

## **International Alps tour June 2014 to Chalet Val in Chatel, France, via the Vosges.**

Just after the International meet in Saarland, a group of 16 people consisting of Barry and Brenda, Pete and Ilze, Andy and Caroline, Pete and Mim, Richard and Sharon, Frank and John, and Andy and Gill, drove down through the Vosges to spend several days in the French High Alps. This time we were also joined by Dennis from, Ulysses Oz Mackay branch, and Herbert from Ulysses club DE. Herbert is shortly to retire and has been promised a new bike if he loses a certain amount of weight. After the amount we all ate and drank on this trip there is no chance he'll be getting a new bike soon! Martin had to return home independently



We had a lovely run through the Vosges and wended our way upwards to the Chalet hotel du Grand Balloon. We arrived triumphantly by late afternoon in glorious sunshine and the wine and beers on the terrace were special.



We met up with two more Ulysseans from Germany, who had just come up for the day. This night was memorable for the spectacular flashes of thunder and lightning back in to direction of Germany. The hotel was modernised and we had comfort rooms but it is still a quaint and old fashioned hotel in a wonderful location. Some rooms enjoyed good views too! The warm weather had tempted so many people up the mountain that day that they could only offer us a limited menu of house terrine, followed by veal in a cream and mushroom sauce on a vol au vent with lots of vegetables. This is a local dish. After that

we had their famous myrtle tart . We finished the evening sitting outside watching the sky and feeling on top of the world.



Next morning we teetered down the mountain and up and down lots of bends. John led us to the lovely Doubs gorge one of the good biking routes of France. After a whole day's ride we finally reached the high Alps with snow capped peaks on the horizon. It was wonderful to ride along with views of Lake Geneva and arrive in glorious sunshine through such wonderful scenery.



We immediately relaxed as the Chalet is very comfortable set in the lovely valley Val D'Abondance with views and the sounds of cow bells all around. Wines and beer on the patio came out again with the sun, and we welcomed five members of the Valley Samva club, Camille and Sandrine, and Enzo, Francine and Benoit to join us for a barbecue. Sadly we then went indoors, for the only rain we had on the trip happened then!. The following day some did a short run up to the top of the mountain with great views, following our French guides. Others chose to rest, sunbathe and read or walk along the valley filled with lovely alpine meadows.





The next day, feeling refreshed we all followed our guides Benoit, Enzo and John to Chamonix to get views of Mont Blanc..



The cable car up the mountain was not yet open but our guides took us up to a viewpoint. In fact this was even better, as we wound our way up hairpins to near the top of a dam and enjoyed a spectacular view including the mountains of Austria, Switzerland, Italy and France spread out in front of us.

I waxed lyrical in French. Merveilleux, formidable, spectaculaire, magnifique, superbe, and when my guide asked what the English was, I said it was marvellous, formidable, spectacular, magnificent, superb!



We could not believe how wonderful the Alps were. Our route back was naturally downwards, on hair pins that look quite lively from the pillion. We followed a route down towards Italy and came back on a fast motorway back to Chalet Val. Having the Swiss carnets helped. In the evening, another lovely three course meal and wine thrown in, and we were ready to brace ourselves for the journey back to England.

Lots of discussion about our route home. It maybe another time we would take a more leisurely route and stop off on the way in both directions. This time we were going our separate ways, some back towards Germany, for Dennis and Herbert to return home. Pete and Ilze and Mim went part way back to Germany and aimed to get back to the Harwich Hook crossing. Andy and Gill were touring back separately through France. The rest of us followed John and planned to stay at an Ibis in Rheims before setting out for our boat from Calais.

It took us about 7 hours getting across France, stopping off when we saw a chance. We did very good time cruising along the French paid motorways that were relatively empty. We thought that we would have time to rest in Rheims, when we spotted smoke on the horizon. As we got nearer we could see flames and the motorway became stationary. It



remained this way for about an hour as ambulances and numerous fire appliances speed past on the hard shoulder. We hoped the driver was not badly hurt.



Barry and I watched and waited but the others eased their way down the stationary traffic. The smoke stopped and John phoned us to say that they were letting the bikes through first, now that one carriageway was clearer. We hopped back on the bike to be directed to the open road past the wreck of a potato vehicle, that had had a blow out and hit the central partition causing it to set on fire. The motorway was covered with water and foam, but we eased past this and soon caught up with the others and enjoyed the rare privilege of an empty motorway. This was a joy.



We could not fault the Ibis hotel in Rheims, which did the job, once we found it. There are three of them and it was rush hour! Another nice meal in France and time to head for the ferry where we said our goodbyes. Richard and Sharon and Andy and Caroline and ourselves still had a further nights stop before the final leg home.

What a great trip, lots of highs but I think we must applaud our Sharon who is the only British female rider, in the club of about eighty people, who drove her bike there and back.



We returned home full of the joys of biking, the companionship of the Ulysses family and lots of brilliant memories. Many thanks to all who made it possible, particularly the staff of the Chalet Val D'abondance and John and the Samva Club. I have no doubt that some of us would love to return to the Chalet Val and the French Alps again some time soon.

Mrs Vanamonde June 2014.