

Trip from Albi to Montpellier, Arcachon, Saint Michel de Ré, La Rochelle and back to Paris By Ernie and Olivia

Sunday, July 3. We drove to Montpellier to visit our friend Francis Guastavino whom we had not seen for 15 years. We walked around the city with Francis. He took us to the lovely esplanade in the city center. We stayed the night at his home and he prepared dinner for us, “À la fortune du pot.” (i.e. whatever is in the kitchen). Dinner turned into couscous plus a tuna fish entrée and a nice camembert for dessert. *(photo of his home is from Google Maps)*



Monday, July 4. Drove to Arcachon. We drove past fields and fields of sunflowers, corn, wheat and vineyards on this trip. The first thing we did was to drive to the Great Sand Dune and climb up to the top. A detailed photo by Olivia is on page 3. Then found a fancy hotel, Hotel Point France, right on the water (the Arcachon basin). (200 € including parking, tax and coffee the next morning!)

photo OD



photo OD



Tuesday, July 5. We had coffee on the terrace of the hotel in Arcachon accompanied by some of the cake that Francis had given us.

photo OD



photo OD



photo OD

Then got our car and began the drive north along the Atlantic coast to La Rochelle. We took a couple of route forestières to try and to be close to the ocean (although the ocean was not in sight most of the way).

On one forest road we drove north about 10 km and then ran into a barrier (evidently it was a bicycle only road although there were 50 kph speed limit signs which made it seem like a road for cars). But at the north

end it was barricaded and we had to drive through some blackberry bushes and sand to get around the barrier.

We then took the ferry from Le Verdon-to Royan across La Gironde. (29 €)



Instead of stopping in La Rochelle we continued on the divided highway around the north end of the city and crossed on the causeway from La Rochelle to Ile de Ré (16 €). Then we drove to Saint-Martin de Ré and found a room at La Barbette (71 €) and had dinner at Le Baleine Bleu. (no toll returning from the island).



Wednesday, July 6. In the delightful and historic town of Saint Martin de Ré we walked around, along the walled fortifications, and then when it opened we went to the Musée Ernest Cognacq (4 €) where there were beautiful displays tracing the long and complex history of the island and of Saint Martin de Re in particular. In the garden of the Museum Ernest Cognacq we found a status of, guess who? - George Washington. It seems he had roots, many generations past, on this Island and the statue was put there by the French Heritage Society.



We drove to the end of the Island and the Phare de Baleine, a lighthouse..

photo OD



photo OD



photo OD



When we arrived at La Rochelle it took a long time to find parking. We had lunch at “Di Venezia”. We split a “salade italienne” (i.e. a plate of charcuterie) and then Olivia had tagliatelles saumon fume and Ernie had moules gorgonzola.



photo OD

photo OD

Perhaps the most memorable part of the highly memorable week, was the drive back into Paris. We deliberately put off our arrival until 8:30p.m. to avoid rush hour traffic, thank god. I had to wend my way through one-way streets and I managed to make a left turn where there were 3-lanes of cars turning left and facing 2 lanes of cars turning left into our lanes. It could have been terrifying except that I have been paying attention to how people drive here for the two years we have been coming to Paris. It is all done quite calmly with people patiently waiting their turn - no honking horns or fist waving, at all. Nevertheless, I breathed a huge sigh of relief when I turned into the parking structure where we were to leave the car. Everything went as smoothly as I could have hoped.



Photo of the ladder up the Dune of Pyla (near Arachon) by Olivia.