

B20 DOING THE DORDOGNE

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B20 DOING THE DORDOGNE SCRIPT

DATE: 24 JUNE 2011

From Limoges we moved on south to the village of Sarlat in the Dordogne Valley region and near the Dordogne River, very popular for canoeing, small boat trips and cave crawling.



The old town of Sarlat is very charming and looks just like an antique village should; tight, narrow streets, lots of stone construction and beaucoup cars. We chose to visit this region because we'd never traveled here before. In a stroke of genius, we convinced our good friends, Beth and Terry Crofoot, to scout the area for us in the last days of May.



They brought back all sorts of reports on good things to do while here. Unfortunately, for us, they stayed for 5 days while we only had 2 1/2 to lavish on this area. Some things had to be left for our next visit.



Saturday is market day and the streets were jammed not only with tourists but with the locals buying and selling just about anything you'd want. The market stretched from one end of the old town to the other and up the side streets. It was about 100 times

larger than our own Calabasas Farmer's Market but it's hard to believe you'd find better friends there than Beth and Terry Crofoot, George and Sue Fischbeck and Marilyn and Dale Young.



Regional food cookers were elbow to elbow but the paella cooker really caught our eye...mainly due to the large metal pan she was using to cook in. It rained heavily for an hour or so and the umbrella sales lady had a field day. By noon the sun was out and we were all sweating in our rain gear.

The rain took care of Rick Steve's advice to buy food, sit back and watch the crowd. We had to elbow our way in a little bistro for coffee and croissants. They don't serve food but solved the problem by running next door to the boulangerie for fresh croissants. Don't think they marked them up either.



We did follow the Crofoot's suggestion to drive along the Dordogne to the various villages built into the sides of the area's many limestone cliffs. At Roque Gageac many homes have false fronts. Open the front door and you are in a limestone cave. Want to add a room? Just start digging. Across the highway there are canoes for rent and you can go paddling up and down the Dordogne.



We decided to make the MG climb a bit to the fortified hilltop town of Domme. The location was designed to repel attacks but has failed miserably to stem the tide of tourists who conquer the town in waves with each bus arrival.



We offered to take a picture of a Portland, Oregon couple who returned the favor. They were on an open-end vacation with no reservations anywhere and no problems getting rooms as long as they waved their copy of Rick Steve's guidebook.



The MG draws attention where ever it goes and sometimes we get included. One man insisted I pose with the car. After the click, and still smiling, I said, "That'll be one euro please." I would have paid one euro to capture the look of shock on his face. When I told him "just teasing," he laughed so hard he began choking. His wife demanded to know what I'd done to him.



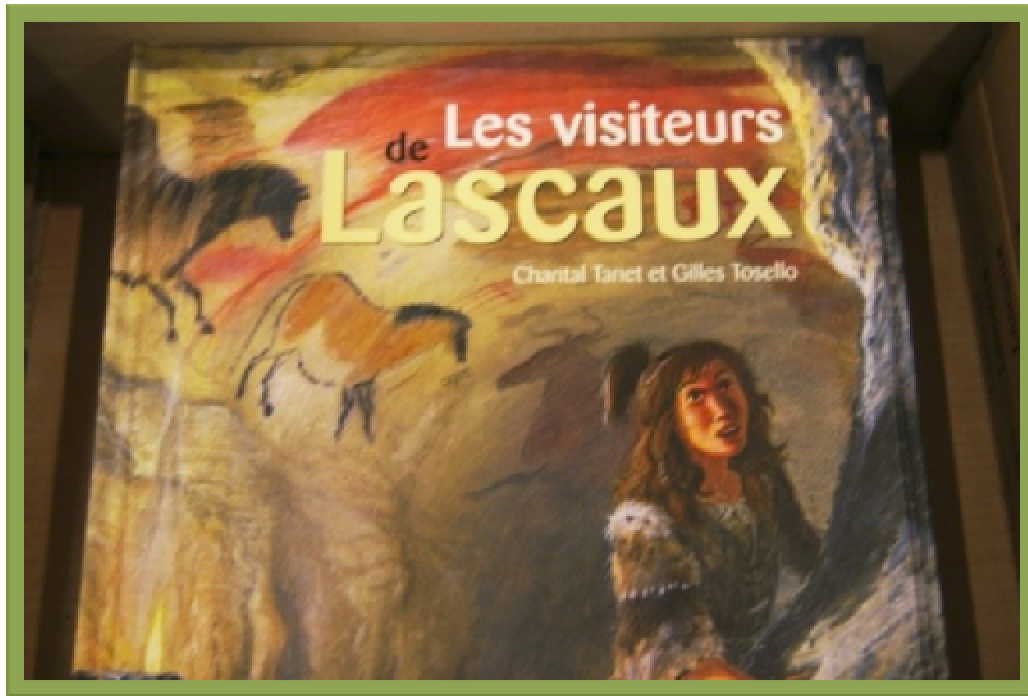
Even more above ground, in fact way above the local terrain, is what is billed as the largest castle in France. It sits high above Beynac in the Dordogne Valley and is miles from its neighbors. It is so isolated that it has its own little village built for the workers.



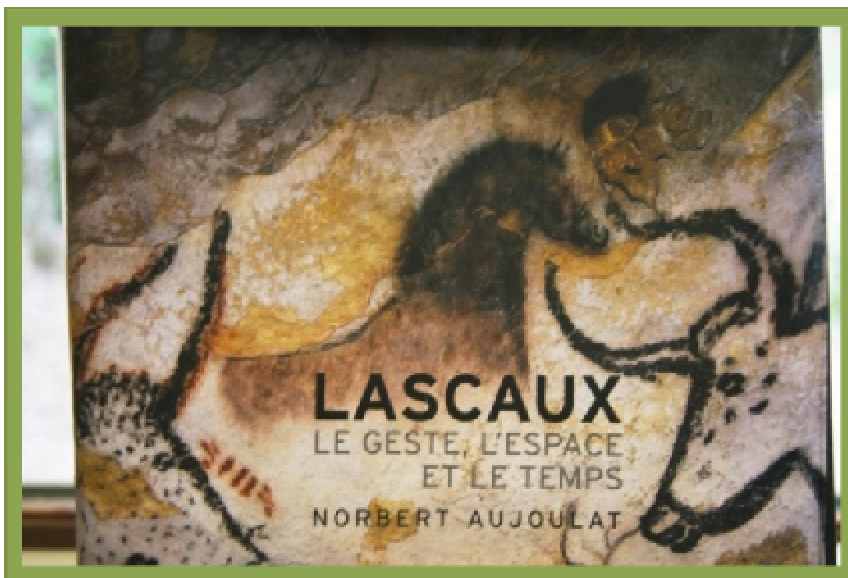
We decided to take a short cut back to our countryside B&B and ended up on a very rough, very up-and-down road that wound through a black forest. "Not a good idea" kept crossing my mind as we drove, completely lost, over strange roads in an antique car. If it had trouble we wouldn't

be found for days and, by then, probably had been eaten by wolves.

The area's main claim to fame is the number of caves within easy driving distance...especially at Lascaux.



The original cave contains ceiling paintings created by humans who lived 17,000 years ago. I say original because, in the '60's, it became evident that visitors were bringing in algae on their shoes and, with the increased humidity, causing big splotches to appear on the drawings. Now tourists are only allowed in a cave that exactly recreates the one discovered in 1940.



The original cave was closed for years until the re-creation could be completed. Still no cameras allowed though, so you'll have to make do with these book covers. One thing unusual though, for some unknown reason, several of the drawings were left incomplete so will never be finished. Several

teachers on our tour suggested the budget for cave painting might have been suddenly cut and the artists shuffled off to harvest nuts and berries or retrained to swing stone hatchets during battle.

That evening we used Rick Steve's book to guide us to Chez le Gaulois in old town Sarlat. It is a Basque restaurant featuring many raclette type dishes with lots of melted cheese over potatoes. The owner spends the whole evening in plain view of the patrons cutting thin slices of meat on a slicer.



Rick's book suggests letting Bridgette, the friendly server, select your meal. She said, "He always eats the same thing. One time I made him change. He liked it so now I'm in the book." Beautifully prepared food on its way to the tables whizzed by us making the choice really tough.



Just as we sat down the Oregon couple we met at Domme walked in so we pushed our tables together. Joy and Dave Pahl are real Rick Steve fans. They've attended several of his personal appearances so gave us inside information on this popular tour guy. We studied the menu but, in the end, Bridgette chose for us and even took our picture.





Due to the heavy tourist season we weren't able to find housing to fit our budget but Chrise did uncover the Hotel Mounea in the nearby village of Marquay, some six miles from Sarlat in the rolling countryside.

The hotel is four years old and built by the hands of Brigette and Joel Battu, a relatively young couple who wanted to operate their own B&B. It was almost full with clients that came from all over the world. Our room was good sized with a comfortable bed, small table for typing blogs and a bathroom with the separate WC as seems to be the custom in this country. A spare bed in the room kept us from doing our daily suitcase lifting exercises.



Breakfast featured meats, cheeses and some of the best pastries we've tasted up till now. WiFi is on the premises although we had to go into the hallway to establish the contact. Then it was just a case of dragging Mademoiselle WiFi back to the room and having your way with her.

We stayed at Hotel Mounea for three nights and were beginning to feel right at home when the time came to leave. We were so comfortable that I asked to wash the MG down by their full sized pool. It was inspiring to see this couple work so hard to keep the hotel spectacularly clean and pay off the mortgage. Joel looks forward to the day when he can give up his part-time job cleaning a local supermarket and spend full time caring for his guests. It is great to see the entrepreneurial spirit is not limited to our own country.



Photo ops are everywhere in southern France and I couldn't pass up this field of sunflowers in full bloom. Our next stop will be in the Bordeaux area, home to some of the greatest wines in the world...at least that's what we're told. We intend to verify that rumor.

Louise and Ray enroute to more fun.