

Old Gits Bike Tour – July 2023 – Spain (also known as the “Ou est les petits chiens” tour)

Old Gits – Pyrenees 2023 – Anticipated Itinerary										£1.60 per litre
Day	Date	From	To	Distance	Duration	Start	End	Hotel	Costs per person	Fuel (@50 mpg)
0	30-Jun-23	Alex & Eamonn	Holiday Inn	120	02:00	15:00	17:00	Holiday Inn Express	114	17
1	1-Jul-23	Holiday Inn	Eurotunnel (UK)	3	00:10	08:00	08:10			
		Customs			00:40	08:10	08:50			
		Eurotunnel (UK)	Calais			08:50	10:25	Train leaves 08:50	62	
		Calais	Orleans	275	05:30	10:25	19:00	Campanile, Orleans	125	40
2	2-Jul-23	Orleans	Loire Valley	110	08:00					16
3	3-Jul-23	Orleans	Cahors	275	05:30	10:00	18:30	Campanile, Cahors	46	40
4	4-Jul-23	Cahors	Pamiers	115	02:00	10:00	12:30	(Lunch stop)		17
		Pamiers	Borreda	112	03:15	14:00	18:30	El Querol Vell, Borreda	278	16
5	5-Jul-23									
6	6-Jul-23									
7	7-Jul-23									
8	8-Jul-23	Borreda	Ainsa	170	04:30	10:40	18:00	Hotel Dos Rios	155	24
9	9-Jul-23									
10	10-Jul-23									
11	11-Jul-23	Ainsa	Lourdes	118	03:15	10:00	13:15			17
		Lourdes	Mont de Marsan	75	01:45	16:15	18:00	Campanile, Mont de Marsan	46	11
12	12-Jul-23	Mont De Marsan	Parthenay	226	03:30	12:30	18:00	Hotel au Relais des Lilas	52	33
13	13-Jul-23	Parthenay	Chartres	176	03:30	12:30	18:00	B&B Chartres Centre	50	25
14	14-Jul-23	Chartres	St Omer	198	04:00	12:00	18:00	Ibis Centre	64	29
15	15-Jul-23	St Omer	Calais	27	00:40	09:30	10:10			4
		Calais	Eurotunnel (UK)			10:50	10:25	Train leaves 10:50	57	

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The Riders

Alex		Mike	
Chris		Simon	
Eamonn			

The basic plan was to ride to Spain in small number of days without being stressed, a week in the Pyrenees, then 4 days relaxed ride back to the UK.

Avoiding motorways wherever possible, although the first day we used motorways for first half of the journey.

Breaks in the morning and afternoon tended to be about 45 minutes, lunches between 1 and 1.5 hours.

Daily reports

Day 0

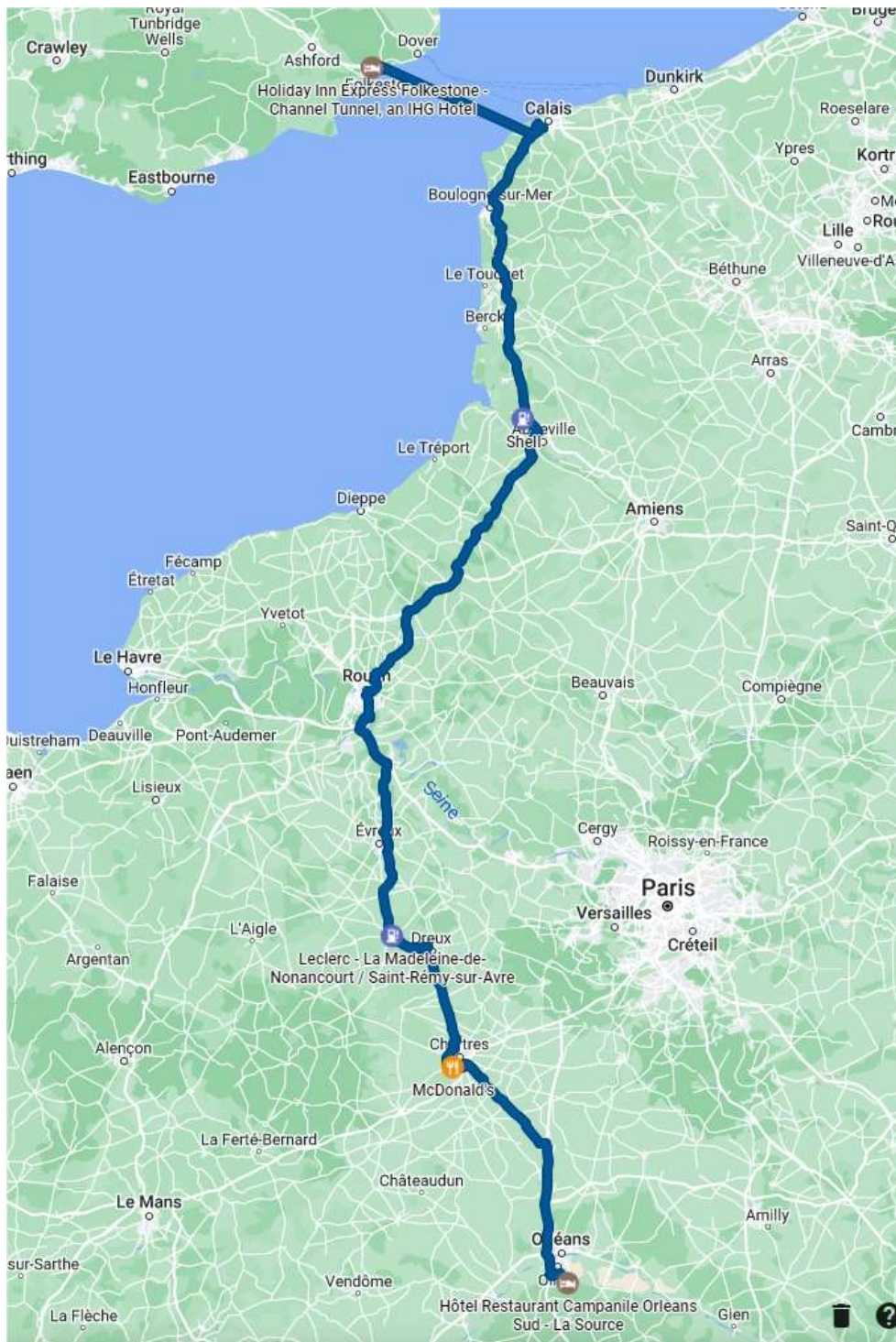
Eamonn met with Alex and after the coffee and biscuits, set off for the first hotel near the entrance of Eurotunnel. Very heavy traffic on the M25, so lots of lane splitting and close encounters with the wide panniers on board! No scrapes though, but with another 30 mins to go and we've been riding for 2.5 hours. So a quick stop for coffee before restarting the last bit, then a good meal before an early night.

The last half hour went by quickly, far less traffic and still no rain. Quite a few bikes in the hotel car park, one group going to Croatia, then Italy and then Spain. That's sounds a long trip!!

The train maybe busy tomorrow.

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Day 1 – Calais to Orleans



The day started with everyone meeting up at the Holiday Inn Express near the Eurotunnel entrance near Folkestone where we all enjoyed an early breakfast to start our day. Simon and Chris made an early start to get to the hotel in time for breakfast, Mike had a shorter journey from North Kent.



Early breakfast with the "team" all arriving before 7. Train is 08:50 so should be OK for getting through customs. The journey today is in 3 stages, Calais to Roen on the motorway, Roen to Chartres on national roads and Chartres to Orleans on motorway. Hopefully to arrive at the hotel about 18:00 to 18:30



Waiting in the queue for the Eurotunnel train, last chance to check we haven't forgotten anything!



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At the coffee stop at the services on the motorway, we met an Australian chap who gloated over the current cricket score whilst complaining that he'd travelled half way around the world only to meet "bloody poms"!!! All in good heart and taken with a smile.

At the second stop of the day outside Chartres, guess what..... it's a McDonalds.... but at least we know there is coffee and a snack - but not enough to spoil our evening meal.

Just another hour to go to Orleans hotel, so we should be on schedule for a good evening.

Arrived at our hotel in Orleans, 5 Euros spent on the last toll saved us 25 minutes and got us to the hotel just before a party of 60 Romanians arrived in a bus for their evening meeting!



Above: at the hotel in Orleans



Right: A local delicacy called "Andouillette d'Orléans", Chris renamed it as "Pig's cock and chips"

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Day 2 - Loire Valley

Following the long day yesterday, today will be a more relaxed day as we are being tourists in the area and staying at the same hotel tonight. Initial plans are for a bingle around some chateaux preferably with sunshine and a good lunch stop. However, once you've seen one chateau Mike says you've probably seen most of them! We visited three today and by the third it was feeling it was becoming an ABC trip, Another Blooming Chateau!



Our first chateau to visit was at Chambord. Alex, Chris and Simon had this idea of locking their helmets together using Alex's security coded cable. The only trouble was that on our return to the bikes, the code Alex entered was not working! Tried many times many different options but the lock remained shut.

Chris helpfully came along with a pair of pliers, snipped the cable and released the helmets! Apparently the pliers cut through like a knife through butter - guess it wasn't a high quality device...



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Whilst enjoying a coffee in the warm sunshine at Chambord, Alex's attention wasn't with our conversation.

Eventually we realised why he was having trouble...



From Chambord we rode into Blois, found a parking space in a little back street and headed to a restaurant for lunch. Very nice lunch sitting in front of the Magic House in Blois. True Brits, 3 of us had fish and chips....





Cookie's fascination with genitalia is becoming worrying....

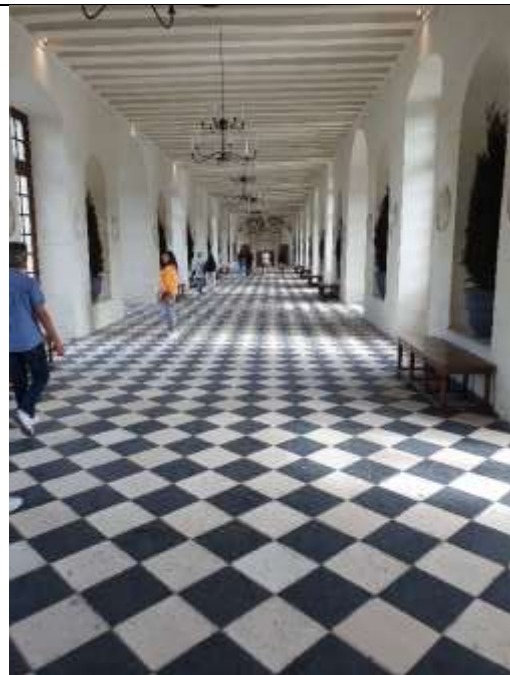


The square in front of the palace for our lunch break



The House of Magic kept us entertained at lunchtime with the dragons appearing every 30 minutes.

After Blois, we rode to Chenonceau. Whilst looking around the large number of rooms, we came across a long room that could have been a corridor or perhaps a very large dining area. There were very few other visitors and Simon was getting bored – he wanted to make the trip more interesting...



The long hall/corridor that Simon thought lacking in excitement.



Above the canopy, a pigeon had decided to make its nest. The eager calls of its hungry chicks could be heard!



There's no need for any comment here...

The pictures tell the story of how he decided to liven things up! We never found out if the security cameras captured the images, but as we were not thrown out, I suspect we got away with it.





Later in the day, we did wonder if the security cameras in the chateau had picked up any unusual activity. It's possible that Simon may have trouble visiting France in the future....

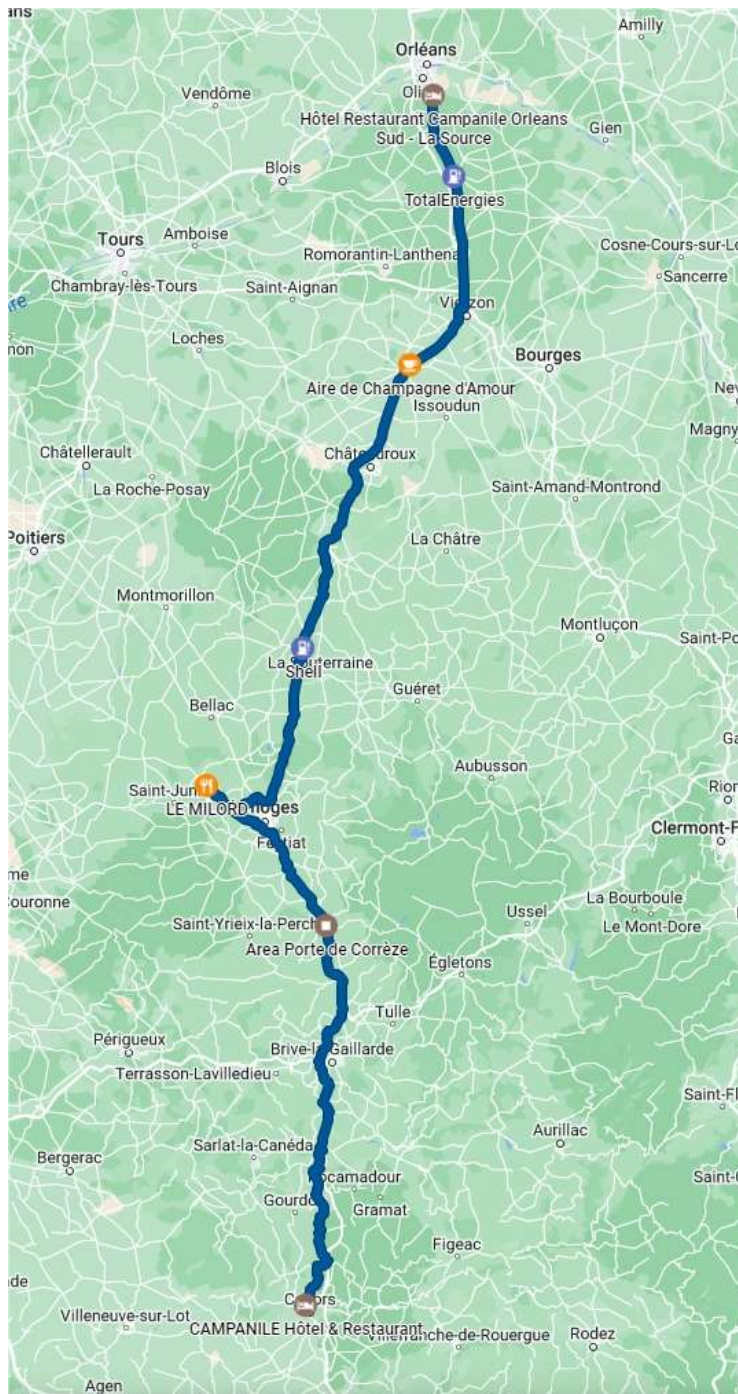
We left the chateau late in the day (they were closing up) at 18:30, then had to rush back to the hotel to make it in time for an evening meal at 20:00. Toll roads again as we had to hit the dreaded motorways on the return to the hotel to make it back in time for dinner.



Back at the hotel, food ordered and beers being consumed.

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Day 3 - Orleans to Cahors



After a quiet day yesterday, we're back to a long day of riding - near on 300 miles today. The journey will be split into two sections as we intend to visit Oradour Sur Glane

(<https://www.oradour.org/>),

hopefully we can get there by lunchtime.

Light early morning rain has now cleared with dry weather forecast for the towns we're heading for. Coffee stop on the A20 at Aire de Camps Amour. There is light rain despite the promised sunshine the forecasts showed earlier.

Mike decided to keep to the back roads for a twisty route while the rest of us kept on the dual carriage way. We arranged to get back together at Oradour.

Arrived in Oradour Sur Glane, all boring dual carriage way, but got the job done. Once the bikes were parked and secured, we found a restaurant for a meal before we take a look around the cemetery/monument.

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When returning to the car park where we left the bikes, Simon noticed a small oil leak at the rear section of the shaft drive on his bike. We cleaned up the oil and decided to take another look later in the day after some more miles.

Having looked around the preserved area of Oradour sur Glane, we headed off for the final section of today's journey. We arrived safely in Cahors, more boring dual carriageway to start off with but the later part of the journey was some nice, fast twisties.

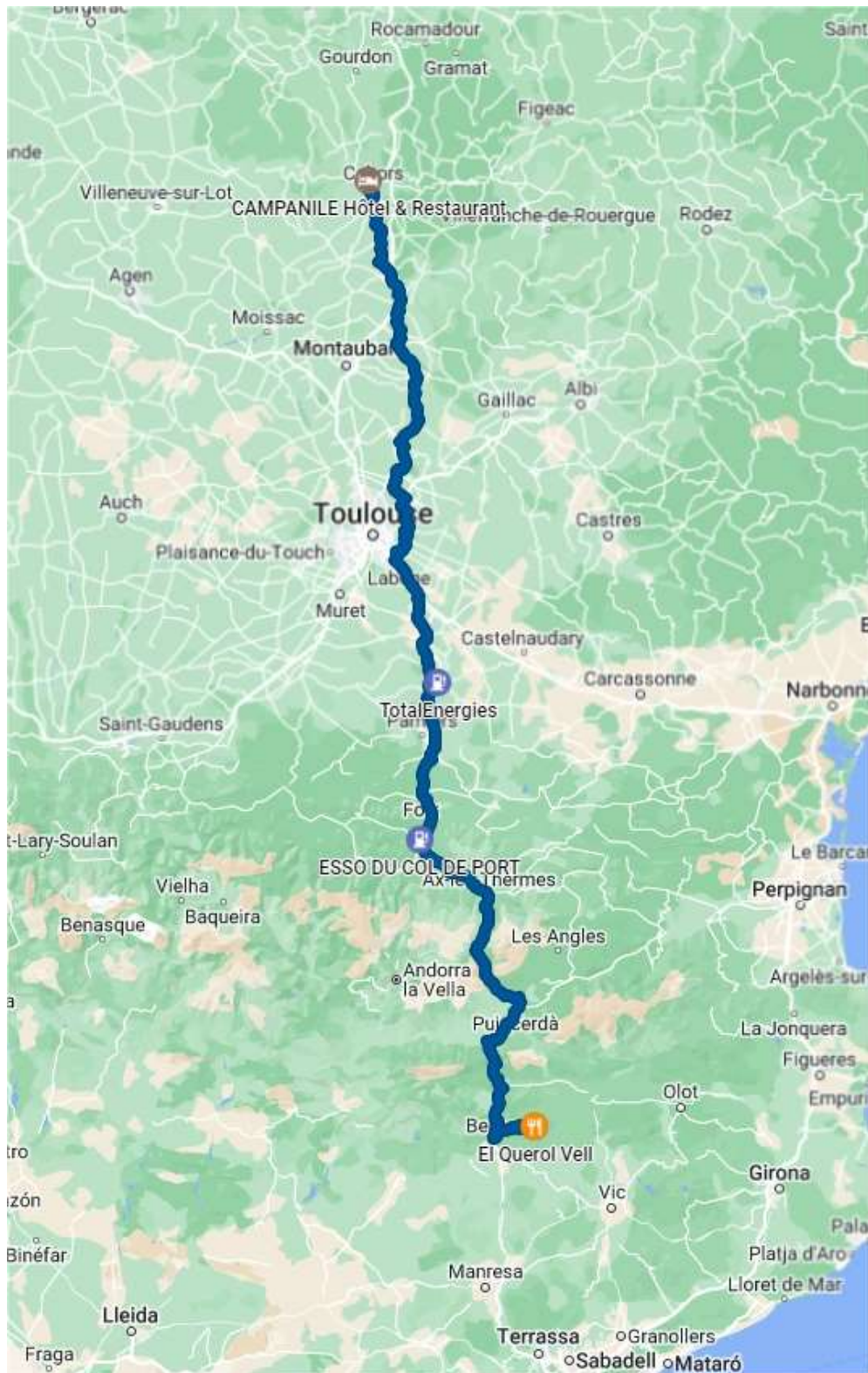
Eamonn asked Mike if he wanted to go first through the twisty bits (being a more confident rider), but he said he felt too tired so stayed behind...

....until the second corner when he came flying past Eamonn closely followed by Cookie and not to be seen for another 20 miles!!! The old racing spirit never goes...

On arrival at the hotel it was time for shower, change and some beers before the evening meal.



Day 4 - Cahors to Borreda



This was always going to be one of the long days, over 200 miles and 6.5 hours riding. The average speed being low due to the non-motorway route and the last section through the mountains.

The first part of the journey was standard national roads, dual carriage ways with occasional country roads. Though some of the French country roads were better quality than UK A roads!!!

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At our first coffee stop, we checked Simon's bike to see if the oil leak had cleared or if it was still there. Unfortunately there remained a small leak and after Simon had checked the Triumph recall notes it became apparent that this was a known problem and a Triumph garage could fix the issue. We found there was a Triumph garage on the outskirts of Toulouse, so we modified our route to include the garage.



We arrived at the garage just before noon, one of the salesmen spoke English and said they could fix it, but they were just going off to lunch so we should come back at 2pm when it would be ready. So we left the bikes at the garage and walked to a nearby Burger King for a fast food lunch.



After lunch, Simon and Alex suggested that Eamonn, Cookie and Mike push on and enjoy the roads whilst Simon and Alex waited on Triumph to finish their 2 hours lunch break before collecting the bike. Alex and Simon would try and catch up by using the motorway.

Cookie, Eamonn and Mike avoided the motorways but used the toll based tunnels through the mountains to save time. We planned on arriving at the hotel about 19:00. Avoiding the motorways meant going through some mountain passes where it thundered and poured down with rain!

We were on the French side of the Pyrenees, the heavens opened and we got soaked. Even with waterproofs put on it was not enough to keep dry. The roads were fantastic for motorcycles but we couldn't utilise them until we went through the Tun du Puymorens, which is the tunnel through the

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Pyrenees into Spain. The tunnel gave temporary respite from the rain only to find, on exiting the tunnel, bright sunshine and dry roads....

Once out of the tunnels and on the open roads the riding was out of this world!!! Switchbacks everywhere, no other traffic, grippy road surfaces - we certainly used all the tyre edges today!!

Meanwhile Alex and Simon used the toll roads and didn't get wet - the motorway was only about 50kms so most was open roads. Downside was Alex lost his credit card! Such is life.

Arriving at the hotel, it was outstanding... We all wanted to stay there for a couple of months let alone the 4 days we have booked.



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Day 5 - Borreda

Today is the start of 3 clear days to explore the area. No plans, just take it as it comes.

The hotel is superb, we are the only people in residence until Friday and so we're getting personalised attention from Susi the hostess. She is an enthusiastic vegetarian and so Mike is extremely happy, Alex is less happy!!!

Currently the weather is overcast and humid, so we're enjoying coffees at the hotel taking in the spectacular views across to the mountains.





We had lunch at the nearest restaurant to the hotel and it was a full blown Catalan menu.

The food choices were a bit random and lucky dip, but it all worked out ok.

A specific waitress was assigned to our table as she was the only one in the restaurant who could speak English. We mixed our English with some Spanish and managed to order our food and drinks from a Catalan menu.

We learnt that although we were in Spain, the language in our area was Catalan and the locals were fiercely defendant of their region. Our Spanish translation facilities from Google didn't work – we had to download Catalan language in order to fully comprehend what was on offer.

So today the only riding was completed by Chris in the afternoon on short round Robin tour. The remaining four took a casual walk around the village to see the local sights. Mike had a kip in the afternoon because he had a terrible night's sleep previously. Alex unpacked his drone hoping to easily swoop to the skies and take some pictures, but a software issue delayed this somewhat until Chris returned and tried with his iPhone and managed to get some footage.

This evening we have arrived at a different restaurant in the village only to find that the same waitress we had at lunchtime is also working here. As well as that, the waitress we spoke with when we first arrived in the village, is also here. It's almost as though someone has coordinated all the English speaking waitresses to be in the same place as us...!!



Evening meal at Bar Sant Marc in the village.



Back at the hotel, we have some evening drinks

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The bikes had a small undercover area all of their own!



In the evening our host, Susi, made the most generous gin and tonics for us.



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Day 6 - Cardona and mountains

Today the sun is shining and a short tour around the region is planned. A substantial breakfast means a sluggish start will follow!!

After a nice breakfast Eamonn planned a route to Paradoir de Cardona, which is a castle on a hill. We only had a look around grounds near the car park, which were fairly interesting, but we're here to ride through the stunning countryside and not do too many tourist things.



This church tower in Cardona looks like it's being repaired but meanwhile you still hear the bells ringing, however....., the bell doesn't move, instead the sound of the bell comes from the loudspeakers!!!



Chris' Yamaha R1



Now who do you think would make a variation of Alex's photo....?



From the castle we found a cafe for coffee, and refreshments, then on to the mountains.

Although the weather didn't look too good, it was in fact dry and perfectly cool. We found a stopping point with views over the hills...



Then Eamonn noticed a sign pointing to a mediaeval plot (possibly a small village). Further investigations revealed a number of stones that appeared to be the foundations of old buildings.

The roads around the park were very twisty and scary at times.

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Day 7 - Andorra

Today's weather is looking good, no clouds, perfect sunshine, 22 degrees C.

The plan today is to ride into Andorra, its only 77 miles but Google predicts 2.5 hours riding time! It could be a very twisty ride....



It all started a bit late because Alex had mislaid his keys! We all helped with the search, but we were all clearly “man looking” as they were found in his jacket top pocket! So finally, about an hour late, we set off for Andorra hoping to find a landmark suspension foot bridge named “Mirador Roc del Quer” viewpoint.

We stopped on the road to Andorra, high in the mountain range, for coffee and water. Roads are extremely twisty.... just perfect!! The views are spectacular, just too much to take in when you're concentrating on where the road goes next!





“Roc del Quer” turned out to be a very different place to that intended and we ended up a small twist road with no viewpoint! As we were running late anyway we decided to head back. This was simple, but very slow because there was a queue at the border control that took at least another 20mins of sitting in the baking sun.

On the journey back Alex and Simon took a slower pace and missed a turning which added an extra 45 minutes to their journey. Much exclaiming was heard when they finally arrived back at the hotel!

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First refreshment stop in Pons, 33 degrees and hot, hot, hot. Another two hours to go so will have another stop before the hotel. Roads are comparatively straight in this section of the journey, perhaps we've been spoilt!!!

We stopped in Estadilla for a drink and we managed to persuade the staff to prepare us cheese and ham snacks!!



Finally we arrived in Ainsa, very nice hotel with secure parking for the bikes. We checked into the Hotel Dos Rios, unpacked, showered, then ordered 5 cervesas! Time for beer and then think about a restaurant. That first mouthful was from heaven.

Ainsa is a medieval town with a castle up the top of the hill, so we headed up there and found a festival about to start. We managed to get a table at a restaurant and the food was great and the local cats had leftovers.

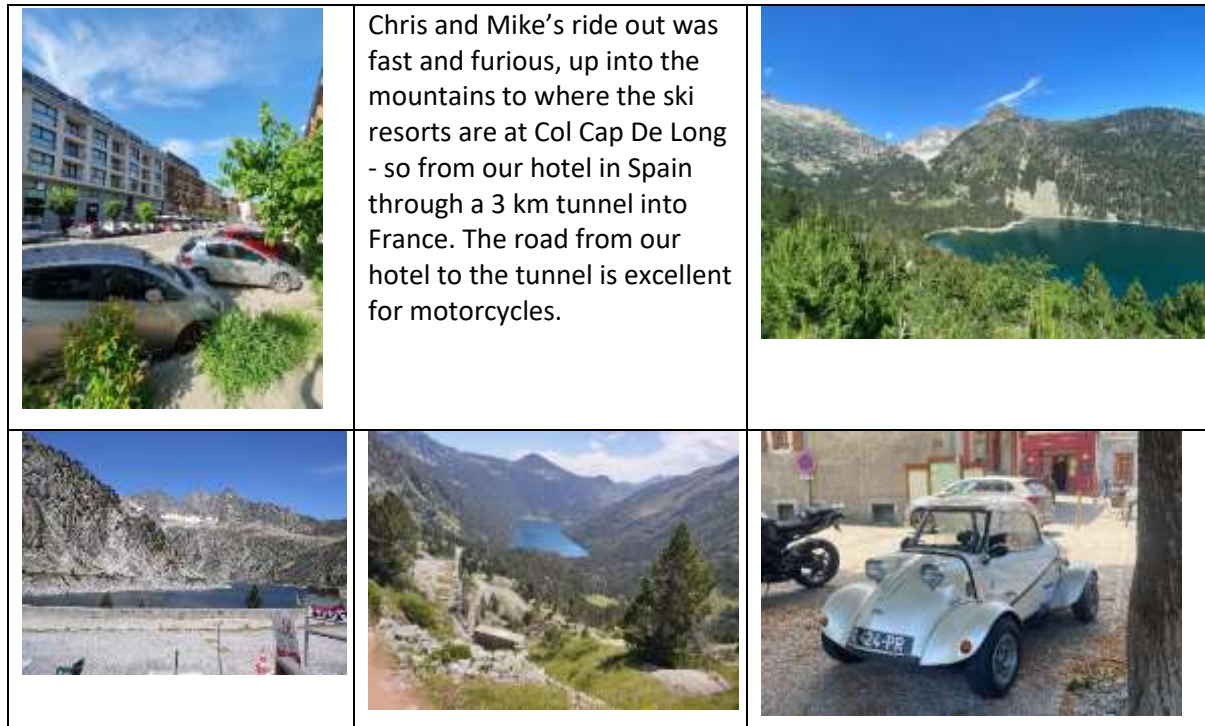




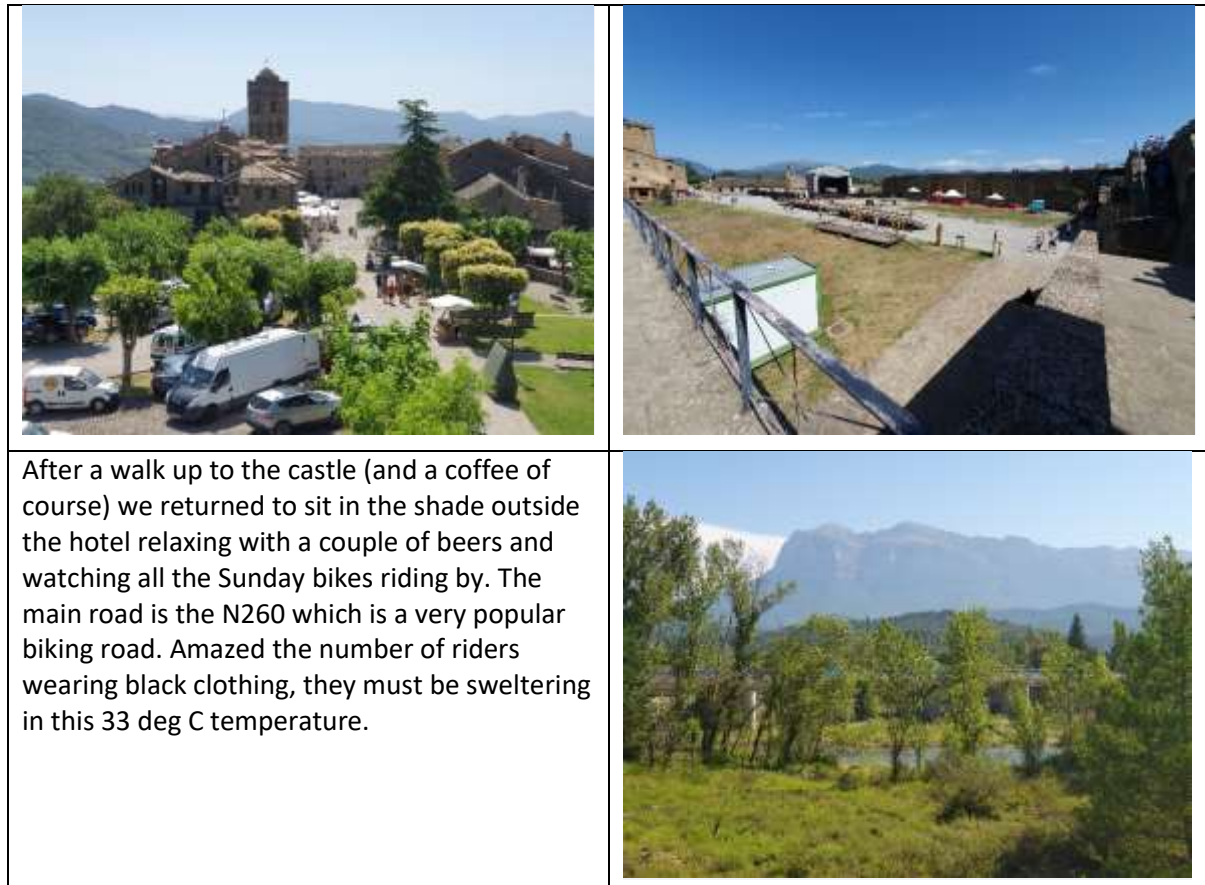
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Day 9 - Ainsa

Today we split into two groups, Chris and Mike went for a ride whilst the rest of us relaxed in town.



For those staying in town, there will be a few coffee stops whilst exploring the historic centre!





Eamonn on tour and relaxing with an afternoon drink.

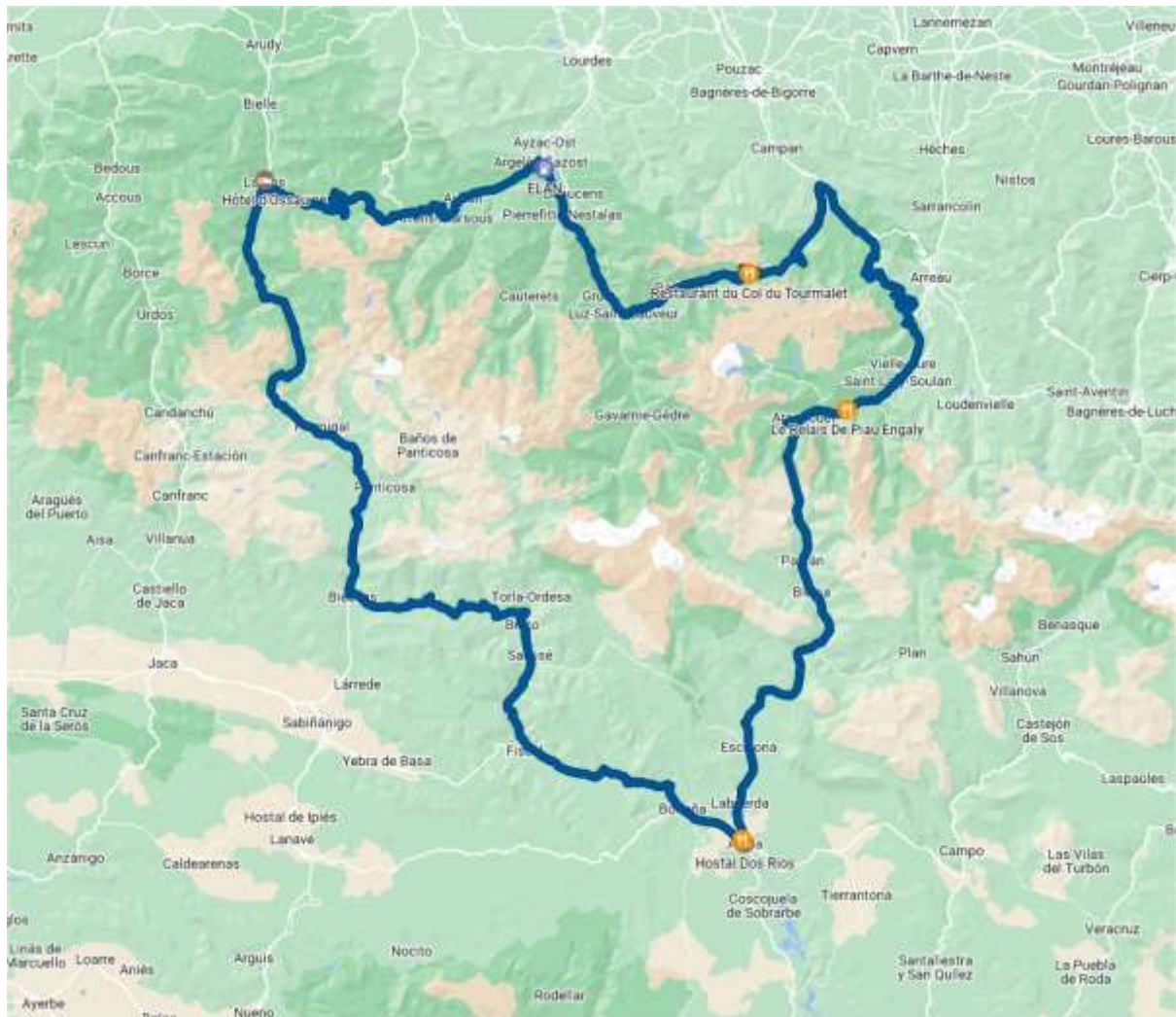


In the evening, with Chris and Mike back from their ride, we walked up to the mediaeval town centre where there are plenty of restaurants and had some food. There are many cats roaming around town, and they all appear to be quite friendly, especially if you give them some leftovers.



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Day 10 - Ainsa



This is our last full day in Spain. After yesterday's relaxing time sitting outside the hotel all afternoon (and being served the appropriate amount of beer, burgers and G&T's) today we're actually going to get on the bikes and ride out to the mountains! Chris has planned a route taking us just over the French border for lunch and then a long loop around back to the hotel. Should be about a 5 hour trip.

Temperature is already 27 degrees in town rising to 34 this afternoon, the mountains will probably be cooler.



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Chris wanted to include his favourite roads that swoop through the Pyrenees from France to Spain and so we did a loop of about 172 miles in and out. There were some issues with roadworks on the outward leg which caused Alex and Simon to eventually turn back leaving Mike, Eamonn and Chris to go ahead.



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It was a superb 5 hour tour around the Pyrenees today, the roads and views are comparable to the Swiss Alps (something I never thought possible) with the added benefit that the French meals were half the price of Switzerland.

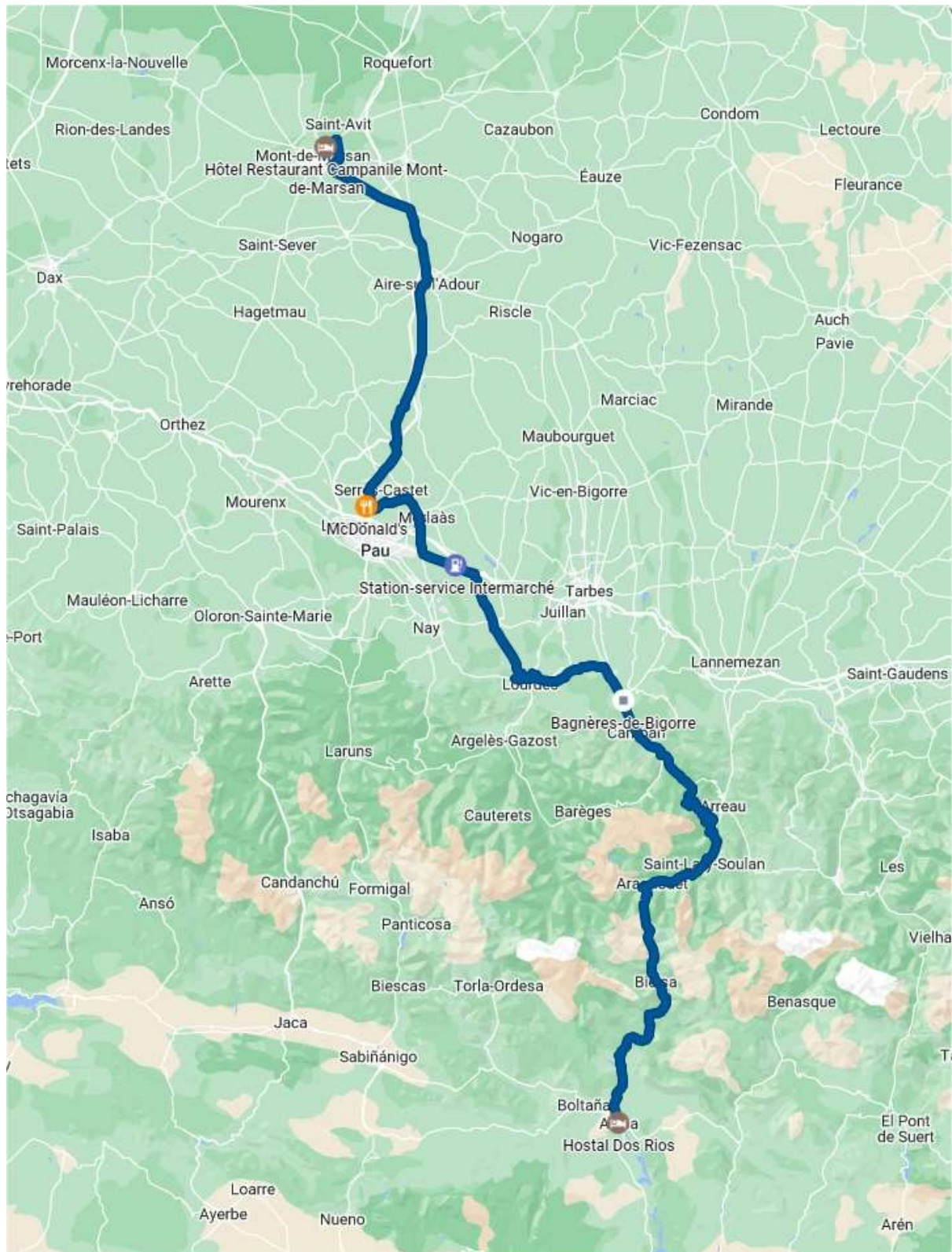
We had to avoid a flock of sheep, two groups of cows wandering across the road and horses wandering down the road. It was a very hot day with 34C+, not the best for motorcycling. We came across some awesome scenery and roads, but also a terrible recently laid gravel topped road that appeared to simply be tarmac with gravel dumped on top without it being rolled in (or whatever the process is) . This resulted in about 5km of loose gravel on twisty mountain roads. Mike hated it, but Eamonn saw it as a challenge. The Africa Twin handled it well, the R1 less so!!!



Whilst Chris, Eamonn and Mike were enjoying the Pyrenean road systems, Alex and Simon found time to relax at the hotel.

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Day 11 - Mont de Marsan



Today we leave Spain and back into France commencing our return journey to the UK.

We've ridden some superb mountain roads, enjoyed different foods (even some vegetarian) and had many beers!

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We're taking a countryside route back and are currently in the hills next to a national park. The views are spectacular, as usual, and the road is very tricky as it's the same gravel road that we found yesterday! Didn't mean to repeat the experience, but now we're on it, we shall continue.



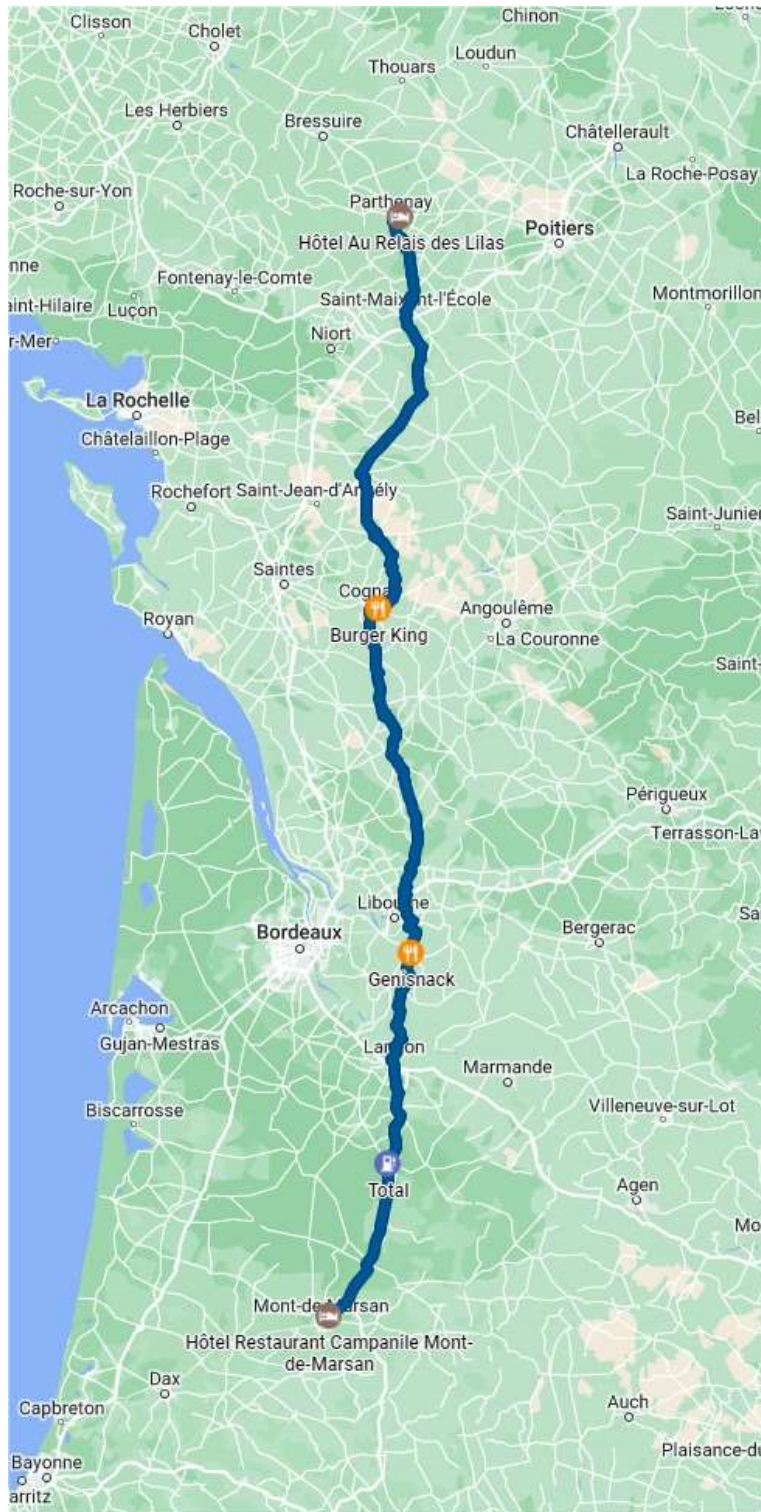
As we travelled the gravelled road Mike embarrassingly managed to topple over when stationary on a gravelled corner. He lost his footing on the gravel, fell over and rolled into a muddy puddle. Mike laughs at it now and uploaded the event to YouTube.

There were lots of twisty roads to start with, but after lunch most roads were straight. The lunch stop in Bagnere de Bigorre was a small fast food establishment that exceeded our expectations. Burgers and paninis were the order of the day followed by ice cream!

After the lunch stop we went through Lourdes, looking for the famous Gruta Deux Maries. We saw lots and lots of coaches parked up and huge numbers of people, so we skipped stopping there and continued our journey.

So after 157 miles and nearly 6 hours riding, we arrived at our hotel for the evening in Mont de Marsan.

Day 12 - Parthenay



Today is a 220 mile ride from Mont de Marsan to our next hotel near Parthenay.

We stopped for lunch, massive pizzas at a road side cafe full of builders from a nearby site and the occasional lorry. Very much in the transport cafe style! Whilst sitting there, we had a short rain shower but the roads dried up quickly. Another 4 hours to the hotel....

Now at the hotel and the first mess up I've experienced via [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com) - though I suspect the fault is more with the hotel management.

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The hotel claim we cancelled one of the rooms, leaving us with one double and one triple. So Chris and Simon booked another hotel a few miles away and we will meet them again in the morning.



Furthermore the hotel is not serving food tonight!!!

So we have ended up at a restaurant next door on a fixed price all you can eat (and drink) basis. No idea how they make any money, I feel stuffed!!

Waiting a few minutes before checking out the ice creams....



Frogs Legs



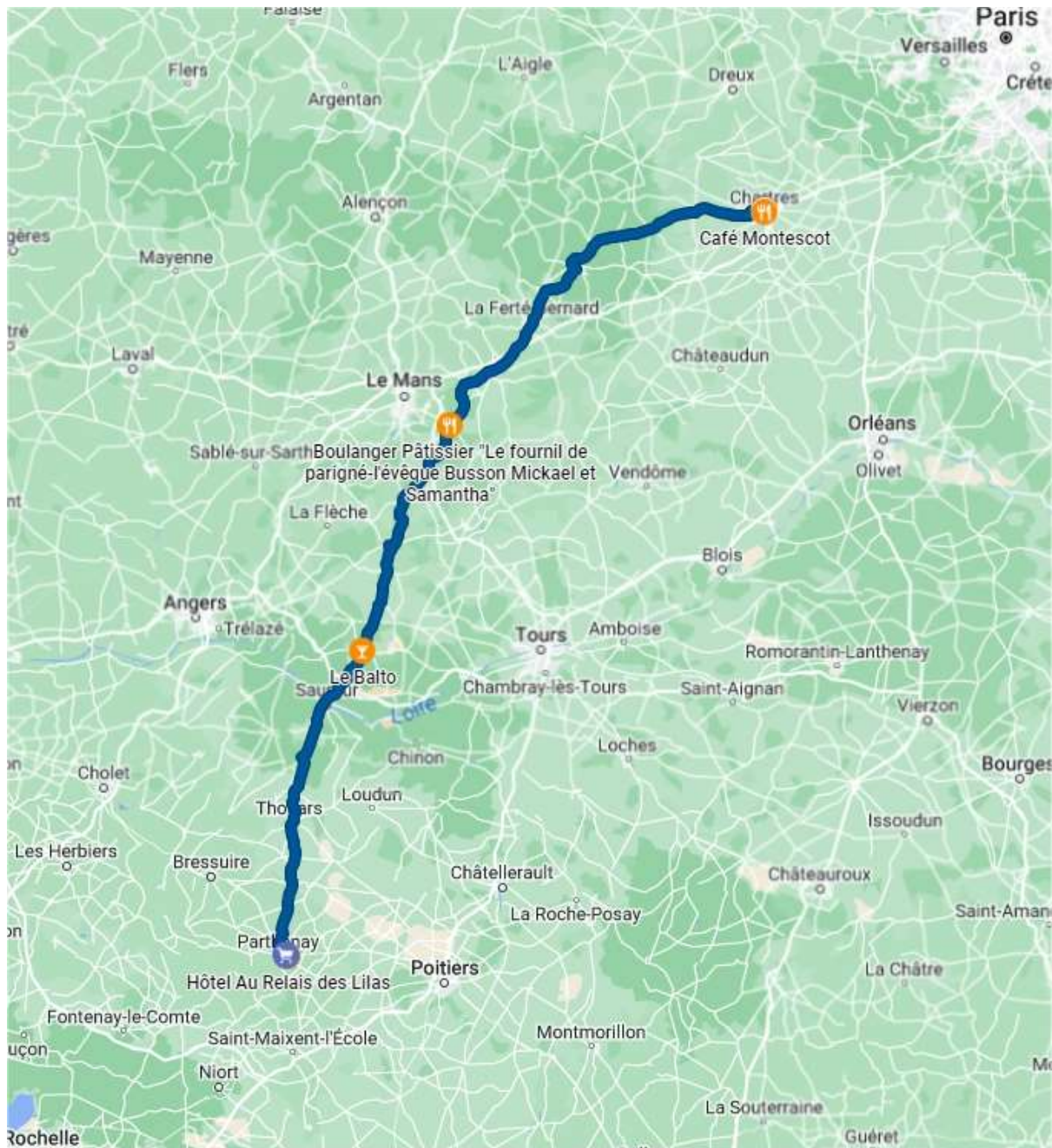
Snails



Alex's meal cooked in front of him

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Day 13 - Chartres



To summarise the evening of the 12th it was a mixed event.... the hotel messed up the booking leaving us a room short, the restaurant was closed and we had to ask especially for the bar to open. They won't be getting any good reviews from us!!

Today we travelled 180 miles to Chartres, checked into the hotel, showered and changed by 16:30 - this is definitely a record for this group to be in place so early! It leaves us plenty of time for a drink before walking the 15 minutes into the town centre. Once there we can find a restaurant and see the local historical sights. We might even have another beer...

We found the town centre and there was a free concert being set up. The lead singer was going through some sound checks and the band were making sure their equipment was all in order. We found a restaurant where we could sit outside and keep an ear out for the concert to start.



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After a good meal and a good few drinks, we were in a good mood for a concert! The town square had a lot more people in it and there was a level of general excitement.

The band started their set and it was really good, most songs in English language with commentary in French, so some aspects of the talk were missed.

Not sure how the discussion started but there was a question about how do you say in French “Show us your puppies!” After some discussion, this was translated as “Ou est les petits chiens” (forgive the grammatical errors!) – consequently at various times during the evening this phrase was shouted out much to the puzzlement of the locals who must have thought we were some strange group of dog wardens...!



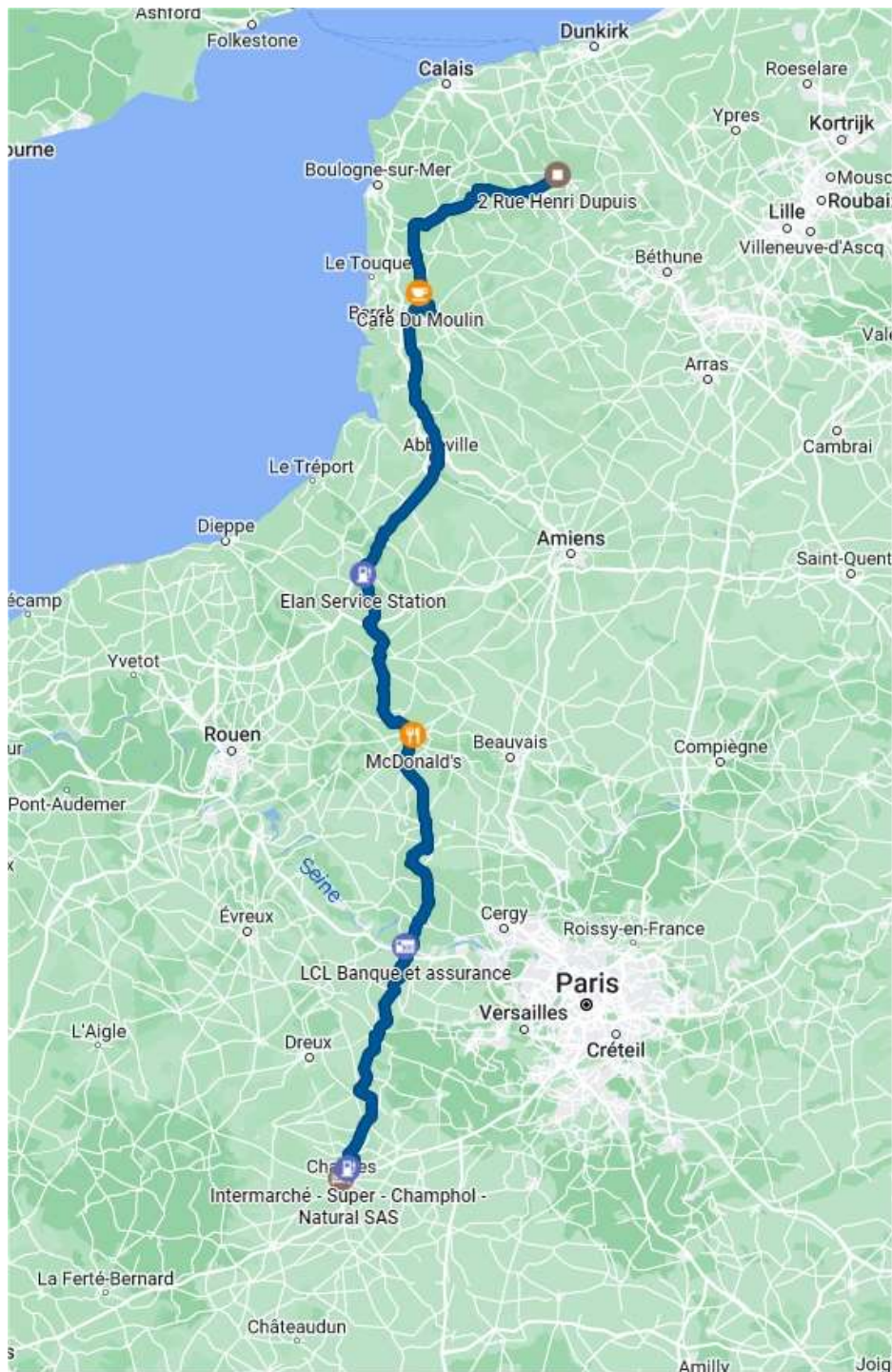
Some of the night time illuminations on the cathedral

As soon as the song “Hot Stuff” started, Mike encouraged us to replicate the dance sequence shown in the film “The Full Monty”. The locals were both puzzled and amused - perhaps they had never seen the film...!



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Day 14 - St. Omer



Today is Bastille day, so we have to be aware that fuel and food stops could be limited.

After an eventful night partying until 1 o'clock last night, it's been difficult getting the enthusiasm for breakfast and packing....but we're almost ready to leave. A mere 205 miles and 5 hours riding!

Bastille day results in a number of shops/restaurants being closed for the festivities. So today, we stopped at a dodgy coffee stop that turned out to be a betting shop and "hotel" with some strange people in it.

We had to find our reserve option of a McDonalds for a lunch stop....Simon is immensely happy.

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Final afternoon stop at Montreuil, everywhere there are Bastille parties blocking off roads. However we have found a cafe in the countryside that remains open!

After arriving at our hotel, the welcoming beer came first!



Note the special tour shirts, courtesy of Alex.

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Day 15 - final day

After a high class meal in St. Omer last night and some restrained drinking, we have now finished our last breakfast together in readiness for an early start to get to the tunnel by about 10am.

It's a short journey of less than 30 miles so should be a relaxed ride enjoying the last of the sunshine here as the current forecast in the UK is for rain showers.

After Mike's fuel gauge read zero for about a mile before the petrol station, we thought we were going to have to push him! But there was just enough to get to the garage and fill up.

With very windy conditions and ignorance of the speed limits we made it in time to the tunnel and boarded the train back to the UK.



--- End of Report ---