

Friendly Encounters in Aquitaine

England lost Aquitaine, the region of France south of Bordeaux, in 1453. English people are still welcome there, as several of our experiences, not long ago, confirmed!

One delightful incident was in Monsegur, which calls itself the “English Bastide Town”, dating from 1265. We parked in the medieval arcaded town square and began to explore on foot. Perhaps we looked lost! We were engaged in conversation by an elderly French lady, proud of her town, who decided to give us helpful guidance. She was “Michelle” – and she turned out to be the perfect tour guide, well aware that she needed to speak slowly and clearly to us. She was proud of her advanced years – and a little disappointed to discover that we were even older! After a fascinating walking tour, during which we learned about her own life, as well as about the town, our route eventually reached the tourist office, where Michelle decided that we should collect some English language leaflets. The staff there knew her, and quite clearly disapproved of her free-lance activities! But we did not!



Elsewhere in the region, we have explored around Lacapelle Cabanac, close to the river Lot. The Eglise de Cabanac has stood, almost alone, since the Hundred Years War. The only nearby building is the Chateau Latuc, surrounded by its vineyards. On our first of several visits there, the owner and his father greeted us with hands dripping with red grape juice, hastily wiped before shaking our hands. But we also had a subsequent memorable visit, received by Mme. Meyan, the owner’s mother. I could not resist mentioning that the day was “mon anniversaire” – and my 80th at that. Our purchase was supplemented by a complimentary bottle, and a kiss on both cheeks to send us happily on our way.



Not far from Lacapelle Cabanac is the village of Montcuq. In riding circles, ‘Les 2 Jours de Montcuq’, a 200 km international horseback endurance competition, is famous. We wandered freely among the participants on one occasion. But Montcuq achieved rather more notoriety in 2011, in the French equivalent of our “Boaty Mcboatface” affair. The makers of Monopoly unwisely entrusted the public with nominations and on-line voting for the location of a new version of the game. Montcuq won! Why, you may ask? Well the French pronunciation of “Montcuq” is identical with “Mon cul !”, which (as Google will tell you) translates as “my arse”.



Montcuq lies on the “Sentier de Saint-Jacques-de-Compostela”, part of the ancient pilgrim routes, frequently way-marked by this emblem, which lead to the shrine in Santiago de Compostela in north-west Spain. Still in Aquitaine, but much nearer the Pyrenees (travelling by car, of course), we have occasionally stopped near this pilgrim standing outside another ancient church. Many modern pilgrims trudge past.



Such lovely memories! Vive la France!

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