

## IFMR FRENCH FORAY MAY 17 -21 2018



19 members on 14 bikes met at Mozzarella Joes, Southsea at 7pm, Thursday 21 May 2018. We had no idea what a treat we were in for over the next few days. The plan was to revisit IFMR French friends in Normandy and enjoy fellowship and riding. Jeff Watkins inspired and arranged the event. Pascal, Corinne and their friends made it a fabulous weekend.

A smooth overnight crossing permitted a reasonable sleep for some: albeit rather short. No drama leaving the ferry, although sadly Phil Watson lost his sat-nav at some stage during the voyage. Pascal met us off the ferry and guided us to the first stop at Pegasus Bridge. A Typical French breakfast of croissant (erm several) and coffee, set us up for a riveting day. So many experiences prevent a detailed resume of the three days riding, eating and fellowship. The weather was ideal. There follows a brief synopsis of the weekend.

Friday included a coastal trip East through to Honfleur where we had lunch in restaurant L'Envie, hosted by Pascal's son Maxence and partner Emilie; delicious. Leaving Honfleur we rode over the Pont Du Normandy (a modern suspension bridge over the Seine), with great views over Le Havre and surrounding countryside. Returning over the bridge.

We somehow managed to lose Paul and Trish even though the Toll bridge was free to bikers!! Pascal suffered sat-nav failure and resorted ably to good old-fashioned map navigation, leading us South to Lisieux for a short break, before returning to Caen. Jeff and Dottie slid off, without harm when an old number plate managed to lodge under the front wheel causing a slide at slow speed.

A delicious evening meal; taken at a local restaurant made even better by international fellowship and the donation by David Arnold of an ample supply of wine to celebrate his birthday. Saturday, this route took us along the 'Le Suisse Normande'. Beautiful, steep and very twisty on mostly single-track roads.

The views were outstanding, it was a technically challenging ride but worth it. We crossed the Orne river and went through the Vere valley. Stopping for lunch at L'Hotel Du Commerce' in Pont D'Ouilly. The afternoon ride followed the Suisse Normande signed route, again spectacular. Arrived at the hotel in Caen weary and elated. A quick unpack, shower and straight out for dinner at 8pm. In the restaurant we met ex IFMR President Jorgen Otzen and his wife Lene, who had driven up several hundred kilometres to join us for the weekend; their presence undoubtedly added to the quality of the weekend. Pascal, President David, Jeff and Jorgen all made short speeches: very well orated and received, Jeff's pidgin French providing bountiful fun.

Sunday, Rather more relaxed riding with a visit to the Bayuex tapestry, the chance to walk around the old town of Bayuex and a ride to Port en Bessin {a major logistics port in WW2 } for lunch, after which we said farewell to Pascal and followed Jeff back for an early dinner, prior to an early start for the ferry the next morning.

On arrival at the hotel, Neil discovered a 100mm screw had gone right into his back tyre!! It took seven IFMR riders to remove it and repair the tyre.....reminiscent of a band of council workers gathered round a hole watching one man at work! Our last dinner was upgraded by the generous provision of wine by President David. Monday, an early start. Up at 6 for breakfast and wheels turning at 7am. Slightly delayed when Steve's Triumph refused to change gear leaving the car park. Clutch lever pin had vibrated almost out of the handlebar, soon remedied using a screwdriver and elastic band! Led by Gordon, we made the ferry in good time our only hazard being an elderly lady in a Discovery who insisted in driving across the parking lanes and parking across our path; reversing haphazardly and blaming us for alarming her dog!

We virtually took over one of the lounges and collapsed almost in a heap as the opportunity to recover lost sleep overwhelmed. The sight of us was ably described by one as 'a ragtag army marching its way back from defeat'. A little cruel - but quite illustrative. Another serenely calm crossing saw us disembarking slightly early and riding mostly independently to complete our journey's; all except Gordon, who's bike decided not to start. This was soon rectified by Alan, Angela and Steve pushing him to the front of the ferry, where a quick bump start down the ramp resolved the issue and he was off on his way.

Pascal, Corinne and their IFMR friends made the trip a joy. We met them as follows: Friday and all weekend; Pascal and Corinne Marilly, Dominique and Marie Helene Letort. Friday, Francois Pfaff and Stephane Padvan. Saturday, Gerard and Nelly Mignot, Phillippe Valereux and Olivier Vide. Past IFMR President Jorgen and Lene Otzen made the event a truly international affair. Our next UK IFMR President Philip was introduced to the next French IFMR President Philippe, Jeff and Dottie made the whole thing appear relaxed and easy, resolving all manner of issues with aplomb and good grace.

Who was it who shared a discrete and romantic carousel ride with his wife in Honfleur, wearing a bright yellow tabard??

Answers on a postcard please!

## Notes on riding in Normandy

Many of the roads we rode on during Friday and Saturday were single track with a pronounced camber, gravel being strewn liberally occasionally in some places. Typical farming countryside. The traffic on these roads was usually very light. Caen at rush hour on Friday is very busy, a narrow bike makes filtering much easier. The 'Priority a Droite' rule does come into play in some places, typically in small towns/villages where you are already engaged in monitoring several other potential hazards and not expecting a vehicle to enter quickly from your right.

We used the 'system' to aid progress. Pascal and Corinne used it to great effect by dropping riders regularly at points not just on junctions but also at confirmatory points, so I always felt positive about the route we were following. This also gave a quicker rotation of riders and made the journey more interesting for me.

***Steve Pritchard***