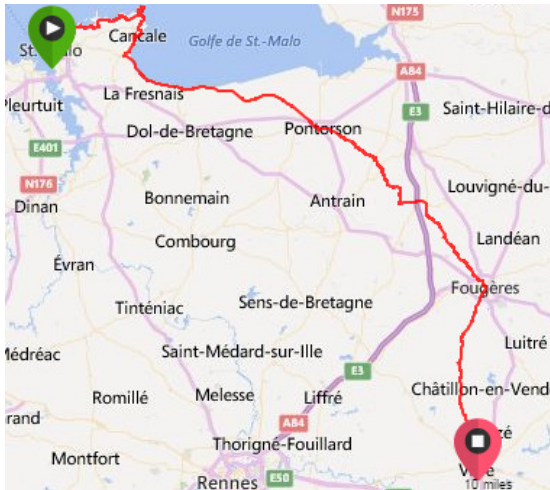


St Malo to Nice

16/06/15 Day 1

St Malo to Vitre 80 miles



The weather was fine, sunshine and a few high clouds meant this was a perfect day for cycling. The temperature around 22C with a light North easterly breeze pushing us along most of the way. We followed the coastal road out of the walled city of St Malo the road climbed to give some lovely sea views and then dropped down to sandy beaches. Once we passed the peninsula we headed for the pretty seaside town of Cancale, which was full of restaurants selling oysters, however it was only 10am and they were all shut. Only having had a chocolate croissant for breakfast I was getting distracted by my empty stomach. We sped along the coast and stopped a few miles later at an oyster bar, where, for €10, we shared a plate of 9 giant oysters and a glass of muscadet, maybe a little early for alcohol, but it was nearly 11am. Delicious.

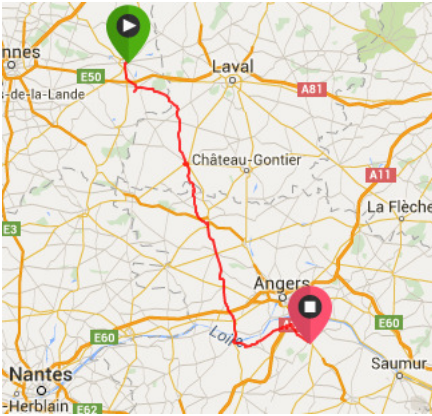
We bought lunch from a boulangerie in Pontoron and had another coffee.

The afternoon ride was smooth and undulating and we arrived in the beautiful town of Vitre at approximately 4.30pm, where we found the Office de Tourism. It was difficult to find an hotel as we hadn't booked and all the town centre hotels were full. However we found room at the Greinouilles hotel on the outskirts of town.

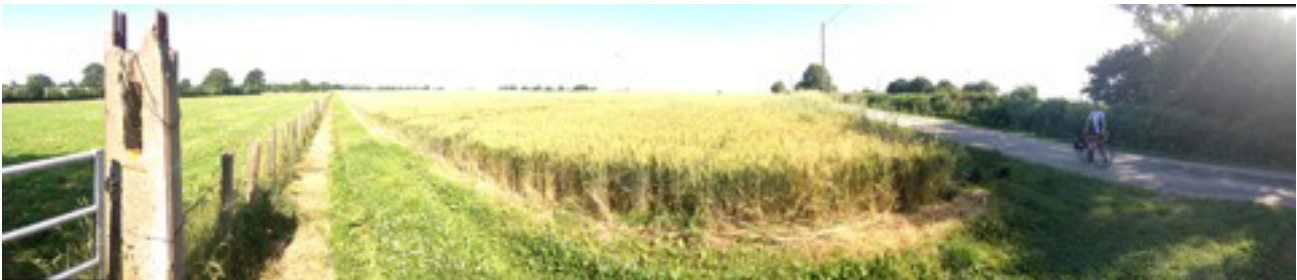


17/06/15 Day 2

Vitre to Brissac-Quince 92 miles

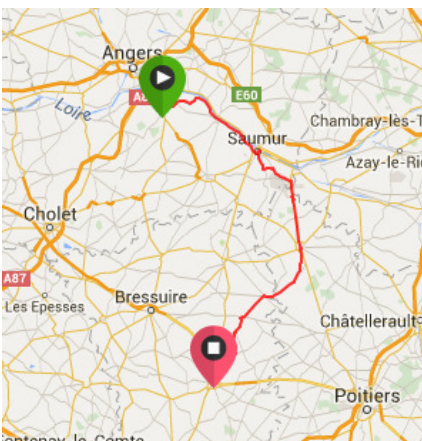


Today was a long stretch at around 90 miles (150k). The weather was once again sunny and warm although the afternoon felt warmer. The countryside we traversed was very pretty and the road undulating. Once we reached the Loire we began to see lots of vineyards and it was nice to cross the broad river via three bridges. We arrived quite late to Brissac sur Loire with its impressive chateau and a steep climb to the town. John went to find the hotel while I ordered the beers, however the hotel was full and they directed us to a gite on the edge of town. They did us a big favour, as the gite was beautiful and the owners could not be more helpful. They prepared a delicious meal for us, as the only two guests and we drank a bottle of Anjou rose the local wine in the garden. Bliss



18/06/15 Day 3

Brissac Quince- Parthenay 84 miles



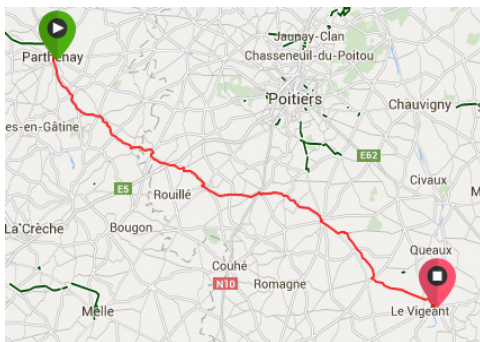
After a very comfortable stay in the gite we retraced our route back to Brissac Quince to find it was market day. We negotiated the town and left following the wide meandering river Loire. The riding was very good with flat smooth roads and not much traffic. We stopped in Samur for coffee, the area is surrounded by vineyards producing sparkling wine. Then on to Fontevraud de l'abbaye, where Richard the Lionheart is

buried. This stretch was through woods and undulating roads. After this we joined a Roman road to Loudon which was arrow straight for 22k, and we had open country and a headwind. This is where John learned to tail-gate and benefit from the rider in front. We ate lunch by the church and then carried on in the same vein with another Roman road to Moncontour. We arrived at the lovely medieval town of Parthenay at approx 5.30pm. Then we went looking for the Office de tourism, which wasn't easy to find. However, find it we did and they found us room at the Hotel de Nord so all ended well. We went into the very old and well preserved town for dinner. We were soon outside the Tourist office where there was a bar, and, although they had stopped serving, the manageress organised an impromptu Madagascan evening with food and music, it was very interesting and enjoyable



19/06/15 Day 4

Parthenay - L'Isle Jourdain 63 miles

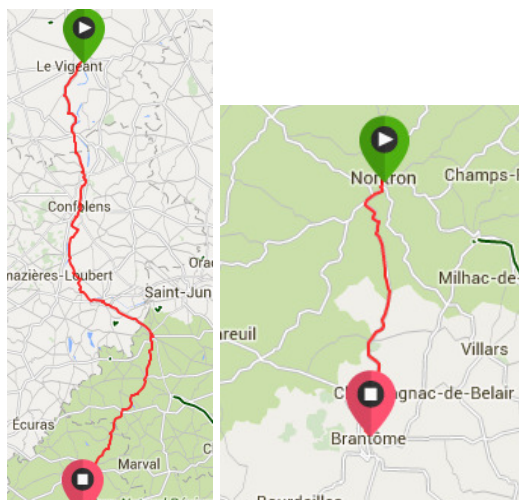


After a hearty breakfast we set off for what was the shortest ride so far, only 63 miles. The forecast was for hot weather so we decided to maximise the distance travelled before lunch. The going was good and the route easy to find, my Garmin route finally concurring with the map. John had a fall in Vivron as a motorist cut him up. The motorist stopped and John dusted himself down and there was no damage to either person or bike, except a slightly twisted brake lever. We had a plat du jour lunch and still arrived at our destination, Isle du Jourdin just after 2pm. Unfortunately the tourist office was closed and we had to wait an hour or so for the office to open. We found ourselves in the hotel du viaduct, close to the river Vienne and the stunning railway viaduct. In the square we met an interesting woman with a donkey who had be travelling for 3 months, only 15k per day with Romeo, the donkey. She had started her journey in the Vendee and was a storyteller, going into schools along the way entertaining the children with the donkey and stories



20/06/15 Day 5

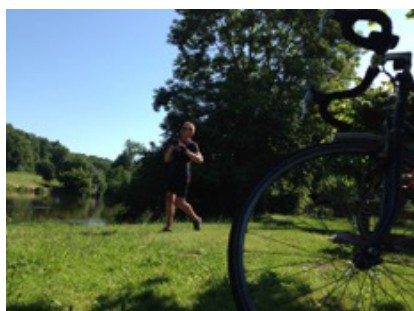
L'Isle Jourdin - Brantome 81 miles



Got off to a bad start as I slipped in the shower and did the splits. The ongoing pain in my thigh made me almost pass out, but I managed to eat breakfast and we were on the road by 8am. The riding was rather difficult for me as my right hip was hurting I had to favour the left side. However as the day wore on it did improve. We stopped for coffee and to buy lunch on Rochachouard. We found a great cheese shop and had a fantastic sandwich lunch up the road, consisting of, avocado, beef tomato, 16 month old compte cheese and it was delicious

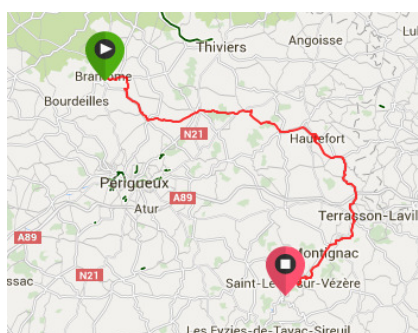
The weather was hot but we still made good time to Brantome, arriving at approx. 5:30pm. There was a "so British" festival going on with flags, Frenchmen in kilts playing bagpipes and typically British food and drink, like fish and chips and gin and tonic being offered in the bar/hotels

We had a nice Perigord menu next to the river and watched a French rock and roll band entertaining the crowd



21/06/15 Day 6

Brantome to Les Eyzies de Tayac 71 miles



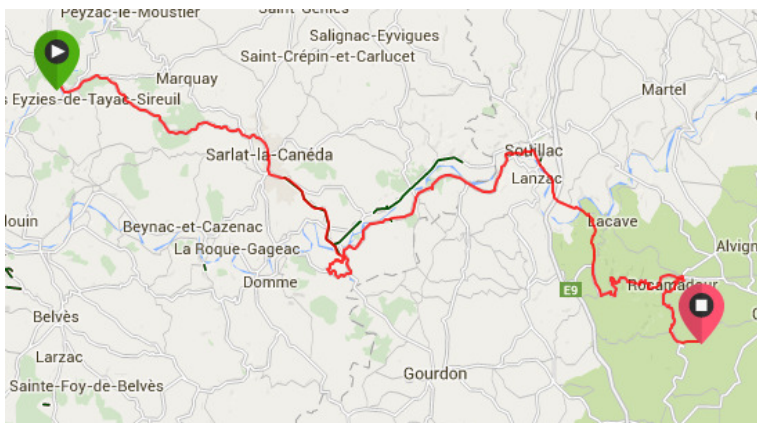
This was Sunday and Father's Day, so we had a lie in and started riding after breakfast, at approximately 9am. The sun was already warm and the day was punctuated with some navigational errors, we walked along an unplanned and unmade up road, climbed a couple of extra hills and the Garmin ran out of juice before we finished the ride. On the up side, we saw some amazing scenery, had a very nice lunch on Hautefort and cycled through the heart of Perigord, through the river valleys with troglodyte caves in the cliffs and the famous Lascaux caves of Cro-magnum man

My hip is getting better and bothers me less on the bike than at any other time. Stayed at La Rivière campsite just outside of Les Eyzias, a beautiful spot with a swimming pool. All day I have noticed the scents of flowers as we pass woods, fields and towns and it makes me appreciate the natural smells of early summer

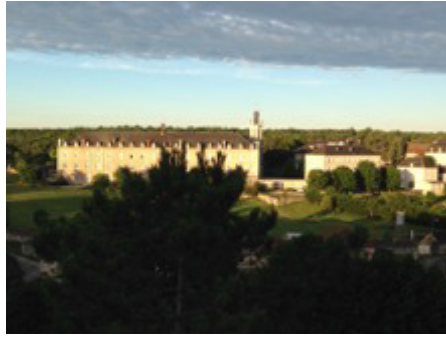


22/06/15 Day 7

Les Eyzies to Gramat 65 miles

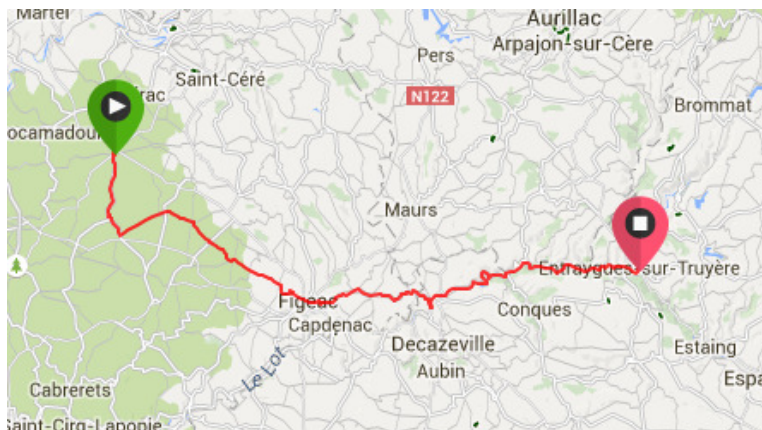


After a relatively easy morning, I spent most of the afternoon in bottom gear, bleeding into the bike. John says he does not like hills but we ascended some very steep hills and not always on the route. We stopped on the riverbank for lunch which was lovely, as the air was full blossom and the fish were jumping. Rocamadour was a very stunning spot to stop for ice cream and although high, this was by no means the end of our climbing for the day. The Tourist office directed us to a gîte for pilgrims and cyclists, where we were the only guests, but it was unlike anywhere else we have stayed. We had a delicious home cooked meal and I am writing this on the terrace overlooking the convent. The accommodation was totally different to anything else we have experienced. Our hosts were very interested in our route and even suggested some enhancements. They were also very interested in the political situation in the UK, the EU referendum, Scottish devolution, migrants etc.



23/06/15 Day 8

Gramat to Entraygues sur Truyere 64 miles



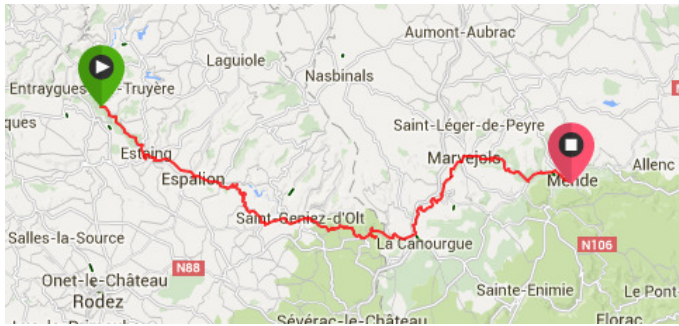
The weather sunny and warm with a fairly straightforward morning ride to Figeac. We had breakfast at the pilgrim gite and discussed word affairs with the owner, the breakfast unusually did not consist of fresh bread, but pilgrims waste nothing. Total cost for board and lodging €26 each. We had coffee in Assier, where the church has a frieze of cannons being carried over the Alpes, as a Napoleonic general was born locally, another tip from our host aka the Sage of Gramat. In Figeac we bought lunch and after a long steep climb out we found the Lot valley, and followed the tree lined bank for about 30k, picnicking on the way.

We arrived in Entraygues at around 4.30pm, which is on the confluence of the rivers Lot and the Truyere. We found a Chambre d'hôtel just 50m from the tourist information office and the host was great, even doing our washing. We had a swim in the pool, next to the river, followed by a wander around the small town, an aperitif and dinner at the restaurant opposite our accommodation, where, once again, we were the only customers.



24/06/15 Day 9

Entraygues to Mendes 75miles

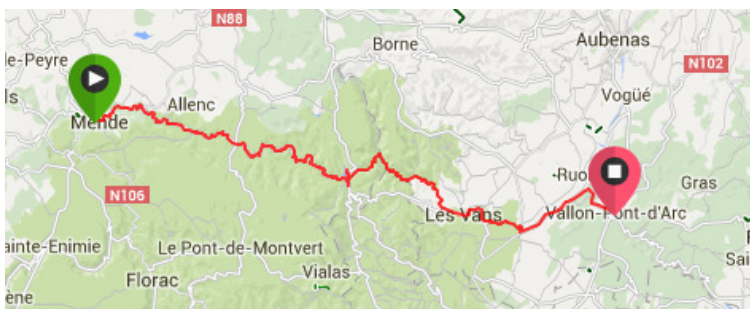


We had a nice breakfast with some French bikers who had been riding in Spain, where they said they had had rain. Our host was very nice and interested in our trip, I have to rely on John to provide the details of the route, as he had marked the route on the maps, and he has done it before and knows the sequence of towns and villages. Along the Lot once more riding in shade in the cool morning air, the scenery was truly wonderful. We were climbing slowly out of the valley, but made good progress and once again bought a picnic lunch. We eventually, found a nice spot by the river to eat our picnics which typically consists of bread, local pate, cheese, tomatoes, avocado, crisps and fruit, all washed down with a big bottle of water. I wetted my face and hair in the river and we got back on the road to face one of the steepest and longest climbs of the trip so far. John is the grimpeur superior as he goes up them much faster than me, however slow and steady, I get there in the end. Because of the hills slowing our pace, we arrived in the beautiful, from a distance, city of Mendes after 6pm, and therefore missed the Office de Tourism. However, they had posted a list of hotels in the window and we found a suitable hotel near the centre, from where, after checking in, we went into town to explore and eat



25/06/15 Day 10

Mendes to Pont d'Arc. 74 miles



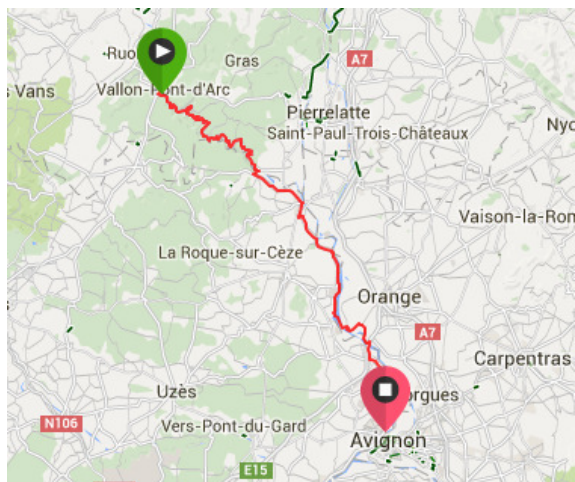
We climbed slowly out on Mendes for about 2 hrs and came to the watershed. This is where the rivers divide, on one side they flow into the Mediterranean and on the other into the Atlantic. This was also the highest point on the trip so far. Thereafter it was a long decent to Villefort a lovely little town with an

interesting market. We bought a good lunch here, with a view to picnicking along the way. The sage of Gramat had told us of a little known route following the river that avoided the major hills in this area. John had listened and found the route on the map and with little difficulty we were able to follow a downhill route for 20k to Les Vans. We saw some spectacular views and very remote places. I also could not help notice that we were now hearing the noise of the cicadas, which grew louder and at some points along the road appeared to reach a crescendo. We descended onto agricultural fields, as we approached the Ardeche. We were soon in tourist land with lots of campsites, cars and vans. We found Pont de l'Arch in the centre of this area and as a result accommodation is more expensive, and after consulting the ever present, and helpful Office de Tourism, we found ourselves in an upmarket hotel with antique furniture.



26/06/15 Day 11

Pont d'Arc to Avignon 59 miles



Very varied cycling today. After leaving the charming antique hotel we headed out of town for the hills, climbing up above the gorge. This gave spectacular views as the road followed the winding course of the Ardeche. Down below lots of colourful canoes dotted the blue green river, as we followed their course, looking down from above. After a morning following this road, up and down, we descended to the Rhone. Thereafter the going was flat. We stopped for a great €12 lunch in St Etienne des Sorts, pork chop, chips and salad followed by ice cream. We had fun finding the hotel, as we started looking in Villeneuve les Avignon, which was the wrong town, but the Garmin found it for us. Paul arrived from the railway station and found the hotel without difficulty, and the brotherhood was complete.



27/06/15 Day 12

Rest day in Avignon.

We visited the palace de Papes and the bridge, the former being the the more interesting venue. The pope, who was French, had relocated to Avignon in 13th century, as the other papal states had become less safe and then subsequently the popes that followed remained there for a century. The palace was then largely destroyed after the revolution at the end of 18th century, and rebuilt once again during the 20th century.

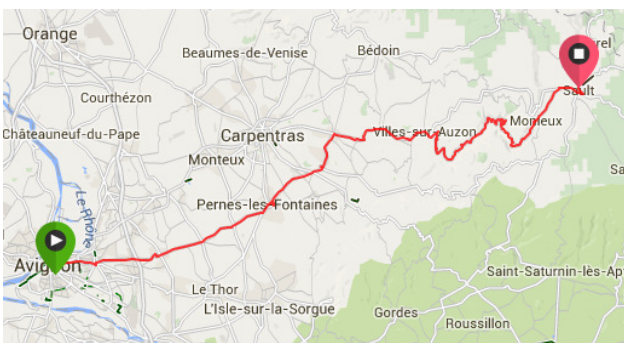
We went to les Halles for lunch, which was a great food market where we had moules and frites, before going to visit the famous bridge. St Benoit is reported to have received an instruction from God to build the bridge, in 12th century. However, although the he bridge reaches over half way across the river, it was never completed and the incomplete structure containing a couple of chapels was used to collect taxes from traffic on the Rhone. Like so many stories this did not seem plausible, but it is still a good story

We took the ferry across the river to lie down and digest lunch before returning to the hotel. In the evening we went to the Place des Corps for a drink and then pizza, which was very good

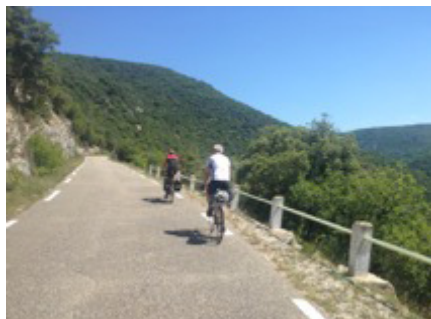


28/06/15 Day 13

Avignon to Sault 45 miles

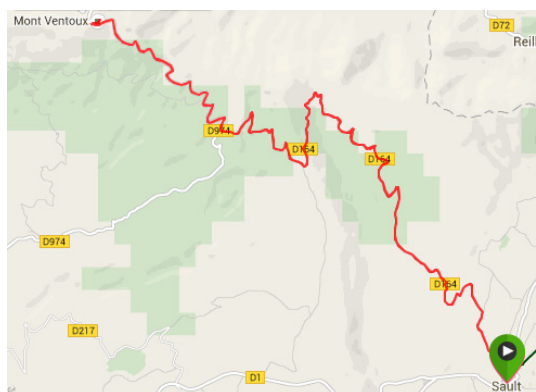


This was a nice ride out of Avignon past some small villages to the gorge de Nesque. Although the river was almost invisible, the gorge was spectacular, as the road followed the edge of the ridge, the landscape was like Utah, uninhabited, huge outcrops of rock and pine forests. Coming down from the gorge we were in the lavender fields of provence, and here we stopped for a sandwich lunch at a roadside cabin. After this welcome break, we continued to Sault, the start point for Mont Ventoux. We found another Gite de etape from the tourist office, which was perfect, and we discussed the merits of planning an ascent of the mountain. Beatrix, our hostess, who had herself ascended the summit 3 times, cooked a delicious lasagne and we retired early, with the decision made

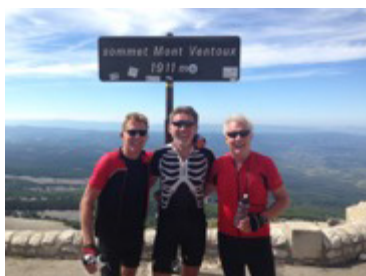


29/06/15 Day 14

Sault to Mont Ventoux and back 32 miles

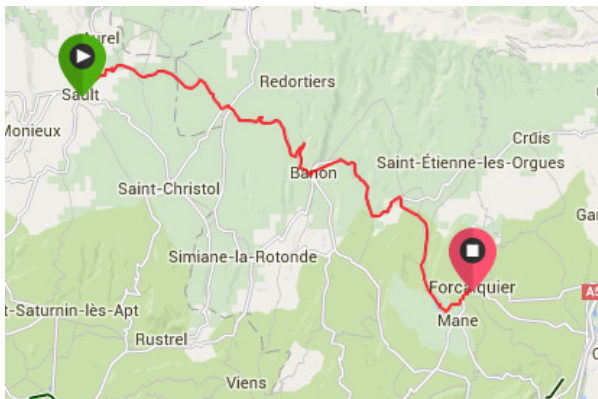


The weather continues to grow warmer, so we decided to get up early and complete the ascension in the morning, before it got too hot. We met some Dutch riders as we left Sault, and we would continue to meet them on our way to the top. From Sault the road descended and we were soon surrounded by lavender fields. The Chinese tourists, of whom there are many, come to see, and get married in the lavender fields, this is what Beatrice told us, and it seems a very romantic story. The fields soon gave way to pine forests, the road was now climbing and the shade was welcome. At the tree line, we stopped at the cafe Reynard, to regroup we met the Dutch group again, and found out a little more about them.. They were from near Eindhoven and were staying for a few days to tackle the mountain from different sides. They were of varying abilities and preparedness, however they were all young and able to complete the course. After a coffee we started the final ascent, 6k of fairly steep gradient. Needless to say we finished strongly and took photos at the top. The descent was exhilarating and it was strange to have to start pedalling when we were only 300m from Sault. We found a good place for lunch and enjoyed lamb chops, chips and salad, followed by ice cream and coffee. Life is sweet



30/06/15 Day 15

Sault to Faulcalquier 33 miles

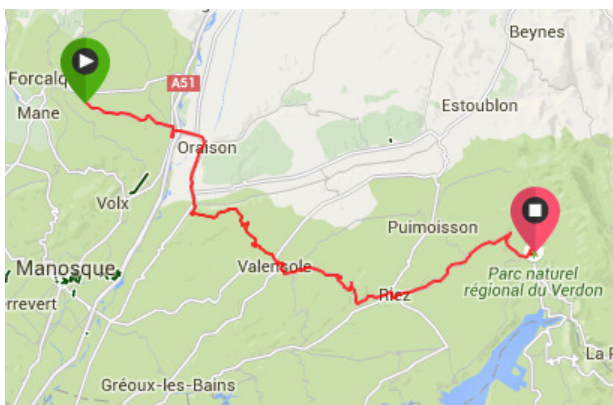


We had breakfast with the young French mountain bikers and said goodbye to Beatrice at 8am. Cycling through the cool of the morning we were soon into the lavender fields. After a steady climb we had a long descent, through the market town of Benon, where we bought lunch and had a coffee. We made good progress on easy roads to Faulcalquier where we found the tourist office closed. We had lunch and then decided to head out of town towards the next stop, with a view to find a suitable spot. We found this on a farm with African buffalo, red deer, and emus. The place had a pool and we had a relaxing afternoon in the sun swimming and playing table football. We had planned to go into town for dinner, however there was a big supermarket nearby and, as Paul needed to replace his sunglasses, we decided to self cater. Paul took charge of the shopping in a masterful way as he was immediately aware of what we would eat and the constituents required



01/07/15 Day 16

Faulcalquier to Moustiers St Marie 37 miles



We met some more French cyclists over breakfast. They were a middle aged couple touring their region. We rode on a fast road, crossing the motorway and river valley before stopping for coffee in Valensole. We had packed most of left overs from the night before for our lunch, although in the heat I knew it would not do well. However, we supplemented it with some fresh fruit from the market and had lunch by the river,

under the Roman Doric columns in Reis. We rested during the hottest part of the day and, with only a shorthand distance to our destination we were able take it slowly.

Moustiers is a very popular tourist destination, with many Chinese and some Americans evident and all the hotels full. We eventually found a Chambre d'hôtel in the centre of town, which enabled us to explore this extraordinary place, built up on the rock face, with a waterfall running through it and a star hanging above. We had a nice evening wandering up to the chapel overlooking the town and the valley below, before finding a good restaurant, recommended by Yolanda, our host. There was an excellent rock band, Lawrence Collin's playing next to the church and we listened to them for a while, before retiring to the CDH and falling asleep to the strains of rock music wafting through the window



2/07/15 Day 17

Moustiers to Castellane 50 miles

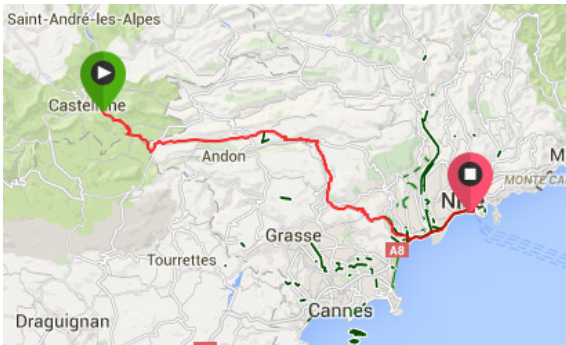


We had breakfast on the terrace in this very cramped little medieval town before heading off towards the gorges du Verdon. We passed many cyclists, in a group, coming the other way in the first few kilometres. There was clearly some event that was planned, as they were mostly British, however, as we turned towards the steep climb into the gorge, the number of cyclists reduced as we were faced with a series of steep climbs. We stopped in a small town to get some supplies and continued to climb. Eric was a Belgian financial director cycling the gorge for the first time and planning to do both sides in one day. He rode with us for a while as we discussed the impact of a Grexit on the EU. Eventually he pulled away and we stopped to wait for Paul. The gorge was spectacular and the road undulated as we passed through the natural terrain with little habitation. Somehow I got ahead of Paul and John and found a good picnic spot. They arrived and we had lunch, and a rest, although the afternoon was not such a demanding ride. We arrived in Castellane at 4:30pm and found the tourist office, who once again directed us to the best accommodation, Osteraou gite, with good facilities. We wandered into town and had a few beers, followed by a nice meal



03/07/15 Day 18

Castellane to Nice 57 miles



As we would be riding in the national park for most of the day, we made the Boulangerie in Castellane our first stop. After an early climb we were sailing along amid some amazing scenery. There were still mountains, but we were surrounded by green fields and haystacks. We stopped for a coffee and watched three paragliders slowly descending into a field. Then just before lunch we started a steep descent and could see the gorge open up before us. Once on the valley bottom there were waterfalls and some parties of abseilers scaling the rocks. We looked for a suitable place to descend to river, but there were none. We came out of the gorge and gradually urbanisation wrapped itself around us as we started to approach our final destination. A 10k ride along the seafront was a nice introduction to the city. Along the Promenade des Anglais we found a spot for a swim before locating the vital office de tourism. Nice is unlike anywhere else we've been on this trip and it was not easy to find suitable accommodation, however we have a nice studio apartment, next to the beach, for 3 days although it does involve sharing a bed...

