

Serendipity Travels

Log of the Gey

We have arrived in the historic city of Carcassonne and are docked at the municipal Port du Plaisance. This portion of the log covers our stay in Carcassonne and the final days of our trip on the *Gey*.

6 October 2014

In many places along the Canal du Midi, moorage is stern-to (often called “Med mooring”). Since there is little current in the canal, no tidal change, and all the boats are well-fendered, the sterns are tied to the dock but the bows are not secured to either a float or by anchor.

Carcassonne follows this pattern. The marina was a short walk from the lock, so Meredith went there and met the dock master. My task was to back the boat between two others. Having had a lot of experience with *Serendipity*, I managed pretty well. Observing others, most accomplish the task by ricocheting off other boats and with a lot of help from line handlers.



Once secure, we visited the office. The marina has a coin-operated laundry facility, which we would use the next morning. No Wi-Fi, but the bistro across the street has free Wi-Fi for patrons who are willing to buy a drink – not too onerous a requirement. She also told us how to catch a city bus to La Cité – the spectacular walled city that occupies a hilltop.

We walked over to the bistro with our tech toys and found a nice booth. With two beers in front of us and connected to the Wi-Fi, we whiled away the rest of the afternoon checking, chatting, and uploading pictures. At some point, another round of beers appeared.

By the time we were finished connecting, it was after 18:00 and a proper time for dinner. Since we were there and seated in a comfortable booth ... we ordered the regional specialty (cassoulet) and a couple more beers. Tomorrow we will visit the walled city.

7 October 2014

First task of the day was laundry – one big load which was taken back to the boat and hung up to dry. Then we set off to catch a bus to La Cité. The busses are well marked and inexpensive (€1 per person) and we were soon at the gates.

Entry to the city is free – it is a residential and commercial area – but entry to the Château Comtal (Duke's Palace) does cost. After walking across the city, we paid the fee and entered this well-preserved structure. The Château is now a regional museum, containing artifacts from Carcassonne's pre-Roman roots, through Roman and Medieval times, until fairly recently. The exhibits are interesting, and the views from the château over the old and new cities are excellent.



Touring makes one hungry. Once we left the château we found a sidewalk café in one of the squares for food and refreshment.

In addition to the château, there are many other sights to see in La Cité. We visited Basilique Saint-Nazaire and many of the shops, selling everything from handcrafts to kitschy souvenirs. The place is definitely worth a visit, but be prepared to deal with crowds, even on a mid-week autumn day.

Having seen enough of La Cité by day, we caught a bus back to the marina. After dinner, we walked about half the distance back to view the site at night. The walls and towers are illuminated, making for a dramatic scene –

To see pictures of our visit to Carcassonne, overlaid on a map, click: [Carcassonne](#)



and a challenge to photograph if you don't bring a tripod. Fortunately, I had my handy walking stick/monopod and was able to steady the camera enough to get some decent shots.

8 October 2014

We have three days of cruising remaining to get to the Négra Locaboat base, where we will surrender possession of the *Gey* on the morning of 11 October. The trip will cover 72 km and 29 locks. The task is quite achievable, but we cannot dawdle.

Today we will attempt to cover 40 km and 17 locks between Carcassonne and Castelnaudary. The speed limit on much of the canal is 8 km per hour, but most of the boats seem to exceed that by a kph or two. The *Gey* is comfortable at 8, drivable at 9, but feels stressed if you hit 10.

On the Canal du Midi in October, locks are open 9:00 – 18:00, but closed 12:30 – 13:30 for the lockkeeper's lunch. We are away from the dock at 8:30. After 25 km and five locks, we stop at Écluse de Bram for lunch. After lunch, we press on.

We will spend most of the next two days traveling, almost in a convoy, with other Locaboats heading to the same base. Today we are following a boat flying a Swiss flag, occupied by two families with pre-teenage children.

We are successful in our quest to reach Castelnaudary, clearing the last set of locks at 17:40. As we approach the Port du Plaisance, we see and hear several people waving and yelling, telling us to moor alongside a large boat on the other side of the channel.



We've learned to do as we're told in such situations, and are soon firmly rafted to on old-style péniche (canal boat) skippered by a British ex-pat. We learn that Castelnaudary is a popular port for those who moor their boats over the winter, and the only transient moorage at these times is rafted to the long-term tenants.

Once we are settled, moorage paid and plugged in, we chat more with our neighbor. He and a friend, another ex-pat (there are a lot of them here!) whose boat is across the way, recommend an out-of-the way restaurant up in the town.



We head off, following their directions, and soon find a small restaurant on a side street. We are the only customers, but are treated like royalty and have a superb meal. Well-fed, we return to the boat.

9 October 2014

Today we will achieve the high-point of our canal trip – crossing the continental divide that separates the Mediterranean watershed from the Atlantic one. We pushed a bit harder than normal yesterday so we could take time today to visit a local business and savor the monuments at the summit.



We depart at a more leisurely time (10:30). Seven km and four locks finds us stopped for lunch under Écluse de la Méditerranée – the highest lock on the Mediterranean side of the canal.

After lunch, we visit Poterie Not, where the Not family has been making pottery for many generations. They must not get too many English-speaking visitors, the proprietor is eager to show us his

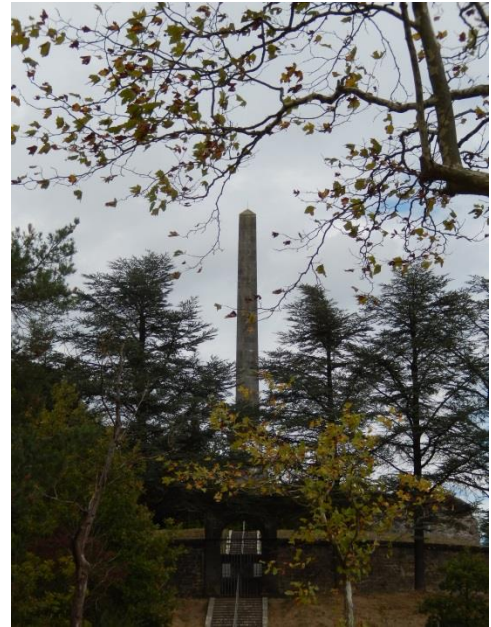
factory, including several wheels, drying racks, kilns, and storage, but we understand very little what he has to say. After a decent interval, and once he is distracted by another couple, we bid “au revoir” and return to our boat.

*To see pictures of the final leg of
our trip, overlaid on a map,
click: [Canal du Midi V](#)*

We are soon underway and through the Écluse de la Méditerranée. This is one end of the five km pond that sits at the summit. Once we are through Écluse de l'Océan at the other end, we moor the boat to do some exploring.

The Canal du Midi was the brain-child of Pierre Paul Riquet. Part of the genius of his design is on display at the summit. He dammed several rivers in this area and channeled the water to a large reservoir. From here, water feeds the locks as the canal descends toward the Mediterranean and Atlantic. In his memory, his descendants have erected an obelisk near Écluse de l'Océan.

Happy with our explorations, we continue to Port Lauragais. This modern facility promises a museum and restaurant. Unfortunately, both seem to have closed for the season. We did find a nice spot to moor the boat however, and were able to visit the associated shop.



10 October 2014

Today we travel the final five locks and 17 km. This part of the canal is some of the most scenic, but least populated. We motor at a comfortable pace, stop for lunch, and encounter the only self-operated lock on our journey. The instructions on the pillar are sparse, but sufficient. Press one button if you are going towards Carcassonne, the other towards Toulouse. The lock will fill or empty as appropriate, and the gate will open for you to enter. Once in, press a button to cycle, and the lock will fill or empty, then open the gate for exit. There are two other buttons, a big red one for emergencies, and one labeled, in four languages,

“In the event of a problem, press the button and wait to get in communication.”

Easy enough, and we complete our journey to the Négra base before they close this evening. We buy a bottle of wine to celebrate our achievement and set about packing for debarkation in the morning.