

09 July to 17 October

At last, we have a bit of time to tell you the rest.

Between 10 and 13 July we stayed at l'Etrier du Pays Mellois in the Deux-Sèvres (where we were in 2005); our friends from Melle, Yvonne Wetjen, Rolan Tchan and Michel Sicault came to see us on the car park of the equestrian centre – our camp site. Rolan had the great goodness to pay for our stay here in the area of Melle. Lovely scented roses from Yvonne's garden brightened our table under the shelter.

The stop of 14 July at Christian Bonnin's at St Christophe du Roc was marked by the arrival of Erwan Heriquet with Jean-Louis Cartron (of the Sauvegarde 56) thus completing the French team. Erwan immediately found himself having a bath; our camp was very basic in this sloping but sunny field, and the hosepipe was the only way of showering. Marie had a hosepipe battle with Jakki and Vanessa and all three ended up soaked. This was a good opportunity for Erwan to integrate happily in the group. The same evening the whole team, except Jakki, went to the 14 July (Bastille Day) celebrations. Quite naturally, our darling super-star Cynthia danced on the stage! Jakki chose that evening to clean the exterior of Invincible, our green lorry...

So we arrived chez Caroline at Poneys de Serzais. Patricia Sergent, Marie's mother, joined us there and was to share our journey for almost two weeks. Her presence was very welcome. Caroline welcomed us most kindly. Xavier asked Caroline to show us her method of working with Oural. His problem was difficulty in being separated from the other horses. The method was impressive and effective. French News, an English language newspaper in France, did an interview with us here and the journalist, Beryl Brennan, and her husband were very impressed by the project. Their convertible MG, on the other hand, was a sensation. Christine Gilet kindly shared her lectures with Xavier, Luke and Andrew.

A farm campsite was good enough to open specially for us. Although our hosts told us that the ground for the lorry was limestone and hard, Invincible the lorry got stuck in the mud. It took a several phone calls and a powerful tractor to get Invincible back on the road.

We depart for another farm campsite, La Ferme de Mervent in the Vendée, where we were surrounded by poultry, goats and of course, our little Camargue horses. Vanessa was able to lie down on Quattro who was himself lying down along with most of the other horses. We dined in front of this spectacle under a rare blue sky.

Swimming, storms in the air, English hosts with a handicapped daughter in a wheelchair, at the Camping du Lac at Pouzauges. We had called the vet for Mogador and Perdigau who were lame. A big celebration for Cerys' birthday on 21 July – 18 candles. It's not every day that you celebrate your coming of age and she was delighted about it. Quito gave pleasure to a young handicapped person who was with her father, as we gave her a ride on the horse.

« Camping a La Plage »: our campsite – one sandy riding school arena at Aurélie Weingarten at the Centre Equestre des Herbiers. Invincible had again been up to mischief before the arrival at Les Herbiers. Breaking down at a Leclerc service station in full sun was a laugh. Happily the partner of Aurélie knew something about motors and helped us out – saved once again.

« *My birthday* » said Jakki «*was one of the best I ever had. The warmth of the team, all the signatures on my cards, all the gifts received, the beautiful meal and the delicious birthday cakes were extremely touching, as well as the Franco-English versions of Happy Birthday!* ». Next day, chez Thierry Merlet at Boufféré, Jakki, Marie and Invincible went to repatriate the horses and riders, arriving at night and in the rain, but welcomed with the delicious *carbos* of Patricia. Mehdi left us that day to return to Brittany. We thank him so much for his help. Thanks to Thierry Merlet for taking Mehdi to the station. Thanks also to Thierry Merlet for the journalists who came, including his uncle!

Finding again our friends from 2005, Arnaud and Cathy Moquet, and saying goodbye to Patricia, as well as welcoming the parents of Cynthia, and our documentary team, Dominic and Sadie, marked our pause at Geneston in the Loire Atlantique; all this crowned by a very pleasant outing with the whole team to a local pizzeria. Great relief to the Brits, Andy and Luke, to see the stocks of English tea brought by Dominic! Then another beautiful reunion, with Marine Vincendeau, at the enlarged Ecuries du Clos. Two youngsters from the club joined us for a part of the ride. Marine gave Jakki a ride on her quad!

A most agreeable pause chez Marie-Claire Barraud at the Ferme Equestre ESAT de la Chauffetière at Le Pellerin before the Loire river crossing. Sadie survived her night in the tent! The grooms at La Chauffetière were handicapped persons. In the morning France 3 television came to follow the riders as far as the other side of the Loire. Muscadeu not wanting to go into the lorry any more, Xavier rode him alone as far as the evening camp. A few days break at the Centre Equestre de la Pirouette. Meeting some wonderful people, including Eric and Piéric. Piéric's help was particularly beneficial with regard to Muscadeu who had been refusing to load into the lorry when not being ridden as he had lost a bit of weight. A symbolic scene for Luke and many among us. There has never been another problem since that intervention and team lesson from Piéric with Muscadeu. Nevertheless we thought it well to buy a couple of natural horsemanship head collars and a long "carrot stick".

Georges and Pascale Sefelin came to see us at the side of the Canal de Nantes at Brest at Bouvron, and Jacqueline and Rene le Tallec at the Haras du Parc at Redon. We would like to thank Brigitte and Christian Amiel for all their help during the last few weeks in Brittany. The indefatigable support with the route, the maps, etc. has been indispensable and their friendship greatly appreciated.

There we were, just preparing the first reception at Vannes on 18 August, with the help of Jacques Busson at l'Etrier Vannetais: washing vehicles, whitening horses, cleaning rugs, saddles and bridles and first trying-on of SLL charity White Horses t-shirts. Great

surprise for Jakki, to see her daughter and grandson Edwin, brought there as a surprise by Dominic and Sadie. The photos of the reception bear witness to the splendour of the occasion.

This magnificent reception at the Hôtel de Ville at Vannes offered in our honour by Monsieur François Goulard, the deputy mayor, was an important moment for everyone and in particular, for the young Bretons who were proud to show the success of the project to their families.

After the reception we left l'Etrier Vannetais to continue on our journey; we received a very warm welcome from Madame Frédérique Beyer and her spouse Jean Paul, a very pleasant place where they receive animals in trouble (horses, donkeys, and a lot of dogs). Then departure for a stop where we had been welcomed before, in 2005, chez Joseph and Anne-Marie Runigo, where we had to call a vet for Osco's runny eye and for Mogador's foot. A very good vet, who diagnosed an abscess in Mogador's hoof. Pierre and Xavier then removed Mogador's shoe, and he was very relieved!! We had the great pleasure of being given a good hot coffee and a delicious piece of cake before leaving.

On then to the Haras National (National Stud) de Hennebont (our charity is supported by the Haras Nationaux) and so offered us the overnight stop, the first night for the horses in the stables, of the Old Abbey; they were well behaved and adorable, as ever! The five French youngsters and their supervisors left us for the two nights, so they could be with their families, an important and difficult stage but which gave them a moment to reflect on all the hard work they had put into their own *self-improvement*.

It was at the Camping Vacancier Belle Plage at Larmor-Plage that they rejoined us and we were all very happy to get back together. We passed a whole week here (the longest break since the start); an immense thank you to Jenny, who helped us enormously and who participated in the financing of our accommodation where we prepared for the reception given in our honour at Lorient on 25 August by Monsieur Norbert Metairie, Mayor of Lorient and President of Cap L'Orient. The youngsters took advantage also, during this break, to have a gallop on the beach at daybreak, unforgettable moments...

We were touched by the tremendous welcome which was reserved for us at the Lorient reception and we had the great happiness to see Mickaël again, who gave a short improvised speech.

Returning to our expedition, we left Larmor Plage on 28 August with a small tug at the heart for the youngsters who were leaving their families again. We took the road towards Camors, the centre where Christine works, where we celebrated Ludo's birthday, not everyday are we 16 years old! On leaving Coz Camors for the next encampment, our lorry Invincible again behaved badly by refusing to climb a steep hill; Jakki, Marie and Pierre found themselves broken down in the middle of the road with Quattro and Mogador, but happily we were saved by Annick Garrau (another great meeting); she arrived with Xavier to repatriate the horses, and told us she had found a sponsor to finance our accommodation (a big thank you to Jean Guéry for his contribution). She also offered us a super breakfast before our departure the following morning and looked after

our Mogador (as our lorry was being repaired at the garage) and afterwards brought him as far as La Ville Chauvin chez Xavier and Maryse Mallet where we would be arriving a few days later. A big thank you!!

A few days later, Pierre left us to return to his occupations. Pierre who had been with us in 2005!

So we found a very happy Mogador with Xavier and Maryse Mallet; our thanks to Bernard Daco (Membre de l'Association des Cavaliers de Montauban) who found us this place (with our friend Christian Amiel) for all his help. That was another very warm welcome and Maryse, Xavier and Bernard helped us a lot. They kept 5 horses for us while we went to the Brittany centres to present them with their new arrivals and also invited us to a meeting of associations where we met the Mayor of La Ville who made us the great honour of a public presentation of our association. We were also invited to a terrific breakfast at the Mallet's the day of our departure for Cherbourg, where we would be catching the ferry for England.

The receptions in the Brittany centres were occasions to reflect on the scope of the project, and the pleasure of the centres (the supervisors and the handicapped persons) in receiving the horses; we almost regretted not having been there earlier. It was very moving to consider the purpose of the project and the marvellous people who were going to profit from it. (A big thank you to Isabelle Ciaravolla, who accommodated us a second time at Coz Camors, and to Véronique Robin and Patricia Sergent, who offered us accommodation in a gîte at Treglonou and numerous meals.) Thanks again!

Big departure on 11 September for Cherbourg; Patrick Mohan rejoined us, he has been our indispensable driver, friend and helper (driving round Brittany then, having driven the horses to England afterwards, coming back to England to fetch the remainder of the team and the 5 horses to be given to the Brittany centres in October). We thank him immensely for his valuable help and for all the time he so freely gave us. So now we are at Martinvast, near to Cherbourg, in an equestrian farm, a superb place, where we passed 2 days, and where Guillaume Le Goupil had the kindness to give a riding lesson to our young people.

We took the ferry in the afternoon of 13 September to arrive at Poole in the evening (we thank Brittany Ferries Freight for having sponsored the association and provided all the necessary to and fro crossings). It is night and we are rather tired. We got lost on the way to our encampment but we were lucky enough to be escorted there by the police. We were received for two days at Shirley Farm with Mr and Mrs Butler, where Graham Axford of Easterbrook Farm, accompanied by his wife and a man with whom he works, gave us the pleasure of a visit accompanied by several handicapped youngsters.

Then we made our first stage on horseback in England, through the New Forest, an incredibly beautiful conservation area, where the wild horses run free and where you can observe deer who aren't afraid of man or cars because they've never been hunted, and

where you have to stop in the middle of the road to let a herd of cows go by; well worth it, it was really marvellous!!

Marvellous but difficult; thank you to James Alford's mother, who escorted the horses in her car when they arrived at night; that evening we had to dine and pass the night in the field with the horses, a great experience, (even if the more curious of the horses tried to steal the bread from the table), but in freezing cold conditions.

A few more incidents occurred with Invincible before our arrival at Sunningdale, where we were received near to a school. (Our thanks to Rob Plews who returned the lorry to us with a new battery, and who promised to help if we had further problems, which was very reassuring.) Before meeting up with the army at Windsor we made a stop at Flemish Farm where Georges Cooper, a charming man, offered us showers (something which had been quite rare recently) and looked after the horses while we were at Victoria Barracks. While the horses were at Flemish Farm (Guards Polo), some of us had the good fortune to ride in Windsor Great Park, where Luke had a fine fall from his beloved Muscadeu. We stayed two days at Victoria Barracks and we slept in real beds! What luxury! We also ate very well and had the opportunity to visit Windsor castle. Merci Chewy!

We left Victoria Barracks – thanks to you, Toby - and in the centre of London we separated into two groups (one to St John's Wood Barracks, the other to Knightsbridge Barracks) for 5 days, to await the big reception in London which took place on 27 September in one of London's largest hotels 'The Mandarin Oriental' near Hyde Park. This was very impressive for everyone, to find themselves in such a luxurious place, where the party was for us. The next day we assisted at the blessing of the horses and of the team at St Mark's church; the mass was a bit long for those not used to it but otherwise very beautiful and moving. That day was notable for the "*au revoirs*" between the French and the English, as the French were leaving on the morning of 29 September to return home to France, a difficult separation for all, which made us conscious of the approaching end of the project.

It was on 30 September that we left the army for Enfield where we were welcomed by Terry Wall (who we thank enormously for everything he's done for us) and where we passed the last 9 days while delivering the horses to the centres in England. A big pang of sadness for us each day that we had to leave our horses but at the same time a great joy to meet the people who would be looking after them, and who had been awaiting their arrival with anticipation, and to find such a welcome as they had prepared for us.

It was on 8 October that Jakki took the young Brits to Kings Cross station and we were separated; hard, so hard, so many partings in so short a time!!! Patrick Mohan came to join us in Enfield and we left for France on 9 October (we were by then only 4: Jakki, Vanessa, Xavier and Marie). Jakki, Xavier and Marie stayed several days in the Finistère at Marie's parents. Vanessa stayed at Patrick's (thanks again for everything Patrick and Laetitia) and we delivered the last 5 horses to the Brittany centres, where also the horses were impatiently awaited. Unfortunately, for reasons which we will explain in due course, the association Cheval Emoi were unable to take the horses as expected. Let's hope that circumstances permit that we can provide them with a horse on a future project.

Penultimately, it remains to ask you, friends, volunteers and members, to be patient until we are able to thank those of you who haven't yet received letters of thanks – that includes our indispensable sponsors and partners – until we prepare our brochure of the project White Horses 2008 and follow-up articles about the horses and the young people during the weeks, months and years to come. However, we would like to thank Sheila Cosma and Paul Malblanc for **all** their work on the web site and for their endless patience!

Finally, we'd like to **thank with all our heart**, the Vice-President of the SLL charity, Mme Shirley Malblanc, who in indefatigable fashion for the last two years has given herself to the project White Horses 2008 – Shirley is retiring from the charity to be able to give more time to her family.

Jakki