

WHEEL CLAMPS AND TOFFEE

PART ONE – WHEELCLAMPS.

We had been looking forward all summer to the visit and stay of our old friend and one-time neighbour, Audrey Boome. The previous year she came for a brief stay in October when the weather had behaved in an English manner rather than Mediterranean and had been somewhat rainy.

This time Audrey had elected to arrive in early September and to stay for a week all but one day. On this occasion she was able to enjoy much better weather; we were able to get about much more freely and Audrey returned home to England a decidedly different colour. She was also able to enjoy a few dips in the pool.

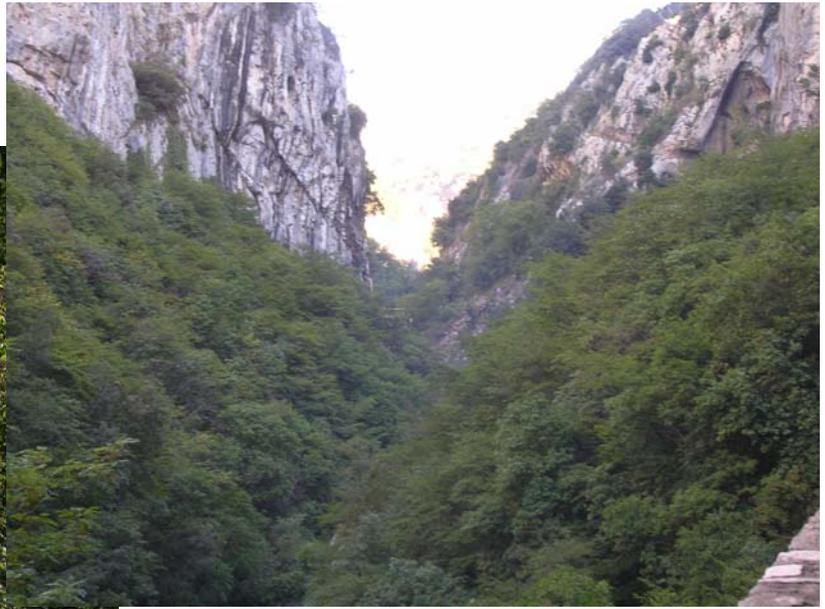
The next day after Audrey's arrival we drove up into the mountains for sightseeing but with the added intention of sussing out the village of Cipières, tucked up in one of the valleys of the Alpes Maritimes. The ostensible reason for choosing this destination was that the Rambling Club to which Lyn belongs was planning a day's outing based from Cipières and from there taking a two-three hour hike in the hills, including lunch at a restaurant in the village.

Our route took us up the "Gorge du Loup" where the river Loup cascades rapidly for a couple of miles from the higher mountain region. It is quite breathtaking, with the cliffs; gouged out of the rock by the melting icecap umpteen years ago had left towering rock faces on their way to the Mediterranean Sea. At the top of the gorge we stopped at a site where the water falls dramatically into a deep basin worn by the ages of cascade before flowing on its way to the sea.

From there we drove on up into the hills in which Cipières lies and had a look around the picturesque village, Lyn deciding that she would not join the outing later in the month. This was largely because I did not fancy joining the outing on that occasion, not feeling I would be up for that sort of exertion.

Next we drove to the mountain village of Gourdon, (a must for every visitor) perched on the edge of a towering cliff and with a wonderful panoramic view of the coast from Nice across to

Cannes and the Esterel Massif. Here we stopped at “The Zarrazin” restaurant for lunch.



Above: The gorge du Loup and the basin near the top.



Above: Panoramic view of the coastline from above Gourdon.

On Thursday we had a mainly lazy day, or to be more accurate, Audrey and I had a lazy time whilst Lyn went for her afternoon ramble with the Roquefort-les-Pins Rambling Club. Lyn returned home hot and enjoyed a dip in the pool, Audrey already having had a swim earlier in the afternoon.



**Left: Lyn toggged up for rambling.
Below: Audrey cooling off in the pool.
September 6th.**



On Friday we took a trip across the border to Italy to visit the market at Ventimiglia, using the Auto route all the way. Parking is always a problem in Italy and this was no exception because all the world and his wife appeared to have decided to go to market – not surprising, as it is world-famous. The market stretches for about a mile along the seaside and although there are not 1000 market stalls, as the name of the town suggests, it is very big indeed. And crowded! A lot of jostling is involved in weaving through the throngs. Italy is famous for its quality leather goods and Audrey bought a pair of sandals. She speaks Italian as well as excellent French, which helped, although most of the stallholders are multilingual.



Whilst these explorations were going on I, as usual lingered at the Cheese stalls and was lucky enough to buy some cheese similar to that which we had bought the previous year in Baveno Market. There the cheese had been called “Piave Cheese”. It is very similar to mature Cheddar. I didn’t have the presence of mind to ask the name of this one but it seemed afterwards to have been a popular choice. We found a restaurant overlooking the sea and enjoyed a hearty lunch.



To our horror, on our return to our car, we discovered that we had been Wheel-clamped along with every car on that stretch of the road!!!



Our car was parked close to a bistro and a waitress directed us, as she must have directed hundreds of others, to a nearby police station where we might procure the release of our car. Whilst I remained at the Bistro Lyn and Audrey went off to the Police Station only to return a short time later with the news that it was closed until 3pm for lunch. So they joined me in a drink whilst we watched numerous passing pedestrians smirk with amusement at the long line of clamped cars. Probably it is a weekly entertainment for some residents of Ventimiglia. Soon though, a policeman turned up on a motor scooter, followed by a towing vehicle. They probably wanted to tow the victims away so that they could leave space for more cars to be parked and later clamped.

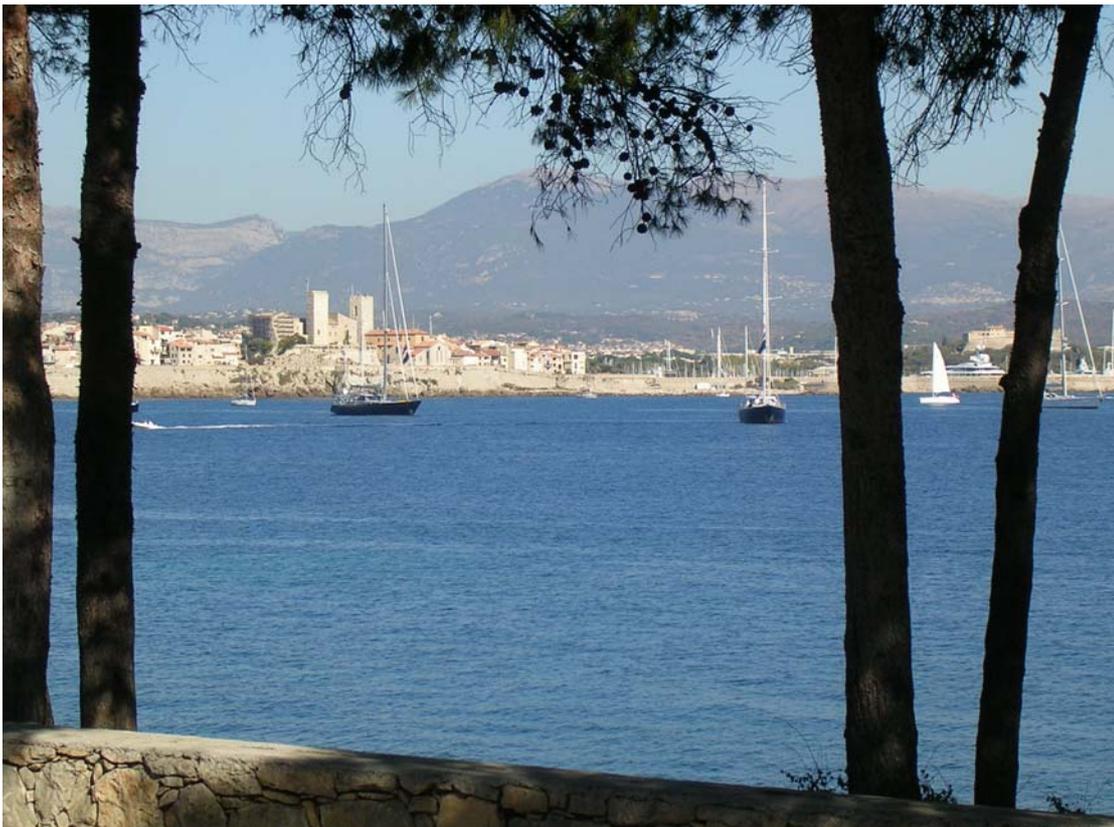
Lyn and Audrey buttonholed the bobby and after lots of discussion, much of it with use of hands in the Italian style, and the exchange of money, our car was unclamped and we were free to leave for home – 116 Euros (roughly £76) poorer. The fine was 36 euros and the cost of attending to unclamp, 80 Euros. Audrey generously contributed half of that cost.

Once home the ladies treated themselves to a swim in the pool.



Saturday, September 8th we drove to our beloved Antibes via the Champions Supermarket and went round the Cap d'Antibes ending up at the Phare de la Garoupe, (the lighthouse atop the Cap). From there we enjoyed the magnificent views – to the east across the Baie des Anges to Nice, and to the west across to Juan-les-Pins, Juan Golfe, Cannes, back dropped by the Esterel Massif. It was a beautiful day and perfect for photography.

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Audrey recognised the Chapel pictured below and dedicated to the Fishermen of Antibes, from the painting hanging in our sitting room.





This pleasant day was rounded off by an evening visit for a meal at our local Auberge – “L’Auberge du Clos des Pins”, which is now in the hands of new proprietors – Giovanni (Gianni) and Vanessa – Italian and Swedish respectively. With our meal we were treated to complimentary aperitifs of Champagne Kir; I also accepted their offer of a glass of Limoncello.



Sunday was the last day of Audrey's visit with us and it was decided to go and see the village of Eze, just west of Monaco. In fact we saw a lot more due to an error in navigation on the Auto route and drove on to Menton. Here we joined the coast road and turned back westwards through Cap Martin, by-passing Monaco, with its sky scraping buildings to Eze. Centrally in the village there rises quite a steep hill, conical in shape, at the top of which there is a garden full of Cacti. There is also a fine view from that height along the coast. Having walked up the hill three times in my life already, I dropped out near the bottom and sat on a bench in the sun watching the hordes of tourists toiling up the hill whilst Audrey and Lyn made the climb. There were all sorts of nationalities to watch, Japanese festooned with cameras, and Americans from the cruise liner, which we had spotted lying off the coast of Monaco. Shortly, I was joined by an elderly American couple from the cruise liner who, like myself, had decided not to make the ascent. They came from Boston, which I had visited a few times and we had quite an interesting chat until I was rejoined by Lyn and Audrey.

Back down in the village we debated whether to seek somewhere for lunch, but the place was very crowded so we decided to make for home to have some lunch – the Piave cheese, which I had bought in Ventimiglia, proved quite popular. We had also thought that it would be nice to wind up Audrey's stay with a meal out.

Unfortunately, back at home, several phone calls revealed that our first choice – “Les Quatre Saisons” (at Roquefort-les-Pins, not the one owned by Raymond Blanc in Oxfordshire), was closed for the day. So we tried to phone the “Auberge du Clos des Pins” only to find that the new proprietors do not open that on Sunday evenings either. Consequently Lyn, assisted by Audrey cooked up an omelette laced with bacon, which we all enjoyed.

On Monday we had, sadly, to drive Audrey down to Nice Cote d'Azur Airport for her departure. There we said goodbye, voicing the hope that Audrey would come again for a stay any time she felt inclined.

Once home we tracked Audrey's flight on the Internet, which reassured us that she had a good flight and arrived at Gatwick on time.

We miss you Audrey.

PART TWO – AND TOFFEE

Jayne, my brother Gordon's youngest daughter, and her partner Andrew James, had bought a villa in Corsica earlier in the summer, and were just returning to the UK after an eleven week settling-in stay there. They had emailed us a couple of weeks previously to tell us that they were leaving Bastia on the ferry on Monday September 10th and would like to visit us for a couple of hours. Their expected arrival chez nous was about 3pm. So having said goodbye to Audrey we were home in time to welcome them complete with Toffee, their Dalmatian bitch, to 27 Avenue des Alpes. Toffee was very grateful to be able to stretch her legs in the garden after the voyage in the ferry and the car drive from Nice. We spent a very pleasant couple of hours with the three of them, ending their stay with a photo-shoot in the garden. They were then driving the 70 miles or so to stay the night at Aix-en-Provence.

As I write this at 4.15 on Tuesday September 11th they should be arriving at their destination for the day at Troyes, just south of Rheims.



Above: My niece Jayne , Andrew (the one on the left) and Toffee.



**Toffee, we miss you too, and your friends. Call again soon!
September 11th 2007.**