



# A Trip to France

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## *PART TWO. The continuing story of the onion seller and his Goldwing*

We ate our breakfast and bid au-revoir to the electronic receptionist at the hotel and set off for St. Pol sur Ternoise. Another really hot day, I was so glad to have my mesh summer jacket as I do suffer in the hot weather (perhaps I'm a tad overweight?). After some time on the motorway with the wing happily munching the miles, boredom set in, so after a look at the good old fashioned map in a motorway rest area, we headed off for Dieppe for a bit of coastal scenery and a spot of lunch. After an enjoyable snack at a beach-side café we asked Geraldine to take us on to our destination via Nouvion, Crecy (ie- rural) and Hesdin. We tried to follow her directions, but found our route barred by a road closure in the centre of Dieppe. There then ensued three frantic circuits around Dieppe, much to the amusement of some "wing spotters" who were waiting for a bus. They smiled at the bike as we passed the first time, looked surprised at the second circuit and were definitely chuckling at the third time of passing!! We eventually found our way out in the direction we needed (Geraldine had thrown her toys out of the pram and been turned off by this stage) and having got back to countryside we gave Geraldine the Map Co-ordinates for Les Ballastieres, our B&B for the next two nights. After her previous tantrums, we were delivered to the gateway into our accommodation without further mishap. Paul the owner was there to greet us and made us a welcome cuppa and sat with us in the lovely garden, where we talked about bikes, building and amazingly how his father had worked on the rebuilding of a hotel near Hastings that Jen's aunt had worked in decades previously. Small world, eh? Paul's partner, Sue, arrived from an afternoon shopping with a friend and it turned out she used to visit an aunt in Bude (5 miles from our house) when she was younger. We had an enjoyable evening meal at a nearby restaurant, assisted by a most helpful waiter who patiently explained every item on the menu, only stumbling on the translation of le chevre into English. He racked his brain for a moment before letting out a plaintive bleating. Aha- goat we said, at which point we all fell about laughing at his most entertaining performance.



The next morning, Thursday, after a good breakfast, we set off to find nearby Azincourt to take in the visitor centre devoted to the Battle of 1415. After an enjoyable and informative visit we went on to visit the WW1 site at Vimy Ridge and look at the excellent Canadian visitor centre and the stunning Memorial dedicated to the Canadians who fought and died there in the "Great War". This is truly a stunning piece of architecture and construction, well worth a visit. On our return to Les Ballastieres, Sue told us they were expecting a group of bikers that evening. They were taking part in a 20000 mile, 16 week world tour, similar to the televised "Long way down" a la Charley Boorman & Ewan McGregor. The 14 bikes + support vehicle arrived and took over the courtyard, and pretty impressive it all looked, I have to say. Virtually all riding BMW's with, I think, one Yamaha, this was their 1<sup>st</sup> night after gathering from all parts of UK to come as a group across to France, ready to start their epic trip the next morning. One guy had, I was told, come all the way from Australia and shipped his own bike at great expense!! Anyone interested just google Kudu Expeditions.

Friday, we bid farewell to Sue and Paul and set off to take the scenic route via Boulogne-sur-Mer and still have time to visit the Military Cemetery at Sangatte to find the grave of Jen's Great Uncle Harold. He was murdered by a deserter at the end of WW1 and has been a family mystery for 90yrs. Jen tracked down his history and final resting place after a long internet search. This was to be our last objective before catching the train from Calais to Folkestone. All was going well until we hit a road closed sign before reaching Boulogne. Instead of following the diversion signs, I thought I might be able to get through on the bike, as

you can sometimes do in Cornwall. WRONG!! We got to a village where the street was completely filled with diggers and lorries. Geraldine was not impressed when I set off down a country lane in completely the wrong direction; she soon had to be turned off again!! After what seemed like an eternity in the back of beyond, we finally made it back to civilisation. Jen was starting to panic by this stage. I, as usual, kept a cool calm grip on the situation, assuring Jen we still had plenty of time to get to the cemetery, pay our respects and be in time to catch the train. Geraldine was called upon again find Sangatte PDQ!! WE were soon in the outskirts of Calais heading with time to spare towards our destination. The traffic was moving very slowly; well below the speed limit. Jen pointed out that we were part of a funeral cortege and that would explain the slow rate of progress. We've a roundabout coming up (according to Geraldine) hopefully the funeral won't be going our way. They did!! And at the next one and the next one. Eventually we took off on our separate ways and we reached Sangatte with not as much time to spare as I had first allowed. Can't be difficult to find Les Baraques Military Cemetery, Sangatte's not that big!! 30 minutes later a visit to the information centre revealed that the cemetery is in the outskirts of Calais. Back we go, don't worry, says I, we can catch a later train if necessary. With a sigh of relief, we managed to find G U Harold in his final resting place in the immaculately kept Cemetery. Jen did what she wanted to do at the grave and we left with enough time to get the train barring any more hold-ups.

It was our 1<sup>st</sup> time on Euro tunnel and I have to say it went very smoothly; straight through to the platform, 5 minute wait then onto the train. We were in the company of a pleasant Scottish Moto Guzzi rider who made the trip frequently and told us what to expect. Although it was hot, the trip seemed to take no time at all and soon we were pulling into Folkestone station. Jen was quite relieved; having been convinced the roof of the tunnel would collapse once Neptune knew he had us at his mercy.



From Folkestone to East Peckham the weather deteriorated, so much so that I had to resort to my wet-gear for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in over 1000 miles. A flying visit to Jen's sister provided us with a much needed lunch, then on to visit Jen's Dad in Tunbridge Wells hospital. From there it was only a few miles to Jen's mum where we would stay for the night before returning to Cornwall the next day. My sister came round to see us, hoping to be taken for a ride on the wing. She'd not seen it before and was disappointed to find that Jen's helmet wouldn't fit, meaning no ride! After an evening meal of pretty decent fish and chips we went with sister-in-law and hubby for a couple of pints of really good ale at one of our old drinking haunts from 30 yrs ago. The

young barman noticed the Goldwing emblem on my tee-shirt. That's the bike that my granddad drives he said, he's really too old to be driving motorbikes- cheeky young bugger!! Anyone in Kent Wings whose grandson serves beer in the Swan at Edenbridge, give him a clip round the ear from Pete in Cornwall! Had it not been for the fact that we had a 250 mile trip next morning, a few more pints could have been given a good home, but two (or was it three) had to suffice.

Next morning the weather was not too good, light rain for the entire trip around the M25, then clearing for most of the time we were on the A303. As soon as we hit the M5 it really reminded us what driving in rain is like! We were so glad when we arrived home. Poor Jen was shaking with the cold, but a good hot shower soon helped her situation while I unpacked the bike.

All in all, we had a brilliant holiday. 1300 miles, nearly all in super weather, all objectives bar one (visit to Dunkirk) were achieved, the wing performed perfectly, we met some lovely folks, visited family and got home safe and sound. Now then, where to next?

