



Terry's Travels

TT31-1 Back in UK and off again 29th September 2009

With just eight days back in Yorkshire and not even in our own house (it's rented) it was quite a whirl. Happily it gave enough time to catch up with family and friends. I even managed to take my grandsons for an overnight stay in Blackpool for the switch on of the famous illuminations. It was VERY wet and VERY windy but fun. The boys fancied breakfast at McDonalds, bacon and egg McMuffin, the menu board rotated whilst they were eating them so they chose slimy chocolate ice creams to finish – oh to be young.

Our friend Val had kindly let us stay at her house and left for St Albans where she plans to live. Di even showed a prospective purchaser around her house and they have expressed interest – I told you it was a whirl.

It was exciting to collect a slightly refurbished Mercie, load the motorcycle etc, say goodbye again to the neighbours and take the road to Reading for the annual re-union with two of my pals from my hifi business days, yes, that seems a long time ago. Di then took the train from Reading for the short journey into London to stay with her family and see the babies of her nephew and niece.

Crazy David is recovering from a bad knee injury from a crash he had whilst skiing and Ian was looking well after a scary set of chest pains. It is great to have pals with such different lives and between beers at the Hobgoblin and Witherspoons we gradually caught up. A highlight was lunch in the impressive new centre of Reading overlooking the Kennet Canal – it felt truly Mediterranean in that days hot sunshine. We saw an electric powered canal boat quietly go by – Hmmmmm.

I managed to restore Ian's laptop to health and in my age related forgetfulness left both the charging lead for my new Netbook (lead now brought to Spain by a friend) and also my new camera outfit at Ian's flat – hence all words and no photos yet.

We had got a pre booked 29 pound deal for two and the motorhome for crossing from Dover to Dunquerque. We wild camped (approved) on the rainy seafront at Dover and walked to Witherspoons there. It's a bit of a rough one but the ploughmans and beer was good and we left before any fighting started. Incidentally we saw one young lady with what looked like an alchopop in a PITCHER which she was happily drinking through a straw.....

The ferry was Norfolk Lines and we sneaked to deck 7 and gazed at the luxury that the lorry drivers have – WOW, then went to deck 6 which was for the likes of us. The three hour crossing was bumpy as soon as we were leaving the famous white cliffs, which managed to look bright even on a dull rainy morning. At least the rain had stopped in Dunquerque as we started our adventure with Sadie (our GPS) reminding us to drive on the RIGHT side of the road – good advice.

Terry, Moraira, SPAIN

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TT31-2 Northern to Central France 1st October 2009

I had slept in Mercie in Reading but there were no provisions on board. A stop at a Carrefour Hypermarket fixed that, we bought diesel and Di made lunch before unpacking and organizing Mercie which all took quite a time. It was nice to stop living out of suitcases after all our recent travels, yes we see that as different to "living" in Mercie.

Our plan this trip through France was to be different. A leisurely pace, no motorways and to tour through RURAL France and there is plenty of it. We knew that it would be expensive with the pound only getting around 1.10 Euros – it was. Not paying road tolls helped plus running at 80/90 kph helped diesel economy which is cheaper here too. Using Aire de Repos to sleep free at nights where safe also helps.

Our route from Dunquerque was to Soissons keeping to the East of Paris along some of the D4 Champagne Route. The splendid open scenery and the very quiet roads gave a good look at the slower pace of rural life. We need a campsite every few days to top up and empty tanks and an electric connection allows the use of our trusty cookpot. We chose an ACSI (discount book) site at Romilly and were very disappointed. The restaurant and pool were supposed to be open but were not. It was a miserable place and we have complained, it cost 15 Euros.

Autumn tints were just starting to appear alongside the River Marne where we ate lunch. Many villages compete for the most flowery and are a joy to pass through. Especially in Northern France are well kept statues and Cemeteries for the fallen in both World Wars and some had just had events marking 70 years since the declaration of the second World War.

A dump station sign (for emptying caravan tanks) led us to a lovely Aire de Repos and we parked up and walked to THE local shop for Chappelle Agiloune on the D940. The shop was a bar, tobacconist, mini supermarket, hairdressers and lottery seller, all run by very large blonde lady with an enormous acreage of tanned chest which made her tattoo look quite small, the French word is *FORMIDABLE*. Her massive dog looked just like the Hound of the Baskervilles, it barked very convincingly and reared up with giant paws on the bar. It was easily six feet high and had really mean eyes – I avoided eye contact. It watched as we nervously sipped our *pressions* (draft beer). Eventually it tired of imagining what we may taste like and we relaxed and watched customers as they came and went. Two local old men were obviously regulars and were served with glasses of wine without asking, we got the feeling that we were sitting at THEIR table. Yes, you can tell that the trip is shaping up.

Our friends John and Jean (formerly UK) live in their splendid rural house on a hill top near Tulle in the Correze. Jean is on the local council and her friend the mayor fixed it for us to wild camp on quiet council land. John collected us for a Barbie with two more of their friends also invited. We had rain and pork ribs with lively chatter. John was a butcher in his previous life and attended the same school as me. He has a new laptop and a brilliant high speed connection so we were able to catch up on our emails. WHOOPEE - the new government in New Zealand has made it so we can spend a full six months EVERY year in our home there.

Lunch the following day was France at its best, 16 Euros for three courses of high quality and the taste was splendid. The same evening we went to hear live music at the Tulle Jazz Festival. Tulle was buzzing despite the rain and seeing locals having fun is one of the rewards of travelling. I really missed my camera as a boy of about eight had his own drum kit at the front of the stage and was drumming with a good band with an excellent mature lady singer whilst the locals were up and jiving.

A final delicious Sunday breakfast and we were back on our journey South crossing the Dordogne River, we were cross with Sadie when she took us along a very minor road that we could only just escape from via a stone bridge that was so tight it needed the mirrors folding in!

Terry, Moraira, SPAIN

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Terry's Travels

TT31-3 Carcassonne Canal du Midi 4th October 2009

More lovely rural driving on the D600 was interrupted by passing through Castres where a Farming festival had closed the road through the centre, the D110 was also scenic but very twisty. We stayed at the Airotel Grand Sud near Carcassonne which was not great and moved to the much better Camping La Cite. Carcassonne is quite an exceptional medieval walled city if you avoid the Haunted House and tourist tat. The sun shone properly for the first time in over a week and we walked along a clear stream to have a close look inside the walls. The strong historic connections go back to the days of the Crusaders/chain mail and presumably chastity belts. We never ceased to gaze at the wonderful skyline created from all around this landmark which will be familiar as it has been used in many motion pictures. Back at the campsite the better weather allowed us some outdoor living which is so important to a motorhome trip.

John and Jean had told us about Homp on the Canal du Midi just a 45km drive from Carcassonne. We squeezed into a small car park but saw motorhomes on the other side of this busy canal and crossed over a small hump backed bridge. We parked near a lovely new Mercedes Rapido and noticed the UK plates and met Anthony who was travelling alone. He is a spritely 73 year old who speaks German and French to a very high standard. He was speaking German to Berndt who was also travelling alone as a break from his job in IT. We needed our awning out as the sun was now so powerful and around 25C in the shade. Conversation was stimulating and switched to English to accommodate us. The wine was going down and we were obviously going to stay there the night. The canal is wide here and is an overnight basin for the barges as well as being a turn around point – some of the barges are very large. In fact some are hotel boats that are entertaining their guests with live music on the outdoor poop deck as they chug on by. It was no surprise that the four of us went to eat drink and be merry – I think the French phrase is *en-tente cordiale*.

Anthony full times (uses his motor home to live in) having now retired from his property and rental business around Greater Manchester. He summers in Germany and winters in Morocco at Zagora which is South of Marrakesh. He was a fountain of good knowledge and contacts. Once again this shows the people that are out there doing it who you only find by travelling. I discussed the route South I had planned and he confirmed that it was his favourite way.

From Carcassonne it was the D118 Limoux/Quillan/Axat/Mont Louis/ this was very slow and spectacular climbing through the Pyrenees and N260 over the Spanish border to La Seu d'Urgell where we wild camped in the car park near the centre. We were a little uneasy but the police drove around regularly and the lights stayed on all night. Vehicles came in through the night and it looked like there was to be a market. In walking round the town we were amazed on the number of banks for a smallish place and also saw a ramp for the RACC which had started a classic car rally that morning, shame we never saw them.

Terry, SPAIN

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TT31-4 Wet Costa Blanca 6th October 2009

Graham my accountant of 28 years with his partner Christine have just concluded buying a lovely villa near Javea, very prudently doing the deal in pounds. He got his way since there aren't many buyers about in overdeveloped Spain just now. We stayed one night in Camping Moraira (good) and met up but heavy rain started and we had to be indoors. We then moved to another campsite next to the Club de Tennis in nearby Javea. We hit the most horrendous two days of thunderstorms and heavy persistent rain. The campsite became flooded and it was 6" deep wading to get to the toilet block. The campsite location is good with 10 minutes walk to Arenal Beach with all its restaurants. We did quite a bit of socializing around drenched Javea with the highlight being a visit to the bar Quo Vadis next to the campsite with terrific quality live music from a creative duo called Blick. With good inexpensive home cooking and great friendly service this gets my TT5* award – a further attraction is the free wifi (the campsite wanted a rip off 8 Euros for a day!).

Grahams sister "our" Jenny had stayed and had the awful weather, in fact it has been the wettest September since records began. We did our good deed for the day by dropping her at Alicante airport, it was so galling for her that the sun was now blazing and 27C, as we headed South and our next meeting.

Our friend Pam who has the finca near the salt lakes of Torrevieja (she has stored Mercie a couple of winters) was not contactable on her mobile, or by email and her landline gave a message that it wasn't a valid number so we were very worried. We used the newish AP7 and quickly found her little lane, immediately we could see small boulders and mud in the narrow lane which was overgrown with all the foliage responding to all the rain. At her finca we opened the gates and drove in to a scene of devastation. Her front garden was piled with furniture and clothing drying in the sun. There was no sign of Pam or her car, we decided we should just wait to see what happens, her 3 dogs were there with geese, turkeys and chickens and doors and windows were open. Thankfully Pam showed up 3 hours later and OK but devastated. Her story explained that the water had washed over her land again (it had happened 2/3 years ago) and flooded the basement to a depth of 4 feet taking out the electrics. She was moving back into her villa that she had failed to sell in nearby Quesada, in fact having major problems with a rent to sell deal to a Bulgarian who criminally stripped the place! We were happy to assist with the moving and helping set things up and over-nighted outside the villa in wide street.

Further down the coast we met my pal Ken (SatelliteKen) and his new friend Carol who owns a splendid mountain top villa in its own valley with almond trees. They live there with 4 dogs and 2 horses in a very stylish way. Carol was Tey Potteries in the UK before retiring to Spain. Living in Mercie for two days and seeing the brilliant full moon at night casting shadows and then setting the following morning just before sun rise was very memorable. The 360 panorama was a few miles inland from Huerca Overa and around 3,000 feet. I borrowed Ken's camera to shoot photos of the winter hay arriving, the pool, the villa and Mercie, bronze eagle – a real eagle lives close by.....this trip is proving incredibly varied.
Terry, Los Gallardos, SPAIN



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TT31-5 Bad Spain/Good Spain 10th October 2009

It has been a relaxing time, living firstly for a week on the Los Gallardos campsite. Outdoor living in perfect weather and using our new gas Barbie along with the well used Remoska cookpot. The Yamaha motorcycle as our transport has allowed us to tour the area and the beaches of Mojacar and see our Spanish Bank, our supply of Euros are there and precious (pound now worth only 1.08 Euros) and we were able to lock into a 7% deal on them hopefully for future European travels. We also caught up with friends Gwyn & Rose who came to NZ and got married some three years ago, we lunched with them at an excellent good value Spanish restaurant in the leisurely outdoor way that is so enjoyable here.

The whole area has grown considerably since I spent time here some years ago but Spain is hurting now and many English ex pats are being hit especially badly. There are many who sold up in the UK, came to Spain and bought a place, younger ones working often to give service to other expats, or retired people who had decided their UK pension went further and gave a better life in Spain. The credit crunch has changed all that and now the low pound is driving many back to the UK. There are MASSIVE drops on some property values due to these circumstances. Worse than this, we have heard so many people telling stories of the endemic criminality that the police are not holding in check. Another criticism seems to be that the Police are stopping and checking motorists a lot, this hardly encourages tourism, in fact one Mayor has specifically told the Police not to stop tourists.

We met Ken & Carol again to visit what proved to be an exceptional restaurant that is local to their mountain top. We had booked a week ahead to visit Casa Joya and enjoy lunch with the world class cooking of the owner (ex Dorchester) which was truly superb and value at 30 Euros each inc good wine for a really special treat (there is some rural accommodation here too). A siesta followed by another soak in the outdoor spa under the stars – wonderful. Carol has in mind to give horse & carriage rides along tracks through all the almond trees to enjoy this restaurant. In fact you could even enjoy renting this mountaintop from her – ask me for details and also tell me if you would like to babysit the house with its animals.....

We decided to have a couple of nights down at the campsite on the *playa* (sea front). The front was quiet with many restaurants closed – some for good. We, as usual, found a bar and people to chat to which was fun. There is a new Restaurant Disco called the Mandala that was so striking with its thatched roofs and tents on the beach, we thought it was Indian style but Polynesian then came to mind, apparently some two million Euros have been spent and the thatchers came from the UK with reeds! It was a bit loud and trendy but worth a look for a late night. Rain hit us badly the next day and kept us indoors for a morning before walking and again seeing just how quiet it was.

Sir Ian Botham was running a golf classic at the nearby Desert Springs Golf Course – again raising money for charity that he does so brilliantly well. In a charity auction tickets for two to Wimbledon went for 7,000 Euros each so somebody (as always) has money to spend.

We are now back at Los Gallardos for our final weekend before preparing to return to the UK ready for our return to NZ.

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TT31-6 Quesada and Torrevieja 23rd October 2009

Back at Los Gallardos camp site life continued in a very relaxed way in the now more autumnal but very pleasant weather. There are two crown greens for bowling and these were packed with white clad bowlers – even the odd “young couple” (in their early fifties). Live music in the bar and plenty of chatting, one lady even celebrated her 90th birthday on one disco evening. On this trip I have been sleeping much more than my usual 5 hours and have read piles of books. Three outstanding ones deserve a mention

A Death in Tuscany – Michelle Guitari – Italian detective story

The Kite Runner – Khaled Hosseini – you may have seen the film which I plan to watch

The Life of Pi – Yann Martell – (Booker prize winner 2002)

Our Sunday morning treat was breakfast out and watching the exciting motorcycle races from Australia and later Jenson becoming F1 world champion. We have ridden lots of coast to the N and S of Mojacar, it's all in the process of being developed and in many ways spoiled but Spain pushes on with mass market techniques and road building with EU money and the talk is that the Indian and Chinese continents will bring the hordes for the next expansion – already you see WOK buffets and curry houses far outnumbering the Fish & Chip shops! so the process has started.

We said goodbye to friends made on the campsite and hit the road again. We had decided to return to Pam's villa in Quesada early to see if we could help her more in her move from *finca* to villa. She now has had terrible health news that requires her to start chemo treatment very soon prior to surgery. A giant bonfire was needed to burn dried trimmings from her orchard in the *finca* plus all the damaged mattresses and furniture from the flood damage. Bonfire night (Nov 5th) came early. Curtain rail fitting at the villa came next and we met other of her supportive friends, it was nice to be able to help this most spirited lady. We discovered another blow to ex pats, people below the pension age (ladies 60, men 65) now have to pay 270 Euros per quarter each for medical cover. This charge is dropped after pension age is reached. This new legislation is also driving ex-pats back to the UK. Dropping out for a cheap life in Spain seems over. There are cheap deals to spend 3 months of winter in Spanish hotels and Brits are doing this to avoid heating bills in the UK.

Mercie required a replacement tap in the bathroom, we found one and with double jointed fingers I managed to fit it. We even managed to apply some wax to the outside bodywork. It will live in the shade of Pam's villa behind locked gates and hopefully will be ready with the motorcycle for our return in May 2010. Our next motorhome travels could take us East to France, Italy, Greece and maybe Turkey.

First it's a quick return to the UK, see family and friends and to celebrate my older grandson James' birthday as he becomes a teenager before suitcases and the start of our next major Round the World trip – 2009 will have been our most ambitious travel year ever

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Terry, just arrived back to a wet and misty ENGLAND
ps – the *finca* will be on the market at a bargain price with all its land in the mid 300 thousands and good homes are being looked at for the geese and turkeys. Pam's collies will miss “herding” the geese in their own retirements.

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