



LETTER FROM FRANCE / COURRIER DE FRANCE

10 September 2012

Hello Everyone / *Bonjour à tous !*

The month since we returned to *Gerde* seems to have flown past. We have been coming here since 2004, but this is the first time for us to be here in August. It is the height of the summer-visitor season, and there is LOTS going on! The local weekly papers are full of photos of festivals, golf tournaments, tennis tournaments, concerts of traditional music, concerts of pop music, village fêtes etc etc. A local visitor attraction is the observatory at the top of the *Pic du Midi* (mentioned in my previous letter), that can be reached by cable car. It is the highest peak in this part of the *Pyrénées* Mountains, so has wonderful views in all directions, including over the border into Spain.



The *Chanteurs Montagnards* of *Bagnères* have just celebrated their 180th anniversary.

Most of the summer visitors are from other parts of France who are attracted by the mountains, fresh air, fantastic scenery, local traditions, local food and an unhurried way of life. We have had the impression of many batteries being recharged ready for *la rentrée* (back to school/ back to work) at the end of August! You will see from these photos from the top of the *Pic* that there are the occasional British visitors too. This photo was taken not long after the Clubs Contact meeting in Barcelona in September 2010 (where we dreamt up the idea for the Gala Weekend), when Bill and Marion Cantley visited us at our house *La Cordée*.



2010/9/28

This particular August has been unusually hot – a real *canicule* or heat wave, with daytime temperatures exceeding 40 °C for several days in a row. Oooof! The radio and papers carried warnings about the precautions that should be taken, such as getting wet several times a day (!), seeking cool places, drinking at least 1.5 litres of water daily. The first point may involve splashes in the fountains found in most towns, and frequent use of water vapour machines in the bigger cities – also the motorway rest areas. *Bagnères* has several fine fountains, including the one pictured below – very tempting when it's hot. The public health authorities became very concerned after the *canicule* in 2003 when 15,000 people died over a two-week period, mostly in the north-central part of

France, and mostly over the age of 75. But there was virtually no mortality ascribed to the heat in our part of France because folk already knew how to manage the heat. We have learned for example, to close the windows and shutters on the sunny side of the house throughout the day, and only open up late in the evening when the temperatures begin to moderate – all very counter-intuitive for folk from Scotland!



I would like now to introduce our village of *Gerde* to you, and probably a montage of photos will you give a good idea:

We live (red dot) on top of the hill overlooking the village.



The centre of the village with its shop *Casa Het* (meaning 'home-made' in Occitan). The restaurant *Eth Courtaou* (a bothy used by shepherds in the summer pastures). Our hosts there are William and Frédérique Leglise. The village hall or *maison du village*, (this was the school in former times, and is now replaced with a marvellous new school building just across the square). The gite on the upper story can be rented at a modest cost.



The other two photos are from this summer's Fête du Village. The children are enthralled by a clown during the *repas champêtre* (rustic meal, literally) on the Sunday afternoon. The shade under the trees was VERY welcome on a hot day. William produced an enormous paella for the Saturday evening. There were fireworks and music too. All great fun.



Greetings to all / *Amitiés à tous!*

Linda

Together with Douglas, Maddy and Magnus...