

## **Bastille, Bicycles and Ballons: everyday life in Entre-deux-Eaux, June-July 2019**

It is rare to see villagers of all ages en masse in Entre-deux-Eaux. But at 22 hours on July 13th, the evening before Bastille Day, we headed towards the village shop. It was just getting dark. Trestles and stalls had been set up in the car park.. Animated chatter rose from the replete diners, who had been feasting on ham, *toffailles* (a Vosgian dish of potatoes, bacon strips, onions, smoked pork, butter and white wine), salad, cheese and dessert and no doubt indulging at the beer stall. Children dodged around playing games, and music was pounded from a small stage. Suddenly everyone surged to the edge of the car park. On the field beyond, torches could be seen moving around, held by shadowy figures. And then the fireworks began. It was a magnificent display for a small village, with barrages of light erupting simultaneously into the night sky and cascading down. It was the second summer that one of the village social clubs had organised the event, and it was very well done and enjoyed by all ages.

For quite a while there have been yellow-painted bicycles adorning the roundabouts along roads in and out of St Dié and yellow banner reminders that *C'est notre Tour*. Later cardboard yellow, green and spotted jerseys appeared on lampposts along the route by which all the Tour de France cyclists would depart in a leisurely fashion from St Dié on 10th July. The racing proper started as they reached the small aerodrome at Remomeix, just over the hill from here. The cameras showed an aerial view from the runway, as if the bikes would take off into the skies, but the reality was tamer than that. We enjoyed watching the recording that evening as they pedalled roads that many of you will have driven along in the past towards Strasbourg, until they turned onto the dramatic mountain sections. The TV adverts seemed to occur at the most scenic moments, but you would have recognised the towers and turrets of Kaiser Bill's restored *Chateau du Haut-Koenigsbourg* and the glimpses of walled towns and villages along the Wine Route like Ribeauville, Kaysersberg, Ammerschwihr, Turkheim and Eguisheim before they finished the day in Colmar. Helen had only returned the day before from a brief return to the UK for the funeral of Ann Hart, who many of you will remember from gatherings here. As John drove to Basel/Mulhouse airport to collect Helen, he was delayed by a scrupulous sweeping of the road and preparation of barriers where the cyclists, after threading their way through the slopes of the vineyards, would round the corner out of Kayersberg and head for Ammerschwihr. (He was also delayed by a suspect package security alert in the short-stay car-park at the airport, with armed soldiers and barriers redirecting everyone).

The route of the Tour de France on 11th was even more spectacular as they set out from Mulhouse and climbed the *ballons* (rounded summits) along the crest of the Vosges mountains. It seemed a long time since we had driven that way from the airport, stopping at cafés along the narrow road (which was created for French troops dug in along the mountainous Franco German border during the first world war). So we thoroughly enjoyed seeing the ridge views and hairpin bends of the descent.

Toby and Rachel drove over to us with Jacob and Farrah on the evening of 26th July. Toby enjoys cycling himself and had watched the short evening reports on all the stages of the Tour, so was a mine of information about techniques and strategy as we watched the last stages including the grand Paris finale. Leila (who had flown over on 22nd) particularly appreciated his comments.

Much of June and July has been uncomfortably hot during the well-publicised French *canicule*, with temperatures here rising to 38°C or more and government health and social care warnings. We had expected water restrictions to be announced earlier than they were, so John had cleared the terrace of the obstinate chives which had sown themselves between the cracks, re-cemented all the joints between the paving slabs, and then erected and filled the small swimming pool and bought new filters. It was well worth the effort as Farrah and Jacob are in and out of it and sounds of shrieks and joyous splashing shoot up to the quietly reading or sunbathing adults.

Do machines sense that a period of heavy use is about to follow? Our 1998 dishwasher had been giving hints of its age, but chose the day that Toby and family arrived for its final refusal to start. But at least John had some stalwart helpers (and the use of a Toby's Landrover boot) to transport the dead machine, and to collect a new one, after clearing the access ramp of old roof tiles, breeze blocks and overhanging branches.

And as no Blackmore newsletter is complete without mention of food, here's another plug for *l'Imprimerie* in the book village of Fontenoy-la-Joute, whose young chef willingly cooked a surprise 4 course menu for the seven of us, which took into account all our foibles and allergies. We had two quite fussy children who would be happy with a children's menu provided it contained a chicken main course, a recent vegetarian who would be happy with fish instead of meat, an adult with a severe allergy to pistachios and cashews, and another who does not like mushrooms, apples or courgettes. (John and Helen decided not to add the fact that they are currently avoiding carbohydrates). And the meal was a great success. We saw plenty of the chef who previously stayed in the kitchen. He and his wife have decided to lose a member of the serving staff and added a trainee in the kitchen, allowing all three chefs to help the wife with bringing the food to the table. In September they are planning to open the kitchen into the restaurant and include cooking on an open fire in front of guests. And, after delicious raspberry sorbets and then coffees and sweet nibbles, the next door premises had even laid on a small Tintin exhibition to round off our meal.

An expedition to Colmar and Riquewihr was less of a gourmet experience, but the Alsace speciality of *tarte flambée* or *flammekueche* (with either an onion, bacon and cream, or gratinée or salmon, onion and cream topping) from a restaurant by the canal in the Little Venice area of Colmar, was just right before a stroll round the old town. And in the walled village of Riquewihr the cobbled streets, Alsace ceramics and the Christmas shop were appreciated, with Farrah finding a blue bowl with a stork on to replace an identical broken one, Rachel getting a Christmas bell and looking at fabrics, and everyone enjoying a different flavoured cornetto at the end.