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Current news

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There's no place like home (August 12, 2001)

How people can stand to travel all the time for business is completely beyond us. We left Rome at 7pm, Saturday (local time) and got to glorious SeaTac at 2pm, Sunday. Ouch. On the upside, English is the language of choice and Starbucks are plenty. After a few moments of uncertainty, Tokul has remembered us and is up to her old tricks. It'll be a miracle if we can stay awake beyond the third inning of tonight's Mariners game, but we're trying to sync our body clocks with the Pacific timezone. Stay tuned for a more coherent trip wrap up and pictures galore in the days to come. Au revoir, adios, ciao, later.

When in Rome... (August 10, 2001)

From the sun drenched Italian Riviera to the hilly hill towns of Tuscany and all with the pleasant company of our northern neighbors Dan and Serina from Vancouver. Who says only freaks use laundromats? Hm, maybe it is true, but at least these two know how to have a good time and allowed us to tag along. We found the best restaurant in all of Siena (did you ever think I'd order a flan?) and I learned all about wine and grappa. If you've never had grappa, just take a swig from the super unleaded nozzle and you'll get the experience. Wow.

After we parted ways in Florence Amy and I toured the highlights of the birthplace of the Renaissance all the while worrying about the fact that our flight from Rome to London left **July 11** instead of August 11. Needless to say, we weren't on it. Luckily, we found a great guy at the Lufthansa office in Rome who reissued our tickets in less time than it took to find their office.

The airline office was probably the newest building we've seen all day since we've been shuffling along the Via Sacra like a couple of real toga-toting Romans back in the days of the Republic. We even walked on the same stones they did. Pretty cool, huh? Now if we could only find some place to relax that was cool and didn't charge us 5000 lira an hour.

Tomorrow we see if the guards at the Vatican will let a Lutheran into St. Peter's Basilica. If not, well, Amy may just have to convert. Ciao.

Sunburned, but happy (August 6, 2001)

Ouch, ouch, ah, ouch. It's amazing how hot the sun can be on the Italian Riviera. Although we've left Cinque Terre we're still more relaxed than the first day we arrived there. Two days on the beach and a day hiking and sampling gelati is wonderfully therapeutic. Too bad the SPF 15 didn't really cut it, especially on backs doomed to carry heavy backpacks for at least another week. Ah well, live and learn.

What happened to the topless beaches? (August 3, 2001)

Last time I was in Europe all the beaches were topless. Now, not so much. Granted, I wouldn't be looking now that I'm married, but I'm curious what brought about such a dramatic change in the span of only a couple of years. I think even Amy is secretly disappointed that she wasn't under pressure to go more naturale, but oh well. The weather is gorgeous and we are hanging at the beach in Montorossa, one town up the tracks from our base in Vernazza. Life's rough.

Italy is hot (August 1, 2001)

Yep, everybody told us we were crazy to go to Italy in August, but what are you going to do when your summer vacation schedule is dictated by the local school district? We've not seen a cloud since we left Amboise, France, almost two weeks ago and the temperatures have been steadily around 90°F. Last night was our second overnight train and this one without air conditioning along the French Riviera and through the northern part of Italy. Luckily it was just the two of us in the cabin, but that didn't stop us being paranoid, not after the stories we've heard from other travellers.

The best two stories came from a three-generation packet of estrogen (grandma, mom, and daughter) in the car next to us last night. A man in their compartment let a gas into the air and left the car. The gas rendered them unconscious and they were stripped of valuables including passports and earrings. Their other story, though less sinister, seems much more frightening to me. A first class car that was supposed to have air conditioning

didn't and a mini-riot broke out because the passengers couldn't open the windows. Granted, we've had but a single experience, but I'd have to say the Italian trains are a pale shadow of their French counterparts. Still, no more night trains for us and only a couple more day trains before it's all over and we become ordinary stay-at-home citizens again. Bummer.

Not to scare you too much, though. The train trips are always worth it when we get to our next stop. Today is Venice and once again I'm amazed at the thought of a city without cars and the boating folk reign supreme. This town isn't for me, though, it's far too hot and just the thought of standing on another bus/boat is making me a bit seasick. Far and away the coolest bit here, though, was Saint Marks Basilica which has a roof covered with golden mosaic and a floor that had Amy sketching new patterns for quilting. It'd have been even better, but they required knees and shoulders covered which made us that much warmer. Tonight we hope the weather subsides a bit and we are able to enjoy our first Italian pasta dinner. Hurray!

Under siege in Barcelona (July 28, 2001)

No doubt you heard about the bomb blast at a bank in Barcelona a few days ago. Apparently, the Basques are now targeting tourists. Last night we were awakened by a loud booming noise quickly followed by sirens. To top that off, we saw a crowd of people and a couple of cops take a guy off the subway and throw him against a wall. Probably for pickpocketing. Our new favorite game is "spot the pick pocket" while walking La Ramblas and eating breakfast on the balcony.

Never fear, though, we're doing smashing. We arrived in Spain yesterday evening, navigated the Metro, and introduced me to the wonders of (a) not knowing any of the languages being spoken and (b) some tasty meat product in a pita pocket shaved off a pole. Please don't tell me what it was, I don't want to lose the joy until later.

Tomorrow night we head to Arles, returning to France briefly, and then on to Venice and the rest of Italy. Internet access may get spotty in some of the smaller towns, but rest assured we'll be resting on the beaches.

Our own private Tour de France (July 25, 2001)

It's been 10 days since we last had reliable access to a computer. I bet a lot of you didn't think I could go that long, huh? So where have we been this last week and a half? From Paris we travelled to Normandy to see the D-Day beaches which were amazing, but nothing moved us as much as the US cemetery overlooking the ocean. Wow.

From Normandy we headed to Amboise in the Loire valley. It was here we foolheartedly rented bikes and started on the Road of the Vineyards which promised to be flat, but was actually up and down from the grape growing plateau (amazingly beautiful) to the valley floor where each house had a mini winery in a cave carved into the cliff behind the house. Unfortunately, it was a Sunday so we only went in one of the caves, but perhaps that's best otherwise it would have been that much harder to get back to Amboise. As it was, we took one wrong turn and wound up on a busy road on the wrong side of the river for the last couple kilometers. Oh well.

That brings us to today which is our last day in Sarlat. Yesterday we rented a canoe and paddled lazily down the Dordogne River, stopping to lie in the hot sun (90F) and read or watch the other people float by. Very peaceful. In the middle of the trip we stopped at Castelnaud to see the 13th century chateau and its medieval siege engines. Yep, they had trebuchets as well as smaller stone throwing machines which has only served to rekindle my desire to build one for the defense of the moosefish estate. Today we're working on getting over our mild sunburns and preparing to head further south where we hear it'll be even hotter.

Bonjour (July 16, 2001)

We've crossed the Channel (via the Chunnel) and are helping to degrade relations between the English speaking world and the French people. The last couple of days were a great rest and a slice of home as we stayed with Colleen and Victor, parents of dear friend James. After a couple of nerve-wracking moments when we couldn't quite get in touch we had a very mellow day with Colleen driving all around the south of England. We saw Corfe Castle and T.E. Lawrence's grave (that's Lawrence of Arabia to anyone not quite sure who T.E. is) and, of course, Stonehenge. I doubt I have to describe the massive tablets of stone set on end in the middle of the field, but it was hard to expect the impact it has on you when you're standing so near something so big and old.

The next morning we left the Grays around 4am and headed back to London to drop the car, tube to the train station, and tunnel our way onto the Continent. After a brief bit of claustrophobia during one of the shorter, earlier tunnels I found a place where I could

relax and we arrived in Paris shortly. The city is huge and more reminiscent of New York than London. The language has thrown us for a bit of a loop, especially me since I'm supposed to speak it. Go figure. Already we've climbed the Eiffel Tower (by foot) for the sunset view and toured a tiny portion of the Louvre. We're heading for Notre Dame now for yet more stairs and then to L'Arc de Triumph for, you guessed it, more stairs!

We leave Paris in a couple of days and we head into the hinterlands of France so there's no telling when the next dispatch will arrive. Keep checking here, though. Au revoir.

Chilling in the countryside (July 13, 2001)

When last we left you we were in Edinburgh, Scotland. Since then we had a joyous trip south 400 miles to the Cotswolds. This quaint backwater in England is home to tiny villages with thatched roofs, one lane streets, and Warwick Castle. It was amazingly relaxing to have few sights to see in the two days we were there. Of course, the prices of such peace is isolation in terms of both network access points as well as Starbucks. Luckily, we're in Bath now (an old Roman bath, go figure) where they have both. Refueled on frappacino and sitting in front of a lovely little iMac I'm once again at peace. We've got another couple of nights in England (at the home of James' parents Victor and Colleen) before we head to the continent where speaking English won't get just odd looks because of our accent (or lack thereof: Are you Canadian?), but rather complete non-comprehension as I try to muddle through French. Egads.

York! Did it used to be called Amsterdam? (July 9, 2001)

After London we were ready for a couple more days of utter chaos as we rolled into York Station, especially after all the trouble we had getting to York and even with our B&B once we arrived. Thankfully, York is a breath of fresh air. It's small and the bits we were interested in are all within the walls of the old Viking city of Jorvik. After seeing the Minster and walking the wall there isn't a whole ton to do in the town except wander the tiny streets and relax so we did both. We've now moved on to Edinburgh and have found that on first blush it is more similar to London than York, so back into high gear (and on High Street to boot) we go.

Look out! Europe's in shambles (July 7, 2001)

Perhaps not Europe, but the EuroMoosefish trip is definitely getting wacky. Although we made it to Europe ok our first check-in should have been a sign to get back on the plane and head home. Our last name was "John" and first name "Soltys" which of course caused no end of confusion for the poor clerk. The next day we arrived at our B&B to find there was no reservation. They had an extra room so that worked out. Today we got back to the airport to pick up our car to head to the north and found that the rental car company, "New Frontier Car Rentals," was actually a Toronto based company. Turns out the travel site we booked through mistook London, England, for London, Ontario, so there's a car with our name somewhere near Toronto. We managed to find a new car, but not for a couple of days so we hopped back on the Underground to get to the train station to catch the next train to York. We made it by 10 minutes. What else could go wrong? How about being met at the front door of our B&B to find the previous night's guests had wet the bed and we'd been relocated up the street. At least I've discovered how to place my order at the local Starbucks without causing too much of a stir. (And yeah, I know the moosefish location on the home page is broken, but I've got no really good facility to work on it.) Cheers!

John and Amy move (July 6, 2001)

Ha! Fooled you. We've changed our remote email address as the service at our former provider (a Times' product and everything) was less than useful. You can now reach us at euromoosefish@yahoo.com.

Where the heck are you guys? (July 2, 2001)

I've been calling and calling, but you're not returning my calls. What's up? Don't expect a response until the middle of August cuz we're not home. Amy and I have headed east to be the ugly Americans wandering the streets of Europe without a clue.

Who's... what's... huh?

Rest assured, all the little bits of string are nicely wadded into a relatively tidy ball. Tokul's splitting time between Langley and Kirkland and the house is being watched by our neighbors. (WARNING: They're under strict orders to shoot first and ask questions later. (Seriously.))

We leave for London tonight. Stay tuned.