

## ACCOUNT OF THE AUVERGNE TRIP MAY 2025



*The Puy Du Sancy - highest mountain in the Massif Central*

It was not an auspicious start to the event when the rally plaques failed to turn up in time and we awoke on the morning of departure to the sound of rain. In addition, we had already learned that our scheduled restaurant for lunch on day one was closed due to severe flooding. The poor owner had lost all his Easter trade and was still over a week away from reopening when we were scheduled to visit on 6<sup>th</sup> May. However, he kindly arranged with “La Brasserie Lasternas – Le 1968” \*at Terrasson-Lavilledieu to take us in and provide us with a “light lunch” which turned out to be beef stew followed by a tarte aux noix – light it was not, but it was very good!

Then after lunch, my car “failed to proceed” out of the car park. After an aborted attempt to push-start her on the main road (thanks John and Annie) thus holding up a long queue of traffic, I pulled into a lay-by and lifted the bonnet. The problem turned out to be a Presidential brain malfunction – and I’m not referring to Mr Trump! I had turned off the fuel pump before lunch as a security measure and then not only forgot to turn it back on, but failed to recall that it was indeed off in the first place. Luckily, this dawned on me very quickly and off we all went.

By this time the sun was out, but there was more frustration due to a road closure and a second unexpected diversion. Unfortunately, this meant that we did not have much time to mooch about at Collonges-La-Rouge after our very interesting guided visit. The town is really very pretty and looked even better with our beautiful cars enhancing its good looks. Some of us found a mustard-tasting and were amazed at the different flavours. We also learned that two cousins spent years of their time and millions in legal fees, fighting over the correct mustard recipe and the right to use the family name. The recipes, it turned out, were identical, except that one kept the seeds in and one didn't!

Our barbecues this summer will be all the better for our purchases of truffle-mustard, walnut-mustard, grape-must-mustard (!! ) and chestnut-mustard.



*The whole gang at the Parking du Lavoir - Collonges-La-Rouge*

The hotel Relais de St Jacques provided us with an exceptional dinner after we had settled in with a few apéros and we were all set to head off to the Auvergne on Wednesday morning.



*The church in Collonges, which at one time was shared by Protestants and Catholics, and the view from the hotel terrace at the magic hour.*

After a lovely drive to Lanobre, we stopped for lunch at the Relais Valcastel, just next door to the picturesque Château de Val (see below).



Where we went on a lake cruise 100m above what used to be the bed of the river Dordogne, but is now a large reservoir used to provide hydro-electric power. We also took the opportunity to create an unusual version of the “Tricolore” using three XK150s!



*BLEU - BLANC – ROUGE – The Tricolore in XK150s*

It was upon attempting to leave Lanobre that a second XK150 failed to proceed. This time it was Guy Poirier's car and again after an ineffective attempt at a push-start, the fault was down to a non-functioning fuel pump caused by a disconnected wire under the driver's seat. Guy found this almost immediately however and off we went.

We drove to Mont Dore in the heart of the mountains, settled into the Grand Hotel and set up HQ in the local Guinness bar, courtesy of a reconnaissance by John and Susan Ball.

Then it was off to Le Bœuf Dans l'Assiette for dinner.



*A substantial meal was consumed at “Le Bœuf Dans l’Assiette” but perhaps the quality could have been a little better?*

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> May found us riding the cable car up the Puy du Sancy, where we encountered snow, ice and a cold wind. Luckily though, the weather was reasonably clear and we had some good views from on high. Lunch was a bit of a mish-mash, with some eating on the mountain and others descending to lower altitudes and then we split up for the afternoon. Sadly we all forgot to visit the source of the Dordogne, which was only a few metres away from the ski lift.

Six of us went on a beautifully picturesque ride through the mountains, with views including fields full of flowering wild daffodils, creating carpets of bright yellow.

The drive included a bit of car-swapping and Chas Hamilton took Annie with him, whilst I got stuck with John Coveney – hey-ho!

The objective was a tiny whisky distillery founded and run by Xavier and Véronique Godet who are friends of our neighbour, Christian Jobit. Many of you are familiar with the wine and Cognac produced by his son, François. Unlike most whisky distilleries, rather than just using malted barley, Xavier uses up to seven different grains, depending on which is in the best condition when he wants to purchase it. In terms of quantity, it takes him a year to distil the same amount as the Macallan distillery makes in seven minutes!



*Xavier explaining his distillation methods – nice beard!*



*Enjoying the moment*



*Cheers!*

The drive back brought our first rain since day one, but the evening meal at L'Estavou was simply fabulous. The owners, a husband and wife team, work on their own and had reserved the whole restaurant just for us. The results spoke for themselves and we cannot recommend this restaurant highly enough to anyone who is visiting the area.

On Friday morning Stuart and Jan Allen left us and we continued to Les Jardins de l'Imaginaire at Terrasson-Lavilledieu. What we didn't realise was that you need to be a mountain goat to reach the gardens! But then a gentle and tranquil stroll around in bright sunshine proved the effort well worthwhile.

On to Sarlat now for our last night. A new HQ having been established at "Le Pub" by the ever-resourceful John Ball, we dined in the cobbled streets of this beautiful town at "Gueule et Gosier" on some very fine food and wine. Back to the Hotel Ibis for a comfortable night.



*The First Lady (Annie) at HQ in Sarlat*

On Saturday morning we all enjoyed the fabulous market in the streets of Sarlat, before making our way home to water the plants and cut the grass, which had mysteriously grown again in our absence!

Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves and as always, this sort of trip helps to cement existing friendships and forge new ones. It was the first trip with the JEC SOF/A for Guy and Bernadette Poirier. We all enjoyed their company and hopefully they will join us many times in the future. My grateful thanks to all of you who came along and made the event a success.

**Trev Miles and Carine Raymonde** - how does she drink so much beer and stay so slim?

**John and Susan Ball** – thanks for setting up our HQs.

**Guy and Bernadette Poirier** – lovely to have you with us on your first trip with the club.

**Chas and Jacky Hamilton** - freshly returned from their world cruise.

**John and Roselyne Coveney** – it was a pleasure to spend time with you in the car John (honest)

**Stuart and Jan Allen** – sorry you had to leave us early, but hope you had fun

**John and Jean Mooyman** – no oil leaks this time!

and of course my lovely wife **Annie** ❤️.

***Words and (some of the) pictures by Chris Park.***

***PS. The rally plaques never did turn up!***