FRENCH COAST CYCLE TOUR, SUMMER 2014.

Another year, another tour on the bikes...

This time it was Steve Rhodes, Rob Foster, Martin Brice and Dave Key, Martin's pal from Oxford. On July 20th we met at Portsmouth to take the Brittany ferry overnight to St. Malo in France; the crossing was fine and we got in at 8 am. Cost £69 each.

Our plan was to head up the French coast to Calais, we had all the camping kit in our panniers. The weather started well and stayed that way – hurrah!

On day 1 we paused to admire Mont St. Michel, then spent the night at pretty Pontaulbault, having cycled 74 km. We prepared a huge salad, washed down with plenty of cheap vino.

This pattern continued, stopping for a coffee/bun when it was available, and shopping when we saw a supermarket, for a picnic lunch and supper. Usually the campsites cost around £5 each, and one was free!

Continuing through Normandy, we stopped to look at WW2 D-day sites – my favourite was 'Pegasus' bridge where the famous airborne assault was explained in an excellent big museum. Then we cut across the Cherbourg peninsula to the coastal resort towns like Villiers and Deauville, but didn't stop much.

Reaching the wide estuary of the river Seine, we had to cross on the vast and high Pont de Normandie, glad to have a narrow cycle lane. Then a steep pull (push) up onto the chalk hills to the north. There are famous cliffs at Etretat, where we squeezed our 4 tiny tents into a 'full' campsite. Lots of tourists and pricey pizza, so more camp cooking. Cycling laden bikes is hot work over the coastal hills, but better than rain!

Crecy battlefield is not much to see, but later we got to the Agincourt site, which has a proper visitors centre. The scenery inland from the channel ports is rural and empty – no shops, no cafes, no people. Steve leaves us to go back to Dieppe & home – and gets crop sprayed which makes the poor chap most unwell! The remaining three press on to Calais, 'My Ferry' to Dover and trains home.

In all, we covered 720 km in 10 days.

Rob F