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# Strauss Annual Report & Travelogue 2012

## vol 3, no 14

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Another year gone, another well-marked-up diary nearly ready to be filed away. Though many of the entries follow the same pattern as in previous years, each story has a new twist to it – new experiences to relate and new photos to serve as useful reminders when things start to all run together!

Our comings and goings during the year may not have taken us to the ends of the world, but they were good.

Exceptionally mild weather in March encouraged us to venture out on our bikes a bit earlier in the year than usual, and we made the most of it, getting out on local mid-week rides, two Daffodil rides and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary ride of the Ledbury CTC



group. The annual Tour Leaders' weekend, held in Derbyshire, gave us a good excuse for extending our time up there. We learned the hard way just how steep the hills can be on the High Peak Trail and around Matlock, but the views and unseasonably warm weather were a just reward, and our wonderful hosts knew how to put two worn out cyclists back together again!



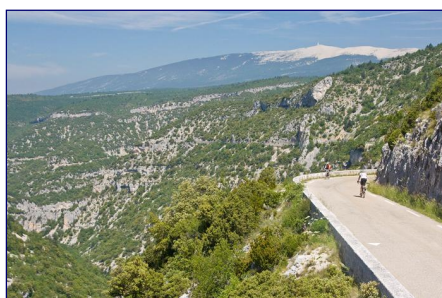
Thankfully the good weather held for the Easter break, as we had opted to make a full week of it and 'go calling'. After two days of long-overdue visits with past StraussTours members near Southampton (one marked by lunch outdoors on a sunny deck!), we joined the Tandem Club for four days in the south western corner of the New Forest, dropping in on a Short Cranks couple in Lymington, then spent a further day with long standing friends in Godshill on a very enjoyable walk through the Forest. The much-reported wettest April on record started just afterwards, though we had a mostly dry Short Cranks weekend at the beginning of May, based only a dozen or so miles north of Ledbury. We were pleased that our beautiful local countryside got to be enjoyed in such good conditions.



All this put us in reasonably good shape for some more serious cycling! By mid-May we were in France with our camping tour, taking in the glories of Provence. Starting in Orange, we cycled south to Arles and the Camargue, east across to the Luberon, west to St-Remy-de-Provence, north to near Orange again, then, via a large loop, around Mont Ventoux. When it was good, it was very very good, but when the wind nearly flattened our tents and it rained for two days solid...! Some of the routes took us to very picturesque places, one of our favourites being a loop around the limestone Alpilles, just south of St-Remy, where we were treated to cloudless views of the bare rocky peaks rising above olive and almond groves, contrasting strikingly against a



deep blue sky. Daudet's inspirational windmill and the remains of a Roman aqueduct brought more photo stops, as did abundant displays of poppies and cactus flowers. We spent quite a long afternoon exploring the extensive and very photogenic cascades just below the medieval village of La Roque-sur-Cèze, west of Orange. These are wide waterfalls, rather than tall ones, but there are a lot of them, with water spurting out of unexpected places, giving Pat plenty of ammunition for milky-water photos!



Our two days cycling around Mt Ventoux were also memorable, partly for the heat that would have made the shade from a blade of grass welcome, especially on the long climb involved, but mostly for the colourful and varied scenery. We never grow tired of seeing that iconic mountain, nor of the glorious descent through the Nesque Gorges from Sault ... nor of the ice cream and Orangina stops, the freedom and relaxation of camping or the super company we keep for three weeks!!





We may have had to say 'adieu' to the south of France, but with some help from the French railways, we made our way via Paris (and a delicious, if rushed, lunch by the Eiffel Tower) to Granville in Normandy for a week at the Tandem Club's International Rally. Unfortunately the weather wasn't very co-operative, limiting our riding to only two days in the week, but on one we discovered the bell foundry in Villedieu-les-Poêles and were lucky enough to be on a guided tour at the moment when they were pouring the molten bronze into the castings. Some of the bells being made were for a Notre Dame refit, some were headed to Vietnam, others to churches in France. We enjoyed the tour so much we did a second one straight after, with a different guide, and learned a lot of



different things about the process. The skies weren't clear enough for good distance shots, but we spent an enjoyable afternoon cycling along the coast trying for photos of Mont St Michel. Our planned two-day ride north to the coast for a ferry back to the UK was semi-successful, enjoying the company of more 'long lost' friends on the Saturday and staying in a fantastic old farmhouse where we celebrated Mike's birthday, being wined and dined in a near-baronial dining room. But the rain returned, enticing us to abandon most of the Sunday ride, take the train to Cherbourg and find solace in large bowls of moules.

For our next leg we needed transport miracles! Our morning ferry to Bournemouth didn't arrive quite in time for our preferred train to London. We got our bikes onto the next one, but its arrival in London gave us very little time to cycle from Waterloo Station across town. The heavens had opened again, and we had to try to remember how to get there without a map, making a couple of mistakes along the way. We ran into Liverpool Street Station (without slipping!), found a train departing in less than 5 minutes, talked our way onto it (bikes shouldn't have been allowed for another two hours) and collapsed into a heap, dripping wet. No, we weren't headed 'home' but across to Suffolk for a fifth week of cycling, this time to support a new tour leader on his first camping tour.

Gratefully things worked to plan from then on, and we had three very enjoyable days dashing around the relatively flat Suffolk countryside, with no leadership responsibilities! The days were dry and often sunny, but the evenings were damp and quite chilly. Flaming June it certainly wasn't!! It was nice to cycle along the British coastline, visit Constable country after a gap of many, many years, and to be guided through the lanes by someone who knew them well. Snape and Framlingham, two venues that figured in the 2011 Birthday Rides, were also on the agenda. Everything was on



a smaller, more personal level, and we really enjoyed spending more concentrated time with a few people. When they went home on the Friday, we turned our wheels south, crossing the river Deben to Felixstowe on a small ferry (second crossing in the week) and thence towards Ipswich for our final night away with friends whom, until the previous August, we hadn't seen for nearly 20 years and who were going to use our house as a base for their summer family holiday.

We hunkered down to a long list of things to do at (or near) home for the whole of July (more anon), though we did pop over to Cambridge one weekend to celebrate a significant wedding anniversary and birthday of former neighbours in London. We enjoyed a very special dinner in the beautifully panelled dining room of one of the colleges, all proper bib & tucker stuff, in the company of friends and colleagues from various points in their lives. We would have liked to spend another couple of days visiting people we know over there, but we had an 80th birthday luncheon to attend at home on the Sunday!

August had only just got going when we headed back to France for what turned out to be a glorious week at the Semaine Federale. Based in Niort (between Poitiers and La Rochelle), the rides took us in every direction, nowhere particularly special but along lots of lovely little roads and through pretty little villages. It's an event to enjoy more for the cycling atmosphere than for the sightseeing, though there's always something to look at and take note of. We started out cycling faster and longer distances than usual, getting caught up with the throngs on the roads at times – a nice change – but as the week went on, we relaxed a bit more. As usual, there were plenty of colourful, decorated bikes along the routes everywhere, calling out to be photographed (great







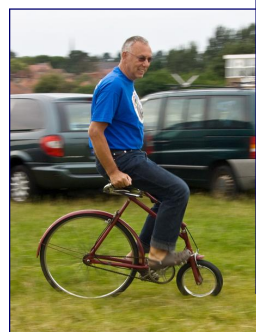
self-control is needed in this digital age!), the final Sunday farewell parade, where cyclists representing the various French 'départments' ride through the town in traditional dress from their area (or something outlandish and fun), and the last night's entertainment and 5-course meal where they serve thousands in one large room!

After a long coach journey (nearly 24 hours!), a mad sprint to Crewe rail station from the M6, a train to Wem (Shropshire) and a gentler ride to Ellesmere, we arrived at the CTC Birthday Rides on the second Monday evening in August with almost enough time to put up our tent before darkness fell. In the short week, made even shorter by a couple of quite wet days, we got out on two good rides – one meeting up with yet another couple from several StraussTours for lunch at a super pub, the other to Chirk, where the Shropshire Union Canal is taken across the valley on a viaduct, next to a second viaduct that takes the rail line. Beyond that our route took us briefly into Wales, where there be sheep, hills and not a lot else. The lack of cycling opportunities was more than offset, though, by the social side of the event – lots and lots and lots of catching up with friends – and Pat doing her emcee bit at the Birthday Tea.



Once again we got lucky with the trains getting us across to Northampton, as planned, for our third week, the Tandem Club's annual UK rally in Kettering. Having had a surprise welcome on the first afternoon by a Red Arrows fly-past, things seemed to go uphill from there. We enjoyed visits to the Bone Crypt in Rothwell church, Foxton Locks, the Triangular Lodge, Market

Harborough, Stanwick Lakes and Northampton – the latter by bus to visit a house that had its interior designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Campsite time can be just as important, and we pitched our tent in a great position for watching people go by, the evening sky develop and attempts to ride funny bikes. A great week to end our travels with!



Well, nearly – we still had two more weekends to look forward to in the beautiful countryside of Derbyshire. The first one in early September, based in Hartington, was a gathering of enthusiasts who ride Flying Gate bikes; the other, based in Youlgrave was a reunion of our French tour group, for which we gratefully found some willing tour members to do the organising. As in March, the scenery

never ceased to impress – nor the hills, for which the excuse of needing a photo stop was used frequently. Our total mileage for the year didn't amount to any great number, but the memorable experiences did!



Yes, we do have a home life, or in Pat's case, a Ledbury life. She has taken the lead in designing and setting up the lighting for all of the local theatre group's productions this year, some dance schools' shows and those of a few visiting companies. This year's panto, 'Aladdin', brought more challenges than any she had previously tried to meet, due to the grand designs of its over-ambitious director. No doubt useful skills were learned, the excesses of



too many Christmas parties were cancelled out by much climbing of stairs and step ladders, and the end product was impressive, but the hours were long. The production of 'The Boy Friend' in October also required a lot of creative lighting, but it was a lot more fun, working with a very energetic and talented cast (mostly 17-19 year olds to match the intended age of the characters) and a clever and hard-working director who designed a very imaginative set.

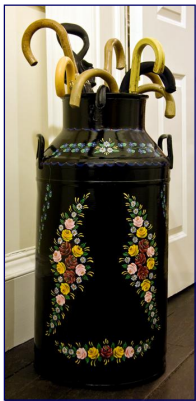


Designing and printing programmes and publicity posters for the theatre has also gravitated to her plate, then there's the photos of the shows and, for both Aladdin and The Boy Friend, the videos to be put together. However, Mike has taken an active interest in taking the videos (stepping in to fill a gap in October!), fellow camera club members have been roped in for taking the stills, and this autumn she finally managed to pass on the Front of House rota to someone else – hurrah! – which handily frees up some of her time to work on the re-designing of the theatre's brochure and website and to take on the job of publicity distributor.

Local history is her other town-based involvement, and this year she achieved her goal of producing a time-line history of all the shop owners/proprietors in our High Street, dating from the present day back to the 1830s, to go with her 5 ft wide panoramic photo of the shops. The timeline was first exhibited at the town's display for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee visit to Hereford in the summer (where Pat stewarded and saw, at short distance, HM herself!), then found a more permanent home in our Heritage Centre.

Both of us worked to prepare the hundreds of badges needed for the various rallies and a few other 'customers', camera club gave Pat many hours of enjoyment throughout the year (along with three commendations and a 'first' on awards night) and Poetry Festival week kept us very busy as usual. Never a dull moment!

Mike's knowledge and support for the computers and printers, vital components for the unofficial 'print house' we seem to have become, has been put to constant use throughout the year. He continues to manage our financial affairs (Pat has to pay the milkman!) and those of the shared house we live in. He also provides a considerable amount of domestic support to the one who is always flitting here or there.



As has been mentioned several times in this newsletter, linking up with friends we haven't seen in some time has been a significant feature of this year. In June, a visit from a long lost friend brought to fruition a dream we've long had of having a large, scruffy grey milk urn sitting in our front hallway painted in the style of canal barge-art. She took it away and returned it four months later beautifully decorated with the traditional flowers and such developed by those who lived and worked on the canals in times gone by. It nicely serves as our umbrella stand! In July, a visit to the UK by a former CTC staff member who emigrated to Australia many years ago generated a reunion lunch in Bristol of a small group who, with Pat, collectively worked on planning and campaigning for the national cycling organisation. It was really good to all sit down together once again and catch up on each others' lives!

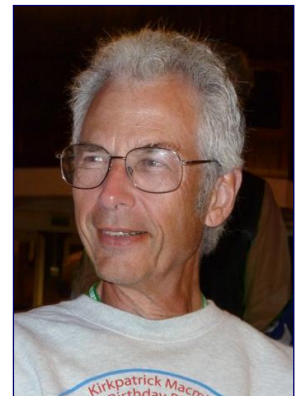
You may be wondering why we have said nothing about the Olympics or the weather. Basically, we were away for most of the games, though nostalgically watched the first weekend of cycle races that went through our former stomping grounds of Fulham, Putney and Richmond Park. As for this year's weather, fortunately we got off lightly, but it could be summed up in four short lines -

*It rained and it rained and rained and rained  
The average fall was well maintained  
And when the tracks were simply bogs  
It started raining cats and dogs.*

We hope you have had a good year and that you tell us all about it in your own way. We enjoy reading all the cards and interesting newsletters we receive each year, whether by post or email, along with the phone chats and the email greetings sent in lieu of a card. Keeping in touch with friends near and far enhances our Holiday Season, so do keep it up.

Wishing you and yours all the best for 2013!

*Pat & Mike*



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More photos (and/or larger versions) can be seen on [www.flickr.com/photos/pscycycle/sets](http://www.flickr.com/photos/pscycycle/sets). Annual reports are on [www.strauss.org.uk](http://www.strauss.org.uk).

