

Mike & Lesley's Tour de Vosges

by Lesley Smith

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Mike and I thought it might also be nice to return to the Grand Est area of France (previously Alsace-Lorraine) to ride the fantastic roads around the Vosges Mountains, so we opened the trip to Club members and it wasn't long before we reached our maximum of 10 bikes (although two people later decided not to come) and the serious planning began. After hours of memory-searching, online research and route planning we finally came up with a grand plan and everyone started booking Eurotunnel crossings and hotels.

Our first hiccup came at the tunnel terminal for the 08:20 train when John B, Paul and Erica were directed to an earlier train than the rest of us. Fortunately, John had the foresight to suggest a meeting site for just this situation and the group was re-united at the first motorway services.



Ready for departure...



En-route from Charleville to Meziers

This area of northern France is not a thrilling place to ride – the roads are often dead straight and pass through miles and miles of open fields. We took a mixture of D and N roads, dual carriageways, and some motorways to take us round the bigger towns such as Nancy and Luneville. From there the riding improved on the twisties towards Fraise and across the Col du Bonhomme to our Ibis hotel in Colmar (secure underground parking!). This is where we were joined by our German friend, Jessica, and the group was complete.



During the three days we were based in Colmar we had great fun riding the roads that make up the Route des Cretes and the surrounding area. Miles of twisty and challenging riding; hairpins, sweepers and long stretches following the ridge of the mountains.

Sadly, the views from the top were often obscured by mist and low cloud, but that added atmosphere to the rides.

The weather was very changeable – heavy rain, mist, overcast skies and some strong winds. But when the sun did shine all of that was forgotten. Our routes included the Col du Bonhomme, Col de la Schlucht, the beautiful village of Riquewihr, the lake in Gerardmer and the ride across the Grand Ballon.



Visiting the monastery at Mont St Odile was a must. From there the views across the Rhine Valley to Germany are breathtaking – even if the weather was a little hazy. In the evenings we ate in the warm sunshine in the pretty old town of Colmar.





John B also led us across the Rhine, through Freiburg and on into the Black Forest – on a road which is banned to motorcyclists at the weekend. The reason for the ban soon became obvious – what a fabulous road; fast and flowing with spectacular views. He led us past Todtnau (there’s a fabulous luge run there - Google it!) and on to Lake Titisee, where we ate a picnic by the lake.



Unfortunately, a road closure spoiled the planned return route and heavy rain started. We had to filter through queueing traffic back to Freiburg (note: filtering is not permitted in Germany we later discovered).

After three days we had to leave Colmar and make our way home, stopping overnight in Houffalize in Belgium. Our final lunch together was in a restaurant by the lake in Beaumont before the group went their separate ways.



John B, Erica and Paul headed for Calais and the Tunnel, Roger and Dawn headed for the Ferry, while John M, Trish and Jessica were joining us in Belgium for a little longer.



Our routes and plans had been dogged by weather, road and café closures, nevertheless, we had a fabulous week. We also found some unexpected high points; the amazing riding experience of the fabulous roads in this area, tasty tartiflettes at the Col de la Schucht, the delicious three course meal for only 15 Euros in a tiny village somewhere on the Route des Cretes, sitting outside to eat in the warm evenings in Colmar. But most of all the wonderful company.



Thank you all for joining us.