

Haarlem, Netherlands, Bruges, Belgium and Paris.

May - June 2002

Our trip so far! This is partly a diary and partly as a way to share our trip with family and friends. Comments may be too sparse for some, too detailed for others!

Some details such as prices will be included. We are picnicking (supplies from grocery stores or ready-made from boulangeries or charcuteries), eating in cafes and restaurants and enjoying outdoor drinking (coffee, beer, wine, etc.)

Day 1 Haarlem

Haarlem at last! We are at Joop's Inner City Hotel, not fancy but central and with a fridge. The hotel is made up of several buildings near the Grote Markt and our building is around the corner from the hotel office. (75 Euros with toilet, bath, kitchen corner (no equipment - can ask, I believe).

Bus from airport (Schiphol) was easy on our jet-lagged brain and a good buy. Whipped us to Haarlem most of the way by a transit lane. At the Haarlem train station at the VVV tourist information office, we bought a map and tickets for the Floriade.

Day 2 Haarlem (Teylors Museum, Frans Hals Museum), Floriade

Day 2 of our trip and we have already seen two museums in Haarlem, visited the Floriade and wandered the back streets in Haarlem.

Haarlem is a smaller city, compact with traditional pointy roofed buildings and not overly touristy with a lovely main square.

Highlights:

Richard particularly enjoyed our visit to the Teylors Museum, the oldest museum in the Netherlands (opened in 1784). Originally there was a research department (lab) so on display was scientific equipment from the 18 and 19th century.

Richard was pleased to see a group of 25 Leiden jars, each about 1 metre high made of glass with metal lining to store static electricity. The full set would have been 100 jars. Although Richard had learned about them in school, he had never

actually seen them. The museum building itself is lovely with original showcases displaying fossils, rocks and other objects and in another room, art! Something for everyone. There was a very good audio guide (included in the price).

It was market day in Haarlem and the Grote Markt was taken over by meat, food, flower and other stalls. We had cappuccino at Brinkmann's Grand Cafe on the square.

We had lunch at Vroom-Dreesman department store which provided a great view and a moderately-priced meal. Supper was in our room - bread and Gouda cheese and Grolsch beer. Early to bed! Unfortunately we were woken by some rowdies - actually I slept through it but woke when someone called our room to complain thinking we were the loud ones!

Today we visited the Frans Hals Museum - the museum of the Dutch Golden Age, housed in a 17th century home for old men. There were not many paintings by Hals himself but recently I had read a novel about Hals in which he describes painting some of the group paintings. Also an interesting Bruegel the Younger painting illustrating proverbs. Then the bus to the Floriade (included in our ticket), just a 10 minute ride from Haarlem.

The Floriade is a strange hybrid - part trade show, part science centre, part garden show. We enjoyed the tulips (some varieties were getting a little past their prime) and the incredible orchids. Interesting too were the small gardens designed for typical Dutch homes (or our small townhouse plot!). We climbed Spotter's Hill for a view that included Amsterdam and the new harbour as well as the flat land (polders?) around Haarlem.

There were many places to shop and to eat but we had the sandwiches we had bought last evening at a grocery store with local apples. Later we had terrible coffee at one of the concessions and we were doubly glad that we had brought our own lunch. We made up for it by a glass of beer (cheaper too!) on the Grote Markt when we arrived back in Haarlem.

We decided to have our first real "meal" across the street from the hotel at De Componist, Korte Veerstraat 1, (www.componist.nl), a great choice, recommended in our Cadogan guide. I had the menu of the month, Richard, the menu of the day. I thought we were getting 4 courses, but with the olive bread with tomato bruschetta topping, the warm roll with pesto, the creamy avocado with baby shrimp and then ANOTHER multigrain roll....

I couldn't finish my lamb and couscous. Excellent formal service, nice ambiance. About 80 Euros with wine. After our 3 hour dinner we went for a stroll. Cities and towns look different after dark. Tomorrow, we will eat lightly! And we go to Amsterdam for the day.

Day 3 Amsterdam day trip

Train to Amsterdam. Cheap, fast (15 minutes), frequent service!

Highlights:

Amsterdam didn't thrill us. It seems a livable city except for the litter! We took the circle tram to get our bearings, well worth the time and the cheap ticket.

The Rijksmuseum which was full of tour groups (naturally!). I particularly enjoyed the Vermeers - the incredible colours.

Canal boat ride which took us out into the harbour - reasonable trilingual commentary.

The Jordaan district - We wandered in the Jordaan district, which looked authentic. Evidently it is very arty. It looked like it would be a nice place to live.

We shared a apple and calvados Dutch-style pancake at the Pancake Bakery, eating outside by the canal.

Nonevent - the Red Light district. Saw some sex shops but we didn't venture down the side streets to see the brothels. A 10 minute wait for our train back to Haarlem and then, walking from the train station in Haarlem, Richard pointed out Haarlem's red light district, a neat looking side street with red lights burning outside some of the homes. It was hard to see it as evil or dangerous - there was a father and young child riding their bikes on the street!

Day 4 Antwerp, Bruges

From Haarlem to Bruges via Antwerp (and several other places - there were train track problems and we took 4 trains, including one or two stop backtracking!). Staff on the platform were helpful but harassed by commuters having trouble getting home.

Antwerp highlights - wonderful Markt, guild houses with golden symbols (St. George and the dragon for the crossbowmen). Lovely low key lunch at a studenty cafe, Did's Bistro - omelets with a huge salad. Antwerp is a congenial city that looks like it would repay a longer visit.

Brugge (or Bruges!) - after our train adventures, we got here safely. Our room at the B&B (Dieltiens on Waalsestraat) is in a lovely traditional Brugge home, about 30 minutes walk from the train station and 10 minute walk from the Markt. Our room was on the 3rd floor (NAmer), no elevator! 50 Euros / night, private toilet and shower, with breakfast.

Dinner on the Markt at Craenenberg. Richard tried the local beer (twice!) and I have kreik (cherry beer). He found out later that Tripel meant stronger, not the type of ingredients! Fabulous view of the square with great lighting. When I saw the photographers with their tripods, I couldn't resist and took some photos too. Walking back, the moon was rising over the belfry (belfort) and trailing light across the canal. Lovely...

Day 5 Bruges

Brugge is a lovely town, bigger than Haarlem. It is well-worth a visit for its beautiful buildings, canals and mis-en-scene. However it is very crowded and restaurants are quite expensive. Breakfast at the Dieltiens was good and plentiful. The other guests were convivial and international and breakfast chatter gave us a pleasant start to the day.

Highlights:

Jan van Eyck exhibit tracing the influence of Eyck and Netherlandish artists in Europe. Paintings are organized by connections and themes. Very illuminating. Some very lovely paintings. Well worth it. Timed ticket event. Going early (10:30 am) meant no wait - we were able to go right in. Good free booklet.

Beginhof with its simple buildings encircling a green with elm? trees. We missed the daffodils.

Walking the canals and crossing the humpy-backed bridges. Lovely vistas.

Jerusalemkerk built by the Adorne family after the return of a family member from Jerusalem with its altar with a bone and skull motif.

A forgettable dinner at Mosselkelder. Local mussels are out of season but most restaurants were serving them, including the Mosselkelder. Frites seemed to be recooked, mussels weren't bearded, no bread was offered, service was very brusque and it was expensive - about 20 Euros per person.

Day 6 Brussels day trip

Day trip to Brussels. Just a quick hour train trip (trains every half hour and a bargain - 30 Euros return for up to 3 people). We started with the Grand Place which in bright noonday sun was nice but not spectacular. Later we strolled back when the afternoon sun shone on the gilding and lit up the tracery on the buildings. Wonderful. Later still at dusk we went back again and there was a sound and light show, music filling the place. Spectacular!

We walked a lot - from St. Catherine's Square to the Palace along Louise to Sablon to the Art Nouveau district and back again to the Grand Place. Buildings were grand, large scale behemoths in the upper town - the courts, etc. In the Grand Place, there were the usual guild houses.

Coffee and cookies in a tea salon recommended by our young friend Anna started us off well. We made sure to rub the statue near it for good luck. Later take-out near St. Catherine's Square from a cheese shop - grilled flat bread sandwiches wrapped for eating on the go.

A memorable evening meal in rue des Bouchers, a restaurant street. Those words don't describe Rue des Bouchers! Two or three narrow interconnected streets closed to traffic with restaurants, just restaurants side by side, with barely enough room between tables of one restaurant and those of another for pedestrians to move by.

We chose Aux Armes de Bruxelles based on Jack's recommendation (jack-travel.com) and sat at a small table facing the narrow passage between our restaurant and the next one! I had salad and chicken waterzooi. Richard had a 4 course meal featuring chicken with endives and fish mousse. Lively, good food, a good price in spite of its touristiness! After dinner, we happened upon the son et lumiere in the Grand Place and then a stroll through Galleries St. Hubert, a grand

arcaded shopping mall and a train home at 10:31. Even at that time of night, the station was busy.

We enjoyed Brussels much more than Amsterdam. It is hard to tell whether it is the city or us! Certainly we were jet-lagged in Amsterdam.

Coming back to Brugge, we walked along a canal with the lawns covered with roosting swans and were caught by the lights and reflections of a small bridge. We took a picture - not bad - but it doesn't do justice to the quality of light, the silence, or the sheer beauty of the spot.

Day 7 Day trip to Damme

A slow start today. Stood in a line to buy bread (yummy), then in another shop, in a line to buy ham and cheese. The shop smelled wonderful! Reminded me of Italy. That's the way the locals do it!

Walked to Damme, 5 kilometers away from the outskirts of Brugge. We took a bus from the Markt closer to the start of the canal. Lovely walk along the canal. If you ever do it, be sure to keep to the left bank of the canal. About halfway along, the footpath splits from the cycle path and moves to the top of the earth dike. If you took the right bank, you would be walking or riding your bike along a very busy road.

Damme used to be a large town of 10 000 before the port silted up and then entry for goods to Brugge. Now it is a small touristy village with lots of brasseries. Nice destination for an afternoon stroll. It is trying to place itself as a used book store town, like Hay-on-Wye. Some English language books available. We visited a small museum, St. Janshospitaal with a hodge podge display of religious and local artifacts. Highlight was a wonderfully gothic fireplace in a room with a black and white tiled floor, just like in the pictures! Friendly Tourist Information office. Bused back from in front of the Stadthouse for about 2 Euros, right to the main square in Brugge.

Finally got access to the internet, at a small cyber cafe, Snooker on Noordzandstraat (a snooker hall). It is west of the Markt (follow St-Amandsstraat, then south on Noordzandstraat. Not open this morning but was at 4 pm.) Emailed home.

Dinner at Breydel-De Coninck, Breidelstraat 24 (another Jack as well as a Routard recommendation). Richard had a typical Flemish dish of eel in herb sauce - good but lots of bones and thus too much work! I had fresh fried fish - delicious. 66 Euros for two including soup for R and salad for me, 1/2 litre of wine, 2 cappuccinos, a huge ice cream dessert with Advocaat liqueur (for Richard, although I could not resist using my coffee spoon!).

Day 8 Ghent, Paris

Train to Ghent, left luggage in a locker. We felt like old hands - we helped a Flemish speaker use the techie lockers! Then we walked through Citadelpark to Museum schone Kunsten.

Ghent is a much larger city than Bruges, fewer tourists, not so cute, but with many fine buildings. During the Middle Ages it was the largest city in Europe. A likable city, busy pedestrian shopping districts, lots of students.

Highlights:

Hieronymous Bosch painting of Christ carrying the cross - an unusual close-up of realistic faces. Amazing it was painted so early (late 1400's or early 1500's).

Best of all, the retable of the adoration of the Lamb at the cathedral by Jan van Eyck and his brother. Well worth a journey. Vivid portrayal of God, Mary and the apostles and other "saved".

2.50 Euros admission included an excellent audio guide.

Lunch in the Patershall district at the Brasserie 't Klokhuis, Corduwaniersstraat 65. Friendly, english on menu, reasonably priced. I had a wonderful dish of white asparagus, smoked salmon and a light hollandaise type sauce. Richard had meat, lots of it (sausage, pork chop, bacon) with mashed potatoes with sorrel. 37 Euros for both of us, including a soup and 2 local beers for Richard.

Guild houses on the river. Not as restored as those in Brussels or in Brugge.

Took the Thalys high speed train from Brussels. Only 10 Euros extra per person on our train pass (2nd class, included reservation fee) and arrived in Paris 1 hour 40 minutes later!).

Strange behaviour by some men at the Metro / RER ticket area in Paris - one persuaded Richard that he was in the wrong queue and tried to show us how to use the ticket machine. He set us up to buy a ticket for the train, not the Metro. After we brushed him off, someone else tried to do the same thing. What is the scam? Must be one there somewhere....you can pay by credit card and must put in your PIN...

Arrived at our studio apartment at the Parisian Zen Centre (www.maisonzen.com). It is small but complete. In typical Parisian style, the front door on Rue de Lyon doesn't look promising but behind the heavy door is a common courtyard with plants and then behind our high locked gate, a lovely small garden leading to our building. Glad to be able to unpack!

Day 9 Paris! Ile de la Cite, Shakespeare and Co., Place des Vosges

We started our day with a visit to the market on Place de la Bastille, a lively place with foods, some clothing and bric-a-brac. Got some lovely white asparagus for supper. Then a wander through our new neighbourhood and into the chaos of the market at Place d'Aligre which has a more Arab atmosphere. After lunch at our apartment, we walked through the Marais, admired the Place des Vosges, through the Jewish area (Rue des Rosiers), along the Seine to Ile St-Louis and Ile de la Cite. Throngs of tourists but we managed to snag a table on a cafe terrace facing Notre Dame at Le Flore en l'ile. Expensive - the archetypal Parisian story! 16.50 Euros for a cup of coffee (with 2 chocolate truffles), a pot of tea (with extra hot water) and a flask of tap water and two scoops of wonderful Berthillon ice cream. But the location was prime!

Visited the most famous secondhand English language bookshop in the world! Shakespeare and Co. and bought a book (naturally!) Wandered along the Seine with the bells of Notre Dame ringing loudly. Home to salad plates of white asparagus, avocado, tomatoes, hard cooked eggs, etc. Lovely! Still time for another walk....

Just got back from a stroll on lively Rue de Lapp with bars and restaurants, across Place de la Bastille to Place des Vosges to see it by night. The fenced garden closed at dusk but the arcades of this royal square looked lovely in the dark. We found the internet cafe near us which might allow us to upload this. Tomorrow, Monday, is a holiday in France so many services and tourist sites will be closed.

Day 10 Paris - Montmartre

Highlights:

It is a holiday in France today. We weren't sure what would be open but we visited an internet cafe where we successfully logged on with our I-Book.

One bakery was shut but we bought two baguettes at Boulangerie Bazin, freshly made, bien sur! It is neat the way the bakery wraps the loaves, just with a twist of wrapping paper in the middle so that you can hold it in your arms or in your hand without touching the bread. Both ends of the loaves are open to the elements!

After lunch at home, we took the Metro from Bastille to Tuileries for a walk through the Passages (shopping arcades) and Montmartre. The first of these se shopping areas were built in Paris in 1776 and a little later were roofed with glass. Paris used to have some 200 of them. Today some of the passages are sadly neglected with the Bibliotheque Nationale using some for overflow and other shops seeming to be abandoned. Beautiful and still vibrant were Galerie Vivienne, Passage des Panoramas, and Passage Jouffroy. Shops are eclectic but there are many rare book, stamp and coin shops and cafes and tea shops, We also saw a hotel and a steam bath!

Montmartre on Ascension Day was packed. There was an outdoor service on the main steps and lawns and only the side stairs were open for casual visitors. Wonderful views of the city as one would expect. Place du Tertre was jammed with locals and tourists. Street artists were working standing up anywhere they could do so with their subject just standing beside them!

A glass of wine at a bistro near Le Lapin Agile to recover from the stairs!

Espace Dali - even for Dali lovers like Richard, it seemed overpriced for what it offered.

Montmartre vineyard - this small vineyard is still in operation. Every year the community makes 300 litres of wine which is sold for community projects. Just past the vineyard are the two remaining windmills (real) of Montmartre.

We walked downhill through touristy shops, then swanky apartments, then the rough and tumble of lower Montmartre and Pigalle. The Moulin Rouge MUST look better at night! It is surrounded by peep shows and sex shops.

Then a walk to Opera Garnier to catch a bus home. The opera house is amazing, built for Napoleon III. Cadogan guidebook calls it “the supreme monument of the Second Empire”. This is the building featured in The Phantom. It is absolutely huge and impressive.

And so, home! The bus let us off just a few doors away!

Day 11 Paris - Promenade Plantee, A La Biche Au Bois

A trip by Metro to the American Express office near Opera - the large bank near us would not cash our Euro travelers' cheques - so that we could pay our rent! Next time, we will look at paying into our Visa card so some other method. I can see why less formal accommodation (B&B's, etc) don't accept traveler's cheques, even though they are denominated in Euros - it seems such a hassle to cash them. We didn't feel comfortable in carrying that much money through the streets but it is done... In the Metro, a man touched my backpack purse. He couldn't get into it and there was little inside anyway. I carefully had my valuables in my money belt.

A grocery shopping trip to a small supermarket, then to Beauveau / Place d'Aligre market for some fruit and veg (strawberries, 2 Euros per kilo!), and then to the boulangerie. Europeans (at least in Haarlem, Bruges and Paris) seem content to queue to buy bread, meat, etc. It forces us to slow down and enjoy life!

This afternoon a walk along the Promenade Plantee, a raised garden walking path built on an old railway viaduct. The roses were blooming and it was quiet three stories above the street. It is fairly extensive, wide enough to accommodate a sunbathing grassy bowl and water features. Under the gardens are boutiques built into the arches of the viaduct. We exited near Jardins de Reuilly and walked to Place des Nations and back along Faubourg St. Antoine. We peeked into some tiny streets which still have furniture makers and ebenistes, the traditional trades of the neighbourhood.

Dinner tonight at a small restaurant around the corner - we had reserved this morning during our shopping trip. A La Biche Au Bois is a “typical” Parisian bistrot at 45 avenue Ledru Rollin and seems untouristy - others around us were

speaking French and many were shaking hands with the “patron” on leaving. Service was friendly and the staff were willing and able to translate menu items if required. We chose the 21 Euro “menu” of four courses with choices for each course. My river fish mousse (sorry, I forget the name), smooth and creamy was served with a tangy red pepper sauce. Richard had terrine au lapin served with a pot of gherkins. We both had the salmon with forest mushrooms as main course. Then cheese - my choice was a blue Auvergne, Richard, Brie and Camembert. Then creme caramel for me and Poires Belle Helene for Richard. We had the house Bordeaux and a half bottle of sparkling mineral water, then coffee. Total price (incl service!) was 57 Euros. We could see why the house was packed - good food and good value. It wouldn't be somewhere for a tete a tete - our tables were packed together, but still a memorable meal. The only problem is that Richard complained that he had to drink too much of the wine - I didn't have my share! The restaurant has been recommended by: Zagat, Cheap Eats, Cadogan, Routard, Michelin Red Guide. You must reserve!

About tipping - we have read various comments about this and saw from our neighbouring table that, if happy, you can leave some change - they left three or four euros (there were three Parisian guests at the next table). It is easy to do when paying cash. BTW, A La Biche Au Bois does take credit cards.

Day 12 Paris - Orsay, Cluny, Sainte-Chapelle

A busy day! We bought 3 day museum passes from the Metro ticket seller along with another carnet of 10 Metro tickets. When we arrived at Musee d'Orsay, we were glad to move to the front of the line with other pass holders. Best of all, we had arrived just before opening and so were among the first to go in. We whizzed to the top floor to see the major paintings and I had Dejeuner Sur L'Herbe all to myself!

Highlights -

Of course, some many wonderful paintings! I was pleased to see Monet's picture of Westminster, his water lilies, Van Gogh's painting of Auvers-sur-Oise church (such vivid blues), and the reflective water in many other paintings. We moved down through the building to see other pieces, including some fabulous Art Nouveau furniture.

By the time we left a couple of hours later, the museum was crowded and viewing more difficult.

Lunch at a small cafe, just a baguette sandwich for me and a croque-monsieur for Richard at Au Comptoir de Saintes Peres. We sat outside almost alone. No other Parisians wanted to escape cigarette smoke as badly as we did!

We wandered through St. Germain des Pres, paid homage to the very first department store in the world, Au Bon Marche (great food hall), then to some famous cafes, Les Deux Magots, Brasserie Lipp, Cafe Flore and Le Procope and on to the Musee Nationale du Moyen-Age (Cluny).

Highlights - their prize possession are several tapestries depicting the lady and the unicorn. It is interesting to note that the colour had faded substantially in the portion repaired in the nineteenth century but the original portions were still vivid.

We also enjoyed some interesting detailed stained glass which reproduced etchings. The collection covers ecclesiastical accouterments, stonework from other churches, notably Notre Dame, manuscripts (calendars, Gregorian chant) and more.

Then to really get our money's worth, we walked to Sainte-Chapelle near Notre Dame. I had heard that this church was awesome but Richard was dubious. The lower chapel, a local parish church is colourful but...

When we went upstairs to the main church, it was wonderful! Huge stained glass windows that covered almost all the walls, light as air ceiling with a blue starry pattern (the decoration / colour scheme reminded me of Notre Dame in Montreal) and those incredible windows. What can I say? When in Paris, see it!

Then we walked home along Rue de Rivoli and Saint Antoine to a homemade white asparagus, cheese and ham omelet!

Day 13 May 23rd, our 29th wedding anniversary - Picasso, Pompidou, Les Halles

We decided that Square Trousseau seemed a likely location for a celebratory dinner but I wanted to see the menu myself. We walked over and booked - there looks like some yummy choices on the menu for tonight.

My French is getting better with practice. I am managing to retrieve long lost vocabulary. The stereotype is that Parisians are rude when you speak bad French but that hasn't been my experience.

Today we visited two museums, Picasso and Pompidou - a change of pace from yesterday's ancient art! The Picasso Museum has a fairly wide range of art but no biggies. I did see one or two paintings I liked - in particular, a lovely small painting of two women running on the beach. Richard noticed after that this picture was chosen to be on the cover of our museum card holders / brochure.

The Georges Pompidou centre is an extraordinary building with all the services (plumbing, elevators, etc.) on the outside. It didn't look as huge as the pictures of it imply but after looking at the permanent art collection, I would say it is big enough!

First we ate our picnic lunch on the steps of a church overlooking some colourful fountains and water toys. We had picked up pain au chocolat from a boulangerie on our walks - scrumptious! Light croissant pastry, a creamy filling of chocolate...And then we ate our apples, like a good boy and girl!

The view from the top floor of the centre is wonderful - in the distance, the grand arch of La Defense, closer to us, Notre Dame and on the hillside, Sacre Coeur. Then the art! Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou (Beaubourg) focuses on art after 1905. We started from the earliest works on the 5th floor - all the big names and some paintings I recognized. After too much Jackson Pollock, we were impressed by some paintings by Dado, in particular one of the slaughter of the innocents which used running red paint over the faces of a multitude of children. You had to look closely to see the children. Chilling. On a lighter note, I saw some interesting photos, many of Paris by Doisneau and Cartier-Bresson (?)

The lower floor has the most modern works - installations, furniture, multimedia, etc. Some amusing and interesting, many tedious (at least to us!) The museum was not busy except for school groups. I guess the hordes were at the Orsay or the Louvre! By the time we left the building, there were more buskers and other people just hanging out! A great people watching place.

We went to see the "new" Les Halles, now a shopping centre. Critics seem to uniformly condemn the new building and its effect on the neighbourhood. Interestingly, they have put the mall building below grade with a park at street

level surrounding it. We didn't bother going in but admired the mirrored effect of the building and the reflections of the church. Lots of tourists hanging around.

We walked through a vibrant pedestrian street, Rue Montorgueil with fishmongers, boulangeries, and more. We walked through part of Sentier, the garment district along side streets and rue Reaumur. I wanted to go to the discount store Tati which I had seen featured on a Lonely Planet television show and so we walked to Republic. It turned out to quite a small branch with no changing rooms. With the help of three older women, I tried on a dress over my clothes (they were doing the same thing!) So I got my bargain Parisian dress...hope it fits without my jeans and blouse!

Richard had been waiting outside with the rest of the husbands and then we went across to a brasserie to recover - biere pression for him and a grand cafe creme for me. All drinks at sidewalk cafes are about the same price - my large coffee, Richard's draught and a small mineral water each were about 3 Euros.

In our walk home, we passed a lock on Canal St. Martin after a small boat had gone through. Richard would have liked to have seen the whole operation. Then back to Blvd. Richard Lenoir and home to get ready for dinner at Le Square Trousseau. We passed the official International Youth Hostel on Richard Lenoir on our way back. The location is good and the lobby was bustling with happy young people. It looks like a good place to stay.

We chose this restaurant because it has a Belle Epoque interior and the reviews are good, moderate in price and within easy walking distance. The meal was good, a little more expensive than A La Biche au Bois (no prix fixe or formule) and seems very much a neighbourhood place (regulars got complimentary aperitifs).

Richard has scallops with lemon and olives - the scallops were very small (chopped?) but dish was very tasty. I had tomatoes with mozzarella - sizable, good and with creamy cheese but perhaps a better sharing plate. Richard had a small rack of lamb with mushrooms, eggplant and green beans in a brown sauce (??!) - excellent. I had duck slices with caramelized carrot - tasty but I wished that I had had the courage to ask for rare, not medium! My dessert was peaches in butterscotch sauce, light and sweet. Richard had "exotic" fruit (not really!) with a biscuit on top (like a brandy snap). Coffee came with soft chocolate fudge. Next time, I will forgo dessert and wait for the fudge - delicious! We shared a half bottle of Morgon and of sparkling mineral water.

An enjoyable meal - Richard said he liked it better than A La Biche Au Bois because his was lighter....

As far as atmosphere, our table was marginally more private but still the next table had to be moved to allow me to get out of my seat. And there were some young friends of the staff or management celebrating someone's birthday rather boisterously. But c'est la vie!

We did learn a few things - that there is sometimes a house wine by carafe NOT on the menu and that it is acceptable in Paris (as it is at home!) to share starters. I wondered how all those French stay so slim with multi-course meals!

Day 14 - Versailles

I set our alarm clock so that we could get an early start. I nipped out to the boulangerie around the corner to get a baguette and got waylaid by some pain au chocolat. We had decided we would pack a lunch because the territory is so big.

We took the RER suburban train from Austerlitz to Versailles Rive Gauche. The RER station and ticket counter is below the main line station. Price: just under 5 euros return for each of us for our 45 minute train journey. It is a short walk from the train station to the Chateau.

We arrived at 10 am, just in time for a guided tour (4 euros on top of entry fee - covered by the third day of our 3 day museum pass) whose theme was the daily life of Louis XIV. It was wonderful, highly recommended. The guide, part of the Musees de France, was knowledgeable, our group was small (just 6 of us) and we were able to visit a few rooms only open to those on a tour or those who rent the audio guide. Because our guide had huge keys to doors that block the general public, we were able to move from room to room the way the king would have, not the courtiers with the added bonus that we avoided the crowds. We also learned some interesting details about the kings, architectural style, daily life, and the palace itself - for example, that the Hall of Mirrors cost more than the rooms with paintings, that Venetian craftsmen with the secret of mirror-making was invited to come to France to train craftsmen.

After our tour, we were able to make a complete circuit of the public rooms on our own. By this time the palace was packed and we shuffled through with incipient claustrophobia! We decided to save the garden until later because it was a little

drizzly and cool. so we walked to the two Trianons (covered by museum pass). I really liked the Grand Trianon - the brightness of the rooms and the lightness of the furnishings (Empire). Then to Le Hameau, Marie-Antoinette's private fantasy village, complete with thatched cottages, fanciful architecture, animals and gardens. Lovely cottage gardens of white calla lilies.

There is a fee now to visit the main gardens, 3 euros (not covered by museum pass) but worthwhile. The ticket is good for the whole day (multiple entry). We visited just some of the bosquets (groves) because the grounds are so vast. We had seen the fanciful paintings of the Versailles gardens in the Grand Trianon which illustrated these groves. Especially impressive were:

the ballroom (rocaille) which was designed like a Roman amphitheatre with a cascade decorated with millstones and shells brought back from the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea by the royal navy. This is the only grove that is entirely authentic and intact.

Baths of Apollo with sculptures in a grotto.

Colonnade Grove with Persephone

Best of all, because the fountain was playing, Encelade Grove with the chief of the Titans. Water gushed from his finger tips and sprayed high in the air. It gave us a taste of what the others must be like when they are working.

By this time it was about 3:30 and we decided to see whether we could see the chateau again without the crowds. We were able to walk through the rooms at a reasonable pace, stop and appreciate the spectacle and the grandeur.

We took a short walk in the town of Versailles before we took the train home. There was a delay with the trains - no explanation and the sign boards did not match the trains. But they all go to Paris and we had seats! Still we had to be serenaded by some accordionists again...

Laundry tonight after a quick supper. We had been washing shirts and undies out by hand but I decided we could not wait any longer! Quick and efficient and just around the corner. 3.40 euros for a 7 kg load. 1 euro for 10 minutes drying time.

Day 15 Paris walkabout, Institut du Monde Arabe Luxembourg Gardens

We headed for Marche d'Aligre near us to get some cheese and something for dinner. It was even more boisterous than our previous visit, jammed with food stands, clothing stalls and household goods. After a quick look around (strawberries were 1 euro a kilo today!), we decided to try the market building. I queued for cheese while Richard cruised the market, ostensibly looking for other items. People seem quite content to stand in line here, especially if it is for food! However, we did notice several queues at photofinishers the other day and again today. They can't be just picking up their holiday snaps because the Japan Camera shop had no queue. A mystery!

I bought several cheeses including some wonderfully runny brie and a small piece of sweet butter. I also risked getting a small goat cheese, Rocamadour (85 cents, Euro cents!) because Richard is not fond of goat and I am not sure about me! On the way back, we stopped at Bazin boulangerie and bought a couple of fresh still warm baguettes (actually Bazinettes!). Home to a lunch of the brie and the French bread. Heaven!

Since it was Saturday, we thought we would walk to Luxembourg Gardens and we crossed the Seine at Austerlitz train station. On the way past Gare de Lyon, we looked in the Train Bleu, a famous restaurant that has featured in several movies. Breakfast looked affordable so we might go back.

We also stopped to ask at the tourist information booth about the museum passes (now 30 Euros for 3 days) and indeed, Carnavalet is no longer included. We may not get another one except perhaps a 1 day pass to avoid queuing at the Louvre.

We were interested in the Institut du Monde Arabe which many claim to be the most beautiful recent building in Paris and it is wonderful. The one wall of the building has an outer shell of mechanical oculi or eyes which open and shut to adjust the light in the building, operated by high tech wizardry (photo electric cells, perhaps). This gives the building an unusual facade as well as creating interesting light patterns inside. We went in (free except must pass through security x- ray) and went to the observation deck on the top floor for a great view of Notre Dame. The vantage point faces the end of the Ile de la Cite.

From there we walked along to Place Contrescarpe, one of Rick Steves' recommended areas to stay in Paris. It looks wonderful, lively, full of cafes, families, music and joie de vivre! We wandered down Rue Mouffetard, a market street with strolling Parisians and energetic salespeople including a carpet cleaner demonstrator. I noticed that berry prices was higher here than our market...

Although the afternoon was wearing on, the Luxembourg Gardens was still crowded with Parisians relaxing. We went to see the manege, the merry-go-round which Richard had just read about in "Paris to the Moon" by Adam Gopnik. Children have little sticks to grab rings from a contraption the operator holds as they go around. Some experienced kids had managed to snaffle half a dozen. We were amused to see some of the lawns labeled Pelouse Autorise. Some tourists got hustled off the unauthorized lawns and we heard them asking each other about it in great confusion. The gardens seem to have everything from tennis and a basketball court to fountains, a puppet theatre and pony rides for children.

We decided to walk back along Rue de St-Andre-des-Arts which is a narrow medieval street recommended by one guidebook. From there, onto Ile de la Cite past Notre Dame, on to the next island along Rue Saint-Louis to get a Berthillon ice cream (ginger!) and home by a shortcut across the Canal St. Martin.

For dinner we made a potato and cheese dish we have made at home. It is from Elizabeth David's French country cookbook. Here however we were able to make it with Cantal cheese which made it especially tasty with some of French thin green beans.

I have decided that canoe tripping is good practice for cooking with two burners (really a hotplate), two pots and a fry pan. There was salt, pepper and thyme in the cupboard when we arrived. We bought Dijon mustard, lemons, olive oil, a tube of tomato paste as staples. Together with cheese, eggs, cooked ham, fresh bread, fruit and vegetables, we are eating extremely well. I also discovered fromage frais with 0% fat content which is great with fruit. The studio has a French press coffee maker (Bodum type), tea pot, basic dishes and cutlery, an electric kettle and of course, wine glasses. On a canoe trip, we don't have the luxury of a fridge or a kitchen sink, so we are all set.

Day 16 Arc de Triomphe, Les Grands Boulevards, Jardin du Tuileries et plus!

We reserved our Loire Valley chateaux day trip with Acco-Dispo this morning. The company provides shuttle service between a set list of chateaux each day. We also made our TGV reservations (6 euros each on a early morning weekday train). This will be another of our train pass days and we realize that three weeks in Paris is not really very long!

After a browse through the Bastille /Richard Lenoir market, we took the Metro to Etoile. When we arrived at the Arc de Triomphe, it was pouring. An enterprising salesman was hawking umbrellas for 5 euros. Thankfully we had our jackets and I had my trusty foldup umbrella in my bag. However, we did shelter with others in the lee of a magazine vendor's shop during the heaviest rain.

Much of that area was blocked off because President Bush was here. We crossed to stand under the arch and then later, because the road was closed to traffic, we were able to stand in the middle of the road and take a couple of photos. We did not go up into the arch - it was still pouring and visibility was poor. But we could see La Defense in the distance and could appreciate the layout of the streets.

From there, we walked along Champs-Élysées to Place de la Concorde with its obelisk. Because of the traffic interruption further back, it was lighter than usual (also it is Sunday) and so we were able to appreciate the place. Beautiful buildings surround the Place and a good view of the Champs-Élysées.

We walked through Tuileries gardens to the Louvre and took tea in Cafe Marly overlooking the glass pyramid. Prices are strange in Paris. It was 5 Euros for tea whereas ordinary cafes charge about 3. I had anticipated a bigger bill, considering the location. Food is pricier - Richard's delicious mille-feuilles was 10 Euros.

From there to Place Vendome, a beautiful square with a bride and groom posing against their car and very expensive shops such as Cartier and Van Cleef and Arpels. Then to Les Halles through Place des Victoires to the streets around Saint Denis, all that is left of the old neighbourhood when they pulled down the original market. The area is a strange combination of local cafes and peep shows. Then on to the Pompidou in time to catch the end of an outdoor show featuring climbers "dancing" against a giant wall, all set to music.

Then along the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois which was crowded with shoppers into Place des Vosges. And then home via Bastille. We finally took a picture of the monument!

Every day when we get back home, I ask Richard to figure out our distance that day. Next time, I will buy a pedometer! Now we have to guess by my sore thighs and by the squares on Richard's Michelin map. Paris Atlas Par Arrondissements has been extremely useful. We bought it in Toronto at Open Air bookstore on Toronto Street before we left. Absolutely an essential travel tool.

Day 17 African Paris

A frustrating morning at the Internet cafe. For some reason, we could not connect even though we had not changed our network settings since we used our iBook there last. Finally I just checked my e-mail but no upload of this travelogue. To console ourselves we bought pain au chocolat (small one for me!) and took it home for elevenses!

Then we took the Metro to Chateau-Rouge and browsed in the batik fabric shops. I was thinking about buying some fabric which they sell in set dress lengths (6 metres). There was so much choice of patterns and fabric qualities, all very bright and vibrant. However, I didn't buy any after all. This area has many African shops and services and many of the locals were in wonderfully colourful traditional clothing. It would be even more interesting on market day.

We walked to Rochechoart, Place du Delta and had lunch at a little cafe, Le Diplomat, chosen without recommendations and without a guidebook! My duck with olives and a side of noodles with a garnish of cheese was good (8 euros) and Richard tried croque madame with a fried egg on top, washed down with a glass of beer for him and of Beaujolais for me.

I left him to coffee while I went across the road to Tati. Now this is TATI! They own most but not all of the shops along the road, each with its own specialty - undies if you want to buy French knickers, men's clothing, household goods and even Tati Or for jewelry. I went to the main (women's) store and browsed. They don't actually have a lot of merchandise but the prices are good and the quality is fair for the price. Sizes are quite small so larger women (size 16 and up) may want to try the Tatissimo department. In this shop, there were fitting rooms (cabines) but most people were either browsing or taking advantage of the easy

exchange policy because I never had to wait for a room. I managed to find a typically French looking navy and white T shirt.

Richard had enjoyed his wait sipping his coffee with a view of Sacre Coeur over the roof tops and in particular, of the street washing crew! These city cleaners come with a foreman dressed in jeans and the workers, dressed in fluorescent green waterproofs. They turn on the water in the gutters and direct its flow with small rolled diverters (they actually look like pieces of carpet). It seems to be quite a science! They also have auxiliary water sprayers, a motorcycle brigade, sweepers, etc.

We wandered to the little street, rue Steinkerque that leads to the foot of Sacre Coeur. Still many tourists but not as many as on Sunday. From there towards Les Halles to find A. Simon on rue Montmartre. This shop sells equipment for the restaurant and cafe trade. Rue Montmartre changes direction - half of it joins rue Poisonnerie and the rest runs perpendicular to that. That is easier to say than to find! City blocks in Paris are NOT four-sided, nor can you just cross the street. Usually the crosswalks or the pedestrian crossing lights are situated so that you must cross several streets to get where you want to go. Also, every "corner" usually is cut by five or six streets. One must carefully look for street names whenever you cross the street!

We had a coffee break in a boulangerie after I confirmed that yes, they had coffee and toilets! It was extremely cheap, just over 3 euros for 2 cups of cafe au lait. In Europe, many shops only have one staff person on duty at one time. This is contrary to police who seem to go about in huge groups. Vans of them roll by. Other vans are stopped and inside are police filling in forms. Today we did see one police car on its own and it almost forced us off the crosswalk although it was our right of way. We figured it must have been lonely and trying to find the rest of its group. Richard proposes that the police here need donut shops in which to congregate.

By the time we got to Hotel de Ville, the rain got much heavier. It has been raining on and off for the last two days but with our jackets and my trusty umbrella and a little judicious cafe sitting, we have been fine. However, we decided to duck into the Metro. At Bastille, the gutters were like rivers and still it rains! After our two snacks and my duck lunch, we weren't very hungry so we went to Flo Prestige, traiteur, near Bastille and bought volailles with morilles, just ready for reheating.

Tomorrow we have to be up early for our TGV train to Tours. I am hoping that it rains itself out overnight.

Day 18 Loire valley excursion

Yesterday we took the TGV from Montparnasse to Tours - just about 1 hour (on our Eurail pass, 3 euros reservation fee each seat for each way for a total 12). We had booked with Acco-Dispo Tours (<http://www.accodispo-tours.com>) because it was well recommended on Rick Steves' bulletin board and I can see why. Pascal and the driver of the second van, Marcel were friendly and competent, the commentary (Pascal ad-libbing through the car radio from the other van) was useful and amusing, the selection of sites was very good and the time allotted to each destination was just about right.

We met Pascal just across the street from the Tours train station at the tourist information office. He had already picked up some passengers who were staying in Amboise. One man in our van was along for his second day. Our itinerary: Azay Le Rideau, Villandry gardens, lunch in Tours on our own, Chenonceau, Amboise, Le Clos Luce in Amboise and a wine tasting in the bottom of the Amboise castle - a full day!

Just a bit about the tour - our itinerary cost 37 euros each with discounts at all sites except Chenonceau bringing the effective cost to about 30 euros. It is not a "tour" but a shuttle service. On the drive, Pascal gave us some history of the building we were about to see; the van brought us to a site, as close to the ticket booth as possible; Pascal escorted us through the ticket buying in order to get us the discount; then he told us when and where we needed to be for pickup. And then we were on our own. Each van held a maximum of 8 people and we were two vans. Commentary is available in English, French and German. Other languages are available by tape. In our van, Marcel played Japanese tapes for some young women after the English commentaries by Pascal. Some variation to the itinerary was made for those staying in Amboise - they were scooted off to another site because they could see Clos Luce and Amboise on their own. Hey, it worked! and well. Richard and I would heartily recommend this type of service and Acco-Dispo in particular.

Azay Le Rideau

Our first destination was a very romantic building with fairy-tale turrets. The inside was fairly small but interesting with state and private apartments and then some

19th century rooms (kitchen, billiard room, etc.). It repaid walking in the grounds - lovely reflections of the chateau in the moat.

Villandry

We walked up to the belvedere as suggested by Pascal and at the overlook, the gardens spread below took our breath away. Absolutely stunning. The amazing patterns of low hedges and plants, the SIZE of the gardens! Then when we walked down to look more closely, we could see that the red leaves were of lettuces and the ferny leaves were carrots.... We had been told on the drive about the vegetables but we thought that Pascal had mistranslated a word! But no, it was a beautifully laid out vegetable and herbal garden with rose arbours. There is a reflecting pond which wasn't working - too much wind and too much rain but that didn't seem to bother the swans. But the gardens were quiet apart from our constant companions yesterday, school groups! If you have been to Villandry, you will know better than I can say how amazing it is. If you haven't, take the opportunity one day and see for yourself!

We had a quick lunch in Tours and then joined the regrouped tour (some were taking half days only) for a drive to Chenonceau.

Chenonceau is one of those places you know - very familiar from photos, from television programs about history or architecture so it was a thrill to actually see it. They are in the process of cleaning the front so when you go, it will look even better! Chenonceau is much more isolated than the other houses we saw but as with Azay, strongly connected with women. As at Azay also, there is not a lot of furniture but it is choice. My favourite part was the long gallery over the river Cher, with its chalk and slate tiled floor and big windows overlooking the river. The room is full of light, even on a rainy day and has such history. The bridge was built by Diane de Poitiers and the gallery was built on it by Catherine de Medici. The two gardens give good views of the gallery and its famous arching supports. We got some good photos, we think. I had to hold the umbrella over the camera so it wouldn't get wet.

Le Clos Luce is in Amboise and was where Leonardo da Vinci died. Richard and I visited Vinci, his birthplace in Tuscany in October 2000 with my brother Jamie and sister-in-law Joyce so we have seen both ends of Leonardo! In addition to some fine rooms, some purporting to be Leonardo's bedroom, kitchen, etc. there is a small Renaissance garden.

And on to Amboise, a huge castle within sight of Leonardo's bedroom window - there exists a picture by him of the castle from his window. It is different from our earlier visits with its defensive structure, built high over the town. A very nice small chapel near the entrance and great views from the towers with wild flowers growing in nooks and crannies. Great washes of scarlet poppies, my favourite.

Amboise itself is a pretty small town of just 1500 or so. A nice central area with shopping and cafes, good location on the river. It would make a nice stopping place for a few days. We were not impressed by Tours, at least what we saw later in a half hour stroll. We decided that the train station was just as interesting!

Our last stop of the our day was a degustation, a wine tasting, which is free. If you are in Amboise, just drop in. With Pascal's help, we worked our way through several white wines, some bubbly and red. Wine prices were very reasonable and we bought a bottle of Sauvignon. In the next room, you could try pates and other foods. Some of our group bought some - it seemed good value compared to the same products in the shop windows in Tours.

Our TGV trip back to Paris was quick and uneventful. The train whizzes at 300 Km a hour and when it passes a TGV going the other way, the whole train rattles for a few seconds. If you are fast, you can see the other train, but you do have to be fast or it is gone.

When the train staff checked tickets on the train, he said that should have stamped our TGV reservation card before we got on the train. We hadn't done so because we thought that filling in the date on our Eurail pass and carrying the reservation card was enough. We knew that you must stamp train tickets (composter) but the conductor when we were going to Tours did not say anything about this. Live and learn!

Evidently the Montparnasse area is known for crepes and we thought we would have some on arrival. I carefully noted the suggestion from "Great Eats", 67 rue de Montparnasse. We hadn't brought our map book but we checked the area map displayed in the train station. Well, we walked (in the rain!) and couldn't find it nor any creperies that looked salubrious. Eventually we decided we had to eat (9:45 pm) and chose Leon de Bruxelles, a chain that specializes in mussels. Richard said that his were better than Bruges and cheaper! My pasta was ho-hum but it was just what I needed. Main courses were about 10 euros (unlimited refills of frites, even with my pasta!).

When we got home, a check of our map book showed that there are two streets which intersect, rue de Montparnasse and boulevard de Montparnasse. We had been looking on the boulevard! Ah well, another day.

Day 19

We had a dinner date with an Australian couple and an American from our online travel discussion group, TheTravelzine at La Gavroche at 8 pm. We walked through to Beaubourg to a large cafe on a square on a pedestrianized street near Les Halles.. The rain seems finally to have stopped and it was great people watching weather. Although we were in a relatively touristy area, “real” Parisians were in the majority: children alone or with their parents, people meeting friends or going home from work, young people on their way out for the evening.

In spite of the recent success of right wing politicians, it is encouraging to see that younger Parisians seem fairly well integrated. We saw couples and groups of young people made up of blacks and whites. This may not be the same for older Parisians because we did not notice any older integrated groups.

There is electioneering all around town. There are large metal hoardings in each arrondissement for posters. We have seen candidates glad-handing at markets. The next step in their elections is coming soon, just as we leave Paris, I think.

We wandered through to the Opera district and joined some other step sitters at the Opera Garnier to watch the hectic traffic and the traffic police. People here like to watch the world go by and steps which cost nothing are popular. The Opera Bastille is another popular step sitting location with a great view of Place de la Bastille.

We arrived at La Gavroche before Gavin and Cheryl Crawford, the Australians. Jonathan Chimene was expected about an hour later at 9 pm. Gavin and Cheryl were charming and amusing dinner companions and so was Jonathan. Proof: we left the restaurant at 1:15 am and the Metro had stopped. We were amazed that we had been talking for five hours!

Good food with a strong emphasis on beef (I had duck and Richard had ham and lentils) and their own wine - 4 bottles of it! The patron? was jovial and teasing and took photos of us with our cameras for posting on TheTravelzine web site. Jonathan will write up a report. We talked about past travel (Tuscany and Lucca in particular), current travel plans, Australia, the Canadian and American dollar,

tennis (Jonathan was in Paris for the tennis match), the book industry and more. Richard was amazed that the Internet could bring together people like this.

When we heard about the closed Metro, we decided to walk home rather than take a taxi, taking care to plot our path along main streets with car traffic and occasional other pedestrians. Once we got to Rue du Rivoli in the Marais there were others leaving restaurants, etc. We arrived home around 2 am. So we haven't headed off to Chartres this morning as planned!

Day 20 Chartres

This morning we got a late start because of last night's dinner. Again we took the bus from outside our building to Montparnasse train station and arrived just five minutes before the next train was leaving.

The train journey took just over an hour on a TER train - first class isn't very classy! We arrived at Chartres well before Malcolm Miller's guided talk on the cathedral. We ate our sandwiches which I had packed in a little park behind the cathedral and wandered the pretty town until 14:45.

The meeting point for the tours is just outside the bookshop in the cathedral. Tickets are not sold ahead of time but special arrangements can be made (see the Chartre cathedral website for a link and more information).

Mr. Miller has been given this tour for 40 odd years and is interesting and amusing. Some members of the audience had heard him 20 years ago or so! The charge for adults is 10 euros with discounted prices for students. Well-behaved children under 10 (?) were free. He told us about the previous buildings on the site, the context in which the cathedral was built and then focused on the stories told by some of the stained glass windows and a stone doorway talking about the connections between the Old and New Testament, the New Jerusalem and more. He has a great grasp of the material and the ability to communicate it to non-experts. Well worthwhile.

I would have been interested in visiting on a Friday when the labyrinth on the floor of the cathedral is uncovered and can be followed. I had never heard about this feature of Chartres. There is a religious and pagan context to this maze and many cathedrals used to have them. They were designed to simulate the pilgrimage to the Holy Land for those who could not do so (during the Middle Ages). Moving through the labyrinth is supposed to make the faithful feel that

they have been on a journey. Mr. Miller said that it attracts school groups, however, and the children can be boisterous.

After the presentation, we wandered the pretty back streets around the cathedral and in the lower town near the Eure River. We had picked up a walking tour and map brochure from the tourist information office when we had arrived and I had notes from Jack's page (jack-travel.com). We saw the clothes washing areas by the riverbanks that Jack mentions - in fact, one had laundry pegged out to dry, although I doubt that the sheets had been washed in the river!

Tea break at a swanky tea shop and then back to the cathedral for another view. We looked again at the window that Mr. Miller had discussed - it was newly restored and looked so fabulous compared to the dirty dark upper windows which are still waiting for cleaning. We also looked at the side of the cathedral where the stone has just been cleaned. The stone is creamy colour, quite lovely, and as he said, there are traces of coloured paint on some of the statues. It is hard to imagine the colourful interiors of the churches when we look at them now. He said that Amiens cathedral, I believe, does a special light show that simulates the original colouring of the interior. That would be worth seeing. There is a picture in his newest book.

After a further stroll in the town, we decided against eating in Chartres and try the crepes restaurant near Montparnasse. When we got to Creperie de Josselin, we couldn't believe that it was just around the corner from Leon de Bruxelles where we had eaten as a substitute. And there are quite a few creperies on RUE de Montparnasse!

I had a simple (a half serving) of forestiere (mushrooms) and Richard went all out with one filled with eggplant and topped with fried eggs and bacon. He said his was delicious and very generously filled compared to crepes in Canada. Mine was good too. The crepe itself is made with very dark flour and is quite strong tasting. We shared a dessert crepe with bananas, chocolate, rum and cocoanut ice cream. It was flambéed at the table - no big production, the hostess just uses her lighter on it! We shared a pichet of cider (75 cl) which was very tasty. A good quick tasty meal for about 27 euros. It was extremely crowded however: it is not a good place for a romantic meal or a tete a tete. Late in the evening might be different - this was 7:30 or so.

We decided to walk home to work off the crepes! We walked through to St. Germain des Pres, past the famous cafes (evidently the hot chocolate at Les

Deux Magots is incredibly rich and luscious!) down the lively rue de Buci and onto Ile de Cite . On the Pont St. Louis leading to Ile St. Louis a string quartet was busking. We stopped to listen for a while. Richard noted that even the motorcycles paid homage to the musicians by idly by rather than roaring through.

The weather has improved again and is supposed to be warm for the next day or so. There were many people along the river enjoying the pleasant evening and each other's company.

We took the shortcut home across the Canal St. Martin, up Jules Cezar and presto! we're home.

Day 21 Paris - lunch, Pere-Lachaise cemetery, Belleville

We walked to Gare du Lyon to make our TGV reservations to Dijon for Wednesday. We decided that we wanted to get our money's worth from the last day of our rail pass. The young girl seemed surprised that we wanted to go and return the same day but with the TGV we can go so much further in the same time as places served only by regular trains.

Then on to lunch at L'Ebauchoir at 45 rue Citeaux, not too far away. This small restaurant is recommended by several books and by Jack of jack-travel.com and it should be. The food was excellent and very good value. We both found something we liked on the cheaper 12 euro menu - salmon and rouget in a red pepper sauce for me and lamb kidneys in a balsamic vinegar based sauce for Richard. My plate was garnished with a round of black olive flan and cooked leek. Richard's plate held pommes Anna (yummy potatoes!) and fried julienned celeriac. Our starters were a red cabbage coleslaw, very tangy for me and hard boiled eggs with thin mayo for R. Wine, mineral water or other beverage was included in the 12 euros and we chose red wine, quite drinkable. For dessert, Richard chose the house specialty, rice pudding with a caramelly topping, creamy and wonderful. I had very good pot de creme caramel, very good too. Coffee was extra but only 50 cents each for espresso and the waitress was kind enough to put a "gout de lait" in mine. Friendly service by a waitress who spoke a little English - she offered to translate the menu for us but we didn't need that. Very plain room but clean. Definitely recommended!

The only problem is that Richard said I didn't drink my share of the wine and we needed to walk it all off. So we set off for Pere-Lachaise cemetery to see some graves. We found Jim Morrison's grave with a small coterie of young people

around it - kids born after he had died. There were momentos on top of the stone.

We found Oscar Wilde's grave, covered with lipsticked kisses. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas's joint monument had little stones and a shell on it. We also saw Abelard and Heloise's grand monument near the entrance. We almost overlooked it because it said abbess on one side.

Finding graves is difficult although our guidebook had a map. We should have bought a larger map at a florist before going into the cemetery. Even though we did not find all of the graves we wished to see, the cemetery is impressive and atmospheric. In the older part of the cemetery, graves are close together, with just a random path between areas, almost like an old medieval city. There are many interesting mausoleums and statues and lovely trees. A great day for our visit because it is a lovely sunny day - enfin!

We walked through Belleville, up to the top of the park. We ran into a film crew, the second one that day. We were looking for the road in Jules and Jim which according to Jack is in that area. No luck but we did get to look at a different aspect of Parisian life. Some of the streets still have older traditional houses but there has been some ugly redevelopment of some sections.

Back along rue de Belleville and rue de Faubourg du Temple which were jammed with pedestrians. Many different ethnic groups seem to live in this area - we saw Muslim butchers, Chinese restaurants and grocers. Then to boulevard Richard Lenoir, Maigret's home, and home to a salad sort of Nicoise, with green beans and hard boiled eggs cooked yesterday, artichoke hearts and white asparagus tips from the deli section of the supermarket with fresh baguette just bought at the boulangerie on the corner.

Day 22 Invalides, Napoleon's Tomb, Musee de l'Armee

After a quick e-mail to my work at the cyber cafe, we took the Metro to Champs-Élysées. We walked across the Pont Alexandre III, very grand with gold decorations to Les Invalides and the church of the Dome which houses Napoleon's tomb.

Les Invalides is still in use as a hospital or hospice. We saw elderly men, perhaps veterans sitting in a private area. It is built on a grand scale with twin churches. The Dome of the famous church is visible from the Champs-Élysées and glitters

in the sunlight. The altar in the church is a copy of St. Peter's in Rome with lots of gold and the painted domed ceiling.

Napoleon's tomb is grandiose. Richard remembers thinking as a youngster that it was made of plastic! I find it odd that they have a monument to a self-proclaimed ruler without any historical setting - no information at the tomb about Napoleon's achievements nor about his negative impact on French society.

We visited the World War II part of the Army museum. It is very well done, with an emphasis on the French, naturally. Richard was interested to hear what an important role North Africa had in the Free French movement. There was a section on the concentration camps, of course. And videos of battles, uniforms, weapons, German African medical kit, etc. Poignantly there was a chair from a German (Gestapo?) office in Paris which a member of the Resistance had written an encouraging patriotic note to future prisoners.

We walked over to Rue Cler where we had stayed when we were here in 1995 with our children. It is easier to see now that the area is upscale compared to some of the other areas we have visited this time. However, it would still be a nice area to stay in. I had a look in the window of Marie Cantin who is well-known for her cheeses. They looked yummy, many different shapes, sizes and colours.

We had shared a sandwich in the Invalides cafe before the museum tour because we were quite hungry. After that, we were thirsty and hot. Yes, the temperature has shot up. Sidewalk cafes were still crowded and there were no shady seats. We bought a juice and a tomato and courgette flan to share on a bench under a tree in the gardens near the Eiffel Tower.

The number 69 bus starts near there and goes all the way to Bastille. It seemed ideal for the hot weather. The route goes through some interesting shopping streets including St. Dominic and Rue du Bac and then along the Seine past the Louvre and all the booksellers.

Tonight we have dinner with Chris, Richard's brother and his wife Anne. They arrived from Manchester this morning. I have booked a restaurant, Les Amognes. Hope it isn't too hot in the restaurant to enjoy the food.

Much later!

Food good. Restaurant not too hot!

The prix fixe menu was 30 euros for three courses with wine, coffee and framboise eau-de-vie extra. White asparagus with lovely creamy sauce and two oysters for three of us and tart of fresh sardines for Richard. Brandade stromboli (whole fish, sea bream, I think, with olives) for three of us, lamb for Richard (he doesn't remember what it was called but it was good!). Pears with chocolate sauce and ginger for two of us, crepe with cardamon flavoured eggplant filling for Chris (delicious!) and strawberries with creme anglaise and pain perdu for Richard. Friendly service.

Day 23 Giverny, Monet's garden

Richard, Chris, Anne and I took the train to Vernon from Gare St. Lazare. Trains are not frequent but take only 45 minutes. The ticket seller gave us a leaflet which outlines trains and the connecting bus to Giverny. It also mentioned typical taxi fare.

The train was crowded and we were worried about the queue at the gardens. We found a sign which said Tete de taxi, I think. One other couple lined up behind us while most of the crowd milled around looking for the bus. The taxi ride was quite quick, about 10 minute drive and cost 14 euros which is more expensive than the bus but reasonable for 4 of us.

The gardens were crowded but that did not spoil our visit. Not even a 45 minute wait to buy our tickets could do that! We spent quite a lot of time admiring the water lily pond, the chinese bridge, the more traditional cottage garden. I tried to get Monet-like photos of the reflected light and plants. Then we visited the house where Monet lived for many years. Clos Normande is evidently a typical farmhouse. The best room was a warm yellow dining room with blue patterned china on the shelves. Lovely. All in all, a great day out and well worth the trip. No wisteria on the bridge, though - too early, I guess.

We went to the American museum cafe down the road for a late lunch. Great salads, reasonable price, lovely location in a garden under a vine covered patio but SLOW service. There seemed to be only one waiter serving outside.

The garden at the American museum was lovely too, especially the white beds with white varieties of a half-dozen different plants. Behind the museum was a wild flower meadow strewn with bright red poppies and blue corn flowers. The

back wall of the museum lobby was glass and the meadow looked like an Impressionist painting.

We decided to take the bus back to the train station. It leaves from the tour bus parking lot and there is a sign. It cost 1,90 for each person, each way. It was very crowded but most people got seats which was not true on the train. The four of us had to stand the whole journey to Paris. I joked we should ask for our train fare back. If we had been traveling first class, I assume we would have got a seat. The second class fare was reasonable - 73.60 euros total for the four of us. One way the fare was "blue" and the other, the fare was "white" and there was a slight difference in cost.

After our late lunch, we decided we didn't want a huge dinner so we walked to Ile St. Louis to the Brasserie de l'Ile St. Louis. It is in Great Eats Paris and when I reread it this morning, I noticed that the author says that she recommends it for its fun atmosphere. The food was okay - Richard had an omelet. I didn't want something we could cook for ourselves though, so I had jarret de porc with apple marmalade. Somehow, I thought the the apple would be like onion marmalade, slow cooked to bring out the sweetness and to caramelize it. But it was apple sauce! For dessert, Richard and I shared some Berthillon ice cream. Chris and Anne enjoyed their meal and we had a bottle of red wine from an unfamiliar area. So though not the highlight of our stay, not bad. My gripe though is that our neighbouring table with three young girls seemed to get the benefit of the "fun atmosphere" from the middle-aged waiter, not us! We only got more bread when it became available from another table!

Day 24 The Grand Louvre

We bought day museum passes at the ticket counter of the Bastille Metro station in order to avoid the queues. We went to Louvre-Palais Royale and entered near the Carousel. There is a special entry for card holders.

We first went to the bottom floor of Sully Wing to see the foundations of the buildings, the donjon, the moat, etc. Very interesting.

We decided to split up and see each other for dinner this evening which we would book. I tried to telephone A La Biche Au Bois but I could not understand the rapid French on the answering machine and we decided just to wait until a human could answer.

We wanted to see the Netherlands art because we have seen a lot of it lately and wanted to see more but that area was shut. There is a list posted showing what is shut each day. Evidently you can see it on their web site also. So be forewarned - Friday seems to be the best day when most if not all rooms were open.

We saw the Egyptian rooms, some furnished rooms, the medieval crafts room with tapestries and ecclesiastical and more homely objects, including a fabulous chess set. Lovely tapestries. Part of the Dutch section was open and we saw that including Ship of Fools by Bosch.

In between we had lunch at the cafe - shared a large salad plate and a piece of quiche. Reasonable. The best was the salad which is priced by size of plate and is filled by the customer from a selection including hard boiled eggs, cheese cubes, grated carrot and prunes!

But the Louvre is huge and very tiring. In spite of the crowds, many areas were not business.

Dinner tonight at A La Biche Au Bois. 20 euros for a four course meal. I had the same starter as the last time, the pike terrine with creamy red pepper sauce; rich coq au vin with lardons and mushrooms served with potato in a small casserole dish; two small pieces of cheese (Cantal and Pont L'Eveque for me); and ile flottant for dessert. Red Rhone wine.

Chris had the same starter as me; Richard had a pate with mushrooms; Anne had mushrooms a la Greque. Richard and Chris had goose with lovely fluffy mashed potatoes as a main course; Anne had salmon. They all had plum pie for dessert.

The restaurant is a warm and friendly place with many locals. Tables are very close together and the room is packed. Staff speak English. Recommended.

Day 25 Musee Marmottan Monet

Today we decided to see the paintings by Monet of the gardens at Giverny at the Musee Marmottan Monet, 2 rue Louis Boilly (<http://www.marmottan.com>)

The paintings are hung in a fine mansion in a posher area of Paris near Bois de Boulogne and features Monet, Berthe Morisot and other Impressionist artists as well as medieval illuminated manuscripts and fine furniture (First Empire). We

were glad to see the water lily and bridge paintings after Giverny because we were able to appreciate the difficulties that Monet faced in painting the light, the movement of the grasses under the water and the various flowers around the pond. We were also glad to see the very first “impressionist” painting called Impression: Sunrise. The painting shows Japanese and Chinese influences and is extremely effective.

We had a late lunch at Le Gare near the Metro station - very tasty salads followed by creme brulee. There is a large restaurant downstairs in an old train station with a full menu but the outdoor table on the main floor suited us. Friendly service, reasonable price.

We went by Metro to Les Halles and walked through Beaubourg to Place des Vosges to admire the arcaded buildings and the park. We found a little store down an alleyway which was like an Aladdin’s cave with pierced metal lampshades, Venetian glass and more. Tea on Place de la Bastille before Chris and Anne had to catch the bus to the airport. We were so glad to have had these days with them.

Day 26 Day trip to Dijon and Beaune in Burgundy

We took an early TGV train to Dijon, just over an hour and a half trip, speeding along at over 300 km/h. We changed to a regular train in Dijon for the half hour train ride to Beaune, which stopped in Nuits St. George before rolling into Beaune. We were in sunny Beaune by 10 am and we had left the rain in Paris.

Beaune is a wine capital and we wanted to see the old medieval hospital for which the town is also famous.

Hotel Dieu (Hospices de Beaune) was built in the fifteenth century based on a Flemish model - both the concept of a hospice for the poor and the architecture. The brilliantly tiled roof set in patterns was such a success that others copied it. When we were in Dijon later today, we saw several buildings including the cathedral with similar tiled roofs.

The hospice is set up to demonstrate early hospital care with bright red blankets covering cubicle beds in a huge room with an altar in it. In another room they have placed a wonderful altar piece of the Last Judgment that had been in that room. The artist was Roger Van der Weyden whose work we have seen elsewhere on this trip. Here there was a large magnifying glass operated by a

staff person who guided us to focus on interesting details of the large painting. There were also some fine tapestries and a pharmacy.

We had bought the 9 euro museum day pass because we were also interested in seeing the wine museum. This small museum had implements, photos, archives on display. We were interested in the stilts with the sabots (wooden shoes)!

A lucky find was the Marey Museum which highlights the work of Etienne Jules Marey who was a precursor of the cinema. He took multiple photos in order to examine movement. For example, of a running man, a falling cat, a running horse. He also developed prototypes of important medical techniques such as using balloons in a horse's heart to measure the pressure.

We had decided to have a full meal in Beaune and took a chance at the restaurant of the Central Hotel, 2 Victor Millet. We opted for the traditional Burgundian menu - just about everything cooked with wine! Richard's starter of eggs poached in red wine was good but too much for a starter. My snails were a more reasonable portion. We both had squab in red wine. I would have preferred the bird to have been casseroled like coq au vin - this was roasted and then served with rich wine-based gravy. However the vegetables were very good. My dessert was based on the local spice cake - layered with cassis (black currant) sorbet. Richard had pear with the same sorbet. And this was AFTER the local cheeses. Coffee came with little cookies. Our wine was wonderful - 1998 Ladoix Premier Cru Les Joyeuses, Domaine Michel Millard.

Richard has sworn off prix fixe meals! We explored the walls of the town, trying to walk off our heavy meal. We thought we would go to a winery to see the caves but Richard could not, would not eat or drink anything! So we wandered the little streets of the town.

We went back to Dijon with a few hours to spare before our TGV reservation. Dijon looks prosperous and has some attractive buildings. Lots of ornate wrought iron, some of the coloured tile roofs. We walked from the train station through the pedestrianized areas and down the main shopping street. Unfortunately shops were just closing and the museums and churches were closed.

The TGV train whisked us back to Paris through farming country. We were glad that we had that taste of Bourgogne. Just two more days in this wonderful city.

Just a small note - we don't have any pictures of this day trip because Richard thought we had left our camera behind. It turned out that we hadn't - it was in the backpack all along!

Day 27 Last minute Paris! A panoramic view, a Roman arena and a mosque

Today we went to the Samaritaine department store by Pont Neuf to see the view from the top. There is a free panoramic terrasse with a super view of the city. Richard tried to take photos of each point. This worthwhile viewpoint is free!

While we were there we also bought some chocolate to take home and had a look at women's clothes. They seemed very pricey.

We had lunch in a chain restaurant that was recommended by Jack of jack-travel.com in the Marais - Pain Quotidienne (Daily Bread). We sat outside where the action is! Inside is mostly communal tables. We had a daily special from the chalkboard - carrot soup, fresh and with a hint of curry, a gouda and ham sandwich with tomatoes and cucumber on great sourdough bread with a mixed salad. Very tasty for 10 euros.

Then we walked along the Seine, right down by the water as far as Tuileries gardens. There we had coffee in Cafe Renard. When we used the toilets we were amazed that this little glassed in cafe which looks so temporary has a full kitchen, cold room and other space below it as well as toilets.

The man using it before me complained that the lights had gone out while he was in there. His wife hadn't the same problem. Just a point - if you think the lights may be on a timer, press the button yourself! And make a mental note where the switch is in case you have to get up in the dark.

We decided to go to see Arenes des Luteces so we took the Metro over the area. We first visited a mosque built in the early 20's. It is very beautiful and would have been even more so if the fountains were running. It cost 3 euros for adults to visit. We were not allowed in the prayer room but we were able to see the courtyards and some visitors' rooms. We were interested in the similarities with medieval abbeys which have the arcaded cloisters too.

The arena was discovered in the late 1890's and is tucked away behind a main shopping street. We ducked through a doorway, down a short hall and out into a

small Roman arena which is now the province of soccer and boules players. We sat for a while on the stone steps overlooking the area to watch. The two or three games of boules were outnumbered by the soccer games. Above us at the top of the steps were three young men practicing stick fighting.

Walked home and did some packing. We have an early start on Saturday morning - the Eurostar train leaves at 9ish from Gare du Nord. Richard says that there is a symmetry because we arrived from Brussels at that train station too.

A memorable meal at Le Saint Amarante, 4 rue Biscornet, 75012 near Bastille. (01.43.43.00.08). Closed Saturday and Sunday.

We chose the 22 euro three course meal and were well pleased with it. A complimentary snack of black olive paste "caviar" on bread started us off well. I had salmon mousse with salad in a balsamic vinaigrette. Richard had cantaloupe with a black pepper jelly. We both had lotte filets (angler fish) on a bed of cooked spinach with mushrooms, carrots and chestnuts. Very tasty. There was another choice of main dish - something made with beef but I don't eat beef in Europe.

My dessert was simple but delicious - fromage blanc (a creamy pudding-like cheese) with strawberries topped with a biscuit like a brandy snap but more caramelized and containing almonds. Richard swooned over his chocolate cake with a soft creamy chocolate centre. It had a rich chocolate flavour but without too much sweetness. We shared a half bottle of a very nice wine, Les Marcet Meneton Salon 2000, a light fruity white wine. Espresso coffee as usual after dinner but with some hot milk for me.

Very good value and Richard thought it was one of the best meals we had during our holiday. I liked them all except for the brasserie on Ile St. Louis. Well recommended. And it wasn't too heavy!

As I implied, there were only two choices for each course but we found something to our taste on the menu. If you ate off the prix fixe, the price would be more but not outrageous. It was a little disconcerting that the restaurant was so empty. Perhaps they have a bigger lunch business or much later diners. The tables were well spaced, a rarity in the price range of restaurants that we have been frequenting and service was excellent. English spoken.

The Faubourg St. Antoine / Bastille area is a wonderful area for reasonably priced restaurants. It is also close to good transit at Bastille. The Marais with its

shops and museums is close by and the bridge across the Port de Plaisance de Paris Arsenal gives us speedy access to Ile St. Louis and Ile de Cite. Not as many tourists around when you get away from Bastille itself although there are a lot of hotels.

Chris and Anne recommend the hotel across from Gare de Lyon where they stayed, Hotel Terminus Lyon, on Rue de Lyon at Boulevard Diderot. They booked it online through the Logis de France site. An additional feature is access from the airport - the bus stops at Gare de Lyon across the street. Modestly priced, good room with minibar (fridge) in their room, friendly service and front desk staff.

Day 28 A guided walk, Le Grand Louvre (again!)

This morning we finally took a guided walk with Paris Walks. We had been planning to for some time but this morning we took the Hemingway's Paris walk from Cardinal Lemoine Metro station. The tour leader, Pam, was very knowledgeable and showed us buildings and locations associated with Hemingway, James Joyce, Verlaine, Balzac (the setting of Pere Goriot) and George Orwell. She wove it all together with anecdotes about the publication of Ulysses by Sylvia Beach of Shakespeare and Company, with people who befriended Hemingway, and other stories about the Mouffetard area. Very interesting. 10 euros for adults for a two hour walk. They have a web site, <http://www.paris-walks.com>. They have a taped message about walks: 01.48.09.21.40

After the walk we had lunch at Pain Quotidienne, another branch on Rue Mouffetard of the same place we ate yesterday. We had very good sandwiches (a trio of hot sandwiches) with salad. 10.50 euros each.

Then we walked through the Latin Quarter into the touristy area, across the Seine to the Louvre to see the northern school of painters and the Napoleon III rooms. There were some famous paintings (The Lacemaker) and some interesting - the picture of the annunciation with the founder of Hotel Dieu hospice in Beaune. We knew of the picture but didn't know of the connection. We saw some Rembrant, Rubens, Holbein, Memling and more.

We also saw the ornate rooms designed for Napoleon III. They were confiscated not many years after they were finished. The decor is over the top but evidently is remarkable because it is the only rooms of that era fully preserved.

After a tea break, we decided we had enough! We had been pleasantly surprised by the lack of queues in the Louvre. We had gone in at 2:30. The price goes down at 3 pm. Perhaps some were waiting for that. Too most tour groups had left for the day.

We walked home to a glass of wine and a rest before dinner (actually we finished packing!). We checked the Saint Amarante on the way home. The menu usually changes every day, according to the waiter but at this point it hadn't. We did not reserve for dinner tonight because we couldn't make up our mind about where to eat! We tried Square Trousseau and La Table d'Aligre but both were full. The Square Trousseau offered us a table at 10pm - too late for us. So we went to a little restaurant that we had noticed on our way home when we cross the bridge of the Arsenal port area. It had current stickers in the window from Pudlo and from Routard, I think.

The restaurant Le Mange Tout is at the corner of Jules Cezar at 24 boulevard de la Bastille (01-43-43-95-15). Closed Saturday midday and Sunday. The cooking is from Auvergne with blue cheese, local wines and friendly service. There was a set meal for 20 euros (3 courses plus cheese) but we elected to go a la carte because prices seemed reasonable and we were interested in other dishes. Richard had pears on toast with grilled Auvergne blue cheese topping. His starter came with its own glass of sweet white wine. I had a taste and it was fabulous. My grilled fish (hot) on a green salad as starter was tasty. His main course was a sea bass plainly cooked with spinach, but very fresh. I had chicken au bleu (with Auvergne blue cheese), potatoes and spinach. Richard had said he didn't want dessert so he had a large plate of profiteroles with warm chocolate sauce! I had the dessert du jour, pomme en cage - a baked apple in pastry with some caramel. Coffee for both of us. The wine was a nice white - a Gaillac, Domaine de la Barthe, Jean Albert et Fils, Castanet, 2000. It was a local restaurant with nice service, tables reasonably spaced, good food. Price similar to A La Biche Au Bois. The waitress spoke some English but not as much as the other restaurants we have been to in our area. She shook hands with me as we left!

Tomorrow we leave early for the Eurostar to England.

Days 29 - 30

We took the early morning channel tunnel train to Ashford, Kent and a local train to Tonbridge. There we took a taxi to the Europcar agency for our one-way car rental to Gatwick the next day. We drove to Swindon to see family and to meet

Richard's mother who would accompany us back to Canada for a visit. We had a pleasant family dinner with Richard's brother-in-law, nephews and other family members. The next day, we were on our way back to Canada. Our trip to Gatwick was as pleasant as can be and reasonably quick. Then the Air Transat flight via Montreal.