

## The Saga of The Cycling Shorts-Part 2

*Eric and son James complete their sponsored cycle ride to Paris and back. Having negotiated the hazards of the Bois de Boulogne at night...now read on.*

Back we went to the hotel in Versailles to freshen up. A couple of hundred yards away found us enjoying our supper on a pavement café. I had their speciality, pork knuckle cooked in beer with sauté potatoes and a long cool lager; excellent. We wandered up to the Palace of Versailles and exchanged pleasantries with a security man at the gate, well we were pleasant but clearly it had been a hard day at the office for him. A few quick pictures, that was Versailles nailed, then off to bed and out like a light



### **Day 4, Versailles to Le Havre, 134 miles.** *(Two Pairs of Cycling Shorts)*

Mon derriere was suffering, hence the extra pair of shorts. We made an early start after a continental breakfast of croissants, French bread and jams, pain au chocolat, yoghurt, fruit juice and coffee. I suggested to James that if things went well, we could make Le Havre that day. Shortly into our journey we were being hassled by a large bus, we eventually realised there was a cycle path at the side of the Palace grounds and the coach driver was duly placated. A little further on we found a scooter/cycle garage open, where we replaced a broken bungee strap and James' rear rack nut... good! He could have his bag back. It was warmer again today and things went

well, so we contacted the ferry and arranged a crossing for that evening. Lunch was taken in a pretty village square and consisted of experimenting with various quiche and flans from a neighbouring boulangerie and patisserie, it was good.

### **A Privet Cyclist**

Many of the French towns make a feature of a roundabout or traffic island, one in particular (regrettably I can't recall which) had a real bike with a cyclist made out of some kind of Privet, it was most unusual and very clever. At the River

Risle we followed the valley on the south side, the roads were much quieter, and the valley very picturesque. We'd brought a couple of lights with us in case of emergencies, but it became clear that it would be dark by the time we reached the ferry, so we purchased another pair in Pont-Audemer. We had tea in Toutainville, croissants again, with some very large biscuits (a bit too dry).

The Pont de Normandie Bridge appeared in the distance as we approached Honfleur; again we had to take a much longer route to get on the bridge than the motorised traffic. As we began our crossing we noted, much to our consternation, a dented crash barrier and lorry skid marks along the footpath over the bridge. *Continued on Page 41*

The Lorries passed very fast and close. Le Havre is a very large container port and seemed to go on forever, but we eventually arrived at the ferry terminal and refuelled on toasted cheese sandwiches. We met a German father and son with well-loaded cycles. They'd been in Paris that morning and then taken the train to Le Havre. In Portsmouth they were taking the train to Fishguard and then cycling to Cardiff. We were soon on the ferry and James treated himself to a large Toblerone, which he kindly shared with me.

### **Day 5, Portsmouth to Milton. 102 miles** (4 Pairs of Cycling Shorts).

We disembarked from the ferry at about 7.30 a.m. (they always let cyclists off very promptly) and followed the cycle paths from the port past the Mountbatten Centre to the outskirts of Portsmouth. Climbing out of the city for about a mile, we arrived at a burger van for breakfast. The sun shone down on us as three portly gentlemen on first name terms with the burger man, turned up for the morning fix. A couple of rats gambolled in the undergrowth at the side of the van as I stared through the electricity pylon down on Portsmouth, ah England!

### **Burger Man**

Burger Man had a spider-web tattoo on one elbow and a large dagger on one forearm, I can't remember the others. Asking him for directions to Wickham, (a village about 2 miles away), he pointed us in the right direction, but could give us no further clues to its location as he'd "never been out of Portsmouth in me life mate." In contrast to Burger Man we were soon to meet Dave. He drew alongside us as we cycled along a quiet country lane. We had

already taken one wrong turn, adding a few miles to our journey. After chatting to us, Dave, 68 and very fit, offered to take us on a pretty route to Winchester, which we readily accepted. His wife died 8 years ago; his hobbies included kite boarding and cycling. Unlike burger man Dave had lived in Canada, and travelled widely. The time passed quickly as we were regaled with tales of China. Dave liked to cycle two abreast and was totally oblivious to the tooting motorists; he gave each a friendly wave as they passed.

### **Café de Paris- Winchester Style**

With a fond farewell he left us just before Winchester, and we sped downhill past the sewerage works into the city. An excellent morning break of orange juice, coffee, croissants, and pain au chocolat were taken at the Café de Paris.

Complete with a large Eiffel Tower engraved on the window, and served by genuine French waiters, this was as good as anything we'd had in France.

It dawned on us that we could have just cycled to this café, done a photo shoot here, and saved a lot of work. Next stop Hungerford for fresh fruit and then coffee at the Tutti Pole café and Blowing Hill.

Despite the four pairs of shorts my backside was causing me a great deal of discomfort and the last ten miles was an ordeal. Eventually we arrived at home, unpacked and rested, job done.

It was an excellent experience and one I was pleased to have shared with my son James. I'd like to thank everyone who sponsored us for this worthwhile charity and particularly the Naish's and staff at Milton Post Office for their kind help in fund-raising. Any donations to the **Burford School Uganda Link** will be gratefully received.

**Eric Corbett**