

Totally Eclipsed: part one

Chris James, Danial (Hybrid) Digam and Terry Dickerson went for a weeks tour in Europe and watched the total eclipse into the bargain. Part one of this three-part adventure saw out intrepid threesome travelling to and through Germany.

France seemed like a good idea for watching the eclipse, so Chris and I decided to go there. I wanted to fly out and ride back, so I got the job of finding a flight. My first thoughts were to go to St Etienne but it was too far south. Frankfurt popped up on the web page, humm I thought too far into Germany. Ah but it didn't say 'Frankfurt', it said 'Frankfurt(Hahn)'. The Hahn bit made a big difference, the airport is 120km west of the sausage town. But exactly where is it? After much searching, I eventually found the airport on a map. In fact the map distinguished between airports and airfields. Frankfurt(Hahn) was definitely an airfield. A grass airstrip with a couple of portaloos came in to minds. We were looking for adventure so I booked two one-way tickets. Now the tickets were £19.20 each - yes £19.20; so at this stage I decided that not only were we in for a grassy landing but also that we would be bundled out the back of the plane as we flew over. My bike took-out one of the portaloos!.

The flight was scheduled for 7 o'clock departure so we took an early morning train to Stanstead. Things were looking up - a real aeroplane was waiting for us. Our fears that the bikes would end up in Afghanistan, or worse still Wales, were allayed when we saw Chris's bike waiting to be loaded onto the plane. The flight was short and sweet, which was just as well as the plane was so old it only had outside toilets!

"Look, look", I said as I pointed out the window, "a real runway". Not only was it a proper runway, but it was a great big runway. The buildings confirmed that this was a military establishment. After landing we were escorted through heavy security to the terminal building, or rather the shed that passed as a terminal building. The English writing on many of the abandoned buildings confirmed this as an ex-USAF base. The bikes were delivered to us with only a few bashes and things missing.

We assembled our bikes and it was about 11 o'clock before we got going. The first problem was finding our way out of the airport. There were no signs, presumably this was a hangover from the cold war days so spies would get lost on their way out. I remembered my MI5 training which said take a left at every junction and eventually you will end up in - a car park! Luckily KGB training was much better so the car park was not full of old Moskvichs with chain smoking spies in. Using an old tried and trusted method - I guessed - we eventually found a road that led to a road that led to the 327. We were now on track, what's more I can get on track with this article and start writing about the cycling!

The airport is well located for cycling as it dropped us off in countryside. We rode westward towards the river Mosel. Chris with his normal charm had chatted up a ~~bit of totty~~ nice young woman on the plane. He reported that she said that a cycle path ran along the Mosel, so we headed for it. If this was England we would have avoided the cycle paths, but this was Germany and cycle paths were better than most of our C-roads. The map said that we could follow a cycle path all the way to France, where it abruptly stops!

The airport must have been high up because the road to the Mosel was mostly flat or downhill. The last five-km was a fabulous winding decent. Not long after joining the river we stopped for an early lunch of soup and bread. Afterwards wound our way along the river valley, for miles and miles vineyards were all we could see. As we were following the river the route was almost entirely flat. We wound our way through to Trier, and had a late lunch of pasta - the holiday consisted of a lot of lunches. We decided to stay the night in a youth hostel in a small town called Saarburg. To get to Saarburg we had to leave the cycle path and ride on real roads, or so I thought. I kept saying that we have to turn away from the Mosel soon, but little did I know we had, we were following the river Saar. I thought the river had got smaller all of a sudden. We arrived at Saarburg in the early evening. The road up to the hostel was a shock, after about 100km of flat riding the last half-km was a 1 in 4 hill.

Saarburg is a small pretty town with many restaurants to choose from. As it was a nice evening we chose an outdoor table in the town plaza. After ordering beers, oh they were so good, we discussed how lucky we were not to get rained on during the day. The weather took its queue and a very black cloud decided to dump on us. The rain was heavy but the restaurant was full so we huddled under the sunshades. In a refreshing sort of way the rain was quite pleasant. After half an hour the rain cleared and our pizzas were ready. Another beer or two rounded off the evening and gave us the strength to walk (climb!) back up to the hostel.

The following morning dawned overcast but dry, it was to be a three-country day! We headed towards Remich in Luxembourg using mainly small roads. Having left the rivers behind the terrain became much hillier. Crossing in to Luxembourg gave us the challenge of the first serious hill. This particular one started off steep and got steeper and steeper. Unfortunately the road was so straight we could see what we had to tackle.

Surprise surprise, Dan powered up to the top - he had a long wait for me though. A nice long down hill took us to Montorf-les-bains close to the French border where tea and cakes were waiting (early lunch). Not long after we crossed into France ... *Part two next month.*