

Thursday, September 16, 2010
Athabasca, Alberta

I am totally unprepared for this junket so I stayed up until midnight in a futile attempt to plan for the trip, or at least the first part where we must get from the airport to the hostel in Paris. Margaret and I are up at 5:10AM, (ecch!), we pack my suitcase and my camera case in the car, and we set off to collect Geoffrey at Sunset Beach. It is totally dark and we cannot find Geoff and Jocelyn's house on the first pass so we turn around and make a second - successful - search.

We are on our way to the Edmonton International airport at 6:05 and arrive some time around 8:30AM. We thank Margaret and send her on her way to work and then limp around in a stunned haze while obtaining our boarding passes, winding our way through the security search, and eventually getting on Westjet flight 142 and flying to Calgary. I am so stunned that I do not notice I am carrying a jack knife until it lands in the tray at the entrance to the security check so my long time companion is tossed in the trash by the inspector.

We arrive in Calgary around 11:00AM which gives us about five hours before Air Transat flight 408 begins its journey to Paris. We capture our luggage and debate whether to look for Andrew or have breakfast - breakfast wins with a big push from Geoffrey's pro-breakfast voting block. With breakfast out of the way, we find the Air Transat checkin and Andrew mysteriously appears while we are getting our boarding passes and this timely tryst allows all three of us to be seated near each other. We make our way through security and I seem to take twice as long as either Andrew or Geoffrey as I reassemble my camera bag, put on my belt and shoes etc. etc. etc.

At 5:00PM we are in the air and on our way. This is hour 12 of 36 hours of minimal sleep.

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**Friday, September 17, 2010
Paris, France**

We arrive at Terminal 3 at l'aéroport Charles De Gaulle á Roissy some where around 9:00AM local time, I change my watch to reflect local time which I have never done before but in my dotage I find I cannot count to nine or remember how far I should count like I could when Cathie and I went to England back in 1982.

I am anticipating a police check of my passport and at least a cursory examination by a customs agent like I saw in my French class and as I have experienced going to the USA in recent years. The reality is a disappointing anticlimax: the police officer glances at my passport, looks at me out of a corner of his eye to see if I resemble Osama Bin Ladin or Stephen Harper, decides to the contrary, stamps a random page in my passport, and sends me through. We go into the baggage area, collect our bags, and walk out an open door to freedom - there is no customs officer to be seen anywhere.

Another early discovery is that Terminal 3 is just a steel and concrete box used to temporarily hold passengers and their portable possessions. This is what I think an air terminal should be but Andrew and Geoffrey prefer something a bit more elaborate and do not hesitate to say so. (Later visits to CDG will prove that the other terminals are very modern and flashy so perhaps terminal 3 was built to service Aeroflot flights and thus minimize the culture shock suffered by Soviet visitors).



Charles De Gaulle Airport Terminal 3

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We walk across to the RER station where we find that the ticket machines refuse our credit cards and will take coins but not paper money. I have the only European cash (all bills) so I stand in line and purchase three tickets at the ticket booth. A pleasant few minutes takes us to la gare Paris-Nord where we hunt up the Métro and go to la Place de la République from which the orientation search was longer than the walk to l'Auberge de Jeunesse Paris Jules Ferry.

We arrive at the Jules Ferry Hostel around 11:00AM but, since it is a hostel, we cannot access our room until 2:00PM but we are able to stuff our luggage into two lockers and wander off to see the sights. Andrew has a GPS and I have a map and we spend some time having a tussle over which one to believe but eventually the map wins - not because it is better than the GPS but because the GPS has very poor connectivity with the satellites due to the surrounding buildings.



Paris Jules Ferry HI Hostel



A Paris Street near la gare de Lyon

A long meandering search for lunch ensues due to the lack of decisiveness by all three of us but eventually we invest €36.00 in some pizza, red wine, and espresso which fortifies us to move on in search of la gare de Lyon where Geoffrey buys a ticket to Switzerland. With that bit of preparatory work out of the way, we take the Métro to the Trocadero station which deposits us across the Seine river from the Eiffel Tower.

Getting from the Trocadero Métro station to the Eiffel tower requires us to walk a block or two and then into a park and down a steep incline to a bridge which leads directly to the Eiffel Tower. Crossing the bridge means that we must run a gauntlet of itinerant souvenir peddlers, scam artists, and beggars. I happily separate myself with something like CDN\$30.00 (I deny having any Euros) for an assortment of Eiffel Towers to bring home for gifts and bribes. The peddlers are starting to circle me with the intention of a strip search for more dollars but Andrew and Geoffrey



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intervene and I am led away before any serious harm can be done. We shell out €13.50 for the privilege of climbing the equivalent of 40 stories up the Eiffel Tower, there is another 80 stories to go but luckily there are no stairs.

It is pretty late when we get back to le Boulevard Jules Ferry so we stop at a late night grocery store and get a pretty good meal of bread, cheese, smoked meat, and fruit for €11.00.



Many pickpockets and confidence men haunt the Eiffel Tower

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**Saturday, September 18, 2010
Paris, France**

Andrew's cellphone wakes us up at 8:15AM so we go down stairs for the free continental breakfast. By the time I have done my ablutions, Geoffrey has already eaten and left. I sit with Andrew and a lady from Québec who is working here as an artist/painter which allows her to tour in an exotic locale at an affordable price.

We finally get everything in order and leave the hostel at 10:00AM bound for Notre Dame de Paris on l'Île de la Cité. We are about to find out that crowds are large today, probably because admission to many museums and historical sites is free on this day only. ("Doors Open Paris" or perhaps "des portes ouvertes à Paris"?)

It is, of course, some distance from the hostel to l'Île de la Cité and many adventures can be had on the way. We stumble across various curiosities including La tour Saint-Jacques which stands in a little park near la rue de Rivoli. The tower is all that remains of l'église Saint-Jacques-de-la-Boucherie which was constructed around 1510 and stood until 1793 when it was purchased and demolished to obtain its building materials.

Construction of the Notre Dame cathedral was started in 1163 and it was under construction for almost 200 years. The church is an immense and beautiful example of Gothic architecture and well worth visiting. After a few hours of admiring the cathedral inside and out we abandon l'Île de la Cité to find lunch which we locate at a little place which is presided over by a lady who only speaks French. We successfully cobble together enough French between the three of us to order something and I have a pate sandwich, a can of orange pop, a dessert, and a cup of espresso for a reasonable €8.50.

We return to l'Île de la Cité and accidentally find la Conciergerie which is part of the large and complex Palais de Justice. The Conciergerie was the home of the French monarchy until Charles V moved into the Louvre in 1347 after which it was used a prison, a torture chamber, and other less unpleasant government functions.





Salle des Gens d'Armes: one of the oldest parts of the Conciergerie

We walk a little further on and find an entrance to le Palais de Justice which in turn leads to la Sainte-Chapelle which was built by Louis IX and consecrated in 1248. La Sainte-Chapelle took five years to build (a bit less time than Notre Dame de Paris) and has the most wonderful windows and an equally wonderful interior, the windows are being restored at a cost of €1,000,000.00 per window. La Sainte-Chapelle was originally built to house Louis' collection of relics including the crown of thorns worn by Christ at his crucifixion. Louis paid 135,000 livres for the crown of thorns and only 40,000 livres to build the chapel.

After showing proper respect for la Sainte-Chapelle we stroll along the banks of the Seine and past the various groups of people lounging in the warm sun with a cold case of beer. How terribly civilized! We return to the mainland around 5:00PM, passing through a stairway that apparently doubles as a urinal.





The Upper Chapel of La Sainte-Chapelle

We find a cafe on la Rue du Louvre and drink espresso for an hour before making our way home. Once again we stop at the late night grocery and buy our supper. Bread and cheese are cheaper than in Canada - cheese is much much cheaper - and the other foods we buy are priced similarly to what we would pay in Canada.

We go to bed with the intention of being up at 6:00AM to see Geoffrey off to Switzerland.

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Sunday, September 19, 2010 Caen, Normandy, France

We grudgingly rise at 6:00AM because we need to have Geoffrey at la Gare de Lyon well before 8:00AM. Geoffrey has studied the route and gets us and our luggage through two Métro stations and into the train station by 7:30. We note with mild interest that there are a number of drunks haunting the Métro stations and cars at 7:30 on a Sunday morning, presumably they are returning home after a hard night of substance abuse but they are a remarkably lively bunch.

Andrew and I see Geoffrey off and then bumble our way to the Opera Métro station where we bumble around in the streets until we eventually find the RoissyBus stop (we have to ask a transit bus driver) and begin our journey back to the airport. The RER is not running today because of track work so we must take the slower and more expensive RoissyBus, that is okay because we see different scenery on the way back to CDG.

Andrew has arranged for us to rent a Volkswagen Golf so we approach the Hertz agent in Terminal 1 with a hopeful smile and soon we are in a diesel Golf with a manual transmission and a very fussy clutch. The easy part is very much over. Right away we cannot figure out how to open the trunk so we try to read the manual which is only in French and it proves to be incomprehensible (not at all like reading *Babar* in the original French). We return humbly to the rental agent who points out that the trunk handle is disguised as a Volkswagen logo.

The day starts to move very slowly. The clutch is very tricky and Andrew stalls the car repeatedly while trying to exit from the parking stall and escape from the garage which only reveals the exit after we have circled the perimeter two or three times (with half a dozen stalls and restarts).

We are planning to go around Paris and head West South West to Caen but instead we head North on the A1 Autoroute. We attempt to escape the A1 and head West but instead we exit into a rest area. We consult the GPS and plan an escape at the next rotary (a rotary is a traffic circle with a 100KPH speed limit) but the GPS battery goes dead half way through the rotary which foils our escape attempt. We continue north on the A1 and eventually make a successful bailout onto a secondary road going vaguely West.

We are still disoriented and not really in control when we arrive in the town of Creil (population 34,000) where we stop to catch our breath. I get out of the car to consult a map of Creil posted on the street (fortunately for us, most French towns post maps on the street) while Andrew tries to invent a way to power his GPS. It seems that perhaps we might be able to head toward Caen if we can exit Creil toward Beauvais. A young black woman who does not speak English comes along and attempts to give me directions to Beauvais - this entails a lot of explaining and re-explaining, hand waving, and eventually even the drawing of a crude map. This is marvelous good fun and I thank her profusely and pretend to understand completely once I reach the level of moderate confusion.



Creil, Oise, Picardie, France

This being lost and out of control stuff is thirsty work so Andrew and I agree to take an hour off for lunch. We find a bar and have an espresso and then step next door to a Chinese restaurant presided over by a young Chinese lass who does not speak English and who corrects my pronunciation of “vanilla”. The food is served cafeteria style and heated up in the microwave - we could have done that at home but home is a long way away.

Now that we are appropriately fortified, we set out in the direction of Beauvais which we are able to bypass and continue on toward Rouen - Andrew’s driving and my navigating are starting to show some small improvement and we are pointed in the general direction of Caen, we may survive the day after all. We get lost only once or twice more before arriving at Rouen and hardly get lost at all between Rouen and Caen.

We arrive in Caen around 6:00PM and get thoroughly lost for a period of an hour while we walk around and stare at the city maps posted throughout the town and then on an educated guess we head South and accidentally park in front of the Caen HI Hostel. The bounces have to go our way once in a while!



Caen HI Hostel

The hostel is in what appears to be a disused school that was built in the 1950s (lots of Caen was built in the 1950s, it is reported that a bunch of Canadians blew the place to pieces in June 1944). The hostel is presided over by a young and pretty blonde woman whose English is only marginally better than our French, she rents us a room and some sheets and sells us some breakfast tickets. Oh yeah, she also helps us to understand that supper is not to be had anywhere near here. We finish off the day by plugging in a 60Hz 115V battery charger and tripping the circuit breaker for the outlets and most of the lights. For that misdemeanor we are sent to bed without our supper.

Good night Caen, sleep tight.

Monday, September 20, 2010
Caen, Normandy, France

Andrew and I are up for breakfast at 8:30AM (it is the usual uninspired hostel breakfast of baguettes, corn flakes, coffee, and juice). We have plans to visit the Caen Memorial but there is an entire city between the hostel and the Caen Memorial so there is no telling what will actually occur.

We quit l'auberge and stroll up la Rue Armand Marie toward the centre of Caen. We turn right onto le Boulevard du Maréchal Lyautey and come upon la Cimetière de Vaucelles. Cemeteries appeal to our morbid nature so we slip in through the side entrance in the Northwest corner to learn about Norman Catholic burial customs and take pictures (naturally take pictures, it is a weakness we share). This cemetery is one of the three new cemeteries that were constructed in the second half of the nineteenth century as Caen outgrew its existing facilities. The Cimetière de Vaucelles contains curious things like little houses over some of the graves and a little fake Gothic mausoleum complete with gargoyles and what appears to be shell damage in some of the stonework. It is a big cemetery and there are a lot of graves clustered around June 1944.

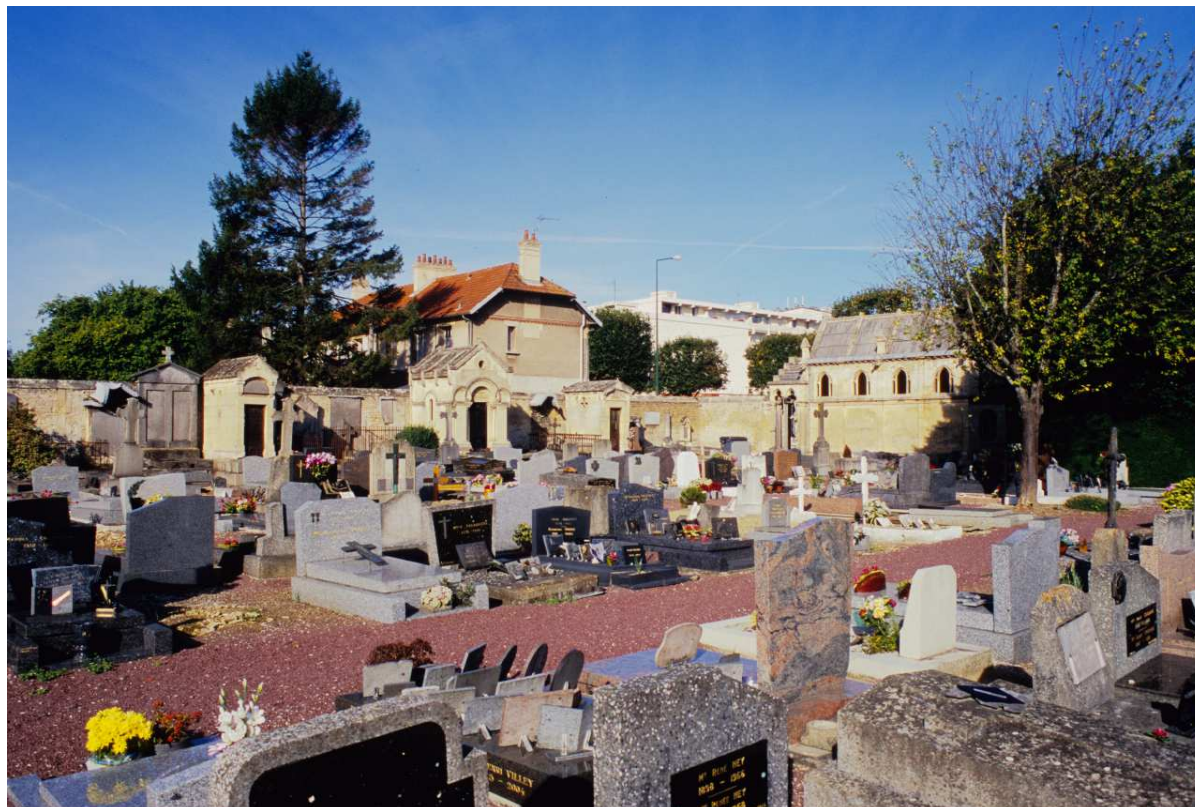


After spending a surprisingly long time in the cemetery we continue on toward the centre of Caen and discover the river Orn with its various locks and channels which today are mostly occupied by pleasure boats. I spend some time being entertained by a class of primary school children whose embattled teacher is attempting to teach them the art of paddling a kayak. It appears to be a bit like herding a couple dozen puppies.

After some more strolling along the canal and a leisurely lunch we saunter in the opposite direction to the Caen Memorial admiring churches and other old buildings until we come to the large Abbaye aux Hommes and its even larger formal gardens. In 1053 local boy who became great: Guillaume "le Bêtard" (who the English more reverently call William the Conquerer) married Matilda of Flanders against the wishes of Pope Leo IX and in 1063 in penance for this disobedience William began the construction of l'Abbaye aux Hommes while Matilda began the construction nearby of l'Abbaye aux Dames for the same reason. Like all such buildings, they continued to mutate for the next thousand years until in 1965 l'Abbaye aux Hommes became the Caen city hall.

Further straying from our path takes us to le Château de Caen which William started building in 1060 (only here the plaques refer to him as Guillaume "le Conquérant"). We waste a lot of time and film in the château since it is our first castle and a well preserved and historically significant castle at that. I discover, by further reading of the plaques, that a lot of work has gone into the restoration of the château since World War II and a lot of it has been inspired

and overseen by architectural historian Michel de Boüard who spent some time in the Mau-thausen concentration camp for not properly supporting the Nazis with their plans for world conquest.



Cimetière de Vaucelles, Caen

It is 5:00PM and we have seen all we can see of the castle without spending money so we reluctantly move on to find the Caen Memorial.

It turns out that the Caen Memorial is in the Northern suburbs of Caen and on the wrong side of the E46 autoroute. It is about six Km from the hostel to the Caen Memorial and only three from the château, that should take us hardly any time at all!...

It takes us the best part of an hour to reach the autoroute which is very busy and cannot be safely crossed on foot so more time is invested to back track and find our way to a pedestrian overpass. We arrive at the museum after 6:00, it closes at 7:00, and they charge €18.00 to get in - even after 6:00 - but the pass is good until closing time the next day so we cough up €36.00 and spend most of our hour watching a movie about the D-Day landing followed by a fast frontal assault on the gift shop.

While we are in the museum I ask one of staff how to pronoun “Caen” and she says it is said “ka” - the ‘n’ is not pronounced (or just barely?) and there is a nasal quality to the short ‘a’ sound. So I ask how to pronounce “Cannes” and it is said “kan” with the ‘n’ distinctly pronounced and no nasal quality to the short ‘a’. Okay? Okay!



l'Abbaye aux Hommes, Caen

The Caen Memorial consists of the museum and a surrounding park which contains the British memorial garden, the American memorial garden, the Canadian memorial garden, and what I will call a peace garden. Andrew and I prowl around the gardens taking pictures and reading plaques until after dark. I even do some flash photography, it shows my dedication to the art and reduces our chance of being mistaken for vandals.

We set out on our way home. A transit bus is spotted and we run to catch it, the driver sees us coming up to the door and turns off all the lights. How terribly curious. We hang around the bus stop for ten minutes until he turns the light back on and lets us come on board. We pretend we see this sort of thing every day but make a muddle of paying the fare. The bus takes us South to the trolley line which, in turn, takes us back to the hostel where once again we are sent to bed without our supper.



I hope Geoffrey is having an easier time finding dinner in Switzerland.

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A bit of le Château de Caen as seen from the moat



The lobby of the Caen Memorial featuring their trademark Hawker Typhoon

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**Tuesday, September 21, 2010
Caen, Normandy, France**

Another morning and another hostel breakfast. Andrew and I confer and decide to remain in the hostel for another day while we drive around the area looking at some of the D-Day battle memorials. We succeed in obtaining another day's accommodation but we are kicked down the hall to a different room.

Today we plan to go to Courseulles-sur-Mer to see the Juno Beach memorial and the nearby Canadian cemetery so we take the car. First we return to le Mémorial de Caen to continue our tour of the museum. We invest three hours in the place and I still haven't seen it all because I spend too much time transfixed and horrified by a display called "Guerre Mondiale, Guerre Totale" which translates to "World War, Total War" which inventories the ruthlessness of both the allied forces and the axis forces. The display argues that the behaviour of both sides were ruthless but the absolute malice of the Nazis and the Japanese sets them apart from the allies. There are horrifying displays here to emphasize the difference like a large map of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp (it includes a large warehouse that held all the goods and clothes taken from the arriving inmates which the inmates sarcastically named "Kanada" after our home and native land which they popularly perceived as a land of endless wealth). There is also a display exploring the science of mass execution which includes the application of the pesticide Zyklon-B and one or two of the cans that held it on its journey from the factory to the gas chamber. It's enough to give me the shivers.



The Caen Memorial as seen from behind in the Peace Garden

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I have a morbid interest in military hardware and some of favourites are on display here including the Hawker Typhoon and the V2 rocket. Oh yeah, they have an East German Trabant and a MiG 21 in their cold war display.

Andrew and I have scheduled two hours for this operation but it is extended to three by the time we find each other, prowl the gift shop again, and stop for lunch. I embarrass myself in the lunch counter, not with my inadequate French but with my inadequate vision which frequently causes me to fail to see that a wall mounted menu is offering A or B and not A and B, I regularly do this in both official languages. This will prove not to be a problem in Dutch speaking areas where I will never have the faintest notion what has been said or written.

We set out for Courseulles-sur-Mer at last and this time the trip goes fairly smoothly because Andrew has charged up the GPS and I do not have any idea where we are going so I am unable to contribute a dissenting opinion. We find Juno beach with little difficulty due to signs appearing when we need them most. We park the car and walk toward what we presume to be the ocean, a local man suspects our destination and suggest a more direct route which we gratefully take.



Courseulles-sur-Mer, Calvados, Basse-Normandie, France

Juno beach proves to be very sandy and the many concrete defensive emplacements left from the Atlantic wall are slowly being buried in sand and in many cases they are also tilting and sinking. The beach environment is perceived to be quite fragile and there are areas which are fenced and marked with signs urging us not to walk on them. The beach and the paved pathway beside it are intended to be a park and an area for jogging and other fitness activities.

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These uses seem to get equal billing with it being a memorial to the D-Day (J-Jour? N'est-ce pas?) invasion. Andrew and I wander in opposite directions for an hour or more and do not cross paths until we reach the Canadian Juno Beach Museum. My favourite moment on the beach is when I come around to the front of a half sunken pillbox and find a family with small children play in its shade on the side facing the ocean - that is how it should be.



A repurposed German bunker on Juno Beach

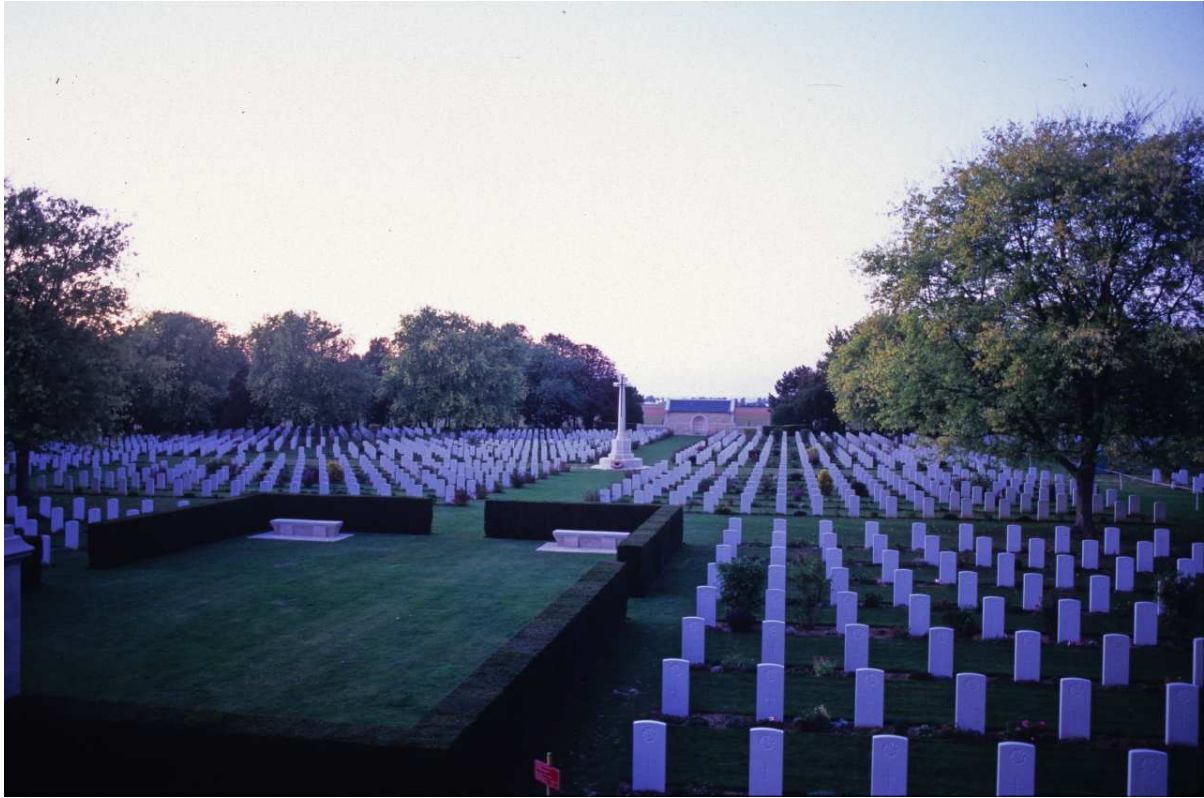
The Juno Beach Centre is the only Canadian museum on the D-Day beaches and it was built by a non-profit association and not by the Canadian government. The museum was opened on June 6, 2003 - 59 years after the Normandy invasion. The museum is largely aimed at children and people who don't know much about Canada and its role in the second world war and doesn't enlighten either one of us with much in the way of new information. Of course, Andrew and I are pretty jaded after already spending three hours in the Caen museum so my opinion is subject to review on my next visit to France. To contradict the above, the Juno Beach Centre has a guided tour of the beach and its artifacts (which I join while it is in progress) that is interesting and informative.

It is late in the day when we leave Courseulles-sur-Mer and look for the Beny-sur-Mer Canadian Cemetery which is curiously located at Reviers and where we arrive around 7:00PM as darkness is falling. The Beny-sur-Mer Canadian Cemetery contains 2,049 headstones and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is replacing the headstones at the time of our visit (even though the headstones are still quite serviceable) so we get to see how this work is done. There are two towers at the entrance to the cemetery and one can climb the steps to get a panoramic view of the cemetery but the steps are amazingly steep and a person would have

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to be over seven feet tall to use them in comfort - a remarkable thing considering that many of their visitors are elderly.

I find one headstone that says, "An Unknown Canadian Soldier from a Canadian Regiment June 1944". I will see many similar stones in the days to come.



Beny-sur-Mer Canadian Cemetery near Courseulles-sur-Mer

We leave the cemetery after dark and make our way back to Caen on unfamiliar crowded high speed roads in the dark, it is rather hair raising at times. We are tired of being sent to bed without our supper so we make our way down town to find dinner and a beer but everything is closed, around 9:00PM we find a single Kebob shop where we obtain a meat sandwich (a kebob no doubt) and a €2.00 can of beer. Once again I demonstrate my inability to read a menu but Andrew takes over and arranges for me to be fed.

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**Wednesday, September 22, 2010
Caen, Normandy, France**

How many days is this in Caen? Three? Well we will make it four and set out for the North tomorrow.

We are up for the customary breakfast and then it is a walk down to le Boulevard du Maréchal Lyautey where we had spotted a place named “Lavomatique”. The laundry machines are American made Whirlpools and their use is very familiar to us in either language. Paying for the machine is interesting: load the machine with soap and laundry, note the number on the front, walk across the room to a wall mounted vending machine, push the appropriate number, and feed in money until the washer or dryer starts. Some guesswork may be required but the vending machine gives change.

We stroll down the street for some espresso while the clothes wash themselves. We drink the espresso while lounging comfortably in the sun and then stroll back to move the laundry into the dryer. This café noir stuff is an easily acquired habit.

Upon returning with our laundry we ask about a grocery store at the hostel front desk which leads to a sunny fifteen minute walk to the East to a large American style supermarket named “Intermarché” where I finally buy a washcloth and towels while Andrew collects a large bag of bread, cheese, meat, and fruit (I contributes two sets of cutlery). We return home by trolley, eat a picnic lunch on the grass beside the hostel, pack the remains in the car, and blow out for Bayeux.



Rue Des Chanoines, Bayeux, Calvados, Normandie, France

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Bayeux is about 30 Km from Caen and less than 10 Km from Omaha Beach which allowed it to be the first French city liberated after D-Day and with very little damage because the Germans were preoccupied with Caen. We park the car somewhere in the centre of Bayeux, wander past the local cathedral, admire the quaint streets, and ask at the tourist information booth about le Musée Mémorial de la Bataille de Normandie. It is perhaps a 15 minute walk to the South we are told. We ignore the signss urging us to visit the famous Bayeux Tapestry (made by Queen Matilda herself) and head South to the Battle of Normandy Museum and pay our admission a bare 90 minutes before closing time.



The museum seems to focus on the American contribution to the war but it has a good collection of American and German vehicles and ordinance with a smaller representation of commonwealth equipment. They have a D8 Caterpillar that was used by the Canadian army and saw 50 years of postwar use by a local company before being obtained by the museum. Curiously the museum painted it up to be a US Army bulldozer instead of an RCA bulldozer.



Inside the Battle of Normandy Memorial and Museum

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We are thrown out after a hour and 15 minutes which is 15 minutes before closing time and before I have seen even half of the displays. Sigh. We prowl around the museum grounds and admire the small collection of allied and German tanks that are on display. It is a collection of maybe six vehicles with the German tanks in particular being in poor condition.



A badly neglected German Jagdpanzer 38(t) tank destroyer

We take a short walk down le Boulevard Fabian Ware to a large British war cemetery which holds about 4,000 British graves, 200 commonwealth graves, and 500 German graves. There are 338 graves of unknown soldiers including at least one Canadian. I see two headstones joined together to hold the names of four RAF servicemen, I presume the four men died in one airplane and it was not possible to tell the bodies apart. These cemeteries are a very emotional experience: acres and acres of men who died violently in their youth. Many of the German soldiers were in their 40s.

We return in the dark along the usual collection of fast and narrow French roads. Supper is some of the food we bought at the supermarket in the morning.

Thursday, September 23, 2010
Arras, Pas-de-Calais, France

This is Geoffrey's twenty-eighth birthday. How are you spending your birthday Geoff? Carreening down a mountain at 60kph?

Today we finally check out of the hostel and head North to Arras which will get us within easy reach of the Beaumont-Hamel and Vimy Ridge memorials. The GPS is fully charged and the map has been consulted so we pack our bags, load the car, and drive to Dieppe. The GPS guides us to the centre of Dieppe where, with some hesitation, we park on the sidewalk like everybody else. We scout around on foot and find a map which shows how to get a bit closer to the beach so we drive over that way and park in a parking lot this time.

We buy a portable lunch and stroll down to the now deserted beach to eat it beside one of the many closed beach front snack bars. This is September 23 and a bit chilly for lounging around the beach. The beach is completely covered in the fist sized rocks which so effectively bogged down the allied vehicles on August 19, 1942. I stand on the beach and recognize the beach front buildings and the cliffs to the South out of the old photos from the Dieppe raid. The beach itself is significantly changed with a raised concrete walkway some 500 metres in length and five metres high which protects an elaborate aquatic and athletic centre from the sea. I have no idea how such an obstacle would have change the battle at Dieppe in 1942 but it sure would have changed it. A variety of plaques commemorating the Dieppe raid are attached to the promenade and the aquatic centre building - everything can be put to use.



We move off the beach at the South end and come to la Square du Canada where the Canadian Peace garden shelters on the North side of le château de Dieppe. The square and the peace garden were erected by the city of Dieppe to commemorate not only the liberation of Dieppe on September 1, 1944 but also events going back as far as the 16th century. I am surprised to find the peace garden but Andrew is not, he did more homework than I did.

We are both surprised by the château. Le Château de Dieppe was founded in 1188, it has had a chequered career of being destroyed and restored, and it looks every bit its age. There is a fine arts museum in the château which has the honour of guarding Camille Saint-Saëns' personal papers and possessions. There is a ticket booth right beside the peace garden which sells admission to the museum, the ticket booth attendant tells us that the museum is closed but we can go up the ancient spiral steps behind her and visit the castle itself. Andrew and I are much more interested in castles than we are in fine arts so we accept this offer with enthusiasm and pass through the ancient door, climb the ancient steps, and stroll the ancient grounds which offer such a panoramic view of Dieppe.



Dieppe looking North from the top of the castle

Upon recovering our composure we return to the streets of Dieppe where Andrew spots a photography store so I am able to purchase four camera batteries and five rolls of slide film (I was running very short on both items). What a relief! I was worried about going into withdrawal or having to finish my trip using Andrew's spare digital SLR - how painful that would have been! This is the first film purchase of a continuing series, by the time I return home I will have chewed through 36 rolls of film. Film is cheap and plentiful in Europe.

We find the car and leave Dieppe with the GPS programmed to guide us to Arras but the Dieppe streets and the Dieppe traffic nudge us against our will onto a secondary road which after 20Km lands us in the little town of Envermeu where we stop to buy fuel - this is the one and only time that Andrew and I refuel the car. A small amount of searching lands us at a place named "Shopi" where we pull up behind the only other customer at the moment and I step out to find a pump that supplies diesel. I can't find a diesel pump for two important reasons: I don't



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know the French word for diesel (it is “gazole”) and the only customer is using the only diesel pump. I ask the attendant. He does not understand English and does not know what diesel is but through some complex array of arm waving I make myself understood and he tries to tell me which pump it is and I don’t understand. The attendant leaves his kiosk and leads me to the diesel pump which is abandoned at that moment by the previous customer. Aha! I ask Andrew to release the fuel filler cover but he does not know how (we know better than to try the manual), we form an adhoc committee and fumble around the drivers seat coming up empty banded, I appeal to the attendant who sighs and shows us it is that it is hidden in the door pocket (THE DOOR POCKET?!), we invest in about 40 litres of gazole, gather up the shreds of our dignity, and leave.

We arrive in Arras as it is becoming dark and find ourselves in a big square named, appropriately, “la Grande Place”. That is the thing about a GPS, if you are not sufficiently specific about a city destination then you never quite know where you will end up. La Grande Place is a very large cobbled square surrounding a very large and very full cobbled parking lot, The square is surrounded by a ring of impressive 18th century stone buildings. We go searching for a hotel with a vacancy and eventually wind up at the “Hotel les Trois Luppars” where we obtain a small but comfortable room for €75.00 where we pretend to watch television until we fall asleep.

So what does “Luppars” mean?



La Grande Place in Arras
The Hotel les Trois Luppars is the red brick building at the distant left

Europe 2010

Friday, September 24, 2010
Lille, Nord-Pas de Calais, France

The full parking lot of the night before is empty in the morning. In the light, with the parking lot mostly empty, the square is very impressive - it looks like something out of a Victor Hugo novel.

We retrace our way to the tourist office that we saw last night and obtain directions to both the Beaumont-Hamel memorial and the Vimy memorial. Since I am there I ask about postage stamps and am directed to the local post office but I obviously do not understand the directions because I lead Andrew on a wild goose chase to nothing much. I ask a passing drunk for directions to the post office but I cannot understand him and he cannot understand me so I give up and allow Andrew to lead me back to the car which we then drive some 40Km South to the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial.

Andrew and I pass many cemeteries on the way to Beaumont-Hamel and we stop at four of them, I never figure out if Andrew knows where he is going or is just very lucky for he does not act surprised when we find a cemetery and he does not act surprised when we drive up beside Beaumont-Hamel either.



Bucquoy Road Cemetery, near Ficheux, 10Km South of Arras



The Beaumont-Hamel battlefield viewed from the Newfoundland Regiment memorial

The Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial is located on the 74 acre site where on July 1, 1916 the 1st Battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment fought on the first day of the battle of the Somme. The 1st battalion had 1,000 men on strength before the battle with 780 officers and men committed to the battle and the rest held in reserve. The battle had already been lost when the Royal Newfoundland Regiment went into action at 9:15AM, within an hour 310 men of all ranks were killed and 374 were wounded including all 22 commissioned officers. That is nine men to the acre and that is only the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and doesn't include all the other casualties in the British 29th Division to which the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was attached.

The failed attack of July 1, 1916 was remedied by the British 51 Highland Division who took Beaumont-Hamel on November 13, 1916 at an additional cost in lives. Hunter's Cemetery, originally a shell hole in which 40 or more members of the 51 highlanders were hastily buried, is the only mass grave at the Beaumont-Hamel site and that is testimony to the misery the 51



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Highlanders went through. The Beaumont-Hamel site also contains a memorial to the 51 Highland Division which overlooks the “Y” revine.

There are three cemeteries in these 74 acres and they hold about 600 bodies but there are at least 15 cemeteries within a kilometer or two.

We park across the road from the memorial as we are supposed to and walk up to the gate where we are greeted by a young woman with a very Canadian accent. I tell her how much at home she makes me feel after a week of trying to speak and understand French, she tells us that she is from Newfoundland and she is doing her best not to use too many Newfie expressions, she further tells me that the memorial is manned by young men and women from Canada and half of them are from Newfoundland.

Andrew and I visit the trenches and the cemeteries, read the signs warning us about unexploded munitions, and are utterly horrified by so much slaughter taking place in such a small space. We go into the visitors' centre to look at the interpretive displays, I remark to one of the staff about the unexploded munitions signs and ask who mows the grass, I am told that sheep mow the grass but they are away on holiday today.



Hunter's Cemetery near the “Y” revine

I ask another staff member where we might find some lunch and we are told that we will find a nice little restaurant in Auchonvillers (the British soldiers called it Ocean Villas) just up the road on our way to Lille. We accept this recommendation and set out for Auchonvillers.