

17 June to 9 July 2008

Hello everybody, this time from the Département des Deux Sèvres (79).

As some of you know, our journey has continued to be eventful. Picasso trod on Vicki's foot a couple of days ago and after a quick trip to accident and emergency at Angoulême Hospital, after an X-ray, no further treatment was deemed necessary. Vicki does have a hairline fracture, but will be able to ride again in a few days – by the beginning of next week. She is now covered in green clay (argile) which is both good for people and animals. We also use vast quantities of our donated Aloe Vera which does repair jobs on horses' backs, girths promoting swift healing on saddle sores or whatever other areas horses, dogs or humans might need it for.

Occitan gave Vanessa and Jakki an anxious hour or so (and to Cerys and Alexis who ride him mainly). Colic was feared. He wasn't eating his Royal Horse supper (unheard of) and started rolling and looking generally uncomfortable. The vet came at around 9 o'clock and by then Occitan was better. The vet thought he may have had a touch of colic, but it wasn't serious. The vet also said that there was never a very windy day – and it was very windy – when he isn't called out to visit a horse with colic. A new one on us and a little surprising given the very strong winds blown up from the Rhone that the Camargue horses endure on their own territory. Occitan is well-rounded so 24 hours without his Royal Horse granules hasn't diminished his strength and courage.

Little Quattro joined the big boys! He is now being ridden as he was able to be shod with the others on 23 June. When being led alongside the rider, he does tend to want to eat grass, however, rather than concentrate on being led. Luke really enjoys riding him, so it would appear he can behave – I refer to Quattro of course... this, of course, doesn't deter Luke from his devotion to and hard work with Muscadeu.

We were joined by Andy Clark, a friend of Luke's to make up our numbers of British young people. Andy flew from Leeds to Bergerac where we picked him up. Andy wasn't able to come along as an SVE/ EVS volunteer due to bureaucracy, but is part of the riding team. He has amazed and surprised everybody by his aptitude to riding. Since the first day he arrived, when he looked a little disconsolate for 24 hours, he began to ride and hasn't stopped since. He also has a great sense of humour. Every good rider needs a tumble. On 9 July, Andy had his first tumble and has been teased mercilessly by the others. Mogador what got into you today?

We have also been joined by Chris Tahaney from Glasgow, who was brought along by Sadie Kaye and Dominic Dandridge when they came to film for 36 hours over the weekend of 27-29 June. Chris is *'one of Sadie's boys'* and was with her in South America and the Caribbean for a month helping boatbuild. Chris is here to help Xavier with logistics. He has ridden a few times since he arrived and is showing a great aptitude around horses too. Poor Chris, even Jakki has to ask him to repeat what he says – and, as

for the French and Southerners like Jakki – so softly spoken is he with his broad Glaswegian accent, that we all remain a little perplexed.

If someone reading this would like to contribute to Andy and Chris the same monthly amount as given by the European Voluntary Service of 125 euros a month which is what the 4 others receive, it would be gratefully received as it would put Andy and Chris on a par with Vicki, Cerys, Rachel and Luke, our SVE's. That would be 125 euros each for the rest of July, August and September!

So welcome to Andy and Chris, and soon welcome to Erwan!!! The Sauvegarde 56 (Jean-Louis Cartron) is bringing 17 year old Erwan to join us in 10 days, to replace poor little Mickaël (whom we gather is now at home in Lorient). So Erwan will be part of the French riding team. Farewell to Anita, who decided to leave us for personal reasons on 27 June. Anita did a great job getting us as far as she did – our thanks to her. Vanessa has now taken over as leader of the riders and horses as she has the right qualifications to do so. (For those who don't remember, Vanessa was with Jakki for the latter half of the 2005 ride).

We've now travelled through the Lot et Garonne, the Dordogne, the Charente into the Deux Sèvres and are making our way northwards at an alarming rate – *The Journey of Discovery* will be over before we know where we are!

France 3 (Périgords) came to film us again at the Centre Equestre Poney Cheval at Le Cros, St Antoine d'Auberoche in the Dordogne and we were filmed again by France 3 Poitou Charentes on 7 July in the delightful village of Villejésus, where we camped by the church with the tents and barnum on the adjoining tennis court, much to the perplexity of the 3^e age card players who had to cross the tennis court for their weekly game of cards. We gather that this went national – people even saw us in Corsica!

As you will have seen, our Sheila Cosma, joined the riders for *a day* when the team crossed an iron bridge over the Lot river at Touzac– clank, clank, clank – with a surprising lack of concern by the horses! Sheila rode with the English on the afternoon shift. On 9 July, Shirley and Michael Shea from east of Angoulême joined the riders for the morning. Gather from Cerys, Andy and Rachel, there were plenty of screams, songs and laughter. We don't think Shirley and Michael will have been disconcerted as they have 3 daughters themselves and, no doubt, grandchildren. Watch the website for their pictures of their *day* with White Horses 2008.

It was wonderful seeing our colourful friend, Thierry Cholet, again at Bourdeilles in the Dordogne. The sight of his 16 horses galloping up the valley at a whistle call from Thierry towards their drinking trough - with our 10 white horses lined up in amazement watching the other herd approach – followed by the donkey – has been caught on camera by Dominic and Sadie. Thierry's swimming pool was a haven from the sudden scorching weather and just about all of us swam. The edge of the swimming pool looks over his valley and as you swim you watch the horses below and the stunning landscape under a peerless blue sky.

It was good to see Dominique Balthazar again at Ste Croix de Mareuil. Dominique and his wife breed arab horses, mainly used for endurance riding. Their warmth at seeing us again was touching. One of the employees, a very nice young man called Mickaël, gave some of the team a wonderful demonstration of de-sensitizing the horses. It included acting the drunk around the horse, grabbing it, leaning on it unexpectedly, making weird sounds and generally lurching about. We all look forward to having a go ourselves with the Camargues – soberly, of course! It was good seeing Joël Ducasse again at Torsac where we spent a night. Staying with Fabienne and Sylvain Bourgion was a treat for the French and English young people. Sylvain gave everybody who wanted one a ride in his quad at a very fast speed indeed over his land. Be reassured: he drives the quad every day for work purposes and has 4 children of his own. Screams of fear cum pleasure/laughter were heard all over the Haras les Barbreaux at Sireuil. As a postnote, Fabienne and Sylvain breed Welsh.

The dogs, Nana and Shiva are fine, the horses too, as are Christine and Alain, the French Team Leaders, Ludo, Alexis, Cynthia and Adeline, as well as Vanessa, Xavier, Marie and Mehdi, Chris, Cerys, Rachel, Vicki, Luke and Andy. A big hello from them all to all of you. Vanessa who is from the Charente was pleased to see her sister, Flavie, who popped over twice to see us in the Charente; Cynthia is really helping a lot now – yes, she did **enjoy** Thierry's pool; Cerys can't wait for her birthday on 21 July (yes, presents welcome please); Vicki a bit miffed (no, Jakki jest's) that her birthday on 4 June was rather uncelebrated, due to Mickaël's accident being on the same day – Jakki said she could share her own birthday (yes, presents welcome, please for Vicki); Luke continues to be lukish; Ludo is affectionate and a good mimic; Rachel is putting all her horsemanship into helping Andy; Xavier has ridden a couple of times again now – he is a very good rider, but logistics prevent his riding regularly (Jakki borrows all of his books, which she reads late at night and which he doesn't have time to read); Marie rides, and with Mehdi they both continue to provide us with lovely meals in difficult conditions – Marie's mother is coming out to join us for a few days which we all look forward to. Marie had the brilliant idea of marking each of our plates on the underside – that way we all wash up...; Alexis is a cool guy, remains unphased by events and never forgets to spike his hair with gel, Adeline remains gentle and undemanding with her familiar refrain: "*Jakki, est-ce-que tu aurais du feu?*"

Today the sun is out again, but we gather rain is forecast in a couple of days... some might say we should be used to it... others say that last year's bad weather and this year's bad weather is due to there being 13 full moons last year and this year. Qui sait!

And from me, Jakki, until the next time