

Memories of our Trip to France
organised by BETTA (Borehamwood and Elstree Twin Town Association)
3 – 5 June 2010

After settling down in our seats, the coach, BETTA 2 with its driver Peter, left Borehamwood around 11am, destination Dover. We made good time and within a couple of hours were marvelling at the white cliffs. Everyone was happy to stretch his or her legs and grab a coffee or something more substantial. Then it was on to the ferry – after being reminded of how to find the coach at the end of the crossing – blue deck 5. Neither of us having made a ferry crossing before, we were amazed at how huge the ferry was and all the facilities that were available. The day was bright and the crossing smooth and in no time at all we were approaching Calais with its windfarms.

In France and back on the coach we were reminded to advance our clocks and watches by one hour. We were thankful that the coach had air conditioning as it was hot outside and we were surprised by the flatness of the landscape once we got on to the motorway. We read a bit, chatted a bit more and the journey continued – our destination, Fontenay-aux-Roses, was apparently 20 minutes from the centre of Paris but oh dear, we hit the Friday evening traffic and at one major crossroads saw the mother of all free for alls as it became the survival of the fittest (or bravest!) to get across.

Due to the massive delay caused by the heavy traffic, Martine had to make several calls to the college where we were accommodated to ensure someone would be there to receive us as we were still to find somewhere for dinner and the accommodation was 15-20 minutes away from Fontenay, so we were led to believe. Eventually we reached Fontenay-aux-Roses and found a restaurant where we enjoyed dinner. Thanks to Martine's chatting up and cajoling of the restaurant staff we were all fed and watered in record time and on the coach once more, looked forward to our beds. Unfortunately our beds took longer to reach than we anticipated due to wrong turnings as someone said the satnav wasn't working properly! If Martine hadn't eventually jumped off the coach and into a passing taxi to guide the coach driver, we might still be going round and round in circles or trying to back out of one-way narrow streets!

It seemed to take some time before we all got the keys to our rooms but that may have been due to the lateness of the hour and the fact that everyone was exhausted by then, not least the college staff who had expected us much earlier in the evening!

Alarms set for the 07.30 – 08.30am breakfast, we drifted off to sleep but guess who forgot to advance her mobile phone by one hour???? We just couldn't make breakfast in time but Martine came to the rescue, (how typical of her) as she had grabbed a couple of rolls and some juice for us which we enjoyed later on the coach.

After dropping off those who were either staying in Fontenay-aux-Roses or had chosen to visit the Louvre, it was off to the Palace of Versailles for the rest of us. This was about 30 minutes ride away. Amazingly, considering the number of visitors already there, our coach was able to deposit us very near to the main gates of the palace. The cobble stones

proved a bit difficult for some to walk on but of course added to the authenticity of what we saw before us. Our entry tickets were quickly circulated round and once inside the building, a translation tool was supplied which we found really helpful as we went from room to room. One has to visit Versailles to properly understand its grandeur – the size and the ostentation of it all held us spellbound as we went round, at our own pace, with a translated description of each room's history, what it was used for and details of the various pieces of artwork displayed etc. – and it was possible to play back the same information as often as necessary – it was marvellous really. After walking round for several hours, we finished off our visit with a lovely ice cream which cooled us down somewhat. Next time we come to Versailles we'll head for the gardens and the Grand and Petit Trianon which appeared from the windows of the palace and from the reports of others to be equally fascinating!

On our return to Fontenay around 4pm, we made our way to the park where a festival was taking place. A few people even cooled their feet in the fountain! Despite the extreme heat, we relaxed in the shade of the many trees listening to the music and watched the youngsters in their colourful costumes, many holding balloons and some even on stilts - until it was time to find L'Argane, the restaurant where many of us were looking forward to having our Moroccan couscous meal at 7pm. It was indeed an evening to remember with delicious food and being serenaded by our own musicians along with singing and dancing by members of our party. What a wonderful end to an exhilarating day!

Sunday arrived – our last day in Fontenay. After breakfast, we collected our bags and started to make our way to the meeting point at the Administration block only to be met by torrential rain. My husband had to shelter under a bicycle shed while I went back for the last bag and an umbrella – trust the brolly to be in the last bag! Many thanks to the lady, one of our co-passengers, who saw him there, went and borrowed an umbrella to bring back to him and even helped carry our “hand baggage” to the Admin block for us.

Thankfully the rain had eased and cooled the air somewhat by the time we reached Fontenay where some people went to church, some went on an organized walk while still others managed to squeeze in some last minute shopping or just to have a coffee and enjoy the view of the Mairie where we were to be honoured with a reception by the Mayor at 11am. This was held in the “Registry Office” where marriages take place – quite fitting really since the visit was celebrating the union between Borehamwood and Elstree and Fontenay-aux-Roses.

After an exchange of speeches and gifts by the Mayors of the respective towns, there was an opportunity for meeting and chatting as our hosts made us feel very welcome and provided finger food and drinks for our consumption. Unfortunately there was a sad end to the visit when one of our party, Elizabeth, tripped and fell on the hard floor. Happily she recovered sufficiently to travel back with us but it must have been a very uncomfortable journey for her.

We gradually made our way back to the coaches mid-afternoon and said a fond farewell to Fontenay-aux-Roses with its colourful flowers everywhere. We just had time to take a

picture of the signboard showing its twinning with Borehamwood and Elstree before leaving. We made good time to Calais, passed through Immigration and had a comparatively short wait before we were on the ferry once more back to Dover, this time parked in green zone, deck 5. Unfortunately we heard that the other coach had been delayed by Immigration in Calais and wouldn't be able to sail till 2am! For much of our journey between Calais and Dover Martine was pleading with the captain to get them on an earlier ferry but without success. Consequently she had to stay behind in Dover until they arrived while we made our way home, reaching Borehamwood at 10.45pm – actually 15 minutes ahead of our scheduled time of arrival. The other coach eventually crossed on a 10.30pm ferry and reached Borehamwood around 2am.

Martine, you did a marvellous job which no-one could have bettered – at the restaurant on the evening of our arrival we would have been there at least another hour or two if you hadn't chivvied along the staff with much humour to serve us quickly. This may have resulted in the staff at the college accommodating us simply locking up and going home! And how many of us would have been able or willing to jump into a taxi as you did, late that first night, to lead the coach to our destination at Chatenay-Malabry?

And you managed to accomplish everything while only charging us each £100 – absolutely amazing! . We are in awe of your organisational skills and look forward to joining you on another adventure whenever we can.

Thankyou so very much.

Mazi and Pat

Your visit to Fontenay was a great idea, and we enjoyed meeting you and re-establishing personal contacts. As you've said, this will certainly strenghten our ties (now that our two mayors have been "married"!) Best wishes, Monika Miller

Many thanks to Martine and all involved for organising the trip, which couldn't have been easy on a shoestring budget. Most of the problems encountered on the trip were of the kind often (but hoped not to be) encountered by tour operators and were dealt with very calmly and professionally and in good humour by Martine, when most people would have 'flipped their lids'. The accommodation and breakfast provided in the university were good, and as expected for a trip of this kind for the price paid, which also included a trip to either the Louvre or Versailles . We did not have the evening meal but understood that this was also very good, as was the evening entertainment provided by some of the group!! The reception at the Mairie, where we were greeted by the Mayor and his staff on Sunday morning was very pleasant, after which we had the opportunity to go back to the park to see some of the colourful characters who were taking part in the festival.

It was a very enjoyable and worthwhile experience which, as a newcomer to Borehamwood, enabled me to meet several more people from the town and around, as well as being able to meet some French people and practice the language. So, a BIG THANK YOU to Martine and all who sailed in her!! Sincerely Audrey Bertrand

Dear Martine, Thank you for organizing the trip to Fonteney last weekend and for all the work you put into making it such success. I really enjoyed the weekend and so did the children. On the bus to Fonteney, I met really nice people. I was amazed how much they knew about France . On Saturday I went with the group to Louvre, we saw all the famous paintings, had a stop at Eifel Tower made some pics and got souvenirs. On our return we watched the parade and went to the park for the fair. Sunday was a relaxing day after all that walking in the Louvre. I was just sitting at the bistro and watching people passing by. It was exciting to see Fonteney's Mayor. I spent some time chatting with him and he told us a lot of things about France . After the reception we went to the park and enjoyed the festival. Fonteney also has large international community and we saw a lot of different groups which were part of the festival. I'm looking forward to learn some French words and maybe go again on an adventurous trip to France . I was surprise to discover that not only did I go to see Fonteney but I also met very nice people from Borehamwood and made some new friends. Also I would like to thank BETTA for making this trip possible. Slavica

To Martine, Irmine, Jane, et al. What problems? We had a fantastic time, I never even noticed any hitches

Versailles was spectacular, Fontenay was lovely, the festival (dancing/parade) was awesome, the locals were friendly, the food was great, and the weather was smashing! The Borehamwood (and environs) crowd were a great laugh, the musicians kept us all entertained with sing-songs and as far as I saw, a grand time was had by all! Well done to you guys for organising such an uplifting trip for a bargain price! Bravo! Best wishes, Sam PS: You *can* quote me on that

Hi Jane, Yes it was an excellent trip enjoyed by all those I spoke to. Please put my name down for the proposed Offenbug trip. Regards,
David

Hi Jane! Just a quick email to tell you how much Peter and I enjoyed our time away in Fontenay. During this little French escapade, there was a real sense of friendship and fun on all occasions even when things didn't go according to plan. I found most people so understanding and genuinely supportive and this trip has really shown that people generally appreciate the efforts of all involved in Betta. The spirit when out and about either in Fontenay, Le Louvre or during the journey itself was really great and the variety of the people taking part and their personalities made this trip a lot of fun. I, in particular, enjoyed the excursion to Le Louvre which was, as expected, eye opening about the magnificent works displayed there, the evening at the Marroccan restaurant on Saturday night when all the participants got a chance to know each other better and the music and singing made it a truly memorable night and finally the return journey when we all had to adapt to unforeseen circumstances (thank you to our musicians who stepped in again!). The superb solidarity everyone showed during this trip was really amazing and I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know many new people and old ones better. I came back elated. The welcome people in Fontenay gave us was great and I really enjoyed the tour of the town that Monika did for us, as well as the reception at the Mairie on Sunday morning. It was also lovely for me as school links coordinator, to see the enthusiasm of the French headmistress, teachers and local councillor regarding the potential for some exchanges between our respective schools. Overall Peter and I felt it was a great success and a very encouraging step towards getting to know Betta members and others better, becoming familiar with our counterparts in Fontenay and, generally for all taking part in the trip, getting more

familiar with some aspects of French culture and its people. I look forward to helping on future trips and enjoying them hopefully as much as I did this one! See you soon **Irmine**