

Europe – Twice Around

On the eve of war and seven decades on - by bicycle

On 16 April 1939 two young women (Bill (Freda) Cole and Berry (Doris) Rowberry) pedalled out of their home town of Worcester in England to start a journey of about 8,000 kilometres through France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany (incorporating Austria in 1939), Denmark, Sweden to Bergen, Norway.

Bill was my mother. Seven decades on I repeated this ride. This book presents her account and my account of our respective journeys. Bill's account is in the style of daily notes on their journey. I have only sparingly edited it. I have added some explanations and comments on the 1939 text. These are presented in square brackets as are words added to my journal after its initial writing.

Twenty-five years of age, Bill and Berry were members of the Girl Guide Movement. They engaged with the people of the lands through which they travelled and learnt of their customs and views of the world. They connected with Girl Guide groups, though not in Germany where they had been banned and replaced by the Hitler Youth.



A clipping from a 1939 Worcester newspaper. "16,000 miles" should read 1600!

Camping, staying in farmers' barns and youth hostels, they were on the road for 143 days or about four months. They had days off now and then. I estimate their average for the days they did ride to be about 75kilometres. Some days they rode more than 100kilometres.

A good many epic bike rides had been undertaken by 1939 though it seems not many by women. Annie "Londonderry" Cohen Kopchovsky was perhaps the first woman to undertake a great ride. In 1895 she rode out of Boston to circumnavigate the globe. She did, but she covered rather more of the distance by ship than on her bike.

Lilian Irene Bartram was born in 1914, a year later than my mother, and coincidentally was nicknamed Billie. Now known as Billie Fleming on 1 January 1938 she started a year-long bid to claim the greatest distance cycled by a woman in one year. By 31 December she had ridden 29,603.7 miles (47,642.5 km) and the record

still stands. She thus averaged more than 81 miles (130 km) per day. These were all day rides and thus she rode a light weight un-laden racing bike.

So by 1939 probably quite a number of women had covered big distances on two wheels. It was surely still rather an unusual thing for women to undertake.

It is a bit of a puzzle that Bill did not choose to do this journey on two wheels with a motor. She had been a keen member of a motorcycle club (there was only one other female member) for a few years. Perhaps it was the cost of fueling her Velocette motorcycle for 8,000 kilometres that was the reason or perhaps it was the desire to do something a bit more challenging.

A number of people who have heard this story have questioned why two young women would have decided to set off on a tour of Europe in the spring of 1939. Bomb shelters were already being built in London and people were being instructed on the use of gas masks. Reading her journal, it is clear that there were actually plenty of young people travelling the continent. So perhaps the young were still optimistic that war would be avoided, or perhaps it was just normal youthful risk taking behaviour.

It has been suggested that Bill and Berry had a mission. Two years earlier (1937) two groups of Hitler Youth toured Britain by bicycle. An article headed "Nazis must be spyclists" appeared in the newspaper the "Daily Herald" in May of that year. Documents released a few years ago reveal that MI5 came to the conclusion that these Hitler Youth were recording information that would be of military value (see Appendix 2). It is not inconceivable that MI6 employed a similar strategy and that Bill was asked to keep a second journal in which to note such things as the ships in the Italian naval base of La Spezia and details of the bridges over the Rhine! Her possible involvement in intelligence work during and after the war (see appendix 1) lends a little credence to this notion.

Bill was a bit of linguist. She was largely self-taught though she had undertaken language courses with the Workers Education Association. Her journal indicates that her abilities in French, Italian and German were good enough to communicate with many locals who had no English. She took with her a little book called Lyell's Languages. It was set out in columns with the English word on the left and its translation in about ten other languages in columns across two pages.

The ride ended early, about a week before Hitler invaded Poland, because Berry crashed on a Norwegian mountain and Bill had to take her back to England.

Immediately the war began Bill joined the Navy.



Second Officer Cole

Seven Decades On

I have a vague recollection of my mother talking about her journey when I was 13 and, with my friend Robert Gibson, planning my first bicycle tour from Tarago to Tuross via the Araluen Valley in Australia. I do remember her being pretty encouraging when Geoff Pearson and I set off to ride from Bath to Manchester via the Welsh mountains when I was about 16. Unfortunately, I did not read her journal in full until 2007, sometime after her death. Only then did I start to think about following her tracks around Europe.

After a couple of years planning I repeated the first half of this journey to Switzerland with two old friends - Philip Henty and Brian Polden. We started exactly 71 years on – 16 April 2010. The second half, to Bergen, Norway, was completed in 2012. My older son, Nicholas, accompanied me through Switzerland, Austria and into the Black Forest in Germany. Jill, my wife, and Philip and Jenny, and Lois and Allan, and George and Suzanne, and Ian and Karin and Nigel and Julie and Anne and Declan (16 of us altogether) rode from near the source of the Neckar in the Black Forest for two weeks down the Neckar and Rhine valleys. Rick Arthur, a friend of many decades, partnered me for the final two thousand kilometres from Koln to Bergen.

Although more than twice the age Bill and Berry were (apart from Nicholas), with modern, geared bikes probably half the weight of theirs and not laden with camping equipment, most of the ride was done at about their pace.

The 1939 route – see below – largely followed main roads which were not so busy then. Seven decades on we more or less followed this route, but by avoiding main roads and using rather indirect country roads and cycle paths we travelled a bit extra and added some climbing here and there. We did take some major short cuts (indicated in red on the map) necessary to complete the journey in the available time which cut the journey from about 8,000 to about 7,000 kilometres.



The Route

***“We saw for ourselves
or
Seven countries on seventeen pounds”***

16 April 1939 – Worcester to Oxford

The great idea was born one December evening after a [Girl] Guide meeting when Berry (who was my Lieutenant) and I were sitting round the fire, as was our wont, gossiping. Suddenly I said “If anyone told me to give up my job, draw all my money out of the bank and go with them round Europe I’d go.” “Right” says Berry, “I’ll go.”

Ways and means were discussed, then followed three months of route planning, getting equipment together, obtaining customs tickets, getting all the buckshee [free] literature and maps we could obtain and then we were ready.

We left Worcester on Sunday morning, the 16th April, in the rain, on second hand pushbikes, which we called Hannibal and Annabelle because we hoped they would cross the Alps. Anyhow, more often than not it was “Come up Horace”. It was raining and with our unaccustomed loads, consisting of camping equipment, stores and clothes we staggered rather than rode out of town. First accident, I omitted to tell Berry that the egg in my oilskin provision bag was not hard boiled.

Our first stop was half way up Fish Hill, where we ate our lunch praising the person who thought of putting a seat there.

We arrived at our destination, Oxford – in quite good time, but it took us a long time to find the Hostel in Jack Straw’s Lane, and an equally long time to get our equipment back on the bikes next morning. We liked the look of the town and decided to re-visit when we had more time to spare



[Note - "Seven countries on seventeen pounds" means my mother did not count her own country (Britain), perhaps because she did not ride from one side of it to the other, or Monaco, the Vatican and Liechtenstein. As the Anschluss had happened a year earlier Austria was one country with Germany.]

16 April 2010 – Worcester to Oxford – 110kilometres

Day one is done. It dawned clear, sunny and cold in Worcester, though hardy Brian disputes the last adjective – he decided short nix were the go. We left the B & B well fuelled with a full English breakfast and wound our way through Worcester's old streets lined with buckling half-timber Tudor buildings. You think something is wrong with your glasses that makes the world all distorted, but the buildings really do have few straight lines.



We decided the official start was the cathedral and a lovely young Worcesterienne took our photo.

From the back – Brian, Philip and me. I named my bike Hannibal III. The first being the guy with the elephants and the second being my mother's bike.

We had learnt a great deal about the cathedral from a lovely very old Worcesterienne the afternoon before, but what she couldn't explain was why a sarcophagus was adorned with black swan, a species of only terra australis completely unknown when these were carved. It seems rather odd, indeed suspicious, to me that evolution should have organised things so neatly as to have white and black swans on opposite sides of the globe.

[I have since learnt that Juvenal, in 82 AD, wrote "*rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cygno*" (a rare bird in the lands, and very like a black swan) and that in European culture black swans represented the impossible until Willem de Vlamingh found them in Australia. That is tens of thousands of years after the first Australians found them of course.]

This is Elgar country. Worcester is very keen to tell you he is theirs. But, with the larks singing high in the sunny sky above the flinty ploughed fields Vaughan Williams' "The Lark Ascending" would have been the right musical accompaniment.

With a few navigation difficulties we got to Broadway for morning coffee at about 11:45. Fish Hill (about a 275 metre climb) wasn't as bad as we were expecting, but for Philip it was a disappointment. He had to wheel his bike up, having a flat at the bottom and both pumps on the bikes ahead of him a bit out of yelling distance. It was a valve problem not a puncture so, so far, the 32mm Continental Sport Contact tyres have been puncture free and they do really roll well.

Lunch was at Blockley, an absolutely delightful Cotswald village folded into a little valley. We decided the pub's beef pies were the best we'd ever eaten. A half a pint of the local bitter washed them down nicely. At about 3.5% alcohol it's not going to do much damage.

The rest of the day was up and down and round about. The country lanes do not follow Roman road routes. Banks of bright yellow and cream daffodils burst into our view around nearly every bend. Spring seems meant for cycling through England.

With a couple of unintended detours we made the Youth Hostel in Oxford a bit after 6:30 with 110kilometres on the clock. It was a longer day than planned. We think the 1939 riders, though pushing heavier bikes and lugging more gear, would have had the advantage of riding the main road which is shorter and less hilly and of course without navigation challenges. We decided we had to think seriously about the plan of averaging 100kilometres a day.

17 April 1939 Oxford to London

We took the road to London with the wind behind us, and made good time until Berry developed a slow puncture. Found the Great Ormond Street Hostel after coping with heavy traffic in town – right through Hyde Park. Thrilled to find many nationalities in the Y.H.A. – Danes, Germans, Hungarians, Canadians, etc. and just managed to cook and eat our supper in the shortest time ever 8.55 – 9pm.

17 April 2010 – Oxford to London – 68 kilometres

Once around the "Camera", the original location of the Bodleian library, a visit to a bike shop for an extra pump so that Philip won't have to push his bike again and then we are out of Oxford on a good smooth fast road for a few kilometres. Morning coffee was at Watlington at an award winning deli. Brian was convinced that its marvellous collection of cheeses had added an extra flavour to the coffee.

As we struggled up the very steep climb up onto the Chilterns about twenty red kites circled overhead. A few of them didn't take kindly to a buzzard in their patch and swooped him off. At the top of the hill a notice board informed us that these kites were close to extinction a few years ago. They are magnificent creatures.

A missed turn at Christmas Common (they have a Christmas shop there of course) meant pedalling back a few Ks to the lane that took us down a beautiful valley which led to the Thames. The hedgerows were still leafless which meant we could see

through them into the fields as we sped along. The possibility of a Porsche rounding a bend between the hedgerows at 100kilometres per hour occurred to us, but then we supposed that most Porsche owners would be taking care not to run into another one coming the other way so driving slowly enough to avoid us. In fact drivers here are hugely respectful of cyclists.

We'd been told that we could ride along the Thames Path so we crossed at a weir and lock at Millend, had lunch at the Flower Pot Inn and started along the path. Being mostly a dirt track and often very bumpy and with kissing gates to negotiate every few hundred metres it was very slow going, but picturesque. After about 10 kilometres we gave up and took to the roads again. At Slough we decided that the remaining kilometres into London wouldn't be much fun so we jumped on a train. The sun had brought out the Londoners and Hyde Park was crowded with vitamin D seekers. After the hostel in Oxford staying that night with dear friend John Dauth, Australia's High Commissioner to the UK, was very welcome luxury.

18 April 1939 – London

Next morning we took Berry's bike to an old bloke who was deaf and almost blind to be mended and departed to find the German Embassy. I'd got the address (99 Regent St) firmly fixed in my head, but on arrival found this to be the Belgian State Railways. The German Passport Office we later discovered to be 18 Belgrave Square – anyhow we drew a blank there, they couldn't extend our visas – or should it be visae? Next to the Cyclists' Touring Club H.Q. in Craven Hill, where we insured the models, and were provided with additional French customs tickets and a route out of London. We aimed to reach Canterbury that night, but the road was hilly and Berry's light and legs conked so we bed and breakfasted at Faversham – we aren't properly run in yet I think. Anyhow we spun a tale about having changed all our money for French and got in for 2/6 each.

18 April 2010 – London – rest day

A ride on the "Tate a Tate" ferry (it goes from the Tate Gallery to the Tate Modern) and a couple of hours trying to make sense of Francis Bacon and many other moderns filled the morning. The Soviet posters were really the only things that didn't require too much contemplation.

We crossed the Millenium footbridge to St Paul's. By chance there was a post Easter service of music and readings which Brian and I decided to observe – or were

we participating in it? Philip decided that would be too much for him so he took himself off to Westminster Abbey. He hasn't said whether he participated in any worshipping activity there. The St Paul's service involved a choir made up of two or three choristers from a number, maybe all, of the parishes of the diocese. We were treated to anthems from Scarlatti to Vaughan Williams and beyond. They produced a pretty good sound, but may well have been better listened too somewhere without the reverberating acoustics of the cathedral. In terms of volume, the organ would have satisfied the average rock concert goer and the finale from the Firebird suite just might have appealed to a person of such musical persuasion too.

19 April 1939 – Faversham to Dover

Canterbury the next morning, we were very impressed with town and cathedral. Dover by two pip emma [2pm] where we had dinner on the beach, and then after cashing our first one pound from the Letter of Credit, we found the Youth Hostel, which incidentally was the Y.M.C.A, and possessed a very affable warden.

19 April 2010 – London to Canterbury – 105 kilometres

So we are now behind the 1939 schedule. We are going to get further behind. The day after we flew into the UK a volcano in Iceland started shooting volumes of ash high into the sky. Unusual winds spread this over Europe and all air travel was suspended. We weren't fast enough off the mark and could not get a booking on the ferry until 21 April so we will have two nights in Canterbury.



She didn't invite us in for morning coffee!

Today was another superb ride. We were initially below the North Downs. Black-headed gulls were hunting in the ploughed fields. The clack of wood pigeons' wings

erupted now and then. Chaffinches darted around the hedgerows and rabbits and pheasants shot across in front of us.

Our route took us up a 7% hill onto the Downs and then dipped and weaved its way to Canterbury. Navigation was again challenging. We swung Philip's iPhone into action on a few occasions and think we will employ it more often in France once we have a simcard francais.

The hedgerows here have a few more leaves than north of London. They have been given severe square crew cuts I think rather like US Marines.

A highlight of the day was a truly superb steak and kidney pudding at the George in Newnham. I don't think I've lost any weight yet!

20 April 2010 – Canterbury – rest day

We had another chance to test cathedral acoustics. A school group was rehearsing in the nave of Canterbury Cathedral. Drums, electric guitar, saxophone and flute accompanied the choir. There wasn't full accord amongst us on the quality of their product. It really does seem that cathedrals aren't designed particularly for easy perception of sung words. They aren't very good for listening to spoken words either. Of course in earlier times the words were all Latin and incomprehensible to most of the congregation anyway.

At the eastern end of the cathedral is a chapel dedicated to the remembrance of martyrs. Either side of the entrance there is a book with entries about martyrs through the ages. Both were open at a page describing the seven Melanesian Brothers who were killed attempting to settle a dispute in Solomon Islands during the Tensions. Their leader was one Robin Lindsay. I felt this a bit of a coincidence given my interest in finding a way to contribute to post conflict work in those islands.

20 April 1939 – Dover to Boulogne

Next morning we crossed via Townsend's Ferry, after an unintelligible joke about 'espionage' from the French Customs' Official on the Quay. The sea really was as calm as any of the millponds I've ever seen, and we made friends with the Purser, who provided me with 'Motor Cycles' [a journal] to look at. We had an anxious moment when the bikes were disembarked by crane, but they landed, wheels undermost, with the luggage intact. Anyhow they must 'renverser' mine for the number [not

clear what this means] *and then we were let loose on French soil, or rather French pavé.*



First stop on French soil – the Calais to Boulogne road

It's rolling country and a switch-backy road to Boulogne, and here I try my French. Berry insisted on my asking about the first person we saw for the whereabouts of the Youth Hostel. She thought we were in need of protection and stopped a Nun, who directed us to the pastor of the English Church – we side-tracked them and then found a gendarme to whom the Auberge de la Jeunesse was not something quite beyond his ken, and at length we found what proved to be a large school, the only occupants of which were about 40 Czech refugees. One lad played the accordion and spoke very good English.

After a grand supper (soup, 2 sorts of cold meat, potatoes, biscuits and heaps of jam – for 7 francs) we went for a stroll, but decided to turn back after hearing a most gruesome howling, which afterwards turned out to be someone selling newspapers, and we followed two lads with rucksacks, whom we suspected were English in search of the hostel, but when one asked me the way in excellent French it was too much, so we explained to their discomfiture we were English.

Spent the rest of the evening round the stove, conversing in a mixture of English, French, Czech and German with the accordion player, a Czech spy, who had been released from Germany in return for a Nazi spy in Czechoslovakia, Madame Aubergiste, and the two English hitch hikers.

10 pm and 'Good-nights' all round, with instructions not to open our dorm door or else we should find ourselves in Sudetenland. We later found out that the Czechs were going to Canada to learn farming, but the spy wanted a war so that they could get their country back.

21 April 2010 – Canterbury to Boulogne – 62 kilometres

Bright sun through the window of our room at Iffin Farm and the busy chaffinches woke us. Iffin Farm is a truly delightful place to stay, just a few kilometres outside Canterbury. Sarah is a dedicated and generous host and her roast chicken with, inter alia, mashed swede is superb. Crotchet, the dog, (they used have a Quaver) amused us including by relocating my helmet, but being a retriever, he held it very delicately.

We left Canterbury in very cold air on the Pilgrims' Way, which was the start of a sign-posted bike route to Dover, so we rolled along with no navigational problems. The tiny village of Barfreston was on our route. It has a cute little Norman church and, apparently, very special carvings around the door. Its bell, in a very old yew tree next to the north-west corner, is rung by a rope that passes into the church.

Ploughed fields in this chalk country are so white they seem to be dusted with snow. The wind off the North Sea made the temperature with the clouds building seem cold enough for the real thing.

We descended to Dover past its mighty castle. After following the red line for cyclists and checking in we had to stand in the car rows waiting to board the ferry. It was 9 degrees and windy and we were envious of the car passengers. There ought to be some arrangement for cyclists to shelter.



A cold wait

Dover's white cliffs were as impressive as ever though whilst some swallows had been about earlier in the day there were no blue birds immediately evident as we pulled out into the Channel.

We felt pretty regal pedalling last down the ramp on to French soil after the madding crowd of cars, trucks and buses. I decided that we are kings of the road – three from the Orient.

We eventually found our way out of Calais and followed a pretty windswept road south to Boulogne. Looking back across La Manche the white cliffs seemed much closer than 22 miles and it looks like a pretty easy swim – for a swimmer, that is, which I am not. I happened to see a French movie on the plane coming over about a Kurdish clandestine, as they are called in French, who decided swimming was the way to get to the UK.

We found the hotel in Boulogne recommended in the Lonely Planet guide to be pretty good value as was the menu at L'Humiot. Philip's fish soup was superb – we all tried it!

21 April 1939 Boulogne to Abbeville

Next morning, we took the road to Abbeville, first stop Montreuil, a queer old walled town approached by an awful winding up-hill pavé road, which made us feel like a caravan approaching a hill town in India. Montreuil has a famous statue of Field-Marshal Haig in the market place, but not much to offer in the way of food. The cheese was stale and apples dear.

No hostel was near our route that night so as the weather was good we decided to camp. Bought petrol for our Primus (Jean) at a country garage and they kindly allowed us to camp in their field. Spent a fairly comfortable, but cold night, and departed after a visit of inspection from the owner, who remarked that we were provided 'comme les soldats'. They seemed anxious to know how the international situation was affecting England, and pleased me mightily when Madame said my accent was 'Assez bien'.

22 April 2010 Boulogne to Abbeville/Caours

An unnecessary climb out of Boulogne started the day. It was then quite straightforward to Etaples especially when we found a cycleway running with the main road. The 1914-18 war cemetery, on the way into Etaples, was an experience. You walk up to a monument and then, laid out below, are the thousands of head stones. Though we'd all seen pictures of these cemeteries we weren't prepared for the reality. This whole region of course was the big battle ground and in the next war too. I wonder about the locals who have been through so much. I wonder about Bill and Berry riding through this country so soon after the first war and surely thinking about the possibility of the next.

Montreuil sur Mer is now a long way from the sea, the estuary, having silted up over the centuries. Its streets are still pavé . We are so very thankful that we don't have the many kilometres of pavé that Bill and Berry had to ride. The bolts on their bikes must have needed tightening frequently.

I had asked directions to a brasserie or cafe from someone who appeared to be a local and in a definite Scottish accent (!) he gave us the way and said all but the, I think, Pompadour, had good coffee. He commented that we could imagine we were on the Paris-Roubaix riding the cobbles. No one so far has commented that my accent is 'Assez bien', but the fact that the replies I get are delivered in rapid French suggest that it can't be too bad. Unlike 1939 the Montreuil boulangerie provided us with some very good fresh baguette sandwiches.

The statue my mother mentioned of Field-Marshal Haig is here because from March 1916 Montreuil was a British garrison town. About 5,000 soldiers were stationed here for the Battle of the Somme and until war's end.

An old water moulin (mill) amongst the etangs (lakes) in a valley on the way stopped us for a photo. We are constantly struck by the beauty of the scenery.



We stayed the night in the little village of Caours outside Abbeville at a 'Chambre d'Hôte' (B and B) which is in a large farm called La Rivierette.

Dinner was at the sole restaurant and I tried the snails. Reading Bill's next entry I see that the region is reputed for its snails. They were nice and meaty.

Helene and Marc were generous hosts and over a calvados digestif (made from Helene's own apples) we learnt all about the growing of flax.

22 April 1939 Abbeville to Beauvais

Beauvais was our next stop. There again everyone was very friendly, les camarades in the hostels come round and shake hands with all new arrivals. Went on our first shopping expedition to-night, bought some grand pastries, and had the best cheese ever – Camembert! At this hostel we were introduced to escargots (snails) – a very fine brand grow round this district apparently, and a railway worker and his wife who were camping in the garden showed us a bag full they had gathered – also offered us some, but they didn't appeal somehow.

The cyclists who had come from Paris for the week-end wore baggy navy blue trousers gathered in at the ankle, and bright red handkerchiefs tied cowboy fashion round their necks.

23 April 2010 Abbeville to Gerberoy (near Beauvais) – 79 kilometres

There was frost on roof tiles as we rode into Abbeville. We agreed that its cathedral, which is rather tall, was not well proportioned and over-decorated. Over the Somme and out into the countryside again the hectares of rape (canola) were bright yellow in the morning sun and contrasted with the early green barley and the as yet unsown ploughed fields. A rape-yellow wagtail popped up from the brown earth. The house martins, back from their winter in Africa, were zooming around the barns and pied wagtails dancing on the roofs.

The villages are very quiet. Though there are some large tractors working across the broad acre (hectare?) land which looks very productive, there seems to be not a lot of wealth in many villages. The old wattle and daub barn walls are, sadly, being patched with corrugated iron. We see the occasional old person collecting their mail from the communal letter boxes. We wonder if, as in too many places, the country youth have fled to the cities.

Helene from La Rivierette told us we should visit Gerberoy saying it is the most beautiful village in France. It very well might be. It sits on a hill around a chateau and church. Houses, some half-timber, squash into its twisting little streets.



The most beautiful village

Some of the timber is painted powder blue. One little corner house with powder blue half-timber is surely from a fairy tale. Someone once suggested to me that France is really a theme park of itself. We wouldn't take much convincing that Walt Disney had designed many of these villages and the chateau.

We were very well looked after by Sarah our hostess at the 'Chambre d'Hôte' which we very highly recommend notwithstanding a bit of a problem initially with the hot water.

23 April 1939 Beauvais to Paris

Sunday morning we set out for Paris, weather was not too good to-day, but we managed to arrive. Our impressions of France so far are what lovely white cart - horses they breed, how friendly all the country people are, how fond they are of a dull grey-blue paint for all their houses, and the number of English cars presumably on their way to Paris.

Had an awful job finding, the hostel address. Shall we ever forget 4 Rue Leclerc? The gendarmes excelled themselves in Paris – I think we asked quite 25, and one was very pained to think I didn't know what the Chatelet was – I know now – it's a monument historique, but query, which of the many monuments is THE one? Finally, we found the hostel, not very nice, but we sallied forth to a very fashionable quarter in search of food, and got bitten at a very swagger restaurant – 12 francs for chocolate and bread and cheese!!

Shared the dorm with two sisters who came from Morocco and discovered there was a large party of English schoolboys there as well. Also met a Dane, ginger, who spoke English with a strong Scottish accent, and who remembered seeing us at the

London hostel – did my good deed by interpreting, as he couldn't speak French. It strikes me as being rather funny – with my very limited knowledge of French.



24 April 2010 Gerberoy to Paris - 92 kilometres

A quick cold run into Beauvais got us going. We found our way to the D35 quite easily. We pushed along pretty quickly on middle category roads. Climbing out of one valley we passed an old couple cutting some vegetation by the road. Philip established that they were collecting wild celery for their lapins. I'd like to think those lapins were not destined for the pot.

We'd planned on morning coffee at Heonville. It has a splendid chateau, but the brasserie wasn't open for business this Saturday morning. We chatted to two cyclists, rather older than we, on very smart, full carbon and très légers Treks. They said we might get coffee at Grisy la Platres 9 kilometres on. They were quite impressed that we were on our way to Norway via Rome.

Brice Le Cluze, the chef at the Auberge in Grisy, produced excellent baguettes with fromage and jambon cru. He spoke English with a Jamie Oliver accent, barely a trace of a French accent, having spent 10 years in the UK and gave very precise directions to the RER train station in Cergy. We crammed our three bikes onto the train at about 12:30, getting in everyone's way. Three or four times the line crosses the Oise and then the wide Seine. The rivers seem somehow to cradle their huge low-riding working barges.

By the time we pushed our bikes onto the fifth escalator up to ground level at Châtelet we were quite skilled at balancing them with their heavy panniers across three or four moving steps.

I think very few Parisians were hiding in their apartments that afternoon, which had become very warm. We dodged them through the narrow lanes of the Marais to our hotel.

24 April 1939 Rest day in Paris

Monday morning we set off to explore Paris, and by great good fortune we found Notre Dame straight away. The glorious blue in the stained glass impressed us most of all. Then we went alongside the Seine to the Louvre which was, unfortunately, closed, then through the Tuileries Gardens to the Champs-Élysées where the chestnuts were in bloom, to the Arc de Triomphe – very English this.

Then on to Cooks for cash and then our first meal in a café – the best we could rise to was ham and eggs followed by Ananas au Kirsch. Off again to find the Eiffel Tower, and then we learnt that it's cheaper to have cakes and chocolate standing up. Then comes a downpour so we buy postcards to send home and make tracks for the hostel.

25, 26 April 2010 – Rest days in Paris

We thought these rest days came at exactly the right time. I won't write about Paris as my mother covered most of the key sights.

25 April 1939 Paris to Fontainebleau

Found the Post Restant, again with the aid of the gendarmes – I take every opportunity of asking them the way, they treat me like a duchess, salute charmingly and say 'A votre service Mlle'. Followed the Seine out of Paris, which we didn't like leaving, and then through an industrial district, until we reach Forêt de Sénart where we have lunch by the roadside.

Shortly afterwards a very jolly cyclist asked permission to ride with us, and treated us to lemonade at a little estaminet in the forest of Fontainebleau. Here we were treated to a charming sight. Hearing horse bells in the forest we looked up to see two timber wagons, pulled by lovely white horses, halt just opposite by a little wayside shrine, and then the carters came across for a drink. One ate a raw egg by just making a hole in the shell and sucking. Max, our cyclist friend, kindly found the hostel in Fontainebleau for us, but seemed rather disturbed as it wasn't anything to speak of even as French hostels go and they didn't go very far. He was also a bit

worried about the idea of our camping out – asked if we'd a gun. Also he pointed out that it was not polite to use the 'tu' in French – said charmingly it didn't matter to him, but other people mightn't like it!

Saw the famous Palais here, a vast place, but it seems to be falling to pieces. Had our first washing day here, with hot water, and after a supper of macaroni cheese went to bed in a hostel to ourselves. The aubergiste's daughter here spoke English, but it was worse trying to understand her English than speaking my bad French.

27 April 2010 – Paris to Sens – 105 kilometres

We pedalled through *the Forêt de Fontainebleau* on pretty smooth dirt tracks. It was possible to imagine the hunting parties of the kings and Napoleon out chasing down the deer and the wild boar. We had to do a few kilometres on a major road before a nice downhill run on a pavé d road closed to motor traffic sauf autorisée into Fontainebleau.

Running fast down a hill we just noticed a shrine to Tadeusz Kościuszko. He seems to have had some relevance to these parts. Some randonneurs approached and offered to take our photo. We managed to explain that our highest mountain was named after him.



Kościuszko in France

We had a slightly tricky conversation at lunch in French with a couple next to us about our trip and particularly about the gear ratios on our bikes and whether we had a low enough gear for the col de St Gottard

Philip and Brian had planned to go to Versailles in Paris on Monday, but found that Monday was its closed day. Guess what? Tuesday is the closed day for the

Château here! We were able to push and ride our bikes around the palace. How did they use all those rooms and all those grounds?

The run in the afternoon was through beautiful, gently undulating countryside. A picture staying in my mind was a small wood with little white daisies scattered at the feet of the trees.

We found ourselves on the road at one point with an older cyclist who showed us a quieter route than we had chosen. He stayed with us for a while, but, being 71, he decided that we were a bit too fast up the hills.

The women at the Mairie at Lorrez-Le-Bocage-Preaux spent at least half an hour helping us try to find accommodation in the next few towns, but to no avail. We rode on to Sens and finished up in the magnificent Formule Un!

26 April 1939 Fontainebleau to Sens

Another lazy day. A lovely flat road still through the forest to Sens. A very tiny hostel, apparently only two beds, but père and mère aubergiste were very nice and gave us a good supper for 7 francs – soup, omelette, macaroni and fruit purée. Sens had a nice cathedral with a museum, which we hurriedly vacated after learning we were expected to pay – a good let out by pretending not to understand. Here I bought a green beret for 12 francs and later discovered I could have had one for 8!

27 April 1939 Sens to Cussy-sur-Forges

120 kilometres today to Cussy-sur-Forges. Glorious country, but all the bakeries are shut today. Anyhow we succeed in getting a stale loaf from a grocer's. Scenery very like the Wye Valley to Avalon. After tea it starts to rain and as there is no hostel anywhere near we look for an inn. The first we ask at is full, but after consideration the inn-keeper shows me what they call a single bed, and we decide it's quite big enough. Later discovered we had turned the colonel out. He and two nice young officers were dining at the same time as we were, but no progress was made, and next morning they had gone before we came down. Berry in bed first under a colossal red eiderdown - she looks like someone buried under an avalanche.

28 April 2010 – Sens to Montbard – 120 kilometres (for us too!)

We left Sens on a fast road along the Yonne by the chemin de fer. This isn't the 1939 route because we are taking the Canal de Bourgogne tow path. Constructing the canal took from 1775 to 1832. The French Revolution interrupted things a bit. It connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea via the Seine and the Yonne to the Saône and Rhône. Sadly for the canal, its heyday was only a couple of decades. By the mid-1850s the Paris to Marseilles railway was taking most of its custom.

Half a dozen motor bikers wearing numbered École de Police jackets repeatedly passed us – maybe they were monitoring us thinking we might be spies as some suggest were my mother and her companion.

We joined the Canal de Bourgogne tow path at Migennes, but found it a bit rough and suffered our first puncture. It was my tyre and the highly skilled pit crew of B and P had us on the way again in moments.

Now and then what I think were Curlew Sandpipers shot up from the banks of the canal and Grey Herons rose lazily into the air as we approached.



Lazy riding along the lazy old canal

Arriving at Montbard we met a very suntanned retired English policeman with a bike very heavily laden with camping gear also on his way along the canal. He'd been on the road from Calais for eleven days. Carrying just the gear for staying in hotels etc. as we are, certainly makes for greater speed.

Montbard dedicates itself to the great French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788), a statue of whom stands outside the gare. A statue of goat stands against his plinth. It seems to have been added quite recently.

We tried a premier cru Côtes de Nuits pinot noir at dinner for about 23 Euros. It was pretty good with a nice bit of the farm earthiness. My magret de canard au cassis

was excellent. Philip's entrecote had an Époisses de Bourgogne (local cheese) sauce with nice viscosity.

28 April 1939 to Dijon

They gave us a lovely brekker at the inn – hot toast and two lovely cups of chocolate then en avant for Dijon. An easy day, with a glorious 9 kilometres downhill, but bitterly cold – we tried in vain to find a sheltered spot for our dinner today.

Arrived at Dijon we had a little difficulty in finding the hostel. We were first of all directed to a kind of Y.M.C.A. place, and finally after a vain wait for the secretary, les camarades took us to the hostel – a lovely little chalet high up above the town (all the roofs in France are a lovely glowing red) where we looked after ourselves. After a little while another couple turned up – a Swiss girl and Guerri-we-don't-know-what. Had a good supper, slept well and breakfasted well, but still freezingly cold.

29 April Montbard to Dijon – 81 kilometres

The legend on the map given us at the Office de Tourisme suggested that the Canal de Bourgogne tow path from here to Dijon was pavé d. It ain't, but it is pretty smooth.

A few kilometres on Monsieur Gougeat runs a guest house in a lock keeper's cottage and serves very good coffee. He's a bit of an ornithologist and he and I attempted to discuss a few species in French. He has a pair of leghorns he calls Arthur and Guinivere – I couldn't quite understand why. We noted he had an ancient typewriter in his office and when I said I had a friend in Australia who had 50 or so it turned out he was a collecteur also with quite a number elsewhere in his cottage.

A glimpse of a Jay, with its fawn colouring and blue wing flashes made me think of Kookaburras. The occasional Black Kite circles overhead beneath the crisscross of aircraft contrails.

We tried to learn from a couple on a barge flying the tricolore why all the boats we'd seen weren't moving. It turned out they were Italian. In Philip's words "one language too far" meant our communication was less than successful. Somewhat bizarrely, we were told we reminded them of a book by P G Wodehouse about three men biking around Europe. A bit of internet research has not revealed which of his this might be.

We finally saw a couple of boats on the move coming and going from a lock. We stopped to watch the lock in operation and found that the boat entering the lock carried a British couple. They couldn't explain why no other boats had been moving as the lock keepers operate every day. These employees of the state ride up and down the canal on scooters simply keeping tabs on boats that are moving and operate the locks for them. Presumably they have each their stretch to look after. This only costs a canal user 240 euros for a year.

We lunched well on croque Savoyard at Pouilly-en-Auxois, the Cap de Canal – its highest point. It goes through a tunnel here several kilometres long and there is no tow path so the bike route climbs over the watershed. Barges used to be towed through the tunnel by a boat with an electric motor which drew its power from overhead cables as does a tram. The whole thing is pretty amazing engineering and presumably all done by manual labour.

As we ran by the canal twisting and turning in the narrow valley of the Ouche the wind sometimes helped, sometimes hindered. The final 15 or so kilometres into Dijon was smoothly pavé d and I got a fast tow in the slipstream of a couple of shapely, pink lycra clad cyclistes.

We dined very well at L'Escargot for 22 euros. I felt escargots had to be consumed, but B and P are not quite yet ready for snails and found the Jambon persille (a sort of terrine) superb. The gougonettes de saumon in white wine sauce were memorable, but the ordinary AOC Bourgogne didn't quite match the premier cru of last night.

29 April 1939 Dijon to Beaune

To the Post Office for letters – no luck for me. Dijon is a very handsome town, but too much pavé for our liking. We buy bread and balance it on Berry's bike. It falls off and narrowly escapes annihilation by a bus – dinner off the same loaf in a copse to a shelter us from the wind.

We are now running alongside the Côte-d'Or, low hills all covered with vineyards, which haven't yet begun to sprout. We arrived at Beaune quite early, and some school lads took us to the hostel. A torrent of French from Mlle which I couldn't understand, but apparently the hostel is only for boys – anyhow we are allowed to stop. It's lovely, the cleanest we've been in yet, and we heat water and have our first bath.

Then we sallied forth as usual to buy food. We liked the town, a very important centre of the wine industry, and the hostel is next to a swagger hotel, the Ducs de Bourgogne. On our return found our friends of the night before had turned up. They, or rather she is rather scornful of our way of cooking our own grub, inform us they buy theirs en route. Anyhow we haven't got as much cash to burn. They go off to the local picture house, and we spend a domestic evening mending and me trying to patch up my hands, which by now are rather painful, a collection of sunburnt chilblains, and do they look a sight!

30 April 2010 Dijon to Beaune – 47 kilometres

A wet day. We followed the Routes des Grands Cru to Nuits Saint George and then climbed about 200 meters to Chaux in the Hautes Côtes de Nuits Saint George. It is intriguing that some fields are vineyards and others next door are sown to rape or wheat. Is the AOC regulation so strict?

A bit chilled, but kept quite dry by our Macpac and Goretex jackets, we rolled down to Beaune. We checked in to an hotel that was in the oldest building in Beaune. It had been an abbey in the 12th century. Two sets of narrow spiral stairs took us up to our roof top room which overlooked the patterned tiled roofs of Beaune.

I was very taken with Beaune's Église Notre-Dame. Notre Dame churches, by the way, are the churches of communities that have a special affection for the Virgin. It has beautiful proportions, a huge portico and tower with a simple curved tiled roof. There just is something very special about its design.

30 April 1939 Beaune to Crêches-sur-Saône

Miss Helvetia didn't use our dorm last night. A flat uneventful road to Crêches-sur-Saône, where the hostel is a lovely old mansion, part of which is turned into the auberge. A young French girl turned up here with a hefty rucksack, and corduroy trousers, hitchhiking to the Riviera – what a nerve! [It was, until a couple of decades ago, not permitted to use Youth Hostels unless one was travelling other than by motorised transport]. What price some of the comments at home on our trip now? The Swiss couple turned up again, Mlle visibly annoyed to think we had come so far. A wood burning stove to cook with here.

1 May 2010 Beaune to Cormatin – 75 kilometres

After le petit déjeuner, which wasn't so petit, by candle light in the vaulted ground floor of the abbey we found our way to the start of the Voie Verte south from Beaune. Voie Vertes are special cycling routes being constructed in France. Because of this Voie we are again deviating from the 1939 route. Initially the Voie wound its way up and down through the grand cru vineyards and their tight little villages each with one or two grand wine houses. It then followed the Canal du Centre (the one from the Loire) to the Saône at Chalon-sur-Saône except that it didn't go right into the centre and we spent some time finding our way in. We were aided by a very helpful, but a rather too rapidly speaking, local. We found a brasserie which had wide awnings thus shelter for our bikes. We quite quickly understood that it was in fact a gay brasserie and though we were perhaps a bit out of place we were warmly welcomed and fed extremely well on tarte au trois fromages and the best salad we've had so far.

Out into the rain we again pedalled several kilometres, some in circles, trying to find the Voie Verte. We gave up and headed to the next town we knew it passed through. Pedalling along we happened to look down through the trees and there it was deep in a cutting of the old railway line it followed. Once on it with its gentle rail grades we moved at a pace. There is something rather sad though about railway stations bereft of their railway. They still display the name boards that told passengers of times before that they had arrived. The landscape here is daubed in large patches with the lemony yellow of the rape fields. Big cream coloured contented cows lie in the impossibly lush grass. This is not vine country.

A Chambre d'Hôte is our lodging again at Cormatin, about 30 kilometres short of Mâcon. Encore we sampled the local wine. It was a Louis Max 2005. It was very good and it washed down the excellent boeuf Bourguignon and the Navarin d'Agneau.

1 May 1939 (Monday) Crêches-sur-Saône to Vienne via Lyon

The road still runs through vineyard country, and much of it is very straight and flat. It's very hot today – we arrived in Lyon about 1p.m. but didn't get out until 3:30. Miles of the ghastliest pavé we've yet struck, no post, and they weren't at all nice at Cooks where I called to see about Tourist Liras. We didn't like Lyon. Resolved not to call at another Cooks until I could dress in a frock.

Hilly going to Vienne, but lovely scenery – oxen are now a common sight in the fields, and Vienne has lots of Roman remains. Some bother in finding our home for

the night – another disused château on the bank of the Rhône. A long walk for milk for our supper – the French country kilometres are as long as the English country miles!

2 May 2010 Cormatin to Lyon – 45 kilometres

Cormatin has a very grand château which appears to float in a lake. It wasn't open for viewing early enough for us so we set off along the old railway route and climbed to the tunnel Clos de Bois. The tunnel is home to a rare species of chauve-souris (bald mouse) or bat. The first few hundred metres of this 1.6km long tunnel are very dimly lit for the convenience of these tiny mammals and it is a cycling experience.



A surprise snack

Immediately on emerging into daylight we found a table set up by the path set out with home baked goodies and chèvre. It was a family fund raising for their local school in Le Bois Claire. We dumped a few euros of change on the table, partook and got chatting. The guy's brother worked in a restaurant in Brisbane and we chatted more. A bottle of the local chardonnay was produced, more euros went into the hat, but we drew the line when a bottle of red was produced. We had more kilometres to go, to Macon, from where we trained into Lyon to avoid the city traffic.

Standing in the middle of the platform at Macon as the train came in we were told we had to be at the tête du train for the bicycles which meant a bit of a sprint. The driver's door was wide open and he invited Brian in. Philip and I joined him for a while and learnt that we were travelling at the 160 km speed limit for this train type. Brian somehow quizzed the driver, whose English was rather limited, and now is full bottle on all the vital statistics of such trains – power, weight, safety systems, stopping distances etc. and on the TGVs many of which had whooshed back and forth past us in the morning.

Unlike our 1939 voyagers we all did like Lyon – very much – the way buildings curve along the Saône and crowd under the mountain with its basilica and little Eiffel tower.

I picked out the street where my son Nicholas had lived in 2007 – 2008. As I walked by the Rhône a swarm of scimitar-winged swifts was working the air over the river chasing invisible insects. Circling and swooping and soaring they moved en masse upstream at about walking pace so they were above me for a kilometre or so as I strolled along the bank. I was entranced and risked tripping over as I stared into the cloudy evening sky. It seemed that often two or three would get the same insect in their sights and race towards it and at the last moment one would score. They surely must have rules that ensure there are no midair collisions.

Magret de canard au miel epicier that night was very good. We were not permitted to leave without a digestif gratuit – Poire William. We learnt how the pear gets into the bottle. The bottle is placed over a flower and voila!

2 May 1939 (Tuesday) Vienne Mirmande via Valence

A good flat road all the way to Valence, much of it through lovely wooded country with a broad green river on our right – the Rhône again. Plenty of heavy lorries on the road – going, we guess, to Marseilles. Valence is a nice clean looking town with no pavé. We read our first bit of English news for the day from a free copy of the newspaper in the news office window.

Soon after Valence a grand fox-hound took a fancy to us, and followed us for some time. He seemed lost. What a pity that such a good dog for ‘la chasse’ should have mislaid his master.

Mirmande, our destination for the night is a peculiar, fascinating place. A town, right off the main road, built on a steep hill side. The houses are all of grey rock and mostly falling to pieces and very old. There are no streets, only very steep tracks, but they have telephones and electric light. We are housed in the disused Hotel de Ville. It reminds me of all I’ve read of Moorish architecture – we go across a pavé courtyard and up a flight of outside stone steps to bed. After a fine supper (our first “Cheese Dreams”) we climb to the top of Mirmande. It is very quiet and peaceful – almost uncanny, but that does not prevent us having a good night’s rest.

3 May 2010 Lyon to La Roche de Glun via Vienne – 75 kilometres

We again decided not to struggle with Lyon traffic and jumped on a train to Vienne. Two venerable local cyclists were putting their bikes into the bike compartment at the tête du train also. My French was well tested in conversation with them. Veterans of much cycling including Lyon to Istanbul, they were off for a day's outing in the Ardèche mountains. They explained that they should have been doing the Haute Route this week, but that their guide had determined that the weather was going to be too bad. This is the alpine ski tour from Chamonix to Zermatt which I have wanted to do for about thirty years. They were 65 and 70 so I still have at least a decade to do it! After I explained that we were repeating my mother's 8,000 km ride of 1939 they suggested that I suffered a *maladie familiale*. I pointed out that if so then my companions must be suffering from a much greater *maladie* as they weren't even *familiale*.

The Office du Tourisme in Vienne was very helpful, but they thought that the Voie Verte down the Rhône was still under construction. We were absolutely delighted to find that they were ill-informed. It is made from Condrieu, with a couple of breaks, for about 50 kilometres.

At lunch time we came into forlorn looking Andancette and began hunting for somewhere to eat, without much hope until Philip chanced upon the railway restaurant. The menu de jour was the only option. I failed to explain what was involved to Brian and when the entrée of lettuce and light pastry roll with a frankfurt inside arrived he thought that was it and resigned himself to missing the pasta and pork he'd seen others tucking into. He was well pleased when it appeared as the main course. We were all surprised that vin or bière was included. The request for l'addition was greeted with some bewilderment by monsieur who asked if we were passing up on the cheese platter. Of course not! But wait, there is more – an apple tart appeared and espresso coffee was offered. All this cost us the princely sum of 12 euros each!



And then we could not depart without a little of monsieur's homemade eau de vie!! All the while we were quietly watched by Ouiy, a St Bernard, who was surely as heavy as Brian. There seemed to be the wisdom of centuries behind his huge brown eyes.



Ouiy

A few kilometres on we found more of the newly constructed Voie Verte. In fact it was so new we decided they'd laid it while we were having lunch. Maybe if we don't go too quickly they will keep just ahead of us right to the Mediterranean!

Tonight we are comfortably ensconced in another farmhouse b & b a few kilometres north of Valence. We had to pedal 6 kilometres into Tain l'Hermitage for dinner into the teeth of the Mistral. It whisked us back and we were fearful of missing the turnoff to our lodgings.

3 May 1939 (Wednesday) Mirmande to Avignon

Sallied forth early to Montélimar – they make nougat there so all the signs for about 50 kilos have told us – so we sample it, and two bars cost us the extortionate priced of 1/-. Then we go through a village called Pierrelatte, possessing a large rock which local legend – so the C.T.C. Route informs us – says was brought there by a giant. Anyhow we saw several of these outcrops of large barren rocks in this district afterwards. It's pretty hot today, and we eat our dinner of pilchards and nougat in the shade, and follow the Rhône to Avignon. It's been a long ride today and I'm about at the end of my tether when we arrive. The famous Pont is falling to pieces, but we like the look of the city walls, and decide to explore further in the morn. Our hostel is at Villeneuve which is over the river from Avignon. What will it be? Idly speculating that it might be the glorious castle on a hill overlooking Avignon little did we dream, after being told to ascend a steep street that it was! Our address for the night is Fort St Andre – a restored Castle with a glorious view of Avignon with its lovely Pope's Palace and city walls spread before us over the river. While preparing supper a Dutch girl walks in. She is hitch-hiking to Florence, and starting pottery making when she arrives. She had pea-picked in England, and speaks several languages fluently – she likes England because sometimes the people on the road offer her lifts without being asked! We walk up to the top of the hill after supper, and gaze down over the walls, listening to the frogs. Then to bed, with nightingales singing outside the window. Elli has gone when we rise next morning, and has left a note in French for the Aubergiste explaining that she will pay the 4 francs she owes for her bed on her return journey, with a note for 'the girls' containing advice on camping in Italy – we are to be careful where we put our tent, and must not drink any water we are not sure of. Also she leaves her address in Holland.

4 May 2010 La Roche de Glun to Montelimar to Avignon

The Mistral howled all night and we looked out onto a very wet morning. As soon as we had the wind behind us the driven rain was tolerable and we zoomed along the D road on the west bank of the Rhône . A lone cyclist passed us then we passed him having a snack huddled in a bus shelter. He caught us again when we stopped to check navigation. He asked to accompany us to Montelimar so we set off in a peleton of four that is until my back tyre suddenly deflated. We found a 1cm shard of glass in it. God was smiling a little though because we were just outside a church

with a large enough portico to shelter us while making repairs which included replacing a brake block on Philip's bike worn to the bone. Michael Haldy, our momentary companion who had cycled 1000kilometres from his home in Domstadt in Germany was clothed very lightly so he decided to leave us before getting too cold. He however gave us his email address and was keen for us to visit him as our route takes us near his home.

Crossing the Rhône on a barrage I failed to see steel tracks used for some machine or other under the pooled water. My front wheel either slid or dropped into the track and before I knew it I was banging my helmet on the road. If I had not been wearing one I might well have not had to look for accommodation that night for a hospital bed would have been my resting place. The helmet definitely did its job – a chunk of it cracked off. With a slightly sore head and a banged hip and elbow I was able to make it the next 30 or so kilometres to Montelimar. With the Mistral and rain continuing and with my feeling a little the worse for wear we decided to train on to Avignon. This meant killing a couple of hours waiting for a train that could take bikes (the autocars don't) during which we failed to partake of the nougat capital's product.

Our lodging, the pleasant little Hotel Mignon, is run by a most amiable and helpful proprietor. We dined at a restaurant he recommended. We thought we were near enough to Marseille to test the bouillabaisse. It was magnificent, but we could not work out why it was described as petit. One serve was enough for two.

5 May 2010 Avignon rest day

Continuing rain and wind and my still feeling less than 100% we decided to stay two nights in Avignon. The first job was to get a new helmet. Unfortunately I couldn't get a yellow one to match my cycling tops!

We spent a few hours in the Palais des Papes, but that isn't long enough to really soak up the special period in Avignon's long history. We bumped into Michael twice and promised to call on him in Darmstadt.

Very unadventurously we went for dinner to the same restaurant again, but this did result in peach and wine aperitifs and a special digestif of Provence gratis the second night. We had indicated our appreciation for the choice of African American blues being played.

4 May 1939 (Thursday) Avignon to Aix en Provence

Goodbye to Fort St Andre and over the bridge to Avignon – a truly lovely city. They have music and banners out – for us? And I get my first post. We invest the three francs to see the Pope's Palace inside and queue up for bread. Its early closing for the bread shops today. Then out of town to a sheltered spot for dinner, a wade in a brook for cakes dropped over the bridge. We do eventually arrive at Aix en Provence, but the country is gloomy and barren although hot and Aix seems to get further instead of nearer. We skirt the town and the Auberge is about 3 km out. Up a glorious wooded valley, a pokey little place. We wish we'd decided to sleep out.

6 May 2010 Thursday Avignon to Aix en Provence – 88 kilometres, 508 metres vertical

Today was a sunnier day and it was a wild flower day. It started with a meander across the flattish farming country south of Avignon crossing, every little while, the narrow water channels, some natural some human directed, that divide up the fields. Quite suddenly a high limestone ridge breaks the skyline. Thankfully there is a gap through which we climb and we are for a time in country that has been left to the forces of nature. Low, rather twisted pines are the main trees. We descend to lands that have been tilled and planted with vines. There are fallow fields of deep but variegated green dotted with rich red poppies. The birds are singing all day long, but I presume as spring turns to summer they rest their voices in the middle day heat.

The day ends with a steep, windy downhill run into Aix and a cruise up the stately Mirabeau Avenue. We dine at the recommendation of the young woman at the hotel (perhaps a student in this university town) at the Charlotte. We are welcomed, rather quizzically I think, by the restaurateur. We are certainly the only non-locals. I decide that all the other diners are students and professors dedicating their evening to solving philosophical problems. I suggest to Philip and Brian that the world is very lucky to have this effort expended on its behalf.

5 May 1939 Friday Aix en Provence to Hyeres

Up and away by 8:30 through lovely country, but very hot to Brignoles. After that we miss our route, but go buy a pretty road to Gonfaron, and thence to Hyeres through wooded hills by a stream valley disaster at Hyeres no one seems to know the hostel, but someone tells us that eventually that it is about 3 km out, and only for campers, campers and we shall be toutes seules as the season has not yet started. Anyhow,

down we go past a huge 'drome lose our way and eventually ride by some desolate salt marshes, with nothing but the croaking of the frogs for company. The light has almost gone when we arrive and are told the hostel is only open for the summer. However, an Englishman living there, tells us we make camp in the bungalow town built amongst the pines. We pitch in someone's back garden brew, cocoa and eat the petit fours. We had bought to celebrate our first 1000 miles and go wearily to bed. There are aeroplanes flying overhead and the stars among the pines are very lovely.

7 May 2010 Friday – Aix en Provence to Rocbaron

This has been our biggest climbing day so far. We got in to our first real mountains and did a total of 766 metres vertical over about 75 kilometres. Riding along under the Montagnes de Sainte Victoire was quite spectacular.



Again we were up in wilderness, following the little road as it wound its way up and up beside a stream sliding over smooth rolls of limestone. The mountain peaks broke through the cloud and caught the morning sun.

A very fine omelette in the town square of Saint Maximin helped us up and through Les Montagnes de Sainte Beaune.

We were taking pot luck with accommodation and luck was surely with us for in Rocbaron, as I approached the Mairie to ask about places to stay, Philip found himself standing in front of a gate with a chambres d'hote sign. We rang the bell and it was answered slightly surprisedly by Monsieur et Madame whose guests usually book. Three Aussie cyclists just turning up was not their normal experience. La Maison de Rocbaron, their guesthouse, is quite possibly the most delightfully decorated and appointed lodging I have ever stayed in. The tariff is not budget, but it is entirely proportional with the quality offered and the hospitality of Guy and his wife.

6 May 1939 (Saturday) Hyeres to Saint Raphael

I woke at 5:30 AM after a restless night and went down to the beach to see a heavenly sunrise over the Mediterranean. Up and struck camp by 8:30 AM, which is just as well for the place is not so deserted, as it appeared last night. Heads have appeared out of several of the windows. So it's a good job we didn't camp in a bungalow that was occupied. The road was hilly, and our legss are weary, but the scenery after Le Lavandou beggars description. The sea truly is turquoise and marine and the profusion of flowers unbelievable. The road is very up and down, full of daily colour villas us change from the maternal grey and blue paint. Dinner, just before the bad weather starts, and it's driving wind and rain all the way to St Raphael where a friendly gendarme asks us if we brought the mauvais temps with us. The hostel looks imposing enough from without, we later discovered it to be built on the remains of an old Roman temple to the sun, but it is not so good within. We go in search of food and cook our supper in the dormitory after pere has made several experiments with the stove inside and out. There is a host of small children and very little cooking and washing accommodation. . We share the dorm with a buxom lass, who is on intimate terms with family that has been a cubber together with three of the children with whom I have a winning argument about opening windows.

8 May 2010 Rocbaron to St Raphael

Guy told us that it was all downhill from Rocbaron to the next town. Well it is after you've done the uphill bit! Actually that's only a K or so then there is a magnificent run of ten Ks or so with a drop of about 400 metres. There is then a gentle climb by a stream up to Colobrieres where we found a very stately town square and a brasserie cum gallerie cum cave cum epicerie run by a Belgian. He told us we should visit his beautiful homeland but explained that the south of France was a better place to live.

It happened to be Victory in Europe Day and we were privileged to see the local veterans march into the square behind three flags held high and listen as a trumpeter solemnly played something I did not recognise.



The flags were dipped, Madame Mayor made a short speech, everyone clapped and presumably then went off for a pastis or two including, I should think, the bevy of brothers from the local monastery whose presence had lent the occasion extra gravitas.



Up we went again into the hills covered in cork oaks many recently relieved of their bark. The olive green of the cork oaks on the hill sides is pierced here and there with the brighter green of the leaves of other oaks and beeches. Cresting the range we have our first view of the Mediterranean. Our legs have nearly got us, except for a few Ks on trains here and there, from the waters of the North Sea as they insert themselves into the Channel to this sea that was the middle of the ancients' world.

Lavender and lilies and wild roses and many more rush past as we fly down to the coast. Wilderness gives way again to humanity and ochre walled, orange tile roofed and pale blue shuttered houses pop out of the landscape. Cypressess, often standing against these houses, point to the heavens perhaps indicating who is responsible for the beauty of the earth. But then, we are entered into a very different world almost completely human fashioned along the Cote d'Azur. Today it is the Cote de Gris – very, very grey and cold and windy and a bit wet. It is most unseasonable and very different from that hot sunny spring day Bill and Berry rode along it in 1939. And it

certainly would have been a much more delightful place with maybe less than a quarter of the human structures than it has today. What is more, this week end is the annual gathering of Harley-Davidson motor-bikers at St Tropez. We had seen a few in the hinterland, but this is unbelievable. The spluttering firecracker exhaust din from hundreds of Harleys filing up and down the coast is stunning. Getting amongst them on our bicycles is quite incongruous. And there must be a major gathering of Shelby Cobras as a side show. Dozens of these pass by. There cannot be many left anywhere else in the world.

One oddity was a little swarm of those mopeds with the tiny petrol motors on their front wheels. I wondered if these were Harleys in their immature form and that one day they would metamorphose into the big, fat adult form. One of their riders wore a Jack Daniels Bourbon tee shirt and this seemed to me to lend credence to this theory.

7 May 1939 (Sunday) St Raphael to Antibes

A fine morning as we leave Saint Raphael for Antibes via Frejus, where we see the Roman ruins. But the road looks hilly, so back we go and take the Coast Road and aren't we glad we did. The road winds along the side of the mountains above the sea and the vivid red granite cliffs make the sea seem even more blue. It's a boiling hot day today, and we have our dinner on the seashore and sunbathe greeted while so doing by two Danes, whom we have seen a couple of days back, who look as though they are doing much the same kind of thing, as we are-great travellers these Danes. It's too hot to cycle much, so we rest beneath the welcome shade of a Pinewood and then make for Antibes, hoping to camp. The hostel at Golfe Juan is full of black soldiers, and as there was no camping accommodation at either of the other two hostels, we share the warden's bedroom for the night. Madame asked us if we minded being in the same room as she and her husband separated by a curtain. We said no. So they took two straw palliases upstairs for us, but we didn't enjoy ourselves very much. The beds were damp, and at about 3 AM the cats came in through the window.

8 May 1939 (Monday) Antibes to Nice

This morning at breakfast, we learn that the other visitors to the hostel are the first secretary of the French socialist hostel Association, and his wife. Both speak excellent English. He is an ardent left winger and regrets bitterly the recent

introduction of conscription in England. One curious thing I learnt about him is his great sympathy to Hitler and his aims partly explained by, I think, the fact that his grandmother was a German. Anyhow, he says most of the business interests in Germany after the war were in the hands of the Jews. And he can quite understand Hitler's object in driving them out!! We discussed the two rival youth hostel Associations in France, run by the Church and the Socialist party, and he told us he was disgusted with it that he had severed his connections with them and with a friend proposed to start a third Association in opposition! Another curious fact – he was what I would call almost an internationalist. He had nothing good to say about Italy or the Italians and seemed rather worried to think we were going there. He asked us to write and let him know how we were treated and said we should almost certainly not be allowed to camp. Italy was full of petty restrictions and all the officials had much too good an opinion of themselves. After farewells to our friends, we set off again in glorious weather, alongside a sea as blue as ever, with distant views of the French Maritime Alps on our left. We have our dinner of bread and cheese and tomatoes on the promenade at Nice watching the soldiers at target practice on the cliffs above. This is a lovely town. The hostel, where we at last pitch our tent is about four kilometres outside the town and ca monte all the way. Oh, how it mounts. The view when we finally arrive is lovely, and the Chalet d'Azur (our home) is next to the Chateau d'Azur; the home of the Tokalon millionaires. Mlle Aubergiste is a dear. As it rains in the evening, she invites us to come up to her kitchen and cook our supper. We have some grand pancakes and after supper, Mlle plays charmingly to us on the flute. She has about 10 cats. She is interested to learn that we are going on into Italy, and gives us the address of a young man, who has stayed there once or twice, an Englishman, whom she says he's in Genoa studying to be a priest – name of Bernard Dawson and very jolly "toujours il rit". Anyhow, we promise to call on him.

9 May 1939 (Tuesday) Nice – rest day

Today we sally forth in our best to stagger Nice. We draw a blank at the Italian Embassy, which is closed for the day and no one appears to know why, but Cooks receive us nicely and we get five pounds ten shillings of Italian lira. Then we explore old Nice, a huddle of narrow streets crowded with stalls, mostly food, cheese, olives meat etc. We buy our dinner here. It's very cheap and we eat in the municipal gardens overlooking the sea. Then a bit more exploration of flower market which was exquisite. Then home to wash our hair (badly needed this) and cook supper, asparagus fried eggs and cherry jam – tres bon.

10 May (Wednesday) Nice – rest day

I'm writing this sitting in the tent listening to the rain on the roof. It's been raining for about four hours. I hope it will clear up soon. It stopped raining so we went downhill to shop accompanied by the other camper in the garden – a rather nice French cyclist, who, although he has been to Scotland doesn't know much English. A sad misunderstanding about a drink, all through Berry's inability to drink gassy minerals, he apparently thinks we don't want to accept his offer and dashed off rather suddenly to catch the bus to town. I do hate hurting people, but couldn't explain if I tried. In the afternoon, we saw our first French film. The adventures of a brave secret service agent one Capitaine Benoit, and most of the scenery was in the Riviera – we recognised it! Another good supper: peas and potatoes, sausages etc. And so to bed. We do ourselves rather well when we squat for any length of time.

9 May 2010 Saint Raphael to Nice

Rather coincidentally, just as in 1939 a couple of cats wanted to join us during the night in our bedroom in the delightful Hotel Cynos in Saint Raphael. This is where F Scott Fitzgerald wrote 'Tender is the Night'. When was that – before or after or at the time Bill and Berry were here?

The sea was still not azure as it was a grey morning as we set out and a dimanche time petit déjeuner and another flat meant we didn't leave town until about ten.

The scenery even on an overcast day though was spectacular. As my mother says the cliffs are a vivid red but the rock doesn't look like granite to me, but maybe my mother was a better geologist than I. I'll have check this. Around headlands the road climbs and then dips into the bays. The houses match the colour of the mountains – perhaps by regulation.

There are numerous Sunday riders on the road with us and we give and receive many a bonjour and a salut. After lunch the paths by the sea are filled with perambulating families and couples.

The film festival is on in Cannes. We pedalled slowly through, but failed to spot a single movie star.

The kilometre or so of parked executive jets at Nice airport we cruised past pretty much confirms that this is a corner of the planet the wealthy rather like. Many might be here for the Cannes festival and the Monte Carlo Grand Prix which is in the next day or two.

We were impressed with Nice: its grand square and buildings also the colour of the pink rock. 71 years on the old part still has market stalls, but I think rather more restaurants with the greater number of tourists of today. Another thing very different must be the local's knowledge of English. Here in France we have managed quite often to avoid the locals having to burden themselves with English on our behalf. However we will be very dependent on people being able to communicate in our language for the rest of the trip except perhaps Sweden where Brian can help. In 1939 surely Bill and Berry would have mostly been required to rely on their linguistic skills.

Having only done about 65 kilometres we decided we needed a bit more exercise climbed the 90 metres to the site of the old fortress above Nice.

The huge memorial set into the side of the fortress mount looking out to sea was draped with a gigantic tricolour and had wreaths left from the previous day's ceremonies. There was a special panel for the men and women of the resistance. I have been wondering for some time about the reconciliation after the war between the Vichy and collaborating people and those who opposed and resisted the Nazis. When we saw the veterans marching yesterday I wondered if the Vichy veterans who changed loyalties and fought with the Allies after the invasion of North Africa might ever be found standing side by side Free French veterans on such occasions.

I have noticed that many, many towns and villages have an Avenue, Boulevard or Rue General de Gaulle. I might be wrong, but there seem to be more in what was Vichy France than occupied France. I wonder if the Vichy towns and villages hurriedly renamed a street such after the war in order to show their loyalty.

10 May 1939 (Thursday) Nice to Mentone

We were up at 6 and had struck camp early. Oh! I almost forgot, during our short stay we were visited by the school kiddies on their way to and from school every day, and one sweet child, learnt to say Goodbye every time she came by. Berry's shorts, on the only occasion she wore them created such a sensation that she put them away in seclusion again. We weren't out of Nice until 11. Went out by a very long hill which we decided to leave and seek the coast at Villefranche, then discovered we were off our route, and rejoined it by another long push up to La Turbie, in the boiling sun. La Turbie by the guide should have warranted a stop, but it was hot, and so we went on. There are three wonderful roads along the Riviera at this part. Low, Middle

and High Corniche, all three wonderfully built, and we had been zigzagging from Middle to High all the time. Anyhow there was a grand freewheel down into Mentone, although we missed Monte Carlo and the principality of Monaco. Then we search for Le Mirador, the home of Mlle. Hovelacque, Mrs Newcomb's friend. It is an enormous house, and we feel some trepidation, as we walk up the gravel drive, but it was quite unwarranted. There is a Guide and Brownie meeting in progress, and after a rather incredulous, but extremely warm welcome, we are invited to watch them act the story of the poor woodcutter and his children whom he tries to lose in the forest. The we are offered hospitality for the night, given tea, and then taken round the town, the old part of which is very like old Nice. We return to dinner with Madame Hovelacque who is as charming as her daughter – here we sampled our first French wine, but we are neither of us experienced wine tasters so the impression leaves us rather cold.

11 May 1939 Mentone to somewhere in Italy

Next morning Mlle. Hovelacque excels herself. She has ordered all kinds of things especially for our breakfast, ham eggs, fruit, cheese, etc. and insists upon our packing the remainder on the bikes, together with the oranges and lemons from Le Mirador's garden. When we are ready Mlle announces her intention of taking us to see an English friend of hers who has lived in Italy, so off we go. Madame gives us several addresses of 'pensioni' and lots of good advice. She too has no love for the Italians, and has plenty to say on the subject of masculine morals. The conversation has depressed us (coupled with what other people have already told us about Italy) and we prepare to leave La Belle France, with the thought that if we don't like Italy we can come back or make tracks for Switzerland. Later we heard that our English friend, who had recently moved into France from Italy because she could not bear the restrictions, although she disliked the Italians so much, was in fact, keeping some of her old servants on Lake Maggiore. The two friends came with us to the frontier, and saw us safely through onto Italian soil, after much palaver, by French and Italians. It appeared that at Calais the official had taken two parts of our customs ticket instead of one, and they had to ring up to see if they really had it there. The Italians seemed rather incredulous at our statement that we were going to Rome, and said Goodbye with several 'Que coraggios' The road and coast are very similar to the French Riviera, but the Italians plant all the corners of the road with geraniums, etc., and the houses are more ornate. Cycled part of the way with a fellow who had been valet to an Englishman Admiral or of some such, anyhow he spoke good English, and didn't make any attempt to molest us, and gave us one or two tips, so

we went on, somewhat reassured. There didn't seem to be a square foot of land suitable for camping so we were obliged to try an 'Albergo'. We got an excellent two bedded room for 9 lira (about 1/6) each, and passed an uneventful night, except for my falling out of bed. Berry has a nasty habit of laughing at other people's misadventures, although she says she feels sorry for them – I'm not so sure.

10 May 2010 Nice to San Remo

We have a late start again. Someone has tried to steal our bikes from the hall at the building entry, but they only got away with the lock and our tools and spare tubes. We therefore have to wait until the bike shop opens at ten to replace these essentials.

It rained heavily during the night, but today the sun is on full duty and at last we have a Cote d'Azur. Unlike our predecessors we stuck to the Corniche Basse. The Moyenne and the Haute soar above us. I don't think I'd get any sleep staying in one of the houses far above on the edge of the cliffs. I'd be listening all night for the sound of the cliff giving way.

There are some other cyclists out on this Monday morning, but I think fewer of them are helmetless. There are tennis ball sized rocks on the road fallen from the cliffs here and there and a helmet just might prevent a braining.

There are huge white cruise ships that look like floating apartment blocks. In the small bays they look quite out of place.



Not a Bad Spot

Monaco is getting ready for the Grand Prix and with the roads that will be the circuit closed the Rolls Royces, Maseratis and Bentleys are moving even slower than they must usually in this crammed little principality. We actually rode on about half the

circuit which I thought was a bit special. I recognised it from the virtual computer racing I wasted a number of hours doing a few years ago.

The Italian border was hardly noticeable except that the signs changed to Italian. We struggled through Ventimiglia's clogged streets and on to San Remo where we decided we'd breathed in enough exhaust fumes for the day and took refuge in the Hotel Alexander. We think we really did have cucina tipica Liguria as we were the only non-locals in the restaurant we dined in that night – eg fish fillets on a sort of ratatouille bed and octopus and potatoes in a tomato sauce.

13 May 1939 (Saturday) to Genoa

En route for Genoa – weather not too good, but the road is flat, and we get there about 4 o'clock. It's an enormous place, starts about 20 kilometres before we get to it – if you follow me – but the policemen and local lads are more helpful in directing us to 73 Via Milano, B.D.'s address. He is out, so promising to return at 5 (my Italian, in one day is progressing marvellously) we search for food, feast on coffee, chocolate and cakes for three lira and make our way back. B.D. is certainly full of joie de vivre, very anxious to help, and thrilled at what we are doing. He's been doing the same thing more or less, with and without tent, since he was 13. He's the son of a parson in Leicester, but I don't somehow think he is destined for the Ministry although he is in charge of the Seamen's Institute. Pietro, his servant, kindly draws a map for us of the way to Via Assarotti, but after a long search we find the Davidsons are away at the English-Italian football match in Turin. This address had been given us by Mlle. Hovelacque's servant, she said Mrs. D was her sister, but their home was a really palatial flat in one of the biggest streets in the town, and quite what we should have done had they been in I don't know. Anyhow, back we went to Via Milano, it was by now quite dark, and time all respectable girls were in bed, and we kept being accosted by hotel touts. Anyhow after much palaver at the Seamen's Institute, B.D. found us a bed at the Albergo California for 8 lira – the honeymoon suite. It was a dingy place and our room was an attic about five floors up, but we were tired, and slept the sleep of the just.

11 May 2010 San Remo to Genova to Levanto

We discovered that there are 30 ks or so of bike path on a disused part of the railway along the coast to Imperia so even though it looks like rain we decide to do this. We

think we will jump on a train then to Genova as rain is likely to arrive and we aren't keen on risking the quite busy, narrow road from there on in the wet.

My mother makes no mention of the greenhouses. Were there none in 1939 or were there few. Now whole hillsides are glassed over. It is really rather ugly. Peering in to some as we go by flowers seem to be the crop.

We wind our way around the base of the seaside mount on which Imperia is perched find the railway station, buy tickets and miss the next train to Genova by about 10 seconds! There is another in 20 minutes, but it requires a stop-over in Savona. Just as elsewhere in the world people in Italy don't worry about how their houses present to the observer from the train. It's presentation to the street that counts.

Genova is perhaps not the prettiest, grandest city in Italy, but it does have character with its very narrow alleys winding between the buildings up from the port.

We spent a great deal of time getting phone linked. The laws require passport presentation and the store's procedures are quite tortuous too. It's raining pretty heavily and we resort to Trenitalia again to get us the 30 ks or so to Levanto. It is our plan to spend the next day seeing the Cinque Terre substituting walking for riding.

14 May 1939 (Sunday) Genova to Pass of Bracci

Away breakfastless, by 8 a.m. and in town met the American boy who'd been staying at the Seamen's Institute. He had hitch-hiked 1200 miles in 4 days to New York, and worked his passage over, and was proposing to do much the same sort of things as us, but made us rather envious by saying that he was doing Italy in about a week by rail, and the ticket only cost about 30 shillings. Anyhow later we were jolly glad we'd seen the country our way. Couldn't find B.D. at the Chiesa Inglesi, but got the address of a Count (a great friend of Dawson's) of Pietro, and then proceeded to shake the dust of Genoa from our bikes. Can't get much in the way of food in Italy on Sunday, so after a meagre dinner we rest for an hour as the road is hilly and hot, at Rapallo, a glorious little coast resort, it is thundering rather heavily, and rains till about 5, so we decide to look for a camp site, and see a spare patch near the railway, but the local inhabitants seem to think its not good enough so on we go and strike a marvellous place, just at the commencement of the pass of Bracci – views of the sea, pine and alive covered hills around us, a grand sunset, and as I write the stars are coming out.

2 May 2010 Cinque Terre

After buying our pass for the Cinque Terre train service and permit to walk the path we train to Riomaggiore where we bump into an Australian couple we met in our Nice hotel. They inform us that because of the wild storm a few days ago only the short path to Manarola is open. Presumably rock falls are the problem. We have a pleasant enough day anyway poking around these two villages. The houses are just crammed together I'm imagining that the villagers defending themselves against the raiders from the sea in years gone by would have had difficulty swinging a sword in the alleys and steep steps between them. Rather sadly, quite recently new broader streets have been constructed over the rivers that tumble through these villages. The traditional open boats are lined up in these streets. Some are wooden, some are new fibre glass but built in exactly the same style. They have rounded sterns with flat water level wings, I guess to assist handling in the waves. And the central timber spine projects above the bow making them rather proud looking little vessels. Getting them down into the water must have required quite a few hands in the past, but now there are sophisticated crane systems.

No mention is made of the Cinque Terre in my mother's journal. I'll have to check, but perhaps the railway had not been built then and the towns were only accessible by sea or steep path from the mountains above. I don't know how long they have been a tourist Mecca, but old women still chat in the alleys apparently oblivious to the hordes in their walking gear with their cameras and loud voices. The cliffs have been dressed with wire mesh to protect the heads of these tourists from falling rocks. Perhaps they should have been left unspoilt and walkers could use bike helmets.

15 May 1939 (Monday) Braccci Pass to La Spezia

Up and away after a good night's sleep, by 9. People are all very interested. A long, long push up the Pass of Bracchi, with fine views of the coast. It's stormy and rainy, but thank goodness not hot. Hungry we arrive at Carridano, but we can only get cheese and more cherry jam and chocolate which is not good and the cheese is soapy. The roadman is so interested he decides to hack up the road just by us. A hilly road into La Spezia, which in spite of its being an important naval centre has not much to offer in the way of food, and Berry has a pain – I think the bread is affecting us – it's much stodgier than the French variety. We decide to look for a resting place early, but on asking permission we find it is just outside a military zone where it is forbidden to remain. Anyhow two strange gentlemen informed us we should be

pinched (charged by the police) if we stayed, but we took the risk. Berry had a good night, but I, with visions of Carabinieri outside, and the rumbling of carts along the road all night, was not so successful. People seem to get up at an unearthly hour here. It's dark by 8 so we have to go to bed early anyway.

16 May 1939 La Spezia to Pisa to coast past Livorno

We were up by 6 and had struck camp and departed by 8. It rained to Sarzana, a nice old town with a fine Cathedral and interesting walls and castle. It's a flat road to Carrara, which is the centre of the marble industry, but there is a terrific hill up out of it where two very kind workmen commandeer our bikes without a word and push them up for us. A freewheel into Massa which we discover we should have reached by another shorter route. Dinner by the roadside, watched by a crowd of barefooted urchins to whom we give cherries. Then a lovely flat road to Pisa, where they make multi-coloured ice cream which is buona, but not so the lads who decide to ride with us. Pisa is a lovely town, wide streets, old houses with lots of wrought iron work. The Campanile and Cathedral are exquisite, the detailed carving wonderful, especially the bronze doors. Inside it is plain and lofty, very much more formal than most churches we've seen, all plain Norman style arches. Out of Pisa by a still flat road, on which we see plenty of small green lizards, to Leghorn (Livorno), which we by-pass, and also see a funeral. Then on to the coast where we find a very friendly farmer and his family, who let us camp, but are rather worried about us in case of rain and take me to the stall where two placid white oxen are having their evening meal, and invite us to sleep with them on the hay – we prefer the tent.

13 May 2010 Levanto to Pisa

We are woken by bells from three or four chiesa presumably announcing early mass. We are taking the ferry along the Cinque Terre coast to Portovenere from where we will start riding. From the sea the villages seem to grow out of and over the rock like pink and orange lichen. Or perhaps the houses are like barnacles clinging to rocks by the sea, the villagers safe inside opening and closing their green shutters as the moods of the Mediterranean permit.



Homo sapiens barnaclus

The cliffs are steep, tightly folded layers of rock and they look like edges of old books and the herring gulls cruise the currents around and above them.

We have bruschetta in the sun at Portovenere and set off up the road that winds around the bay to La Spezia. It is still a major naval base. A wall a few hundred years old with a moat hides a couple of square kilometres of something military. I wonder if Bill and Berry did some spying here which is recorded in a journal now in MI6 archives!!

We make good time along the coastal road which is mostly flat. Towards Viareggio we pass kilometre after kilometre of hotels and camping grounds. We have occasional glimpse of the beach that is the reason for all this. As we approach Viareggio we are amazed by the hectares of deck chairs and umbrellas in serried ranks on the beach. It is a chilly, windy day so they are unutilised. In fact we have been told that the Riviera has not had cold, wet weather such as we have been experiencing at this time of year for decades. Some have said 70 years (71?) others more. The holiday makers in Viareggio are consoling themselves with purchases from the fashion boutiques along the esplanade. It seems a strange thing to think that should the sun emerge they would descend on the beach and line themselves up in all those deck chairs. How different was this coast in 1939 with perhaps a few hotels and no roadside advertising and garish petrol stations.

This afternoon our wheels must have passed over exactly the same ground as our predecessors on the Via Aurelia – the old Roman road. There is some modern ugliness as we come into to Pisa, but this gives way to old cobbled streets and ancient buildings. You pass unexpectedly from these narrow streets into the grand place of the cathedral, the baptista and of course the tower. The buildings are a very

stark, very, very pale grey standing on a bright green lawn against a dark grey sky. We are quite stunned.

I agree with my mother that Pisa is a lovely town. Yes it has some wide avenues, but also narrow alleys and very appealing is the way the buildings follow the curve of the Arno. The Arno looks very full – the consequence of all this unseasonal rain.

We understand that more than a third of Pisa's 100,000 inhabitants are students and it is advisable not to change direction quickly walking the streets as they whizz by on their bicycles. Pisa seems to me to be Italy's Oxford or is Oxford England's Pisa?

This is of course the town where Galileo taught mathematics. Andrea Bocelli studied here, but I don't know mathematics was amongst the disciplines he pursued.

17 May 1939 (Wednesday)

A lovely winding coast road, we decide to swim if possible, but can't get down to the shore. A rather unpleasant individual attached himself to us, and it took about 10 miles for him to realise we had no intention of resting. Camped on a farm – there must have been an accident farther up the road, and the locals were holding an inquiry in the barn, visited by two policemen, who had to look at our Passports, and came back to warn us not to leave our bikes too near the road. Supper of macaroni and tomato, but we over-estimated our capacity.

18 May 1939 (Thursday) To Lago di Orbetello

The only large town today was Grosseto, where they have rather a nice Cathedral, but the shops were nearly all closed for the midday siesta, and we have difficulty in getting what we want. We have to take opportunities of buying food when they arise in Italy, for villages and shops are few and far between. Rather a gruesome sight today, a bad accident and a body covered by someone's tablecloth. Not much in the way of villages, we pass Lago di Orbetello, and camp in the backyard of a farm – two eggs each for supper and porridge and tea without milk – lack of shops making us tough.

19 May 1939 (Friday) Lago di Orbetello to San Marinello

A switch back road to Mont alto del Castro. A roman town on a hill, as most of them are. Narrow cobbled streets, and the shops and work shops are all open to the street, built in alcoves. They mend my shoes for nothing in one such workshop. One

thing we are quickly discovering about Italy is the intense almost animal-like curiosity of the people. We are quite accustomed to pitching camp with the whole family watching the procedure, and passing either comments of pity or amazement. It is indeed a bella campagna now. Rolling corn barley and wheat fields, with mountains in the distance and a wonderful profusion of wild flowers. Every shade of every colour – tall yellow flowers like dandelions only pale lemon, fields of a glorious crimson cultivated clover, big wild mauve sweet peas, Canterbury bells, masses of gorgeous scarlet poppies, and a whole host of other lovely flowers impossible to remember. I've started collecting pressed ones, but I don't think they'll arrive in England whole. We arrive at Civitavecchia, (after passing Tarquin) at about 4, and seize the opportunity of our first and last bathe in the Mediterranean. It was heavenly and no disturbances. Then we amble into the town – it is very swell, hosts of multi-coloured uniforms about and we eat buns and drink coffee outside a café in style. On through San Marinello, rather an attractive seaside resort, till we find a spot, quite invisible from the road, near the coast and quite close to an old pig, who grunts a lot. Have qualms about camping in the mowing grass, but the old farmer doesn't seem to mind, and we lie in bed and watch the stars come out after a lovely sunset over the sea.

20 May 1939 (Saturday) to Roma

We've only about sixty more kilometres to go on No 1 Via Aurelia, the road to Rome. Bought bread and cheese at the only shop for miles, and had a frugal dinner by the roadside, the figs we bought in Civitavecchia were exciting – one might expect something from such a posh town – they had almonds in them. There are farms and sheep grazing about three kilometres from Rome, but we lose our beloved bucket, and also the road, on the outskirts and find ourselves by accident outside the walls of the Vatican. There we shelter under a bridge, while Berry treats herself to an ice – they are about her only failing.

With the aid of a map, and the miracle of two people we asked speaking English, we ascertain that the pensione, of which Madame Campbell kindly gave us the address, no longer exists, but we are directed to another pensione, which looks much too swell. We ascend by lift to the 5th floor, and bargain Madame down from a posh bed-sitting room for 20 lire each to a small cubicle affair for 10 lire each. There are about 50 Balilla girls [Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) was an Italian Fascist youth organization] and true to Italian form they are very noisy. We shop and return about 8pm bearing in mind the warning that no decent girls are seen out in Italy alone after dark, then

eat some grand elaborate kind of cake called Macedonia in our bedroom and write postcards before retiring for the night.

14 May 2010 Pisa to Roma – by train!!

Rain is forecast for the next three days. I hope, looking down on us, Bill and Berry won't be too scornful as we are again resorting to Trenitalia. We find ourselves loading our bikes onto the train with two young Polish cycle tourers. They have been touring Corsica. They have been camping and often, like Bill and Berry, in remote parts simply by the road. Also they talked of the friendly encounters and hospitality of the country people of Corsica. I'm thinking that their experience on that island would have been much more similar to Bill's and Berry's than ours has been where we have journeyed seven decades on.

The changes of the last seven decades (apart from the replacement of cobblestones with tarmac) have, I think, made cycling in much of Europe less pleasant. The next ten years though will undoubtedly see rapid growth in the dedicated cycle ways and I think it will be possible to criss-cross this continent with only occasional encounters with challenging traffic. I'm hoping I can do a bit more of this while I can still keep a bike upright.

As we roll into Rome I note that the last sheep we saw grazing were many more than three kilometres out. We farewell our young Polish friends who are flying home tomorrow and set about finding somewhere to stay. We have to resort to one of those hotel touters. Yes that hasn't changed in 71 years.

After dinner we trot off to catch a recital of opera arias and duets, which we saw advertised. It is in the Episcopalian "Chiesa Di San Paolo entro le Mura" (St Paul within the Walls). I'll have to find out about this church. It's a few centuries old so I guess it wasn't Episcopalian originally. [It turns out that it was. It was built in the 1870s by a group of Americans after the Vatican ceased to rule Rome. It seems there must have been enough Episcopalian Americans living or visiting Rome to encourage building of a protestant church in this the bastion of the Roman Catholic Church]

We missed the first third, but reckon we got our 15 euro's worth anyway. It was a group called "I Musici Veneziani" and while they were excellent singers and excellent musicians, what really made them special was the way they were so clearly having a great time performing.

21 May 1939 Roma

Up at seven, wrote further postcards, breakfasted in style in the dining room and then sallied forth to view the town. First to the Piazza del Papa, by the Villa Umberto, and then down the Via Umberto – if we are lucky, for it was Vietato a velocapedi (forbidden to bikes) – this is a nasty habit they have in the big towns in Italy! We find the Pantheon, and stand awestruck at the vast unsupported expanse of the ceiling.

A disappointing search for the Palace of St. Augustine, and after many side tracks find the Victor Emanuel monument, a colossal affair of white marble and gold statues, and innumerable steps and fountains. Then on by Trajan's Forum and the Roman Forum to the Colosseum – this absolutely surpassed all our expectation.

Then in search of food, down the Via Appia, where we had meat and lettuce for 13 lira, and a jolly good cream trifle at a pastry shop for 2 lira. Afterwards we found the Terme (bath) of Diocletian, and saw many more churches, temples and fountains, until we arrived back at our old friend the Piazza del Popolo. Thence along the banks of the Tiber to the gorgeously elaborate Palace of Justice, and the massive Castello S. Angelo, and so home.

It should be mentioned that this journey was done on the bikes - not a piedi. Roma is such a contrast to Paris. In spite of all its large historic buildings, Paris has an air of lightness, the only word I can describe it with is 'fairy-like' which is ridiculous, but its beauty is to me somewhat ethereal, although there is nothing temporary about it. Rome, on the other hand, seems rooted and immovable in the solid earth – much may pass, but Roma will remain, sort of thing.

15 and 16 May 2010 Roma

It being well more than two thousand years since the first words were written about Roma, I guess that no other city has had more penned about it. What can I possibly say that has not already been said including by my mother? I agree with her comparison between Paris and Roma. She is saying that the label "The Eternal City" is apposite. I'll make a few observations that surely others have already recorded.

Looking down into the chambers below the arena level of the Colosseum I find myself thinking that this was the centre of the civilised world. But civility was something very different then. Being civil did not mean being humane – not towards many classes of people and certainly not towards other creatures. I find it very difficult to comprehend the lengths to which the rulers of that society went to

entertain, or occupy their constituencies with violent, cruel spectacles. We are genetically hardly different from those peoples. How solid is our different morality?

Though there is little evidence that Christians were fed to lions in this place, they were martyred elsewhere. It strikes me more forcefully being in this place what a terribly painful birth Christianity had in Europe struggling against the might of the most powerful empire there had been until that time.

I'm sure we were just as awestruck on entering the Pantheon as Bill and Berry were seven decades ago. It is now a Christian temple, but had been the temple of all gods. I think perhaps it is the greatest symbol of the turning of Europe to the new culture. And what if Constantine had not been converted to Christianity? Or was it inevitable that because of the growing numbers of followers of this new faith that some such leader would have made this step sooner rather than later? Maybe because I am not quite a Christian I am especially impressed that this religion grew the way it did against great odds. The struggle it had was surely what gave it the strength it eventually assumed in Europe.

And then, to its great cost, this strength and power gave birth to its corruption. Commentators on the current public debate between the atheist opinion leaders and Christian and other religious leaders suggest that this fight will do religion generally more good than harm. But I hope the power religion still has over the society of humanity declines and declines and it confines itself to what is truly extra temporal or spiritual. An exhibition in the Santa Maria degli Angeli on Galileo, his work and his faith and the relationship between science and religion adds to this hope. I've been listening to a choral mass by Cherubini while writing this!

22 May 1939 Roma to Vetralla

Rose again at 7, breakfasted, paid up – our stay in Roma has cost us about 100 lira, and we only have 500. Went to the post Restante for letters and spent 5/- in stamps, which left us broken-hearted. The Post Office is very elaborate. It has a courtyard in the centre with fountains playing. Our legs have a job to push us out of Rome, the climate seems very enervating. The country at first is hilly with sheep grazing; after Monterosi it looks interesting. Sutri, which is built on fawn sandstone has many visible Roman remains, and a lot of caves like those on the Severn at Arley, only more so. Buy bread in Vetralla, and then look for a site. Up a long lane to a farm, and there meet a very affable old farmer who insists on putting us in the barn for the night, and not content with that, brings us wine, bread and broad beans on a dish

covered with clean white cloth. This is to us rather amazing, because although the people have been kindness itself I am sure they have nothing to give away. The country people seem awfully poor, and dinner is usually a hunk of dry rye bread. We are on a hill surrounded by hills and mountains, and while we get ready for bed the cuckoo is still going strong, but the nightingale??, to whom we are now quite accustomed has just struck up.

23 May 1939 Vetralla to Acquapendente

Awake early, and packed up about 9 – a grand morning. The old farmer, who was evidently going off for the day had said Goodbye before we realised it. Stood in the doorway, raised his arm, with a very courtly gesture and said “A riverderla” (He had fought in the Great War he told us, but had forgotten all the English he’d learnt. I don’t think the Fascist salute is an invention of Kusso’s – it’s a relic of days of old when Knights were bold, and much nicer than Adolf’s version. The Senora came up with more broad beans, and brought her mending, to settle down and watch us I imagine, but we are ready to go, and on we go into Viterbo, which we find very interesting (as the town does us). A nice lass takes us to the Cathedral. It’s well worth seeing and so are the beautifully carved buildings around. They seem very fond of a particularly mild looking carved lion here, and there are fountains everywhere and weatherworn cared stone. Also lots of heavy wooden gates with brass knockers and fine wrought iron, opening into gardens and courtyards.

We buy lettuces and oranges in the market, and exit by the road to Siena. These walled towns don’t look as though they’d altered much since the Middle Ages – once you’re out side you’re very completely OUT. A hot ride till dinnertime, with a very long hill and no shade to Montefiascone, accompanied by a lad rather quieter than most, then a grand free wheel down through wooded country to a large lake, 28 kilometres long, and a flat road to San Lorenzo, where we go up the hill with about six children carrying bundles of wood as big as themselves on their heads, garlanded with broom. If I’ve not mentioned it before – the women carry everything, shopping, jars, and all on their heads, usually on a pad rather like a deck tennis ring. Not much in the way of shops, but several people came with us to shop, added up the bill for us, and watch with interest – what does Tedesca mean I wonder? Down to Acquapendente where our very first misfortune (except in London) in the shape of puncture befalls us, so we decide to camp at the first farm we come to, taking it for granted they’ll have us, and they do. Puncture mended and supper (beans, eggs and scotch eggs and bread and jam) over we prepare for bed.

17 May 2010 Roma to Orvieto – 80 kilometres, 896 metres vertical

So now we turn to the North. As for previous big cities we decide to train out. Given misinformation we ride about three kilometres across Roma to Fermia station to find that the train that uses that line won't take bikes. Back we pedal to Roma Termini and discover that we have an hour or so to wait so a couple of cappuccini and an early lunch occupy us. Once on the train we discover it doesn't stop at the station for which we bought tickets. One has to alight about 20 kilometres up line and catch a local train back. We decide we don't really need to do this and just as well because the road to Orvieto has quite a bit more vertical in it than we had expected.

We are taking a more easterly route than Bill and Berry initially following up the valley of the Tevere (Tiber). Orvieto is about the same latitude as *Acquapendente*. What we didn't quite figure out is that except for the autostrada there is no road in the valley for several kilometres so we climb to the east about 300 metres then back down and up the western side. But the wildflowers are in full bloom as they were in the primavera of 1939 and we have some delightful views of Umbria in its first verdant clothing of the season. I suppose that the Romans thought that Northumbria in England looked a bit like their Umbria. Maybe they were just homesick.

There is an amazing luminous green lizard that lives hereabouts. One luckily escapes my front wheel. A solitary Hooded Crow disappears into a little wood and all the day long the Blackbirds proudly claim their territory.

A brief storm arrives just as we pass a truck drivers' snack bar curiously named "Titty Bar" so we boost blood caffeine and wonder what the tall and short Carabinieri officers are chatting about to the senora. They do look quite dashing in their uniforms and we think they are not unaware of this.

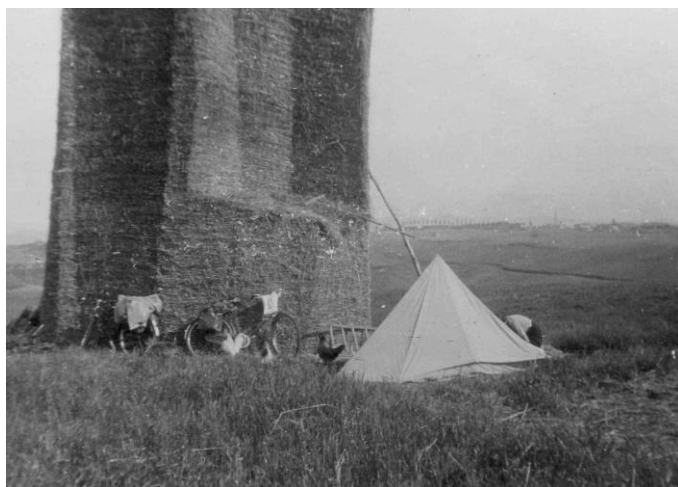
We arrive at the base of the mount upon which Orvieto stands and pay a couple of euro for the funicular to take us up the last 150 metres or so. We've done about 80 ks and I think about 750 metres vertical in the afternoon and a large beer seems justifiable, but not before we marvel at the huge duomo built at the highest point in the town. It has that layered light and dark stonework and the most stunning façade of intricate carvings and huge friezes of Santa Maria and others made from little ceramic tiles. Seven decades on, not surprisingly, Orvieto and other towns we have passed through still largely seem to look as they would have done in the Middle Ages except for the new glass display windows some of the shops have and a few other little modernities. I doubt that there are any women still carrying loads on their heads

though and just as well. A lot of loads are now carried in little three wheeled vehicles with trays. They sound like and go like they have engines little bigger than a motor scooter's. These have been around for a few decades now as have the Fiat 500s (the original ones) and there are still plenty of them at work

We have really buona cucina at a very moderate price in a simple trattoria – tagliatelle with truffle sauce or mushrooms and local sausage and a carafe of classico. I'm sure we don't appreciate this as much as Bill and Berry did their meal under the stars of the wine, bread and broad beans the farmer gave them.

24 May 1939 Acquapendente to near Siena

To-day has been a queer mixture, off bright and early for Radicofani, but we discover it to be a city set on a mountain, with 7 kilometres up to it of awful road surface. We drink gratefully at what we believe to be the top, and then a down only to go up again AND AGAIN, but first I go into a little inn, the only one for miles, for bread and see someone having something that looks like a pancake, so we order some and a flask of wine, and it's the mostly lovely omelette I've ever had – 3-50 (8d.) the two. Up and down to San Quirica, here there is a fine old Church, then the road flattens as we near Siena, and we anxiously look for a resting place. After one setback we are finally installed on a hill with hay to lie on. A grand sunset behind a line of slim Cyprus trees. By the time we are ready to turn in the new moon is high in the sky, and a blue-grey silhouette of Siena stretches before us. As I write the glow is facing from the sky and lights are appearing all over the city, a lonely bird is calling monotonously crickets are chirping, and there are sounds of animals being put to bed.



Our camp outside Siena

18 May 2010 Orvieto to Montepulciano – 70 kilometres, 689 metres vertical

The day starts with a very steep run down the cobbled main street of Orvieto and then down and down to the valley floor again. Our hands are sore from squeezing the brakes. We then climb again out of the valley to the east using a via bianca (white road). These are unsealed roads and they are whitish when dry, but grey brown when wet as was this one. And when they are wet they are sticky like riding on honey maybe. But it is very quiet. So much so that I come upon a little adder sunning itself. It's only about 20 cms so I get a close up photo before it decides I might be a threat and slithers away.

The road climbs and climbs and we round a bend to see perhaps our first ever 15% sign. We keep pedalling for 50 or so metres up this 15% slope before we resort to walking. Coffee at Ficulle at 437 metres seems more than justifiable and the trattoria has tables on the village square which has a spectacular view across the valley to Allerona. A group of old men are enjoying each other's company in the sun on the stone steps and benches. House Martins are repairing the nests under the eaves above us that they left when they went to Africa over winter and the Swifts soaring and circling and diving over us are black against the soft blue sky.

Back down to the valley we go then up to Chiusi for lunch and down again before the final climb to Montepulciano's 600 metre Grand Piazza near where we lodge for the night.

25 May 1939 (Thursday) South of Siena to near Florence

Farewell to the family, with a promise to send a photo of the old farmer and his two grandchildren when we get back, then up to Siena, the most enchanting town we've yet been in. They have a fine fan-shaped Campo (market place) where they used to run the horse race mentioned in Untermeyer's 'Donkey of God' vide "there was the sound of wings in the market square to-day". There is a glorious Cathedral of black and white marble, lovely intricately carved arches and marble mosaic interior with busts of Cardinals all round. All along the streets which we traversed we found on the doors curious carved knockers in the shape of bats. There are no pavé ments, narrow flagged streets, with the usual workshops opening out onto the road, handsome young policemen – they have different uniforms in different towns in Italy and you can easily tell where the cars come from as they are numbered with the initial letter of their town – SI – Siena, VE – Venezia.

A very up and down road after dinner, all the villages in this part are on the top of mountains, and its pouring with rain. We get rather panicky as we get closer to Florence at the thought of having to pay for our night's lodging, but I drag Berry off up a hill, and after a little difficulty we are finally allowed to sleep in the barn, and watched for about an hour with great amusement by the whole family.

19 May 2010 Montepulciano to Siena – 65 kilometres, 409 metres vertical

It is again a very steep descent from the town. The road we take to Asciano has very little traffic and a smooth surface. It follows the ridges mostly and the hills roll away, some sown to wheat, some with sheep or cattle grazing. It is really great cycling which is perhaps why we see a large group of softy cyclists – that is the ones who do it the easy way with a van carrying their gear.

We coincidentally stop for a breather at the top of a long hill by a little pale grey clay cliff face about which is swooping a flock of birds with bright red/orange backs and upper wings. One alights on a telegraph wire and with binoculars its yellow and aqua throat reveal it to be a Bee Eater. Brian correctly suggests they are nesting in the cliff face. Bee eaters do dig burrows in such places. I think perhaps there is no creature of the animal kingdom that combines such beautiful colours, such a delicate graceful shape and which moves with such artistry. Its wings are finely pointed and partly translucent and its tail is decorated with a little spike. It flares its wings and stops and turns and I think of formal, stately dancers. I'm wondering if the designer of the most beautiful little aeroplane to take to the skies – the Spitfire – might have been an admirer of the Bee Eater as its wings are much the same shape.



Photo by Chris van Rooyen ©

The road rolls on to Taverne d'Arbia which is just short of Siena, but since it is nearly 2pm we stop and enjoy some excellent handmade pasta I think called "Picci". Siena is just 7 pretty flat ks away via an E road, but bikes are vietato on these. Our maps

and our GPS indicate that we must use a little road which takes a circuitous 11 km route. Not only is it circuitous but it adds a lot of vertical metres to the considerable number we've already done. The last part is labelled as a bike route with the name "L' Eroica". The climbs are so steep our bottom gear is needed. I think its name means that riding it with the lowest gear most road bikes have you have to be a hero!

Siena is nearly as and nearly has all that that my mother observed in 1939 except that the bat door knockers seem to have been replaced by lion and pharaoh head knockers. Maybe there was a decree ordering this change sometime in the last seven decades. And sadly there are no artisan's workshops spilling out onto the streets anymore. The Campo is quite spectacular and the town hall is a very fine piece of architecture. The main building is symmetrical, but at the left side it seems anchored to the earth by a grand portico and the bell tower reaches above this to the heavens. The Duomo really has to be seen to be believed: the intricacy of the façade and the mass of carving! Maybe it's really a bit over the top.

26 May 1939 (Friday) Florence

Off to Firenze (Florence) and by great good fortune, we go in by the side entrance, and Lungano Corsini, where B.D.'s friend lives is the first big street we come to. Giovanni is out so we wander round the town, and then return to the flat to await the Count's arrival. He is charming, smallish, fair, and speaks nearly perfect English. He later told us that when he asked us if we knew English (thinking we were German) our response 'We ARE English' as though there could possibly be any doubt about it, was too funny for words!! He finds us a rather nice Pensioni for 8 lira a night and then in the afternoon takes us a sightseeing (Cathedral, Baptistry, Art Gallery, Churches, E.B. Browning's House, The King's Palace, etc. etc.), but as he says he is not a very good guide, we all do too much talking to do any intensive sight-seeing. Back to his flat for tea, and then spent all the evening discussing all sorts of things, and find he has very similar ideas to our own about religion and government. Remembering all the things we had heard about Fascism, we asked Giovanni if he wasn't afraid to criticise the Government openly, with ideas of secret police, but he said "Oh, no, there is nothing like that in Italy!". Later he told us what a mistaken idea it was for people to think the Italians didn't like English people, in fact he said they were all very sorry that English people go no longer to Italy for their holidays. Found out the meaning of Tedesca – it means German, no wonder people were surprised to find we were English. Italy is apparently about the only country that German currency is any good in, and they come in swarms. I should think the natives must rather resent

the way they sweep through the country side in their fast cars, and we have heard there is little love lost between the two peoples, in spite of the supposed solidarity of the Axis. We went hungry to bed that night, but elated at the thought of being arm-in-arm with a Count in one of the loveliest cities in the world one night and like drowned rats on straw another.

21 May 2010 Siena to Firenze – 67 kilometres, 676 metres vertical

We found our way out of Siena onto Strada 222 the hilly road to Firenze. It is hilly. I guess we did a total vertical for the day of about 700 metres, one big climb of about 300 metres up to Castellina at about 600 metres, another of something over 200 and several more, smaller ones. This is Chianti country, but not a lot of the land is under vines. Many of the hills are covered with what looks like pretty natural forest.

Cuckoo calls reach us now and then. Hooded crows continue to make appearances in their smart morning suit like grey and black plumage. I rather like them, but they don't seem to like each other too much as they are always solitary.

The last few ks into Firenze are downhill into the valley of the Arno which we last saw in Pisa.

We all had osso bucco for dinner which was excellent with marrow in the bones just at it should have. As we'd had carafe wine the night before we spent a bit more and had a very good Chianti Classico with it.

27 May 1939 Florence to Ferrara

Met Giovanni at 8-30 the next morning, and he took us to a hill above Florence to see a panorama of the city and listen to the Band rehearsing Toscanini and Lohengrin. Had great fun in the American Express Office (an organisation existing like Cook's for the benefits of orthodox tourists) finding out the time of the train to Bologna. Then went inside Dante's Church – It has a beautifully carved wooden roof. G says the most outrageous things to people's faces in English, banking on the fact that they can't understand him – he is funny to use his own expression, or rather one of them. I could mention another, not quite drawing room. My two most beautiful memories of Florence are the face of Michael Angelo's 'David' and a beautiful Della Robbia over a door in the street. But I also don't want to forget the shape of the arch of the lovely Santa Trinita bridge and also the shops on the Ponte Vecchio.

Parted at 1pm and went to the station – let me explain – we are heartily ashamed of this bit of the journey, in the light of what we did later, but we hadn't a lot of money left, and the 40 miles to Bologna would have taken us two days, as there were two mountain passes to cross, and remembering that the route didn't even say the road rose to Raducofani, we didn't think it worth the effort. The train is rather crowded, but this isn't to be wondered at when we remember it is Whit-Saturday. Went through about 50 tunnels, then arrive at Bologna, and after a long search for our bikes, depart to the great amusement and interest of the porters, on a grand flat road to Ferrara, and near here we camp on what must have been the village green, or rather the green belonging to a communal farm – the zoo is again open.

21 May 2010 Firenze – rest

So we've now seen the three splendid cities of Toscana – Pisa, Siena and Firenze. I think they must have been strongly competitive with each other in a number of ways. Today they certainly battle for the tourist. In the past they surely would have fought for the best artists and architects perhaps in turn in competition for God's attention and benevolence! With their basilicas they took different approaches. Florence's is the most colourful being constructed of marbles and other stone of white, pink and green and it has a huge dome. In Sienna they went for carved decoration. For me Pisa wins. Its basilica is much simpler, in plain relatively less decorated pale grey. But it is the way it is set in a wide space with its Baptistry and Campanile (tower) nicely placed a little apart that really makes it.

I must find out about the lease purpose, building approval and body corporate arrangements for the Ponte Vecchio. Why have some of the title holders been permitted to extend their units past the edge of the bridge with cantilever structures over the river and apparently some not? I think the current regulations should not have allowed one of the stall holders to replace the lovely old varnished timber covers that fold over their displays at night with steel rolling shutters.

I've noticed that as in 1939 the police in each town – the Polizia Municipale – do have different uniforms. Here in Florence they have smart, tall helmets a bit similar to those of British bobbies but in white. The national Carabinieri and another national force are very much in evidence here as in every other city. Often both of these forces, fully toggged up, including with bullet proof vests, are seen wherever there is any possibility of a crowd gathering. I am wondering if this is because of concerns about the crowd's behaviour or about the possibility of terrorist bombers.

You have to pay to see nearly everything in Florence now even the Bobbito Gardens, but you can still walk up to the Piazzale di Michelangelo for nothing and see the city spread out below. I think this must have been the hill up which Giovanni took Bill and Berry, but she doesn't mention the copper David replica.

There is an olive grove on the eastern side of this hill. Amongst the olive trees Florence's iris enthusiasts cultivate prizewinning varieties. I think they were just coming to the end of their blooming, but they were still quite spectacular.

The splendid Synagogue also charges entry, but it was closed for a Jewish holiday. If you didn't know otherwise you would take it for a Mosque with its domes and minarets and geometric decorations. It makes me think of the rather brief time when all the "people of the book", those of the three Abrahamic religions lived together in relative tolerance.

Now as to the real David, as I indicated you now have to pay to see him in a museum. He once was outside under the loggia in the town square. There is a replica in that square now. I don't know whether Bill and Berry saw the real one or a replica and I don't know whether Jill and I saw the real one under the loggia in 1975 or a replica. I'll have to find out where he was when!

After dinner we happened by the Chiesa Santa Maria de Ricci from the open doors of which we could hear an organ. We approached and found that a recital was underway for which listeners were asked to make a donation. I stayed for quite a while though Philip and Brian had their fill after a few pieces. I must see what I can find out about this organ as to my ear it sounded like a really good one and perhaps the acoustics of this relatively small space (compared with the Duomo) were also very good. The programme included pieces by Mozart, Franck, Liszt, Bach and Mendelssohn.

I don't think I've ever seen a dog in church before. In the corner, under an illuminated statue of Joseph cradling his newborn, a gentleman of some years was sitting enjoying the recital cradling his terrier who perhaps with his ears flattened against his head was not enjoying the louder passages all that much. It seems to me that this is a very nice thing that one can go for an evening walk with one's faithful companion and take in a recital along the way. I was rather pleased when the dog seemed to single me out to say hello to as he left.

22 May 2010 Firenze to Bologna – 110 kilometres, 1116 metres vertical

Today was a bit special as in a way we made amends for Bill's and Berry's not riding across the Apennines. Rather riding the road they rode we rode the road they wished they had ridden! We did train out of the conurbation of Firenze and Prato and up the valley a bit which cut our climb from about 700 metres to 500. It is a well graded climb and we made the top before we expected to. At one stage a gentleman perhaps a couple of years older than I came up behind on a black and gold Colnago. I'd seen this model in a catalogue and knew it was a special edition of their steel framed bike with a price tag of more than 8,000 euros. I was pleased to be able to match his speed for a few ks especially considering I was pulling about 20 kilogrammes more.

We had booked a hotel in a parallel valley and decided to take a short cut rather than go into Bologna and back out. I think someone decided that saving the 200 metres at the start was not appropriate because we got them here and at an almost impossible 16% incline!

After checking in to the hotel I wandered out and spent about 45 minutes trying to spot a nightingale without success, but was rewarded with a Cirl Bunting. Brian was sure I'd made up that name. Anyway the nightingale sang through the night competing with the rock band playing for the hotel's Saturday night dinner dance. Actually it was no competition – the nightingale was the clear winner.

28 May 1939 Sunday Ferrara to near Padova

A lazy day, on a flat straight road, running part of the way beside the River Po. But on nearing Padova, a curious and furious wind springs up, and we are treated to an Italian thunder storm. We shelter with a crowd of children just released from Sunday School – greatly to their amusement – our divided skirts and sheath knives quite overcome them. Then we find a nice farm for the night, and, watched by six solemn faced children, cook supper – somewhat of a fiasco, burnt omelette and macaroni, and then upset the water for the cocoa, but mother gave us some more, already 'caldo' (hot). We have the giggles really badly tonight. Berry says G. has put a spell on me. Anyhow Venice tomorrow we hope.

23 May 2010 Bologna to Padova

We got away by 8 because we had 140 kilometres to knock over to get to Padova. Early Sunday morning through the old cobbled streets of Bologna was very pleasant except for the broken bottles we had to avoid. We'd watched the first half of the annual Champions game last night. It was between Bayern-Munchen (or Monaco in Italian) and F C Internazionale the Milano team. The latter scored before half time. We still don't know who won so we don't know if the bottles were broken in glee or anger.

We were told that Bologna had the most beautiful little square in Italy, the name of which I have now forgotten, and it is quite delightful except that it is a triangle not a square. It has white lines across its river pebble paving and these are made from quartz pebbles.

The Po plains are flat as flat and so productive. We'd never seen wheat so tightly packed. They must be at the top in their yield per hectare.

Arriving in Ferrara we learnt that we'd missed the Giro d' Italia the day before. We should have timed things better! The families of Ferrara were out for Sunday morning rides and older gentlemen were out on their carbon racers, their bright lycra stretched a bit more than perhaps intended.

The flatness of the plains and little antagonistic wind allowed us to make the 140 to Padova with our best average yet – nearly 23 kilometres per hour.

29 May 1939 Whit Monday –near Padova

No such luck, it poured practically all day, so we stayed in camp and read Hamlet, and only sallied forth to Mazzina for food, spent the day mending, washing and teaching the children to play noughts and crosses, they called it croce e zero, and picked it up quite quickly in spite of our having no common tongue. We called one the Ugly Sister, I don't think she could help having a grouse against the world, poor child, and the podgy infant who squatted outside the tent sucking his thumb, and whose 'popper' kept coming undone 'cos he was so fat – Sitting Bull. The mother and father are rather a handsome couple, but mother shakes her head sadly over us, and asks the usual question, are we sisters, aren't we afraid, how old are we, why aren't we married, and what on earth are we doing this trip for? Or that is what it sounds like. Berry and I agreed that this was the funniest Whit-Monday we had ever spent.

30 May 1939 – Near Padova to Venice

Took leave of our friends and rode on a flat but wet road to Padova, which after buying drinks and honey, we by-passed by the road to Venice, along the city walls. All Musso's (Mussolini) National roads by-pass the best of the towns, but we were coming back so it didn't matter.

It's a flat road to Venice, alongside a canal, with many barges. Advice to anyone wishing to go to Venice via Fusina – don't, it's a few kilometres less on the sign post, but the road ends in a shed where you take the boat. So back we went to Venice by Mestre, an 'orrible place, all factories, like the great West Road (in England) only worse – the only bit of commercial Italy we've so far seen.

At Venice we have to park our bikes, as everyone else does, cars, motorbikes, and all because they are no good to you. We wander around trying to find the Piazza San Marco, but it's a queer tow, seems to built without any definite plan, and you can't see any further than a couple of hundred metres anywhere except on the Grand Canal. At length one kind man takes us and we gaze across the Canal at it. We won't pay two lira to go across and we thoroughly confuse our helpers by asking for Casa Frollo, the cheap pensione we'd been recommended which is also on the other side of the canal. At 8:30pm a kind Shell company man offers to go with us to a place at Mestre where we can get a bed for 5 lira – what sort we wonder – and after having put everyone to a lot of trouble we eventually do get ourselves to San Marco. It is very lovely, but we need a pensione. Would you believe it? After having been taken for Germans for all of the time we've been in Italy, and being at some pains to correct this wrong impression, we find ourselves, for 12 lira each, at the Pensione Mitterer, where the proprietor and everyone else are German!

We rode back up the Grand Canal by motor boat to collect our baggage at the Piazza Roma then returned to the Ponte Rialto. With thoughts of Shylock we again get lost. Braving lousy weather we find somewhere to buy food and passing John Ruskin's house we eventually at land up at the Pensione Mitterer. We eat our supper in our bedroom and retire for the night.

31 May 1939 – Venice via Padua to Vicenza then a barn outside Vicenza

Up at seven and a rush to get our bikes before eight so that we shall not have to pay two days parking fees. Another ride on the water, motor boats take the place of buses in Venice. Everything looks much lovelier in the sunshine, go past all the Doges' Palaces, and see the gondolas laden with garden produce going up and

down the canals. We dashed to collect the bikes and just outside we breakfast royally by the side of the railway on ham and honey and fig pudding.

Venice seems rather pointless to me. I suppose most of the people who live there now must work at the factories outside and they maintain the place purely from a tourist point of view, but a town that has lost its reason for existence, as it were, is not very attractive to me.

We make good time to Padua and decide to explore the cathedral. What does one do when asking to be directed to the cathedral, when they say "which one?"? Anyhow St Antony's seems to be the most famous and also we see the Basilica St Giustina, but it is now raining fast and we make our exit and have dinner under a tree by the roadside.

The rain stops and on we go to Vicenza. All we see here is the Teatro Olimpico from the outside. Our money is running short, only 70 lira to last us out of Italy, so we cannot even afford ice creams. On we go inspecting farms and eventually are happily housed in a large barn. By this time my interest in the world has disappeared, but mind conquers matter and I avoid a bilious attack (too much macaroni cheese) by lying in the tent and leaving Berry to cope with the Padrone. Anyhow, any other time I couldn't have resisted interfering, so perhaps it was for the best – she had to practice her Italian.

24 May 2010 Padova

Philip and Brian trained the 30 ks to Venice for the day. I stayed put as I've been to Venice a couple of times before and plan to go there soon again with Jill.

Padova's Basilica di Sant' Antonio is very eastern looking with five domes and several round minaret type towers. It is impressive, but its façade leaves something to be desired. It is too wide. Its expanse needs to be relieved by a projection of some kind. Inside there is a Capella delle Benedizioni attended by a priest whose job it is to sprinkle holy water and bestow a blessing upon whomsoever wishes to present themselves – I think even atheists if they so wished. It has paintings done in 1982 by one P Annigoni. I would have passed by except that the main painting of the crucifixion had at the foot of the cross a little Robin. Not surprisingly this little bird, and the other species so named elsewhere in the English speaking world, has always been a bit special to me. I asked the priest not for a blessing, as now I sort of felt a bit blessed anyway, but what the meaning of the Robin was. He told me that Annigoni's wife added a depiction of one of God's little creatures at the bottom of all

his paintings. Maybe she was trying to remind us that not even a sparrow falls without God's notice.

The basilica holds the tomb of Sant' Antonio and his having a pretty keen following was evidenced by the women pressing their fingers against the green stone of his sarcophagus.

My mother mentions seeing John Ruskin's house in Venice. He was an early critic of the groundbreaking work of Giotto in the Capella Scrovegni. I was lucky to overhear a detailed explanation of this work by a young Italian woman guide to a group of seemingly earnest and pious young Americans from the Indiana Wesleyan University. They were clearly disappointed when their guide suggested that it might not be appropriate for them to sing a sacred song in the chapel as they had wished.

Brian and I trotted off to a free concert in the early evening. It was given by students of the Padova conservatory. They were good. The programme included a Bach cantata sung by Namritha Nori. She might be a soprano to look out for. There was some Antonio Scarlatti and Frescobaldi and pieces by three composers I'd never come across: Janitsch, Pepuschi and Susato. I'd also not previously heard a recorder with mechanical keys nor a trumpet with four valves similar to those of a French Horn.

1 June 1939 – Vicenza to Verona to Largo di Garda

A flat road all day, with snow-capped mountains on our right, to Verona, a large and lovely town and a remarkably preserved Roman amphitheatre, beautiful decorated covered promenades (these last are a feature of nearly all Italian towns) and a large very swish castle. Here we celebrated our 2000 miles by having gorgeous strawberries (3d per lb) for dinner. Later on the road we saw about 50 Swedes, men and women, cycling with cases on the back of their bikes – speculation as to their business and destination. By the side of Largo di Garda, and after rejecting about 12 farms, we choose one and camp under a walnut tree. Without our asking, the farm family knew what we wanted, and were very anxious that we should sleep in the hay. Evidently some Germans with the wanderlust have been here before us for we aren't very far from the border now. The kiddies playing outside the tent were catching fire flies when it got dark and Berry did the same and discovered the light comes from a bulbous protuberance underneath them and it flickers as they breathe.

25 May 2010 Padova to Vicenza to Verona

Philip and Brian stayed in Padova for the morning and rode to Vicenza where they will stay the night. I rode to Vicenza and then on to Verona to where Philip and Brian will catch a train early tomorrow and from where the three of us will continue.

It was a biggish day for me. I made the 46 ks to Vicenza in a couple of hours it being a good flat road. I sat and drank a cappuccino and looked upon the famous architectural achievement of Palladio, the Basilica Palladiana, but because I didn't have a bicycle lock I couldn't check out the inside and like Mum nor could I look inside the Teatro Olimpia.

I chose a route away from the highway from Vicenza to Verona and found that it involved a 250 metre climb (which severely dented my average of 23.4 to Vicenza!) up to a Piazzale with a view across the city similar the one in Firenze.

The road then dipped and climbed along a chain of hills to the south west. The descent back to the Po plains was great, but then I had to contend with a westerly headwind all the way to Verona. Nevertheless I got my average back up to 22.1 at the end of the 116 ks.

Sitting enjoying risotto with porcini mushrooms and a glass of Valpolicella in a little square in Verona I am watching a local on his mobile phone. If there is any culture that desperately needs videophones it must be the Italian culture. I suppose using fixed line phones it has always been the case that the hand not holding the phone has been as active as it would be in normal conversation. But the mobile phone reveals in the streets that the free hand gestures quite oblivious of the fact that the listener cannot see it. It is very common to see mobile phones in use by drivers in Italy. I rather wonder if road accidents are caused frequently because the hand on the steering wheel simply cannot resist a gesture at a critical point in the conversation.

2 June 1939 – Largo di Garda to near Gorgonzola

Up early and away to Brescia, where we see several churches but not much else – these towns seem much more industrialised than in the south. Tonight had a spot of bother finding a camp site, all the farms seemed to be communal, much too much so. At length we camped in a field where we could hear the bells of Gorgonzola, and the people were charming, not too inquisitive, and they let us do our washing at the communal wash place, in the stream on the stones. A word about the farms – they are huge places called “Podere” consisting of a large block of living space and barns

and stables in the form of a square, and the Padrone sometimes lives there and sometimes not. There are about 6 families on one of these estates and we were quite used to having a visit from the whole lot before we went to bed.



Last camp in Italy near Gorgonzola, Milan

26 May 2010 Verona to Chiari

I met Philip and Brian on the platform for the train to Villafranca. They had 10 minutes to find their way to the right platform after arriving from Vicenza and they needed about 9 and half of them. Training the 18 ks to Villafranca got us just past Verona's outskirts. Today was a mixture of very pleasant riding on little country roads and not quite so pleasant riding on roads carrying a bit of traffic including heavy vehicles. The delightful village of Borghetto was on our route. With its water mills, it straddles the Fiume Mincio which is a substantial river draining Lago di Garda. In fact some of the houses are built on a low lying island which certainly seems prone to flooding.

Towering over Montichiari is a truly classic and well preserved castle. In fact it looks like it was constructed recently perhaps as the set for Russel Crowe's Robin Hood.

It is just a few days before spring becomes summer. The wildflowers are still in abundance especially the poppies. Some fields are red with poppies. And often a wheat crop has more than a sprinkling of poppies through it.

The air is scented with the aroma of the flowers and newly cut hay and ploughed fields. But we often pass fields which have recently been fed with what clearly includes the organic matter carefully collected from the barns and barnyards where the farm animals have spent time over winter. Sometimes it is not an altogether unpleasant aroma though rather stronger than one might wish to find in the nose of a good pinot noir. But sometimes it is so pungent that we find ourselves trying to decide whether to ride faster to some fresher air or to ride slower so as not to

breathe in so much. I suppose this is an aroma that has been part of the Primavera for centuries.

We spent the night in our first ordinary Italian town – Chiari. Ordinary because it has nothing much of great interest to tourists or holidaymakers so it seems most unlikely to see many of them. I think we well might have been the only foreigners in the place. It's quite a large town, but it has but one hotel and the manager speaks not a word of English. We had some communication with him through someone who had a little French.

3 June 1939 – Near Gorgonzola to Milano

Our last camp in Italy was struck (stricken?) and off we go to Milan via Gorgonzola, but there's never a sign or smell of the famous cheese. A flat but hot road to Milan, which is much too large to suit us. After a good dinner in the park, (strawberries, cakes, cheese, etc) we go in search of Madama Fagioli, armed with a map kindly provided by a nice young man in the German tourist office, and leaving a trail of resigned policemen in our wake – Milan has lots of one way streets and streets "Vietato a velocapedi". Madama is charming and, although she herself has just returned from Paris, she welcomes us in. To find accommodation she sends us to the Office for the Protection of the Young at the station. This is a colossal and elaborate building. Musso was openly criticised by the people for spending so much money on it. Then in turn we are sent to a convent (German) and finally an albergo where I succeed in bargaining the price of a bed down to 10 lira.

We return to Madama Fagioli's apartment for a good tea and a much needed bath. It's a swish place and we nearly had 40 fits coming down the stairs at the thought of what Giovanni would say if he saw us in our old clothes being received by someone who was obviously pretty well known in Milanese society!!

We explored the town in the evening, including a lost journey to see the church of Santa Maria de la Grazie where Da Vinci's picture of the last supper is painted on the wall.

27 May 2010 Chiari to Como

Like Bill and Berry we decided that Milan was "much too large to suit us" so we set a course across country toward Como also avoiding Bergamo. We got away by 7:30 and put about 20 ks behind us before stopping for breakfast in Martinengo. I would

like to know what Italians do for breakfast at home. The breakfasts we've been having at hotels have been very mediocre. The café at Martinengo however supplied excellent cappuccini and croissants that would pass muster in France.

We crossed the Fiume Serio and then followed back roads to the Fiume Adda at Canonica where we chanced upon a towpath that we followed upstream for about 5 ks saying buongiorno to about twenty groups of two or three soldiers dressed in camouflage. They told us they were doing a 15 k march – well it looked a bit more like a stroll. We were pretty sure that they were reservists, not the regular army.

We missed the little town of Colnago by about three ks so we weren't able to determine if it has any connection with Colnago bikes. Yesterday we missed a little town named Campagnolo so again we don't know if it is the home of the Campagnolo bike company.

On leaving the river the rain that had been threatening arrived. After a few ks of pretty heavy rain and pretty heavy traffic we decided we'd risked enough and headed for the nearest railway station and jumped on a train to Como. As I write this the lake and the gilding on the Duomo are sparkling in bright afternoon sun shine.

4 June 1939 – Milano to Lake Lugano

It's still hot and a lot happens today. We leave Milan after another unsuccessful search for the famous picture, and in Como near the Swiss frontier we try in vain to find something small to buy hoping to spend our last 20 lira on as souvenirs. We had refused to use it by going into the Da Vinci Exhibition in Milan, and wished afterwards we had not hoarded it so carefully, for all we could buy was ice-cream, which we had gone without for about a week, and cakes, and some eggs and bread. At Ponte Chiasso we are nicely treated by the Swiss Frontier officials, but only get 9 francs for our 10/-.



We are in the only Italian speaking Swiss Canton, and it seems so funny to see Italian signs up everywhere, doesn't seem like another country. Spent the night in a gorgeous spot by a stream at the head of Lake Lugano.

28 May 2010 Como to Locarno

We climbed up from Lago di Como to the Swiss border at Chiasso under threatening clouds and then on over for a total ascent of about 200 metres before rolling down to Lago di Lugano. We sheltered from the rain that had arrived at a trattoria and consumed some Swiss cappucini and pastries. In spite of the missing sun the ride around Lago di Lugano was beautiful. After re-entering Italy I started to see numerous Great Crested Grebe. Perhaps the Swiss make it as hard for these birds to acquire citizenship as they do humans or perhaps I just hadn't noticed them earlier. I think they must be territorial as they were quite regularly spaced at about 100 metre intervals.

We followed the fast flowing river that drains Lago di Lugano into Lago Maggiore and lunched overlooking this lake on excellent pizzas. The sun came out as we traced the eastern shore of the lake negotiating five tunnels and cruised on and back into Switzerland. We are about to seek a ristorante in Locarno and are trying to decide how much pasta we need to take on to do the 950 meters vertical to Airolo tomorrow.

5 June 1939 – Lake Lugano to somewhere in the Valley of the Ticino

Awakened at 6 by the sound of cowbells – a skittish young sheep is making them jump about. A lovely road by the lake to the town of Lugano, where we change our money and ascertain particulars of the Youth Hostels in Switzerland. The route says 'ascend' but we are pleasantly surprised that the road doesn't. We camp in a field belonging to an old German speaking man, who leaves us milk for 'nichts'. Food is pretty dear here, but we had strawberries for dinner.

6 – June 1939 – Valley of the Ticino to

Up and away by 8:30 and the road follows a surging mountain river – the Ticino. There's snow on most of the mountains and the views are magnificent – waterfalls rushing down to the river, and lines of dark pine trees stretching up to the snow. At Airolo we have a shock – we'd argued as to the best way of getting over the St. Gotthard pass, and finally decided to walk, and sleep at the Hostel on top, sending

the bikes on the Goschenen by train, but the matter is decided for us. We and the bikes go by train to Goschenen as all the passes are still closed by snow. We then follow the River Reuss down to Lake Lucern. It's a grand freewheel again, and at 6 we ask permission to camp, and are lucky but now we're in a German speaking canton, and I'm hopelessly at sea with the lingo – a firm resolve to study to-night, how much I wonder? I'm tired already. We have a mountain with its snow covered cap in the clouds just in front of us to watch to-night.

29 May 2010 Locarno to Airolo

We joined Saturday morning Locarno bikers on the bike path that runs around the lake and then through fields and along steams to Bellinzona. This is a fertile alluvial plain and we saw zucchini and fennel being harvested and all manner of vegetables and fields of wheat and cream coloured cows with bells. The lower slopes of the steep mountain sides above are vine terraced.

We push on up the valley against a bit of a head wind thinking that we are making some altitude and are disappointed to find that even after about thirty kilometres we are only a hundred meters above Lago di Maggiore. The real climbing is yet to come.

What looks like a woodpecker with a bright red rump flashes across my path. At lunch in Biasca I check my bird book and decide it is a Great Spotted Woodpecker.

About ten ks on it begins. There are two steep parts each gaining about three hundred metres and the river crashes down beside the road.

We make Airolo at about 5 pm – 1150 metres. So we've each pushed about 28 kilogrammes of bike and gear up 950 metres over about 85 ks. None of us has done anything quite like this before and we are quite sure we deserve the beers we fall upon. The sun has dipped below the clouds and it lights up the snow covered peaks above. Looking up at the road curling its way on up to the pass we know that we have to do the same vertical tomorrow, but within about 15 kilometres. We are hoping to knock it over and get down to Andermatt in time for morning coffee.

7 June 1939 – Reuss Valley to Lucern

A grand road all round Lake Lucern today. Past Aldorf where we inspected Tell's statue and along the Axenstrasse, a road cut from the rock, sheer above the lake. We descend to the lake shore to see Tells' Kapelle – this is familiar ground to Berry having been there the year before last on an H F Holiday. We had to wait in company

with other traffic while workmen on ropes up the mountain were clearing loose rocks. The bloke on the ground had a bug le to signal to his pals above – a nice job.

It's grand weather and we have a nice ice at Wegggis. Later we saw the memorial chapel erected to the memory of Queen Astrid of the Belgians, who was killed on the road by the lake. A very beautiful, but simple inscription in French and German.

Nearing Lucern it is thundering so we decide to hostel and buy a guide. We are installed for the night in a lovely big hostel on a hill above the town with a view of Pilatus. The misguided people at the shop gave us paraffin for the primus and it won't take it so we use an electric cooker, but supper is not a success.

30 May 2010 Airolo to Altdorf – over the St Gotthard



The St G conquered

About thirty metres northwest of the statue of an emaciated St Gotthard being led over the pass by a chap dressed in animal furs (looking a bit like depictions of William Tell) there is a boulder about the size of a Smart Car. In one hundred or two hundred or maybe a thousand years this boulder will have broken down due to some process of weathering that I learnt about in high school, but the details of which I have long forgotten. After this happens someone may find a little brass Girl Guide badge belonging to my mother. You will recall, dear reader, that she named her bicycle Hannibal because she hoped it would cross the Alps. Well it did later cross a couple of Alpine passes, but as you will have read from her journal it did not cross the St Gotthard because on 6 June 1939 the road was still blocked by snow. Bill and Berry had to take the train under the pass. The road they would have ridden still exists. It is still pavé d with cobblestones. But on 30 May 2010 it was again blocked by snow. Since 1939 another road over the pass has been built. And indeed an autostrada road tunnel has also been built.

A couple of weeks ago the new road over the pass was cleared of snow so we were able to make the crossing. We had hoped to depart our hotel in Airolo at about 8:30, but it was then raining quite heavily and we decided to wait and see if the weather prediction that this would ease was correct. At about ten the rain stopped and the sun pushed a bit more of its light down to Aiorlo. We set off.

After about half an hour down came the rain again, but we pressed on and were rewarded by a lifting of the clouds and views of the snow bound mountains and the green valley of the Ticino stretching away to the south. At 1930 metres we discovered a café that no website, nor any other source of information had told us about. We were wet and cold (well Brian in his sandals wasn't because he has a very odd metabolism) so we dived in and consumed coffees and bratwursts that were barbecued outside. After putting on several more layers (well that is after Philip and I put on several more layers – Brian was fine in shorts, tee shirt and sandals) we pushed off to do, the final 170 metres vertical. Now I should note here that I had in mind at the 1930 mark that the top was at about 2000. It isn't. It is just short of 2100. I think B and P did have an idea about how much further we had to go, but when I found that there was yet another 100 metres my legs started to feel quite tired.

Anyway, we made it of course. We walked up to the statue and I went over to the aforementioned boulder and took the little brass badge out of my pocket and dropped it into a crack at the boulder's base. So now there's sort of a part of Mum up there on the St Gotthard where she had wanted to go. On the train into Como two days ago we met a couple of Swiss bike tourers and told them the 1939 story. They suggested that I would be a bit closer to my mum at the top of the St G.



This pass has apparently been the main connection between northern Europe and the Mediterranean countries for a very long time. So important has it been that the Swiss had a garrison stationed at Andermatt just below the pass from 1885 until

1947 though I think they never fired a shot in anger. The run down to Andermatt was windy and cold. It is a bleak landscape – rock and snow and windswept grasses. A lone Alpine Chough drifted over us like a piece of black crepe paper born on the wind. We felt justified in stopping for apfelstreudel and hot chocolate.

This fortified us for the next 33 ks to Altdorf. All in all there was about 35 ks of downhill or “grand freewheel” as my mother calls it, but now and then there was a bit of a rise and having to get our legs moving again after idleness for many cold kilometres was each time quite painful. The final 15 ks into Altdorf was flat and against wind driven rain so a warm hotel with hot showers in this town that claims the revolutionary William Tell as its greatest son was very welcome. His statue is of course still there 71 years on.

In the pub we started talking with a local who had been involved in constructing the tunnel under the pass in the 70s. He had in fact later spent some time in Australia. He asked us if we knew we had passed by the Devil’s bridge on the way down and we said we had seen an old stone unused bridge, which he confirmed was the one. He told us the legend. The Devil offered to build the bridge and contracted payment of the first soul to cross it. The villagers fooled him by pushing a goat across the bridge. The Devil, understandably rather cross about this, picked up a large stone (the *Teufelsstein*, the Devil’s Stone) with which to smash the bridge. But an old woman apparently of some fortitude and faith held up a cross and scared him off. So he dropped the stone and took off. The stone remains and it bears the marks of his hands or claws as he held it.

Bill and Berry broke their journey for a few days on the northern side of the Alps in Adelboden, the location of the International Girl Guide Chalet. Having crossed the Alps we too will break our journey though for twelve months. Five more countries and about three and half thousand more kilometres remain to be traversed in part two.

PART TWO

22 May 2012 – Frankfurt to Spiez by train

Spiez to Adelboden (30 kilometres, 837 metres vertical)

As I whizz along in the ICE train (why do the Germans call their trains Inter City Express rather than some much more [interesting](#) German name?) from Frankfurt to Switzerland I am looking forward to getting on the bike again; to the relative simplicity of two wheeled transport technology that hasn't changed a great deal since 1939. I'm struck by the contrast with the incomprehensible systems and machines that have whisked me from one side of the globe to the other, including over its "top", by the way, which meant for the first time I saw the white polar world; the snow bound tundra of Siberia and ice floating on the White Sea.

I left the train at Spiez and before putting Hannibal III back together for his next 3,500 kilometres in Europe, I enjoyed, really enjoyed a beer and a bowl of pasta in the sun looking over the aqua water of Thunersee with the little harbour of Spiez and its protecting tower. The mountains were lovingly wrapped in the clouds' multiple arms.



The climb from Spiez to "Our Chalet", the first Girl Guide international centre, was about 800 metres vertical and of course the steepest bit was at the end. With my 27 gears I wondered how tough it would have been for Bill and Berry.

I must confess that I was a bit apprehensive about walking into a Chalet full of girls and women. I arrived just as [dinner](#) was being served and I was immediately made welcome by everyone and found that there were three other males in residence anyway.

"Our Chalet" now comprises the original building [gifted](#) to the Guides in 1932, plus a new chalet and several extra houses.

A post dinner walk and the setting sun breaking through the clouds to light the western slopes of the mountains ended this sort of prologue day.

8 June 1939 – Lucern to Interlaken

There's a very big religious festival on all over Switzerland [today](#), guns banging, processions, and church bells ringing, but worst of all we can't buy food for love or money, so it costs us about 5/- to dine at a Gasthaus halfway up Brunig, but oh boy! Did we need it. The scenery is glorious, weather boiling, waterfalls from the melting snow rushing down the mountains and placid green lakes to follow at the bottom. Brunig Pass is not such a long push as we had anticipated but we look unsuccessfully for a camp site all the way from Brunig to Interlaken and arrive at the Wilderswill hostel in the middle of a thunderstorm.

9 June 1939 – Interlaken to Adelboden

Breakfast in the garden, with a view of Jungfrau, and then we follow the lake to Spiez, and mount along a river valley towards Adelboden. Dinner in a pinewood off the dusty road, then upwards ever upwards, shelter under a pine from a thunderstorm, and arrive at the youth hostel only to find it closed but we [apply](#) at the Chalet above to Fraulein Maurer. It's a genuine Swiss Chalet, all wood. Walk after supper and the snow turning pink in the sunset is an unforgettable sight. Berry thinks she has spotted the Guide Chalet on the other side of the valley...

10 June 1939 - Adelboden

Up to the village, by a woodland path to buy food, and on enquiry we find the Chalet to be the place we thought, so arrayed in our best, we stagger up the mountain. A charming Guider, the mother of two delightful small boys, takes us round and is very envious of our trip – we later discover her to be a Countess who once had done a three weeks walk on her own because she couldn't find anyone else daft enough to come with her, among the mountains of Northern Italy. She slept in mountain huts, or on the mountain without the hut. In the kitchen I find a Scots Guider, Ballantyne, who was at the Lithuanian National camp last year. We are invited to stay for lunch, and eat our sandwiches with the rest, plus a redcurrant drink provided by Helga, a Dane, who is helping Falk. Then Falk asks us if we would like to bring our gear up and pitch the tent up there – we didn't need asking twice you can bet, so we hurry down the hill to inform Fraulein Maurer that we shan't want a bed for the night. A tough climb back but it was worth it. We cause great excitement when we meet the rest of the guests, and Berry does more talking than she's done for the last two months put together. 'Enterprise' is our middle name according to one Guider. How easy it is to get a

swelled head – we are among more ordinary people, now, to whom our life is an adventure, but hitherto the only English speaking acquaintances seem to have regarded it as quite an ordinary thing to do – specially B.D. It's raining all evening so Falk suggests we sleep in the attic with the rest. We bring delight to the hearts of the two little lads with Gretchen (2012 note – They had named their tent Gretchen). They can talk of nothing but the tent, and when they can have one like it. A grand browse in the Library (given by Great Britain) – all the rooms in the Chalet were furnished by different nations. Bed – a pillow fight in our dorm – it's last night for most of the gang up there – and three pillows vanish – we nobly give up ours – “They don't mind – they're tough”.

11 June 1939 – Adelboden

Colours, and afterwards a hurried walk to see the famous waterfall, which we haven't time to approach very closely, back to a good lunch (roast meat, baked spuds, etc...). Oh, we saw Mrs Storrow's private Chalet en route (she was the donor of the Chalet) at present occupied by the Countess and her family. A lazy afternoon mending and reading – raining, but it's good just to be here, the valley, mountains and chalets all combine to make lovely pictures wherever you look. Bed and deep sleep after supper and a fine Guide's own – a lot of good points in Falk's address but she didn't enlarge on them enough. We are lucky to have just walked in when some of the people booked last November.

12 June 1939 – Adelboden to Meiringen

We have to strike the tent this morn, luckily it's dry, but the clouds are low and it looks damp all round – Our first taste of publicity is a battery of cameras to face when we are allowed to leave, with good byes and good lucks. It only cost us 5/- each for our food for two days – cheaper than we could keep ourselves, and we were always under the impression that it was expensive to stay at the Chalet. It rains nearly all the way down the valley to Interlaken, but mail there cheers us, and we go on to Meiringen. Here the hostel has been commandeered by the military and we eat our supper in solitary state in the bedroom.



Leaving Our Chalet

23 May 2012 – Adelboden to Luzern (120 kilometres, 1300 metres vertical)

I was farewelled with photos to go on the WAGGGS website and plunged back down the valley under a grey sky which had deposited some moisture during the night and continued to do so now and then, but it wasn't really rain. Well down in the valley I stopped to shed some layers before the climb over the ridge to Interlaken and had a "conversation" with an old man out for his morning constitutional. He had zero English and didn't seem to be able to make sense of my few words of German, but we managed to agree that it wasn't so cold and that it would be nice if the rain held off.

Interlaken gave me my first really good cup of coffee since leaving Oz and then I set off on the radveg that I just learnt about that runs along the southern shore of Brienersee. Running through forest past waterfalls it was spectacular and although it went up and down and up and down, meaning much bottom gearing and full on braking (I think about 400 metres vertical were involved) and thus took probably twice as long as the road on the northern shore would have, I have no regrets.

A big margarita pizza at Brienz fortified me for the very steep 500 metres of the Brunig pass and a deer, a chamois perhaps, welcomed me over the top. The run down to beautiful Lucerne was a treat, including the 33 kmph drafting tow into the city by a young chap on his Felt carbon.

Lukas, my Scout/Guide host for the night, met me outside the train station. He of course had little trouble identifying an Australian sexagenarian leaning on a muddy bike with red pannier bags. Lukas took me to his flat and introduced me to his flatmates (all twenty somethings) who had all very generously agreed to have Nicholas and me disrupt their lives for the night so that I could add a little money to help WAGGGS with its work in the Pacific. Nicholas arrived at 9pm after many

travails in getting his new bike. We rewarded ourselves with a beer and bratwurst and sauerkraut by the river that flows from the lake through the the middle of the city.

13 June 1939 – Meiringen to the other side of the Brunig Pass

Raining this morning – the soldiers are paddling about in the mud with their horses. Off we go in a drizzle, but on enquiry find that the passes won't be open for another three weeks so we have to make Brunig our day's march. It's freezing cold and we eat dinner in something approaching misery under the wet trees, and then reach the summit. Then it begins to pelt down. Lucerne is 40 kilometres away so we dive into the nearest Jugend herberge and there wait while the rain teems down. We have to revise our route – the snow doesn't look like melting yet, and the warden says it has been snowing on the hills today – we are not surprised.

14 June 1939 – to Schwyz

Rain still pouring down and it's bitterly cold, with quite a good layer of fresh snow on the mountains. By 11:30 it's decided to stop, so off we go with all our winter clothes on, round the other side of Vierwald-stattersee to give Lake Lucerne its correct name, to the ferry at Beckenried, past the scene of Berry's vicissitudes last year. Very cold on the boat, everyone looks perished – mostly English tourists and they don't seem very good at coping with the natives – we had a good laugh at someone who wants to spend an hour in the 'little place' (Gerschau) and have 'dinner' save the mark – it's 4 when we finish, on the lake side. On to Brunnen, where a misguided director of a tourist office tells us the Klausenen pass is open but the Garage man later says it is absolutment impossible so we amble on to Schwyz, and find the hostel – lovely beds, above a garage, with one silent Swiss for company – soup and strawberries for supper.

24 May 2012 – Luzern to Feusisberg (Ship on the lake then 45 kilometres)

I'm writing this on the veranda of Robert's wonderful house looking at the sunset over Zurich See a hundred metres or so below. Today did not go according to plan. And for Nicholas, nor did yesterday. He had to get himself from a meeting in Paris to Biel in Switzerland to pick up a new bike and then take it by train to meet me in Lucerne. He missed his plane, missed the next departing TGV by getting stuck in a traffic jam and finally got to Biel about half an hour before the shop closed. Failure of the the

shop's payment machine meant trips backwards and forwards to bank machines and he wasn't in Lucerne until 9pm.

We had opted to go by water from Lucerne to Brunnen, but the late night yesterday meant a departure an hour later than intended. Anyway it was a delightful cruise. The sun was out and the wisps of cloud around the mountains added just the right amount of punctuation to the stunning scenery. Once disembarked in Brunnen we set about readying the bikes. We discovered that the rack that had been sold to Nicholas for his bike was completely unsuitable for transporting pannier bags. We fiddled for some time to make it work but it was clearly going to be unsatisfactory, so we decided to find a bike shop. We set off up the hill towards Schyz and lunched on rolls and salami in the sun looking back over lake Lucerne. We then asked where the nearest bike shop was located, only to be told it was back down in the valley. So down we went, and located the shop and explained our problem. An hour or so later we had a new rack fitted that was going to work. All in all we were thus a couple of hours behind.



Nicholas after his first big climb – about 400 metres vertical

My mother's diary indicated that there was something of a climb over to the Zurichsee valley, but not having examined the topography with a great deal of care I did not know that it was quite a big a climb as it turned out to be. This was Nicholas' initiation by fire, and he proved himself to be potentially a Tour de France mountain climber. This pass which is over 1000 metres high is a pass with no name.

Descending the other side we found a route with the assistance of our Garmin GPS that took us off the main road and through little farm roads. Resting before one little hill we were engaged in conversation by a cyclist of somewhat later years who asked us where we were going, advised us on a better route and told us it would probably take two or three hours to get to our destination. It was late in the afternoon and he

said that rather than pressing on we should come and stay with him for the night. We dithered but said we thought we should get as far as we could as we had to get to the base of the Arlberg the next day, so we parted company. About five minutes later he came back down the hill and repeated his invitation, and this time we gratefully accepted. Robert showed us the way to his abode – a magnificent house high on the hills overlooking Zurichsee, with a garden blooming with rhododendrons and azaleas and other flowers. He informed us that he owned a company that makes energy and nutritional foods for sportspeople, and before supplying us with plenty of beer he required us to consume a special preparation that would restore our muscles. Enjoying beer and Muscat wine from the Valais, we discussed the problems of the world and agreed that one of the things that most needed fixing was corruption and the failure of wealthy people to pay their taxes.

15 June 1939 – Schwyz – Filzbach

Hooray. The blessed sun this morning – but not for long, and we have a weary 7kilometres up on to barren moorland, and it's very cold and we can't find tomatoes, no not anywhere, but we have our dinner with a view of Zurich See in a hayfield. Here the stopping came out of my tooth. A flat road to Nafels, then about another 7kilometres up again to a glorious road up above Wallen See – en route we commiserate with Polytechnic people who look as though they spend their days in charabancs, as they sweep past, but they didn't know. The hostel at Filzbach is a holiday home run by a convent, and is on the spur of a mountain overlooking the lake. We prepared a three course supper, which we were too shy to eat in front of the others so shiver in the garden, and then, still hungry, wander in the search of chocolate, knock an old lady up for it, and retire triumphantly to bed. (Ironically, a sweet girl gave me a packet next morning.)



Filzbach

16 June 1939 – Filzbach to Liechtenstein

The lake is heavenly in the morning sunshine, we have brekker then go for a stroll and sit on a rock arguing and admiring the view, the farewell to the 'immigrants' from Germany and down to the lake.



Lake Walensee

Dinner in a shady wood, interrupted somewhat by large creepy great brown beasts (bats?) who drop from the trees and painfully first crawl and then fly, taking off clumsily like an old aeroplane. A flat road to Sarsans, and a detour to Bad Ragaz, which I had a passion to see, as is usually the case, the unexpected happens and I was disappointed. On the way back we console ourselves with ices, which we had in style on a table and they cost us 1/6!!! on to Liechtenstein, we wonder whether it is

Swiss or German. Anyhow judging from the view across the river, we are now running alongside the Rhine, which as yet is quite small, it must be nearly all mountains. We see our first Schloss on the Rhine, red turrets that could have come from a fairy tale. We stock up with food at Buchs, and the greatest joke of the trip is the frontier at Liechtenstein. We have to cross the Rhine, then we are stopped by an officer in a different uniform from the Swiss. We cannot understand what he says, but someone else with a bike comes along, solemnly puts two feet in a box of sawdust nearby and goes on his way. The same with cars, the road is strewn with wet sawdust and all the passengers have to get out and step in the little box – it's really "Dornford Yatesish". On we go into Liechtenstein, and ask permission to pitch Gretchen (the tent), and are soon installed near some very kind people, whose whole family seem to be Pfadfinders (Scouts) – up the Scouts.

25 May 2012 – Feusisberg to Wald am Arlberg (125 kilometres)

The next morning Robert farewelled us with a large bag of his company's products, and after thanking him for his very great generosity we rolled down towards the Zurichsee, on a beautiful but slightly chilly morning, through farmland and forest. The route from the valley floor was initially through an industrial zone that soon gave way to farming country with villages every few kilometres. To our delight we discovered that there is now a cycle path, or Radweg, which stays on the valley floor and follows the shore of the Walensee, utilising for part of the way an old railway tunnel, and further on what seemed to be a newly cut tunnel just for cyclists. We were so thankful that we did not have to climb up to the old road that Bill and Berry would have done. Morning coffee was had at a cafe on the shores of Walensee. It wasn't hard to appreciate that Franz List in his peregrinations was inspired by this beautiful lake with its sheer cliffs on the northern shore and aqua blue water to write his Walensee Suite. Leaving the Walensee and heading gently slowly upwards towards Liechtenstein, we failed to find an eatery for lunch. So we supplied ourselves with fresh bread, salami, cheese, cherry tomatoes and fruit from a mini supermarket at a service station, and found ourselves a spot in a field under a tree, with a fabulous view back towards the mountains of the Glarus canton. The watershed between the river that flows to the Walensee and the Rhine valley is almost indiscernible, so with no effort (except for a headwind) we found ourselves in the Rhine valley, and we were soon measuring our pace with that of the river's current. It was about 16 km/h, and in spite of a small headwind we managed to do about 22 km/h. We crossed to Liechtenstein via a timber-covered bridge, in the middle of

which was a sign that showed precisely where the border was in the middle of the river. In Vaduz we decided the sun was well over the yardarm so it was time for a beer which we enjoyed looking up at the Liechtenstein castle which is featured in every photograph you ever see of this funny little country

P.S. Why do the motorcars' registration plates have FL on them? (Note added later – It stands for Fürstentum Liechtenstein which means Principality of Liechtenstein)

P.P.S. We weren't required to put our feet in wet sawdust as Bill and Berry were.

We pedalled out of Vaduz up towards Feldkirch and crossing the border we couldn't work out why it appeared to be staffed by Swiss Zoll/Douane officials on the one side. As we were still three hours behind our schedule, we decided we had to get a bit of assistance to get up the valley to Wald am Arlberg, but found at the Bahnhof that the only train that would allow us to take bicycles would get us only as far as Bludenz, a mere 20 km or so up the valley. We took this train nevertheless, and we were less than delighted when we discovered it only got us 100 metres vertical. To make matters worse Nicholas found that his back disc brake pad was rubbing against the wheel, adding to his labours. So as the sun began to descend behind the Swiss Alps, we soldiered on to climb 400m to hotel Sonnblick at Wald am Arlberg. On arrival Herr Bilgeri told us that he was not going to require us to trek the 1km to the nearest restaurant, but that he would provide us with dinner – which was excellent and reasonably priced, especially washed down with a litre of beer.

17 June 1939 – Saturday – Liechtenstein to St Anton (about 75 kilometres)

Left our kind Pfadfinders for the frontier. The Swiss just looked at us, said 'Gruss Gott' and passed us but more formalities with the Deutsch (2012 note – At this time Austria was part of Germany – The Third Reich). A kind Motor Touring Club man in leather shorts (our first sight of these) told us where we could buy a Hostel Guide in Feldkirch but no luck, and on we go to Bludenz, and buy food, which we eat, with what if the weather had been kinder, would have been a lovely view of the valley. The road mounts now and the cloud is lower. 5 cheery lads on bikes accompany us quite a long way, and tell us no Hostel till Innsbruck, and the Arlberg Pass between. To quote the French looking one – Oh la la la la. Up we go, buy food, it's raining steadily now and at the last Dorf (?) before the Pass we rest and eat half our chocolate – 5 kilometres up to the snow line, with only cloud to look at and a few passing cars, etc. A foul and lousy road surface and rain. Are we glad to see the St.

Christopher Hospice. Down we go to St Anton and camp in a pine forest. Hot soup, eggs and cheese soon put life into us, and tired we sleep soundly on pine needles.

26 May 2012 – Wald am Arlberg to Axams (105 kilometres)

We awoke to the sound of cowbells and chaffinches, and after a solid breakfast we had a go at fixing Nicholas' brake and 45 minutes later gave up, deciding that we had to pay a visit the next bike repair shop. With this little encumbrance we headed out to tackle the mighty Arlberg.

Now in Nicholas' words, the Arlberg:

We had coffee after the first 400 metres vertical at the town at the base of the Arlberg (Stuben am Arlberg). The climb had been gradual enough until then, so we were still in good shape, and with this momentum we took to the road in bottom gear and began to pedal our way slowly upwards. As it was a Saturday many cars and motorbikes accompanied us on the road, making the struggle all the more unpleasant. Dad was especially mocking of the motorcyclists, who were 'pissants' in resorting to motorised assistance where one should have opted for the old-fashioned way, if there were to be any sense of achievement. As the we progressively wound up the road we were rewarded with ever-more stunning views of the valley below as well as the snow-capped mountains which we would soon ride amongst. The vertical we had to cover was of the order of 400 metres, in the space of roughly 10km. We decided we would break at every 100m of vertical.

The long descent down the Inn valley should have been easy except for a persistent head wind and a not quite intended climb of about 150 metres vertical up the valley side to Imsterberg – it looked like a short cut! Both of these factors meant we would have been rather late arriving at the home in Axams of old friends Charles and Gitti who were putting us up for the night. Charles had offered to come and get us if we were running late so we made the call. He was able to load Nicholas' folding bike plus the pannier bags and Nicholas. I carried on down the valley and minus 15 kilograms of luggage made it to the bottom of the hill up to Axams just as Charles descended. We had a delightful evening catching up on a few decades.

18 June 1939

Wash in the river, late getting away – 10-30. Dinner in a grit shelter by the roadside, watched by gypsies. One child thought we were selling waterproofs, and wanted us

to give her one. They had a grand haul of wild strawberries somewhere on the hillside, and everyone who wanted desert for dinner just took a mug and got as many as they wanted. Rain again, still following a mountain river, part of the way on awful road with a 1 in 6 gradient down. We are making our way to Silz, but when we arrive at 6-30 are told there is no Jugend herberge until Telfs, So on we push, very wet, with not much hope of finding a Hostel, and we are unlucky so the first farm outside I summon up courage to ask if we can sleep in the barn, and they let us. Have a good supper, spread a blanket kindly lent us over us, plus the tent and sleep well.

19 June 1939

Away bright and early to Innsbruck, find the Hostel, then go sight-seeing, take Berry's shoes to be mended. Have a good meal at a very crowded restaurant for about 10d. Many tall young soldiers. You just get a coupon for the price of the meal you want and the waitress collects it when she brings the food. The food is interesting for the first time, but we decided we should get fed up with it after a week, and anyhow we seemed to have a gap afterwards. Went exploring the town, bought cakes and ice cream, had our haircut, and then went back to the restaurant to experiment again with the menu. Berry's rostkartoffel are disappointing. Back to the hostel to write and mend. Innsbruck is an interesting old town, crowds of sightseers, as indeed there seem to be all over the place, cafes and restaurants, and no visible signs of food shortage, except that bread and butter is omitted from the menus. It seems difficult to believe the horrors one reads about – the people all look much as we do in England, except that the clothes seem a little thinner and not well cut, and we've seen one or two men painfully thin and walking with sticks!! We were gently led back by a policeman on a street crossing and the error of our ways pointed out to us, and got ticked off for going down an Einbahnstrasse (one way street) they seem much more conscientious than the French and Italians, but there's about four times the amount of traffic about.

20 June 1939

Up early and away – coffee at Hostel and the warden charged and extra 20 pfgs. for our beds. We go to collect shoes n.b.g. they won't be ready till mittag. Won't they though, we get them promised for 11 and go and have breakfast – bread and cherry jam – outside the cemetery. What a difference the sun makes to everything. We have a good flat road following the river to Worgl, and then up a winding valley en route for

Kitzbuhel. Camp at a farm for the night and Gretchen stands her first thunderstorm – incidentally it knows how to thunder here.

21 June 1939

Up at 6, sardines for breakfast. Then we follow a stream past the picturesque old villages, with large wooden chalets, beautifully carved. We bought dinner at Kitzbuhel where we saw our first anti-jewish slogan – Kitzbuhel wants no Jews. On to dinner by a roaring mountain stream, with miniature Christmas trees all round, a lovely place for children to play at being giants. Up Thurn pass, not so black as it was painted in the route guide, a valley simply covered with pine trees, and then a free wheel to Mittersill. An abominable road, and a thunderstorm on the way to Zell am See, which was crowded with trippers like Weston on a wet Sunday afternoon. The Reise Buro sends us to a non-existent hostel, but the address he sends us to has someone who speaks English (she says the English people don't come to Germany now – they don't like the new Germany) we try two "Gasthofs for Tourist Betten", so we shake the dust of Zell from our feet and 10kilometres out camp for the night with a grand view of the mountains with beacons on top – presumably for aircraft.

22 June 1939

*Wake to find sunshine, and the washing dry – hurray, it was beginning to smell mouldy. On to **Lofer** on the foulest dustiest road imaginable. The mountain valley is being gashed by a great wide tourist road. We buy dinner in Lofer, and have it on a mossy bank above the river outside, with wild strawberries for dessert. On by a tarmac road to the Knie pass – a delightful surprise, it's a gorge between the mountain and no push. On to the Stein Pass – the old Austro-German frontier post – it's now a petrol station. Adolf is gradually building very fine roads in Austria. It's a long and weary ascent en route to **Berchtesgaden**, and Berry tries to throw her bike down a ravine, beg pardon, it toppled over. The scenery is magnificent and the hostel, a huge place outside the town on a hill, with two other houses added. It is crammed full of young people, mostly Hitler youth, and school parties, and you get your meals by the coupon system, like the restaurants. Milch reis for supper and a stroll to watch a grand sunset over the Gipfels – it will be fine tomorrow a fellow wanderer tells us.*

23 June 1939

*Breakfast in the lovely dining room, heavy wooden furniture, pretty orange wooden lampshades, and crowds of young folk setting off on bikes or on foot. We're away early and decide to miss the town and go to **Konigsee**. K. is like Venice, a dead end, but we park the bikes and stroll. The lake is all the better for having no road around it. The wooded mountains, rising sheer from the water's edge, and reflected in the blue-green water, make the loveliest picture imaginable. Back to Bad Reichenhall, where there's an interesting fountain in the market square. Dinner by a little lake, the road is hot and uphill afterwards, so on arrival at **Traunstein** about 5-30 we park ourselves at the hostel for the night.*

24 June 1939

*Up at 6 and away by 7-30. Everyone seems to get up extraordinarily early in Germany – the shops are open and youngsters are going to school. A flattish road to **Rosenheim**, by Chiem See, where we are gushed over because we are English, and celebrate our 2,000 miles by some truly wonderful Hollander Kirsch Torte, but we could only afford one piece between us (30 pfgs). So the lady in the shop provided us with two forks with which to eat it, and cut it in two. All the pastry shops in Germany serve these very elaborate cakes, which they cut into slices, and you eat it in the shop at a table. On to dinner and washing-drying in a hollow in a hayfield, then a VERY up and downish road to **Maesback**. There are giggles en route over a woman pegging her goat down. I thought she was hammering him, and remarked to Berry, who was pedalling laboriously up a hill that the old goat seemed to be standing it well! Were turned away at one farm, but the next one we try, we are allowed to camp in a little glade in a pine wood with a stream for company under an ash tree. Sausage for supper and a general knife sharpening on a stone from the stream before bed.*

25 June 1939

True to form we are late getting away – excuse rain first thing. Saw a grey squirrel in the pines this morning, before B was awake. A lazy morning, riding round Tegern See, and dinner on a hill overlooking the blue lake with little white boats on it. This morning we saw what must have been a wedding, very picturesque costumes. Attendants in black satin full skirts and white aprons, and flowers all round their hats, perched on top of their heads, all carrying bouquets and then men were in the

traditional green faced jackets and grey leather shorts, with green velour trilbies with feathers in. The person came in for a much hand-shaking.



Wedding in Bavaria

These Germans certainly believe in seeing their own country, hordes of motor bikes, cars and charas everywhere. A hot and hilly road, then it's lovely country to Kochel, and a long push up the Kesselberg pass, with a tablet in the rock en route to the man who built the road, it was rideable with an ordinary load all the way, and part of the way as we were equipped. We are rewarded at the top for the Urfeld am Walchensee Jugendherberge is high above a green lake, with wooded hills rising from it and snow-capped mountains beyond. It's a beautifully built and furnished hostel and peaceful until a gang of about 50 young girls in charas shatter the quiet, accompanied by two elderly men (this is a custom they have here). We climb the hill, and sit on a log looking at the view, arguing as usual, then to bed. Thought we were to have a dorm to ourselves, but no! Anyhow they were very friendly, and we shall be proper old maids when we get back if we continue with our dislike of crowds and large towns.

26 June 1939

Brekker on the lake side, and a grand run by a mountain river to Oberammergau, with a storm in between and a friendly lad on a bike who halts with us at Gasthof to shelter. While we were pushing up a pass Berry notices a dear little shrine to St.Leonard, a tiny figure of a saint with a colt kneeling at his feet with the inscription 'St.Leonard, bitte fur uns' underneath. Oberammergau much commercialised, but we dutifully pay our 50pfgs to see the theatre, and are lucky that our tour includes two Americans, so the guide, who has been to America, interprets. It's now a huge place roofed with steel girders, and the only open air part is the actual stage. Even here it

says 'Juden unerwünscht' – what a mentality! As we go further into Germany things like this become more apparent. One tires of the eternal military pictures and flags everywhere – so what must the old democrats feel living with it all. We go on by a glorious road, with a stop at a gasthof for apfelsaft (the best we had anywhere) to camp near Schongau. Free milk at a farm, and the people where we camp are very friendly. A girl about our own age – we flatter ourselves, younger I mean, seems very interested, and it's like old times in Italy to have her sitting outside the tent watching our meal preparations.

27 May 2012 – Axams to Oberammergau (70 kilometres)

This is where we depart from Bill's and Berry's route. They headed much further east to Konigsee. We turned north for Oberammergau which Bill and Berry came back to after turning back north west. Our route took us through the beautiful high valley of Leutasch then into Germany and to Mittenwald where there was high incidence of lederhosen and other Bavarian peculiarities. On down we went to Garmisch-Partenkirchen watched over by the Zugspitze. Richard Strauss' favourite abode was here and it happened that the twin towns were shortly to have a festival to honour this great composer who, for me, comes second in the pantheon only to Ludvig van B.

We didn't especially enjoy the 200 metre vertical climb over to Oberammergau, but, rolling down a path beside a mountain stream into the town, the struggle was soon forgotten. Every second shop in the little community famous for its annual passion play offered numerous carved effigies of the various holy characters. So, 73 years on the adjective "commercialised" still fits Oberammergau.

27 June 1939

A grand flat road all the way to Augsburg – rainy, but it stops for dinner. On the way we are pulled up by a police car for riding two abreast, it is verboten in Germany. I've often advocated it in England, but never realised how tiresome it is to ride with someone in front or behind to shout to. Anyhow, nobody seems to take very much notice of it here. Augsburg proves bigger than we thought, but we find the hostel without much trouble, and amble out to explore and celebrate our 3000 miles. The town is interesting, we see the Rathaus with its goldenen saal (room) (through the keyhole), then more churches and veal schnitzels in a low winehouse for 2/6 and then on to a backeri, where we have 50pfgs of strawberry torte. We always seem to

have our meals in two instalments here, but we don't like their idea of pudding. Back to the hostel, Berry to mend, and I go off for a stroll around the town walls with a lass who has been in Italy – she's interesting to talk to. Says that as Italy is now an ally of Germany they must learn their language and study their culture. Remarked that the Dalmatian coast was the loveliest thing she had ever seen, and seemed anxious to come to England, but currency regulations make this impossible. In for a cold shower, and bed.

28 June 1939

Away by 8:30 en route for Ulm, a good road over rolling downland, and then we strike what must be the extreme edge of the black forest. Pines as far as the eye can see. We've left the painted houses at Tyrollean shorts behind us now. Resolve to have dinner in the forest, but when the time comes the Autobahn, which cuts the country like a white gash, has the only bit available after rejection a damp birch wood on account of the mosquitoes we dine under laburnums by a wayside shrine. On to Grunzburg, where there's a nice old archway over the main street and they stock too icy ice cream. We strike Ulm with our tongues hanging out, it has an interesting cornhouse and a truly marvellous cathedral, beautiful gothic carving outside, and some very old bas relief carved stone door lintels. The tower is the chef d'oeuvre, highest in Germany (or in der welt) 160 meters, paid 20pfgs to enter but the inside is completely spoilt in our humble opinion, by a hideous brass angel perched over the west porch, with a huge sword in its hand, and brass shield and laurel wreaths, and Nazi flags all round – some sort of a war memorial we suppose, but brass in that lovely building. A blinking long hill out of Ulm and then more walls, and not a farm in sight for miles, just beginning to give up hope but our luck turns and we swoop down a hill to find farms at the foot. We camp below a pine wood and finish supper as the moon, silver and nearly full, rises above it. 29 June 1939 Away by a hilly but lovely road to Gerlingen, where we follow the valley, and an awful road full of pavé and factories to Stuttgart, which we dodge and go on to Ludwigsburg where we hostel. By now we've sampled nearly all the cakes that German pastry cooks make, we buy two and eat two halves each. The hostel is the top story of a building, and we have to carry the bikes up two flights of stairs, but we are left to our own devices and they have a beautiful grand piano in the common room, where I entertain Berry from memory for a short while, until the warden comes in and sits to talk with us. As usual to tell us how 'ruhig' and peaceful everything is in Germany and what a lot of unrest

there is in England – what are we missing we wonder, not having seen an English newspaper since we left Dover.

28 May 2012 – Oberammagau to Immenstadt (100 kilometres)

This was a day of rolling across the rolling alpine foothills of Bavaria. It seems to be really a bucolic paradise, a green and benign land, though the huge stacks of firewood against the huge houses joined to their huge barns indicate that there is a winter at this 800 metre plus or minus upland. The dwelling part of the buildings is usually at the winter sun facing southern end and the livestock in the northern part of the buildings add to the warmth.

The farmers are spreading the manure collected through the winter on the fields. Up close, as we sometimes are, it is pretty rich.

Immenstadt is our objective and we jitter across its pavé d inner strasses in the still warm late evening sunshine and find a Gasthof with room for us and our bikes.

29 May 2012 – Immenstadt to Friedrichshafen (110 kilometres)

This morning we were looking forward to a gentle descent to the Bodensee 400 metres or so below. On advice from a bike shop owner, who kindly refused payment for adjusting Nicholas' brakes and gear changer, we opted for the radveg which we discovered goes all the way from Konigsee to Bodensee. It was beautiful riding meandering along little valleys with a bit of up to go with the down now and then. For lunch at a wayside gasthof I opted for the "Romadur sauer" even though our hostess suggested I might find it a bit different. Romadur is a local soft, tasty and pretty smelly cheese. The dish was a chunk of this sitting in a bath of oil and vinegar with sliced raw onion and herbs. There was one other guest. An elderly lady was the only other diner. She wanted very much to converse, but her very Bavarian dialect and her shortage of teeth made it difficult for Nicholas to make much sense of what she was saying.

It was a few more kilometres before the path really started to descend to the Bodensee and then we had a flat fast run to Lindau, the old part of which is on an island on the edge of the "see". A very good espresso and apfelstrudel fortified us sufficiently for the final 25 kilometres to Friedrichshafen, our destination for the night.

30 May 2012 – Friedrichshafen to Villingen (120.5 kilometres)

The cycle path around the Bodensee is more than a little bit popular. In due course it will be necessary to duplicate the cycle path so that there are two lanes going each way. When we could get a clear run we were able to move along pretty fast between the water and the vineyards, or the water and the holiday houses. This south facing shore of the Bodensee has a feeling similar to the Cote d' Azur with a few differences including especially being able to see snow covered mountains on the other side. We lunched on excellent pasta and salad for a mere 5 euros at an outdoor restaurant in Ludwigshafen at the far north west end of the see.

Our route from the Rhine valley over to that of the upper Danube took us back up to about 850 metres and through a couple of drenching thunderstorms. The rain cleared as we crested the watershed following a little gravel farm track and we plunged down to the infant Danube with the westering sun shining under the clouds and larks rising and seemingly expressing gratitude for the passing of the storms. We joined the Danube or Donau radweg at Geisingen and followed its meandering path by the river disturbing the occasional heron doing some evening fishing to Donaueschingen. There is a cycle route from there directly over the hills to Villingen. We pedalled through the gateway of this walled town and jittered across the cobblestones to our hotel with our trip metre reading 120.5 kilometres for the day.

Villingen is the place where I meet Jill, my wife, and 14 friends for the group ride down the Neckar and Rhine rivers. Six of the group, Jenny and Philip, George and Suzanne and Julie and Nigel, have arrived. Allan and Lois, Anne and Declan, Ian and Karin and Jan and Chris and Jill are to arrive at various times tomorrow.

After dinner Nicholas and I celebrate our big day and our big week with a Talisker pure malt followed by a Lagavulin.

31 May 2012 Villingen

I woke at about the time that Jill was to land in Frankfurt and as soon as I thought she was likely to have turned on her phone I called her. On and off yesterday as I pedalled toward Villingen at an average speed of about 18 kilometres per hour I thought of Jill racing around the globe to meet me about 50 times faster. I recalled the time 36 years ago when I waited in Zurich for her to arrive from Australia when fog meant her plane went on to Frankfurt and she had to fly back to Basel and jump on a train to Zurich. With no such thing as a mobile phone back then and with communications between airports and airlines being even worse than they are today

I sat in Zurich with no idea of where she was. After about 4 hours at Zurich airport I was about to give up when she appeared.

Well today had certain similarities. She arrived safely, but she phoned me back about half an hour later to say that our tandem bike in its suitcase had not. Nicholas and I met Jill and Anne and Declan at the Villingen Bahnhof at midday and shortly afterwards received a call to say that the case had been sent to Basel and was then to be couriered to us. At about 10 that night we were told that, unlike Jill, 36 years ago, it had failed to arrive in Basel. Meanwhile all the other river riders arrived safely. They were ready to tackle the first 70 kilometres down the Neckar the next day, but we were not.

1 June 2012 – Villingen to Glatt by train

An early message to the hotel told us that the bike had not left Frankfurt. We called Qantas lost luggage in Frankfurt and found that they didn't open until 9:30. We farewelled our companions and phoned and phoned again, but were only greeted by a recorded message. At about 11 am we decided that I would train to Frankfurt and take possession of the bike and take it to our next night's destination, Glatt, while Jill and Nicholas would travel there directly by train. About 5 minutes before I was to get on the train to Frankfurt we were called and told that the bike was now in Stuttgart and would be delivered to Glatt. With not much confidence we set off for Glatt by train. The train stops at Sulz and while we three had lunch in the town square Declan and Anne and Chris and Jan and George and Suzanne pedalled in. Jill and Nicholas took a taxi over the hill to Glatt and I rode Nicholas' bike (which had come with us on the train) with the others up the tributary valley to Glatt. Glatt has a classic symmetrical schloss with round towers a real moat.

The whole party assembled for dinner and just as the 17 of us were about to sit down to dinner the bike appeared. This was the first night we all dined together and all was well as we all would be riding tomorrow. Some of us very well chose the trout which we learnt was the product of a trout farm just metres away from the hotel. I managed to have our tandem mostly assembled before the sunlight faded.

Our companions, by the way, had a beautiful day's riding beside the river through forest and farmland with covered bridges now and then. The Neckar was barely a stream in Villingen and by now had grown some, but was yet many times smaller than it would have to be in a 100 kilometres or so to carry full size barges at Plochingen, which is its destiny.

30 June 1939

Ludwigsburg has a very fine schloss and garten we discover. Then on by a river valley (the Neckar – 2012 note) where we notice vineyards, the first we've seen in Germany. Our luck is in today. We met two awfully nice lads – one speaks English fairly well and asks permission to accompany us. In **Heilbronn** we are invited to lunch at the canteen of the Kaiser Kaffe factory. We wash in the luftshutzraum (air raid shelter) and dine in state near the head of the firm – soup, fish and apfelsaft. Then a grand tour of the factory – it's thrust upon us that Germany must make grain coffee because she has no colonies (incidentally this malz coffee is foul stuff – it's served in all the hostels but the people would rather bring their own and make it themselves) I can't very well tell Hans that Germany didn't make full use of her colonies when she had 'em. After the tour of inspection Herr Lektor shakes hands with us and presents us with a packet of chocolate each – some wisecracks which we can't fully understand about England only having produced one great man – Shakespeare, and off we go for **Heidelberg**. Apparently Hans works in the office at another branch of this factory – he says he hopes he won't receive a bill for 4 dinners when he gets home. These lads don't seem to be able to get what they want as well as we do. There are frequent stops to consult the map en route and a frantic search for a farm which sells milk, then about 6 o'clock we have a meal in an old gasthaus (inn) , with apfelsaft to wash it down. I'd heard it was possible to do this sort of thing on the continent but it was our only first hand experience. Shortly after we leave the river valley road and take to the hills, it's shorter the lads say, but is it? Manoeuvres on a large scale by the military in the forest – more propaganda from Carl, but all Hans says is Bitte and Ja wohl. Berry says she doesn't think she can stay the pace to H. that night so we leave the lads and camp. A kindly farmer gives us milk and insists on our having a piece of rye bread to go with it. Up the hill after supper to see the abendsonn- the most exquisite I think I've ever seen. The sun has gone to rest behind range upon range of blue wald and the clouds are grey and pink, with a faint rainbow in the east after the rain. A visit later on from the local lads, but they soon clear off and leave us in peace.

2 June 2012 Glatt to Tübingen

After some final adjustments the tandem is ready to roll. Our companions have departed except for Ian and Karin with whom, together with Nicholas, we ride back to the Neckar and to Horb. Here we fold up Nicholas' bike and sit down to coffee before his train to Stuttgart from where he will take an ICE train to Berlin and back to work.

We are spied (I think it's the tandem that identifies us) from the high village square on the other side of the river by Nigel and Julie and Jenny and Philip who phone us and then wave. The tandem takes the attention of a local fellow who examines it for several minutes, walks around it and stands and stares at it for some time more. He then walks off to with some purpose, but on his return he again studies our rather unusual machine.

After fare welling Nicholas we cross the river and pedal up the steep cobbled streets of Horb to its 13th century kirche which has a lovely, light, airy and relatively simple interior. Behind the kirche stands a tower. Many of the towns have these towers which seem to have served as the the last stronghold of the community. Two hobbies (small falcons) are perched on it. I think they are debating its merits as a nesting site.

We roll carefully back down to the river and passing villages tucked into its steep sided valley every three or four kilometres we come to the town of Rottenburg in time for lunch in its marktplatz and in time to see a just married couple descend the steps of the Dom St Martin. They are confronted by a sheet printed with a large heart and their names. Somehow the heart is removed leaving a heart-shaped opening through which the freshly minted husband carries his beloved.

A side route to see Wurmlinger Kapelle seems like a good idea. We take a wrong turn and wander through some extra fields of wheat, which at this stage is a mint green and barley which is a brighter green with golden fronds and corn and potatoes. These crops a planted in alternating strips some only about ten metres wide. What is the reason for this pattern?

The kapelle is on a rather higher hill than we expected and we decide that it looks just marvellous from down below and climbing up would surely be a disappointment.

On we go to Turbingen for the night. We learn from Declan and Anne, the members of our party who scaled the hill to see the kapellmeister, that there had been a wedding there too and that it was notable for the fact that the bridal party all wore walking boots, even the bride with her bridal gown. They guessed that this was to signify that they had climbed up to their place of betrothal.

3 June 2012 – Tübingen to Esslingen

Today we got right into the grape growing country. The steep sides of the valley, sometimes 45 degrees or more, are tightly terraced and divided vertically into plots presumably so that everyone has to do the same amount of climbing up and down to tend their vines and perhaps so that everyone has a bit of the same soil type and the

same sun access. There are modern monorails running top to bottom to carry the grapes down, but some landholders still have a rather older looking cable system. We speculate as to the purpose of the little cabins in the vineyards. Some of us suggest that they may be used for liaisons that are not quite legitimate.

The tradition of little garden allotments my mother noted continues 7 decades. They are leased by people who live in towns in houses or apartments without gardens. Often they are on strips of land along railway lines, presumably land belonging to the railway that is surplus to requirements. Some are extensively decorated and some decoration is quite idiosyncratic.

We pass Plochingen, the highest point on the river the lock system goes to. I noticed the tower of the Hundertwasser house without realising what it was. Declan and Anne are the only members of our party who actually go and examine this rather quirkish bit of modern architecture.

Esslingen, our destination for the day, does not seem to be a large enough town to support its seven churches – all within less than a square kilometre. One belongs to the Dominicans and we are told it is their oldest bit of real estate north of the Alps. It is called a “munster” which seems to mean either a monastery or a cathedral in German.

The rathaus (town hall) of every town is a fancy, decorated building, but Esslingen’s very old half-timbered rathaus is rather more decorated than most. It’s facade has the appearance of a large, pink, tiered wedding cake.

Our group dines tonight in a gasthof which occupies one of the many 13th century half timbered buildings. Sauerbraten, which I haven’t sampled before, is my choice. It is beef which has been marinated in vinegar and spices for a few days and then roasted. It is very hearty and good. The group tries some trollinger and some lemlinger rotweine. The latter is fuller, but we decide the former is better.

4 June 2012 – Esslingen to Marbach

Before departing Declan, Anne, Ian, Karin and Jill and I climb to the fortifications above the town. We hike up past the trollinger vines (this is the red grape of these banks of the Neckar) and enter the fort to find a model, with improbably long legs, sheathed in a leopard print dress, being photographed. There is debate about whether such a job would be more or less tedious, especially with a photographer who was very particular, than enduring strategic planning meetings and the like in a bureaucracy.

The initial few kilometres from Esslingen involve negotiating industrial territory which is perhaps centred here as it seems to be the main end point for the barges thus where cargo is off loaded for Stuttgart or to be taken on by rail. We then return to farmland and villages. At one point we cross the river by a modern, glass-covered footbridge.

My mother is quite right. Ludwigsburg does have a very fine schloss. Though it is not on quite the same scale as Versailles, I think its architecture is on a par. It is worth the steep climb up from the river valley. I haven't mentioned before that mini golf seems to be a favoured pastime in this part of the world. As I recall it came and went several decades ago in Australia.

The poet, playwright and philosopher Friedrich Schiller was born in Marbach which is our home for the night. Lois was sorry that he hadn't chosen a village down on the riverside rather than a hill above it! Our hotel is situated in an area called Schiller Hohe where there is a museum and several buildings apparently devoted to the literary arts. Schiller was, maybe, the Robbie Burns of Germany. Schiller's friend Goethe would be a contender for such a title, but let me mention Beethoven's view on the question. You surely know, dear reader, that it is a Schiller poem that Beethoven uses as his text for the choral movement of the 9th which is now the anthem of the European Union. It was Beethoven's view that Schiller was greater than Goethe and as Beethoven is possibly my greatest hero that is good enough for me. His opinion was that the composer, in setting poetry to music, must attain aesthetic heights greater than the poet. He wrote "who can do that in the case of Schiller? In this respect Goethe is much easier".

5 June 2012 – Marbach to Heilbronn

Marbach's town clock plays a lovely tune as we wind our way through its cobbled streets and half-timbered houses back down to the river. The land subdivision of the vineyard covered hillsides continues to be in narrow, vertical slices. In some parts the slopes have cliffs at or near the top and the vines are grown right up to their base and to the very edge of their tops. A kestrel lifts off a vine in the valley, catches an updraft and then cruises along the cliff face and we disturb two Great Spotted Woodpeckers who seem to be finding food in the bark of the vines. Further on a flash of yellow leaps off the path and alights on a barn roof. It is indeed a Yellowhammer.

We are riding with Ian and Karin and catch up with Nigel and Julie just before the village of Besigheim. We sit down to morning coffee which turns into lunch in its

crooked narrow main street or main lane which separates the multi-coloured, half-timbered houses by four or five metres, each with their abundantly blooming flower boxes.

At Lauffen a number of us opt independently to take the right bank path. The signs take one to the gated entrance of a factory. We six decide that the couple of cyclists going around the gate must be workers at the factory and turn back and up, and up a road that takes us away from the river until we see a sign that suggests going down a dead end road to a cement works. Nigel and Karin scout this and find that it does go down to the river path and on we go. We learn later that others in our party are also puzzled by the signs to the factory gate and also think that cyclists slipping past it are factory workers, but they are smart enough to question them and find that they are not workers and that they are accessing the path. Someone must have stolen the sign.

Heilbronn is our destination for the night. Chris suggests it is the victim of two bad mistakes: first being mostly levelled in WW2 and secondly being mostly rebuilt in the 60s. Some of the original buildings have been carefully restored. The Rathaus has a most impressive clock with three dials showing the time, the days of the week, the phases of the moon and the movement of the constellations. When the hour is struck two golden rams butt each other as the bell tolls while a fellow at their left waves a sword.

The Kilianskirche has what appears to be an entirely decorative, and apparently oversize spiral staircase on the outside of one of its towers with a statue of some chap at the top. Rather oddly it also has a completely modern main door.

1 July 1939 – From between Heilbronn and Heidelberg to Worms

On next morning to Heidelberg – it's a lovely town, lots of red sandstone, a grand schloss on the hill, and a fine old bridge. After visits to the post and bank, and a very imposing affair this last, we meet the lads, say farewell in the university grounds and proceed to have a good dinner.



Karl and Hans at the University

We leave Heidelberg, and I got my shoes mended again for nothing, after many sad shakings of the head from the cobbler at their condition. The road to Mannheim is quiet and flat – we do appreciate it – I've revised my opinion of Autobahnen, they're a boon to cyclists. We see the Rhine at Mannheim but nothing else – it's a colossal industrial town – so out we get p.d.q. Our road runs alongside the Rhine today – a mighty river with vineyards and orchards on the banks and shipping from Switzerland down to Holland, passing up and down. We spent the night in the basement of a gymnasium at Worms. Bessi's letter asking when we are coming home has quite upset the applecart – I kept thinking of all the things I must do when I get home – look at my hairy knees and wonder what I'll look like in silk stockings.

6 June 2012 – Heilbronn to Heidelberg

Bad Wimpfen is on the route today and is apparently worth, but we have 90+ kilometres to do and all of us bar Jenny and Philip decide the climb up from the river is a bit much and that it looks good enough from afar. Schlosses continue to decorate the valley sides and there are beautiful stretches of the ride through damp green forest that goes right to the riverside. Undaunted by the rain chaffinches sing all day long and redstarts start up from the edge of the path flashing their long rufous tails. There a few mishaps today which we could have done without since the day was long enough anyway. Karin has a fall and Jan delivers first aid, but Karin seems no less bubbly as a result. Christ and Jan have a valve problem and Chris has to hitch a ride to a bike shop to get a new tube and Anne and Declan have a puncture. But we all make it to Heidelberg and it means that we now have some new members

of the 100 club – that's 100 kilometres in a day. A number of us find ourselves together on the very grand old bridge my mother mentioned.



On the Alte Brücke

It is built with red sandstone as is most of the city and the schloss above it. I was expecting red sandstone as my mother mentions it, but I wasn't expecting a whole red city. Dinner tonight is on the haupt strasse watching the students of this university city pass by. I am well satisfied with a plate of four different kinds of wurst, sauerkraut and dumpling and a dunked.

7 June 2012 – Heidelberg

Today is a well-earned rest day and we disperse throughout the city to take in its sights and finish with dinner all together to farewell Ian and Karin who had only signed up for the first week.

8 June 2012 – Heidelberg to Bensheim

Not only are we saying goodbye to Ian and Karin, but also to the river we have followed for a week. We leave it at Lardenberg, the oldest town in Germany east of the Rhine. It has two kirches with tall copper steeples that can be seen from a distance across the very broad valley we are now in. We have come into the valley of the Rhine now. We are now riding through broad acre farming country. The wheat and barley is no longer grown in little strips. As we enter Lardenberg, high above a stork wings over us. It is the first I have ever seen. A flock of Grey Lag Geese and a flock of Canada Geese are grazing on the Neckar's bank. Neckar means wild fellow or wild water. Here, just before it unites its soul with the mighty Rhine it is no longer wild perhaps resigned to its fate. I am a little sorry that having watched it from

its youth in the Black Forest we don't actually stay with it until its last gasp. Lardenberg is a tangle of pavé d crooked streets like most of the other towns we have passed through. The growth of these towns is so clearly organic. There were town planners back in Roman times and perhaps before, but that art was not exercised here. Many of the towns and villages here in the Rheintal hug the wooded hills that rise steeply from the flood plains. I read somewhere once that humans have generally favoured the edge of something for their settlements. In Bensheim it is a late shopping tonight and in a platz, watching the locals pass by, we enjoy a meal which involves a lot of schnitzel and spargel. It is the celebrated spargel (asparagus) season now and the very large white spears with hollandaise sauce are delicious. We have pedalled past fields of sprouting asparagus and appreciate the labours of the bent backed workers doing the harvesting.

9 June 2012 – Bensheim to Mainz

We all went by various routes to our first meeting with the Rhine this morning. No one else found the path that ran about eight kilometres through a forest Jill and I found. But all of us but Allan and Lois arrived at the river to board the ferry to cross to the west bank together. Allan and Lois made it to the next ferry having spent a successful half an hour rectifying a problem with their tandem. I think most of us are interested to watch gliders being launched at an airfield we pass, but Chris is a little too interested and discovers that looking up into the sky is not the best way to navigate a rough track. Over the handle bars he goes, but the main damage is a rip in his shirt. There seem to be many more barges on their way up stream than down. Downstream they go at about riding pace or around 20 kmph while upstream they can barely manage walking pace. There is nice little ride amidst vineyards after we wind our way through Nierstein. Tonight it is Germany versus Portugal in Euro 2012 and Mainz is festooned with black red and yellow flags. Germany wins and the celebration goes on into the small hours.

10 June 2012 – Mainz to Assmanshausen

Being a Roman town the history of Mainz goes back to beginning of the first millennium CE. The construction of its 1000 year old Dom St Martin punctuates its passage into the second. Though many of its buildings seem to date, like Heilbronn's, from the less than creative 60s and 70s, it is quite an elegant city. It presents itself to the river with a grand schloss and riverside walks lined with plane

trees. It is the city of Gutenberg. I'm not sure how to measure them, but of all the advances in human communication, including the internet, surely this place saw the greatest with Herr Gutenberg's printing press. Mainz is at the confluence of the Main river and the Rhine. The Main is the link to the Danube by canal and so downstream from here the river traffic is significantly greater. The map we have is not completely contemporary with the actual route on the ground. At one point I choose to disregard the radweg sign and go where the map says. There is a path as per the map, but it is nearly 50% large puddles and we have to negotiate them pushing the tandem. In due course we connect with the new route. Our path takes us through a large area of the garden allotments of the families of Mainz and as it is a sunny Sunday many are out working the vegetable plantings or simply sitting and enjoying their little patch of green. Some gardens are entirely decorative and others entirely given over to vegetable and fruit production. The area is under power lines. I imagine that the leases for such plots are handed down from generation to generation.

The river is swollen with the melt from the winter snows and spreading across lower lying land so that trees have their feet in the water like mangroves. We come upon a tower about five metres high with a family of storks nested on top of it. It is clearly built for this purpose. There is another un-utilised a little farther on. I am hoping to see houses with storks' nests on their roofs nearer to the Baltic. A little before Bingen we come across the remains of a bridge which we learn from the notice was constructed in 1913 and was the largest bridge in Germany and the photo showed it to be a graceful structure too. It was here when my mother passed by in 1939, but was destroyed on 13 January 1945. Our German isn't good enough to tell us if it was destroyed by the retreating Germans or the advancing Allies.

A restaurant on the riverbank at Bingen is our chosen lunch venue and two gentlemen ask to join us our table being much larger than needed for two. They are on holiday from Nuremburg. Their wives have returned home and they, the gentlemen, are spending a few extra days to attend an 80th birthday party in Worms. They are members of a "wine fraternity" and have just been to a gathering of about 400 members of wine fraternities from the three German speaking wine producing countries of Germany, Switzerland and Austria. The conversation thus increases our knowledge of German wine considerably. They tell us that German Riesling is the best white wine in the world because the soils of these slopes of the Riesling growing area are perfectly matched to the grape type. I think I agree with them. We also learn that eiswein can only be made when the grapes are ripe and the temperature drops below – 7. This year only limited areas achieved these conditions so the eiswein crop

is about 80% down. You will recall, dear reader, that we were wondering about the vertical strips of land under vines on the Neckar and the narrow strips of wheat and barley etc. Our Nurembergers say that this is the result of land being divided fairly amongst sons and daughters. Our destination today is Assmanhausen. It is on the other side of the river from Bingen. One option is to take the ferry straight across and ride the 5 kilometres or so, but on a road not a bike path and another is to take a ferry all the way. Chris and Jan join us for this option. Bingen was not a place I had heard of until I heard the beautiful music of its famous Abbess Hildegard von Bingen. I am very sorry to say that the ferry timetable meant that we had insufficient time to go and see her abbey. The short ferry ride is just a bit exciting as the river is quite narrow here and thus the current is very strong. It used to be stronger until the river was widened, I think sometime in the 19th century. The barges are creeping up very slowly against it. We pass the Mauseturm in which, as legend has it, some bishop hid himself as he had made himself sufficiently unpopular, but with whom I know not, to be at risk of losing his life. Apparently this turned out to be a poor strategy as he was attacked and eaten by mice! Our Nurembergers, by the way, had told us that the grape they grow in Assmanhausen is pinot noir. We try a bottle that night and I think it is pretty good, but Chris, whose opinion is that only 20% of pinot noirs are good, thinks that this one is in the 80% category. What was a bit more special was finding on the list of wines several old auslese Rieslings including a 1976. Since it was only going to cost us 20 euros to drink this wine picked in the year Jill and I were married we could not say no. It was very good.

11 June 2012 – Assmanshausen to Koblenz (37 kilometres)

It is a wet day today and the option of taking the MS St Nickolas for 30 kilometres or so down to St Goar is irresistible except for Jenny and Phil, Susanne and George and Julie and Nigel. Anyway, my mother did a few kilometres on the water so this is fitting. This is possibly the most spectacular part of the Rhine. The valley sides rise steeply and are mostly wooded. The villages are squeezed into little triangles of land where tributary valleys descend and there is a castle every couple of kilometres. Even on a grey day with driving rain it is entrancing. What foresight the castle and village builders centuries ago had. How did they know to decorate this valley so to make it such a traveller's delight hundreds of years on? We pass the Loreley or Lorelei (the former is used here) and luckily the indomitable little St Nikolas is not lured into its deadly jaws by the siren who amuses herself with this pastime. The rain stops and Chris and Jan and we lunch watching the increasing river traffic and of

course as soon as we mount our steeds it starts to pour again and does so all the way to Koblenz where we find that our luggage is yet to arrive and thus have a wait before we can put on dry clothes.

12 June 2012 – Koblenz to Rolandseck (near Remagen) (56 kilometres)

I think I heard a nightingale for the first time last night. That is I think it was a nightingale and I think I hadn't heard one before! We had a conversation over breakfast with a German who was most concerned about how his country was perceived by peoples of other nations. In his view it is still that terrible time seven decades ago that is prominent in most peoples' minds when they think about Germany. We agreed with him that it is sad that Germany's centuries of achievements in every peaceful field of human endeavour; its great philosophers, scientists, composers and more were not appreciated as they should be.

Koblenz is where the waters of the Mosel merge with those of the Rhine. How should I describe this mingling? To me it looks like black coffee (the Mosel) being mixed with white coffee (the Rhine). The Rhine of course rises in the Alps and way back where Nicholas and I crossed it into Liechtenstein it was that muddy grey colour that many of the alpine rivers seem to be. I assume it is to do with the geology of the Alps. But when we saw it again in the form of the Bodensee the water was quite clear. It must pick up quite a bit of mud from where it departs the Bodensee. The Mosel's course must be less muddy.

Right at the confluence there is a large statue of Kaiser Wilhelm I which celebrates the unification of Germany under his leadership with a bit of help from Otto von Bismarck. A few hundred metres away a smart Kurfursten schloss presents itself to the Rhine. Here resided one the Kurfursts or electors responsible for giving Wilhelm I his job. There was a bunch of these electors across what is now Germany and beyond who ruled their bit of the empire and got together to decide who would be emperor. The lucky chap was then sent to Rome to be crowned Kaiser by the Pope. Andernach is one of the towns we pass through downstream from Koblenz. It has the remains of an impressive town wall and around this wall the town council grows vegetables in attractive, well tended beds amongst decorative plants. We are told by a local that the vegetables are available to any citizen who is in need of vegetables. I wonder what the local greengrocers think of this. The community must be quite socialist for another initiative is a book exchange. This is simply a telephone box sort of structure with glass doors and shelves of books to which citizens may help

themselves and to which they make contributions or returns. At Andernach the river enters hilly country again and some of the slopes are vineyards, but mostly they are forested. Passing through these hillsides are the largest ships we have so far seen on the river. They would not look out of place mid Atlantic though when fully laden they sit too low in the water to cope with ocean waves. I'm reminded of our breakfast conversation when we pass the remains of the bridge at Remagen destroyed in 1945. It is impossible to travel through this land and not be constantly reminded of those terrible years. Nigel and Julie ferry over ferry back and eisweine on the balcony.

2 July 1939 Sunday

It pours with rain until 10am. But then we sallied forth to see Worms. It has a wonderful bridge over the Rhine – a massive affair, very solid and satisfying red stone with 4 towers six and lovely Roman shaped arches. A flat but cobbly road now to Mainz. This country reminds us of Italy – miles of flat cultivated fields and the hill slopes covered with vines – even the women are carrying things on their heads to complete the picture. Mainz is a large town, of which we see only one of the old gateways, and we go on to Rheinbrücke. At first sight it's terrible disappointing – a huge railway junction full of trippers – so much for the "Queen of the Rhine". But the hostel is lovely; high above the town (on the site of an old castle Carl told us later) – with views of the river both ways. It's very busy – barges and tugs and paddle steamers from Switzerland and Holland going up and down. We were just eating supper commenting on a miserable looking fellow hosteller who only spoke less German than I, so I said must be English or American when in walk Karl and Hans to have supper with us. Hans had a pullover full of enquiries and when we'd eaten our fill he invited the rest of the hostellers to fall to – but "no answer came the stern reply". The farmers along the Rhine must have had a bad day that day. We went down town after supper and en route though full of cherries, we literally fell on a strawberry bed – definitely superior to cherries. We wanted to find out about the boats to Koblenz – they are an aimless couple, after much enquiring they find out that it costs 2-20 to go to Koblenz at 8-45, and if we wait till 5 we go for 1-70, but if we get a party of six we go for half in the big boat. Met a handsome Frenchman going back and K. persuaded him to come with us. Incidentally his French is no better than mine – I wonder how much Italian and Spanish he speaks.

3 July 1939 Monday

Up early – the river is glorious this morning – we get on the boat for half fare because we are J.H. members, and have an extra half hour to Rudesheim. The nicest bit of the lot was when he had the boat to ourselves. It's packed for about an hour and even the dodge of telling people about the awful vibration of the engine and a practical demonstration doesn't succeed, so we share the bow. It takes three hours to get to Koblenz – a lovely stretch of river – it doesn't seem true to me that the one thing I really wanted to do I've done. Castle every hundred yards, mostly owned by rich Americans Karl tells us. The 5 of us have dinner in a Fisch Kuche at C. for 55 pfgs. And it's very good. Then another goodbye and we seek the Polizei for our visa only has about two days to go, and we don't want to get shot on the frontier for overstaying our welcome. At the Auskunft is a young blue eyed fair curly headed policeman with whom we both fall in love, particularly as he tells me I speak German quite well. We're given a long form to fill up and told to return at 3, so we buy cakes and eat them on the banks of the Rhine and puzzle out the form with the aid of a dictionary. Our visas are extended until the 20th July so that's that. On by a cobbly but glorious bit of road by the river to Bad Godesburg where I and the Hausmutter have a common tongue – French. She tells me that the Schwarz Korps slept here on the occasion of Adolf's next visit after Chamberlain had been to see him. Der Fuhrer is very fond of Bad Godesburg. There is the inevitable gang of school girls here, but they are very jolly and after supper the warden plays the concertina on the front lawn for them to dance to. We look on through the top window, and they make a sweet picture with their tight waisted, full skirted frocks and aprons. In the morning their leader, an old boy who has had a month at Cambridge University, shows us the hotel where Neville stayed, right on top of one of the Brackenfels – they certainly did him proud.



Probably one of rather a few visas issued to British citizens before war was declared

4 July 1939 Tuesday

A flat uninteresting road to Koln. It's boiling hot, and the hostel is a huge place all down the side of one street – here there are Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, French, Americans, etc. We change and sally forth to see the sights – a lovely meal in a very swagger restaurant, painted ceilings, old oak paneling and lots of wrought iron work – price 2-70. I try some sauerkraut – mother will appreciate it when I tell her. I used to detest it at home – boiled bacon, pickled cabbage and mashed potatoes!!! No luck buying souvenirs – Cologne is much too expensive for us – so to bed.

13 June 2012 – Rolandseck to Koln

Today was cold and rather wet. Some air mass must have moved in from the North Sea and the temperature only reached 14C. The river continued through hilly country with a couple of schlosses overlooking it until we entered the outskirts of Bonn. John

Le Carre's novel "A Small Town in Germany" is set in Bonn and he works hard to give the reader the impression that Bonn is unrelentingly sombre both in climate and character. Well it was grey and cold and sombre today, but a very good cup of coffee and apple and almond tart in a warm cafe in the main platz with Jan and Chris lifted our spirits. And then an hour or so in the museum in Beethoven's birth house followed by kartoffel and smoked salmon soup and the cold damp thirty or so kilometres to Koln was a breeze. But a word more about the Beethoven museum. I often ask people who is the person they feel they know best whom they have never met – living or dead. One day, some while ago listening to one or other of the great man's works it occurred to me that he was someone I really did know. His dedication, his struggle, his idealism, his self-confidence or indeed pride, but above all his humanity is in his music. And wandering through the house where he spent his very early years, looking at his viola, his manuscripts, his piano and all the paintings and sketches of him (never smiling) was quite an emotional experience. Afterwards we experienced a "digitised" recording of part of Fidelio. The four principal characters were rendered in a darkened room in 3D by coloured moving shapes. We weren't at all sure that it did anything for the work, but I think that Beethoven, being the experimental sort of guy he was, would have appreciated the attempt to interpret his music in a new way. The very tall Koln Dom or cathedral can be seen from a long way up river, dark on the horizon. The route we took into Koln was through a large area of factories including chemical and petroleum works. It was aesthetically challenging. What a contrast with the vine or forest covered hillsides. What an even greater contrast with the wilderness of the Alps. But there was a certain beauty to it. This was the last day of the Neckar-Rhine riding group. We celebrated in a fine Italian restaurant which we chose because it was a little less boisterous than others. Tonight Germany plays the Netherlands in Euro 2012 and there is much enthusiasm in the streets. The black, red and yellow of the German flag is everywhere – not a sign of the colours of the Netherlands. However, it seems that even the finest restaurants cannot trade well in these few weeks without a big screen. In this one it is incongruous above the white table cloths. Jan and Chris organised a trivia contest for the night, which required each couple to ask 5 questions related to the ride down the two rivers. Anne and Declan won which was fitting as the next day Declan was to clock up six decades. We sang him Happy Birthday.

14 June 2012 – Koln

All members of the group departed in different directions over the course of the morning. Jill and I are the only ones left. We took ourselves to see the Dom up close, but it just cannot be appreciated up close. And, because it is surrounded by not so pretty buildings of the last few decades, it can only be partly seen in frames of these buildings as one walks away. It is a grim cathedral. It has a doleful countenance. Perhaps this is fitting given what it's been through. It saw the city around it almost completely destroyed in WW2 and it suffered itself 72 direct hits. But it stood tall. It is actually improbably tall both outside and in. Is it the tallest of the great cathedrals? I rather wish my mother had said more about Koln. What was it like before the WW2 devastation. The only clue she gave was that it was too expensive for Berry and her. It does have some boulevards and street layouts and a few pre-war apartment buildings a little reminiscent of Paris and I think it might well have been quite an elegant city. There must be some photos and paintings that show what it was once. Well this is the beginning of a two week break from riding. I shall come back to Koln on 2 July to continue the journey with Rick. Meanwhile Jill and I are using one of those new fangled four wheel conveyances to visit Nicholas in Berlin and then make a good sized circle through Dresden, Prague, the Tatra Mountains, Budapest, then to Gitti and Charles at Axams in Austria, Nuremburg, Frankfurt, from where Jill will return to Australia and from where I will return to Koln.

PS – It turned out the that the new fangled conveyance was about as new fangled as you can get. We were upgraded to a brand new little BMW 120D. This probably made up for the fact that in every hotel the group stayed in Jill and I seemed to get one of the lower graded rooms!

5 July 1939 Wednesday

Up at 5, having shifted my position in the night. The lass on the top deck was chucking herself all over the place all night and talking in her sleep. Berry had beaten me and been down to the river. The road is rather nice today, we strike the wald again, then after dinner we strike the coalfields, or rather they strike us – it's pavé , pavé , pavé , dust and tramlines. Two Norwegians who speak excellent English stop to talk, then they stop us again to ask if we've seen a shirt, the one lad lost his coming down a hill – he'd hung it out on the bike to dry. On to the country again and we camp in an orchard with a horse – the family having made a ceremonial inspection – quite like old times.

3 July 2012 Koln to Witten – 100 kilometres, 500 metres vertical

As planned, Rick and I met in Koln last night. We were both late in so dinner was late. We were up early enough, but by the time I'd returned the rental car and we'd done some bicycle adjustments we didn't get away until well after ten. We found our way to the river and worked through the tourists and school excursion groups along the bank for a couple of kilometres then over to the east bank for a few more kilometres. Then it was goodbye to the Rhine which Nicholas and I had first met hundreds of kilometres back in Liechtenstein. There were a few kilometres through urban and industrial territory before we were out into some countryside and over some hills to Solingen. We couldn't work out just where the knives were made, but we came across a bunch of retired knife makers playing street chess.

A local woman saw us studying our map and insisted on leading us to the way, as far as we could understand her, for bikes on from Solingen. It turned out to be a brand new bike path on an old railway route and it did give us a few fast kilometres toward the Ruhr valley. We climbed a little pass and looked out over the valley which did not seem to be absolutely full of coal mines and steel works as was the impression I had from Geography lessons at school. In fact it was quite a quiet pleasant ride up the river to Witten where we decided we should find lodging for the night. Hunting for hotels we passed Karl Marx Platz and Beethoven Strasse so the good citizens of Witten clearly appreciate creative genius.

6 July 1939 Thursday

They told us at the farm this morning that the horse had either vanished or been stolen. Berry remembered seeing a man in the field very early, but we couldn't tell them, and anyhow the farmer didn't seem very worried and started talking about the unrest in England – bombs and a fire in Birmingham. After Dortmund which we bypass we have no pavé to speak of and it's an excellent (No.1.) road to Paderborn. The hostel seems to be an old castle and we have fried eggs and bacon for supper and then survey the town. It's quite exciting – a couple of rivers seem to run underneath the old part, and appear at intervals, giving it a Venetian look, it has the remains of the turreted wall around it, a lovely old unusual looking Cathedral, and lots of large quaint houses, stone and half timbered. We are invited to have a drink by a strange man, but decline, without thanks. Many of the houses in this part are faced with black slate, giving them a very funereal appearance.

7 July 1939 Friday

As usual a school party arrived during the evening, and we are regarded as curiosities – I expect we would be in England, my shirt's a horrible sight. We have a close look at the Dom before departing – some interesting old carving on it. We strike the road again – lovely country all the way to Hamelin – some in the company of an Italian who spoke German – all the old farm houses are timbered, great wide doors, with a text or part of a psalm carved over the lintel. Hamelin is a quaint old place, but the hostel is right out of the town on a hill and a place "suitable for school parties". We know them of old – house shoes on before you enter, and can't get to your dorm before 9, feel like strangers in a strange land, but with determination wash my skirt and our towels in HOT water, and write and file our nails in the garden, looking deadly respectable in our frocks, until abendessen, which we hope is soon. Later we engage the Hitler Youth in conversation. They know quite a bit of English. At meals they're very noisy, bawl a song, and then all roar after in response to the leader's cry, and when they've finished another song, mostly about the Vatherland I gather. We learnt that these huge, beautiful, elaborate hostels are built by the boys in their filch jahr.

8 July 1939 Saturday

Away early and arrived in Hanover by 11. A huge town, lots of very old tall houses, storeys overlapping one another, a large Rathaus and a good free museum – our one and only, got lost but found our way back Goethe strasse and have an excellent dinner for about 75 each. Talk about going to Hanover – we couldn't get away from it, we went all the way round to where we came from, but at length we emerged and rode on to Celle where we bought supper and salts! Then on through pine forest – roads tarmaced half and sanded half. This is very like Lithuania – only tracks going through the forest. We camped in the wood, had a lovely supper, cheese and tomatoes, and stewed cherries and milk.

5 July 2012 Spitze Warte to Hanover – 88 kilometres (train Paderborn to Hameln)

We were on the bikes quite early and decided to try to make up a bit of time using the main road to Paderborn. It had a wide smooth verge except where it had a middle overtaking lane and we did the 35 kilometres in a bit over an hour. The thing

is though, as I did not turn the map over until we arrived in Paderborn, we did not know that about 15 of the kilometres of this road were verboten for radfahrer!

We had to be in Hannover by the end of the day and as it was still about 120 kilometres away we purchased tickets for the train to Hameln. We had about half an hour before it departed so we did what is probably a record breaking tour of Paderborn. We were able to confirm my mother's observation of the rivers or streams emerging from under the city. In fact, they arise from numerous springs and come together to form the Pader river which has a very short life (supposedly the shortest in Germany) as it dissolves into the Lippe after only about four kilometres.

A retired teacher engaged us in conversation on the train to Hameln. He was taking himself to Berlin for the day to hear a talk by the president of the Deutsche Bundesbank (Germany's central bank). He tried to educate us on the constraints of Europe's banking system which limit the use of monetary policy as a tool of economic management, but the train arrived at Hameln before our lesson was complete.

I'm surprised that my mother did not mention the Hochzeitshaus (marriage house) the face of which is arrayed with bells of a range of sizes. These bells play a tune periodically, but I couldn't work out the timing. Maybe they are an addition since 1939. What definitely has been added since then (1964) is a mechanical Pied Piper who emerges followed by the rats and then by the children with the lame boy trailing behind.



This other bike might be a bit rough on the cobble stones

We wended our way towards Hanover stopping for a roadside lunch amidst the cornfields. We follow the radveg signs to Hannover from village to village. Interestingly at one point the radveg sign says 41 kilometres to go while the road sign says 31. My guess is that generally that is about the difference between following the roads and following the radvegs. For us this afternoon, though the difference was stretched further when a sign which someone must have tampered with sent us the wrong way into a forest along a narrow track probably used by wild boars than humans.

A little before the path led through a really beautiful wald of tall trees with an open floor carpeted in green and rusty brown then we were back out into the grain fields with outskirts of Hanover in sight. Wilfried Duckstein, our Pfadfinder contact met us as arranged as we entered the city with very welcome bottles of water and juice. We loaded the bikes into the Pfadfinder mini-bus. Wilfried, as he had read my mother's journal, showed us the Rathaus that had impressed her and Goethe strasse which she had travelled a second unintended time and then brought us to a grand welcome



at the HQ of his Pfadfinder group. We were a little overwhelmed. A troop of young Pfadfinders, who had made a banner in our honour, all wanted to shake our hands. We shook left hands as Scouts and Guides do and I found that I had to explain why that is the tradition. I also found that the handshake amongst Pfadfinders here includes a slightly tricky interlocking of little fingers which I could not quite master.

This was followed by interviews with local journalists. (These resulted in a couple of newspaper articles and an appearance on regional TV! – see

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ApC0KJm4Ssw&feature=youtu.be> or <http://youtu.be/ApC0KJm4Ssw>.)



We were then treated to a magnificent dinner under canvas with a number of the Pfadfinder leaders with meats barbecued by Sebastian and delicious salads, for which I must get the recipes from Anje.

Sebastian had read my mother's journal and noted that in Celle, his home town, she and Berry had bought supplies so he made us a gift of food they might have purchased – labskaus, pickled gherkins and pretzels.

Volker, the chairman of the Hanover Verband Christlicher Pfadfinderinnen und Pfadfinder, and Gabi, his wife, very kindly gave us beds in their home for the night. On the way to his home Volker took us to see the cathedral with the statue of Martin Luther at its door. I remarked on the similarity of the architecture around the cathedral to some of the architecture I had seen a long time ago at Hampton Court Palace. Maybe the first Hanoverian King of Britain, George I, had his modifications done to the Palace by an architect he brought from this his home town. George had a couple of pretty hot employees in Hanover, the great mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Leibniz and, as his Kapellmeister, George Frederick Handel. He must not have understood Gottfried's genius because he didn't take him to his new court, but apparently he was quite fond of George and would have taken him along had the latter not already deserted him for the Court of St James to work for Queen Anne. Rick told me that when Anne died and, rather to his discomfort, Handel's previous employer became his new employer, he wrote the Water Music Suite to try to ensure Monarchical favour. This it apparently did as George liked it so much he required the G F H All Stars to play it over and over again on the Thames cruise.

9 July 1939 Sunday

A windy day, nearly all through the forest – plenty of traffic on the road and we picked wimberries for our supper. Near Hamburg we fell in with a sailor who spoke English

and took us right to J.H. En route B threw her poor bike about again, she's good at skidding and just walking off it so to speak, letting it slide. Hostel is a weird place as usual, but we sun in the garden and have saft (a fruit juice drink) then to the dorm labeled "Jews sleeping room" for bed.

6 July 2012 – Hanover to Totstedt (by old Fire Engine to the outskirts of Hanover then 100 kilometres)

Volker fare welled us at the VCP house. He is a much jollier fellow than this photo suggests!



We were then taken out of Hanover by Alexandra, driving, and Sebastian, navigating, in the grandest style in the vintage fire engine the VCP uses for one of its three social



programmes the JuK iMob (Jugend und Kinder Mobil). In conversations yesterday and in the fire engine we learnt a little about what these excellent programmes are achieving with underprivileged children in Hanover. They provide very good models for what the Scout/Guide Movement could do elsewhere in the world. I'm sure the VCP would be pleased to provide details – email info@vcp.de.

This is Heide or heath land and along the way we are offered heide kartoffeln and heide erdbeeren. But we had some bread and cheese and the excellent gherkins Sebastian had given us and we lunched in a church garden in a little heide village.

There is a very large military reserve to the west and another to the east and we pass by the Bergen-Belsen army camp where some NATO forces are stationed. Along the cycle path for a kilometre or so opposite the army camp someone has painted a white line and periodically anti-war statements in both German and English. It does seem a little odd that this area which was the location of the Belsen concentration camp remains today a military site.

Arriving in Tostedt we spot a church steeple and our guess that the house of our hostess for the night, Pastor Sabine, would be close by proves correct. The evening is warm and in the garden, serenaded by a Song Thrush, we are very well fed by Sabine and two Pfadfinders, Marcel and Anne-Katarine and Youth Deacon, Hans-Peter.



10 July 1939 Monday

Still very windy – amble round the docks, and fish market and admire a large white sailing boat – the Hein Godenwind, then it takes us about 1.5 hours to get out – it's a colossal town. Very windy ride to Bad Bramstadt where we decide to halt for the night. The Hostel is part of an almshouse – where we write and talk of what we propose to do in the next six weeks. Must make a note of how all the families here go about on bikes – gangs of quite elderly people. Funnily enough tonight has been the most friendly hostel yet. The warden seemed amazed that I'd learnt German at home and asked if I'd any German ancestors, or worked for an export firm. We've two Danes here tonight, just been talking to the one and landed a nice map of the Danish Youth Hostels. Later also landed a hostel guide. Berry went to bed and we all started

talking a mixture of Dansk, German and English – great fun when we found the one hosteller was a policeman. The Dane, with a lovely grin, tiptoed softly backwards from him, and, rather embarrassed, the bobby explained that it was ‘Feriens’ (Holidays). Apparently – manufactured goods are much cheaper in Germany than Denmark and the Dane had been buying a fountain pen.

11 July 1939 Tuesday

Handshakes from the Danes and off we go, an uninteresting road all day to Schleswig, with a foul wind in front of us, but we picked wild raspberries. Huge hostel at Schleswig, and two lonely looking Danes, and 5 Swedish girls, whom we think may be Guides, but we discover they’ve borrowed their brothers’ belts. A dorm to ourselves tonight.

7 July 2012 – Totstedt to Berkenthin (117 kilometres)

Sabine gave us a much too generous breakfast then showed us over her church which she shares with three other pastors. It is a typical brick church of northern Germany, but perhaps a little more elegant than others. The parents of a bride to be married by Sabine in the afternoon are busy trying to ensure that all will be as their daughter wants it. We learn though that weddings here have not become the commercial events that they have in Australia and the parents and Sabine and we all express the hope that they do not.

Today we are departing from the 1939 route. We are slipping around the south of Hamburg crossing the Elbe and heading toward the eastern side of Denmark.

After passing through Buchholz in der Nordheide we climb a little through the Klecker Wald, roll down to the Seeve valley then up through the Grosser Buchwedel and down to the flats along the Elbe.

Lunch, on the levee bank looking over the Elbe, is rolls and delicious Italian cheese that Sabine sent us off with plus the remains of Sebastian’s gherkins and wild peaches which are much more flavoursome than the domesticated variety.

After crossing the river, we meander through the countryside sometimes on smooth tarmac lanes, sometimes on gravel tracks through forests and fields of wheat close to harvest. Quite by chance we find ourselves passing a country pub at Wotersen where some other cyclists are enjoying a beer in the afternoon sun. We can’t seem to find a good reason not to stop and quench our thirsts that way also.



Immediately on departing the pub we stumble upon a grand schloss.

Our plan is to get to Elbe-Lubeck Canal and follow it to the Baltic. Signs dubiously direct us down this track and that, but quite suddenly we break through some trees and there before us are the mirror still waters of the canal.



With a storm threatening we roll along the tow path and I find myself thinking of the “best of all possible worlds” ideas of old Leibniz, that Hanover philosopher. I ask Rick if a better one is imaginable. I suggest that for we sentient beings to be truly free to make choices, be they as ordinary as whether to pedal 100 or 120 kilometres today or as profound as whether or not to believe in a divine being of some sort, then the existence of a divine being must be equivocal. And that can only be in a world where geological forces can both produce magnificent mountains and monstrous earthquakes and where evolution can result in both the graceful swallows swooping over the canal and bubonic plague. Before we get to Berkenthin, where we hope to find lodging, we have also swapped ideas on Kant’s categorical imperative and Rawls’ original position argument for social justice. Perhaps it was the afternoon beer that brought on this intellectual idling. Anyway, Berkenthin has a zimmer frei on one side of the canal which we get to just as it starts to rain and a gasthof with a buffet on the other and more beer.

12 July 1939 Wednesday

Awakened by the leader of the girls playing a tune on a concertina rather like Falk's idea at the Chalet of singing us to sleep every night. Berry later remarked "Fancy Skip us up by playing the mouth organ". Rain and wind today. We endeavour to spend our German money in Flensburg, and then dine in a beech wood before crossing the frontier. The formalities get simpler and simpler – we are just passed through both Passkontrols, and after getting money take a very windy road to Tonder. Our first impressions of Denmark – fine tarmacked road and rose gardens round the sign posts, very pretty gardens at the farms too, and plenty of cows grazing, Will butter be cheap??. At Tonder the hostel is a matey little place, more like our own, where we come and go much as we please. A jolly sing-song after supper with English songs, My Bonny, Auld Acquaintance etc.

13 July 1939 Thursday

Speedy work next morning to Ribe where we see our first storks. The people put wheels on their chimneys for them to nest on, and its lucky if they come to your house. Ribe is a quaint old place with masses of cyclists more loaded than us. Denmark IS friendly, everybody – cars, lorries, and all – wave to everybody else. Dinner outside the town, then up springs our bête noir, the wind, but it's not against us and by 5 we are, or rather think we are, on the way to Henne Strand, the hostel that Gudrun at the Chalet had told us to stop at. Turn off down a lane, ask the way at a shop and get free orangeade and a free lift on a lorry back to Varde where we came from, then it's a weary rotten sandy road to Henne, but someone else knew it was my birthday – a warm welcome at the Hostel and a bedroom with two divan beds to ourselves. After a hasty supper we go down to the beach and play ball. A glorious stretch of sand, backed by dunes, and a lovely sunset. N.B. today being my 25th birthday Berry sprung several surprises on me first thing this morning in the shape of mysterious packages on my bed. One was her beloved air cushion which it must have cost her a lot to give up, next was two figs, which she had hoarded from the night before, and next a scrubbed carrot. She never told me where she got this last from. All I could get out of her was that a donkey asked her to scratch his ear and told her where a carrot was.

14 July Friday 1939

Up early, Berry still in bed, for a bathe – cold but good, I had the sea almost to myself. I washed my hair in the handbasin, and then we return back over the same sandy, skiddy road to Varde, accompanied by a lad who works at the Customs at Esbjerg. We decide to camp for the night, show the farmer the bit of paper we'd carefully carried from Switzerland, written by Gudrun, and he nods!! They insist on putting us on the front lawn, give us milk and two eggs, and as if that weren't enough, invite us in to coffee, and cakes with the family!! N.B. This is an apparently prosperous farm, where they almost certainly make butter, but the family uses margarine. Danish margarine is infinitely superior to the English variety, and we existed on it throughout our stay in Denmark because butter is more expensive here than in England.

15 July 1939 Saturday

Late away but we make Horsens by 3 and meet Gudrun, whom we hardly recognize as the rather plain Guide we met at the Chalet. She is all dressed up expecting her sister from Africa. All the family is home and they are having a grand reunion, so we fade out. Go down to the hostel, but change our minds, and after much wordy intercourse with the lady in charge leave a card in case Gudrun comes down that evening. I only hope she didn't. It's a weary push back to Vejle, and after a storm we decide to stop at Y.11. Its bung full, but they speak English, give us a nice dinner, beer soup with milk, and mutton and lettuce. We then go into town and try to buy a blouse in an "Udsalg" but it's closed until tomorrow. Then we buy the best fourpennyworth of bun we've had, and eat it dangling our legs over the harbour wall, watching the boats. I have a passion for harbours, and drag poor Berry to see the boats whenever possible, but sometimes she won't be dragged. Back to the house, sort out our beds and rest, interrupted by a pretty heavy thunderstorm in the night.

16 July 1939 Sunday

Rain till 11, but we make Fyn, which is the jumping off point for the bridge across to the other island. Crowds of people about and very friendly – it's like an English Sunday afternoon out. Buy milk and ice cream at kiosk, and have sugar given to us, and then on to Odense. There are literally hundreds of these kiosks by the sides of the roads, they sell bottles of milk and ice cream chiefly. The hostel at Odense is very nice as usual, and after a hasty supper off we go on a conducted tour of the

town, with several interpreters, one a marine engineer, the other a Norwegian we'd already met on the road. See H.C.Anderson's statue, school, birthplace and living house. The Cathedral where King Canute was killed, and much else, and return home tired, but very interested at what we've seen.

17 July 1939 Monday

Off to Nyborg where we meet all our friends from the hostel on the boat to Korsor. A big ferry this, takes two trains, and many cars and bikes. It takes an hour to cross and only costs us 2/- each plus 1/- for the bikes. We amused ourselves by discussing all the people parading around, until we heard some very Oxford English accents. Off the boat and take the road to Copenhagen, dinner on a high bank overlooking the sea. The flavour of which was rather spoilt by a strong smell of honey, but we couldn't find out from whence it came. A flat road until we camp for the night 48kilometres from Kobenhavn. Show our bit of paper and again they nod, but much to our disappointment two other people come and pitch in the same spot as we, and we don't like 'em much. Half a litre of milk for 10 ore, and then they invite us in to eat a huge bowl of loganberry puree, with milk and sugar. An amusing? incident earlier in the evening – a vain search for tent pegs, which we concluded had been taken by the children the night before, so we valiantly set to and improvise a set out of bits of fir tree. When the tent was satisfactorily up a bulge under the ground sheet proved to be the missing pegs.

8 July 2012 – Berkenthin to Avendorf, Fehmarn Island (66 kilometres)

After consuming a copious breakfast provided by the Clasens we had a fast run along the canal into Lubeck with the wind (as Herr Clasen had predicted) nicely at our tail. Lubeck is built on an island in the estuary and it is a very smart little city with tall green copper steeples and Dutch style building facades. I did not know it, but it was the eastern side of the divide. At least I think it was because most, though not all, of the pedestrian crossings had the East German green and red, man with the hat lights. The West German pedestrian lights use the more usual hatless stick figures?

It has a city gate building which must be on rather soggy foundations because its two big round towers with conical tops lean in towards each other nearly as much as the Pisa tower does. In very large golden letters the gate proclaims "Concordia Domi Foris Pax". As my companion Latin scholar's knowledge was not quite enough to

make sense of this a translation will have to wait. (Note added later – it means “Harmony within, Peace without”)



We decided that we had bitten off a bit more than we could chew today as we had booked a hotel on Fehmarn Island so we jumped on a train to get us about 25 kilometres out through the industrial and suburban parts of Lubeck. However, we unknowingly got into the part of the train that was not going on the branch line to our planned stop and we were stuck going on another 20 kilometres to the next station – without valid tickets! Otherwise today’s ride would have been a more respectable 85 kilometres.

When we got riding again the wind had turned nearly 180 degrees and increased a good few kilometres per hour so our first sight of the Baltic was of a grey and rather angry looking sea. The windmills were working hard, it was cold and there were precious few swimmers, but the kite flyers and kite surfers were having a good afternoon.



Windswept fields

We ploughed on into the wind through waving fields of golden barley and wheat that was still green to the Fehmarn Brücke.

As we approached it there was a crow enjoying the rushing air by sailing up high then folding its wings and diving, breaking the dive near the ground and sailing up to do it again and again.

The ride across the bridge was more than a little exciting as the railing was not quite high enough for us to be sure that, if picked up by a big gust, we would not go over it to the sea many metres below.

We were glad to arrive at the Gruner Jäger hotel. We tucked into a fisherman's catch rather than a hunter's and I'm not sure if the many products of the hunter's endeavours that were watching us while we ate, albeit with glass eyes, were happy about that or not.

Tonight is our last night in Germany. As I am about to leave this great and complex country I first think of some of the war protest words painted on the cycle path next to the Belsen military compound and of my mother's observations about the 1939 attitudes to Jews. The words were "To forget is to betray". Well my weeks in Germany have convinced me that the terrible time of the Nazis will never be forgotten by the people of Germany. Not only are there reminders everywhere, but also the people seem to keep reminding themselves. And even though, with some justification, they complain about the price they are paying to keep Europe in union they, who have been so important in forging the union, understand its importance and will continue to support it. Enough of them appreciate that bringing together these nations that have warred on and off for hundreds of years is human kind's greatest experiment and achievement. We think of evolution as mainly a process of competition, the survival of the fittest, but it has in many species produced

remarkable examples of cooperation. Perhaps Europe is an example par excellence of the evolution of cooperation.

Barack Obama has suggested that as the rich US states support the poor, so should the rich states of the EU. But the EU has only half a century of history as a commonwealth while the USA became the USA more than two centuries ago. It of course had its own war, its civil war, which I think perhaps played a part in cementing its union and led to more of the instruments of government being concentrated centrally. It thus has the capacity to regulate much more across all its states than does Europe yet. So that the people of one state cannot say that those of others are not required to play by the same rules. And this is a problem yet to be fixed in Europe. The fact that there isn't a Union wide tax system with evenhanded enforcement, indeed there are widely varying levels of taxation, means that people of one state can rightly say that those of another are not pulling their weight. The German people are now pulling more than their weight and I think they have the goodwill to continue to do so.

9 July 2012 – Avendorf, Fehmarn Island, Germany to Praesto, Denmark (110 kilometres)

This morning checking our bookings I discovered that the B and B I had booked for today was somehow on the wrong Danish island! There must have been a place with a name similar to the place where I had wanted accommodation and I failed to notice. Our accommodation problems did not end there. We booked a place near Praesto and set off. We stopped in at Burg auf Fehmarn to buy a tyre as my front one was starting to look a bit dodgy. It has gone all the way from Worcester. At the northern tip of Fehmarn island, we lined up on the ferry to Denmark with the other vehicles like we'd done for the Channel, but it was rather warmer than the 9 degrees it was then.

Yesterday's headwind was today a powerful tailwind and we flew across the flat fields of Lolland to Maribo where we refuelled with a Danish hot dog and chips. The wind carried us on and over the little bridge to Falster Island and towards Vordingborg. We fell in for a while with Denis from Vancouver, whose parents had come from Denmark. He still had a number of relatives here and was on a root discovery tour.

The wind was directly behind us over the long bridge to Sjaelland, the island of Kobenhavn, so we did not fear being blown off it as we had the bridge to Fehmarn. It

is rather decrepit and Rick convincingly told me that he'd seen a notice saying that the bridge was to be decommissioned next week. There was no such notice, but we both were thinking, as we pedalled across, that there seemed to be a chance that the structure might not hold up until we reached the other side!

We meandered through country lanes past cute little half-timber thatched cottages and huge half-timber barns, around lakes nestled in folds of the hills to Roneklint the place we'd booked lodging. Unfortunately for us, but more unfortunately for her, the mother of the owner had taken seriously ill in the morning the owner had not returned from taking her to hospital and there was no lodging to be had at this lodging. We pedalled back to Praesto and found the Hotel Frederiksminde. It is a grand old hotel that had once been the town hall. It is also quite pricey, but at 8 pm we weren't going to go shopping for a cheaper deal. The hotel information in our room informed us that the doonas were "allegory" friendly which was a pity because neither of us could think of one to test this.

18 July 1939 Tuesday

Rain nearly all the way to Kobenhavn, and in addition Berry's tyre developed a puncture. Wheel off and we mend a leaky patch, but still it goes down so after dinner it's blowing it up every kilo. 13kilometres (about 8 miles) before Kobenhavn the suburbs start – rather like Birmingham in this respect. Two attempts (1) an errand boy led us to the central youth hostel office (2) hostel proper, which was full but we mended the puncture there, then off to the annexe on the Frederiksborg canal. In the evening we dash about trying to find a P.O. before 6 to post Mother's birthday card. Then pay 60 ore each to go into the famous Tivoli, which is a large park, full of restaurants, roundabouts, lights, fountains, and various stages and halls for entertainment – every amusement imaginable for grown ups and kiddies. All Copenhagen and his wife goes to the Tivoli. We see an open air acrobatic and contortionist show, and then sit and listen to an excellent orchestra for an hour, wander round once more, and then to bed.

10 July 2012 – Praesto to Kobenhavn (93 kilometres)

The wind was still blowing hard from the south west today. There are lots of wind turbines so wind must be a frequent visitor to these islands. The thatched farm houses are usually one story and often tucked into the edge of sheltering woods.

We pitied our fellow cyclists heading south into the wind. We chatted to one, Daniel, from near Gotheburg in Sweden. He had two complaints about his neighbouring Danes: their excessive use of diphthongs made them impossible to understand and they don't allow free camping in their forests.

Coffee and cake at Koge kept us going. We wondered why there seemed to be so few people about in the towns especially as it is now school holidays. Maybe the wind is keeping them behind closed doors.

Later we stopped to eat a roll with ham and cheese we'd pilfered from breakfast, looking over Koge Bugt (bay or bight). A flock of dumpy little Dunlins seemed to be trying to disregard the carrying on of some squabbling Lapwings on the mudflats.

The village churches here are a bit fearsome looking. They have stepped gables and wide towers, not steeples, which, like the knaves, have red tiled roofs. They have a rather military appearance.

We came into Kobenhavn along a road by the bay through seaside suburbs which reminded me of Beach road in Melbourne. It's interesting that my mother noted in 1939 that the suburbs start quite a long way out. I suspect they stretch out a bit further now. As we neared the centrum the streets became busier and busier, especially with peletons of cycling commuters charging along. Rick suggested that Kobenhavn had sucked in the life from the towns that we had passed.

We had yet another little lodging problem tonight. Miscommunication meant that we only had a single room booked at Copenhagen B and B, but Carstens, the owner, offered us a flat in another part of town. He entertained us with beer and conversation, telling us how Denmark used to be a big country before the Swedes and the Germans stole chunks of it, while the flat was made ready by his assistant. He then locked our bikes in his garage and drove us over there.

Walking back after a red salmon curry (it works well) at a Thai restaurant we both experienced some very aggressive marketing by a couple of ladies of the night.

19 July 1939 Wednesday

A full day!! Christiansborg Slot (palace) passed en route to buy breakfast, then off we go – from 10-11 the Rund Turm is open free – it's a weird tower, which is ascended by a volute, no steps, and the legend runs that once Frederick the Great rode a carriage and pair right to the top. Used to be an observatory. Then we saw the cathedral, with a fine frieze outside over the entrance, then through the art museum

we saw copies of lots of the statues we missed in Italy. Failure by both fully to appreciate Denmark's modern art, and dinner in the museum gardens. Then via Rosenberg Slot to Danske Landsmanbank, where we are treated like royalty, and then one whole hour in the national museum, with its unique collection of prehistoric art"- it certainly is. Back to the hostel to repair Berry's blister, and out again in search of a check blouse – everybody on the road wears them, but where they buy them at a reasonable price I don't know. By the way, we bought flags of all the countries we'd already visited, and intended to visit in C. (including a Union Jack). All the cyclists and car owners fly no end of flags, even more than we noticed in Germany. Back to supper, then we go and walk past the royal palace, where the king is in residence, to the promenade called Langeline, which runs out to sea, by all the boats. See a lovely sunset over the docks, hurry back, but are tempted by a grand ice cream with jam inside en route. We're developing a sightseeing technique now we're almost at the end of our trip, get all the free shows we can, and also free maps and guides.

20 July 1939 Thursday

Rain, Rain, Rain, breakfast talking to an American teacher from Worcester Massachusetts who has been to England. He thought our Worcester's cathedral the loveliest he'd seen. Had a lecture from Custos re the people over in America not sending them a proper photograph of their church in return for a stone from St. Wulsta's Cathedral – what a coincidence. Then in comes another American who's been round the Baltic sleeping in barns, tough guy, and has some unpleasant information re the state of the roads in Sweden. Then an exaggerated English voice, just to let us know, asks for a match, and condemns Lithuania and the Danish language in a single sentence. Oh these English abroad! She's a woman about 50 who thinks we're lucky dogs until she discovers exactly how we are doing it and then is rather scornful. We pack up, say farewell to our two American friends. The tough Californian coughs a bit when he learns we've been on the road 14 weeks. The rain clears, and we have our dinner on the seawall outside C. I think it's quite the nicest town we've been in – prosperous, clean, friendly and lots of free shows (important this). It's a flat road by the sea to Helsingor where we meet 4 Scots lads in kilts, and I have a lovely bathe and BUY A CHECK BLOUSE!

11 July 2012 – Kobenhavn

The morning was devoted to getting my iPad fixed at the Apple shop (which meant I lost everything on it thus the journal entries from 3 to 9 July which I had not had a chance to upload) and getting some washing done.

Being in a flat with a kitchen gave us the chance to try for lunch the labskaus (check Wikipedia) that Sebastian had given us in Hannover. Washed down with some non-alcoholic Becks beer (which we thought could be mistaken for the real thing) I thought it was pretty good especially with the addition of a little balsamic vinegar and pepper.

We set out to see the city and went to most of the places Bill and Berry visited including the Rund Turm with its spiral volute, but it and most other things are no longer free. Kobenhavn is a city of green copper roofs and steeples. Quite the most extraordinary steeple graces the stock exchange building. It is a spiral of dragon's tails. There is yet another spiral on the steeple of Our Saviour's church which one can climb, but we did not.



A Very Decent Dane

And there are green copper statues all over the place. I'd been expecting to find one of Søren Kierkegaard and sure enough he sits outside the Royal Library.

The modern architecture is impressive in the way it harmonizes with the old especially in the use of a lot of greening copper and dark colours and in some cases shapes that mimic older buildings. Kobenhavn, by the way, is quite a young city as it was pretty much razed to the ground by the British in 1807 after the Danes refused to

ally with Britain and Sweden against Napoleon. Thus the boulevards are wide and few buildings are older than 300 years.

I found that my opinion of Kobenhavn was much like my mother's. It is a very decent and dignified city and indeed is widely seen as having a very high quality of life among the world's cities. One thing that really makes it is its cycling culture. Bikes are almost more important than cars. Cyclists have their own dedicated lanes and their own traffic lights. Because so many people cycle the volume of motor traffic is much lower than comparable cities.

21 July 1939 Friday

Away early to shop in town, then we go to visit Hamlet's grave in the grounds of Marienlyst Slot – a simply carved stone tomb beneath the trees. I think he must rest in peace there. Decide we don't like Rudolph Tegner's modern statue of Hamlet in the grounds, and then go on to see Kronborg. The chapel is full of beautifully carved painted wood work. Then we go round the various rooms, it's a colossal place, with walls 1 metre thick – a lovely Knight's hall 64 metres long. Then we sit round Shakespeare's statue (placed as a sop to the English visitors I imagine) and await our guide to the dungeons – another kilt, but this time much more immaculate – he even has a dirk stuck in his sock, and causes great excitement. We grope our way all through the gloomy dank dungeons, see Holger the Dane, who sleeps down there like Drake, to wake when Denmark is in danger, then out into the sunlight of the courtyard again, and farewell to Kronborg – and Denmark, for from there we take the ferry to Helsingborg. The customs officials in Sweden are most charming, and it's a treat to ride on the left again, today we are flying our union jacks, and we still get waves from soldiers, cyclists etc. Camp among the pines, with eggs, cheese, and pancakes with raisins in for supper, and the sun like a squashed orange sitting on the earth's rim sinks below the pines, and there's only a yellow glow left in the north west to show the way he went.

12 July 2012 – Kobenhavn to Melbystrand (117 kilometres)

As my mother said, it is a flat road to Helsingor and not only was the wind still at our tail, but we got a bit of extra speed by drafting a bunch of young tourers for a few kilometres. Rick wondered what quotes we should be uttering as we approached Hamlet's castle. We tried to recall the soliloquy, but only got to the fourth or fifth line. I said I was most keen on "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than

are dreamt of in our philosophy". We actually found ourselves in the lineup for the ferry before we knew it and only saw the castle from on board.

If Rick and I had done this as school boys we would have switched from the right to the left side of the road after leaving the ferry, like the 1939 riders. Sweden only changed in 1967 and now of course, for no good reason, most of the world drives on the right. You might know, dear reader, that there is a connection between shaking hands and driving or riding a horse on the left side of the road. Most humans are right handed so the right hand is the weapon hand. The theory is that riding on the left meant that one was able to respond to attack from an approaching traveller. If, on the other hand, (so to speak!) one wished to demonstrate no hostility one could show one's empty right hand more readily and offer it to shake hands in friendship. I mentioned that I had to explain to the young Pfadfinders back in Hanover why Scouts and Guides shake with the left hand, but I did not actually give the explanation in this journal. As Scouts and Guides belong to a world-wide fellowship they have no need to prove that they have no weapon in their right hand. It is unfortunate that all this is discriminatory toward left-handed people as is some of our language: the two meanings of "right" and the fact that "sinister" comes from the Latin for "left".

The west coast of Sweden is wide open fields of varying shades green of barley and wheat, and rye with large red barns. The fields are separated now and then by forests of birch, oak and conifers. And the rivers are brown – that is the water is not muddy, but is just like black tea or, better still, brown ale – even with the froth.

We timed things very well with the rain, which was about before we set off from Kobenhavn, while we were on the ferry over to Sweden and while we lunched in Helsingborg and then again after we were safe and sound in Melbystrand.

22 July 1939 Saturday

Late away, and only gone 100 yards when BANG went Berry's back tyre – the canvas had worn away in several places. Mended one puncture, but there must have been another for still it went down. We'd no money, so it was a mad dash for Halmstad before the banks closed. A very elaborate bank – great improvement on the English ones, scribbling pads, writing desks latest exchange information etc. No tyres to fit in Halmstad – Goteborg "vielleicht" they say, so we shop in the market and have dinner half way up a steep bank leading out of the town, then get to work and change the tyres round, helped by two very kind men, one of whose English consists of "I help you" takes us to a cycle repair shop, where we have canvas fitted. The road

then became appalling – 2-3 inches deep in grit and sand, smothered with dust by every car that passed – we believe all the American told us now. Anyhow, it improves to pavé , and after a more or less successful attempt to buy food (all shops here shut at 6, even on Saturday), we camp in a pine wood on sand, quite near the sea.

13 July 2012 – Melbystrand to Bjorkang (89 kilometres)

Mum was born 99 years ago today. This plus today's being Friday the thirteenth we decided luck would be with us and that the early rain would disappear. It did.

With the wind still behind us we had a quick run to Halmstad where we consumed a bit of delayed breakfast (that is a roll and cheese and salami pilfered from the breakfast buffet).

Our route sometimes passed near the Kattegatt, as the arm of the sea between this part of Sweden and Denmark is called, sometimes inland. The coast varies between low granite headlands and beaches. Cows graze right down to the water's edge so the butter they produce should need no salting.

The landscape inland is wide fields of barley or wheat or rye between forested low granite hills. In one of these particularly waterlogged fields we disturbed a flock of Wood Sandpipers. The dwellings are almost invariably nestled into the base of these hills. The rivers are fast flowing and one we cross on an old arched stone bridge is dammed and generating electricity.



Brown Ale Flowing

We found the hostel we'd booked for the night just where it was supposed to be and then pedalled down to dine at a restaurant that served a camping ground. After dinner we rolled down to the beach to see the sun low over the sea, but did not wait to see it disappear as it takes its time sliding sideways below the horizon at this latitude.

Today we celebrated both my mother's 99th birthday and 1000 kilometres since Rick joined me at Koln. We had bought some malt whisky on the ferry from Germany to Denmark so this seemed an occasion to have a wee dram.

By the way the ride made it on to Hannover TV see <http://youtu.be/ApC0KJm4Ssw>

23 July 1939 Sunday

Rain and wind all night long, and nearly all day. We pack a wet tent and very wet ourselves, stagger on pavé towards Goteborg – dinner in a shed where we dry out and then heaven be praised the rain stops and it's a lovely road now by the sea, masses of water everywhere, it must have rained pretty badly for about a week. Tea on a rocky headland overlooking a grey and stormy sea, then a good road until they try to bye-pass us, but we go straight on, and it gets wus, and wus, until finally we're pushing over concrete covered in a foot of straw – our own silly faults for trying to be funny. Late finding a camp site, but it's dry, up on a lovely hill and we get free milk. The squire visits us afterwards to practice his English – tells us it will be wet tomorrow.

24 July 1939 Monday

A short ride to Goteborg – a very large town, quite a big port built by Gustavas Adophus, the Lion of the North, see the Domkirk and try in vain to buy a skirt, but succeed in getting a tyre to fit Berry's bike for 5/- (manufactured goods incidentally seem pretty cheap in Sweden – they have their own minerals). Dinner just outside on the roadside, like tramps as usual. Lousy pavé for about 20 kilos, just great blocks of red stone laid anywhere, though the road follows a chain of lakes, fringed by silver birch woods, and we camp by one under a wood which grows wimberries and raspberries. A cold night for me – this field is almost waterlogged and very damp.

14 July 2012 – Bjorkang to Varberg to Goteberg to Kungälv (128 kilometres)

The wind has turned to the south and is blowing in rain clouds, but they stayed to our east all day. We have been so much luckier with the weather than Bill and Berry were.

The landscape is starting to get a little more varied; more forested hills breaking up the fields. And there are more inns and outcrops in the coastline. On one occasion, as our path took us close to the Kattegat, a flock of Eider ducks was idling near the shore and one male was still resplendent in his winter plumage.

Later a huge flock of Greylag geese passed overhead honking away. We speculated that the honking was coming from the ones at the front of the wedges and meant “I’ve had enough at the front of the peloton, who is taking over the work?”

Rather like these Greylag geese massing together there are flocks of huge old American cars rolling up and down the coast. We actually shared the hostel with the driver and passengers of one last night. There is some sort of gathering of American cars happening over these few days. There is a great concentration of them at Varberg so this might be their annual breeding ground. It is just a little incongruous to see these extravagant machines sharing the roads with environmentally sound SAABs and Volvos. I suppose many of the Swedes who emigrated to the USA and later returned could not leave their beloved winged metal road monsters behind. Most of these cars are post 1967. Maybe it was to please their returning sons and daughters that the Swedes changed to driving on the right. Actually I don’t really know if many of the million plus Swedes who went to America from the late 1800s onwards came back, but some certainly did.

At the bistro where we lunched we met a Swedish fellow cycle tourist who told us that we should not bother to go to Oslo. In his opinion it was a pity more bombs had not fallen on it in WW2! We are thinking of taking his advice and crossing the Oslo fjord at Moss. This is partly because the distances we have to do to get to Bergen on time are perhaps a little too great.

We had revitalising coffee and cake at a cafe on a bridge over the canal that runs through the centrum of Goteberg. The waitress, as nearly everyone we have met does, spoke perfect English. I’m getting less inclined to ask people if they speak English before talking to them because their unspoken reaction mostly seems to be something like “Of course I do, I’m Swedish!” I suppose if seven decades ago my mother found many who spoke English (albeit American English) then I should expect everyone to do so now.

Realising the lateness of the hour we made a very fast run to Ytterby (near Kungälv) to get to the Sol and Sand B and B before reception closed at 7 pm. We were actually about 15 minutes late, but that was OK. Contemplating why this B and B, which was really a hostel, was called the Sol and Sand occupied us for a bit. The nearest sand must be about 50 kilometres away, but apparently there was the option of taking in a bit of artificial sol in the artificial sol room. There were bizarre pictures of happy looking Swedes sitting in a room with pictures of palm trees etc on the walls soaking up this ersatz sol. Of course for about half the year there is precious little real sol so perhaps it is not a gross breach of Swedish consumer law to make something of the fact that you have a pretend sun in your lodging house.

15 July 2012 – Kungälv to Hamburgsund (near Fjällbacka) (97 kilometres)

Kungälv has a main street that could be used to shoot an American western. In fact much of the timber architecture especially the red barns with mansard roofs would not look out of place in the US mid-west. What I don't know is whether the Swedes took this architecture to the New World or they brought it back when returning to their home country like the way they brought back the cars.

Today we departed again from the original BillBerry route which went inland to Örebro and we have decided to depart further and cross the Oslo fjord at Moss.

The landscape has now changed considerably. There is ridge after ridge of pink granite often steep and treeless about five times the height of the houses, which now, almost invariably, are two or three storeys. The houses are often tucked in under these outcrops perhaps for shelter from the winds. They are all timber, only the churches are fashioned with the granite, and are painted mostly yellow or white, but occasionally blue or green. The Scandinavians must know a thing or two about paint as it has to cope with a temperature range of many degrees below zero and exposure, on the southern side, to what can be a surprisingly warm sun. Many have the date of their construction emblazoned on their front gable and mostly they are not much more than a century old. Maybe the laws of probability are such that timber houses just don't escape destruction by fire for very long.

At some time today we passed from pedaling beside the Kattegat to pedaling beside the Skagerrak. That is we passed north of the most northerly point of Denmark and the coast is now exposed to the North Sea.

25 July 1939 Tuesday

Late away as we had to dry the tent, then a lovely road to Alingsas – where there is a group of houses some distance off the road which have a little row of letter boxes alongside the road for the postman. And they also hang wreaths on new houses as in Denmark. The soldiers are on the march today, and they look very tired, we pass them twice, having stopped for lunch, and each time the stew's still boiling away – whatever time are they going to have dinner – their rifles look like the ones Gustavas Adolphus used, but I like the way the officers walk with the men. Dried our washing today – loud cheers! A lovely flat road to Varas, with a stop en route to pick wimberries, then about 6-30 just as we're looking for a camp site we get a lift on a lorry – takes us two days ride in three hours – 150kilos. He's very kind, treats us to pop, biscuits and chocolate, and sings wild Swedish songs on the way. It's a lovely sunset and we enjoy ourselves enormously, thundering along through the everlasting pine woods. Then we are plonked down at the cross roads near to Porla where we have to collect post forwarded we hope from Stockholm. We camp by the roadside and sleep soundly.

26 July 1939 Wednesday

Wash in a very brown river and through Laxa by a most unholy track to Porla. No signposts, but by asking we eventually arrive at a very small station, and are directed by the stationmaster, via a now improved road to the post office. Porla is an immense surprise – it's a spa. A circle of white wooden hotels and houses, no roads, only gravel paths, and they speak English at the post office. I have the shock of my life to see an envelope from Egypt. We read our letters on a bench outside, and watch the people walking about with beakers and tubes taking the water, then strike the main road to Porla. We're just despairing of finding a shop – they happen about every 40 kilos in Sweden, and they haven't a very large selection of eats, but seem to sell everything else, but one appears, and we buy our grub and eat in the first available shady spot – Berry aptly described it as a pastoral scene – cows all around us. It's a flattish road for the rest of the day and on the road to Orebro we spy masses of raspberries by the wayside. So joyfully drop the models and get to work. After filling mugs, and tins we're just starting to feed ourselves, when up comes an old man, highly amused to find we can't understand him, but indicates that they're his raspberries – good job he didn't know how many we had concealed on the bikes. We laughed and he laughed, but for different reasons, and we rode off, leaving him chuckling. Camped early in a wood by the roadside, full of wimberries, free milk

again and a good supper, bacon and scotch eggs, and as many wimberries and raspberries as we could contain – what hogs! Spent the rest of the evening mending and writing. Oh yes, we struck a grand bit of concrete road for about 5 kilos this p.m.

27 July 1939 Thursday

Up and away by 9 – concrete into Orebro, where again we endeavour to buy a skirt, but no luck, they tried to sell me shorts, but I don't think I'll risk it. Asked a very nice policeman the way out – he spoke about 6 words of English, but saluted charmingly – the police carry very swagger swords here – and we were directed back along the road by which we had come in to Christinehamn. It was lovely again today, glorious banks of cloud over horizons of pines. Dinner by a little rocky brown stream, then on by a dusty road to Karlskoga, with two stops en route to pick wimberries, past a succession of still black lakes, with yellow and white water lilies, bog myrtle and heather around. K. is a town of wide streets, and lovely gardens. It has a lovely red shingle wooden church, and by it, right in the middle of the traffic, we saw a brown squirrel come cautiously across the road, dart into the churchyard and out again to retrieve some food he'd dropped from the tree. Then he dashed up the tree like billyo and proceeded to eat with great gusto, secure in the knowledge that he was unmolestable. The factories here all close at 4:30 – what an enlightened country. We get on to a very up and down road now, and it's the wrong time of the day – after tea, no farms at all, and we're just despairing when Berry sights a house in a gap in the forest so we pitch the tent outside the farmer's front gate and again sup off free fruit – this time with 19 ore's worth of cream. While we're clearing up and writing, a faithful swain with a car hovers around, apparently waiting for his girl at the farm, but she won't come out tonight, and so after three attempts off he goes.

28 July 1939 Friday

Christenhamn is another well planned town with wide streets and lovely unfenced public gardens. An early stop for lunch, and to pick more wimberries, then on we go, with several glimpses of the very large lake and another stop to pick raspberries, to Karlstad. Just outside we are greeted by an English lad going to the hostel, but he vanishes before we have time to talk – shop at the co-op, and buy milk for which we pay too much, and then on to a silver birch glade. The boy at the farm spreads the news that we're English, and presently we are visited during supper by another lad to whom we give cocoa. He politely takes off his cap, bows and shakes hands before

and after – N.B. cf. the kids in England!!! A nearly full moon tonight over the hayfields, and railway line – never in any country have we been far away from this, the roads in Europe seem to follow the railways much more closely than in England. (Which seems to point to the truth of Chesterton’s statement that the reeling English drunkards made the rolling English road.)

29 July 1939 Saturday

Very late away and no excuse. An up and down road and rain most of the day. No towns at all today so we had to stock up at a tiny shop where there was someone who spoke English – then on until it and we were too wet, so we sheltered in a barn. Eventually the farmer’s wife came to see us. She spoke very bad American, had some brothers there. We are allowed to stay in the barn, then a talk with the farmers who’d been twice to America and we sleep in the hay-well.

30 July 1939 Sunday

A windy morning to send all the clouds away and fetch the sun out, a lovely ride past heaps of lakes, till I persuade Berry to stop for an early lunch by one huge one – several unsuccessful attempts to purchase food, but eventually at the last town before the Norwegian frontier we purchase two scone looking things, which are lovely with cheese for supper. We get to the frontier before we realise it – no soldiers, only one to stamp our passports, in his shirt sleeves, and then it’s a “small Korkig vag” to the Norwegian frontier, where we have to change to the right of the road. Our first impressions are good, they stock plenty of wild strawberries. The toll station is 7kilometres away, we change money and get passports stamped, and ride off past a lovely lake in search of a camp site. After one unsuccessful attempt at a farm two lads indicate they’ll help us. After dragging me up a hill to another farm we finally pitch the tent bang on the side of the road at the edge of the lake. Our helpers stand and stare, and return again after supper to gaze again, amazingly curious, but quite harmless. The lake looks glorious, and when we are quiet we hear the water lapping against the shore.

16 July 2012 – Hamburgsund to Svinesund (87 kilometres)

Our first stop today was at Fjallbacka. While waiting for Rick to buy a postcard a local woman asked me where we had come from and I told the whole story. She could not

believe what we were doing saying that she would not even contemplate cycling to Goteberg. She insisted that we climb the rock above the town to get a good view over “the most beautiful archipelago in the world”. It is a fantastic archipelago of low pink granite islands crowded quite close together. The town is now very much a tourist destination, but it still has the charm of the fishing village it once was.

A few kilometres on we quite unexpectedly found ourselves amongst the Vitlycke rock carvings at Tanumshede. These are carvings in the granite made in the bronze age between 1800 and 600 BC. They are not unlike the ancient images made by the Australian aborigines though the latter do not depict boats. It seems that there must have been some natural and plentiful source of viagra or something like it given the way all the chaps are depicted.

We bought lunch in a little town where a group of young Gotebergian cycle tourists were also buying lunch and of course had to tell them the BillBerry story. We ate our lunch, or dinner as Bill calls it, overlooking a beautiful farming landscape. We continue to admire this land of forested hills with cultivated fields seemingly stretched taught between them.

The day ended with the very high bridge over the Iddefjord which separates Sweden from Norway. So now I have come into the last country of the 12 (if you count Monaco and the Vatican) through which the BillBerry trail passes. The last 800 or so kilometres are ahead. Part of me is keen to get to the end now, but the other part is wondering if I will wish when I see the North Sea at Bergen that the road would go “ever on and on down from the door where it began”.

31 July 1939 Monday

A late start due to rain, and a hilly road until we have lunch over a quarry, with a wonderful view of Glomma Fjord – so we are told by two lads with a car who take our photos – nice sights us, Berry with her eye bunged up from a bite, and me with shoes a tramp wouldn't own. We came soon to the swiftest river I've ever seen, with logs racing past by the score. So fast that when you looked down over the bridge you had the impression of being on a boat looking over the deck at the wash below, and travelling with the water, a queer sensation. Here we strike tarmac and a glorious road past our first fjord to Oslo – get a bit windy about camp, but strike off up a lane and we're landed again in a pine wood, and again free raspberries for supper. I long to go and help a stranded motorcyclist down the hill, but eventually, he gets his bike cracking and away he goes, A few things I've forgotten to mention. The brown

squares we saw in Sweden we thought must be a kind of peat, the masses of wild flowers by the roadside, great banks of pink willow herb, lovely against the dark pines, and further down great bunches of golden tansy, and St. John's wort, with white mayweed, and yellow toadflax – all in great profusion.

Note re the roads. They are mostly layers of pure earth on rock and every morning a large locomotive comes and scrapes it all up, if we're following one we try to catch up and pass it p.d.q the surface is not pleasant to ride on after its been scratched up.

1 August 1939 Tuesday

Very late away – my watch stopped we have some glorious porridge these days) Oslo is in a lovely situation, seems to be built round the mouth of several fjords, and inlets, and behind it the mountains. It's a huge town, but the first policeman we ask send us to the K.F.U.K. (Scandinavian for YMCA which is closely allied with the Y.H.A.movement) where we leave our steeds, and go and execute our commissions. No post for us but we get a free plan of the town, and find out about the boats to Rotterdam, and then go and eat cheese and bun in the castle grounds. Then we decide to do some sightseeing so by ferry to the Bygdo, where the first stop is the national Folk museum – a vast, part open air place with a collection of wooden houses and farm buildings, mostly 16 and 17th century from all over Norway, and a wonderful assortment of all kinds of wood furniture, handicraft, toys, etc. The whole town is swarming with Americans. After an argument about a lad we see whom I think was the English lad we saw in Karlstad we go to see the Viking ships, three very fine examples from about 800 A.D holding about 34 men. Up comes the lad aforementioned with his stock phrase "Are you English?". We have a crack and he tells us awful tales of the road to Bergen, heard from two Irish lads, he'd met, and also that we must see the "Fram" Nansen's Polar exploration ship. It's a long walk, but well worth seeing, contains lots of the actual equipment and food taken. Then back to the hostel, and I stopped behind to see what was causing the excitement, and discovered it to be Berry's rust linen shorts.

2 August 1939 Wednesday

Departed about 11:30, after wandering round a bit, and a vain attempt to get near the old fortress – Akershus. There isn't a free square inch of ground about 20 kilos from Oslo, but eventually we dine and push on past Drammen, along a fjord jammed with factories – an exaggeration this, but it was rather industrial, and later camp on what

must have been common land near an almshouse, for we had no end of visitors, but they didn't disturb us.

17 July 2012 – Svinesund to Tonsberg (97 kilometres, 422 metres vertical)

Norway is a green and pleasant land, the sun shone strong and warm today and it was hard to imagine that it is gripped by a white winter for so many months of the year. Maybe Roald Amundsen, whose house we passed, was a bit better at polar exploration than Scott because he grew up with snow about for half of the year. The houses here are, not surprisingly, very much the same as the houses south of the border, but they do seem to be a bit more decorated with carved beams and such like.

Our first experience of Norwegian bike routes was not all that terrific. The track by the river to Frederikstad was a single lane path with wheel burying gravel suitable for mountain bikes, but tricky on our tourers. We therefore opted for the main road to Moss from where we took the ferry across the Oslo fjord as we had contemplated a couple of days ago. So we are again departing from the BillBerry route. It is our plan to follow the national bike route up the Telemark canal into the mountains rather than following the main Oslo to Bergen road as did the 1939 riders.

From Holten, where the ferry took us, we followed a national bike route south to Tonsberg. At one point we lost it and a local woman showed us the way. She had been to Australia and remarked on how friendly she found Australians. She told us that when cycling near Perth her bike had broken down and she and her friend and bikes were driven many kilometres back to Perth by complete strangers. I said that I thought the kindness of strangers could be found the world over and she agreed. I have experienced it on this ride and Bill and Berry certainly did seven decades ago. But I think it is something more common in remoter parts.

So we continued to follow the bike route south along the Oslo fjord shore sometimes along narrow muddy tracks through forests of birch and oak right beside the water sometimes through narrow lanes of fishing villages with small timber fisherman's cottages now apparently holiday cottages and sometimes through the farming hinterland. At one point the path took us past some Viking burial mounds.

And so to Tonsberg and a hotel amidst restaurants along the waterfront where we ate dinner watching the million dollar boats tie up.

3 August 1939 Thursday

Watch stopped again, so it's dinner time when we get to Kongsberg, where we lunch by a mighty river, and then go on by a perfectly lousy uphill road following a river, and Ian Sutherland overtakes us. Help him fill his water bottle and he introduces us to Ged Ost, and then on to Notodden – the road gets worse, it was described to him as a dancing floor covered with marbles, and this is a good description, for it is loose earth some inches deep in shale. He has to push on so we say goodbye and camp near a lake where we do lots of washing, including my SKIRT. A plague of ants, and a skittish young white goat were two interesting items of that camp site.



18 July 2012 – Tonsberg to Lunde (120 kilometres, about 100 metres net vertical and about 870 metres total vertical. Our route today runs more or less parallel to but about 50 kilometres south of the 1939 route.)

Today we went from the sea to the mountains and from illegally, and not quite intentionally, riding on a super smooth and low gradient motorway with vehicles constantly flashing by to riding on a rough forest track with lots of high gradients and, as it was gated, no vehicles at all. We went from peaceful farming land to busy industrial port towns and from breakfasting on hotel prepared fruit salad in the company of privileged tourists to snacking on tiny wild strawberries wondering if they were the property of the local bear and whether he or she might come and assert his or her property rights! At least I wondered that about the bear, but Rick didn't think we were in bear country. We are coming into the land of mountains and lakes and forests now. Our last forty kilometres was through largely wild country with just

occasional hamlets and farms. At one there was a beautiful little white timber church with a steeple set in the middle of its roof.



It was surrounded by a graveyard which, like all we've seen in Norway, was full of flowers and clearly tended regularly. An elderly couple arrived to do just that while we were there.

A final downhill run took us into Lunde and our hostel for the night. A restaurant by the canal was recommended by the the hostel warden (I'm not sure if that is the correct word today as it was in 1939) and he mentioned that it was karaoke night!

We ate right beside the canal lock in this evening light which makes you think it is still afternoon. After I enjoyed the traditional meat balls served with cranberry sauce we took our beers over to the karaoke zone and Peter, the hostel warden who was there with Monique, his partner warden and wife, and their children persuaded us that we should give a performance. After a third beer each and since no one else besides the organisers was risking it we decided to make dills of ourselves. Actually we think we gave quite creditable renditions of Moon River, The Green, Green Grass of Home, Jamaica Farewell and What a Wonderful World with a bit of harmony here and there. Anyway we got appreciable applause and a free glass of Genever each from the restaurateur. Genever becuase he was Dutch and I should mention that not only were our hostel warden family Dutch, but Peter told us that there was a community of about twelve Dutch families in this little town and that the quieter life here was the explanation for this migration.

On our way back to the hostel we discovered that the railway bridge had the most remarkable acoustics and we decided we had to do a couple of extra numbers for the cows nearby.

4 August 1939 Friday

Away by 9:30 to Notodden, where we buy ged ost, and then away by a glorious flat TARMAC road, till we have dinner in a shady pine glade (including strawberries and raspberries) and dry our washing. Passed a fine wooden stave church this morning, and lots of curious old barns like those we saw in the folk museum. The road follows a river right up till it becomes a stream, and then we leave it and go by a steep hill down to another river, ride until we come to a glade by a stream and pitch for the night.

5 August 1939 Saturday

A bath in the stream, sharpened our knives, and in to Seljord, which has three shops where we buy our weekend stores, and then along an uphill valley road, till finally we lunch at the top with a marvellous view of blue mountains, and fields in many shades of green – a minor catastrophe – 1 lb of sugar upset itself in my pannier.

19 July 2012 – Lunde to Dalen (98 kilometres, about 100 metres net vertical, but 933 metres total vertical)

We initially followed the river with its locks up to the Flavatn lake. Apparently this Telemark canal, which, for its upper half isn't so much a canal as a string of lakes connected by canals and locks, was a major transport route for getting from one side of Norway to the other. We had expected that the path would be like canal paths in other countries flat! But the route did not stick at water level. We went up and down and up and down by two lakes in the canal valley and it started to rain, but the scenery was too good to let that bother us. In pouring rain we approached a turn where we had to climb 270 metres over to a parallel valley. It was past lunch time and we had little hope of finding anywhere to fuel up before tackling the climb, but we lighted upon a museum of reconstructed collected old turf roofed farm buildings and there was a cafe attached. The menu was very limited, but it included rohmgrøt which you will read, but I had forgotten, Bill and Berry had on 7 August 1939. It is quite a remarkable dish. As far as we could understand it is milk boiled down with a

little flour so that it has a smooth yogurt like consistency. But the most remarkable think is the you eat it with great dollops of sour cream and butter and sugar and cinnamon and with local cured ham and salami and crisp flat bread. It is not the sort of thing you could eat every day (though perhaps it was here in times of yore), but it gave us the kilojoules we needed for the climb and the remaining kilometres. At the museum we learnt that it was birch bark that was used under the turf to seal out the water.

The road by the lake in the next valley stuck mercifully by the water. As we were doing OK time wise Rick stopped frequently for photos and I to try to identify birds mostly failing, but a Common Sandpiper whose nest must have been nearby stayed put long enough to give itself away so I scored one new species.



It was great riding all day looking down on to these stunning mountain lakes with their deep dark water. They are not aqua blue like those of the Alps and the rivers are clear not grey like many Alpine rivers.

We had what my mother would call a grand freewheel back to the valley of the Telemark canal route and the town of Dalen where it terminates. After fish and chips by the lake we walked back to our B and B through the famed Dalen Hotel.



It is one of the oldest timber buildings in Norway. I surmised that timber buildings must often end their days ablaze and have a limited average life span. The hotel was frequented by many royal persons in the past. We were not sure quite why. The location is magnificent, and inside it was quite regal, but we thought it a pretty ugly structure from outside.

PS – Our B and B proprietor told us that we were in bear country and would have been when we picked the strawberries. One had been shot recently because it was taking sheep.

6 August 1939 Sunday

The scenery for the past two days has been exquisite. One follows a wooded valley up, and then suddenly the mountains open out, and there below you is the most lovely dark lake with farms and pines and mountains reflected in it. There are no sharp colour contrasts here like Switzerland, but their dark brown houses, turfed on top and the green fields, misty blue mountains, and thousands of pine trees blend magnificently. The road this morning ran along half way up the mountainside, and we overtook all the villagers attired in their Sunday best, going to Church. The women's costumes are mostly full black skirts, with an embroidered (generally in red) bodice and white full sleeved blouses, with lots of heavy silver jewellery, and a long black scarf arrangement over their hair and down their backs.



The places marked on the sign posts usually consist of three houses and a shop that sells everything you can possibly think of from inner tubes, boots and shoes, food to face powder and tooth paste and buckets and tools. We had our dinner with a lovely

view of the river valley, and then the road went up and up. Two stops, one to shelter under some immense boulders from a storm, and one to pick wimberries, and eat a bit of chocolate. By 6 the hills are too much for our legs, so we look for a site. By now we are really well up in the mountains with only bog land and dwarf silver birches around, and a mountain pass in front. We are lucky though and pitch on the site of an old house and cook supper just before a thunderstorm commences (our first wood fire) boiled eggs, potato, tomato, and goat's milk cheese, cocoa and sugared wimberries. The sight is awe inspiring, we are right out on a spur of the mountain, below us a lake, and in front range upon range of mountains with snow on them, and above grey clouds with an intense light over the tips of the mountains.

20 July 2012 – Dalen to Vagslidtun (70 kilometres, 700 metres net vertical, 950 metres total vertical)



It's all too beautiful. There is so much beauty we have to stop all the time to capture it digitally. There are wild flowers all the colours of the rainbow; yellow daisies with darker yellow centres, white daisies with yellow centres, bright buttercups, little yellow bells, big purple bells, little white bells, huge heads of pink clover and pink, five petal flowers with pale centres and all set against multiple shades of green of the moss and ferns and shrubs.



There are more deep, dark lakes ringed with pale green rushes from which birches and fir trees climb and climb to the high mountain ridges as if competing to get closest to the sun. The birches seem to dominate higher up but there are silhouettes of fir trees on the sky line. The sun rays shimmer off the wind rustled birch leaves, but seem to get rather lost amongst the deep green of the fir needles.

We started the day buying lunch provisions in case we weren't able to sit down to rohmgtrot again! I wanted gherkins and Rick agreed on the basis that I carried them. To reduce the weight I put them in a plastic bag and, with Rick a bit doubtful as to the reception I would get, I proceeded to return the jar to the supermarket lady. The equanimity with which she took the jar suggested that a myriad of cycle tourists before me had dealt with their gherkins in just the same way.

Rick was equally unsure about the artistic merit of singing "one man went to Mo on a bicycle" as we climbed 200 metres to the settlement of that name.

As we climbed higher I heard a sound I'd not heard since the Alps – cow bells, only it turned out that they were on the necks of sheep that were actually nearly the size of a small cow.

Halfway through the day we joined the E134 and so began riding the actual road of the 1939 ride. It occurred to me that we have a GPS and bike computer so we know exactly where we are, including our altitude, and how far we have to go and how much we have to climb. I think Bill and Berry might have had rough maps, but not ones that would have the detail to allow them to work out what our machines tell us.

This BillBerry way is surely the way to travel across Norway. It is beautiful from the Swedish border, but the landscape just gets more and more stunning with the deep west coast fjords yet to come. West to east would mean seeing the fjords first and the slightly subtler beauty to the east would perhaps not be as well appreciated.

We climbed finally to the 800 metre contour and then to our hotel which not only had a superb view over a lake with snow dappled mountains beyond, but was turf roofed.

21 July 2012 – rest day

I'll try to find time later to describe our mountain walking on this day. Tomorrow we ride the last stretch of the 1939 BillBerry ride. We go over the top and descend where Berry came to grief.

7 August 1939 Monday

It rained and thundered most of the night – a break in the weather seems the usual procedure before approaching a pass. Some little trouble with a cow who didn't like us camping in her field, but she was quite docile, and then we strike and prepare for a long push. Rain, still more rain and thunder. A stop at Haukeli Saeter, about three houses, but no shops. A strong American accent hails us – "what are ya looking for?" and the kind soul directs us to a place where we buy bread and more goat's cheese and shelter from the storm. When we arrive at the top the rain has stopped but it's blowing a full gale so dinner behind a boulder, and we hasten down to the hostel, Midtlaegi Saeter, just a little way down the hill. It's the sort of place usually to be found in the Norwegian mountains. A four roomed wood house with bed and washing and eating accommodation in the same room. They had about 150 goats and 20 cows, and only live in the place in the summer – move their stock down below in the winter. We dry out and then read and sample sour cream with sugar and later another hosteller staying there who has been walking in the mountains gives us rohmgtrot (cream and flour cooked) and is it good? He says "No I can't speak English" in a reply to enquiry, but manages to converse most of the evening. We regret to say we turned him out of his room – a place holding a single bed and a chair in which we sleep top to tail quite comfortably.

8 August 1939 Tuesday

It was a howling gale all night and still blowing great guns, so we hasten down the hill – Berry has a little trouble with her brakes – of which more later, down to Roldal where we break our flask, nobody can imagine what a blow this was – a tried and trusted companion for the whole trip. And we don't feel holy enough to pay 30 ore to see the old wooden church inside. A six kilometre push up another pass, with an

interval for lunch, and then disaster. Berry passed me down the hill saying her brakes weren't acting. I yelled "Put your foot down", this she did, but it failed to stop her. It was ghastly to know what was going to happen; she crashed into a low wall at the next hairpin bend and thank God pitched in to the road and not over the edge. Some workmen rushed down to her and I discovered her badly cut about the face, arms and legs and only half conscious, and stopped the bleeding as well as I could with my towel, and – a touch of grim humour this – all the work men could do was tie her face up in my bags which happened to be wrapped up in the towel. Fortunately, a car coming up turned and rushed us both down to Odda, 30 kilos away, where they took her to hospital and patched her up. With the help of an American girl staying there I found a bed for the night, nothing on me but 8/- and the clothes I stood up in, and both bikes up on the mountain.

9 August 1939 Wednesday

Up early to catch the bus to Roldal. A kind person whom I asked the fare turned out to be a missionary in Hong Kong and knew of Bishop Duppuy. He seemed worried that after paying the fare I'd nothing left and insisted on my having 10 kroner and his card. Found the bikes by the roadside and had cheek enough to hail the first lorry that came along and they very kindly took me and the bikes back to the hospital, refusing payment. Saw Berry, she seemed very dazed, and then went off to prospect for a camp site. Found an ideal spot about 6 kilos out and pitched and went back for the rest of the kit. You could hide a hundred men here, all great boulders and several hidey holes that have been used by workmen or tramps (this is on the side of the Hadanger fjord, only room for a road along the one side, and then the mountains rise up steeply almost from the edge of the fjord).

22 July 2012 – Vagsliddun to Odda (88 kilometres, total vertical 1320, net vertical minus 720)

Today was a very big day. It was the day that we actually got to the end of the 1939 ride. We passed early in the day the site of Bill's and Berry's last camp at Haukeliseter. The weather, which had been so relatively benign all the way from Koln was quite unkind to day. Wind, low cloud and rain and soon our wet weather gear was well tested. Only the booties and the gloves were found wanting and they wanted quite a lot. I hope to travel this road again one day in sunny weather, but the drama of these mountains, the scale, their might was magnified by these conditions

and anyway we really needed to experience the kind of weather Bill and Berry experienced too much.

The road over these mountains was actually not very old when Bill and Berry pedalled it. It was only completed in 1913. It was re-constructed in 1968 with tunnels and embankments mostly along the same route, but the old road remains over where the tunnels go and while this means climbing a bit more it is good to get on these sections away from the traffic. By the way, the Norwegian drivers, especially the truck drivers, are at least as courteous to cyclists as anywhere else on this journey.



A dose of Sponser magic at the top

We climbed the highest pass at 1148 metres with drifts of snow up to three metres deep beside the road (just like the St Gotthard) and then descended to Roldal at 400 metres where we walked very wet and cold from the descent into a cafe for a hot Mexican chili beef and rice. The rain had eased when we started the climb to the next pass at 1067, this all on the very road that the two 1939ers travelled. Then down we started toward Odda one thousand metres below. I had thought that there was plenty of life left in my back brake blocks, but early in the descent that awful noise appeared that says they have worn down so that the metal clips that secure the rubber blocks are scraping the rims. I proceeded all the more gingerly down that old twisting path at every bend wondering just which one it was that ended the 1939 adventure with Berry's misadventure. The road drops down into what is really a huge canyon. There is rushing water and deep pools with blue ice and huge blocks of rock. Rick told me later that he had started humming "In the Hall the Mountain Kings" from Grieg's Peer Gynt Suite. It was a giant mountain king's hall and we felt very small. Of course it was doubly appropriate to be humming this music as we were now getting very close to the city of its composer.

We are now safely in Odda where Berry was hospitalised and have but two days and about 200 kilometres pretty much on the flat to go to Bergen so the work is really over.

10 August 1939 Thursday

Spent the morning messing around, and then armed with some wild flowers went to see the patient – she seems better, but head still bad, anyhow we decide if possible to catch the boat for Bergen tomorrow. Spent the evening dreaming! So! This puts finish to our grand adventure. No more breakfasts by lakes with the dew on the grass – no more dinners by shady brooks with views of lakes and mountains – no more wet days cursing a cape that's supposed to keep the rain out and doesn't – no more jolly crowds at hostels, or washing days by streams, and most of all no more of the freedom that I've revelled in so much, but oh how thankful I am that it all really happened – for the friends that we met and the way that we went.



Last camp at Hardangar Fjord

23 July 2012 – Odda to Dysvik on the Hardangar Fjord (110 kilometres, total vertical 1250 metres, net vertical minus 90 metres)

Just as my mother had a birthday on her ride, her 26th, so too did I, my 61st. And it was a good birthday. One of its best features was that it did not rain. The Norwegian weather service was predicting, even still at 9:30 am, that it would rain all day and even harder than it did yesterday, but we got but a few drops just as we approached

our destination. There were two ornithological occurrences which were a bit special for my birthday. Soon after we had left behind Odda's huge factory, which I think must be an ore smelter (in the town there was a statue of two chaps apparently unplugging a smelting cauldron) what I think can only have been a Golden Eagle cruised up the Sorefjorden. And later, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, two Robins paid me their respects. This would not have been very remarkable except that I have not seen a Robin at all on this trip until today. As it was already my birthday in Australia last night Rick bought a bottle of wine to have with dinner and later presented me with Elk stickers carefully wrapped in paper napkins and tied with a long piece of grass!

The lower slopes under the towering mountains on both sides of the Sorefjorden are quite densely farmed with fruit trees and berry bushes. We cruised a fairly level road up to the point where the Sorefjorden gives into the Hardangarfjorden. And then things changed. I spoke too soon about the work being really over. I have now learnt that roads around fjords do not necessarily stay close to sea level. The road along the Hardanger both before and after we crossed it by ferry at Jondal climbed up and away from the water often. Today we did as much vertical as we did yesterday which had included 350 and 650 metre climbs over passes.

This evening we were welcomed into the home of Gunhild and Olav Bråthun. We are staying in a cabin on their farm which belongs to their son and daughter in law. This was arranged by one of their two daughters who is a teacher and Scout leader not far from here. Gunhild fed us very, very well with deer meat that Olav had smoked over a period of three months. Because of the very limited English they had we aren't sure if he was the hunter. We also had boiled potatoes with onion sauce made with deer meat stock and kholrabi. Home preserved pears and apricots followed.

I've just washed my cycling clothes for the last time, but before bed I'm going for a little a walk by the fjord. It's after 11 and it's still light.

24 July 2012 – Dysvik to Bergen 87 kilometres 1330 vertical metres

While Gunhild gave us a very satisfying breakfast complete with home-made raspberry and strawberry jam and some nice strong coffee Olav took the grandchildren (barnebarn) net fishing and by the time we were ready to leave they brought back a couple of mackerel, a flounder and 3 or 4 others whose Norwegian names were not close enough to English for us to translate.



Olav explaining, I think, the intricacies of fishing the Hardangar Fjord

Before we departed Gunhild showed us her magnificent felt work which included a rendering of the Edvard Munch painting “The Scream”.



The ride today this last day to Bergen was really something. It was sunny and still and the lakes mirrored the mountains perfectly. The water of the fjords was blue and the greens of the hillsides over the water were given their full value especially when punctuated with the little flashes of colour, red, mustard, white and blue of the timber houses. Australia has its Great Ocean Road, but Norway has hundreds. Every 500 metres there is a picture post card.



There is a cycle path along an old railway for about fifteen kilometres into Bergen. This was our Champs Elysee. The last few weeks have coincided with the Tour de France and we often thought of those cycle tourists way down south as our tour headed ever northwards. We, of course, especially thought of our Cadel and as his fortune faded we preyed harder and harder that he would pull through. We hoped that our little victory ride into Bergen would, a couple of days later, follow his victory ride, but it was not to be. We won't be riding to Bergen again next year, indeed never again, but surely Cadel will race again to the Champs Elysee and perhaps claim the prize a second time. He has it in him.



Just seven to go after about six and a half thousand

Counting down the final few kilometres into Bergen was more than a little strange – 10, 9, 8, 7 – down to the last kilometre of about 6,500 on the last day of 72 days riding. I recalled words from the movie “The World’s Fastest Indian”. The movie was about a 60 something New Zealander who decided to turn his Indian motorcycle into a speed trial bike and attempt to break the record for its class at Bonneville salt flats in America. Of course he was scoffed at, and of course he ultimately succeeded. Talking about his ambition at some early point in the story he says “All my life I’ve

wanted to do just one big thing". I don't know if my mother thought of her ride as her one big thing or if there were some other big things. Anyway it was a big thing and this has been a big thing for me. One person's big thing may not be all that big for another. And this to me is one of the essential pieces of Robert Baden Powell's wisdom. That is, that we are all different in what we find easy and what we find hard to achieve. For some whom life has not been kind, just getting through the day is hard. Baden Powell knew this and he simply asked that we each do our best. Scouts and Guides do not have to pass fixed tests to be recognised, but are judged on whether they have done something as well as they could – essentially, whether they challenged themselves. I rather doubt whether Bill and Berry would have challenged themselves to do their ride back in 1939 had they not been given what the Scout/Guide Movement gave them. I think I might not have had the gumption (one of my mother's favourite words) to set out on this journey had I not benefited from Baden Powell's philosophy. I hasten to add that this journey was surely rather a lesser challenge than it would have been for two young women in 1939.

So I give thanks to the Scout/Guide Movement, I give thanks to Bill and Berry because I would not have done this without their example.

I give thanks to all my journey companions, Philip and Brian from Worcester to Rome and over the St Gotthard, my son Nicholas from Luzern over the Arlberg and then Villingen, my wife Jill, and the other riders of the Neckar and Rhine valleys, Philip again and Jenny, Anne and Declan, George and Suzanne, Nigel and Julie, Karin and Ian, Chris and Jan and Lois and Allan and lastly and certainly not leastly Rick for the final 2,000 km leg from Koln to Bergen. I thank them all for putting up with my foibles especially sudden stops to try to identify birds.

I give thanks to the many people that assisted in various ways including putting us right when we were navigationally challenged. In fact, we were having trouble finding our way the last couple of kilometres into Bergen until a couple who were pedalling in for a Bruce Springsteen concert said "Follow us". They took our photo on arrival.

I give thanks to the people along the way who gave us shelter and food and this means that, as promised, my riding companions and I are donating what we would have paid for shelter and food to the BillBerry Blue Stocking Fund. I also give thanks to those who have made donations to the fund.

But most of all I give thanks again to my darling Jill for her support in this little enterprise who, except for a few weeks, had to continue working to pay the bills and on top of that had to do all the domestic things herself though with a little help from

our son JJ. And because I don't want to be away from Jill again for so long I'm not planning to do this kind of big thing again.



Bergen Arrival



A good enough reason for a beer

Epilogue 1939

We caught the boat from Odda as arranged, and had a grand journey home. Everyone was very sweet to Berry. They were all most kind at the hospital, and on the boat I left her to her own devices and the steward found her a 1st class cabin to sleep in (for nix). Met rather a nice Norwegian who seemed to have intelligent views on the world in general, and turned in at about 11:30 pm. About 1 am went down to sleep on the floor of Berry's cabin – tough! We arrived in Bergen at 7:30 and had a good breakfast at a café. Then got over to the Vega on which we were to sail for England – as Ainar said – a fine boat, but absolutely crowded with tourists, by this time we don't regard ourselves as such, and they annoy us rather. When I went for the post, back at Bergen, I'd have given worlds not to have had to come back. Well, we met a charming couple, a Canadian Engineer and an American school teacher, all decked up in Norwegian bonnet, and slacks, they'd been right up to the Polar circle, cycling in Norway, and had a grand time swapping experiences. He had about three weeks' growth of beard on his chin, and more cheek than anyone I've ever seen – demanded two lunches and got 'em, and she asked for two ices and got 'em. The food on the boat was excellent. And the purser took a fancy to Berry and gave us the first officer's cabin on the boat deck, where we talked with our new friends till quite late – suggested throwing a party for all the people on the boat who'd slept in barns and haystacks, but I expect we'd have been the only four. The rest were much too respectable. Anyhow the food on the boat was grand, and I ate so much I disgraced myself by being sick in the officers' cabin. Newcastle came all too soon and so farewell to Mary Margaret, and her lad, with promises to write. The train for Worcester went at 7 something, so we had a wait. England didn't look at all good to these wanderers, and I made a resolve to get back and blow the rest of my money – 5 pounds – in Belgium and Holland as soon as poss. (The postcard we'd sent announcing our homecoming came with us on the boat from Odda to Bergen, with us on the boat from Bergen to Newcastle and with us on the train to Shrub Hill Station, and we got there before it.

The story of how I went off for a week on my own and tried to get to Belgium, and decided that at Harwich things looked so bad I'd have to come back, and how for the first time in my life I did what I'd always wanted to do – sleep under a hedge, is neither here nor there, so that's that as the actress said to the Bishop.



Epilogue 2012

The Bergen hostel is up in the highest part of the city so there was yet one more climb (of about 200 metres) and then of course a “grand freewheel” down the next morning to catch the ferry to Hirtshals, Denmark via Stavanger. The smorgasbord dinner and breakfast on the ferry were huge and we were glad that, as we had a day to kill, we had decided to do a final day’s riding from Hirtshals to Aalborg. It was very very pleasant and leisurely winding through the low rolling hills of Jutland (the North Jutlandic Island to be precise) except that I discovered that my rear tyre was splitting and I was expecting that any moment the tube would pop through and burst. It had only done 3,500 kilometres. Nine kilometres short of Aalborg bang it went.

While riding very gingerly with a replacement tube pumped up to only about 35 psi those last few kilometres I found myself counting the joys of travelling by bicycle. The first I thought of was, not surprisingly, the fact that you can do, yourself, pretty much any maintenance or repair work that the machine that is getting you from A to B (Adelboden to Bergen!) requires. But there are many. A bicycle is not too fast as a car is, not too slow as walking is. It gives more freedom than the former and in a sense the latter too as you can do an extra 20 kilometres at the end of the day if you need to.

You are in the elements. The wind is your friend the wind is your opponent. You get cold when it’s cold, wet when it’s wet and hot when it’s hot. You get hot climbing hills and cool off descending them.

You can look around and up and see the birds and hear them singing. You can see the flowers, smell the smells, the farm smells, the scent of the pine trees, the smell of freshly cut hay or timber, the smell of the sea. You can hear the rushing water of the

streams, rivers and water falls and feel the spray. You collect gnats on your face that swallows have missed.

At the beginning of the day your legs protest from the effort of the day before. At the end of the day you feel you have done something and the hot shower and cold beer are well justified and a good meal and ultimately a soft bed are never better than after one hundred kilometres in the saddle.

Rick and I said fond farewells in Aalborg. He headed off to England by train and ferry for a week before returning to Australia and I jumped on the first of five trains back to Frankfurt to fly home.

On the road
by the rushing stream
on snowy heights
across the wide golden fields

'Tween hedgerows high
on winding country lanes
down cobbled streets
of villages old - we lose ourselves

Where we are going
we really can't say
we are just travelling
as surely we must
our minds are divided
we're here and we're there
both on the long road
and thinking of home

By narrow trails
in forests deep and green
down mountainsides
through vales of ancient vines

In grand old towns
of sandstone dark and red

by still canals
and rivers wide and slow

Where we are going
we really can't say
we are just travelling
as surely we must
our minds are divided
we're here and we're there
both on the long road
and thinking of home

Under skies
high and clear and blue
or blown back or on
by strong, cold, wet winds

High on hills
above seas azure bright
by rocky shores
in grey and fading light - we lose ourselves

To be sung to Mark Knopfler's Local Hero tune

Appendix 1

Freda Maynard Gwynne Brown (nee Cole) affectionately known as “Bill” was born on 13th July 1914 in Walsall England, the only surviving daughter of Tom and Annie Cole. She had one brother John, 4 years younger. She grew up in Worcester and attended school there. She reached adulthood during the Depression. Her father died when she was 17 years old and the ensuing financial difficulties meant she was unable to continue her studies, despite having achieved well at school. Her thirst for learning was to remain with her all her life and she pursued part-time studies in languages, art and psychology with the W.E.A. (Workers Education Association) while working as a secretary.

In her early twenties she joined the Rangers and thus began a life-long association with the Guide and Scout movement. She found in this an opportunity to engage in the outdoor pursuits she loved and to make friends and overseas contacts. She saw the Guide and Scout movement as a force for the promotion of social equality and international understanding, taking to heart the promise to “be a friend to all, regardless of race, colour or creed”

Having missed out on the opportunity to go to Teachers’ College, she was able to satisfy, through being a Guider, her desire to instruct young people. She gave many hours of her time to this task, throughout the rest of her life.

She had a great love of travel and it was with one of her guiding friends that she embarked, at the age of 25, on a cycling tour of Europe, 6 months before the outbreak of World War 2. Having a passion for writing, she kept a meticulous diary of this trip, and it reveals much about her love of freedom, adventure and companionship as well as her impressions of pre-war Europe.

She also rode a motor bike, and was one of only two female members of a motorcycle club in her home town of Worcester. At the outbreak of World War 2 she joined the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS; popularly and officially known as the Wrens). Apparently, according to her when asked, it was “because they had motor bikes” – she wanted to be a despatch rider. She rose to the rank of Second Officer – equivalent to Lieutenant in the Royal Navy. She never revealed what her role was, simply saying that she worked for “some Admiral”.

After the war she worked for the British Foreign Office – spending a year in Patras in Greece before being sent to Singapore where she met and married an Australian Army Officer, Ian Brown. She never said so, but it seems likely that she was actually an employee of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) in Greece and Singapore. If so, it also seems likely that it was the Admiral in charge of naval intelligence for whom she worked in the Wrens. Ian was Australian representative of the Joint Intelligence Bureau in Singapore.

They settled in Australia, living first in Melbourne where their two children Robin and Anna were born in 1951 and 1954 respectively. During their married life Ian and Freda had two overseas postings. Ian was the representative of the Joint Intelligence Bureau in Washington (1955 – 1959) and in London (1967 – 1971). Canberra was the family home from 1962 to 1978. As well as raising her family Freda was actively involved in the Girl Guides, worked as a typist for the Army and later as a secretary to the Arts Council, studied Art (she took up painting in her sixties and became quite an accomplished water colourist). She also had a great love of animals, especially dogs.

She and Ian shared a love of travel. Their overseas postings allowed them to indulge this, and many holidays were spent camping and caravanning and (later using the hotel alternative) all over the world. After Ian retired in 1975 they were able to continue to travel. Freda never lost her love for England and they spent a few of their retirement years living in a 300 year old thatched cottage in Somerset. Many of their friends and their children's friends visited them there.

From about 1983 onwards Freda and Ian divided their time between Wollongong and Canberra. Among her many other pursuits Freda took up teaching English as a Second Language on a voluntary basis, visiting a young Indonesian woman in her home. As always a warm friendship ensued.

In 1987 her first grandchild, Nicholas, was born to Robin and his wife Jill, followed in 1990 by Jonathan. In 1992 her granddaughter Clara was born to Anna and her then husband Bill. The grandchildren were a source of enormous joy to Freda and Ian. Up until this time Freda had enjoyed good health, despite suffering a minor heart attack in her mid fifties. She fought and won a battle with cancer and had treatment for the heart condition which eventually got the better of her.

Despite health problems she never lost her get up and go. She continued with her painting, teaching, travelling and concert going and keeping in touch with friends – she was an avid letter writer – what she wouldn't have done if Facebook had been around in her life time!

In 1998 shortly after she and Ian moved back to Canberra, Freda was struck down with an aortic aneurism, and this took her life. It was the same affliction that had killed her brother John at the age of 49. Freda was just a month short of her 84th birthday when she died.

Appendix 2

MI5 feared that Nazis used cycle tourists as 'spyclists'

Cycle tourists have been in the national media this week – after newly declassified British intelligence files revealed fears in 1937 that Hitler Youth cyclists touring Britain might have been 'spyclists'. The MI5 file includes information on the suspected spies' visit to Spalding Rotary club, where they enjoyed a 'sausage and mashed potato supper'. The concerns appear to be the result of an article appearing in the 'Daily Herald' on May 24, 1937, headlined 'Nazis must be spyclists'

The mystery of Hitler's 'spyclists'



By Sanchia Berg - Today programme

Summer 1937. What could be more fitting in the cool afternoon of an English country lane than a group of cycling tourists steadily pedalling their way from one historic site to another, stopping to camp overnight in fields along the way.

The only problem was, that summer, some of those groups of teenage boys were Hitler Youth.

In an era without satellite photography, when detailed ordnance survey maps could be hard to come by and when tension in Europe was rising, MI5 were worried that this innocent cyclo-tourism was a cover for spying.

MI5 had been told that Hitler Youth groups visiting abroad were asked to complete a detailed questionnaire, including questions on terrain, population, and political views of the population.



Hitler regarded his youth movement as the kernel of an Aryan 'master race'

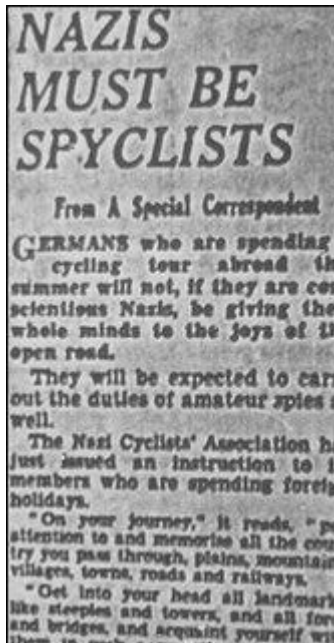
They were asked to take photographs, especially of industry, and to get lists of names of all those taking part in anti-German movements.

In May 1937, the British "Daily Herald" paper had printed an article about "spyclists" - based on translation of the Nazi Cycling Association's advice to members travelling abroad.

It too asked travellers to try to note carefully the features of the countryside they visited:

"Get into your head all landmarks like steeples and towers and all fords and bridges and acquaint yourself with them in such a way that you will be able to recognise them by night"

And one of the senior figures in the Hitler Youth had moved to London at the start of the year, ostensibly to study. MI5 suspected that Joachim Benemann's real object however was to develop the Hitler Youth in the UK.



Local papers speculated
on the real reason for
the visits

On an earlier visit, undertaken in 1934 and 5, he had set up joint Anglo-German youth camps, one at Bryanston School, and he had tried to develop links between the Hitler Youth and the Boy Scouts, without much success.

So the head of MI5, Colonel Sir Vernon Kell, decided to try to track visiting Hitler Youth cycling groups. Chief Constables were asked to monitor them, to try to find out what their planned routes were, without questioning the leaders.

From the file, it appears they identified seven substantial groups, each of about twenty young men. These were generally the older members of the Hitler Youth: in their late teens or early twenties.

Their itineraries were usually built round visits to the great English historic sites - Oxford, Cambridge, London. Though one party was touring Scotland and another finished in Wales.

MI5 did not shadow the cyclists closely, so it is not recorded exactly where they stayed and who they met. There was some reporting in local papers though: the Boston and Spalding Free Press reported that the Spalding Rotary Club laid on a special dinner for one group, who thoroughly enjoyed their sausages and mash, and charmed the local people with their good manners.

'Hitler salute'

The Hitler Youth who travelled to Britain had been specially selected - a number had even had been to training camps before the visit.

Some of them met or shared camps with British Boy Scout groups. The most striking was the Tamworth Scout troop - for whom this was a return visit. They had already been guests of the Hitler Youth in Hamburg earlier in the summer, thanks to their very pro-German Scoutmaster.



"It was like a Roman legion"

Les Fardon, former Boy Scout

They had stayed at a Hitler Youth camp and even taken part in a torchlight rally. One of the boys, Les Fardon, told Radio 4's Document Programme ten years ago: "It was like a Roman legion," he said. "You had these long banners and you were marching to tune... it was very stirring and frightening"

Another of his fellow Scouts remembered it as being a very exciting trip, and he recalled how even the British boys fell into doing the "Heil Hitler" salute. "They liked you to do it," he added. Both boys made friends with some of the Germans.

When the Hitler Youth came to visit them, it proved controversial, and prompted intense debate in the pages of the local paper, the Birmingham Post. The head of MI5 asked to see the letters. The most pro-German was R. Charles Lines who wrote about the farewell supper for the Hitler Youth:

"Many remarks passed to me by Tamworth residents showed very plainly what a wonderful impression these boys have made during their stay. There is no doubt that Tamworth has thoroughly enjoyed entertaining them and I know how splendidly local people have risen to the occasion"

Which prompted a tart response from another correspondent, "WFA", who wrote: "Is it not easily understandable that when one has first-hand information of the

persecution and cruelty meted out by youthful Nazis at home, one is suspicious of their perfect behaviour abroad. One is bound to ask oneself "is it a confidence trick?"

The charm offensive was being carried out at a far higher level too. In November 1937 Lord Baden Powell met the Chief of Staff of the Hitler Youth at the German Embassy. The elderly Chief Scout had long been an admirer of the Hitler Youth, and was keen to develop closer links.

Baden Powell was asked if he would visit Hitler personally, and did not demur, telling the Germans that he was "fully in favour of anything which would bring about a better understanding between our nations"

The British government stepped in to stop that though. A note on the file shows that Lord Cranbourne, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, called Lord Baden Powell's chosen successor, Lord Somers, around a fortnight later. He "strongly deprecated" close relations, runs the note.