

Monday, October 16, 2006

Brian and Liz Trickett - holiday in the Loire



I'm putting this in the Ride Report section as it's the only place I can currently show 3 photos! Many thanks to Bill and Liz for providing this account of their very successful cycling holiday in France.....

CTC holiday to Loches in the Loire Valley, France

This is a short diary of our first ever cycling holiday, which we booked through the CTC, Pam and Dave were our guides.

Sunday

Although the holiday was based near Portsmouth, we were very fortunate that the bus was based at South Cave near Hull. We left home at 10.00am with the tandem on the roof of our car to drive to South Cave. There we joined the Yorkshire Bikeline Bus which was taking us on our holiday. We arrived there spot on 12.00 having stopped for a coffee at a very nice garden centre. Simon, the driver, was there waiting for us, and soon the tandem was loaded onto the bike trailer and secured and we were off. The sun was shining and all felt well with the world. Simon was very easy to get on with and chatted easily away with us. On the outskirts of Oxford another two holiday makers got on the bus, Ian and Roger. We arrived in Denmead, where the rest of the party were meeting at about 7.00, an hour earlier than arranged, but this was no problem as there were already quite a few waiting there too have their bikes put on the bus, which took quite sometime. This was due to the care which Simon took with each and every bike as he made sure that each one was secured in place using pipe lagging to protect vulnerable parts. We left at 8.30 for the short drive to Portsmouth harbour. We were on the ferry for our overnight crossing by 10.15, found our cabins and had a coffee before sailing at 11.10.

Monday

The next morning we were up at 6.30 after a calm and quiet night, had a quick shower and drink before boarding the bus at 7.30 for departure. After a few traffic problems and hold ups we arrived in Loches at 5.20pm, very hot, tired and sticky. The hotel was right in the middle of

Loches and was built in the 17th Century. After unloading and getting our rooms allocated the first thing to do was shower.

Evening meal was at 7pm, the tables were laid up outside and we joined Roger and Ian at a table with Rita and John, a couple in their mid seventies who had travelled down from Arbroath by train to Portsmouth to join the trip. The meal arrived, there were no choices (apart from to eat it or not!), but it was delicious, pork with prunes, red wine was free and very good! (A vegetarian option was available every night)

Tuesday

For our first days ride we were up at 7.15 it was still dark! Breakfast was at 8.00 every morning, and every morning the same, croissants and bread with jam, apart from the choice of jam and the company. After breakfast everyone walked into the town centre (2 minutes walk) to buy provisions for the days picnic, today a sandwich, bananas and juice. The choice of food for the day's picnic was fantastic and did little for the waistline.

Each day the ride started at the same time, 9.30, and every morning it was off promptly on time! Today's ride was to Montresor. There were 6 tandems, so it was very nice to have the company and shared experiences of other tandem riders, and 13 solo bikes (25 riders in total). Ages ranging from mid 30's to mid 70's. It was a lovely hot day with a coffee stop at Genille and lunch under the walls of the chateau at Montresor (Our guides had been across to France a couple of weeks earlier to check that all the coffee stops were expecting us). Then we had time for a quick look around the chateau, where most unlike England we were allowed to wander on our own and touch everything. Pam the leader of the tour even played a piano that Chopin had played. On the way back we made an unusual stop - at a cemetery to fill up water bottles for those running short! We arrived back at 4.30 having done 43 miles, at an average speed of 11.5 mph. Everyone enjoyed a cold drink outside the hotel before showering and evening meal. The meal was excellent as it was every night of our stay.

Wednesday

The second morning started the same but today's ride took us to Tauxigny for coffee, and lunch at Cormery, (next to a very old church) we then went down into the town to see an abbey there but it was closed so didn't go in. It was another warm and sunny day, with beautiful countryside. After lunch the pace got slower and slower as Bill struggled to keep up and Pam and Dave slowed down to let him keep up. We arrived back at 4.30, having done 46 miles, with an average speed of 11.6 mph.

We had a large beer outside, then a shower,

The weather looked to be changing so we ate inside tonight, we sat with Marion and Pete (tandem riders) and Gill and Bill. Again really nice people, Gill and Bill were both in their 70's, and only took up cycling 9 years ago. Gill managed a good pace and frequently overtook us going up the hills - very demoralising when she's so much older! Brian enjoyed Pete's company, both enjoying the red wine together!!

Thursday

After a grey start the weather cleared and it was fine and sunny for our ride to Amboise (coffee at Luzille). Bill and Rita were taking the opportunity of having a non riding day and were going with Simon and the bus to meet us in Amboise. In Amboise we left the bike on the trailer and had lunch at a pleasant outdoor café. We all had a look around Leonardo da Vinci museum, which was very interesting with over 40 models of his inventions on display, and an excellent ice cream. Then went back to the bus to be taken to the Amboise Vineyard where we had a tour with Simon making a very good job of interpreter to explain the Champagne making process (though we couldn't call it Champagne) and wine tasting with the chance to buy wine, and of course we did - three 10 litre boxes, 2 of red and 1 Rose.

Back for 6pm and a quick shower before the evening meal. Only 29 miles today.

As we were leaving the Vineyard it started to rain, and continued so again the meal was inside.

Friday

Raining this morning, and has been all night. Cycled 46 very wet miles today! It never stopped raining all day, low cloud, and fairly cold. Today we stopped for coffee at a café in Ligueil, who thought we were going for breakfast, and so we had a second breakfast, which given the very wet circumstances was very welcome! Gill, Bill and Rita decided to go back from there, (all in their 70's so no shame in that!) We stopped in Grand Presigny for lunch; there was some problem about where we could eat our picnic, so while Pam and Dave sorted it out we sheltered from the very heavy rain in a closed shop doorway. Eventually it was agreed that we could go into the local pub and as long as we bought a drink they wouldn't mind us eating our picnic there. In the end they were very hospitable, especially as there were 20 very wet, dripping people in the pub! They moved tables so we could all sit together, brought out kitchen roll to use as plates or to dry ourselves with and served very good coffee and hot chocolate, which again was extremely welcome! Starting up again and putting on the very wet clothes was horrible and cold, and everything was wet through and dirty.

We saw the first sign of sun 2 km from the hotel, but it didn't come out until after we got back. In the end we had 24 hours of solid rain.

Today was the hardest ride of all, no doubt because of the rain, but also the terrain was more undulating and the hills just kept coming one after the other.

Saturday

Not an inspiring morning, overcast and grey, but time to improve!

Today's ride was supposed to be a short ride, back for lunch to give us time to look around the town (today is the people's day so there is no admission fee to the public buildings). Today the ride was again undulating, and the pace was faster, quite challenging! We stopped for coffee in Chatillon-sur-Indre. As we came back into Loches we passed 200 miles this week, finishing on 203 miles - not bad! The sky stayed grey for the entire ride, but began to clear as we got back - at 2.10, having done 38 miles, a long short ride!

The rest of the day was free to look around the town, or do nothing!

Sunday

Alarm was set for 6.30, to load bikes at 7.00, then breakfast and off by 9.00. We all had a group photo taken outside the hotel before setting off. It was a good journey; we were at Le Havre for 3.30, sailed at 5.05, docked at 9.30, home for 6.10am!!

This was our first ever cycling holiday and we can't wait to book another of the CTC tours. This trip to Loches was a brilliant introduction with very thoughtful guides who had done a lot of work in advance to make sure that the holiday went without a hitch. We are both fairly new to cycling and have only had our tandem for 2 years so booking a holiday like this was a real adventure. It was also an incentive to get some miles in on the bike before we went (when we booked the holiday back in December we'd only managed about 150 miles total in all 2005!)

The holiday cost just over £450 each and for that we had our coach fares and bike transport, the ferry crossings both ways with a cabin for the longer outbound journey, Bed, breakfast and evening meal at the hotel. If you've got this far you will realise that we thought that the 4 course evening meals with jugs of free wine were excellent. But, no matter how good these aspects were, it was the other people in the group, the organisers and Simon the bus who made the holiday so special. Spending a week with so many like minded people was a real treat for the soul.

Our advice - join CTC and give one of their holidays a go (the brochures come out in November and the holidays book up quickly). If you want any more information or, to see any of the photographs please grab one of us for a chat.

Brian and Liz Trickett

