

We Depart

Wednesday 14th March 2000

The big day arrived and of course all five of us were excited.

Our flight take off time was 1630 (4.30pm) so there was no early morning rush. Marie's suitcase weighed 20kg and mine 17kg. My weight was 60kg.

I packed my daypack (small backpack) in my suitcase. My blue backpack was my take on baggage and Marie used her usual green sports type bag.

Ray Field, David's father arrived to drive us to the Brisbane International Airport while David took his family to the airport.

We all left home at 1.30pm.

We all had the usual last minute discussions and drinks and Grace said a nice long prayer. We waved David and Ray good-bye which to me is always a tearful occasion.

At our seat and baggage checkin, Marie was advised that her hand luggage bag was too heavy at 10kg and should be about 7kg.

We went through Customs without problems and boarded our Qantas QF 351 flight at 4.30pm. We were surprised that the Boeing 747 aircraft was a British Air (BA) one with video screens on the backs of the seats. Dinner was a very nice little meal of beef, chocolate piece and complimentary wine of our choice. Grace and Christian were given a bag each with various reading and drawing items and toys.

At 10.30pm another light meal. This BA flight was great!

Next stop Singapore. We arrived at 10.30pm (11.30 EAST) in the not so hot temperature of 24C.

Singapore

AUD\$1 ~S\$1.0
Population~3,000,000
Temperature 4c



Today Nana, Pop, Mum, Christian and I left on the plane to go to France. It was sad to say goodbye to my Dad and my cat, but the plane was interesting. They had tiny, packed food and televisions in the backs of our chairs!

The five of us were still awake and passed through Customs OK again. We were collected by the Boulevard Hotel's transfer little bus. Maria commenced her video tape recording. Grace and Christian were very excited to see such different things. We arrived at the hotel at about 11.30pm where we had adjoining rooms.

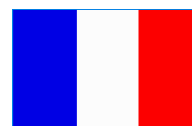
We rose a few hours later and had breakfast consisting of muesli bars. We walked to the Singapore Botanical Gardens where we saw some swans, topiary and of course the orchids. Grace and Christian had their photo taken with a Bride and Groom while they were having their wedding photos taken. Of course it was hot and humid but not as bad as we normally endure. We walked and walked back to near our hotel and had lunch in Tanglin Hall. I started a conversation with two young women and a young man, Singaporeans, who wrote in Grace and Christian's autograph books. What fun already.

On Orchard Road we saw electronic signs next to the walk sign showing the time in seconds left to walk across various streets.

We departed the hotel at 5.45pm by transfer bus to Changi Airport to catch our BA flight at 10.55pm to Paris and were surprised again to find that it was a Qantas aircraft instead of a BA. We all settled in for the long flight. We did not take any of the New Zealand made jetlag tablets because we were travelling west and took a punt by not taking any at all for our entire journey.

During the early morning hours Maria, Grace and Christian went to the aircraft's flight deck to see the cockpit. At the time they saw the country Ukraine below, see photo in the album. Breakfast was served at about 5am.

France



Thursday 15th March 2000

To Disney Paris.

AUD\$1 ~FF3.8
Population ~59,000,000
Diesel price ~\$1.50/lt
Travelled today 50km
Temperature 3c.

See map of our Journey on page 10 which is mainly of the Alsace Region.

We arrived about 6.15am again without much ado and we went to another floor where I wanted to have a shower. In 1997 I had to use the Men's while women came in also because the Women's was being cleaned. This time the Men's was being cleaned so I showered there. I did have my shave in the Men's afterwards as it was then clear to use.

went
arrang
car. In
Peuge
about
time a
days
option
pay for
local tax,



Opel Vectra Nancy

Next we all
to another floor to
e our Hertz rental
1997 we leased a
ot but that was for
four months, this
rental car for 24
was the best
. Items we couldn' t
in Australia were the
fuel and insurance
totaling FF3890 (A\$968). This was on top of A\$2016.00
we paid to our travel agent at home.

It was a silver/grey Opel Vectra which was a few centimeters smaller than what we had hoped, a bit smaller than our Australian Holden Commodore. Anyway we managed to fit all the luggage in with a bit of a squeeze.

There are better photos of it in the photo albums. It had many modern features of course, remote door locking, alarm, electric windows etc. Also almost a new car, there was only 300km on the "clock" which was registered in March 2000. We nicknamed her Nancy.

After a few maneuvers to reacquaint myself with a right hand drive vehicle again we (I) drove out onto the big 1/E15 highway on our way to Paris Disney. Ripper!!

I (we) thought we could remember the way from 1997 but we made a right turn instead of a left turn. We drove off into outer suburbs where Maria was so glad that we did miss the turn because it was the Field' first experience of the real France.

We arrived at the Motel Santa Fe at 11.30am and booked in but couldn' go to our rooms until 3pm so we parked Nancy in one of the motel' car park and caught the special bus to Paris Disney. What a fantastic time to come, the special promise Marie made to Grace years ago.

The Santa Fe Motel we booked in Australia as a package deal for five persons. Two nights and three days entrance into Disney Paris for A\$1469.00. I estimate A\$368 for each person.

One of the first attractions we went to was Small World then Alice' Maze which Grace and Christian loved. We caught the bus back to the Santa Fe at 6pm which means we had a full days fun, then unloaded our baggage. I made a cup of tea with our immersion heater as there was no tea or coffee making facilities.

Friday 17th March.

Temperature 5c

Up at 7am but we had to wait until 10.30am to have breakfast in the Apache Room of the Santa Fe. I took Maria for her first lesson and drive of Nancy on the other side of the road. Disney France does not open until 10 am so there was time.

A few manoeuvres in the car park then out on the roads around the motel.
Christian came with us and was helpful because we took a wrong turn but he saw the motel' big sign so finding our way back.

Maria learnt very fast.

We bought our first provisions at the nearby petrol/diesel/food service station, also a road map covering the area from Paris to Alsace, for about 75% cheaper than if we had purchased it in Australia.

Then we caught the bus to Paris Disney again for another fantastic day. We had rides on Pinocchio, Pirate, Small World twice, a fire engine and watched the afternoon Parade. The Small World is much better than Disney World Magic Kingdom in Florida, USA in that just before leaving, there are many little windows to look through and see little hologram figures of children talking on telephones to other children all over the world.

The Imaginations Parade was very good and pretty, not the ghastly figures of the Parade when we were here in 1997.

We walked out of Disney to the Disney Village which is about 50mt away. As the reader can see by the photos we all wore our cold snow clothing most of the time because the temperature was 5c to 10c, cold.

It has many different things including Planet Hollywood. We all had dinner at one of the restaurants called "Annette' Diner". It was built in the theme of an American diner with some of the staff working on roller blades, dancing and singing on table/bench tops. Very noisy but we all loved it! Christian was very tired and went to sleep after dinner.

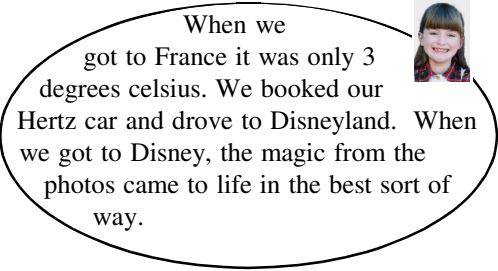
It was St. Patrick' Day and there was going to be a special parade and fireworks later in the evening, but we were so tired we caught the bus back home at 8pm. I must remind the reader sunset was about 7pm.

Saturday 18th March to Sézanne.

Travelled today 80km

Temperature 6c.

This morning we had an earlier breakfast which was just as well because we planned to have only four to five hours at Disney Paris. There was a good choice of cereals, croissants, small rolls, meat, cheese, yoghurt, custard, butter, jam, juices, tea, coffee and great hot chocolate. We tried to use our Harvey World Travel 'Phoneaway card to ' phondJohn (our son) but it would not work. Maria ' phoned David OK though.



When we got to France it was only 3 degrees celsius. We booked our Hertz car and drove to Disneyland. When we got to Disney, the magic from the photos came to life in the best sort of way.



After another wonderful time including a ride on the big paddle steamer we departed Disney at 2pm, back to the Santa Fe by bus and checked out.

After a few kilometres on highway 4 I became our navigator/passenger so Maria could do some driving. She had no difficulty and loved it!! The countryside is quite flat with a few low hills but we saw trees that were flattened by the big storm which swept across Europe in December 1999. More than sixty-five people were killed in France.

We stopped for Nancy' first drink, 10lt of diesel costing 60FF (~A\$15.78). About 10km from Disney France we paid a toll on highway 4 of 11FF.

About 4pm we stopped at a small village called Esternay where Maria and I checked at a little hotel. This was Maria' first real

need to use her French as the woman could not speak English. I understood a little but Maria sounded great. The hotel was "complet" in other words, full. We drove on and stopped at Sézanne. A man and woman showed Maria that there was a hotel up the street, in French of course. Maria and I then walked there and negotiated our accommodation which was like a chalet (with a space for Nancy to sleep off the street) costing 450FF or 90FF (A\$23) each person or 225FF per family. Reasonable which is what we expected.

Its name was Le Relais Champenois and we were thrilled as the hotel and the town was still steeped in ages past.

The real France on our first night stop on the road!

Sunday 19th March to Nancy.

Travelled today 80km

Temperature 5c

After breakfast we walked the town again and met our first French fireman, see the photos in the album of Grace and Christian with him.

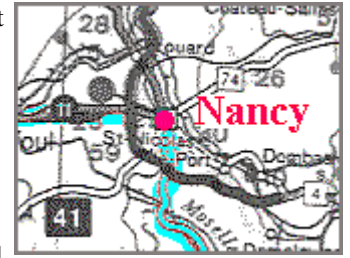
What a lovely old town, old windows and shutters, doorways, a church, cobbled streets, the real old France. I point out that as this town area was east of Paris, these people endured such terrible times during the wars. First the Germans then the Allies liberating them.

We tried to impress on Grace and Christian without laboring too much on events, what had happened to France and Germany in ages past.

We checked out of the cute little hotel run by friendly people with my co-driver, Maria driving on 4/E17. We agreed that both of we drivers would sit in the front seat and be driver or navigator as we swapped.

This meant Marie sat in the rear with Grace and Christian and did not have to read any maps.

We stopped in a park next to a church in Saint Dizier to have lunch of baguettes, croissants, and biscuits.



Nancy

Still driving on 4/E17 highway we arrived at the city of Nancy after only making one wrong turn. We decided using "Nancy" as the nickname for our car because its first letters on the number plate were "NBK". We used these three letters to mean, "Nancy By Car".

Marie and Maria went into a hotel but nobody seemed to be around so they went across to another one called Hotel Le Stanislas and booked in for 580FF (A\$153) for two rooms. We asked the young woman there where we could park Nancy and she said something like "around the corner".

After unloading our baggage I drove around the block a couple of times but couldn' find the parking place so I parked in the street a couple of blocks away. By the time I walked back to the hotel there was one vacant space across the street from the hotel so Marie stood guard while I drove Nancy back to park there. In the process I had so much trouble I purposely drove about 30mt the wrong way along a one way street, this is Europe!

We were so lucky the main square called Place Stanislas was only about 100mt away with its beautiful golden gates and other objects.

In 1997 we drove right through this lovely city without stopping. There were still many shops and other building with Christmas decorations on display.

We saw the Porte De Graffe that was built in 1336ad, the Eglise Saint Epvre cathedral built in 1871 and so many others. In the park was a small childrens amusement area where Grace and Christian could have some rides but the cost was A\$10 each for six rides which was expensive. We also saw some young students playing the game called boules. Back in our rooms we had our own dinner of cold chicken, bread and fruit.

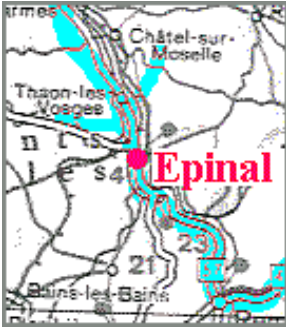
Monday 20th March to Epinal.

Travelled today 207km

Temperature 6c



Everyone here is so friendly. As you probably heard on the news, France had a big storm with high speed winds of 300km and England almost had a tidal wave. And it was true, because everywhere we went over France in our whole holiday, we saw huge trees knocked over, fields of broken trees, wrecked farm houses, ruined rooves and even bent highway signs!



In the morning the three "girls" walked around some more while Christian and I stayed home. We departed at 11am taking 57/E23 highway southward onto the city of Epinal. Maria was driving when we did a 1km detour off the highway to a very small village called Frizon. What a cute miniature village, it really

showed Maria why we knew the Fields were going to love France.

Back onto the highway to arrive in Epinal which is on the bank of the Moselle River.

I went to the Tourist Office where I had to wait about 15mins until after lunch. Remember, this is Europe where many places close for lunch, even tourist offices.

On the way we stopped at a cute, teensy town called Frizon . It had about 30 to 40 houses, a little creek running through it and just like every town, no matter what, it had its own little church! It was amazing!



I obtained good information so we drove to a hotel called Etap. Actually it' s a motel chain by that name. There are many other motel chains that the Australian Travel offices do not tell people about. Some others are Formula One (F1), Villages Hôtel and Hotel Premiere Classe.

End album # 1 commence album # 2

These are modern ones and much cheaper but don' t have the old European charm. We couldn' book in because it was too early so we drove up to an old Chateau, went to a bank for cash and to a Marche (supermarket) for food supplies. We went back to the Etap Motel after 5pm and booked in for 190FF (A\$50) each room. In this instance I have given the cost per room which is the same for one, two or three persons.

I cooked ravioli and noodles in a tin by using one of our two 240volt immersion heaters that we take on such journeys. I also make hot soup, tea, coffee and so on. This cuts down on the cost and means we could have meals whenever we liked.

Tuesday 21st March to Thann.

Travelled today 93km
Temperature 5c

One degree colder but we didn' mind because we knew we were in for another fantastic day!

I went into a newsagent type shop, I think it may have been a Tabac, a shop that sells tobacco and similar smoking things, and told the young man about my difficulty of using the French ' phones.

He talked me into buying a French "Omn Ni Com Carte Téléphone" for 50FF (A\$13). So outside I tried it but I still couldn' t use it. We left the big 57 and drove on a smaller road number 11. The country is quite mountainous in this region being called the Vosges Mountains so we were confident that we would be in snow soon.

I tried to ' phone John using the Phonaway Card number but still unsuccessful. Just outside Gerardmer we took photos of the beautiful lake.

We arrived at Gerardmer at 10am with the temperature being 2c which is what one would expect at a snow ski resort.

I went to the Tourist Office and Maria bought some bread. What a cute little snowski town with a carousel which unfortunately was not operating. We drove about 2km up the mountain to the snow, Grace' and Christian' s first time in the snow ever. What excitement!

There are lots of photos in the album of us all in the snow. As is usual at ski areas, at the base there are the lifts, the cafes, ski hire and ski-school and so on. We sat outside the cafe in the sun (by this time the temperature was warmer at 16c), and all had a thick hot chocolate drink with our picnic lunch. Maria also ' phoned David. We got talking to some skiers from Belgium/Luxembourg who were here for the last days skiing. The ski area was to close in a couple of days time. There was still plenty of snow on the slopes, skiers in Australia would love to have their Victorian and NSW slopes covered with snow as deep.

Just as we departed at 2pm a group of school children arrived who were going to do some skiing. What a wonderful experience for Grace and Christian in the lovely white snow, something they will never forget.



We drove on smaller roads and then big N66 to arrive in Thann at 5pm which is on the River Thur.

Thann

After Maria and Marie checked two hotels that were full, the woman at the second one ' phoned through to another one that still had vacancies.

Maria had a fun time as the woman spoke in a combination of French, German and English. We found the Hotel Kléber easily which was only a kilometre away. Note the German name as we were very close to the French-German border.

The rooms were great for 600FF (A\$158) for the two rooms which was very reasonable. We all walked the town with the usual winding cobble stoned streets, narrow lanes and so on.

I spotted a French Telecom Office so I hoped I would be able to fix up the Phoneaway card troubles.

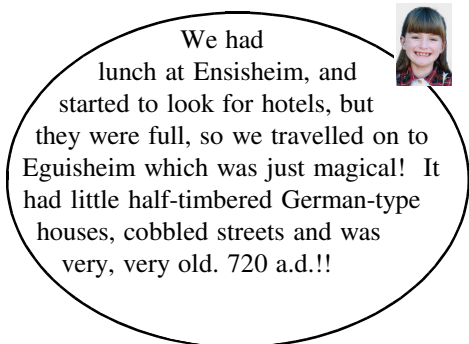
I showed her the OmNiCard I bought the day before but she said it was a GTS type which would not work in this region of France. The woman there was so very helpful that she ' phoned the Australian number and I spoke to an Australian man who said, "yes the French ' phonenumber was incorrect" and told me the correct one. Three digits were different. We all had a little snack for dinner in a little cafe which was going to close shortly. We suspected every other business in Thann did also as the place was very quiet later. We saw a wonderful old church, many old buildings and ruins on the hill. (please see the photos in the album).

Back in the Hotel Kléber Marie had more plumbing difficulties, she couldn't get the hot water to run properly so she endured a cold one. Such travellers fun!


Wednesday 22nd March to Eguisheim and Christian 7.

Travelled today	99km
Temperature	7c
Population	~1600

We walked lovely Thann again buying a cake for Christian. Marie had brought a "7" candle from home and we sang Happy Birthday to him. We departed at 10.30am for



We had lunch at Ensisheim, and started to look for hotels, but they were full, so we travelled on to Eguisheim which was just magical! It had little half-timbered German-type houses, cobbled streets and was very, very old. 720 a.d.!!



Eguisheim on highway N66 over flat country because we were close to the Rhine River. We drove through Mulhouse, pronounced "moo loose".



We drove on small roads through small towns before stopping in Orschwir being another little old village. We saw lots of stork nests in trees and tops of buildings with most occupied by storks, which is an attraction in this area. On further to Ensisheim we stopped at a little cafe just for toilets and a drink. While Marie and the Fields were in the toilets, one customer spoke good English so I told him that Christian became seven years old today.

He said that was great. I asked him that perhaps he and the others would like to sing "Happy birthday" to him in French or English when he comes out of the toilet. Well they did, and it was just terrific for Christian. French people are so friendly.

We arrived in Eguisheim and had no trouble finding accommodation.

Eguisheim

Eguisheim is a walled medieval town and so we booked for two nights at the L' AubergHotel Alsacienne for 2250FF (A\$592) or equivalent to A\$60 per person per night. A parking spot for Nancy in the big covered area behind the hotel.

Very reasonable for such a historic town. These old villages would rarely be visited by Australians on Coach tours which is why we call ourselves travellers and not tourists.

There are many photos in the album of this ancient town, please see them. Eguisheim was Maria's favourite place. Some buildings date back to 700ad. We saw a sundial which is not unusual but this one was mounted on a wall of a building.

We had Christian's birthday dinner in the restaurant "Du Pape" next to the hotel. Maria ordered only two meals as she, Grace and Christian sometimes shared meals.

The waiter insisted that they would be served on three plates, not two, french people are so friendly. For dessert we all had raspberry sorbet and when it came time to light the candle on Christian's cake, I knocked my drink into my dessert. Well what laughter! We could not stop laughing. Soon some of the serious looking customers also laughed.

The hotel's rooms were all named, the Field's was "Mirabelle" and ours was "Piore".

Thursday 23rd March.

Travelled today	50km
Temperature	7c

Maria planned to go to any small primary school in France and introduce Grace and Christian to the pupils and teacher. This is exactly what we did this morning. We just went into the office and Maria spoke German and before too long she and Grace and Christian were taken upstairs to a classroom. Marie and I waited downstairs. They had a wonderful and productive time. The valuable experiences were a two way thing.

This school in little ancient Eguisheim has only ninety students and the young children were amazed by the size of the Milton school which has 310 students. And of course Grace and Christian were surprised by their small school and their activities. Maria gave out some small books on Australia (that Marie brought) to the children and teacher. Outside in the playground during lunch, I gave out some paper Australian flags and old one and two cent Australian coins to the eager children at the fence. What a wonderful experience!

At 10.30am we drove onto other ancient towns few kilometers away called Ingersheim and Riquewihr where one building was dated 1094. Riquewihr is another old walled town with big gates at each entrance/exit. Grace and Christian had their photo taken with a chimney sweep. We saw another sun dial on a wall in Riquewihr. We had our usual picnic lunch in a little park just outside the town's wall. Maria walked up the hill amongst the grape vines. I point out that we were in one of the grape growing regions of France. A photo shows Maria as a speck amongst the vines.

Another drink for Nancy 30lt for 174FF on the way to Hunawirh which has a fortified church that we tried to drive to but couldn't because of roadworks. The next ancient town was Ribeauville. Back to Eguisheim where the three girls walked around to sightsee some more. They visited a modern art gallery and another building where a man showed them where he was converting old stables into a lounge room.

Back home I cooked our dinner of baked beans, sausages and two minute noodles.

Friday 24th March.

Travelled today 19km
Temperature 10c

As we enjoyed this area so much we all decided to stay another night at the L' AubergHotel. We departed at 8.30am for a bigger but no less interesting town of Colmar with a population of about 63.000. We walked in a well known part called Little Venice with a canal like in Venice. We had lunch in a German man's cafe which advertised "American Burgers" and thought we would have a nice change from baguettes. Alas, we were tricked...they were baguettes after all, but with different fillings.

Another special place for Grace and Christian that we visited was the Doll and Toy Museum. Very interesting even for us oldies.



Another interesting object was a sundial, no not a twenty-four hour time sundial but a month of the year one. See the photo in the album.

On the page opposite, in the album, that photo is a photo of a public toilets. The two half doors are where men stand to urinate, to be seen by all in sundry outside. This is France.

Grace and Christian also had their photo taken with two police Gendarmes. Back home for our third night in the old hotel.

Saturday 25th March to Obernai.

Travelled today 88km
Temperature 7c

We departed Eguisheim at 8.30am and soon visited a walled town called Bergheim which also has a city gate, this one dated 1300. Travelling on D1, then on a winding road up the mountain side to Haut-Koenigsbourg, which is a well know tourist attraction. Haut-Koenigsbourg Castle is situated on the top of a mountain 757mt above sea level (ASL). It has a long and vague history about its beginning but its first noted history commenced in 1147ad.

After a self guided tour of it we had a nice lunch in the castle restaurant, quiche, potato chips etc. We drove back down the mountain through Kintzheim then through Sélastat then N42 to Obernai arriving about 3pm.

We saw Petite France which was the old section of the city, with lots of old houses, and a canal where we saw a boat going in and out of a lock. We drove to the Maginot (pronounced Mar-jin-oe) line.



Obernai

We booked into the Heritage Listed 14th century Hotel La Cloche in the heart of the town, in a family room on the third floor.

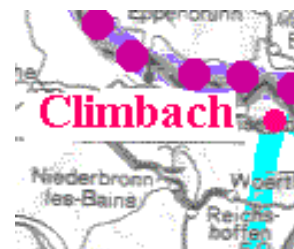
This is an old building as parts are crooked and neither vertical nor horizontal as the reader should see by the photos in the album. Nancy was happy as she had a parking place at the side of the building.

Right outside the hotel is the Well Of Six Buckets dated 1579ad. Our room cost 455FF (A\$113) which consisted of a attic above us where Maria, Grace and Christian slept. Both our windows had good views over the city, another old one. What's new?

End album #2 commence Album # 3

Sunday 26th to Climbach.

Travelled today 143km
Temperature 10c



The task today was to get to the areas where we could visit some of the Ligne Maginot (Maginot Line) which most people should know is of special significance during WWII.

At last we were hearing the lovely sounds of church bells.

In this town they rang all night but at every fifteen minutes it was a bit much. We drove on A35/E25 into Strasbourg. We walked through the old covered bridge built in 1888 which is one of the many things to see. The population of Strasbourg is approximately 260,000.

Strasbourg has an area called Petite France which was interesting and is where we saw a boat lock in operation on a canal.

Strasbourg has some locks so I was so pleased to be able to explain to Grace and Christian what a lock is. A tourist boat moved in and out of a lock while we were there, great.

We drove on A4/E25 to Haguenau then on a smaller highway D27 to Lembach. This is where we were going to see a part of the Maginot Line but as there were no accommodations here we drove on about 6km east to the next village of Climbach.

Climbach

We booked into a little modern hotel "Cheval Blanc" for 685FF (A\$180) with a definite "No Eating In Rooms" sign so we decided to have dinner in Deutschland (Germany) after going back to Lembach.

We arrived at about 1.30pm and had to wait until the next tour time of 2pm of the Maginot Line costing 25FF per adult, cheap.

What a fantastic interesting place which again is just too complicated and big for me to type in here. Please see the booklet in the photo albums.

Perhaps people who do not see the albums and only read this book, may be able to borrow the Maginot Line booklet. I point out that this is only one part of the Maginot Line as it extends from Belgium to Italy. Big!

We saw many more trees blown over and smashed caused by the big storm I had mentioned before, the damage covered a big area. So after the tour which lasted about one hour Maria drove back to Climbach and into Germany, what fun!

A Short Time In Deutschland.

We had dinner in a little restaurant in **Deutschland** but because we had no German cash we paid the man in FF which he happily accepted. This of course is common in Europe at border towns. We had German sausage, sauerkraut etc, and I think we all enjoyed our first meal in Germany.



At the restaurant we learnt that Daylight Savings Time commenced in this region at least so the Maginot Line Tour that we took was not at 2pm but 3pm.

Back in France Marie, Maria and I had our usual liqueur drink. These were common place in Alsace and also very cheap. Many types made from various fruits, yummy!

Maria drove all day, a good rest for me.

Monday 27th to Worms in Deutschland

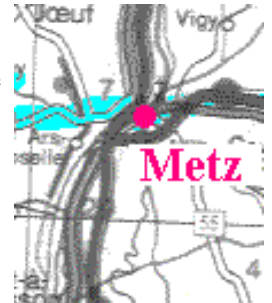
AUD\$1	~1.1DM
Travelled today	222km
Temperature	4c

We drove on D3 to Wissembourg through the town still on D3 along side the French/German border on the southern side.

We crossed into Germany again just southwest of Karlsruhe. From there on 5/E35 to Heidelberg to visit the Heidelberg Castle. We had our picnic on the banks of the Neckar River beside a riverboat type of restaurant.

On the river bank there were daffodils and tulips and also various barge type boats carrying all sorts of items.

The Neckar branches off the Rhein River about 15km north so there are almost as many boats here as on the Rhein. More diesel for Nancy, 25lt for 38DM.



Worms

We wanted to stay the night in Worms, pronounced Verms so after getting caught in the traffic on the main street. We then thought we might try at a small town called Gernsheim but it was on the other side of the Rhein and we would have needed to travel over on a river ferry. We didn' have any German cash so that wasn' an option. The width of the Rhein here was about 500km.

See a photo of Grace and Maria touching the River Rhine water.

We drove back to Worms and soon found a hotel, the Hotel Faber for 290DM (A\$263) which we paid with our credit card, one of the very few times we used the card. Nancy spent the night in a little lane beside the hotel.

While we were still in Heidelberg, we had a picnic by the river Neckar, with all the daffodils and tulips growing on the bank. In a way it reminded me of the Brisbane river.



We walked the town as usual but had to just look as we had no cash but if we really needed we could have used the card. By the way the banks were closed this day for a reason we don't know. At home I cooked beans and sausages and for our desert we enjoyed tinned peaches.

Tuesday 28th March to Metz

Travelled today 220km

Temperature 3c

Our breakfast we all enjoyed in the hotel's dining/breakfast room which was included in the cost of the accommodation. We estimated at the time cost each day was A\$197 which was very reasonable for five people. We drove on A6/E50 southwest across slightly hilly countryside. About here Maria took over the driving to her delight on this very busy highway as it's the main one from Germany to Paris. Lots of cars and semi-trailer trucks but never we were threatened by the amount of traffic.

Maria really enjoyed driving on the big busy A6. We bypassed the big city of Saarbrücken where about 5km south we re-entered lovely France. We stopped for ours and Nancy's sake, 25lt of fuel costing 38DM (A\$35).

Back into France.

(This is end of Maria's first VHS video tape).

By this time the A6 also became E25.

We arrived in Metz, pronounced "mess".

We drove out of the city and about 3km came across a group of modern motels and hotels. We tried at five of them but all were "complet".

We decided to have our picnic lunch before heading back to the city. In the process we saw one part of two remaining sections of an ancient Roman aqueduct.

We found a spot for lunch on the river bank, probably the Moselle River. It was another cold lunch time, about 5c. We then drove back into Metz and wandered around for thirty minutes or so and came across some old hotels near the Gare (railway station).

We booked into the Hotel Bristol, very British in name but just another old French hotel, across the street from the Gare. Cost was 545FF (A\$136.25) for two rooms for all of us. But Nancy had to be content with sleeping in the street again, just around the corner. The Gare paid a major role in WWII as Metz was a major manufacturing centre and it's also a big railway junction and crossroads.

Our dinner this night was in style at a restaurant next to the hotel. Pizza and peach melba with plenty of cream was a change for us all. During the day Marie and I spoke by phone to John and Lyn and all was under control at home. The hotel had another interesting item to mention, an old electric coin operated shoe shine machine manufactured in the USA. So Grace and Christian gave their shoes a good shine.

Wednesday 29th March to Châlons-sur-Marne.

Travelled today 186km

Temperature 5c

We drove around Metz which is situated on the Moselle River to see the usual old buildings and parked in a shopping centre

covered car park so that we could visit a 4th century old church called "St Pierre

Aux-Nomains". Christian found a

watch in the park above the car park but didn't want it because the wrist band was broken, so we kept it so I could fix it on our return home, which I did and gave it back to him. It still works fine.

We departed Metz at 11am driving on N3 to arrive in Verdun which is a very sad historical WWI place. Our picnic lunch was probably the coldest as Grace and Christian had theirs in the back of Nancy, see photos in the album. Another drink of diesel for Nancy costing 150FF for 28lt.

Yes a very sad and distressing area. Maria drove along a dirt track to Fort Souville which was built between 1875 and 1877 and was almost totally destroyed in 1917.

The ground still shows the scars of war in that there are holes in the ground big enough to fit a small car, holes blown up by the constant shelling during the war eight decades ago. Horrible!

We also drove to the museum and memorial where there are thousands of white crosses in the ground. Tours are conducted here but none of us wanted to go on any because it was all so distressing.

Beside the highway there were a few special small monument objects about 1.5m tall, probably made of concrete. The inscription on the them is "Vole de La Liberte 1944". The liberation of France in WWII, see photo in the album. Another stop for Nancy for 28lt of diesel for 150FF (A\$39.50).

Chalons-sur-Marne

We arrived in Châlons-sur-Marne on A3/33 at about 4.30pm and had some trouble finding accommodation but ended up at the Hotel Saint Crox right next to a small Arc de Triomphe and a castle.



At Verdun, we stopped to have a picnic....and of course, it was freeeezing! A little further on we saw an army bunker from the second World War, and two war memorials. At one memorial there were thousands and thousands of white crosses on soldiers graves.

This cost us 570FF (A\$263) and a free night for Nancy in the grounds of the castle. The three "girls" walked the town while Christian kept me company. For dinner I cooked chicken ravioli with our desert being fruit Yoplait.

It rained during the night which made it nice for a photo of the Arc outside our window.

Thursday 30th to Paris.

Travelled today 193km

Temperature 5c

This was our last big drive although most days we travelled less than 200km. Maria drove to start the day on 3 then 11 and 33 highway through country side a bit like the farming area of the Darling Downs near Warwick. We stopped at a little cafe in a small village called Coulimmers for lunch, which has a university. The people running the cafe could not speak much English but the very helpful man asked another man who was a customer if he could help. Sometimes Maria' French was not adequate so we had fun using both languages. We had a nice hot meal of ham omelette with chips and hot chocolate. Yummy!

Grace and Christian had a game on the old type soccer games where you have to push and turn the rods that have attached to them the little soccer men.

We drove past where Disney Paris is about 5km away in the distant so we had done a full circle so to speak. By now we rejoined 36 highway. The last twenty kilometres was going to be a big test for the driver and navigator, remember Marie was still a passenger so I took over the driving. We exited near Porte De Charenton and drove back and forth in what was the greater city of Paris. Paris is divided into sections called arrondements and we were wandering around somewhat in circles.

We came across a couple of hotels which Marie and Maria checked out but were very seedy and dirty to say the least. Grace and Christian stayed with me in Nancy. We drove on some more and came across some hotels in a better part of Paris.

Marie and Maria checked the first one called Hotel Chaligny which was OK, as it had a lift to get us to the fifth floor, was clean and the man was friendly. But a place for Nancy to rest was a parking place closeby.

Paris

Hotel Chaligny cost 685FF (A\$180) per night for all of us in two rooms which is cheap in Paris but we only paid for one night and told the man that we may stay for six more, was that OK? Yes it was. We unloaded all our baggage then I parked Nancy temporarily. The lift. The lift is the smallest we have ever seen which measured 75cm by 65cm, very small. So small that we had to stand our suitcases on end.

After settling in I went back to Nancy to find her parking place which after many hassles I found under a big shop. I paid for one night only as we didn' know if we would be here more nights.

Maria walked to a shop and purchased the usual baguette and milk. I cooked dinner which was sausages and beans, dessert was fresh peaches.

Friday 31 March to sightsee Paris.

Temperature 9c sunny

We decided we would stay the extra six nights here so we all went to the parking station where Nancy was and spoke to the men staffing the place. We were so pleasantly surprised that as we were tourists we could leave Nancy in the parking station for the next six nights and days for 400FF (A\$105) or about A\$17.50 per day. But Nancy had to stay parked for all that time which was OK as we were going to travel by public transport to sight see Paris, lovely Paris, big Paris.

Our task today was to visit the Palace of Versailles.

On our way in the Metro a man boarded the train and played a piano accordion, a typical French tune, a lovely touch.

We walked about 1km to the Gare de Lyon which is big, then a bus to Gare d' Austerlitz for a metro train to Versailles. If the reader is looking at the Paris Metro train map which had the various lines in various colours you may think Paris is not so big.

But the width in kilometres across of the white part is about 15km. The Paris public transport system is extremely efficient and good, as is many other European cities. This can' be said of the USA and Australia for that matter. Americans and Australians love their cars too much. And of course we do not have a big population.

We purchased special transport tickets called a "Canet" costing 55FF (A\$14.50) which is for ten trips or journeys anywhere within Paris on buses, trains, metro trains etc. They are stuck together like a little book and one tears one off to put into the machine at a Gare or a bus. One has to keep that ticket to use again to get through the gates at a Gare, that is to exit. This is not necessary on a bus though.



When we got to the palace it had real gold gates everywhere, wonderful painted ceilings, marble walls and hectares of gardens with lovely flowers, fountains and sculptured hedges.

Marie and I needed more Francs so I headed for a money change place on our walk to the Palace but a sign indicated it had moved, to an address we didn't know and I suppose most tourists wouldn't know. I then asked at a hotel where the helpful young man told me where it had shifted to, about 50m away. We got our cash there without any problem.

What a fantastic place the Palace of Versailles is, no wonder there was the French Revolution. Such opulence. The Hall of Mirrors is just magnificent. A very good learning experience for Grace and Christian. The three girls walked around the gardens while Christian had a rest near one of the many fountains. We saw more little scooters called Razor Scooter.

We had lunch at our first French McDonalds just around the corner from the Palace before returning home on the metro and checked out a Chinese restaurant across the street which wouldn't open until 7pm. Anyway we returned later and enjoyed a small meal which wasn't what we expect a Chinese meal to be with lots of vegetables and rice. It was a very sparse meal.

As we had decided to stay six more nights here we paid the extra 4110FF (A\$1,082) on our way back to our home in Paris. I point out that is A\$90 per room per night. We had just settled in when the fire alarm rang so we all hurried down the stairs to the office. As we suspected it was a false alarm thank goodness.

End Album #3 commence Album #4

Saturday 1 April to sightsee Paris.

Temperature 8c rain

We departed at 8.30am to visit the Eiffel Tower by catching a bus a couple of streets away which took us all the way.


A woman on the bus told Maria the best she could in French some of the special buildings, so very friendly. Marie and I watched Maria, Grace and Christian as they were so excited to see the Tower in the distance. I took a photo of Grace.

Compared to when we were there in 1997 there was no big crowd so we queued up at one of the four corners to buy our tickets which cost about FF40 each (A\$10) to the second deck. This took about thirty minutes but was really worth it. Unfortunately it was raining a little so the view was not the best. We had our picnic lunch there on the inside and talked awhile to a young Australian couple. At 1.30pm we walked to a metro station and got out at the famous Notre Dame.

This famous building did not miss the effects of the big storm either as some of the spheres were damaged. Inside we heard a choir practicing singing Amazing Grace.

We caught a bus home and watched more of the European Skating Championships on CTV which was held somewhere in France. So far Maria had managed to telephone David each day with no problem. We phoned John and Lyn on various days and with less trouble now that the special number was correct. Marie, Maria and I had some cherry liquor before retiring.

I got a photo of the Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo. We saw the Winged Victory, Rembrandts collection and lots of other famous paintings and statues. We had lunch at the top of the Louvre, next to the fountains and the glass pyramid, and fed the pigeons.



Sunday 2 April to sightsee more of Paris

Temperature 10c sunny

Today to the Louvre and beyond. We caught another Metro train to the Louvre I think from the Gare Reuilly-Diderot. I must mention here that the Metro stations are so clean and tidy. The part underground where the platforms are to catch a train are so beautifully decorated, with paintings and drawings coinciding to that gare.

In the case of the Gare Louvre the paintings are copies or representations of some in the Louvre itself. Although we only saw and travelled through perhaps twenty gares the instances of graffiti or rubbish was almost nil. This was also the case when Marie and I were here in 1997. This time in the train a busker got on at a gare and played "Let It Be" on his guitar and backed by his tape recorded music. A lovely touch.

We were in luck again because entry to the Louvre on the first Sunday in the month was free.

The normal cost on a Sunday was 35FF (A\$9.20) or 45FF on any other day.

The Louvre is absolutely magnificent and so very big. As I have said on numerous times before, Europeans do things in a big style and of course so old. On about the third floor we saw the Mona Lisa which is mounted behind a glass case.

I took a photo of a painting of Jesus carrying a cross. Grace and Christian enjoyed the little that we did see, some of the paintings are huge.

I measured one which I think was "David", "Jaquis-Louis 1748" at about 11m (eleven metres) wide, huge! A photo in the album shows Grace in front of it. There were others I saw later that were even bigger.

Our picnic lunch we all enjoyed in the sun outside next to the glass pyramid which is always shown in advertisements about the Louvre.

We walked over the Pont (bridge) Carrousel to the Musee d' Orsay to see amongst others, "Whistler's Mother". I think most readers of this would have seen the movie "Mr. Bean" where Mr. Bean sneezed on the painting and tried to clean it. Well the more he tried the worse it got. What a funny movie. Maria loved all the French impressionist paintings.

The museum was a train gare (railway station) many years ago and played a terrible part in WWII so please read the brochure and booklet in the album. On our return to walk over the same pont, along came a big group of people on roller blades.

We thought it may have been a protest march but on questioning a couple of young men on roller blades they told us that it was a weekly affair. Each Sunday afternoon and Friday night people can roller blade in a well organised, safe environment with police clearing traffic. The route is about 25km long and is suitable for children and adults. There were about a thousand taking part on this one.

We walked back over the same bridge to catch a train home from the Metro Gare Louvre. I cooked dinner again, chile con carne and baguettes. Of course topped off with a liqueur.

Monday 3 April sightsee more of Paris.

Temperature 13c sunny

Marie and the Fields went to the Sacre Coeur by train and bus while I walked around the corner to a big computer store which is about ten times bigger than our Harvey Norman stores, big! This is the building that has the carpark where Nancy was resting. I didn't buy anything computerwise. I was there at about 9.30am, went down to the carpark to say Bonjour to Nancy. This store is more like a market with various sections and stalls. But I gather that purchasers paid at the usual type checkouts.

9.30am was too early for most of the stalls as there were no one staffing them.

There was one section about 50m long that were repair stations, places where people could bring their computer or printer and so to have it serviced. I spent about two hours there by which time it was in full operation. Prices of things was about the same as in Australia, some even dearer. I did not buy anything.

I had my lunch at one of the usual cafes which occupy some of the footpath. Marie and the Fields had a very enjoyable time at the Sacre Coeur and walked to the Gare De Nord, (north station). This was the gare that Marie and I used when we were here in 1997.

Tuesday 4 April sightsee more of Paris.

Temperature 12c

We caught a metro train from the Gare Reuilly-Diderot to Gare Ch. de Gaulle-Etoile to arrive at the Arc de Triomphe. It was sunny again so Maria, Grace and Christian had a good view from the top which is reached by walking up the 300 or so steps.

I walked them in 1997 but was happy to just read the inscriptions on the various areas. On one part is what we think is my father's name, D' Altonas he did fight in France in WWI and received a DSM medal. We had our picnic lunch across the roundabout in the little park. From here we walked the Avenue Des Champs Elysees having a drink at one of the many cafes, this one being "George V".

Marie and I went to a bank and changed most of our Thomas Cook FF Travelers Cheques into US Dollars. While we were there Maria saw and took some video of some gendarmes (policemen) who were on duty and wearing roller blades. What a great idea, very fast mode in the traffic of Paris.

Everyone else were going to walk along the Champs Elysees but I knew how long it is, about 4km. I caught a metro train at Gare Franklin D Roosevelt and departed at Gare Châtelet. I walked around here and met Marie and the Fields about 5pm. We had dinner at a cafe/restaurant called "Benjamine Brasserie", chicken and chips, Bolognese and family omelette. A big storm came and went on our way home. Another fantastic day. Things many Australians will never see, a great learning experience for Grace and Christian. Things that our young settled country of Australia will never have.

Wednesday 5 April sightsee more of Paris.

Temperature 8c rainy

This was the Field's last full day in France so although it was raining again we were determined to make the best of it. We caught another bus to visit the Jardin De Luxembourg which was rather dismal, the plants were quite sparse and we could not see inside the Senate building on this day. So we walked some more in freezing conditions and I decided we should have our picnic lunch in a McDonald's, I said as long as we buy some drinks it should be OK.

After lunch we walked to a well advertised shopping centre called "Lafayette" but what a disappointment. It is three floors of expensive clothing, footwear and not much else. There is just one restaurant.

Us three girls had a last walk around our neighbourhood and saw lots of modern, expensive art work and lots of people making things like, musical instruments, painted porcelain boxes, dresses, embroidery and more. As we were walking along we found some markets and Mum and I bought some stamps, I got a little French doll and a lovely hairclip.



We caught a metro train from either Gare Luxembourg or Gare Jussieu to Gare Châtelet and walked the shops there and came across a hotel or I should say pub. It was an Australian pub called "Woolloomooloo".

This is another very busy place. We arrived home by metro where I cooked dinner again, soup and baguettes.

Thursday 6 April Maria, Grace and Christian depart for Australia.

Travelled today 36km

Temperature 8c

Marie, Maria and Grace walked around a few blocks closeby for a last sightsee of this lovely Paris, while Christian stayed home with me.

I point out that we were only about 5km from the Louvre. They came upon a street market where they purchased a few small items and at one stall an old French man hugged and kissed Marie and said something in French. We assume he was so thankful for the Australian servicemen in both the World Wars.

They arrived back before noon and so we all checked out. I brought Nancy out from her resting place and we packed her with all our baggage for the last time. Because Maria did such a good job navigating to this home, she navigated again to leave Paris. In Brisbane we arranged two nights accommodate near the CDG Airport so our next job was to book in there. We drove onto the big A1 and into the airport then to a suburb called Roissy to the Mercure Hotel arriving at 1pm. It is one of a group of about five hotels on the western side of the A1 and so about 3km from the airport.

We all had a buffet lunch but still no real food as we know it. Christian ordered hamburger but so disappointing to him because it was not really cooked, it still had blood in it.

As the Fields were flying out this evening they used our room to clean up for the big journey back to Australia. Grace and Christian tried the free shoe shine machines similar to the one in Metz, the city.

At 7.15pm we all caught the courtesy bus that runs between all the hotels in this group to CDG. After they checked in we sat at the foot of the escalator they had to use to go to the departure lounge. After a half an hour or so Christian said that a tear was coming from his eye. I was not far behind him. I hate good-byes and Christian started to really cry so I said to Maria it would be better if they left us then as I couldn' take it any longer.

So off they went up the escalator, it was so sad, after such a wonderful time with them. Such well behaved grandchildren and Maria enjoyed it more than she thought possible. The trip of a lifetime for them.

So we caught another courtesy bus back to the Mercure. It was so quiet just the two of us again. From now my darling and I were going to commence another journey, just the two of us to look after each other.

End Album #4 commence Album #5

Friday 7 April to Senlis.

Travelled today 29km

Temperature 2c

Our last full day in beautiful France, just the two of us.

What a noisy area as the hotel is only about 100mt from the big A1. Even though the windows were double glazed the noise was still high which naturally wasn' the best for Marie. A feature of this hotel was that there was a loudspeaker in the bathroom so one could hear the CTV. We had the hotel' buffet breakfast then off we went back onto A1 to Senlis about 25km north. We drove through Senlis a few times in 1997 but never stopped so this time it was great that we couldn' get a flight to London, then USA two days after the Fields departure.

Senlis

We arrived there at 10am and were fortunate to use a car wash just before the city centre. I always like to keep our rental/lease cars clean especially on their return to the depot. We parked Nancy just near the city wall, yes another ancient walled city. We came across a street market where Marie bought another watch band. The man actually replaced the old one for her. We came across the Information Office and spoke to the two women for about half an hour. Both spoke good English, one was an ex air hostess.

They told us that we were their 13th and 14th inquirers so far this year which was a big increase from the same number for all of 1999. For toilets I went into the Mairie (city/town hall) which were sort of unisex, like they all must have been in the past. See the photo in the album of the men' urinal where women and men have to walk past to go to a closed box for the other purpose.

We booked into the Hostellerie De La Porte Bellow for 400FF (A\$105) for the night. After lunch we walked around and saw much of the inner wall and the remains of the outer wall which were built about the 3rd century by the Romans. So very historic, our real last hours of fantastic historic Europe!

We decided to eat out but as usual nothing would be open until about 7pm. We even had to wait until 7pm for a pizza place to serve dinner.

Saturday 8 April back to Paris (CDG).

Travelled today 77km

Temperature 4c

We knew Maria, Grace and Christian would now be home in Brisbane.

We drove about 10km south to Luzarches where we stayed in 1997 as our base for a week to visit Paris. Memories for us! We phoned Maria who told us that they had arrived back home OK. So far so quickly.

Then back onto A1 to the CDG Airport to leave Nancy at the Hertz depot at 1.15pm. Yes, even times like that is sad for me. Our mobile home for the five of us for three weeks. Maria drove about 1930km in Nancy.

We caught the courtesy bus back to the Hotel Mercure for our final night in Europe.

I got a refund on Nancy's car park at the hotel as we were not going to require it again. When we entered our room there was a nice welcome message on the TV, see the photo in the album. We couldn't have dinner at the hotel until 7.30pm so we walked the little modern village. Back home we arranged for a wake up call for 4.15am as well as I set my clock.

Sunday 9th April to USA

Temperature 6c

We received the CTV wakeup call as well as our own alarm clock at about 4.00am. We caught the courtesy bus to the CDG Aerogare (terminal) 1 in the dark. My suitcase weighed 19kg and Marie's 17kg, well within the limit. We departed at 7am on a British Airways Boeing 747-400, a one hour quick flight to London's second airport, Gatwick arriving at 7.15am. I phoned Sylvia Groom who were going to meet us at Orlando which was a trifle early, about 5am.

U.K. Gatwick Airport

We also had time to have a good look around the terminal then caught another BA flight, another Boeing 747-400 at 1150am. This plane was loaded with lots of British people and children who were obviously going to the Disney area in Orlando.

Some extra notes on France and Germany

- Marie doesn't think French women are pretty but I do.
- So many wear their hair quite short and so look manly.
- As we found in 1997 there are not many birds or wild life in France even though we saw many, perhaps fifty "Deer" signs.

- Also no ants, yes I mean the common ant.
- This time we saw many roadside and highwayside telephone systems operated by solar cells.
- Local phonecalls are timed and charged.
- We did not see any Internet cafes.
- We are so glad that we chose the Alsace Area as it is so interesting and the fact that people and places are a mixture of French and German.
- There were no coffee or tea making facilities in our 2 star hotel rooms. But in the Mercure Hotel at CDG there was an automatic vending machine.
- Emergency vehicles, Police, Fire etc, only use their sirens which are very loud, when needed and not all the time.
- Compared with 1997 we found accommodation much easier this time. Perhaps it was because of the region we were in. Another chain of accommodation was called "Logis De France". It appears they may have been privately owned.
- We never felt unsafe at any time.
- Grace and Christian were really well behaved and went through the little hardships with us without complaint.
- Both of them spoke some French such as "merci", "Bonjoi" and some other words.
- I repeat Maria was a very capable driver which meant I could rest a little.

+++++++ ++++++

Now to the U.S.A. and Canada, see Albums #5 to #9

+++++++ end ++++++