

Old Gits Tour 2018

12th July to 18th July

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Introduction

This years tour was essentially an extended weekend trip with the option of a few extra days should anyone want to extend the break. After the 2017 tour to Poland, the majority of the Old Gits wanted a break that involved less riding and more drinking!

And so the trip to Northern France was arranged and, for those that wanted, a few extra days riding an extension into Belgium at the end of the French section was booked into place.

This year, the Old Gits are:

Alex Guthrie	Harley Davidson Sportster 1200
Andy Smith	Honda CBR600
Brian Williams	Yamaha Dragstar XVS650
Eamonn Townsend	Honda Varadero XL1000
Kenny Lambert	Yamaha R6
Mike Elliot	Suzuki Hayabusa GSXR-1300
Mike Irving	BMW K1200GT
Roger Hick	Suzuki GXSR-750
Simon Laishley	Triumph Tiger 1050
Tracey Constant	Pillion with Mike I

Alex, Eamonn, Mike I and Tracey were to go on the extended trip to Belgium, the others returned to the UK on Monday 16th.

Day 1 - Thursday 12th

Keen to start the holiday as soon as possible, Eamonn met with Alex for lunch in Burghfield. A relaxed lunch break and final checking/packing was completed by early afternoon.



Alex and Eamonn then met up with Brian and together rode south to join Simon who was waiting en-route for us. The group of four continued on to our meeting point of the Coach and Horse in Portsmouth where we could have a meal before embarking on the overnight ferry to Le Havre.

As we were arriving at Portsmouth, Mike I and Tracey (pillion) caught up with us – video on YouTube : <https://youtu.be/Jk1fEC6MOIA>

Boarding the ferry: <https://youtu.be/3ck9Heiybow>



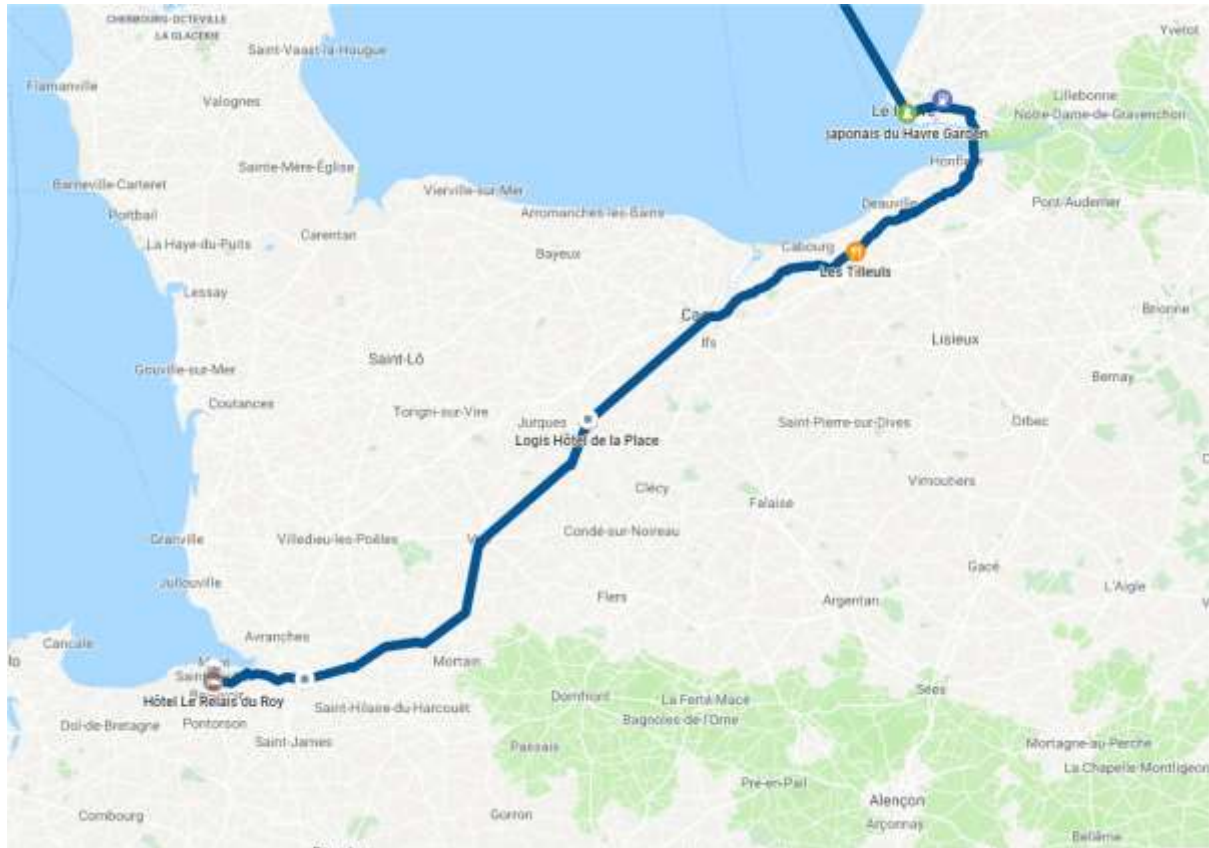
Once aboard, we found our cabins, claimed our bunk beds and headed swiftly to the bar! Following one or two beers (☺), we retired for the night and set our alarms for 6am ready for the early breakfast before disembarking the ferry.

The next morning the alarms rang out, fuzzy heads cleared and we went to find breakfast – there was no-one around other than one or two other fuzzy headed people. No breakfast, so signs of any officials, nothing.....

Then someone pointed out the small print at the bottom of the breakfast timing notice – the times were local and not British Summer Time, we were an hour too early.... After the inevitable recriminations we settled down in a lounge to wait for the breakfast staff to appear.

Day 2 - Friday 13th

Le Havre to Mont St Michel



Breakfast was consumed, bikes loaded and off we went through the non-motorway routes to Mont St Michel.

Top priority was a coffee break, Mike E leading the group found a superb bar at Les Tilleuls, La Croix d'Heuland.



After refreshments, Brian and Simon headed off separately to meet up with some friends who lived nearby and would then join us later in the evening at Mont St Michel. Waving “au revoir” to Brian and Simon, the rest continued on our way to find a lunch stop.

Lunch stop at Brasserie Du Centre, Aunay-sur-odon



During lunch, we received a text from Simon saying that as Brian had quenched his thirst a little too much, they were going to stay at their friend's house overnight and would meet us in the morning at the cemetery near Gold Beach.

After the lunch break, we set off for Mont St Michel. Mike E had booked the hotel and explained that in order to get into our hotel we had to pass through a security gate which required a pass number – the hotel had given him the number so everything was in order....

When we arrived at the security gate, Mike E entered the number whilst Mike I waited to ride through. The gate rose and through went Mike I. Next rider approached the gate and Mike E entered the number again... this time it failed. Retrying didn't resolve it. Asking for assistance from the security guards didn't help either. A queue of traffic was building up behind us so we pulled over to the side to check with the hotel again. Mike E spoke to the hotel staff who explained they had given him a number for one vehicle.... we had seven!

After the hotel gave us a new set of numbers we passed all bikes through the gate and found the hotel. After checking in, shower and change we set off to walk over the causeway to have an evening meal on the island.

During our exploration of the island we split into two groups and so ate in different restaurants. No problem, we arranged to meet up in the hotel bar later in the evening.



We walked along the causeway to the island for an evening meal.



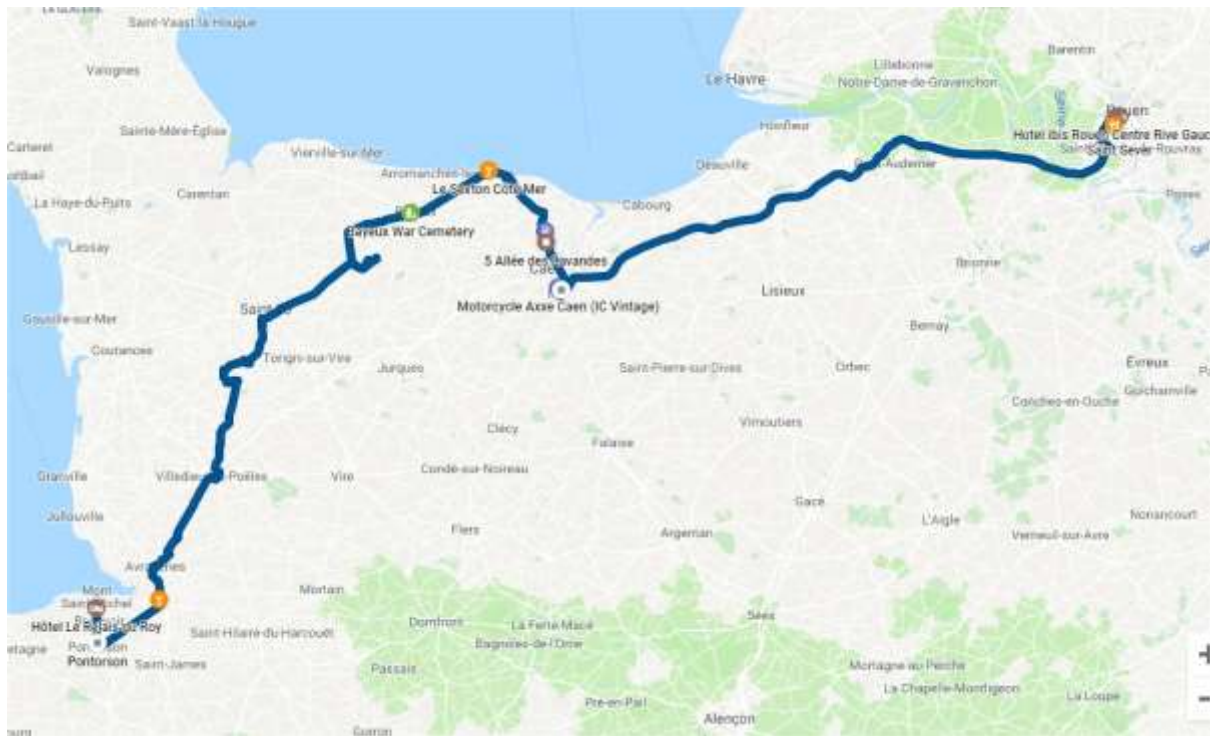
The streets on the island are very narrow, probably unchanged since medieval times.



Prices on the island were high! A large glass of beer was 9 Euros – more than twice that found on the mainland.

Day 3 - Saturday 14th

Mont St Michel to Rouen



After breakfast we left Mont St Michel heading for Rouen with a plan to meet Brian and Simon at Gold Beach around lunch time.



First stop was for coffee at a small bar called Juin Manuel in Pontaubault. It was too hot to sit directly in the sunshine (even mid-morning), so we squeezed around a small table with umbrella. With our caffeine levels topped up we left for Gold Beach.

On our route we passed by the Bayeux war cemetery, so we stopped for a look.



After spending more time than we really should have, we headed off and found a lunch stop at a restaurant called Le Sexton Cote Mer in Ver-Sur-Mer.

We were later than we expected to be and so had missed meeting with Brian and Simon. We arranged to meet them when we got to the hotel in Rouen.



Shortly after leaving Ver-sur-Mer we came across some slow traffic at Epron. As we were preparing to filter through the traffic, Eamonn slowed and Alex who was behind Eamonn and checking the traffic around him, nearly hit into the back of Eamonn. Unfortunately the emergency braking locked Alex's front wheel and he slid off. A few scrapes and bruises but otherwise OK. The other motorists were exceptionally helpful both at the scene of the incident and in letting the riders in front know what had happened.



Initial assessment of what needs to be fixed



Getting the gear lever repositioned

The effect of the crash was that Alex's gear change lever was broken, left mirror broken, both left side indicators were smashed and the end of the clutch lever had been snapped off. We all chipped in with some emergency roadside repairs to see if we could get the bike rideable again, meanwhile Tracey tried to contact a nearby Harley Davidson dealer.

The HD shop in Caen didn't answer the phone – it was July 14th, Bastille day – trying to find anyone open was going to be a challenge. Another bike shop was found who was open, but they couldn't help as all their spares were for metric fittings and the HD was definitely not metric! We decided to go to the HD shop in Caen as there was a small chance they just ignored our phone calls...! When we arrived the shop was closed, but there was a general bike shop next door that was still open. We asked the shop assistants for any help they could provide and fortunately a mechanic was still on site who offered to make up a temporary gear change lever using the damaged item as a basis. With the purchase of a set of general purpose indicators and the modified gear lever we were able to resume our journey to Rouen.

Of course by this time we were much later than originally planned... but at least we were still all riding.

We navigated to the Ibis hotel in Rouen only to find there were two Ibis hotels and the one we had stopped at was the more up-market version... ours was the "economy" Ibis hotel and further mile or so out of town.

As we had arrived at the hotel late in the evening, Brian and Simon were already booked in and had walked into town for a meal. However since it was Bastille day, the town centre

was packed and all restaurants were fully booked. Whilst Brian and Simon embraced the celebrations in town, the rest of the group walked to a local grill for a meat feast (apart from Mike I and Tracey of course!).



The group at the Buffalo Grill – Brian and Simon were in the centre of town.



Simon enjoying the Rouen town centre.

At breakfast we were re-united with Brian and Simon, the group was one again!

Following breakfast, we set to work on attaching the new indicators to Alex's bike and repositioning the gear change lever to make it easier for Alex to use. The gear change was difficult to pull off its splines as it's designed to be a good interference fit. On a nearby building site, Simon helpfully found one of the biggest iron jemmy bars one can get – fortunately for Alex's bike, we didn't have to use it as the lever had been prised off with a more appropriate sized tool.



The front of the Ibis (economy) hotel



Eager not to be left out, Kenny checks the coolant level of his R6.



Final touches to a bodge job of replacement indicators



The gear lever before it was repositioned slightly lower to make it easier to use.

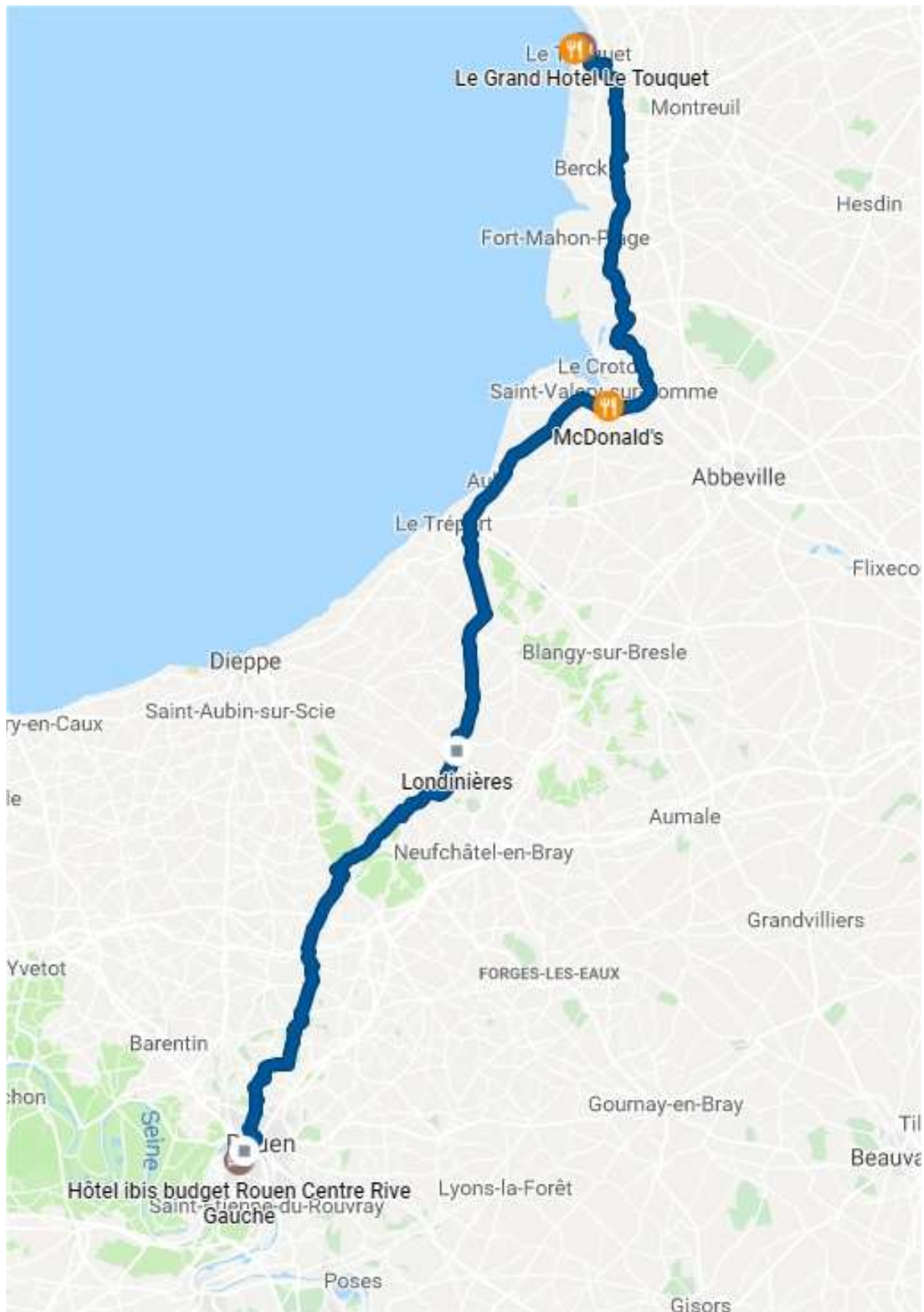
With the indicators now working by courtesy of lots of sticky tape and temporary wiring joins and the repositioned gear lever, the HD was ready to roll again. Since Alex was one of those who were staying until the Wednesday it was important to make sure the bike would be operational for the extended trip.

Brian offered to ride the HD back to England himself and to give Alex use of his bike for the rest of the holiday – a truly generous offer that shows the camaraderie between them both.

As Alex was confident in riding the HD the group left the hotel and headed towards Le Touquet.

Day 4 - Sunday 15th

Rouen to Le Touquet



With the group together for the last full day, we set off from Rouen to go to Le Touquet. With Mike E leading the group, he found a cafe at Londinieres for our mid-morning break.

After coffees, we pressed on to ensure we would arrive in Le Touquet at a reasonable time. It was a Sunday, in France, very little in the way of restaurants open. By 3pm we were getting anxious that we should be finding somewhere to eat – the final resort was a McDonalds in Saint-Valery-sur-Somme.

With the forthcoming football final between France and Croatia, the face painting crew were busy marking up anyone who came near them with the French tricolour...



The final part of the ride saw us arrive in Le Touquet at Le Grand Hotel – did we really book this place? Would they honour the booking once they'd seen us arrive on bikes? It was certainly higher quality than we were used to...! Facilities include: swimming pool, sauna, massage, golf, tennis.



After a short discussion with the staff, our bookings were confirmed and our rooms allocated. These high standard facilities were most welcome and after a shower and change of clothes we met in the hotel bar.



Brian enjoying the luxurious hotel facilities and looking forward to Simon returning from his shower...



How many people can we get into this small lift space?

With the bar prices reflecting the quality of the hotel, we decided to move into Le Touquet centre. We had been recommended a particular restaurant by a friend so that's where we were headed.

On arrival in town, it became clear the place was packed due to the football match that was in progress. We found a restaurant (La Taverne Royale) with an empty table, quickly occupied it and ordered our drinks and food. Inside the bar, whenever the French football squad scored a goal the restaurant erupted with cheers, shouts and applause. It all made for a very lively evening!

Once the match had finished with France being the winners (4 – 2) the whole street became a mixture of everyone celebrating with flares, chants, singing of the "La Marseillaise", waving of flags, etc. These celebrations continued all through the night – at least until 1am when we left town to return to the hotel.

After the evening meal, we decided to take a walk down to the sea front – it seemed like a good idea at the time...

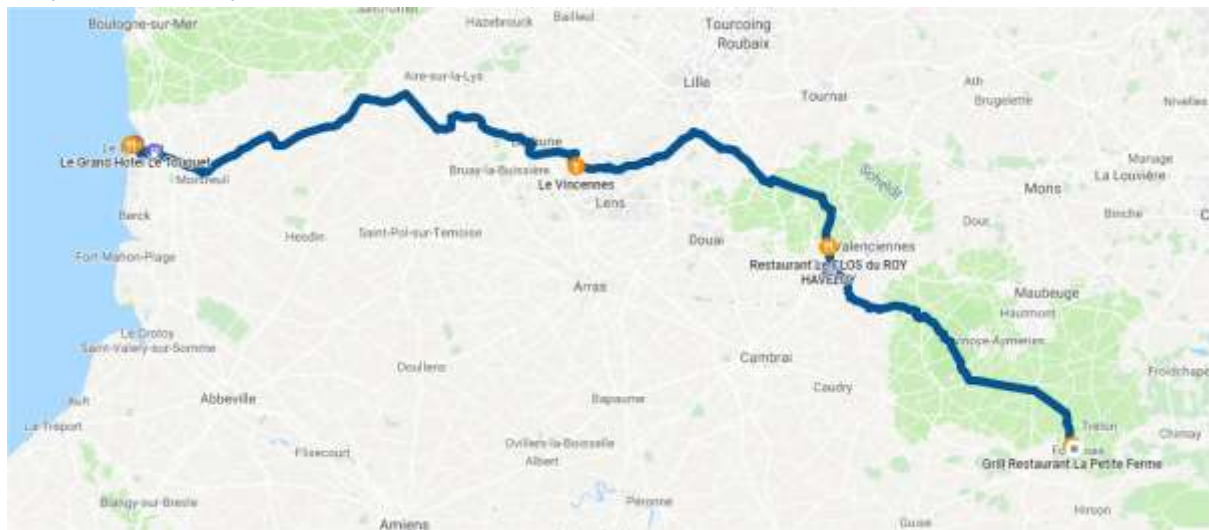


What were we doing here?



Good mates always support each other when attempting to walk after a night out

Day 5 - Monday 16th



Today the group splits into those returning to the UK and the four who are continuing on to Belgium.



Those returning to the UK headed northwards to the Eurotunnel.

Roger didn't really enjoy the return to the UK....



The four remaining (Alex, Eamonn, Mike I and Tracey) enjoyed a walk into Le Touquet to the sea front and to have a relaxed breakfast at La Taverne Royal (breakfast in the hotel was an extra 25 Euros each!).

Today's ride was to a chateau in Vermelles, Mike I took on the lead rider responsibility and after a couple of hours riding we stopped at a small bar in Le Vincennes. The bar was occupied by a couple of locals and no-one else, it didn't serve any food and looked like you'd expect a traditional English drinking saloon to look! The locals didn't speak any English, so Eamonn practised his best (O level) French to order some coffee. One of the locals clearly detected Eamonn's skill in the French language and continued to have a lengthy conversation in French with Eamonn. It was somewhat one sided, but we all parted great friends and the two locals came out to see us off.

With a few dark clouds in the sky we pressed on to hopefully avoid any wet weather. It was getting late in the day and we decided to stop for something to eat. We found a small restaurant (Le Clos Du Roy, Haveluy) and pulled in, it looked very quiet and would provide a very nice location to sit outside for a meal.

However, as we walked into the building it became clear that there was no-one about! We found the owners son who was a South African helping his mother in France before returning to South Africa. He explained that they had closed an hour ago, but was happy to serve us some local beers and offered to drive down the road to buy some bread and make us some sandwiches – how could we refuse such hospitality!

The sandwiches were excellent, the beer even better and feeling fully refreshed we loaded up and went on our way. As we were leaving, the whole family (proprietor, his wife and his mother) all came out to wave us off on our journey to Fourmies.





The road to Fourmies was through some forestry areas and proved a good road with a mixture of scenery. It was humid and the clouds threatened thunder, but we stayed dry all route.

We arrived in Fourmies and found the chateau (Hôtel Château de la Marlière.) – a large mansion that really didn't look like a hotel at all. It was more like a town hall! We went in the front entrance and was greeted by a lady who we later found to be the owner of the chateau, she booked us



in and showed us to a set of new buildings beside the chateau that had the residential rooms as well as a large hall suitable for weddings and large parties. We appeared to be the only guests. The annexe had only been completed the previous year and so was new to having guests stay, it looked like the income from the new building was being used to fund restoration work on the main chateau.

The rooms were all very new, but there was no air conditioning and after a hot journey we really could have done with cooler rooms. Opening the windows didn't help as it was still

hot outside, however we found some large fans near the stairwell and we “borrowed” these for our rooms.

As Eamonn jumped into the shower and turned the water on it sprayed directly into his face and in his reaction to turn it off he knocked the glass soap dish off the wall and onto the shower base. Of course the glass shattered into pieces and this had to be cleared and removed from the shower before moving. With the glass cleared and safely put in the bin, Eamonn continued with his shower. Afterwards Alex noticed that the bedroom carpet near the ensuite bathroom was wet, it turns out that the shower was clearly a beautiful French design that really didn't suite being actually used as a shower! Not only was there glass soap dishes, but the shower floor was completely flat, not a tray format as usual, and that the base of the shower was 10 cms higher than the bathroom floor. This meant that any water that didn't find its way directly to the hidden plug hole would dribble down the side forming a puddle in the bathroom that ultimately drained into the bedroom carpet...

We wondered if these rooms had ever been used before as there was clearly some improvements that could be made!

The chateau had no evening meal facilities, so we walked a mile up the road to a grill restaurant called La Petite Ferme – primarily a grilled meat restaurant but at least there were some vegetarian options on the menu.

Having finished the meal, we walked back to the chateau and relaxed in the garden chairs outside as it was still very warm and there was no bar to make use of.



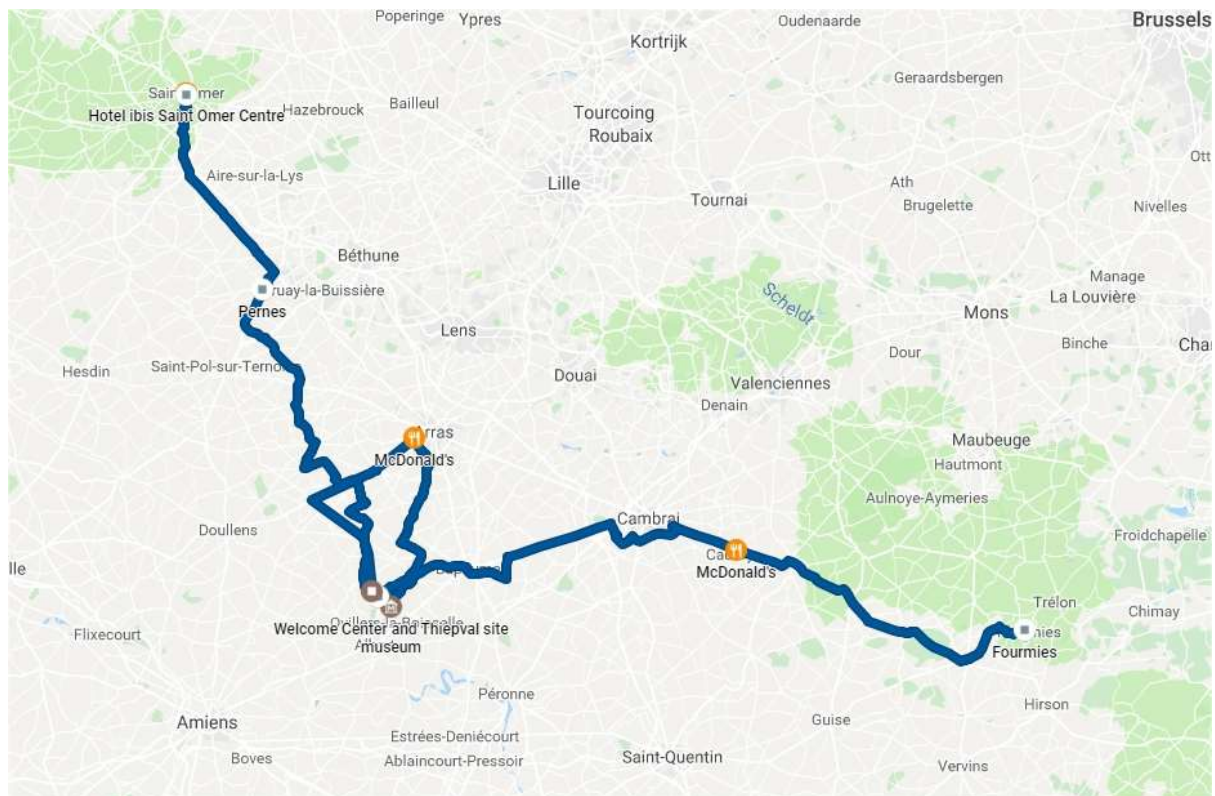
We spent many happy minutes (hours?) identifying the bats that were flying overhead around the chateau.



Loading the bikes ready to depart the chateau.

Day 6 - Tuesday 17th

Fourmies to Saint Omer



Breakfast at the chateau was a real treat, the meal was served in a large dining room in the chateau – clearly one of the rooms that had been renovated. There was a good selection of the usual continental breakfast items, but the lady of the house came out of the kitchen and offered to cook us all a fresh omelette!

After the excellent breakfast, we packed up and left on our way to Saint Omer with a stop at three World War 1 cemeteries on the way.

The first morning break was (yet again!) a McDonalds in Caudry – we were getting used to these French style McDonalds.

The first stop was at a Canadian cemetery, Beaumont Hamel. One of the main features of this location was that it had retained the original trenches from WW1. It was only a brief stop so after a short walk through the remains of the trenches, we resumed our journey.



The next stop was at Thiepval where Alex's Great Uncle has an entry on the monument for those who were killed but never found during the battles of WW1.





We were offered a guide from a Wargraves Commission trainee who was eager to help out – we gratefully accepted her assistance and later found out she came from Reading and was on a 6 month transfer to Thiepval. We found the inscription relating to Alex’s Great Uncle, took the photos and resumed our journey to a small cemetery at Warlincourt Halte a British cemetery. The significance of this cemetery was that Alex, Mike E and Paul Burt (a previous “Old Git” participant) had once spent the night sleeping in the cemetery entrance as on that journey they couldn’t find any rooms to stay in!



Alex’s overnight bed!



The cemetery at Warlincourt Halte.

After looking around the site, we headed off for Saint Omer. Yet again, we left it very late for a lunch stop and had to resort to having a meal at McDonalds in Dainville. So much for experiencing the French cuisine....!

With our hunger satisfied, we continued our journey on to Saint Omer. As we travelled the remote country roads, some of them seemed familiar – perhaps we were getting used to the French countryside. Mike pulled over and after checking gave us the news that he had programmed the SatNav to go to Thiepval rather than Saint Omer – an easy mistake that had lead us in the wrong direction! Alex had noticed we were traveling in the wrong direction earlier and had tried to make us aware, but everyone ignored him thinking his gesturing meant something else...!

With a reprogrammed SatNav, off we went again this time taking more major roads to save time as it was getting late in the day.

We arrived in St Omer and found our hotel for the night - Hotel Ibis. Parking spaces were in the hotel car park and there was already a few other bikes in the car park.



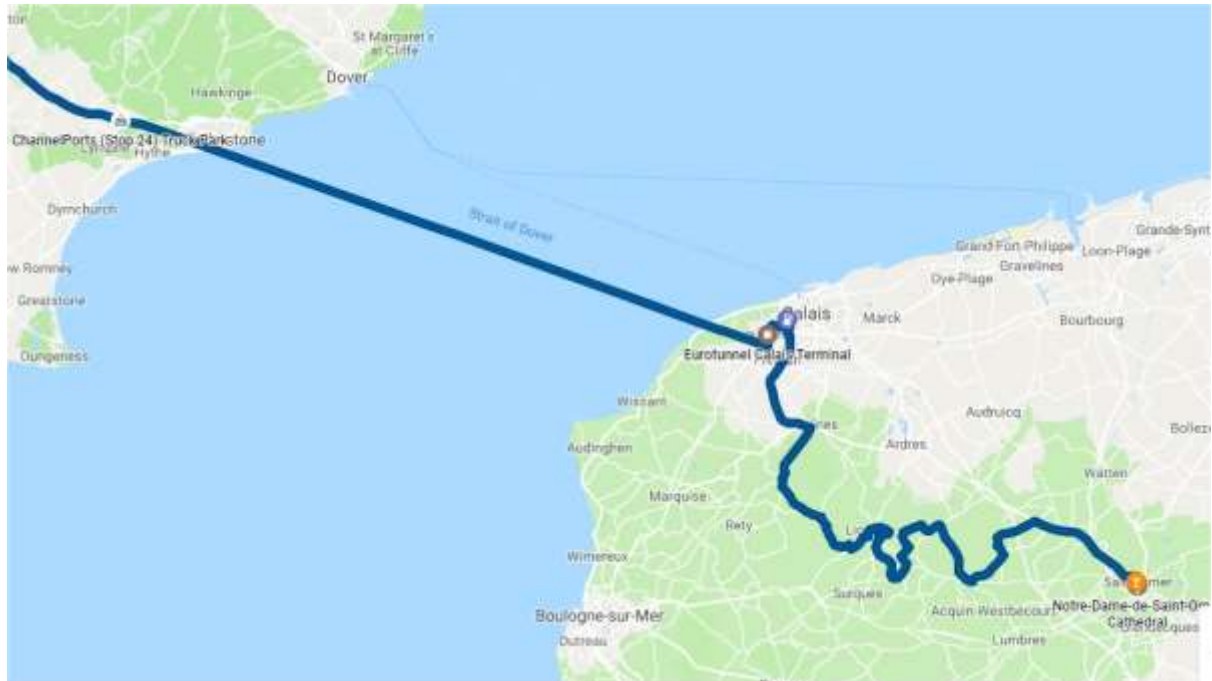
The usual quick shower, change and out for an evening meal at Le Gardian in one of the side streets off the town centre. Of course this was followed by a couple of beers and a walk around town before returning to the hotel.



The above photos are of the St Omer cathedral (Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Saint-Omer) illuminated by the night time flood lights.

Day 7 - Wednesday 18th

St.Omer to Folkestone



Morning breakfast in the Ibis nearly failed completely – an official looking person tried to inform us that we couldn't sit in the restaurant for breakfast as it was all reserved. A second member of staff indicated we could sit down but only in a certain area. It turned out that there was a pre-booked trip for a number of elderly people who were not staying in the hotel but were having breakfast!

After the standard continental breakfast, we took a walk into town to have a look around.



During our walk, Alex and Eamonn were approached by two young boys who were part of a larger school trip. The boys greeted us and introduced themselves in their best French language – it was clear they were English!

The look on their faces was something to be remembered when Alex greeted them back in perfect English. Of all the people they chose to practise their French language skills....

Following our morning walk around the town, it was time for a coffee at Le Spey River in the town square before we embarked on the last part of the ride to the Eurotunnel port.



The short journey to the Eurotunnel port was a leisurely ride through some forestry park land arriving in good time for our train to Folkestone.



On arrival back in the UK, it was time for lunch...

We stopped at the services on the M20 at Junction 11 for a simple meal – at least it wasn't McDonalds...!

After lunch, Mike and Tracey split off to return home in North Kent, Alex and Eamonn headed up the M20, M25 and M4 before splitting to their respective homes.

--- The End ---