

HARDELOT MAY 2009-05-04

This is a brief summary of what we did at HardeLOT on the weekend of 1-4 May 2009.

It is for the benefit of anyone who wants to read it but particularly for parents and carers who stumped up the cost and who might like to know exactly what the children got for that money.

DAY 1

Having met at 6-6.30 we loaded everything on board and briefly met Sandy our driver. He turned out to be an absolute star...his local knowledge was superb and we never saw him angry. Thanks Sandy.

For a few moments there was utter panic when it was felt that Bravo might be left behind....as a result Mrs B was seen scurrying to and fro (indeed she is the blur on one of the early pics)...but panic over, he turned up.....Bravo of course being a lad!!

Our first stop was Norton Canes on the toll road where we had a breakfast and leg stretch. From there down the M6 and M1, M25 to Maidstone services where we stopped again. Time was on our side and traffic was flowing well. We already knew that our sailing would be late-ish so it was nice to arrive at the dockside feeling unstressed. Clearing customs was a piece of cake (well played Sandy) and before we knew it we were aboard and sailing out of harbour. Sadly it was cold and misty but spirits were high and quite some time was spent on deck. A few braved a stroll half way along the side of the ferry in the teeth of a strong gale. Messrs Warren and Ferguson get an honourable mention here! We waved bye-bye to the White Cliffs (rapidly disappearing in the mist)

After a 90 min crossing, we drove efficiently out of Calais harbour, and having filled up with diesel, we flew down the motorway towards Boulogne, with the children rehearsing their spoken French! We went round the ringroad and headed towards le Touquet and HardeLOT....and in a surprisingly quick time we were driving along obviously affluent houses, built between pine trees, at HardeLOT. It seemed attractive.

We duly arrived safe and sound at Le Pre Catelan, our home for the next few days. Given the time, it was straight into dinner which was Sweet and Sour Chicken, Rice and veg followed by a jelly like pudding with trifle under....mmmmm trifle!!

Next our children were given instruction on fire drill and shown to their rooms in groups. Our rooms were all within easy distance of teaching staff and discreetly separate. Anyway, everything seemed so efficient, surely there couldn't be an actual evacuation!! (see later!!)

Hardelot has only been around since 1906 and, as a seaside resort, was designed, conceived and delivered by an Englishman!!

The children, who quickly worked out all local logistics, then enjoyed some leisure activity in the grounds....table tennis, badminton, football, strolling (girls) and rushing around at great speed (mostly boys).

And so to bed with clear specific guidance about lights out etc. Not surprisingly, our children did us proud....a good night's sleep was had by all.

DAY 2

Up with the lark around 7 (6 in UK time) and down for breakfast at 8 (Mr How in typical fashion had already been up for hours sussing the local landscape). The dining room was a buzz with the noise of the gobbling of orange juice, cereals, croissants, bread/jam and fruit for those who felt the need. Coffee too for the adults. A good start to the day.

At 8.45 we joined Sandy and drove a modest distance to Eperlecques...I say modest because it was decided the children should only have to put up with short journeys, for obvious reasons. In no time at all, therefore, we reached La Coupole...so what was this all about?

One could write pages but in a nutshell this was a German-constructed concrete masterpiece housing a launch site for firing V1 and V2 rockets at London in WW2. From outside the domed building seemed mildly impressive... inside we enjoyed a multi-media series of displays, including multi-lingual headphones, which came on all by themselves. Films, pictures, two shows ...and helpful, civil assistants made our 90 minute stay extremely worthwhile. Auschwitz was mentioned at one stage and other elements of WW2 which the children have studied.

Wry grins appeared when it was explained that the young mastermind behind the project (Werner von Braun) was recruited by the Yanks to help their space exploration projects. Not sure about that!!

Anyway, having walked through the shop we took our packed lunch in the grounds (sandwich, fruit, cake and water)...oh and French crisps.

As we boarded the coach for the return trip, it was universally agreed that the visit was excellent and also relevant. Hats off to the management team.

Having driven back to Hardelot, we had time for a quick cuppa whilst the children chilled....but not for long as we walked the short distance past the lofty dunes to the vast sandy beach where we were treated to separate group sessions of 1) sand castle digging 2) kite flying, 3) rounders and 4) windsailing.

All this under the crafty supervision of the Pre Catelan staff...and our own adults. Of course, some running around was helpful as it was still a wee bit nippy.

The sandcastle making including burying volunteers up to their necks (see the photos). The kite flying was tricky as the wind was fickle but I am proud to report that all children achieved lift off and some (walking backwards to improve the aerodynamics) kept the kite aloft for a while.

The rounders was hindered by the buffeting wind but the years of practice at Beaver Rd came in handy and a vast tally of runs was accumulated....sadly no one seemed to be counting but, hey, does it matter??

There was a limit as to how much could be achieved with the sandyachts in 30 mins each....suffice to say no one disgraced themselves and the rudiments were quickly picked up and the yachts manoeuvred around well. What bright children we have!

Having walked briskly "home" our tea consisted of fish and chips with veg followed by a lemony tarte.....lemony tarte..mmmmmm!! plus fruit for those who felt the need. This was consumed efficiently and the kids were then able to enjoy some free time for an hour doing what they wanted in the grounds. They did so quietly as one of the "neighbours" in an adjacent property is quick to complain to the local police. Our children, as we know, are naturally quiet, shy retiring types and so keeping quiet came easily to them....seriously, they did themselves proud!

We then returned to Hardelot resort for another look around the shops....and someone spotted an ice cream shop!! Purchases were made of said ice cream plus slush drinks and the occasional crepe. The weather was still chilly and windy but we were dry and lapping it all up.

Having strolled sedately back to Pre Catelan, the children were in bed by 10 and mostly asleep by 10.15....camaraderie and behaviour were both of a high order. So what would tomorrow bring we wondered.....

DAY 3

Having anticipated another leisurely start to the day, at 7.30 we were treated to a very loud wailing siren noise....doors slamming and local staff rushing round with clipboards....A FIRE ALARM.

We were all out in 2 mins, including a less than delighted Mr Warren who had been woken from a rather wonderful dream....there was no smoke nor smell of burning. An announcement made it all clear....the alarm had been triggered by shower steam in one of the ensuite rooms.

I am not going to say who the individual was....but here is an anagram of her name....Jiana Mystri....and please see the photo where children are identifying said person.

As we are good at forgiveness, the issue was behind us quickly!

Continental breakfast was followed by the brief drive to Berck sur Mer where we were hoping to put into practice our French phrases (ask the children to tell you!!). Again a cold, misty but dry start to the day....but the market was extensive and colourful. The girls like lemmings swarmed to the stalls selling jewellery, sunglasses etc, whilst the lads quickly found their way to the sellers of watches and sweets. I do believe that takings of these items were substantial and the local press later reported that we prevented Berck from slipping into recession.

The sights, sounds and smells of the market have to be experienced to get full benefit....and our children joined in the fun. Instructions were followed about staying in groups and clearly no one was "lost at sea".

Amusingly we came across several elegant dogs with equally elegant owners....and the largest dog I've seen in a long while. Please see photo. The physique belied a gentle temperament. My only fear is that Rowanne's Snoopy might get a bit jealous!

We ate our packed lunches on the beach....the grey clouds were starting to thin and there was enough blue to make sailors' trousers.

On our way back, we took time out to visit the military cemetery at Etaples. As with our visit last year to Vimy Ridge, this visit, which lasted a mere 30 mins, was a useful addition to the proceedings. The serried rows of headstones, all white and beautifully maintained, can impress old and young alike. The children in particular noted the many nationalities of those buried there and the tender ages of so many.

I took four photos, at random, of the headstones of a priest, two nurses and a young gunner....

Without sentimentalizing, the children were very quiet as walked back to our coach.

So, having driven back to Pre Catelan it was in sunshine that we walked off via the pine forest to do our "dune walk". This was fascinating as the wind had dropped and tea shirts could be seen.

At a place where there was a long drop of clean light sand the children could cavort around running and rolling....at this point Jack S decided to prove to us that the human body can fly as well as a V2 rocket and achieved several lift offs...please see dune photos by way of proof....diving prospect for 2012 I ask myself?

We then arrived at the very large concrete bunkers and lookout post built by the Germans in WW2. The passage of time and wind has made these unsafe to enter but they are interesting to look at and reflect upon. Again, we had now reached the beach and were able to stroll calmly back to Hardelot resort on a huge flat, spotlessly clean beach. A nice way to round off our excursion.

Before we knew it we were home for tea and what a spectacle this turned out to be.

The main event was roast chicken or lamb casserole but lo and behold snails (big ones) were there in abundance....none were left and some ate more than others....the initial food sampler was the brave, intrepid Robert C who has been known to nibble other interesting objects....he is a hero this time as he downed his snail with gusto.

Dessert was crepes....plenty of them....and if crepe eating is to feature in the 2012 Olympics, they may as well send the gold now to Jacob Fthe Tom Daley of crepe eating.

After a sensible break, the children got ready for their night walk....into the pine forest again with Pre Catelan staff preventing us getting lost. We ended up at a hut next to which we all sang droll songs about such things as Captains in the Army and Sharks....followed by an elimination game with the chanting of what I must have misheard as all about Gorillas picking their noses.

After further games involving chasing each other round a seated circle, we strolled back to Pre Catelan. Given our need for a prompt getaway the following day, rooms were tidied (sort of) and bags packed (a sight to behold)...and then to bed.

Would we experience another Fire drill? What do you think MrW?

DAY 4

This was a sort of whiz bang day....after our usual breakfast, we stowed our bags, tidied the rooms and before you knew it, had said byebye to the Pre Catelan team and were speeding down the motorway to Calais.

Good old Sandy had arranged for us an earlier sailing as, if we had sailed on our booked ferry, we would not be home til at least 10pm or possibly far later....perish the thought.

In brilliant sunshine we reached Calais, and as if by magic, were whisked through customs and onto the Pride of Calais.

Our guardian angels were smiling on us as we found an area where there were non-stop showings of Tom and Jerry. It was wonderful the way our children politely applauded at the end of each cartoon.

The holiday to all intents and purposes over, we simply drove home via M2, M25, M6 and M56, stopping at Medway for a plentiful packed lunch and Corley for crisps, cake and fruit juice.

Where was the traffic?? Who cares....we reached Beaver Road at 6.47 in the safe care of Sandyyou know the rest!!

Particular thanks also go to the teaching staff especially Miss Mistry who led the party. And many, many thanks to the parents and carers for letting your children attend this trip. Each one of them will have their own view of how it went...what we know is that they were a credit to themselves, to our school and our country as they travelled abroad.

And as they say "That's all folks!"