

WILDLIFE ETC. ON THE EDGE OF FRANCE

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After the long endurance test of a half-planetary flight, Geneva was reached and the way was fought clear to France. The peace of Domancy, tiny destination high in the French alps was finally achieved and appreciated. Out the bedroom window looms Mt Blanc highest in Europe, and other shorter but nearer and more looming peaks - Aiguilles (needles). As Alpine as anyone could want, every house a chalet, lots of skiing, and for us, family and new friends. Two lengthy sorties were planned from this point; south west to Le Puy en Velay, and north west to Burgundy; bisected by the nuptials which formed the basis of the trip.



The cry of the Cuckoo rings through the French countryside. The sound is unmistakable, though the bird itself is rarely seen. The famous repetitive cry, growing and fading among the trees, mixes in many areas with the pleasant tinkling and donging of cowbells. Sizeable crowds of cows produce, with their various bell tones, a wonderful lilting chorus of sounds, like running water.



At Le Puy en Velay there are three major pilgrim-turned-tourist attractions. A huge statue of the Madonna and child waves down from the overlooking hill to a large cathedral reached by a steep cobblestone street meant to be climbed on knees.



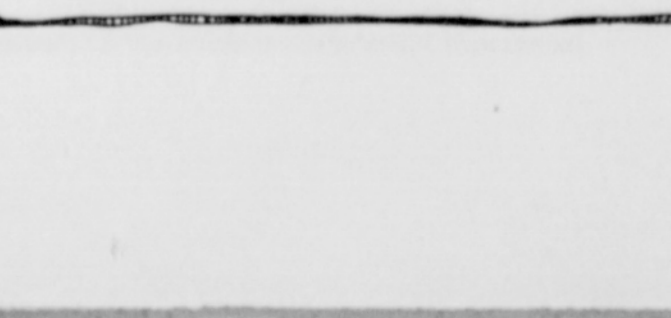
But the neatest part is the tiny Chapelle de St Michel, perched on the top of a sharp needle of rock and reached only by 268 Steps.



This split-tailed beauty was seen often in various settings and states of age. She is a Siren, but her significance is not known.



Not many Storks make Mid-Eastern France their home, but this one was seen flapping rapidly (no baby to weigh it down) across a high alpine valley.

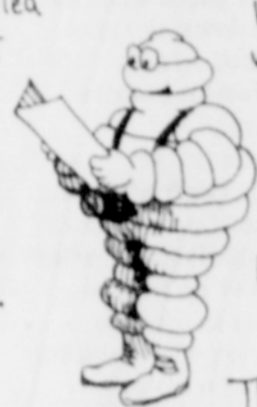


A massive centuries-old Wisteria tree entwined itself around Le Moulin Richard de Bas, where wet linen is pounded into pulp by huge water powered mallets, then sifted and dried into paper.

Much interest was taken in the two prevailing types of Architecture used in Churches and Abbeys - Romanesque & Gothic.

The former, older Romanesque is much simpler and more primitive, while Gothic is all soaring arches and buttresses and spidery carvings. Often the two are combined in structures built over long periods. Cloisters, the enclosed private squares built in Abbeys for the Monks to meditate and walk in, were of particular interest. The architectural differences in the houses of different regions is also fascinating. And the people were people.

So, packed up in our rented Brand New Citroën (the first new car our family has ever driven) and guided by the trusty Michelin Man, we set off into Greater France.



On the higher wooded slopes grow a variety of Orchids, often in scattered clumps containing 2 or 4 types. This is the blossom of what is believed to be an Early Spider Orchid.



This pensive carving of Joseph by an early mediaeval master stone carver in Autun, sits on the end side of a pillar capital picturing the Adoration of the Magi, everyone oohing and ahing over the baby Jesus while Joseph sits all by himself sulking in a corner.



Wild Sanguier (boar) run free over much of wooded France. Though one was not actually seen, stories were heard about the havoc these fierce, massive creatures can wreak overnight on lawns and so on in their endless rooting and overturning of the soil.

Mutilated Plane trees loom everywhere in France, like huge gnarled claws punching out of the earth.

A nice wine can be made from the Cowslip, a relative of the primrose, and often whole fields of the nodding yellow heads were seen.

Beautiful but potentially deadly Laburnum with its yellow dangling blossoms hung innocently along the roadsides.



Out of the corner of the eye, Lizards darted on every stone wall under the sun.



The Forget-me-not was probably the most abundant and numerous flower in France in May, clouding the roadsides and slopes with great splashes of pale blue.

Many chateaux were seen and envied, including this 16th century one in tiny, mediaeval but 'touristized' Conflans.



The three horrendous Daemons at right are proof of the weird, otherworldly beliefs, the provoked dark-aged mind held in esteem.

