

Totally Eclipsed: the end

Chris James, Danial (Hybrid) Digam and Terry Dickerson went for a week tour in Europe. In the last part of their adventure they head home across the Belgian plains.

Eventually the hotel came into view and what a sight it was. Rooms, showers, a bar, a restaurant, all set in an old mill - just what we wanted, just what we needed! We were going to make a night of it and make up for that night under the stars! The rooms were good and the showers were massive and hot. Having cleaned up and settled-in, we headed up to the restaurant; it was a respectable place - not really suitable for Chris - but we felt obligated! A few beers loosened us up before the main event. In keeping with Belgian tradition the menu consisted mainly mussels and dishes made with mussels - all well and good, if you like mussels! Dan loved them, Chris liked them, 'mais je déteste des moules'. One little problem was the menu was in Flemish. I guessed at something that would not have the stinking little shellfish with it. EH-EH wrong - mine turned out to be smoked salmon and mussels! Dan ate the bits of slime and I ate the salmon. We were washing this down with a nice drop of wine. This game of 'pick the dish without mussels' went on for several hours. It was great. The wine was good - plenty of body but no mussels! I went to bed a bit sozzled, happy and relaxed.

The next morning we headed north-north-west towards Brugge, from there it was on to the port to catch the ferry back to England. Precisely what port we did not know. The going was much flatter now but still rolling. The wind was favourable and we were still losing height which meant we were able to make good time. Somewhere south of Gent, the ground became flat as the Fens and it stayed that way all the way to the coast. Eventually we picked-up a cycle path along side the Brugge-Gent canal and we followed it all the way to Brugge. Chris decided to have another puncture, which he quickly mended. Two miles later, we had stopped again and Chris was mending the same puncture again.

It was about mid-day when we rolled into Brugge; I had not been there before and I was pleased with my first visit even though it was short. Wandering about a bit in the throngs of tourists, Chris quickly decided it was time for lunch. First though we had to find out about the ferries to take us back to Blighty. The tourist info man was very helpful - but even so he could not reinstate the Zeebrugge-Folkstone ferry that had been discontinued six-months earlier. We had to go from Oostende-Dover with the departure timed for 2300h so there was plenty of time to kill. After eating we wandered around the back streets of Brugge, the town has many canals and is quite enchanting. Having killed a couple of hours by looking in shops and buying about 20kg of Belgian chocolates for our nearest and dearest, we set off for Oostende - again along a wide, well-surfaced cycle path by a canal. On arrival at the port, Dan decided it was time to eat and drink again - neither Chris nor I objected. We ate drank and made merry - that was until we looked at the UK train timetable. The boat was to arrive in Dover at mid-night and the last train to London was at 1205h - roll-on an integrated transport system! The high-speed ferry left and arrived on time.

Back on English soil, we cycled like b*\$sary to get to the rail station. We had missed the last direct train to London but there was a train to nowhere in particular where we could get a connection to somewhere else where we could get a train to London. All these trains travelled at 14mph and stopped everywhere. After arriving in London, we cycled to Kings-cross to get a train - the station was closed for engineering works and we were directed to Liverpool Street. Chris decided that it would be cosmopolitan and drink coffee in Leicester Square through the night. Dan and I foolishly agreed to this and believed Chris when he said he knew the directions. We cycled about 20km around London trying to find the Square. Eventually we found a café near Covent Garden and what a relief it was. We spent the next two-hours drinking expensive coffee and watching the street life. Chris was in his element, but eventually Dan and I had to drag him away to the rail station.

The trip back to Cambridge was uneventful, but it did give us time to reflect on our holiday. We had cycled through German wine country, ridden through Luxembourg and on into France. Watched day

become night and back to day in a matter of minutes. We had roughed it by sleeping under a table in a Boule-o-drome and had eaten chips and mayo in a funfair. Climbed and descended the not inconsiderable Ardennes. Feasted on mussels and wine. We had crossed the flatlands of Belgium to get to the port and taken a ferry back to England. Finally we had experienced the inadequacies of the British rail system.

Back in Cambridge we went our own ways. Chris went home to ready himself for a '50' the following day - he had not had ideal preparation. Dan had to get ready to fly to Scotland for a golf and booze holiday. Me, I just went home to get some sleep! *Terry Dickerson*