

Motorcycle Tour Magazine

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BACKROADS

Motorcycles, Travel & Adventure

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Tour de France

HOLIDAY ISSUE
PAGES OF GIFTS
GREAT AND SMALL

RIDE • EAT • SLEEP • DISCOVER



Tour de France • Riding Back through History

with Edelweiss Bike Travel

While most of the riders in the Backroads region were craning their heads to the west to see the Great American Eclipse in the middle of August, Shira and I had planned our moves way in advance – and headed to Paris, France to meet up with the tourmeisters from Edelweiss and a few other temporary ex-pat Americans to do what the bike travel company called their Paris to Omaha tour – we called it our Tour de France.

On tours that head out of North America we have found it best to make time to get in a few days early. This allows acclimation to the local clock, so to speak, and – in a city as grand as Paris – the opportunity to do a little old fashioned sightseeing before getting on the bikes and beginning the tour.

So that is what we did, staying right down the street from the Palace at Versailles and an easy and fairly quick run to the center of Paris.

Over the next three days we tried to squeeze in as much of the City of Lights as we could – the Palace, the Eiffel Tower, the museums – mostly using the RER, Metro and the excellent Open Air Tour Buses. Yes, total tourists, but it got the job done.

By that Sunday afternoon we met the rest of our group and our guides, Tony and Malcolm, and got the first of many briefings before taking charge of our ride for the next few weeks – a 2017 BMW R1200RT, on which Shira and I would be two-up.



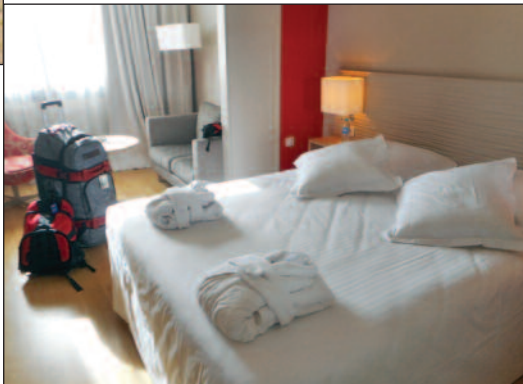
Versailles to Tours



For those of you who have never been on or read about organized motorcycle tours like those held by Edelweiss Bike Travel let me give you the daily goings on.

After breakfast there will be a morning meeting – going over the routes, options, places of interest and the general lay of the land. Shira and I consolidated our clothes and needed things into one bag and that went into the van that would take its own route to the hotel at the end of the day, and it would be in our room waiting when we got in each evening. This may seem a small thing, but it is part of the way Edelweiss has always done it, and is really handy at the end of a full day of riding.

Our journey this day would head west towards the Brittany region of France and along the Loire River (pronounced loo-R) - the longest river in France. It also has some of the most beautiful castles along its way as well and we would make it a point to stop and see a few this day.



Our first stop was really a cathedral at Chartre. Chartres Cathedral, also known as the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Chartres in French. Built between 1194 and 1220 it is a massive stone structure with huge flying buttresses and intricate stone workings. Truly amazing. Many Christian pilgrims come to worship its famous relic, the Sancta Camisa, said to be the tunic worn by the Virgin Mary at Christ's birth.



We continued westward along the river valley, with a magnificent castle here and a splendid château there, on both banks of the water. You know... the usual.

We did make it a point to stop and visit one in particular.

Begun back in 1519, this palace would rise up out of the swampy lowlands of the Sologne region, on the edge of a forest filled with wild boar. François I, the young king who had garnered glory in the Battle of Marignan, ordered its construction and today Château de Chambord is truly one of the most glorious and the largest châteaux in France and an iconic image of centuries past.



Along the grounds there are shops and restaurants and a filling French lunch of chilled soups, cured meats and salads was to be had before exploring the palatial grounds and the château itself.

Horses paraded by with men and women in 16th century character, carrying the flair of Chambord some five centuries back.

Still, walking around the grounds you will be reminded of the 20th century, as the walls of the château are pitted with bullet holes from both World Wars.

On a better note it is in this region that the Chambord Liqueur Royale de France is made and can be found around the planet.

Before we left Shira found a stand selling macarons and café frappe - a nice way to sit and end the visit to the great château.

Our ride along the river would bring us past caves, cliffs and by many bridges that went nowhere - ending at the riverside - destroyed early in the Second World War in an attempt to stop the German advance.

Today this tragic history was balanced by miles of sunflower fields, just a few days past their prime.

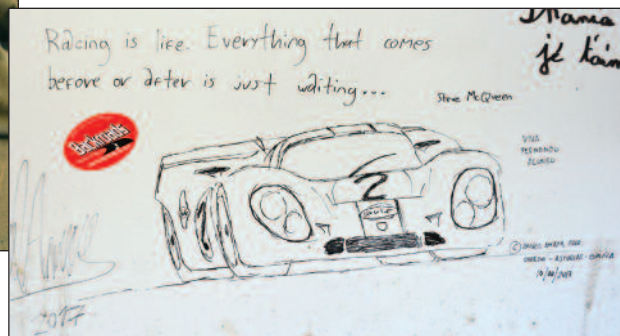
Our ride would end this day in the town of Tours with its beautiful fountains and, unfortunately, a bit of late afternoon traffic looking to get home.

Tours to Angers (via LeMans!)

When you're racing, it's life. Anything that happens before or after... is just waiting.

Steve McQueen - Lemans

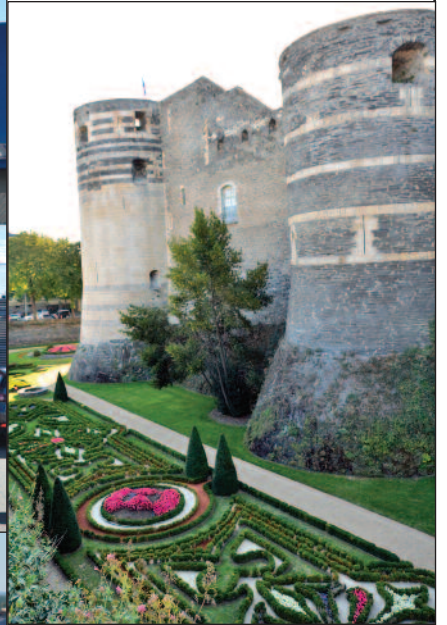
France is usually cooler this time of the year, but the heat was on this day as we continued westward, but not before an all important (at least to me) stop at the Circuit de LeMans.



But first we followed our guide Malcolm as he brought us out of the city and right into some very pleasant French backroads. Passing through forest and farmland and by one exquisite "small" château, we

stopped in a tiny town square for morning café de crème. Around the square were three older automobiles belonging to some Scots who had come down for a bit of a drive around the French countryside. The interior of the café showed dozens of racecars and it was very apparent we were nearing the center of the French racing world!

In short time Shira and I were quickly running through the gears, breaking the ton, along the Mulsanne Straight - the part of the track that runs on public roads before riding into the track complex itself.



We walked part of the track and watched some of the bikes do laps and then crossed over the famous Dunlop bridge. I was in heaven and I kept hearing Steve's voice echoing in my head. If you have never seen the film *LeMans* please do – it is the greatest race film ever made. Period.

Another bucket list item checked. I've been enthralled with *LeMans* since I was a young boy, watching Michael Delaney's (Steve McQueen) exploits in the film of the same name. Here at this track the world's most famous motor race is run – the 24 Hours of LeMans called by some the "Grand Prix of Endurance and Efficiency." The 24 Hours race has run continually (except for WWII) since 1923. The track envelops the town itself, although there are other circuits in the main facility – most notably the Circuit Bugatti. This day we found local motorcycle club races were being held. We took a few hours to stroll through the phenomenal museum with its dozens of historic racecars, displays and LeMans memorabilia.

We reluctantly geared up and got going, following Malcolm back into the French countryside and eventually to the city of Angers. Keeping with the previous day's boozy stop...in Angers they make Cointreau – that orangey liquor that sits up on the shelf of every good bar. It also has an old medieval fortress made of black stone, complete with moat and drawbridge, which holds the Apocalypse Tapestry – at over 100 yards long it is the largest in the world and it portrays the Book of Revelations, which was well worth searching out.

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Angers to Carnac

There were a few things that stood out and intrigued us when we looked at the overview on this tour. First, although we have ridden in France a number of times, it had always been to the south in the Pyrenees or east into the Alps.

Paris, Brittany and Normandy were yet unknown to us. The second thing that appealed to us was some of the highlights of this Edelweiss tour – including the castles, château, fortresses and LeMans (of course) and later on the D-Day sites in Normandy.

But, along with the places we'd see later on the tour, we would be heading into Brittany proper and making a lunch stop today in the town of Saint-Nazaire. Saint-Nazaire, found at the mouth of the Loire River, has become famed for its port and ship building – The QE-2 was built here – and Airbus is located not too far from the town.



But, what we had come for would relate directly to the Second World War and the Nazi occupation of this region. As we approached the Atlantic Ocean and the mouth of the Loire Shira commented on the fortress ahead of us. This was no fortress, but the reason for our visit.

During the war Hitler wanted to fortify the

coast and thus created what became known as the Atlantic Wall. The fortifications included colossal coastal guns, batteries, mortars and artillery, and thousands of German troops were stationed in its defenses and almost a million French workers were drafted to build it.

Here in Saint-Nazaire the Nazis built a mammoth submarine base, using nearly a half million cubic feet of concrete. The place is enormous.

We toured some of the sub pens and then crossed over to the main building that now houses the French submarine “Espadon” – which means Swordfish. We toured the boat and made a quick run around the giant concrete structure, noting the now empty placements that once held anti-aircraft weaponry, machine guns and mortars. In the distance we could see the long Pont de Saint-Nazair bridge and a new cruise ship nearing completion.

If this was in the U.S. I am sure O’Life would be all over this place, but we’d have something for the good Doctor come the following day.

After lunch we headed up into the backroads of Brittany, where the signs began to have two spellings for each direction, as the people of Brittany speak a slightly different, and a bit more Celtic, language than the rest of France – and they are proud of it.

We made a quick stop this day along the Guérande Peninsula where the land has two distinct qualities – one being the Pays Blanc (the white land) and the other being Pays Noir (the black land) the difference being one is made up of salt marshes and the other dark peat bogs.

These salt marshes have been harvested since the 9th century and create some amazing tonnage of salt each year, including their famous Fleur de Sel –



which contains a number of minerals and algae and more flavor than regular table salt. It is considered one of the best in the world and we made sure to bring some home to have a head to head against our favorite salt from West Virginia.

By early evening, as our gaggle of riders rolled into the small town of Carnac, we could see a long field of standing stones right along the roadside. This was another one of the sites we truly needed to see, as the megalithic stones here, like Stonehenge in England, have had scholars and historians scratching their collective heads for centuries.

The next two nights we stayed at a boutique hotel alongside the Tumulus of St. Michael. Although there is a church atop it, the site is really a burial mound dating back nearly 6,500 years; yet another mystery to be looked into while here in Brittany.

Tomorrow was a free day for us and we hoped to channel our best inner-Seymour O’Life and drink in the energy of these enigmatic stones.

Free Day in and around Carnac

The megalithic Stones at Carnac are a true mystery.

Over 3,000 stones and dolmens can be found here and many of them are in perfect alignment with each other, like soldiers on the march.

Local myth states that a Roman legion was on the march when the wizard Merlin turned them into stone and that is why they are in a straight line.

The truth is they were raised between 4,000 and 6,500 years ago.

Although Stonehenge is far more well known, size-wise it cannot compare to the fields of megaliths here in Brittany.

In the morning we took a quick walk to the top of the Tumulus at dawn and then rode over to the stones, well before the crowds that would flood the area later that day. From atop the stone tower that was more recently con-





structed you could see the alignments clearly with the stones stretching for a very long way. We were all amazed that they had not

been totally disturbed or knocked down over the centuries.

With a free day, and with half of the riders staying around town, we sped away into the Brittany countryside with a smaller group than the previous day's outings. We rode to the coast and then along the Atlantic for a bit, occasionally spotting German pillbox gun nests that still remain along the forests on the beaches, these days covered with graffiti from modern spray-paint Picassos.

Our guide brought us to the Basilique Sainte-Anne d'Auray, another impressive Catholic cathedral, before just going for a spirited and fun ride through the French countryside with roads that were a bit on the small side, but made up for that with great views, easy sweepers and fairly good pavement.

Definitely the best day's ride of the trip so far!



We got back to Carnac in the early afternoon, with me dragging Shira back to the standing stones and taking in the different fields of them before finding a filling lunch of oysters and fish along the coast.

The afternoon was finished with a walk around the tiny town and a short stroll around the Prehistoric Museum found there.

That evening fellow riders Mike and Carla decided to throw a little cocktail party.



When I saw the spread these two had put out and heard the Jimmy Buffett blaring I knew that some were going to the Brittany version of Margaritaville this day.

For us we stuck around for a bit and then strolled back into town which had been closed to traffic, transforming the village into a bazaar

with a throng of locals and tourists filling the streets and alleys around the central church and dozens of vendors selling handmade crafts and trinkets.

A band was playing local traditional music, very much in the Celtic flair, and we sat and had another dozen oysters, which had been plucked just an hour before from the French Atlantic. We watched the locals dance to the music, some men and women, but mostly pairs of gals from young to seasoned all in synchronicity with each other's steps and moves. It was marvelous and I wished more local towns at home would have things like this each week.

Late that night we walked arm in arm back up to the Tumulus.



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Garnac to Roscoff

Although the previous day's ride was quite brilliant, Tony told me that this day's ride would be much more than that and he was right, as Edelweiss mixed together a great day of historic and scenic locales and laced them together with some very pleasant tarmac all the way from the southern coast to the rocky shore of the English Channel to the north.

For Shira, our Cooper Union alumni, one of the high points on the tour would be a stop in the town of Pont-Aven.

Until the mid-19th century, Pont-Aven, named after the river that runs through it, was known for its mills and its port. With the advent of the railways along came tourism and in the 1860s some painters discovered the village. Word spread throughout the artistic community about its merits and in 1886 Paul Gauguin arrived for the first of several stays; in 1888 he met fellow artist Émile Bernard and the post-impressionist art movement, which focused on color and symbolism, was born.

Pont-Aven is still a haven for the arts and, although a bit more touristy these days, it is still a beautiful part of France.

We continued along the coastal area, swinging around to the north and to the medieval town of Locronan, named after



Not too far down the road we were treated to the traditional Edelweiss picnic lunch, this time along a beautiful inlet to the sea that smelled of the sea and salt. Once again our guides Malcolm and Tony did a stellar job and the Edelweiss picnic is a much anticipated part of their tours.

The afternoon's ride brought us along the most agreeable pieces of pavement, nothing too technical at all, but nice wide sweeping turns across the rolling farmlands of Brittany. This would be our most western part of this tour and, as if to celebrate this region,



we rode up Ménez Hom, a thousand foot hill that offers a fantastic panorama of the countryside and the Atlantic. The view was a breathtaking setting to say our goodbyes to Brittany, as we would head into the Normandy region the next day. But not before a late afternoon stop at a local apple cider farm to stock up on some regional delights for that evening.

By early evening we rode into the small coastal town of Roscoff, right on the English Channel. I have traveled a lot in France and in England, but this was the first time I had ridden to this waterway that has been so im-



Saint Ronan, who was venerated in Brittany and is considered by many to be the most beautiful of ancient French towns. It really was a pleasure to amble its cobblestone streets, to take in the church and walk through the cemetery. The stone architecture was really fascinating and it seemed, with some buildings, that they were thought up and built by different people at different times. In past centuries the town was known for its hemp, exported internationally, as it was used for rigging the ships, both commercial and military, that operated from Britany's many ports.



portant through the centuries of man's history – from ancient times to D-Day to the Chunnel.

Roscoff, where you could if you wish, pick up ferry service to both England (112 miles) and Ireland, was a happening little town. The restaurants were plentiful, a British Rockabilly band was doing their best Stray Cats impression and we even got to sing Happy Birthday to one of our own.

Happy Birthday Larry!



Roscoff to Saint Malo

Today's ride was promised to be a bit longer than previous day's romps so we made sure to get going around 8:30, right after breakfast with a wide view of the Channel and its rocky coast.

The jaunt this day would follow the Channel eastward along and through tiny, and some not so tiny, Brittany towns – all with the now familiar French coastal charm and flair.

Coffee stops were made, and lunch of local, fresh seafood enjoyed across from a harbor filled with pleasure craft.

The roads themselves were getting more and more interesting as the coastal shore consisted of cliffs, hills and valleys all leading to the sea to the north.

One very interesting side trip that Malcolm made was bringing the group to one of the most unique locations for a home we have ever seen. In the Côtes-d'Armor region, near the quiet little village of Plougrescant, you will find the Castel Meur, also known as La Maison du Gouffre or "the house between the rocks." It is a charming cottage wedged between two huge jagged rocks that has been drawing travelers and the simply curious for years.

The house has her back turned towards the sea, against which her owner sought to protect her by building the house in a cradle between the two rocks to shield her from the violent storms that frequent this place. The tiny house was built in 1861, at a time when building permits did not exist, where anyone could build at will. After the death of her original owner, Castel Meur served as the second home to the descendant's family who lived here sporadically. The current occupant, the granddaughter of the first master of the house, has lived here since 2004 after selling her business in America and returning back to France.

Eventually we made our way up the narrow road along the cliffs to Frechel Cape, with its tower to climb and panoramic vistas of the pink granite cliffs, the sea and the region.

By now it was late afternoon and we needed to get to our hotel for the night in Saint Malo and from here it was a fairly short ride, but Shira and I would steal one more quick stop at the world's first, and one of just two, industrial tidal power stations on the planet - The Rance Tidal Power Station.

Opened in 1966, the station, located on the Rance Estuary River, offers the interested a free tour of the museum and a close up view of the 24 huge turbines that create over 500 gigawatt hours of power each year and powers half of Brittany.

It began mankind's charge for renewable energy.

That night we stayed at a Channel-side hotel overlooking the town's slate roof spires, tightly packed stone buildings and the sea. We learned that this town was almost completely destroyed in the 1940s and they certainly have rebuilt in an appealing manner.

Our dinner that evening was a wonderfully fishy affair, with different soups, seafood salad, crabs, oysters and shrimp being served and this was followed by a most splendid sunset over the English Channel.



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abbey, the turrets, the dungeon (always a happy place) and the museums that were to be found.

Lunch was had at one of the most famous restaurants in France - La Mère Poulard - famed for its giant omelets that are several inches thick, made whipped in hand-hammered copper bowls, and cooked over an open fire. More a soufflé than your traditional omelet, they are huge, and so was the bill. Neither of us had ever had a \$40 plate of eggs before – even with lagostinos or smoked bacon and potato or smoked salmon with Camembert cheese. But, we had never ordered in a thousand year old fortified abbey either.

From here we followed Tony, whose turn it was to lead this day, along some of the more challenging roads we had ridden so far.

Like a great fireworks show or an orchestral movement that gets bigger, better and more vibrant as it moves along, so it is with Edelweiss' Paris to Omaha Tour here in France.

Each day the sights got grander, the food more delicious, and the roads more fun.

We stopped for coffee in the town of Aunay.

Along the building I spied a plaque etched into the stone telling the fate of the town just after D-Day. On June 12 two waves of aircraft destroyed all of the town center killing a hundred people. On the night of June 14 to 15 the town was totally destroyed by a new wave of bombing leaving only the bell tower standing in the smoking rubble. Twenty-five percent of Aunay people were killed in this action.

The town was quickly rebuilt but, looking at the images on the wall of the café, we were reminded of how terrible this war was.

This would be brought home more fully the next day as we toured the beaches of Normandy. Tonight we stayed in the town of Arromanches, also known as Port Winston Churchill.

Saint Malo to Arromanches

We were now deep into Normandy and heading towards the historic landings of D-Day.

Along the town squares you began to see more and more monuments honoring this turning point in the Second World War. But, before we rode into our recent past we travelled back a few more centuries with a long morning stop at Mont Saint Michel.

Although we had been to some very beautiful and impressive castles, monuments, cathedrals and places of natural beauty – it is hard to compare anything or anyplace with Mont Saint Michel.

The worship of Saint Michel was introduced on the Mount in 708, after a Bishop Aubert d'Avranches had a vision of the Arch Angel Michael and it became one of the most important places of medieval pilgrimage. Benedictine monks started building an abbey here in the 10th century.

From 966 onwards, the dukes of Normandy, followed by French kings, supported the development of a major Benedictine abbey on Mont-Saint-Michel. Magnificent monastic buildings were added through medieval times, one lofty section being nicknamed The Marvel. The Abbey became a renowned center of learning, attracting some of the greatest minds and manuscript illuminators in Europe. Vast numbers of pilgrims visited, despite warring cross-Channel royals. However, the ramparts at the base of the island were built to keep English forces out.

It took nearly a thousand years to become what it is today – a truly fortified abbey that has been sieged many times over the centuries. As the centuries passed other buildings went up along the steep village streets and many are now converted into museums, hotels, restaurants and shops for today's travelers.

We parked the bikes early that day and spent a few hours touring and exploring the



A sobering Free Day along the coast of Normandy · June 6, 1944 D-Day

The previous evening, after dinner, we walked the beach at sunset taking in the port town that was key with the liberation of Western Europe after D-Day. Along the beach we could see and walk around the staggeringly big floating concrete caissons that were towed over from Britain in June 1944 and still remain here from the Mulberry Harbor, the artificial harbor thought up by Winston Churchill, that the British built to funnel machinery and fuel to Allied forces in France.

Just off the shore we could still see remains of the large concrete structures that formed the breakwater and there is a section of the Mulberry lying on the sand, still soaking wet from the ebbing tide.

It was a tremendous feat of engineering.



In the morning two private guides, hired to give us a morning tour of the largest maritime invasion in the history of our planet, picked us up at our hotel and we rode over to Pointe du Hoc. Here the Allies bombed it to smithereens before sending 225 hand-picked US Army Rangers to assault its cliffs, using grappling hooks and ladders from London fire departments.

We walked among the craters that still dominate the cliffs and heard how the Americans climbed the cliffs under heavy enemy fire and, after a long and close battle, took Pointe du Hoc after using an American flag to wave off an attack run of Allied fighters. When they took the Pointe there were only 90 Rangers left standing.

We then headed to Omaha Beach, where things were as bad as they could get on this June day. The beach was heavily mined and booby-trapped, the cliffs were full of Nazi machine gun placements. Of the 156,000 soldiers that landed on June 6th, 1944 nearly 9,000 were casualties that first day.

It could only be described as Hell on Earth.

It is a place of remembrance and honor.

This peaceful day we sat on the beach for a while and watched families enjoy the summer sun. A little girl splashed in the water with her mom. A young woman and a small girl galloped horses across the sand.

We made time to visit the American cemetery where over 9,000 Americans are buried – their Christian crosses and Jewish stars stark white against the cloudless blue sky this day; the English Channel, now empty of war ships and warriors, lapping quietly against the shores of Normandy.

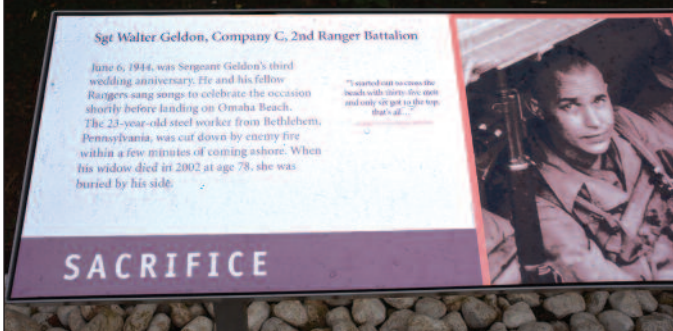
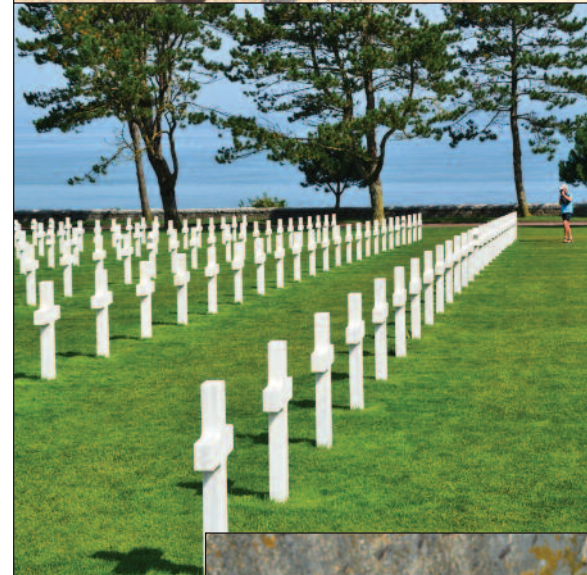
We walked amongst the markers quietly speaking each name that we saw – it felt like the thing to do here; maybe, some how, a way to say what we were feeling inside. Our friends Paul and Connie, who were travelling with us, were especially moved, as were we all. Paul, a U.S. Marine (you are always a Marine – Semper Fi Paul) was especially taken with it all.

With its deep history, deep meaning and deeper blood the beaches at Normandy are almost overwhelming and should never be missed if you travel to this part of France.

After our tour Shira and I do what we do best on these trips and took off on our own – first heading to the town of Bayeux to see the 950 year old, 230 foot long Bayeux Tapestry.

Fittingly enough this historic relic tells the story of yet another invasion – this time in the year 1066 when William the Bastard, the head of the Normans, would defeat Harold Godwinson – self-appointed King of England at the Battle of Hastings.

The story, as told through the audio guides, was very informative and entertaining as we moved from



panel to panel. This was every bit as serious as the battle some 878 years later. We were both enthralled by this story and it brought the prominence of this region through out the years.

Riding back into our more recent past we rode the BMW west to Sainte Mere Eglise where the US 82nd Airborne Division had a fateful landing on the town. There is a museum dedicated to our Airborne here as well as a very interesting church in the town square. Atop the steeple you will see a paratrooper hanging by his parachute from the top of the church. Although it might look odd, it relates to a very true story from that night.



Arromanches to Étretat



It was the middle of the night and the town of Sainte Mere Eglise was on fire. Occupied by the Germans since June 18, 1940, the town had survived several allied air raids. A stray incendiary bomb from one of those raids had set a building near the town square on fire and it was spreading. The townspeople formed a chain to ferry water from the pump in the town square to the fire.

At about 1:30 a.m. that day, June 6, 1944, the sky filled with hundreds of American paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division. Well lit by the flames beneath them, the paratroopers were easy targets



We would have a far shorter ride this day as we cut across Normandy heading ever further east to what is known as the Pegasus Bridge that crosses the Caen Canal, between Caen and Ouistreham, right outside the town of Bénouville.

As Operation Overlord began the British Parachute Regiment landed, well... more like crash

for the startled German soldiers on the ground. One of those paratroopers was Pvt. John Steele of F Company, 3rd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Steele was already a combat veteran, with combat jumps into Italy and Sicily under his belt prior to D-Day. During his landing, Steele's parachute became caught in the steeple of the church in the middle of the town square. Shot through the foot, Steele hung there for two hours pretending to be dead before the Germans noticed him and cut him down.



landed, a number of large Horsa Gliders late in the evening of June 5th – the day before the landing. Each carried 30 plus men and a fierce and close battle ensued as the British took the bridge, ensuring control of this part of the canal. This was yet another story I had never heard before and the entire operation was so outrageous and brave that it is amazing how successful it was.

As forward moving Allied troops met up with the Parachute Regiment, a lone Scottish piper, Bill Millin, led the way... with his bagpipes proudly playing... the way it should be.

The British Parachute Regiment wear the emblem of Bellephophon riding the flying horse Pegasus on their shoulders, and the bridge is so now named in their honor.

The museum here was well worth the stop as was sitting for a cup of coffee at the Café Gondree, considered the first place to be liberated in Operation Overlord and D-Day.



John was taken prisoner and his leg taken care of. He escaped and three days later joined the Allied lines, being transferred to a hospital in England.

If you have ever seen the film *The Longest Day*, John Steele was portrayed by actor Red Buttons. It is an amazing story, one of many that day.

However, despite all setbacks, by 04:30 on the morning of June 6th the Stars & Stripes flag was flying proudly over Sainte Mère Église, which became the first town in France to be liberated.

Also found in this church are two other interesting things, one being a pair of wonderful stained glass windows, donated by US Airborne soldiers. One is of Saint Michael, the patron saint of paratroopers. He is descending from the heavens on his wings with sword in hand. The other the Virgin Mary with child and Airborne paratroopers floating around her.

Very fitting.

The other is a Roman-times marker of stone outside that church. This ancient Roman marker has absolutely nothing to do with D-Day. These were used to mark every 1,481 meters of the road from England to Rome. For as the saying goes, "All roads lead to Rome."

We started back to Port Churchill, but spent some time at Utah Beach, a battle that went far better for the Americans and Allies than Omaha.

By evening we had ridden back to Arromanches – we were out just after dawn and back at dusk – in our own way it was our longest day too.



We then rode back to the coast and into the very picturesque town of Honfleur. This town was, remarkably, untouched by the war and today the buildings are as they were before the conflict.

The very interesting thing about this town is that years back they levied taxes by how wide the building was. Thus everyone built these narrow, multi-story buildings, which makes for an excellent photo op these days.

The lunch of fruits de mer (fruit of the sea) today was the best we have had on a trip that was a constant culinary delight. Af-



terward we strolled the old port and took a spin on the giant Ferris wheel to get a bird's eye view of Honfleur.

We got into Étretat that afternoon, taking our rooms at a very nice resort hotel with a grand view of the white chalk cliffs that were painted many times by Claude Monet. Known locally as Côte d'Albâtre they made for a striking end of the day and our final night on the road for this tour, as tomorrow we would motor back to Versailles.

The rest of this day would be spent along the lawn, in chairs, with adult beverages with the most magnificent view. After a truly tasty dinner we watched from our room as a storm moved in with a fireworks display of lightning and thunder - the first rains since our journey began.

Étretat to Versailles

This would be the tour's final day on the road as our trip would swing back to Versailles later that day, but there were kilometers to be done and a few very interesting place to see on our way. The midnight tempest that came rambling through the area had moved on, but left a murky mist that would dog us most of this day. Still one iffy and wet day, after all the glorious sunshine, was a small price to pay.

We picked up the River Seine and rode along it a bit to the city of Rouen and a quick visit to Jumièges Abbey – although now in ruins it is still considered one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture in the world.

Some stayed to explore, but Shira and I had other plans as our artist in residence is a lover of the works of Claude Monet and his home, studio and gardens were not that far off in the town of Giverny - so we struck out on our own for a visit with Monet.

The town was easy enough to find and we uncovered a delectable lunch amongst a flowered café before taking a long walk around the famed artist's home and property. Monet's gardens were breathtaking as were his famed water lilies. The house is exactly the way it was when the artist lived here and I was amazed at how freely they



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let us walk around and enjoy it. Sitting in the garden taking it all in we could see how and where much of his brilliant inspiration was found.

All good things must come to an end and, saying goodbye to Monet and Giverny, we punched up Versailles on the Garmin and by later afternoon, fighting a bit more traffic than we had gotten use to, we rode past the palace and to the hotel where we had started this tour some ten days before.



Final Thoughts

Edelweiss' From Paris to Omaha Tour was a bit different for us.

Many times our journeys are about some distant point of land, or perhaps it is the fantastic and technical riding, or striking terrain to be found.

But this tour was about the culture, history and romance of France.

From the château at Chambord to the stones at Carnac, down the Mulsanne Straight at LeMans to the magnificence of Mont Saint Michel, the humbling experience to visit the D-Day sights in Normandy to the beautiful art of Monet – this tour taught us, told us and showed us so much more than any other motorcycle journey we have been on before.

And, the riding was a happy time as well.

If you are looking for a few weeks in Europe that will challenge your riding abilities and throw curve after curve at you – well, the people at Edelweiss will happily bring you to Alps! But, if you wish to spend a couple of weeks, with some very pleasant riding, taking in the brilliance, history and majesty that is France then we highly recommend From Paris to Omaha – you will not be disappointed.

Viva la France!

You can find out more about this tour, and all the other

great destinations that Edelweiss Bike Travel has to offer on their website: edelweissbiketravel.com. For more personal perusal, ask them for one of their new catalogues – it's great winter reading.

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