

B56 GRUYÈRES – A BURG OR A CHEESE

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

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“Is Gruyères a cheese or a town?” I asked our host Charly Page. “It’s both but it depends on how you spell it,” he said, “and today we’ll show both to you.” That set the agenda for the day but, first, the MG had to be



dropped off at Garage Bochud to look into the overheating problem. Using my best French and Charly’s translation when stuck, I gave Monsieur Bochud my diagnosis. He listened politely as I went through the water pump incident and described the overheating problems. I tried to find some way to insert the few French automotive words I knew but valves and sparkplugs had no direct connection with overheating. We finally agreed that back flushing the radiator might solve the problem. “Call back after five this afternoon,” he said. Great. That gave us the rest of the day to explore the Gruyère question.

Gruyères is less than an hour’s drive from Romont unless you get behind one of the many hay wagons that ply the back roads of Switzerland. After all, it is a farming area.



Gruyères is a mixed-modern town with up-to-date stores and a bustling economy. It is not to be confused with old town Gruyères that sits high atop a steep hill crowned by a good sized castle that you see behind us. It is surrounded by the same ramparts as old town Romont and for the same reasons. It wasn’t the cheese they were protecting.



We were joined on this outing by Charly’s companion, Huguette. Years ago they were school-mates. After going in different directions during their adult lives, they’re together once again. Old town Gruyères is not new to them but usually they follow a hiking trail up to the main square. We felt fortunate they settled for car parking this time.

Like many of the picturesque villages in Europe, old town Gruyères has become a tourist magnet and more trinkets and T-shirts are sold up here on the hill than examples of the region’s best-known product.



At the base of the hill is a cheese manufacturing facility that gives tours on the cheese making process. Unfortunately, it is very popular with tourists and a long line snaked out the door. “You’re going to end up tasting cheese anyway,” Charly said, “So let’s go to where there’s no line.”



We stopped at their favorite cheese factory's store where tasty bits of gruyère and other cheeses could be sampled without waiting in lines. Huguette was looking for an extra special type of gruyère that would be perfect for the evening meal they had planned. It would be one of our favorites...fondue fromage. We dropped Louise and Huguette



off to begin the evening meal while Charly and I went by the garage to pick up the MG. "What was the problem?" I asked the mechanic, waiting to have my diagnosis validated. He held up a dulled metal object. "Thermostat," he said. Sure enough, the metal parts were separated and the thermostat was unable to open fully causing the overheating. "I just took it out," he said in French. "You won't need it until winter." When we left he had that satisfied look of



most mechanics when they've proved they know more than the client. He had thirty Francs of my money as well. Huguette lives in the house she was born into. It is a long, narrow building constructed in the 1600's and has been in the family well over 100 years. It's four stories and has a wine cellar chiseled by hand out of the bedrock. It is unusual in that you enter the home from a busy city street



but when you exit the back door you are in the country with a view of pastures, woods and distant mountains. It was the perfect place for our outdoor meal.



The cheese for the fondue was extra creamy with a delicate taste I'd never experienced with that we buy at home. The baguettes were cut into small chunks and we were ready to add kirsch, a distilled, colorless, flavorless brandy made from distilled cherries with a kick that will ring a Swiss cowbell.



Charly then threw in his particular twist that made me realize we'd been doing fondue fromage incorrectly for fifty plus years. I'm not going to reveal it because there are several people we want to surprise at our dinner table this year. Trust me, it was worth the trip.



We returned to Charly's apartment with a list of "must see" suggestions for the rest of our stay. Checking the iPad before bedtime, I found the following e-mail from the German family we'd met in the Aston Martin parking lot.

"Thanks for the reminder of the availability of your MG TF. We are advancing our offer with a maximum bid. If you can be in Nidda, Germany no later than 3 PM on Sunday, we have a deal."

Louise and I talked it over for about 30 seconds and replied. "Send your address. We'll see you on Sunday." Now came the bittersweet. It was Friday night and Nidda was a two-day drive by MG. If we wanted the sale it meant we'd have to cut short our wonderful apartment arrangement in Romont and leave our friends tomorrow.

With mixed feelings, I picked up the phone to call Charly and Huguette.