by the Palais de Papes (Palace of the Popes) whose walls are over 100 feet high and several blocks long.

A couple of blocks from the palace is Place de l'Horologie with six or seven restaurants all in a row. Each has seating for fifty or sixty people under awnings out in the Place. And each has a hustler trying to talk people into eating at that particular restaurant.

There was also a large carousel and a couple of other rides in the square. The whole place had a carnival atmosphere at night.

The weather had become very mild, and we chose one of the outdoor seating areas for our dinner, a 65 FF. menu.

Miles of cycling today - 41.

Thursday, October 13 Avignon

Our continental breakfast was served in the room.

After breakfast we walked out through one of the few gates in the city walls. We went to 6 Route de Lyon looking for the Hertz agency to confirm our car to drive to Paris on the fifteenth. Guess what? 6 Route de Lyon housed the local ambulance.

Two men in a shop thought Hertz was two or three portals to the south. We walked

down to several portals, but found nothing.

At a little hole in the wall driving school office, I asked a pretty young lady at the counter if she knew where Hertz was. She said, "No, but it's no problem finding out."

She turned to her computer and typed, "Hertz, voiture location?" The correct address came back immediately, "4 Blvd. St. Michel." She said, "Oh, that's very near," and she took my city map and marked it for me.

Hertz was about two blocks away so we went there and confirmed that we would indeed have a car Saturday morning adequate to fit the bikes in.

We walked all through town. Came upon a very well equipped little camera shop where I was able to buy a lens to fit my camera.

From there we went to the Palais de Papes, paid the admission fee, and spent an hour or so touring the huge, unfurnished rooms.

This is one of several palaces built on the same sight in the 14C. From 1309 to 1377, seven French popes succeeded each other at Avignon.

The Clementine Chapel is 49 ft. wide and 171 ft. long with a 62 ft. ceiling. The banquet room is 33 ft. wide and 157 ft. long. The walls are covered with frescoes and tapestries. Here and there is a piece of sculpture.

There are three floors of these huge chambers. The

exterior walls are 164 ft high.

One can't help but wonder at the wealth and power of the popes.

I gave my new lens quite a workout taking pictures of the palace.

We then went to a little sandwich stall just off the main business street and got hero sandwiches. We took them back to the hotel and had lunch in the room.

After we ate, Joe went to sleep. So I got my bike out of the garage and rode across the Pont Edouard Daladier to Ile de Plot so I could take a photo of the palace reflected in the river

I went back to the hotel, woke Joe, and talked him into taking a bike ride to Barbentane where we visited a 17C chateau with baroque and rococo decor.

Part of the route was on N570. Returning, N570 was very busy. We went back to the hotel, stowed the bikes, changed, and went into the Place d l'Horologie to select a restaurant.

We selected one that offered Canard au Vin. The food was not great, but sitting outside in the square was pleasant.

After dinner I talked Joe into walking with me back to the Ile de Piot to take night pictures of the illuminated palace reflected in the Rhone.

It was very dark, very deserted, and very spooky on the island.

On our return at 10:00, the Place de Palais was bustling with activity. Sidewalk cafes were doing lots of business. People were strolling around.

The weather today was sunny and warm, perhaps 75°F.

Miles of cycling today - 17.

Friday, October 14 Avignon

Instead of having our petit déjeuner brought to the room, we opted to go out to cafe. After walking around, and after eating a pastry from a patisserie, we ended up at the Cafe Parisienne in the P1. de l'Horologie.

While we were in the cafe, a rather dense fog moved in and obscured the huge palace across the P1. de Palais.

We walked up on Doms Rock for the superb views - given two stars by the Green Guide - and could see only a couple of hundred feet.

So we went into the galleries of the Petit Palais. They contained a very impressive collection of Renaissance Italian religious paintings.

We returned to Donis Rock. The fog had dissipated. We could see Villeneuve -les- Avignon, another fortress city, across the river.

About 11:00 we got our bikes out and started a ride to Chateauneuf de Papes.

When we went through the village of Roquemaure, we looked for an epicene, but found none open. But we did

find a small, nondescript restaurant that was attracting quite a patronage. So we had lunch there.

The plat de jour was mussels, fish with a cream sauce, bread, wine, creme caramel, coffee - all for 142 FF. for the two of us.

Chateauneuf was a small town among rolling hills covered with vineyards. It had a ruined castle on a height above the town, and it had a million wine shops. We were told that the wine is supposed to be the best and the most expensive in France.

We talked to two couples on bikes who we had seen earlier in Avignon. They had been negotiating the rental of their bikes from a little shop in the alley behind our hotel when we came out of the hotel garage with our bikes. They were Canadian, from Ottawa.

After returning to Avignon we showered and got dressed and went looking for dinner. We walked up and down the main business street until we found a brasserie promising chicken and spaghetti for 49 FF.

An American couple was already seated at a sidewalk table, and they asked us to sit next to them.

The chicken came with pomme frites instead of spaghetti, and Joe refused to accept his. The maitre de came out and asked if he would settle for rice because the spaghetti was all gone. Joe said okay. When his dish came, there was only about half as much chicken

as before with a tiny portion of rice.

The American couple was from Colorado and they were traveling on a Eurail Pass. They did not like the weather where they had been so they came to Avignon. They seemed to be old hands at traveling around Europe in a strictly impromptu way.

Miles of cycling today - 36.

Saturday, October 15 Avignon to Fontainebleau

We got up at 6:45. We had arranged for our petit déjeuner to be brought up to the room at 7:15 so we could get an early start for Paris.

We rode our bikes to Hertz, got the car, loaded up, and were on the road at 8:45. The car was a tiny Renault Clio, but the seats folded down and there was plenty of room for the bikes and luggage.

The drive up the A7 to Beaune and up the A6 to Fontainebleau was quick and easy.

We stopped at one of the restaurants with a bridge across the freeway for lunch

Since we did not want to go into Paris until the next morning, we looked at the map for a stopping place. Fontainebleau seemed most logical. It was about an hour out of Paris, and it had lots to see.

We got a nice room in the Hotel This which we selected from the Red Guide.

We visited the palace which was fabulous. Easily the most impressive thing we had seen so far on our whole trip.

The ballroom, the gallery, and the chapel were very ornate but not ugly ornate.

There were lots of tourists in the palace, the gardens, and in the town.

The weather was nice. We sat at a sidewalk cafe and had a glass of wine. We struck up a conversation with two English girls in their early twenties who were sitting next to us.

They were studying French and working near Fontainebleau as au pair for what sounded like some very affluent young professional couples who had small children and who commuted to Paris to work.

They both seemed very pleased with their situations. One was provided with a car as part of her compensation.

Dinner in the Ibis dining room was very good. Salad bar and tagliatelli with smoked salmon.

Miles of cycling today - 1.

Sunday, October 16 Fontainebleau to Paris

After breakfast in the hotel dining room, we drove out of the hotel garage into a very foggy morning. At times as we drove north toward Paris the visibility was a real problem. We needed the windshield wipers all the way.

We had no trouble finding the Hertz agency in Montparnasse, arriving there at 9:30. But they had no parking! Joe sat in the double-parked car while I unloaded the bikes and luggage and took them into the office.

Joe then drove the car the two or three blocks to a public parking garage as instructed by the Hertz staff. While he was gone, I assembled the bikes and hung the panniers on them.

When he returned, we rode our bikes in a northeasterly direction across Paris. We found the junction of Boulevards St. Michel and St. Germain with no problem, but from there we had heck of a time finding Rue Sommerard and the Hotel Jardin de Cluny.

Rue Sommerard was not on our map, and everyone we asked had no idea where it was. After about thirty minutes of looking, we found it. The street was only two blocks long and it was between Blvd. St. Germain and the next Boulevard to the south. So we had completely circled it twice before one of glanced up a side street and saw the street name, Rue Sommerard, half a block away.

At 10:30 the hotel did not have a room ready, but they let us put our bikes behind the bar downstairs.

We went to Musee d'Orsay and stayed until 3:00. Wonderful museum. Lots of 18-19C paintings. Delacroix, Ingres, Daumier, Millet, Corot, Courbet, Degas, Monet, Manet, Sisley, Renoir, Van Gogh, Cezanne,

Gauguin, Seurat, Toulouse-Lautrec, etc., etc.

We had lunch in the d'Orsay restaurant with an American couple (John and Erin Hogan from Saratoga, New York). He was an attorney, he owned horses, he was in France primarily looking at horses, and he was a typical American tourist. He called the waiter, "Garçon." He referred to the French as "Frogs."

The restaurant was very elegant. As ornate as some of the rooms in the palace at Fontainebleau. And the lunch was good and reasonably priced.

At 3:30 we went into the Louvre. Nothing could compare with it. One can walk for miles looking at the greatest art treasures in the world - the Mona Lisa, Venus de Milo, Winged Victory, Diana, the Three Graces!

There is a huge room of nothing but Rubens paintings commissioned by Marie de' Medici depicting her life allegorically. There are works by the masters on every wall - Leonardo da Vinci, Michaelangelo, Giotto, Rembrandt, Van Dyck.

By 5:30 closing time we had seen several billion dollars worth of art.

The entrance to the museum is through a huge glass pyramid designed by the American architect I. M. Pei. The Green Guide said that Mitterrand selected this design "to form a stunningly contemporary entrance to the Louvre Museum."

I think the pyramid is totally out of place, but what do I know. Another guide book that we had with us discreetly called the pyramid "eye-catching."

We went back to the hotel and rested for a while, then we went to a little Vietnamese restaurant about three doors down from the hotel.

The weather was dimly overcast and cool all day.

Miles of cycling today - 5.

Monday, October 17 Paris

Petit déjeuner was in little vaulted rooms that occupied a maze of catacombs a couple of floors below the lobby of the hotel. I guess from their location they extended underneath the street. Quaint!

After breakfast we put on our cycling clothes and started out on the bikes for Versailles.

Along the way we stopped by the Eiffel Tower and the Hotel de les Invalides. It was so cold that we went into a coffee shop near the Ecole Militaire and warmed up. We then continued out through the southwestern neighborhoods of Paris. But I was so cold I talked Joe into turning back. There was a bitter wind, and our breath came out in clouds of steam.

When we got back to the hotel, the desk clerk told us the temperature was 4°C!

We changed into street clothes with sweaters and

jackets and walked up Blvd. St. Germain where we found a combination boulangerie, patisserie, cafeteria, bar that had a choice of salad and hash or spaghetti and veal chop for 42 FF. I had the hash, Joe had the spaghetti.

We went back to the Louvre and saw the Greek and Roman sculptures and Napoleon's apartments among other things. We stayed until closing time again.

Came out to see a little very weak sunshine. But it was still very cold.

We walked around the Latin quarter where we were conned into a Greek restaurant by a fast talking, hustling, manager or owner.

It turned out to be very good. Moussaka, potatoes, rice, pork, lamb, salmon, prawns, onions, bell peppers, Greek salad, French bread, retsina. The waiters were characters. They sang and danced and threw plates on the tile floor which was covered with porcelain shards.

We were very tired and were asleep by 9:00. We certainly were not partaking of the Paris night life.

Miles of cycling today - 5

Tuesday, October 18 Paris

After breakfast we walked to the Sorbonne and to Luxembourg Palace. Still bitterly cold. Breath comes out in clouds of steam and feet are cold.

We gave up on riding to Versailles. We walked to

Hotel de les Invalides and saw Napoleon's tomb.

Then we visited the Rodin Museum which was wonderful. There were not only lots of Rodin's sculptures, but there were also lots of paintings and sketches. There were also a few Renoirs, Van Goghs, Monets, and Manets sprinkled around. The gardens were very nice and they also contained lots of Rodin's sculptures.

We walked to the Grand Palais which was supposed to have a Rossoin exhibit, but we could not find an entrance.

We walked down the Champs-Elysées to the Tuileries and past the Louvre. At mid-day the sun came out weakly and provided a very nice light for photographs along the Seine.

Our walk took us past the Law Courts, so we went in. It turned out to be a two-for-the-price-of-one deal. The same ticket admitted us to Sainte-Chapelle.

Sainte-Chappelle deserves every one of the three stars awarded it by the Green Guide. It is a masterpiece of high Gothic architecture with lightness and clarity of form. The walls of the upper chapel are almost all stained glass. The altar and surrounding woodwork are all have gilded edges.

We walked back to the Latin Quarter because Joe wanted a Greek Gyro sandwich. After looking at the street stalls selling gyros, we decided our stomachs might fare better at McDonald's.

And besides, we could sit inside where it was warm.

At 2:30 the weather was not all that bad so we started out for Versailles on our bikes once again.

At 4:00, due to the circuitry of the lesser traveled streets, we were still quite a distance from Versailles. We were in the Foret de Meudon when we decided to head back.

On the way back we passed

- construction project where
- workman was hosing down the street and creating a lake of mud. We got all wet and muddy. The bikes, relatively clean up to now, became a muddy mess.

When we got back to the hotel, we phoned the Hotel Ibis at Orly for a reservation and to find out exactly where they were located. I finally talked to a lady who spoke some English, and she said they were at the south terminal about two minutes from the American Airlines counter.

We splurged and went to a nice restaurant for dinner. It specialized in fresh seafood, and it was g0000d!

Joe had shellfish bisque and a combination of three different fishes. I had fish soup and grilled salmon with a butter sauce. The ile flot-tante was huge and had caramel sauce dribbled over it.

A bottle of good wine brought the bill for the two of us to about \$75.00.

Miles of cycling today - 24.

Wednesday, October 19 Paris

After petit déjeuner, we started out for the Georges Pompidou Center.

On the way we went into Notre Dame which was big, dark, and spooky. Very little was open to the public. A weak sun outside barely lit the stained glass in the impressive rose windows.

We walked past the Hotel de Ville with its beautiful fountains and soon came upon a huge, ugly structure all covered with pipes and ducts. Joe thought it was a refinery. I thought it was a power plant or a substation. It had open stairways and a huge elevator on the outside.

Around back there were huge glass tubes with escalators and catwalks inside them. When we went closer to investigate, a sign told us that this strange conglomeration was in fact the Pompidou Center! But it was closed!

On the way back to the hotel we stopped at the rear of Notre Dame where tour bus loads of tourists, mostly Asian, were taking each others pictures with the butresses for a backdrop. They were all laughing and talking and having a good time, unlike American tourists who always seem to be telling someone about their problems with the hotel, the luggage, their schedule, or something.

We went back to the Hotel Jardin de Cluny, checked out about 11:00, and headed for Orly. We rode down the Rue Monge, Rue des Gobelins, and Avenue Italie

to Pte d'Italie, and out of Paris.

In Villejuif we stopped at a little pizzeria and were just about to go in when we spotted an archway leading into a courtyard and to a Cafe de Vieux Paris. It looked elegant, and the clientele going in were all dressed for business. So we went in and enjoyed a very nice lunch.

We came out of the restaurant at 2:00 to find a light but steady rain falling.

So, all we could do was ride directly to Orly and to our hotel. The last kilometer or so entering the airport was on a bikeway between the N7 and one carriageway of the A106 autoway.

The bikeway went beneath the south terminal. But Joe spotted a stairway. We carried our bikes up the stairs and came out in the passenger terminal.

We stopped at the American Airlines counter. There was nobody there, but we got an English speaking agent on the courtesy phone who said she would call the counter first thing tomorrow morning and remind them that we needed bike boxes.

Then we went out the front door and down the perimeter road about 300 yards to Hotel Ibis. The hotel was very large; 300 rooms perhaps. By the time we got to the hotel there was a steady rain.

The desk clerk gave us a suite because they could not think of any place where we could store the bikes except in our room.

Dinner was buffet. We talked with an American couple who had stayed at the hotel the previous night and all day Wednesday waiting for their luggage. (We have been so lucky with luggage and bicycles!)

Rain continued all evening.

Miles of cycling today - 10.

Thursday, October 20 Paris to Chicago and on to Sacramento

When I got up at 8:00 there was no rain, but the sky was very overcast and very dark.

Although this looked like a big, modern hotel on the outside and although the room is more spacious than we are used to, it is still France.

The basin faucet handle came off in my hand. The metal flex hose on the in-tub shower was so heavy that it pulled the shower handle so the shower pointed back at the wall. Several tiles had fallen from the side of the tub. There were little heaters in each room, but only one of the three worked and it was in the little ante room. The only light in the bathroom had a little fluorescent of about 5 watts that flickered constantly. The toilet was the German type with a shelf.

I sat at the little desk to write some notes, but the desk wobbled too much for writing.

The petit déjeuner was buffet with cheese, ham, yogurt, eggs, cereal, fruit, juice

added to the basic croissant and baguette.

It took us about two minutes to get to the American Airlines check-in. The passenger agents were very helpful in getting us boxes and getting us checked in early. We had plenty of time to shop in the duty-free.

Ride home was quiet and smooth. At a beer stand in the Chicago terminal I ran into Al Gallardo.

He and Marge were returning from Ireland. It turned out that my seat was directly across aisle from his on flight to Sacramento so we had a good visit reminiscing about Stockton and San Francisco.

The panniers and the bike showed up at the luggage claim area just as Jane walked in. Perfect timing.

When we got home, Joe phoned to say that his bike did not show up at L.A. (AA delivered it a couple of days later, though. Apparently AA kept the two bikes together and his bike came to Sacramento with mine.)