

BEAUTIFUL BRITTANY (BELLE BRETAGNE) - FRANCE 2014

Saturday 12th April

I can't say the alarm at 05:00 on the overnight ferry to France woke me from a deep sleep, as I'd hardly managed any sleep at all, but I still groggily carried out morning ablutions and presented myself for a *petit déjeuner* of English Breakfast tea and a fine French croissant with Alan and the rest of our party (son Dan, daughter-in-law Paula, granddaughter Willow age 6 and grandson Piran almost age 4). I can't say we were in party mood at all, but for the second time we were enjoying the comfort of the *Armorique* from Plymouth to Roscoff.

Willow had remarked at the rising sun shining over the sea and since it was a nice morning, we went out on deck for some fresh air. As I took out my camera to take a picture of the pinkish sun above the rocky approaches to Roscoff, it disobligingly disappeared behind some cloud, but it was soon time to return to our cars anyway and eventually drive on to French land - or I should say *terre*, as we were on our way to Finistère, derived from Latin for 'end of the land'.

To be pedantic, we were heading for the extreme west coast of Brittany, but I was very interested to discover that the Breton name for the district of Finistère is Penn-ar-Bed, the name of the ferry that Alan and I had taken to Roscoff on our first French holiday in 1973. I'd always thought it was a strange name for a ferry, but never took the trouble to investigate further. However, I've investigated further to discover there is a Parc Naturel Régional d'Armorique, created in 1969, covering 425,000 acres, over 150,000 of which are maritime.

Twice now I've appreciated the experience of travelling onward from Roscoff and this third time was no exception. Apart from one stop in sudden misty conditions to fix the Continental headlight reflectors, our first visit was to a small, interesting town named Sizun, where we parked by the church of Saint-Cadou. Although we failed to realise it, this was our first sighting of the famed Parish Closes or *Enclos Paroissiaux* of Brittany, built mainly of carved granite during the 16th and 17th centuries and comprising a triumphal archway entrance, a calvary (an ornate type of crucifix), an ossuary and a church.

The remnants of the mist evaporated as we walked around the grounds of the church, before wandering out into the town and along the streets until we came to a small *boulangerie-pâtisserie*, where we stood outside and gazed at the tempting bread and pastries on display in the window. Before I knew what was happening, Dan purposefully marched into the shop (followed by Alan) and emerged triumphantly a few minutes later wielding two baguettes. He admitted to having felt nervous, but had achieved the transaction completely in French - and later on even posed for posterity, or proof, or something.



"Deux *baguettes*, s'il vous plait."

After this excitement, we drove on to an area that looked a lot like Dartmoor in Devon, or Bodmin Moor in Cornwall. At one point, Alan spotted a chapel on an individual hill peak and said how he wished we had time for a visit. Without any communication (except possibly telepathic) Dan in his car in front of ours drove to a parking area about halfway up the large mound of the hillside in question and stopped. Perfect - or rather, *parfait*.

It was still too early for lunch, so we stood and sampled Alan's buns, if that doesn't sound too colloquially bizarre. There was a choice of chocolate chip or cherry and almond and they were well received. Close by, there was a path consisting of many steps to the chapel at the top, which turned out not to be too taxing (maybe the buns helped). The weather was dry and reasonably warm, although by the time we reached the summit, there was quite a cold wind.

There was nobody else there when we arrived, so we were able to investigate the small stone chapel in peace - and it did feel peaceful up there, at what I later discovered was Mont Saint-Michel de Brasparts on its 380 metres/1246 feet high peak within the Armorique Regional Nature Park (one of the Monts d'Arée hills that curve across central Finistère).



Chapelle de Saint-Michel

Inside, the chapel felt a little cold and austere. Some of the walls consisted of old stone with spreading areas of moss, while near the altar the walls had been plastered. Set in one mossy stone wall was what looked like a *piscina* (Latin for a shallow basin used for washing communion vessels), not to be confused with a *piscine* (French for swimming pool). There was a simple but beautiful stained glass window comprising vertical strips of different coloured glass within their own lead surrounds, lined up between five horizontal sections of thicker lead.

A large flat slab of rock had been laid upon two squat level stones to form a table that was clearly used as an altar, as it was adorned with offerings of flowers, candles and many small pieces of rock. Willow was intrigued and when I asked her if she wanted to put a rock on the table, she readily agreed and went outside again to choose a 'special' rock. She enjoyed the process so much that she asked if she could put another rock on the table and since I felt that Saint-Michel would only smile at her eagerness, she happily repeated the whole process.

A few more people arrived as we moved outside again, so we wandered around looking at the 360 degree view. The outlook was pretty barren and craggy in places, with quite a few trails criss-crossing through the bracken and heather. In the distance down below was the Saint-Michel reservoir, with a disused nuclear power station beside it (what?!) as well as the ancient marsh of Yeun-Elez. Breton legend says this marsh is the boggy entrance to hell, but personally I see nuclear power stations as the gateway to hell.

Still up on the peak, though, Piran appeared to be in his own little heaven by making a long line of stones on the grass. Others before us had made similar lines and patterns of stones on the grass areas around the chapel, so Piran was simply adding his own offering. To be honest, Willow and I had started doing this with him, but we soon gave up while he continued to the bitter end - and it was definitely on the uncomfortably cold side standing there in the wind.

The site had first been dedicated to sun worship with a Celtic temple, but in 1677 a newer temple was consecrated, known sometimes as the 'Chapel of the Shepherds' because it was used by many shepherds herding their sheep on the Arrée hills. By 1806 (in the wake of the French Revolution) this chapel was in ruins, but was restored in 1820 and reconsecrated the following year. Druidic ceremonies are still held there today - which surprises me not at all and seems very fitting amid all the natural wildness of the site and the rudimentary stone altar.

As we descended the steps, it was a relief to feel the warmth of the sun again. Its effect was soporific as we drove on towards another small town or *commune* and it was therefore no surprise that both Willow and Piran fell asleep. On arrival at Huelgoat (An Huelgoad in Breton meaning 'high wood'), we were able to park by a lake that had been created between the 16th and 18th centuries to supply water to nearby silver-lead mines via a leat or canal.

It had been a long morning, but at last it was lunchtime and we fell upon some sandwiches and crisps brought from good old UK with pleasure, making sure we also ate them. It seemed silly not to explore Huelgoat, so we set off along the side of the lake until we came to an old watermill, with steps and slippery paths leading down into who knew where? It turns out they led to a rather secretive green world, strewn with huge mossy boulders and a 'devil's grotto' that over the years had inspired some rather bizarre Arthurian, Celtic and Christian myths.

This *Chaos de Rochers* (chaos of rocks) would have been a good place to explore on a sunny day when we had more time, but we retraced our steps to the village square and wandered a little, until we came across a likely looking gift shop. As well as buying postcards for Willow's and Piran's scrapbooks (my holiday task), Dan asked how the name Huelgoat was pronounced and was told to say every syllable, as in Hu-el-go-at. As we strolled back to the cars, I felt we hadn't been able to do justice to this village, but maybe one day we can return to Hu-el-go-at!

It was time to go to a supermarket to buy food for the *gîte* and so we stopped at an enormous *Carrefour* in Quimper. Dan, Alan and I went inside, but I don't think I was much help, as I was on my last legs and my brain felt as if it was missing believed lost in France. Dan was more alert, though, understanding what was happening when we caused a slight hold-up at the check-out by having failed to stick our own price label on a bag of grapes. *Des raisins? Oui!* ☺

The weather felt quite hot by the time we arrived at the *gîte* not long after 16:00. The owner was waiting for us there, although I confess I avoided him by allowing myself to be diverted by Willow and Piran, as I felt far too tired and untidy for human consideration, especially by a French man - and no, I'm not entirely sure what I mean by that.

It was a tasteful place, spacious and comfortable, although the tiled and wooden floors were cold to bare feet. We consumed cheese, bread, salad, fruit and wine for tea, although Dan's baguettes were moreish, especially with a generous helping of French *beurre!* It was quite late, so the children went to bed and I washed dishes. I felt much too tired to play Long Rummy with Alan, Dan and Paula, but forced myself to stay awake and write up the day's events...



Just to verify!

Kay Santillo, 2014.

Sunday 13th April

Despite just net curtains at the windows on the ground floor (unlike the bedrooms upstairs), Alan and I managed to sleep quite well. The temperature in the house plummeted rather a lot during the hours of darkness, but no doubt this is welcomed in the heat of summer. There are shutters outside our bedroom window, but we decided not to bother with them. Shut the shutters and sleep in the *chambre? Non!*

We took our time having *petit déjeuner* and preparing for an outing, finally leaving at around 10:00 in Dan's car to visit Pont l'Abbée (bridge of the abbot), known as the self styled capital of the historic Pays Bigouden region of Brittany. Pont l'Abbée was founded in the 14th century by monks who built the first bridge across the river estuary, hence the name. The weather was cool and threatening to drizzle, but it thankfully never carried out its threat.

There was a more than adequate car park by a pleasant port area, from which we headed into the *centre ville*. I do love the streets and shops of all the places we've come across so far, as they've retained their identity and soul, whereas England seems to have followed the USA and sold its soul to the great greedy twin gods of corporate commercialism and consumerism.

However, wandering up a gently sloping street of delightful, individual shops, we very soon came across a *boulangerie-pâtisserie*, whereupon Dan again purchased *deux baguettes*. The *pâtisserie* part of the shop sold fantastic looking cakes and chocolates, the sort that you would buy and not want to eat because you would spoil them.

Rather than just continue to walk around the town, we diverted to a walk along the quayside and then onward and upward slightly to where we eventually came across the Gothic looking remains of what was once the Catholic parish church of Saint-Jacques de Lambour, built between the 13th and 16th centuries. It was unfortunately shut, but we walked around the exterior, peering into the interior whenever window spaces allowed.

Returning to the *centre ville*, we did some further street wandering before Alan, Willow and I went inside a most interesting looking *biscuiterie* shop. It was pleasingly spacious with a wide range of regional products among the more touristy postcards and gifts. Willow was being very good, so Alan let her taste a couple of the biscuit samples put out to help people choose which they preferred. She preferred an orange variety, so Alan bought a large packet of those.

It was nearing lunchtime, so we returned to the car and drove back to the *gîte* for another baguette and cheese session with the accompanying salad and fruit (no wine this time). As it turned out, we could have indulged in a glass, because our chosen afternoon activity was a walk from the *gîte* - but it mattered not, because the warm sunshine and the fresh spring flowers were intoxicating enough ☺ OK, so I may have exaggerated slightly there for literary effect, but it was very pleasurable walking along the country roads, lanes and paths, until we arrived at a chapel with an adjoining holy well that was possibly the best I've ever seen - Chapelle de la Madeleine.



Piran ponders & Willow performs a Celtic ritual dance

Kay Santillo, 2014.

This Gothic style Roman Catholic chapel was built between the 12th and 16th centuries on the site of a former leper colony. However, we were drawn mostly to the holy well of Saint-Pustache, where the water is said to cure children with pustules. Fortunately, Willow and Piran weren't suffering with pustules at the time, so we just wandered around and took photos, mostly of the aforementioned holy well. Some other tourists arrived and so we departed.

The walk back was just as enjoyable, noticing the many wild flowers growing in hedges and grass verges along the way. All the flowers in Brittany seem to be a few weeks ahead of Cornish flowers, including the municipal planting on roundabouts and in towns and villages. Willow and Piran clearly both enjoy the countryside, although Willow assured me she doesn't share Piran's avid interest in insects!

Taking a slightly different route back through a wooded area, we came across another holy well amongst the trees. There was a date of 1717 carved into the stone, but as far as I could tell there seemed to be no discernible name either on site, or retrospectively on the internet. These holy wells are just one example of the strong link between the historic settlement of Cornouaille in north west Brittany and Cornouaille as the French name for Cornwall.

In fact, Cornouaille in Brittany came about by the settlement of migrant princes from Cornwall during Anglo Saxon invasions and the founding of the Bishopric of Cornouaille by ancient saints from Cornwall. Rock on Cornwall! The two regions spoke a similar language that evolved into Cornish in Cornwall and Breton in Brittany. Both languages are similar to Welsh. Fascinating!

Well, we eventually walked our Welsh and Cornish selves back to the *gîte*, where some tea helped, both liquid and later in the form of salmon, potatoes in their jackets and salad, followed by strawberries. Willow and Piran went to bed, while the rest of us later attempted a game of Long Rummy, but I was so tired that I lost shamefully and hopelessly.

Monday 14th April

Sleep turned out to be a bit tricky, not helped by having a cold leg (why the one you may ask and I would answer that I had no idea). However, it was a lovely morning and although the *gîte* was quite chilly at first, it warmed up reasonably quickly. When everyone was ready, we once again all clambered into Dan's car and headed to Penmarc'h at the extremity of a small peninsula in Finistère and the most south westerly township of the Pays Bigouden area.

Parking the car at Pointe de Penmarc'h at the northern limit of the Bay of Biscay, we walked along what for all intents and purposes resembled a building site. There was undeniably a lot of building taking place, as well as what seemed like a lot of lighthouses. One in particular named Phare d'Eckmühl looked very imposing.



Phare d'Eckmühl

Kay Santillo, 2014.

At 65m/213ft high, it's one of the tallest lighthouses in the world, made of granite and inaugurated in 1897, with its light visible for 60 nautical miles. As we walked around to the end of the rocky point, there were more lighthouses - and more building work, including an enormous crane (not the bird variety). We briefly investigated a small beach that looked as if it had suffered from winter storms, before retracing our steps, walking up a road that seemed to be leading out of Penmarc'h and then retracing our retraced steps.

While thus wandering somewhat aimlessly, Alan took it upon himself to enter the *Boulangerie de Phare* and buy a *baguette* - just the one. Dan was heard to say that he was "*baguetted* out"... We then came across a Tourist Information place with a good selection of postcards, so Alan and I went inside with Willow and Piran for scrapbook postcard purposes. Without going into details, Piran had a mega tantrum that I confess made me want to '*baguette*' him out of the shop and pelt him with stale *croissants* and *croutons*, but instead I had to woman-handle him outside, while Alan stayed behind with Willow to pay for the postcards.

After that debacle, we walked along the coastline in the opposite direction. Other lighthouses sprang into view - many other lighthouses of various shapes and sizes. The land was quite flat, but out at sea there were many small islands and reefs resulting in white breakers, giving the impression that the whole area consisted of rocky, dangerous coast that could be the scene of frequent savage storms and significant danger to shipping.



A typical coastal scene at Penmarc'h

As it was nearing midday, we decided to have lunch at a *crêperie* we'd passed earlier and because the day had gradually become much warmer, we sat outside at a table for six. The waiter was very helpful and spoke some English, although Dan did very well at ordering in French. We all chose from the *galettes* menu - a Breton *galette* being a large thin buckwheat flour pancake with various fillings, washed down with local cider and lemonade for the children.

I chose a simple egg filling, Dan chose goat's cheese and bacon, Paula and the children chose ham, egg and cheese, while Alan plumped for the *fruits de mer*. The waiter smiled approvingly at Alan's order and when it came it was obviously a house speciality, with its 'sea fruits' of mussels and other fishy items paddling around in a presumably fishy sauce on top of the *galette*, lorded over quite dramatically by a langoustine. I immediately had a flashback to our daughter Rachel's French wedding fare less than a year previously, but managed not to shriek.

The *galettes* were savoured by all and then we chose dessert from the *crêpes* menu. The children wanted ice cream and there was a slight misunderstanding when Alan and I ended up with ice cream in a dish instead of ice cream on a *crêpe*, but it was all good and since Alan chose the house speciality cider apple ice cream, he once again had the waiter's approval.

After this success, Dan drove us on to a town called Guilvinec, a fishing port with a beach. I'm sure it has more going for it, but we just walked through some of its streets until we arrived at the beach and spent the next hour or so on beach type activities, such as wandering around a bit and looking for small shells, while Willow and Piran amused themselves quite easily.



"Bladderwrack, I believe?"

While we'd been practically the only ones there at first, more people started to arrive after 15:00, at which time we decided to make tracks for the *gîte*, because we felt *un peu fatigué*. Here we embarked upon various activities, Alan taking the children outside to the grassy area and also the adjoining outbuilding with its variety of games, including table tennis, soft balls, a Velcro dartboard and much more.

It was *baguettes*, cheese, salad, fruit and wine for tea again, followed by the usual evening tasks. Dan took Willow outside for a play until bedtime (which she very much enjoyed) while Piran was tired from the beach and chose quieter pursuits. Dan, Paula and I later played Long Rummy until about 21:30, when I could no longer think straight, or even slightly sideways.

Tuesday 15th April

It had been another cold night, but it was another fine morning that quickly warmed up, despite a cool wind. The plan for the day was to visit a couple of places seen in a tourist booklet, so when everyone had breakfasted and was ready, we departed once again in Dan's car towards a place called Plovan. Willow and Grandad Alan started a game of I-Spy that lasted on and off for the rest of the week, but was interrupted as we came across the Chapelle Notre-Dame-de-Tronoën and its calvary (*calvaire*), dating from around 1450.



Willow at the monumental calvary of Tronoën

As a type of monumental public crucifix, the Breton calvaries are distinguished by 3-dimensional figures surrounding the Crucifixion scene itself. The Tronoën calvary is the oldest surviving one, originally painted in bright colours, depicting scenes of the life of Jesus. The clothing of the figures helped to date the sculptures, as no archives have been found.

The calvary was so massive with its huge base, that we seemed to pay scant attention to the chapel itself. It was fairly easy to imagine that calvaries such as these played an important part in Breton pilgrimages known as *Pardons* and formed a focal point for public festivals (but presumably not the Glastonbury kind). They are most common in northern France, from east Brittany and through Belgium, sometimes encased in an open shrine.

The wind was still a bit keen (unlike Willow and Piran who were beginning to lose interest), so we went back to the car and drove on to the ruins of the Chapelle de Languidou. The notice board informed us that the chapel had been dedicated to Saint Quidou and was originally built in the 12th century in the romantically sounding Pont-Croix architectural style. It was then rebuilt in the 16th century, when a rather lovely rose shaped window was constructed, but was partly demolished in 1795 (presumably the after-effects of the notorious French Revolution).



Chapelle de Languidou in the morning sun

We walked around the site for at least half an hour, partly due to purposeful loitering - otherwise known as waiting for some other visitors to depart for photographic reasons. It was a pleasant site, though, with a nearby picnic table that was very useful for morning snack time, when Alan's buns came into their own once again.

After that we were unsure where to go, but ended up not very far away at Canté beach in Plozévet. Something that immediately caught my eye was a large memorial menhir engraved in granite in 1840 for the 600 or so dead of the French 74-gun ship *Human Rights* (in French *Droits de l'Homme*), sunk in a battle in bad weather during the aforementioned French Revolution, its two adversaries being *HMS Indefatigable* and *HMS Amazon*.



Memorial menhir

Kay Santillo, 2014.

After trying semi-successfully to translate the writing, I joined the others as they moved on to a more sheltered place, where we ate our lunch of sandwiches and crisps down on the beach. It was rocky, pebbly and sandy, which resulted in some of us engaging in a certain amount of creative beach type activities for a couple of hours - especially Alan!

He must have been feeling a bit prehistoric, because he constructed a rather decent stone circle, complete with heel stone and dolmen. At Willow's request, he then improved his new-found skills further down the beach. It was good enough for a passing French man to comment, "Ah, Stonehenge!" and engage with Alan in a halting but very passable Franco-English conversation about stone circles, Cornwall, Brittany and Celtic monuments.



The second circle

After this constructive afternoon, we left the beach and drove to a nearby *Carrefour* for more supplies. It was then back to the *gîte* for a mug of tea and afternoon snack time. The weather was still very good, so we sat outside for a while. Dan played with Willow and Piran while Alan and Paula cooked baked potatoes with tuna and/or baked beans for tea, followed by a Magnum (uncooked). Various evening activities followed, including sitting outside with a glass of wine for a while, until the later evening coolness descended.

Wednesday 16th April

Today was going to be a special day, a trip to somewhere Alan and I had wanted to visit for a very long time - Carnac, one of the most extensive Neolithic menhir collections in the world. The weather was kind to us once again and we left the *gîte* at 08:50 in two cars, for a 1 hour 40 minute drive south east to the district of Morbihan, a large proportion of which was along the motorway. My notion that French motorways are safer and more pleasing than British ones was confirmed as the morning progressed and the temperature kept steadily rising.

The Carnac stones are a surprisingly dense collection of megalithic sites around the village of Carnac, consisting of alignments, dolmens, tumuli and single menhirs. Hewn from local rock, they were erected by pre-Celtic people of Brittany in around 3300 BC, some possibly as early as 4500 BC. There are three main groups of stone rows (Ménec, Kermario and Kerlescan) that once may have formed a single group, but have since been split up as stones were removed.

In more recent centuries, many of the sites were neglected (probably during and after that renowned French Revolution), with stones allegedly used as chicken sheds, sheep shelters and even ovens. Stone baked food - mmm! Even more commonly and probably more recently, others were taken away to be used as building materials, or to make way for roads. Shameful, those people should be stoned. Or possibly I should, for that rocky joke!

It was somewhat of a surprise to be driving along an ordinary country road one minute and the next minute be gazing at hundreds of mystical, enigmatic menhirs on one side of us - we had arrived at the alignment of Kerlescan and for a while were the only ones there. Unfortunately, all three sites were open to guided tours only, but I surprised myself by not minding that so much, because there was still a lot to gaze upon - so *many* stones!



A small section of the Kerlescan alignment

To be pedantic, there were 555 stones arranged in 13 lines, although I have to say we didn't actually count them. The total length of the site was approximately 800m/12,600ft, with the stones themselves ranging in height from 80cm/2ft 7in to 4m/13ft. Alan and I enjoyed taking photos in peace, especially on such a perfect morning.

We walked a short distance to a nearby path that led us through an adjoining wooded area and after ten minutes or so, came across an intriguing arrangement of stones known as the Manio Quadrilateral that formed the perimeter of a large rectangle. This had originally been a 'tertre tumulus' with a central mound, measuring 37m/121ft long and 10m/33ft wide to the east, but only 7m/23ft to the west. Nothing wrong with a bit of well organised irregularity...

Close by was a tall menhir called the Manio Giant, standing at 6.5m/21ft. It was in shadow and seemed a little menacing, but when I turned a bit New Age and touched it, there were no nasty vibrations or malevolent energy that sent me shooting backwards through the air. Just as well, or it might have spoiled our following walk through the woods as we tried to find another prehistoric feature, but failed. It didn't matter, as the walk was just plain enjoyable.

We returned to the cars and drove on to find Kercado dolmen, a passage grave within private property, but open to the public. On our way from the cars to the dolmen, Piran and I amused ourselves by pointing out wayside flowers, while up ahead Willow and Alan were deep in conversation, probably about the relevance of insects or the meaning of life or whatever.

It was a very decent dolmen, dated at around 4800 BC with its entrance facing almost exactly towards winter solstice sunrise. There was nobody else there, so we could investigate inside in peace, finding a single quadrangular chamber of 2.2m/7.2ft by 3.2m/10.5ft. The internal structure was covered by a cairn about 40m in diameter, surrounded by a wide enclosure of 27 small menhirs, some more well-preserved than others. Like humans, really. Excavations had revealed arrowheads, flint axes, pottery, beads and charred remains of human bones.



Kercado dolmen

Kay Santillo, 2014.

After walking all around the outside, we returned to the cars again and drove to the alignment of Kermario (meaning 'House of the Dead'). It was a large 'house' consisting of 1029 stones in 10 columns in length about 1300m/4300ft and occupying the centre position of the Carnac alignments. Some of the stones were over 3m/9.9ft high, while others were much smaller.



Kermario menhirs stretching into the distance

The sky was very blue and the sun was very warm. Dan and Paula decided to stay behind at a more shaded area close to a huge rock, while Alan and I ventured out into the stone zone. It felt brilliant walking along next to where so much energy must have been expended by so many people so long ago. It was a pity that we couldn't walk amongst the stones, but I can understand why and it was actually much better for taking photos free of lingering strangers!

There was more or less a circuit around the site with a small tower at one point that gave an enlightening aerial perspective, so Alan and I naturally took advantage. It did help to see the overall layout of the alignment in both directions and it was really quite amazing. It was more or less past lunchtime when we returned to the others, but we had passed a *crêperie* and a gift shop on the circuit, so decided it would be a good idea to go there for some food.

Galettes were ordered and it was quite a relief to sit outdoors in the shade under a large awning and sip a cold drink while we waited for the food. It was almost 14:00 by the time the *galettes* finally made an appearance, but since we were in France, it felt quite chilled and Continental to be taking our time over lunch. Also, the place was no longer crowded 😊

While we were finishing, Paula took Willow to the tower (an interesting alternative to the toilet) while Alan and I had a quick further short walk to a substantial dolmen. We then convened at the car park and drove on to the third and probably most popular site, the alignment of Méneac. Again, it seemed a good idea for Alan and me to walk around on our own - I think Dan was stoned out, which fortunately or unfortunately has nothing to do with being stoned.



Looking down the western alignment of Méneac

The Ménéac stone count stands at 1050 and stretches for about 1000m/3280ft. The largest stones at the western end are about 4m/13ft high, becoming as small as 0.6m/2ft along the length of the alignment, before growing in height again toward the extreme eastern end.

We started our walk through the village of Ménéac, probably built during the Middle Ages and unfortunately intruding somewhat on the stones, but without detracting too much from the overall wonder - and I defy anyone not to wonder about the sheer effort involved throughout the Carnac alignments. I felt a subtle but very real sense of peace as we strolled along, no doubt helped by not too many other people and the truly beautiful weather.

Before we left that magical place, we called in at the *Maison des Mégalithes* (an information place and gift shop) and bought a booklet about Carnac written in English. It would have been challenging to buy one written in French, if not a little foolhardy. We bumped into Paula and the children in the shop, buying a book for Paula and a rubber each for Willow and Piran. For a moment, I fondly remembered days long gone of buying souvenir rubbers (badges, book marks, note books, keyrings and other memorabilia) for our own two children. Happy days!

It was time to head back to the *gîte*, although we did call in at *Carrefour* in Quimper for milk and a cucumber, but left also with strawberries, Magnums, cheese and wine, as you do. Willow came into the store and walked around with me, chatting all the while. She was telling me that her baby teeth might fall out soon, because her adult teeth will be pushing them through. She then looked startled and stopped abruptly, voicing the sudden thought that she hoped one of her teeth didn't fall out in France, because the French tooth fairy would leave her French money and she needed English money - logic that you can't fault!

We were caught in some heavy traffic out of Quimper (presumably rush hour) so everyone was a little on the tired side and happy just to consume bread, cheese, salad and fruit for tea, with the addition of a Magnum for a hint of holiday decadence. A quiet evening followed!

Thursday 17th April

Alan and I slept well, both obviously tired from the previous day's adventures. It was another sunny morning when we arose at 07:30 and proceeded with the usual morning activities. The general consensus was to return to Pont l'Abée for some further purchases from the *biscuiterie* and although when we arrived the *centre ville* was much busier than it had been on Sunday, there were still many spaces in the conveniently large car park. There was also a rescue truck there, dealing with the aftermath of a two car smack.

Before the delights of the *biscuiterie*, we meandered towards the *boulangerie-pâtisserie* to feed our *baguette* habit. Alan completed the transaction with the willing help of Willow, who had bounded into the shop after him and was unexpectedly rewarded for her enthusiasm when the shopkeeper gave her a slice of baguette with a small stick of chocolate through its centre. She came outside with her prize looking very pleased and immediately broke off a piece of the chocolate to give to Piran ☺



"Une baguette, s'il vous plait..."

Kay Santillo, 2014.

After that success, we all did our *biscuiterie* business - OK, maybe some of us a bit more than others, but it was such an interesting shop! So I didn't need the kitchen scourer holder gaily painted with images of sardines, but it was so colourful and unusual and somehow so French...

Our next port of call was Penmarc'h to appease Dan's hankering for a *fruits de mer galette*, but first of all, we walked along the coastline path in the heat of the morning sunshine. While I was walking along with Piran, he suddenly became extremely excited and it took me a little while to realise it was because a ladybird had landed on my scarf - he definitely has the bug for insects!

At about 12:30, we arrived at the *crêperie* and were able to have the same table as before, this time already under a sunshade. Dan took charge of the ordering completely in French and achieved his goal, which included asking if Alan could have a goat's cheese and bacon *galette* without the bacon. *Magnifique!* He was also pleased with his *fruits de mer galette* when it arrived with its poor dead sea creature gazing dolefully and accusingly at him - and while on the subject, I have come to the conclusion that langoustines freak me out more than a little.



Dan and the langoustine size each other up

Dan also managed to order himself, Alan and me a *crêpe* with apple and cider ice cream for dessert this time, which I confess I enjoyed more than the *galette*. Both items were very thin, so therefore not as filling as they might sound (that's my story and I'm sticking to it).

As we still had a sunny afternoon to enjoy, Dan drove onward to find a sandy beach for the children, but just before the beach, we came across rows and rows of brightly coloured tulips. For a moment, I thought we'd slipped across a border or two when I hadn't been looking...



Tulips from ... France!

Kay Santillo, 2014.

After Alan had possibly trespassed a little (but very carefully) for photographic purposes, it wasn't much further to a free car park that led through some sand dunes interspersed with grass areas on to a lovely, long beach with the most delicious fine white sand that just begged for shoes and socks to be taken off immediately. I couldn't help but consider disloyally how Britain would have charged the earth for people to set foot on such wonderful sand.

The beach scene awaiting us at Baie d'Audierne was really quite breathtaking, with a wide expanse of sand, sea and surf that seemed to stretch along for miles underneath a totally blue sky. The surf wasn't huge by any means, but enough for a vanload of surfers from a school of surfing to be enjoying themselves with their surfboards (what else?)

We plonked ourselves on a likely looking area of sand, applied sun lotion and then applied ourselves to the beach experience. It was no hardship, as there was lots of sand to practise making sandcastles with and plenty of shells to investigate. There were some interesting sights too, such as when a group of about 10 riders on horseback rode slowly across the beach near the shoreline - and all the time, the sky was a deep, amazing shade of blue. However, at around 16:00, we decided it was time to pack up and head back to the *gîte*.



Willow and Grandad call it a day

As ever, a reviving mug of tea was a priority and then I was on scrapbook duty, while Dan and Alan took turns on playing-with-children-outside duty. Tea was of the *baguette* variety and then the evening proceeded in various degrees of noise from the children, followed by quiet...

Friday 18th April

Another sunny morning, but although it was our last full day, nobody was certain what to do. In the end, indecision drove us (or to be precise, Dan drove us) to a town called Plomelin near the Odet river, to the accompaniment of the longstanding and sometimes rather noisy and inventive game of I-Spy between mainly Willow and Grandad.

Our mission was to find some menhirs, which turned out to be easily accessible not far from where the car was parked near the *hôtel de ville*, in a tranquil wooded glade beside a stream. A sign proclaimed "*Menhirs de Pont-Menhir*" meaning presumably 'menhirs of Menhir Bridge'? There was indeed a bridge, albeit a small one, as well as two quite large standing menhirs of about 3.7m/12ft high and two of a similar size that had fallen down.

There may have been more, but we found ourselves strolling along a path in dappled shade through a wooded area, which was a most agreeable way to spend half an hour or so on a Friday morning in Finistère. The leaves were all the fresh, almost lime green of spring and there were many wild flowers growing beneath the trees. Unfortunately, I didn't have my wild flower booklet with me to identify them, but Willow was in a chatty mood as ever!



Willow and Piran on a French bench

On the way back to the *gîte*, Dan and Paula stopped at a *boulangerie-pâtisserie* for *baguette* supplies, which we partly consumed for lunch with cheese, salad and fruit - such a simple but delightful meal. Afterwards, we went for a short drive to Kerugou dolmen, situated just inside a field beside a small road near Plomeur, about 23 kilometres/14 miles from Quimper.

There was a large compartmented chamber at the back, with a central passageway about 9m/29.5ft long and 2m/6.5ft wide, opening up at the rear. It had been the site of a famous find in 1876, when a particular type of ceramic pottery was discovered, with later such discoveries referred to as 'Kerugou style'. I may be wrong, but I think there was a Kerugou stile at the entrance to the field, which has little significance but pleases me greatly.

We were the only visitors and therefore happily able to take our time, both photographically and investigatively, which is a little hard to say. It was another pleasant location, with many wild flowers adding to the general feel of a natural place that had once been of great prehistoric significance. I'm not sure Willow and Piran were particularly impressed by this, but they still enjoyed a childlike exploration of the T-shaped dolmen with its different sized stones, some almost completely overgrown with grass.



Willow and Piran's archaeological field trip

I was a little sad to leave what was our last holiday outing, but needs must. Actually, we still had a further holiday outing to complete, namely a final visit to *Carrefour* to purchase wine. I tried not to be embarrassed when Alan and Dan took their trolley laden with just wine to the checkout and felt the need to throw in some French biscuits and chocolates for good measure.

On returning to the *gîte*, we had to start the process of clearing up (and I had to crack on with the scrapbook tasks). After a 'bits and pieces' tea, I did enjoy sitting outside in the evening sun playing a travel game with Willow, which she won fair and square. However, all good things must come to an end and so did the evening. *Bonsoir!*

Saturday 19th April

We awoke to another quite sunny day, although there was a bit of a cool breeze. After a quick breakfast, we began the awful preparing-to-leave procedure, which included washing the tiled floors. This was a bit of a challenge with pieces of grass being blown in and brought in on shoes as the cars were loaded up, but we managed. We had to!

We also had to figure out how to tell the owner that one of us who shall be nameless had broken a glass. After consulting my trusty but dated French dictionary, I wrote down: "*Nous avons cassés un verre.*" When the owner came and was shown my written statement, the confession was received with a sudden "Ah!" and a faint smile, plus assurances that we didn't have to pay anything. On checking Google later, the translation for 'we have broken a glass' seems to be '*nous avons brisé un verre.*' *Intéressant!*

Before we left, I remembered to take a photo of the *intéressant* hearth that I had sat looking at all week (but not continuously). Apart from dried grasses, two wooden plaques and a few random rural looking sticks, what mainly caught my attention was the pair of French *sabots*. This type of wooden clog was worn from the 16th to 19th century and associated with the lower classes. The word *sabotage* is allegedly derived from *sabot*, when disgruntled workers wilfully damaged workplace machinery by throwing their *sabots* into the machinery. Good for them! The *sabots* in the photo, of course, played no such part in any French rebellion.



Sabots decorate the rural hearth

The drive to Roscoff was straightforward, with just one stop at an *aire* that scared me slightly when the automatic metal door wouldn't open when I wanted to go (as in leave). Despite having read the instruction to push the button and push the door to exit, it took me a few failed attempts until I realised these actions had to be carried out simultaneously!

At Roscoff, we stopped at the red bus place (WBS) and perused the bottles and crates and cases and ... whatever else is used to hold wine bottles. Willow and I spent some time walking up and down the aisles, failing sometimes to keep out of people's way when she liked the look of a wine label and stopped in her attempt to read it. Meanwhile, her father and grandfather were deciding on how many hundreds of *bouteilles de vin* to buy...

The ferry crossing was once more comfortable and taken up with various activities, including a magic show for children. Alan booked a cabin for us again and the hours passed as hours do. We finally docked at around 20:00 on a warm enough evening, but with a forecast of much rain on the way for the rest of the Easter weekend. We'd been meteorologically very lucky ☺

I did enjoy discovering Finistère and realise it was only a taster of a deeply historical area. I loved the feeling that you could turn a bend and come across a menhir or dolmen, or drive through a small town and notice the most amazing sculpture or war memorial. The countryside was green, fresh and lovely, the coastline was wild, expansive and wonderful - and the food and wine were pretty good too. What's not to like?!