

the uninitiated among you, and about to light the bbq for the pork!

21st May

I'm typing this sitting by a window with a view of the mountains in Brancon in the east of France having crossed the border from Italy just after lunch. There is still snow on the tops and earlier there was a lot of snow as we were pretty high driving down through a beautiful valley with an interesting mountain road. I deserve extra points for finding the most twisting roads wherever we are! We thought we might stop at a winter sports town with the highest golf course in Europe but it was like a ghost town so we kept moving on.

But to get back to where I left off. We visited Ephesus, another ruined city, in Turkey and enjoyed it, but not able to explore as easily as we had in Syria and Jordan. As we have travelled west we have noticed that sites become more restricted. But lots of bus groups and lots of people just wandering and not really looking – but it's part of the tour and paid for so has to be done, then we can say we've been there!

The crossing from Turkey into Greece took time but no real problems and a small piece of paper from the Greek Customs to say we could take the car out at the other end. Of course no one was interested in it at the other end! In Greece we found some good campsites which are still very quiet and lots of super eating places. Also enjoying the malt whiskies we bought between Turkey and Greece. We celebrated Jim's birthday at the Hotel Alexander near Plakta Litochoro. Like the campsites many hotels still not fully geared up, but all produce good food and we've had some lovely Greek wines. As Jim wished to see the Corinth Canal we drove down to that area and stopped for a few nights in the Isthmia Beach Camping. The cutting for the canal is quite spectacular and we watched several boats of all sizes going through. They do cruises but we opted out and spent a day traveling around the area south of Corinth. When in Turkey I had thought to buy Jim a meerscham pipe as we were in the area where it is found, but he couldn't find one he really liked. But on the trip around the Corinth peninsula I noticed, in a very small village, a place selling Briar pipes. So we stopped and it was a family concern and mother, father and son all worked on them. After a bit of holding and stroking he chose a pipe!

Then we drove across to Patra and took a ferry over to Brindisi in Italy. Again there wasn't a lot happening on board so it was very quiet and no problem getting food or a drink. It also meant that the purser could offer us a four berth cabin so we didn't have to toss for the top bunk! Our first meal in Italy was café and croissant for breakfast – also first go at Italian. We



Above:
Lago Grande
Avigliani, Italy

spent some time down on the Amalfi Coast in a very pretty hotel on the front at Maiori. The drive along the coast road was hair-raising because as we all know Italian drivers are manic! But then we had to drive over the mountain road to reach Pompeii. This meant that our first view of Vesuvius was from the top of the mountain opposite and was quite spectacular. Had a wonderful time in Pompeii but sore feet and a growling tummy finally forced us to give up. Had hoped to go up Vesuvius but it got very cloudy and there was thunder and some rain. But one of my wishes was fulfilled. We moved inland to some of the walled towns on hilltops and stopped at Castiglione de Lago, where we found a good site by the lake. A bit cooler there so it was on with the thermals at night! Unfortunately there were trees with seeds like cotton and they were blowing everywhere and it was impossible to avoid them, they got everywhere, so we moved on.

We tried to stop by the coast further along but it was a holiday and everyone was by the sea so we finally stopped at a Sheraton by Genoa's airport! That was not a good day. There have been other less successful ones also. Like the day when we were 150 km down the road and Jim started going through pockets and bags and finally asked if I had the other passport! I pulled into the next layby and after a thorough search turned round and drove back past the harbour that the Argonauts sailed from and through a fantastic gorge and then all the way back! Now I have charge of passports. Heaven help me if I lose them!

As there is a christening in Carlisle we'd like to be at we have decided that it is time to make haste for home ground. We both feel that we've had a fantastic adventure but need the comforts of home, so next weekend we are heading to Irene and Tom Gibb's north of Toulouse then up to Jane and Peter Fisher's at Charroux before making for the Channel and home. We'll do a final dispatch once we hit home.

Some facts and figures.

We traveled 10800km.

We went through 6 countries.

We slept in 27 different locations.

We managed three clothes washes.

We paid only one bribe of 100\$ in Syria.

Jim wore the same shoes throughout.

We ate so much fish that we have grown fins.

We opened and reorganized the suitcases too many times to count.