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On the left side of the road just as we enter Auchonvillers is a tiny parking lot in front of a little garden beside a little old building and there is a sign telling us that this is a restaurant and hostel with the very Gaulic name of “Avril Williams Guest House and Tea Rooms”. I, being visually impaired, am not aware of just what kind of establishment I am entering until the waiter speaks to me in United Kingdom English. I am comfortably at home once again and even more when I notice the chickens scratching about outside the open garden door and hear the rooster crowing. As Andrew and I are eating our supper, a cat comes in to introduce himself to me and to be petted. So I pet him and say hello. I comment to the waiter about the cat and he tells me that the dog also makes a habit of coming in to greet the guests. We must leave this oasis so I step up to the cash which is overseen by the proprietor, Ms Avril Williams herself, who speaks to me not only in a UK accent but a working class London accent (I bite myself, we must have died in a car crash and gone to heaven). I ask her why such sounds are being uttered in a small village of 150 honest souls in the French countryside. Avril says she moved there 20 years ago and opened a restaurant. I ask why. She says that they had nothing to lose. I ask how that has worked out for her. She says that they have been there 20 years and a number of relatives have moved out to join them.

They have a website, look them up. Oh yeah, Peter and Linda Driedger stayed there once, Peter is always ahead of me.



**HI Hostel, 12 Rue Malpart 59000 Lille**

Time is a wasting and we have miles to go before we sleep. We hurl North in a cloud of diesel smoke and make our wild way to Lille where the GPS guides us almost, but not quite,

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to the door of l'Auberge de Jeunesse de Lille. Yes, another youth hostel, and one for which Andrew has obtained us a reservation. This hostel is in one wing of a large institutional post-war building which future observation will reveal to be a former maternity hospital: lots and lots of space but not especially well equipped.

The day is not yet done. We find our room, mark our territory by tossing our luggage on an unclaimed bed, and set out to find the Lille train station and Geoffrey who is supposed to arrive there this evening. The usual wandering in circles and staring at street signs sets us on the right path and we find a train station but not the right train station - there appear to be three train stations. We step outside and are slapped in the face by the sight of Euralille: one of the largest, most modern, and most ostentatious shopping complexes to be found anywhere. We flee from Euralille and find the third train station where Geoffrey has already arrived. It is now a matter of winding our way back to the hostel and eventually to bed.



**Eralille in case you cannot tell**

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**Saturday, September 25, 2010**  
**Lille, Nord-Pas de Calais, France**

Our reunited company is up bright and early to face a warm shower and a planned visit to the Canadian Vimy Memorial, it appears that we will have a cloudy and possibly rainy day.

Andrew and Geoffrey confirm their earlier suspicions that the promised WiFi service is largely theoretical - it is more accurately small fi since it does not reach more than 1% of the building. I am not much interested in their problems since I don't have a computer.

We all seek solace in the Official Hostel Breakfast and then Geoff and I part company with Andrew so that we can find "le bureau de poste" where we purchase 20 stamps. This is an improvement on Arras where our search for a post office ended in failure. Perhaps its a matter of preparation, here in Lille we are carrying a map with a circle drawn around the location of the post office. The mission is accomplished successfully so we return to the hostel covered in glory.



**Lille and the city hall belfry as seen from our bedroom window**

Andrew, Geoffrey, and I repair to the car and we head in a vaguely Southerly direction for the promised visit to the Vimy Memorial. The GPS ensures that we find the village of Vimy with a minimum of fuss but finding our way from Vimy to the Vimy Memorial proves problematic especially since I can't read any of the signs and Geoff can't read them either because those two guys in the front seat block his view. I view my occupancy of the front seat as a privilege of seniority but this sign reading problem forces me to suggest that I sit in the back. The suggestion is soon implemented with an accompanying improvement in navigation and we arrive at the Vimy Memorial in short order. There are benefits to the back seat, I am quieter back there and I can spend my time reading and sleeping.

The Vimy Memorial at 250 acres is three times the size of the Beaumont-Hamel site and is manned by young people from Canada just like Beaumont-Hamel. Again like Beaumont-Hamel, the Vimy memorial has both restored and unrestored trenches, craters from mine explosions and artillery shells, and a wide array of unexploded munitions necessitating the fencing of some areas and the contracting out of the grounds maintenance to a flock of sheep.

Here at Vimy there are a collection of restored tunnels through which we might be able to take a guided tour. The rock here is predominantly chalk which made it relatively easy and safe to build tunnels (which the British called subways) so tunneling was practiced more here than in most other places along the Western front. Both the British and the Germans made tunnels and they used them for the same purposes: to dig under the enemy lines to plant explosive mines, to allow soldiers to be moved very close to the enemy lines, and as a protected place to put command posts, hospitals, and stores.



**The Vimy Monument, some shell holes, and undetonated explosives**

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The down side of the chalk is that it is porous so if it rains it also rains in the tunnels. We are informed that we don't get to visit the tunnels if there is significant rain because they become wet, slippery, and uncomfortable. The original occupants did not get that consideration.

The guide tells us that the tunnels are better lit by far now than they were during the great war but since they are none too bright now they must have been extremely dark when they were in use. We are told that the dispatch runners were granted the privilege of staying in the tunnels when they were not running some place, this may have been their only perk since apparently the snipers watched for dispatch runners and tried to shoot them ensuring that the typical runner had a short career. We are told Adolf Hitler was a dispatch runner. Whatever he may have been, Hitler was not a coward.



**Touring the trenches and the tunnels under ideal conditions**

The infrastructure of the front line trenches turns out to be much more elaborate than I would have ever imagined. There were many many kilometers of trenches and tunnels along with all the essentials of a well turned out war - anything could be had provided it did not improve safety or comfort. It is terrible to imagine how much murderous effort could be invested in a war that nobody wanted to fight.

The Germans built a lot of their trenches and bunkers out of bricks and concrete but the British lines had a more temporary nature to them being built out of boards and sand bags - it was believed that a more substantial construction method would demoralize the troops by suggesting that they would be there for years. I would think that wet, cold, filth, disease, vermin, and death would be demoralizing too and by 1917 they must have caught on to the fact that they had been there for years.

the Vimy battle field is located on a high point that, especially the German side, looks out over miles of countryside and the Vimy Monument is placed on Hill 145 which is the highest point in the immediate area. It is a walk of perhaps 500 metres from the preserved battlefield site across a vast expanse of smooth mown grass to the top of Hill 145 and the Vimy Monument itself. The Vimy Monument design was selected from out of 160 candidates and was unique at the time because it expresses grief, loss, and sacrifice rather than glory and victory. Construction of the monument was commenced in 1925 and it took 10 years to complete, it was unveiled on July 26, 1936 by King Edward VIII - just in time for the next war. The monument was restored to its original beauty over a three year period starting in 2004. The written material on the restoration expresses the hope that the modern techniques used will allow the monument to stand

out in the weather for a much longer time before requiring another reconstruction - not that the 75 years that the original construction survived is all that bad.

A person standing on the parapet of the Vimy Monument can see out over at least a 10km radius and there are 7,000 Canadian soldiers buried in 30 cemeteries in that radius and that is



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only a tiny fraction of the 1,000 World War 1 cemeteries in France and the hundreds of thousands of people buried in them. It is a wonderful monument and well worth visiting if you are in the area.

At the end of our visit we are footsore and ravenous but there is no food to be had at the Vimy Memorial so we set out to return to Lille and stop at a town along the way in a futile search for a restaurant. Failing to find a restaurant, we stop at a bakery for some portable food including a quiche and the French equivalent of a pizza and then make our way through the hair raising French traffic to Lille.

Ah hostel sweet hostel!



**The view from the Vimy Monument**

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**Sunday, September 26, 2010**  
**Lille, Nord-Pas de Calais, France**

Lille is the least interesting place that we have been so far. Oh my gosh! Did I say that? That isn't what the Lille tourism web site says.

We are sending Andrew and the Volkswagen back to Paris today and I suspect that Andrew will be glad to say goodbye to the car, not that there is anything wrong with the car - the problem is the places where he has to drive it! Two days as a pedestrian in Paris will do Andrew a lot of good.

I go to the front desk and rent the three beds for one more night. I rent all three even though Andrew will not be here - this allows us to stay in the same room and ensures that we do not inherit a new room mate. I welcome the chance to be both selfish and slovenly.

Well Geoffrey, what shall we do with ourselves now? We do what I always do when I have time on my hands, we go to a laundromat. Once again the money goes into a central vending machine and remotely controls the washers and dryers. We have a strange negotiation with a woman who needs our money to make her washing machine run but when we are done we have just as much money as we started out with. We will be locked out of the hostel from 11:00AM to 4:00PM so we take heroic measures to get our laundry back in the room on time.



**A random side street in Lille**



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For want of anything more important to do, we got to “le Palais des Beaux-Arts” which is the second largest general interest art museum in France behind the Louvre. The museum building was purpose built to be an art museum in the late 19th century and houses a large collection of 17th to 19th century European paintings, sculpture, and ceramics. This is the Northwest corner of France and the museum reflects that by emphasizing the works of Flemish, Dutch, and Belgian artists like Van Dyck, Rubens, and Carpeaux. Way down in the basement we discover 15 three dimensional models of the cities fortified by Sébastien Le Prestre, Seigneur de Vauban in the 17th century. These relief maps were commissioned by the king in the 18th century are made out of papier-mâché, moss, and other perishable materials so they are displayed under extremely dim light to slow their deterioration. We spend an amazing amount of time in the Palais des Beaux-Arts considering that we are a pair of unlettered ruffians.



**Le Palais des Beaux-Arts**

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I left my tooth brush in Arras so when we leave the museum in late afternoon we set out to find a purveyor of brosses à dents. Bear in mind that it is Sunday afternoon. We find that all the drug stores are closed (they seem to all be marked with a green cross) and the small grocery stores only seem to sell groceries, we find one shop that appears to have a wider range of merchandise than the other retailers but we are told that they do not carry tooth brushes.

The moving finger writes; and, having writ, moves on. It is now evening and we think maybe we should have bought food in one of those grocery stores we saw. We move back, the grocery stores are all closed, we move on.

We return to the hostel and Geoffrey notices the faded marks toward the top of the building which say distinctly: “Maternite Henri Salengro”. I’m not surprised that the hostel is in a failed maternity hospital, the whole city is falling apart.



**Place du Theatre, Lille**

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**Monday, September 27, 2010**  
**Bruges, West Flanders, Belgium**

Today we shall leave Lille for the almost randomly selected destination of Bruges in Belgium.

I have a last errand to run. I leave Geoffrey to surf the web and I set out to find a mailbox and a tooth brush. I prowl the streets but fail to see a mailbox so I go to the post office. I assume that the fault is mine and the French have street mailboxes like every other country but maybe not... On the way home I take a route that I assume should lead me to a pharmacy but I do not see one. I reach the hostel empty handed and continue on a short distance to the pharmacy I had seen the previous day, it is small and it takes little effort to find a rack of tooth brushes, select one, and pay for it without revealing my inability to understand either of our official languages. This operation took four times longer than it would have if I known where to go beforehand.



**la Gare de Lille-Flanders, Lille**

Geoffrey and I load up, say our au revoirs, and rush off in the direction of la Gare de Lille-Flanders which we assume would be the place to catch a train to Bruges, Belgium. We arrive at 9:45AM and purchase a couple tickets for the 10:08 train to Bruges via Ghent. About now it is apparent that the public address system is broken because most announcements consist of a buzzing noise instead of words. We check the departures board and find the 10:08 train but there is no track number which implies that it is not ready to board. The departure time comes and goes and no track number appears beside the 10:08 train to Ghent, at 10:08 the 10:08 train entry is removed from the departure board. Geoffrey has ridden the SNCF to Switzerland and returned unscathed but this is my first exposure to it and I am getting

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agitated and angry. Geoffrey is not agitated and would like to give me a strong sedative but he does not have one. I accost an SNCF official and plead for information about the 10:08 train to Bruges - two other pairs of English speaking people are asking the same question - the official is unperturbed and tells me I ain't riding no 10:08 train no how. The official's announcement horrifies the gathering Anglos, he is still unperturbed and tells us to take the 11:08 train to Courtrai which will leave from track 14 and we can use our present ticket even though it names a different time and a different route. Track 14 is located at some other location so we go to some other location and there we find a track 14 and a train to Audenarde via Courtrai and discover that this is the track from which the train to Ghent would have left if there was one. I will not be satisfied so easily and remained in a state of total agitation until we finally board the train and leave the station. At Courtrai we go to track five and catch a train to Bruges without incident. I settle into my seat and wrap the shards of my dignity around me like a ragged coat.

We arrive at the Bruges train station around 1:00PM where I immediately seek out a bathroom and find that it is co-ed and presided over by two elderly women who sit behind a table stacked high with coinage. I pay the ladies €0.40 for the privilege of using their facility and they add the coins to their teetering stacks. I pass the sinks and urinals to a stall and am amused to find that that it contains a healthy amount of graffiti - in spite of being co-ed and presided over a pair of elderly ladies.

By now it is apparent that no French is written or spoken here. We find the signage largely incomprehensible but everybody speaks Flemish accented English so we should get along just fine.

We seek out the tourist information booth where we obtain a map of Bruges and updated information on the short list of hostels that Geoffrey had pulled off the internet. I ask about the rumoured Atlantic Wall Museum in Ostende. I have my pronunciation corrected and I am told that the museum is not actually in Ostende but in Domein Raversijde, I tell her to write that down because I have already forgotten it and she writes in a very different alphabet than I am using here and provides a brief explanation on how to get there.

We walk across a busy street, through a park, and into the old city of Bruges where we weave through the twisting cobbled streets, and at Dweersstraat 26 we find The Passage Hotel and Hostel which is reached by turning into a tiny and almost invisible passage (duh!) and entering the side door of an ancient building with an ancient pub and a young desk clerk. We ask the young lady about a room and she tells us that the hotel is full but the hostel is not and puts us in a room on the second floor (counting in the European manner of main, one, two) which is intended to house four people in close confinement, the bathroom down the hall as usual.





**A typical Bruges street, but wider than some**

Bruges was originally fortified by Julius Caesar but the Bruges of today was built between the 12th and 15th centuries during the time when it was one of the most wealthy trading cities in Europe. The passage to the sea silted up and became unusable around 1500 and the city collapsed financially which led to the population dropping from 200,000 to 50,000. Due to poverty, not much changed in Bruges between 1500 and 1800 and that led to it becoming a tourist destination in the 19th century and that is why tourists go there today, we want to see the ancient walls, canals, buildings, and cobble streets. Around 2:00PM Geoffrey and I set out to tour the ancient streets.

Geoffrey and I wander through the streets in a not unpleasant rain photographing buildings, canals, streets, store windows. I run out of slide film and we stop at a photo store but they only carry print film so I start shooting prints - yecch! We browse the chocolate and lace shops (both chocolate and lace are Belgian specialties) and stock up on both, chocolate is low priced compared to Canada so we must restrain our appetite to



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avoid early onset diabetes. We have dinner at a restaurant with outdoor tables beside a canal where we watch the swans, ducks, and gulls while dining under a threat of more rain.

We return to the hostel to drop off all the stuff we bought and then set out to find a pub which claims to have more kinds of beer under one roof than any other place in Bruges. Geoffrey has carefully researched the pubs of Bruges and shows a surprisingly deep knowledge of Belgian beers which seem to have a reputation for quality of which I was unaware. I follow Geoffrey's recommendations and we drink a couple beers while discussing wives, daughters, and sweethearts - those are two of the things that healthy well adjusted men like to do.

On our return to the hostel we find that we share our room with a young Scottish couple who are on their way home from a low budget European tour. We talk together about the joys of hostel touring and they make a number of recommendations based on their few weeks of experience and one of them is that we check out the website:

<http://www.hostelworld.com>

when looking for places to stay. We are also told that Berlin was the highlight of their trip and we receive suggestions on where to go, what to see, and where to stay while in Berlin. The distaff side of the couple carefully writes all this in the back of my diary for future reference - good thing too since I forget it all as fast as she tells me.



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**The view from our dinner table**



**A street facing onto one of Bruges's many canals**

**Tuesday, September 28, 2010  
Bruges, West Flanders, Belgium**

Our room mates are up offensively early because they must catch a train to Amsterdam and then a flight to Glasgow. The Scottish couple used the words, “Offensively early”, it is not offensive to us because we can ignore them and sleep for another hour or more and then head down for the complimentary breakfast at 9:00 - the breakfast is served by the desk clerk of yesterday and is not much different from the HI Hostel breakfasts except that we express our affection for espresso so she makes us good quantities of espresso.

Today we get to test the instructions which are to lead us to the Atlantic Wall Museum. The lady at the tourist information booth told us to take the train from Bruges to Ostende and catch the Kusttram to Domein Raversijde. It sounds so easy doesn't it? We begin our experiment by going back to the train station where peering at electronic signboards and blustering at the ticket office reveals that the train to Ostende runs once an hour, takes 15 minutes, and costs about €8.00 return. We buy tickets and are soon in Ostende where, upon stepping out of the station, we look down the street and spy the platform where one catches the coastal tram. So far, so good.



**Ostende, Belgium: Centre of town near the harbour**

Belgium has only got about 70Km of coastline and the Kusttram or Coast Tram runs the length of it from Knokke on the Netherlands border to Da Penne on the French Border. Bruges is about 10Km from the Dutch border and inland about 10km from its port at Zeebruge, Ostende is about half way along the coast - midway between France and Holland. It



takes over two hours to ride the tram from Knokke to Da Penne, I think we should do that but Geoff wisely disagrees. We buy return tickets (there is no place to buy a ticket at Domein Raversijde) and 20 minutes later we walk across the highway from the Domein Raversijde tram stop, climb some steps, and take a path that guides us to the Atlantic Wall Museum.



### **Domein Raversijde: the Atlantic Wall**

The museum is located on an estate owned by the Belgian royal family. In 1904 King Leopold II built a summer house on this site but in 1914 the site was taken over by the German army who built a fortification to protect Ostende harbour and burnt down the summer house so that enemy ships could not use it as a land mark. In 1940 the German army moved in again and rebuilt the fortification which eventually becomes part of the Atlantic Wall.

At the end of both wars the Belgium royal family prevented the local authorities removing the weapons, fortifications, and other things left behind by the occupation forces and today this site and those artifacts form the best surviving remnant of not only the World War 2 Atlantic Wall but also of the occupying army in World War 1. Of course those surviving artifacts probably reduced the German army's workload when they reoccupied the site in 1940.

Geoffrey and I do not get to move in because we are not the German army and the museum does not open for another three hours. We return to Ostende and lounge around for three hours photographing the harbour and drinking coffee. A good lunch fortifies us for our second assault on the Atlantic Wall Museum.



**A small arms repair shop in an underground bunker at the Atlantic Wall**

At 2:30PM we are back at the Atlantic Wall Museum where we pay our money and receive a little audio device (they come in assorted languages, ours is English) which we use to learn about various specially marked artifacts and dioramas throughout the grounds. Not all of the military artifacts are directly tied to fortifications, they have an assortment of sea mines from both sides of both wars and at least one torpedo - some of these items were fished out of the sea and presumably rendered harmless.

We get to walk through yet more trenches and tunnels but these are walled with brick. We are told that German army scoured the surrounding countryside to beg, borrow, and steal every loose brick they could find - stealing was by far the preferred method - and when you look at the walls they contain every kind of brick imaginable and some of them have withstood sixty or more years of weathering better than others. The tunnels are generally little more than covered trenches and are intended to be invisible rather than resistant to bombs or shells, there are period port holes



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where you can stick your head out and see what is going on.

We are still touring the site at 5:00PM when officious museum staff hunt us down and throw us off the property. The official relents and lets us visit a final bunker or two on the long walk back to the front gate. The museum book store also closes at 5:00PM so my credit card is saved from an onslaught of book and souvenir purchases.

We get back to Bruges in time to have supper in the Passage Hotel's Grand Café and drink the complimentary glass of beer that is offered to residents. The dinner is not at all bad and improved by additional glasses of beer at about €2.00 for 500ml. The menu and the liqueur list is written in dayglo felt pens on a glossy black panels on the wall - pretty much unreadable by me so I feign knowledge by repeating what Geoff says.

Geoffrey retires to bed with his computer so I set out to find the town's only cyber cafe and find that it is long gone but I find the post office so I store that information for tomorrow. It is now completely dark and the market square is all lit up, full of tourists, and extremely photogenic so I return to the hostel for my camera and tripod and take shots of the hostel and the market square. Ancient buildings and modern lighting can be a wonderful combination.



**Bruges market square at night**

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**Wednesday, September 29, 2010  
Bruges, West Flanders, Belgium**

Let's call it a rest day.

Geoffrey is feeling under the weather and remains in bed while I am up and around. I make two trips to the post office, one to buy a small box which I fill up with 5kg of stuff that I find I don't use or don't want to carry around. This includes all my exposed film, my portable radio, some books, some gifts, etc. I am dismayed to find that it costs me €50.00 to send this 5kg package to Canada, it is €100.00 to send more than 5kg and I must remove a tiny 5 gram item to save the extra €50.00. Uff Da!

Upon my return I find Geoffrey to be up and functional so we set out on a stress free day of shopping, eating, and drinking beer.



**De Halve Maan Brewery, Bruges, Belgium. What IS all this stuff?**

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We begin by making our way to Walstraat and Walplein where De Halve Maan Brewery is located and purchase tickets for their famous brewery tour. We have an hour before the next tour starts so, since it is lunch time, we invest that hour in dinner and a beer in the brewery restaurant. The restaurant is fairly high quality and priced appropriately, I have some concern about finishing dinner before the tour starts. We finish just in time. Whew! If we were late, We would have to sit and drink beer for an hour while we wait for the next tour.

Beer has been made on this site since 1856 but the equipment and the process has changed over the years. The tour is more about how beer used to be made rather than how beer is made today, we get intimate with the retired vessels and machinery as well as a rooftop view of the ancient city but there are only passing glances at the modern stainless steel brewing equipment currently in use. We are told that only the early stages of the beer making process still occur on the premises and then the product is trucked out of the city to another site where the beer making process continues. The tour finishes off with a glass of Brugse Zot beer (refer to diagram 1).



**The top of De Halve Maan Brewery reveals the roof tops of Bruges**

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We are blessed by an opportunity to repent of our intemperate ways when we pass the Jerusalem Church which was built in the 14th century and then rebuilt in the 15th century to resemble the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The church was built by the Adornes family who still own it more than 500 years later. Geoffrey and I shell out a few Euros to see the church and then we move on to the lace museum in the restored alms house in the church yard. We move on fairly quickly since the history of lace doesn't seem to be as interesting as the history of war and mayhem. We go back down town and shop - mostly for lace and chocolate which will be gifts and for even more chocolate which we will be eaten.

The day ends after supper with some study of our stolen copy of the railway timetables and a negotiated agreement to go to Luxembourg tomorrow.



**The yard of the Jerusalem Church with the alms house on the right**

**Thursday, September 30, 2010**  
**Grand-Duché de Luxembourg**

We retrace our steps to the train station and purchase tickets to Luxembourg. This is one of the few times that one is reminded that Europe consists of many countries: each station has a domestic ticket office and an international ticket office and we generally go to the wrong one first. It is about 100km to Brussels from Bruges and there we have half an hour to find the connecting train and soon we are settled in for the three hour ride to Luxembourg.



**A platform at the Bruges railway station**

I find a copy of “The Metro” - the same free paper that is distributed to transit riders in Toronto or Edmonton but this one is written in French. I find that I can read the paper with the aid of a dictionary and the pictures but it takes me all three hours to read what should take 15 minutes. I learn that a GM automobile plant is closing, I learn that construction workers dug up a 500lb bomb. I learn many intimate secrets about indiscrete female celebrities. I delude myself that I am becoming quite good at reading French but that illusion is shattered the first time I try to read “La Figaro”.

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg covers 2,600 square kilometers and has a population of 500,000 with the highest per capita gross domestic product in the world. Luxembourg borders Belgium on the West and North, Germany on the East, and France on the South; the city

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of Luxembourg is in the Southern part of the Grand Duchy and has a population of about 100,000, you have to climb 200 metres to go from the lowest point of the city of Luxembourg to the highest.

Geoffrey and I arrive at the train station which is located a couple km from the centre of the city. We find the tourist office and ask about the location of the hostel and are told to take bus number 9, we are given obscure suggestions on how to find it. We seek a second opinion by going to the transit ticket office, also in the train station, where we buy a couple bus tickets and get slightly less confusing instructions on how to find the number 9 bus. There is no great hurry and we do find the bus which drives uphill for a couple kilometres until we reach a plateau which is the highest point in the town and where the biggest and swankiest stores are located. The district has been named “Ville-haute”, I bet they had a huge contest to select the name. We drive right past Ville-haute and over a bridge which built on the ancient Casemates du Bock, we are dropped off on the other side of the bridge where we walk down some of the 100 metres we have just ridden up to find the very modern Auberge de Jeunesse situated under an astonishingly tall stone train bridge.



**The Luxembourg HI Hostel**



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Going from Bruges to Luxembourg is like going from Quebec City to Montreal: the streets are wider and straighter and the buildings are newer but there are still pockets of cobbles and old buildings. It is a bit of an anti-climax. Modern may be comfortable but it is not especially interesting.

Geoffrey and I leave the modern, spacious, and civilized hostel and walk back the way we came. We stare up at the towering train bridge and walk up hill to the Montée de Clausen and walk back over the Casemates du Bock and stare over the railing at the hostel situated so far below us. In Luxembourg the most direct route to a destination is frequently fatal.



**The view from the Ville-Haute, the hostel is seen on the left**

It is after 4:00PM when we reach the Ville-haute and we have eaten nothing of consequence since breakfast. We enter into one of the enclaves of ancient cobbled streets and approach a cafe with a Spanish motif with thoughts of dinner but we are told by the lady in charge that real restaurants do not serve food before 7:00PM, there is an extended pause and then we are told with hesitant distaste that if we move toward the centre of the shopping district that we will find McDonalds and a few similar vendors. We feign gratitude and set out in that direction and find a small grocery store where we are able to obtain buns and fruit and things like that, I ask the lady in charge if we select the items ourselves or she does it and are told that she will do the selecting and packaging under our direction.

We prowl the streets while eating our lunch and that keeps us on our feet until after 7:00PM when we find a place named "Restaurant Academie" that serves us an excellent supper of mussels and snails. I eat my dozen snails and Geoffrey receives three buckets of mussels,

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every time he finishes his last mussel a new bucket is placed on the table to our mounting astonishment. I am overcome by an unaccustomed fit of altruism and help Geoff eat the last bucket of mussels. I thought Belgium was the land of the mussel, not land locked Luxembourg!

We get hopelessly lost on the way back to the hostel - not for the last time! How can you get lost on a round plateau measuring less than 1km in diameter? How can you get lost like that several times a day? The weather is very pleasant so we can wander around in a totally confused but very comfortable state while digesting all those mussels.



### **Le Ville-Haute, Luxembourg, Grande-Duché de Luxembourg**

We rediscover the hostel, in spite of our worst efforts, well after dark. The hostel is so very modern and so much unlike the other places we have been. There are separate bathrooms for the men and women, this may not seem unusual but it is not the case in most of the hostels where we stayed. There are card locks on the stairs and card locks on the rooms and they are locked by default. Geoffrey and I do not really think this through so we only have one card which we pass back and forth, to put it another way, we take turns locking ourselves out of the room. We share our room with three other guys with whom we have a minor disagreement about whether the window should be open or closed. We lose the negotiation and the window is closed.

It seems that most occupants of the hostel speak neither French nor English.

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**Friday, October 1, 2010**  
**Grand-Duché de Luxembourg**

We are up for the customary continental breakfast in the customary hostel dining room. A lady asks me in French where I found a toaster. The lady is not to blame, it doesn't look like a toaster, you put your put bread on a conveyer on the left and toast comes out the right, it is a miniature of the pie machine in "Chicker Run". I am thrilled to understand the question and tell her where to find the toaster.

Geoffrey and I quit the hostel and make the climb back to the high street where we set out to find a photography store. We find a tourist information office who directs us a short distance to "Photo Cine Studio" who are equipped to serve the professional photographer and thus are awash in film. I buy six 36 exposure packages of Fuji Sensia 100 for €40.00, I am pleased at the price and regret not buying a dozen.



**Grund in the foreground and the Ville-haute in the background**

We return to the Bock. The Bock is the North Eastern cliff face of the great rocky plateau on which the Ville-haute is built and it is surrounded on three sides by the Alzette River. The Romans built a watch tower on top of the Bock in the fourth century which was still there when the site came into the hands of the Abby of Saint Maximin in Trier in 723. The Abby sold the Bock to Count Siegfried, a famous Luxembourg historical figure, in 963 so that he

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could build a castle on top and use it to protect his land holdings. The Bock remained a fortress for the next thousand years while it was expanded, overrun, rebuilt, retaken, and abandoned until 1867 when the treaty of London, which granted Luxembourg permanent neutral status, ordered the Bock fortifications dismantled.



**The North side of the Bock**

We find a doorway in the ancient rock and pay €3.00 each to visit the casemates (casemate is just another French word for fortification). Vauban, Louis IV's chief castle builder and destroyer who we first learned about in Lille, rebuilt the Bock in the late 17th century and he constructed the bulk of the underground fortifications and the amazing Pont du Château that we have been passing over since our arrival. The casemates were made up of 23km of tunnels in multiple layers going down to a depth of 40m plus the even deeper castle well which goes down 47m. The galleries had accommodation for 1,200 soldiers and firing positions for 50 cannons. When the fortress was fully functional the casemates had stables, warehouses, kitchens, slaughterhouses, all the necessities of daily life and daily warfare. Geoffrey and I mostly see empty stone rooms



with the occasional cannon scattered about to remind us that this was once a military installation. We see the stone rooms where Marshal Von Bender lived for eight months while, at the age of 82, he defended the city from the besieging French revolutionary army in 1794. I