

Local travelers recount European visit

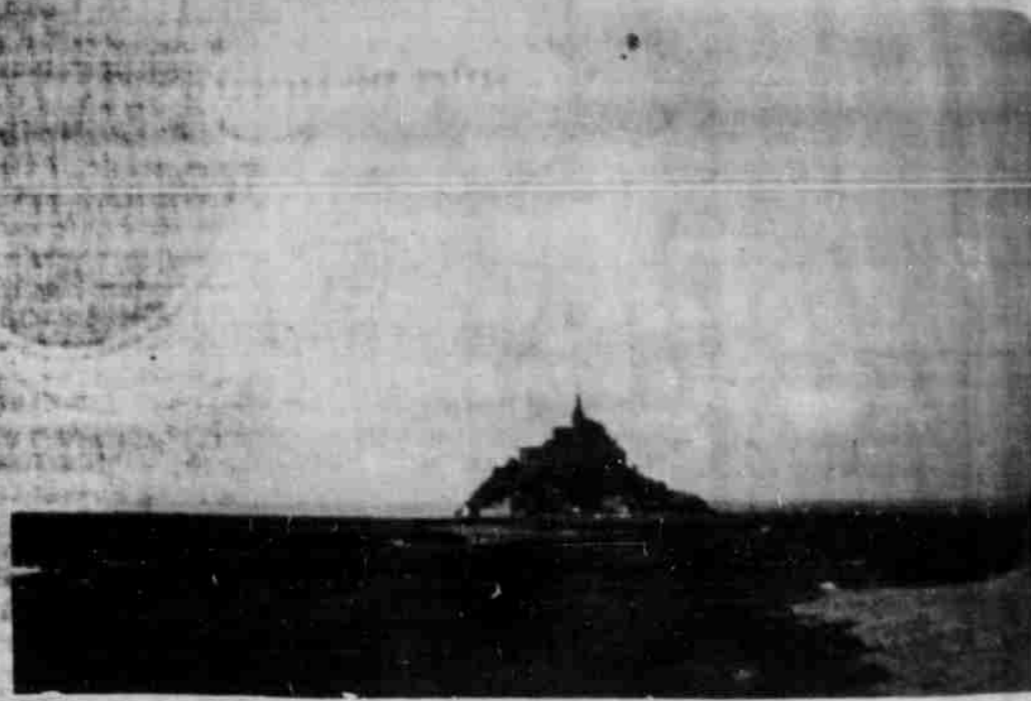
(Editor's note: The following article is the sixth in a series to appear in the Gazette-Times concerning a recent trip to Europe made by several Heppner High School Spanish students, their teacher, one student's mother and a school counselor.)

We're off again, heading north toward Brittany and Normandy. After this many days of hotel living we've got our baggage down to a system—we load it on the elevator, send it down and meet it at ground level. So far we haven't lost a suitcase!

It's a long drive from Tours to Mont-St. Michel and we were all ready to stretch our legs for lunch. You had to be adventuresome for this meal: pork pate, shrimp with legs and eyes intact, escargot, peas, beans, roast beef, potatoes and ice cream. We may walk 10 miles most days, but the weight certainly doesn't come off with meals like this!

Our first glimpse of Mont-St. Michel was unbelievable. This freak of nature (of volcanic origin) rises abruptly between the salt marshes and an immense sandy bay of 100 square miles—one of the natural wonders of the world. It's almost perfectly circular at its base, rising in four levels on one side but sheer on the outer curve. In the year 709, the first place of worship was built on the top, a tiny chapel; then in the 12th century the church and monastic buildings of the Benedictine order (Monks) were begun. These we reached by walking along the Grande Rue, 300 steps plus miles of cobblestone sloped walkway bordered by many little shops and cafes. When we reached the summit, the view was magnificent. Our guide dearly loved her job and made it all come to life for us. After the French Revolution, the monks were dispersed, the buildings looted, and Napoleon turned the mount into a prison; it remained so until a century ago. We all want to return to watch the moon rise or the sun set over the huge bay and to view the tide come sweeping in at 65 yards a minute, rising 49 feet when the moon is full.

On to Bayeux, population 14,000. In spite of being close



Mont-St. Michel from a distance

to the 1944 invasion, it largely escaped damage. First a Viking settlement to which the Dukes of Normandy sent their sons for education, it has existed for 2,000 years! We were able to view the famous Bayeux Tapestry with 58 embroidered scenes of the Norman Conquest of 1066. Multi-language commentaries were transmitted to explain the history of this 230 foot tapestry.

Twisting streets with quaint French cottages and beautiful flowers brought us to the Pacary Bayeux Hotel where Eisenhower, Carter and Nancy Reagan have stayed. It was here that we dined and visited with some 50 to 70 men representing 34 countries: Colombia, Peru, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Pakistan, Switzerland, Sweden, Holland just to name a few. These men were attending a war college in Paris and had come to Bayeux to tour Normandy Beach. It was at this time that we realized how much we represented our country because when we answered their questions we had to consider that they might take this as the opinion of all Americans. Most visiting was lighthearted, some of the heavier questions were: "If France was to go to war again would the USA fight on their soil?" What did we think about Viet Nam? Why do

American women work? They are much too aggressive and liberated. How do prices in New York compare with Paris (this they ask someone from Heppner!) For most of them, their dream is to visit the United States of America. This was a most interesting and educational evening, which made us realize how important it is to visit other countries in order to build better understanding among men, who whether they know it or not are really very much alike! It was frightening, however, to learn that peace was not necessarily foremost in everyone's mind, to some of their problems, they felt war was the only answer.

Our trip to Normandy Beach (Arromanches-les-Bains) the next day put peace foremost in our minds! It was a very touching experience, especially to those of us who were "war babies" or had lost relatives there. The Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial is located on top of a cliff overlooking Omaha Beach, the scene of the June 6, 1944 invasion. Covering 172 acres, there are 9,386 American War Dead buried here. The headstones, set in 10 plots, are all of white Italian marble: a star of David for those of Jewish faith and a Latin Cross for all others. The remains of approximately 14,000 men were shipped back

to the states. The dead came from every state in the Union and the District of Columbia, a few from England, Scotland and Canada. There is buried here, side by side, a father and his son, and in 33 cases brothers rest side by side. We will never forget it.

We picnicked by the museum, where 4,000 ships and 1,000 small crafts participated in the invasion 39 years ago. The remains of the Mulberry floating harbour are still in position. We shared our bread, cheese, fruit and cider, and boarded our bus for our return trip to Paris.

The last two days in Paris we crammed in all we could! Visited the Left Bank, the Impressionist Museum of the Louvre where Monet and Renoir are exhibited; walked down the Avenue des Champs-Elysees with its shops and sidewalk cafes where one can devour crepes and watch the world go by. We didn't have to work too hard at spending our last francs, in fact some of us had long ago spent them. Our hotel was in walking distance of the Eiffel Tower, only a few blocks away, and from some of the hotel rooms we could see the top. Memorable to us will always be our last dinner together in the restaurant; toasts were given all around; the can can was performed by some, and later parties were had by many. Some of us took



A closer look at Mont-St. Michel

a last walk to the Eiffel Tower at midnight when its beauty is most notable, before going to bed.

June 30, our last breakfast in bed: warm croissants, jam, cocoa or cafe au lait; then downstairs for hugs and farewell goodbyes to "West Virginia," "Georgia" and "Ohio" who had to leave for London ahead of us. There were quick promises of getting together again, writing letters, much laughter about things that happened, some tears and lots of cameras!

Three hours later we were thrilled to find "Ohio" on our London-Chicago flight along with teen idol Matt Dillion, who gave a few autographs. Our arrival in Chicago via Greenland, Canada, Hudson Bay and a splendid view of Lake Michigan found us having no

problem with customs, mainly because our 13 pieces of luggage were still in London and we had only the clothes on our backs. That, being the worst thing that had happened in 18 glorious days, we were able to survive. Special memories of the Heppner travelers were varied:

Carolyn Hughes - "Torrerolinos, Spain was my favorite part of the trip. The coast and three free days was a good way to relax after 20 hours on the airplane."

Jennifer Hughes: "My favorite place was Sevilla... that was where we got to know the other people on the tour, and in the afternoons when we weren't listening to a guide, we could go wherever we wanted and take as much time as we wanted to see the town."

Kathleen Clark: "I think my favorite was the Eiffel Tower; when I saw it, I knew I was really there!"

Kimberly Hughes: "I couldn't choose among all the things I experienced, but I especially liked meeting all the new friends on our trip. Hopefully someday we can meet again."

Wanda Riley: "The train ride was the most fun, especially fitting 17 people into a compartment which was made to hold only six!"

Anne McLaughlin: "My favorite was learning about different cultures and lifestyles, meeting people from

all over the world, also castles, cathedrals, shopping, sunshine and all the attention from the Spanish and French men!"

Michele Portmann: "My favorite... all the men at Bayeux from different countries, of course; and the friendships made within our group."

Claudia Hughes: "I loved the laughter, the kids; the history and beauty of such old countries; the evening walks along cobblestone streets, the smaller towns of Mijas and Toledo, Spain and Chartres, France; meeting English speaking people from other countries; flying; getting to know the Heppner group and becoming friends with the other members of our tour—I loved it all!"

Valery Volesky wasn't here with a quote, but we especially want to thank her for putting her "all" into planning this trip. We wish everyone could have this opportunity.

We have enjoyed sharing our fantastic trip with all of you who have continued to read week by week.

Until we take another trip (don't hold your breath)... GOODBYE!



A "Goodbye" picture. Jennifer Hughes (L), Kimberly Hughes, Celeste Holt (Georgia) and Michele Portmann



Normandy American Memorial Cemetery

RODEO FUN

After seeing you at the Snack Shack we'll see you at the Elks.

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