



The ALC Bulletin

June/July 2024



From the Editor...

For the past two years we have been thinking about the future of our publications. This has been a regular topic at Council meetings, at our AGMs, and more informally at our Meets. You will know that a steady decline in our membership (and corresponding loss of income) combined with steep increases in the costs of printing and postage, have pushed printed Bulletins beyond our budget. We know that amongst our members there are many different opinions on the best way forward, and we know that we can't please everyone. We have therefore taken an Executive decision to trial a new form of publication that we believe will combine the best features of both the e-News and the printed Bulletin. This is the first edition of the new style of publication. It begins with coverage of recent Meets, and then moves on to kit, very like the e-News until you reach page six, where you find 'The Long Read'. Here you will find the type of article that had come to dominate the printed Bulletin, longer pieces that report on cycle tours, camping-related hobbies and interests and current issues that relate to all of these. A big advantage of this new style Bulletin is that because it will be produced monthly, you will get these Long Reads as they are submitted to us, rather than waiting up to 6 months for them to appear, by which time they are not always topical. Your feedback on this new-style publication will be very welcome. This is a combined June/July edition because it seems you have all been busy camping, not writing - items for the August Bulletin are now needed!



Best wishes, Susan

Clitheroe 14-16 June...

Susan: The CCC site at Clitheroe is one that we haven't visited for some years because it no longer has enough grass-only pitches for the Club's rally rate, but the new 'per person' booking system and our ability to pitch 2 tents on a standard pitch has opened up this type of site to us, and we had a great weekend there in June. The staff were very welcoming and had given us a perfect grass area for our tents - we had agreed in advance that any cars would go onto a hardstanding 'car park' (Clitheroe has no visitor parking). Despite the sunny weather the ground was very wet, but not at all muddy. The town centre is a short walk from the site and has a good range of shops, cafes and pubs, and there's also the castle and a small but interesting museum.



The Contemporary Arts Festival was taking place during our visit, with exhibitions and events at several venues around the town. These served a dual purpose for us—worth visiting in their own right but also an excellent way to escape from torrential rain and even hailstones at one point!

The Norman Castle is now open to the public after essential maintenance work, and it's certainly worth the climb to the top for the fabulous views, although damp weather made it rather misty when we were there...cont'd >>

The Bulletin is the newsletter of the Association of Lightweight Campers, a Special Interest Section of the Camping and Caravanning Club. The ALC has an unbroken history of small tent camping since 1901.

Clitheroe cont'd...

The Castle, with its surrounding grounds is dedicated to those who died in the Great War . The war memorial, with additional names of the Second World War and incorporating a relocated Boer War memorial was erected in 1923. It was no surprise to discover it is Grade II listed.



In the former Rose Garden in the Clitheroe Castle Grounds we noticed The Pinnacle. A gift from the then MP, Sir William Brass, in 1937, it has an interesting heritage, having originally being part of the Houses of Parliament.



Pamela and Sarah, umbrellas at the ready!

The castle grounds also house a skatepark - have we any skateboarders in the ALC?

And some rain protection: the heavy rain at Clitheroe was not unexpected and of course we demonstrated our usual ALC preparedness, versatility and adaptability! Joan, TJ and Nye had their kitchen items organised in weatherproof containers and Joan's huge umbrella kept her dry whilst still within reach of the Trangia!



Kim had made excellent use of her recumbent, a single pole, and a tarp, to create a Des-Res!



Jo and Martin demonstrated the resilience of a tarp, here holding masses of water after torrential rain (at Blackmore they had a stylish rain-proof setup!)



Thanks to Pamela for capturing this, and to Nigel who then tipped out the water!

Hayfield update...

At our Easter Meet in 2023 we were disappointed to find that the backpacker facilities at Hayfield were in need of repair, so on discovering that Kim would be breaking her journey home from Clitheroe at Hayfield, we asked for an update...

Kim: Greetings from the Hayfield backpacker hut! I can confirm that the outdoor cooking stands and picnic table are under cover, but the brick surrounds to shelter your stove are still absent.

Meanwhile, the hut is pretty much the same as last time I visited (though I don't remember if the lockers in the drying room required keys then).

Temperature is currently 23.9C in the main part of the hut, and having opened a window, I can confirm warm-ish radiators and occasional boiler cycling on and off noises. The sink has a single cold tap. The power sockets are live, and I'm making good use of them. WiFi signal is a bit marginal here, so photos will have to wait.

Susan: we'll be asking the Club to replace the windshields that made it possible to light any stove in high wind. Is a three piece suite a good way to seat a crowd of wet backpackers?



Chertsey 12-14 July...

Nigel: Members of the ALC naturally have a love of the outdoors and physical activities. Numerous of us enjoy running, including the now World famous "Parkrun" which was started in October 2004 by Paul Sinton-Hewitt CBE in Bushy Park, close to the Chertsey CCC site. Parkrun is a 5km fun run that takes place on Saturday mornings by millions of runners all around the world. Each runner carries their own barcode and when they cross the finish line they are handed another barcode on a token. Both barcodes are then scanned to create a finish time for the runner.

By the way, this is not a competition, people can run or walk, the finish time is NOT important, taking part is! Shortly after the event finishes everyone receives an email with their finish time and position. The runs are fabulous social events, with all kinds of people taking part, it's fantastically inclusive! People are chatting at the beginning and end, often going on to a nearby cafe for coffee and cake, or whatever! It's a great boost for people's physical and mental health, there are innumerable stories of people who have used parkrun to recover from all kinds of difficulties. In my own case I was "prescribed" parkrun by my doctor in 2016 as a way of increasing my physical activity, I haven't stopped running since! Like many parkrunners I am a "parkrun tourist" visiting parkruns wherever I go, including internationally. There's even a company that specialise in arranging trips to parkruns. We must also mention the fantastic volunteers, without whom parkrun would not be possible.

Back to the ALC connection and the recent Chertsey meet was a perfect opportunity to attend the Bushy Parkrun, where it all began. Stephen, a valuable serial parkrun volunteer, and myself, went along. There were 1500 runners there, the biggest parkrun I have ever seen! Bushy Park is a beautiful location and we thoroughly enjoyed the sunny weather. Whatever your age or physical ability I can thoroughly recommend parkrun, once you start you will never be the same again...



Chertsey cont'd...

Rich: We finally managed to hold a meet at the Chertsey Club site after having to cancel last time, I think due to Covid restrictions. The site itself is right on the banks of the river Thames and is the oldest of the current Club sites. I arrived on Thursday evening due to a later start than planned and a circuitous cycling route from Euston station via Greenwich. Friday was an easy day with a quick ride into Chertsey town for food and then stewarding duties in the afternoon. On Saturday the yearly Black Cherry fair was on the green in Chertsey, apparently it started in around 1440. Sunday saw people heading off, I left around mid morning to cycle towards Watford station around the side of Heathrow and the Grand Union Canal, I never got there in the end as once I was on the canal I decided to cycle the rest of the way home along it.

Martyn: Here's a photo from the Chertsey Meet. We had lots of space and the Chertsey fete happened to be on the Saturday so I had a nice few hours there. Rita and I sat in the museum garden listening to a lady singer. Lovely! **Rita:** This was such a nice relaxed Meet, with everyone sitting around in the evening chatting, and it was good to meet Elaine, who joined us for the first time. Packed up wet but was wearing gortex top, bottoms and boots. So glad I bought the small tarp which meant I could cook outside in comfort.



Chertsey from the archives...

The Chertsey CCC site, opened in 1927, is often referred to as the first Club site but this is not actually true. It is certainly the oldest of the *current* sites, but according to 'First in the Field' (the official history of the Club written by our very own Hazel Constance) four other Club sites were opened even earlier than Chertsey. These were: Weybridge, Surrey (1905), Huntsmoor Park, Buckinghamshire (1922), Denham, Buckinghamshire (1924) and Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire (1924). Hazel reports that the Club acquired the riverside site at Chertsey shortly after the AGM in 1926. It was opened the following year, but caravans were not allowed and neither were musical instruments. Since folk dancing was a popular activity at Chertsey from the start, a gramophone had to be used to provide the music. Chertsey had a number of permanent pitches for which there was a waiting list as they were heavily over-subscribed.

The Chertsey site has always made good use of its river frontage, often with eye-catching activities. In 1964, at the Chertsey Club site annual regatta, a caravan was floated down the Thames, to the astonishment of passers-by. The Canoe Camping Section of the Club (founded in 1933) has had strong connections with the site that continue to this day, with members of their Section working to maintain the river bank and safe access for their canoes.

In the 1970s the Chertsey site was closed and completely redeveloped as a holiday and touring site for Club members only, although members of foreign clubs could also use it. As such, the site had a warden and it became the first site to remain open all year round. "At the time it was equipped to the highest of any known standards in the UK. A warden was sought who could preferably speak both French and German, accommodation was provided and there was a shop available on the site" (First in the Field, p224 - *Hint, copies can often be found on eBay*).



*Nigel at the "home" of Parkrun.
Another first for Chertsey!*

Kit and Stuff...



Sarah: On my recent camping trip I tried beeswax pouches for storing sandwiches and snacks in for the first time instead of plastic bags.

They worked really well and moulded with the warmth of my hands to closely wrap whatever I wanted to carry. They're made from waxed cotton and

are an antibacterial, sustainable and re-usable alternative to plastic bags or clingfilm. After each use they can be washed in warm soapy water and air dried ready for re-use and the instructions suggested they'll be usable for at least a year. The only thing to be careful of is that they're not suitable for raw meat or fish because they can't be washed at high temperatures. In the shops they can be very expensive and I only bought mine when I saw them greatly reduced (probably because of the funky pattern...) in a hardware shop. I've since found plenty of instructions online for making my own wraps by grating beeswax over cotton cloth and gently ironing it between two pieces of parchment. After being pleasantly surprised by how well the shop bought ones worked, I'll probably have a go at making more myself.

Nigel: When we go out camping, especially when travelling light weight, food is one of our most important considerations. For people like me who is useless at cooking, but can just about manage to boil a kettle, ready-made dehydrated food can be an excellent choice. During our recent Clitheroe meet we had a short discussion on this topic and I offered to write this article, so I will start with my considerations, which might totally differ from yours!

1. The food I carry needs to be lightweight. In my case that means mainly dry food, except my essential chocolate spread and peanut butter, exceptions can be made for luxuries!
2. Easy to cook and prepare.
3. Tasty - in my case I can eat almost anything so this is a pretty easy one to pass!
4. Reasonable cost, although this is at the bottom of my list if I can satisfy points 1-3.

I have tried a variety of pre-prepared, dehydrated food and frankly have no preference on brand. However, the one that I ate at Clitheroe was a "Firepot" one so I decided to photograph that one

and review it here. Please note that I am not connected with Firepot in any way and unfortunately I won't receive any money from them for this review, not even a freebie packet!

So this one was the dal and rice with spinach, which happens to be a vegan option. This is rated at 750 calories, which is one of their higher calorie range and was left over from my Ireland trip, where I certainly needed those calories! You can see on the front of the packet that it is marked "Extra Large". This meal also happens to be lactose and gluten free. It's probably worth mentioning here that the Firepot range has a few key selling points: they only use natural ingredients, this means no additives, and they are hand made in Dorset.

They are also very easy to prepare:

1. Tear off the top and remove oxygen eater sachet.
2. Add boiling water to the required mark, which varies depending on the meal type, and stir.
3. Reseal the bag and leave to stand for 15 minutes. NOTE: I have found that it is better to leave them a few minutes longer than this otherwise some of the contents may still be hard.
4. Stir again and enjoy.

I have found them to be very tasty and enjoyable but, as I mentioned, I'm certainly not a good judge of tasty food. They also seem to be quite healthy but I'll leave that to your own judgement, but the low salt content is very good as this is important for my blood pressure regulation.

Otherwise, like another lightweight camper and YouTuber, Susanna Thornton (Brompton Touring), you can prepare and dehydrate your own food using a dehydrator, but that is well beyond my abilities.

Perhaps you should reconsider dehydrated food for a future camping trip, they are not necessarily the tasteless mush you perhaps thought they are.



Susan: Do any of you have your own dehydrator? This topic came up in a recent ALC Zoom Meet, and some of our ALC members are keen to know more about home dehydrating. Please contact me if you have any hints or advice to pass on.

Email Susan at: newsfromthealc@gmail.com

The Blackmore Birthday Meet 2024 - our 123rd

The August Bulletin will contain a full report of the Birthday Meet which this year was held Fri 2 Aug to Mon 5 August, the exact dates of the 1901 camp at Wantage that began our Club.



If you attended the Meet, please do send me something to include in the report. All contributions will be very welcome, including accounts of what you did, where you went, what you enjoyed (or didn't?). And if you can also send photos, so much the better!

I think there was a separate party going on for Crew members, some of whom bought Regalia!



Rita's Coffee & Walnut...Yum

Send your Bulletin items to us at newsfromthealc@gmail.com

Academic cycling?

Susan: My absence from the Chertsey Meet was due to it clashing with a conference in Oxford. It turned out to have an unexpected cycling theme...

Talking with another delegate over dinner we somehow got on to the subject of the York Cycle Rally, and from there to the content of the paper he was presenting - an ethnographic study of a bike shop. This research took place over several months, during which the researcher spent many hours in a large bike shop in the north of England, where new bikes could be purchased, old ones repaired, and coffee & cake could be savoured. The research looked at everything that was happening at the bike shop, such as ways of learning, relationships between employees, and cycle technician qualifications. There was obviously a lot about learning on the job, including some examples of pupils doing work experience there – something that overlapped with my own presentation on the importance (and lack of) vocational learning opportunities for young people.

He was obviously a cyclist himself, and I mentioned my own propensity for falling off bikes and several kind suggestions (from ALC members) to put me on the back of a tandem. By coincidence, as we left the dining hall we came across this - the college tandem! And no, I didn't try it out!



Harris Manchester College tandem

ALC Summer Meets 2024

There are just two Meets left in our Summer Programme and at the time of writing there are still some places available.

Fri 6 Sept Crowborough CCC site 2 night Meet

Fri 20 Sept Nottingham CCC site 2 night Meet

Use this link to our booking form to request a place.

<https://forms.gle/Pwx3Bfu7YQqFs49N7>

ALC Winter Meets 2024/25

Our Winter Meets programme is taking shape and full details will be available in early September. Based on member requests, survey responses, locations and facilities, the following sites are currently under consideration:

Boroughbridge, Bowness on Windermere, Canterbury, Chichester, Conkers, Delamere Forest, Theobalds Park and Winchcombe.

If you have any further suggestions or any questions about the Winter Meets, please email us at newsfromthealc@gmail.com

Editor: finding myself with this gap on p6 and being all out of ideas, I appealed to our ALC Secretary (formerly known as the Camping Widower...)

**"I'll find the Club Poet and hand 'im"
Said Susan, "a job picked at random.
I'll tell him I need
At double quick speed
A limerick based on a tandem"**

Editor: Hmm, so now he's the Club Poet... I don't think we have a job description for that - yet!

The Long Read

NTKC Revisited...

Stephen: When I first joined the CCC, over a quarter of a century ago, the ALC had very close links with the NTKC, De Nederlandse Toeristen Kampeer Club. The relationship was close enough to have a NTKC Liaison Officer, a role which for many years was held by former ALC president, Pat Contance. The NTKC has rules about tent and caravan sizes, in essence "small" tents and caravans only are allowed. I say "small" because some of the tents I have seen are fairly large and many made of canvas, and hence are not light.

In August 2002 and 2004 I did week cycle camps using the NTKC sites. We were treated as if we were members of the NTKC. This was a very important feature, not just in terms of fees, 2 Euros a night person, but in terms of access. The NTKC is in essence a private members club that currently has 20 campsites run by the members for the members. If no one was camping at a site, then the site would be locked up. Upon finding a site locked up, the members would need to look up the keyholder listed in their site booklet, collect the key, open the site. The last person leaving the site would then lock up the site and return the key. The first person on site would become Kampmeester, a role they would take on until handing over to another camper when they leave.



A Kampmeester's tent - similar to our Steward?



The Kampmeester will collect sites fees sometime during the day at a time known as "melden", these times are normally chalked up on the notice boards.

On our 2002 tour we were the only people on the NTKC's largest site Het Groene Hart near Hazerswoude. Fortunately, as we arrived the Kampmeester was in the process of locking up, so they booked us in and as they were local they came back after we left to lock up.

The other time we were the only people on site was on our 2004 tour at a lovely site in the middle of nowhere, NTKC's De Kooiberg site near Ugchelen. I had to cycle 3km to collect the key and then return it the next day. The site is so



Sunset view from Stephen's tent at the NTKC Het Groene Hart site near Hazerswoude

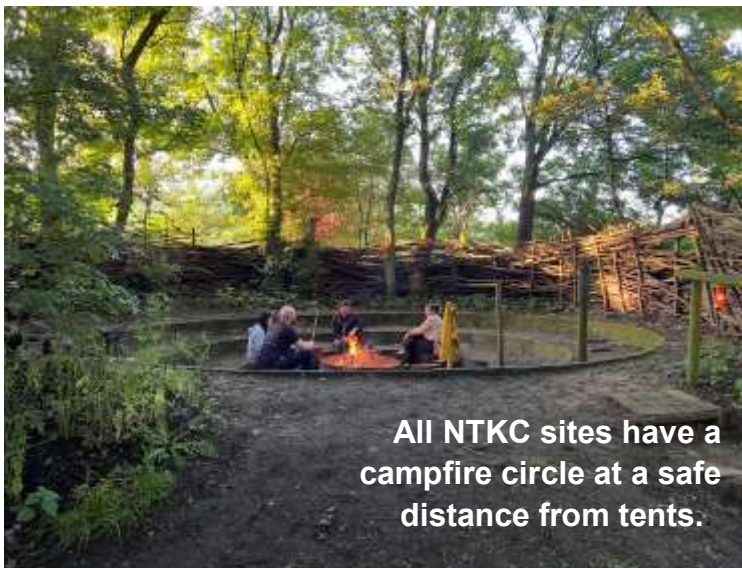
Whitsun this year I did a parkrun orientated cycle camp where I had planned to visit 3 NTKC sites, two I had been to before and one new to me. In the end with the weather I had to modify my plans and I ended up skipping the one I had not been to.

Since I last used NTKC sites, the information that was provided in a booklet is now web based' with some important bits such as addresses of site keyholders only available to members. Before going I had emailed the NTKC, who confirmed that we can still camp, and that the cost would be 9 Euros a night. I later learnt that this is the non member introductory charge, as members pay 4.50 Euros a night. Another change is that nearly all sites now have showers and they are no extra cost.



Stephen at the
De Haan site

Due to its locality the De Haan site, on the southern side of Den Haag, is meant to be always locked. The lock being a combination lock, with the combination known to members. Fortunately, when I arrived, there was someone going through the gate, hence I had no problem with access. At their other sites, the gates are not locked if members are camping. Normally when a camper arrives they will just find a place to pitch and pitch up. I normally out of politeness will say hello to the Kampmeester if they are around when I arrive.



All NTKC sites have a
campfire circle at a safe
distance from tents.

No cash is used at the NTKC sites now, it is all electronic card payments via a special device, which enables the member details to be recorded and accept card payments. I had no problem paying with my Post Office card loaded with Euros, but beware many cards are still not widely accepted by all in the Netherlands. My Post Office card (Mastercard) was accepted by the NTKC system but not at a few shops I tried.

When I returned to De Haan for the last part of my trip the payment system was bust, and members were asked to pay by bank transfer. This I did after I got back, I sent an email to the NTKC and they let me know the info I needed to make an International Bank Transfer.

Due to the soggy weather, there were not many people out camping at the NTKC sites and I was concerned that I might end up alone on a site but in the end there was at least one other person camping in the 11 nights of my trip.

If trying the NTKC sites for the first time I would recommend going in August like I did in 2002 and 2004 and have back up plan in case you can't access a site. The NTKC sites on Texel and at Ouddorp are popular sites and can be very busy at peak times (packed in like sardines!). The De Haan site tends to be occupied daily in the summer, but to quote the NTKC secretary, don't bank on it.

If cycle camping via the Harwich – Hoek route, the day ferry arrives early evening, you can be cycling away after customs before 6pm and it is about 8 miles to the De Haan site in Den Haag. For the return, the ferry leaves lunch time, so there is plenty of time to strike camp and get to Hoek van Holland for the ferry.

The NTKC De Haan site near Den Haag on a misty morning



Wouldn't you like to go to the Semaine Fédérale?

Hint: You don't need to be a cyclist to enjoy this cycling event, read on!

Nigel: Tired but wishing for more, I am writing this just after returning from the 85th Semaine Fédérale, in Roanne, near Lyon, Europe's huge cycling festival with 6000 attendees.

I have only been a "serious" cyclist for about two years, one of my transformations due to being an ALC member for about the same time! Earlier this year several ALC members were suggesting to me that I should attend this amazing event. These days I like to stick to the UK and Ireland but I was so glad that I was persuaded to go to France!

There will be at least one other article from this year's event but mine only has one objective, suggesting that YOU think about going next year! So here goes....

What is The Semaine Fédérale?

It includes all these elements, not in any order:

- A week long festival of cycling, with thousands of attendees, mainly from Europe but I noted somebody had flown from New Zealand especially to attend.
- Daily, **non-competitive**, rides around the area, with four levels (distance and ascent) according to your fitness and appetite for riding. There are food and drink stops along the routes.

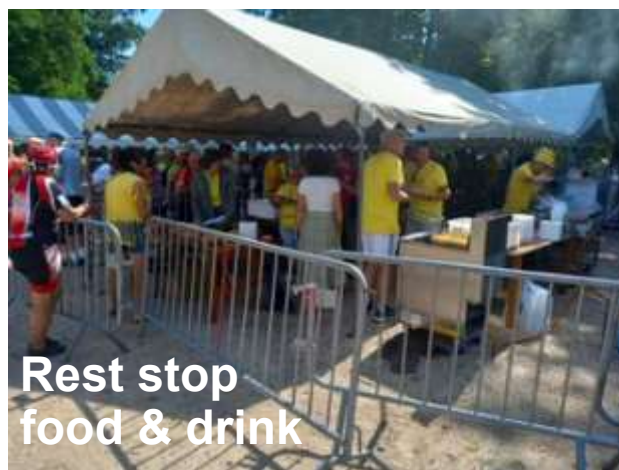
Chris: This is an annual cyclists meeting held in different places in France each year. This year there were 6500 registered, of which 250 were British. The event was in Roanne, about an hours train ride west of Lyon. We camped there for 9 days in total.

There were 4 members from the ALC, along with 2 other cyclists in our group, we named our area Boulevard des Anglais. Each day we had a choice of rides, each one clearly marked, with a food stop along the way. It was amazing how we kept running into the British riders each day.

The weather was hot at 32 deg (there was an ice cream chap who drove around selling ice cream at strategic points!). but we all had a good time and managed a bot of Franglais with the other cyclists.

Three of us had taken Bromptons, which lead to many riders pointing and laughing, saying "look, little bicycles", we cycled away from them!

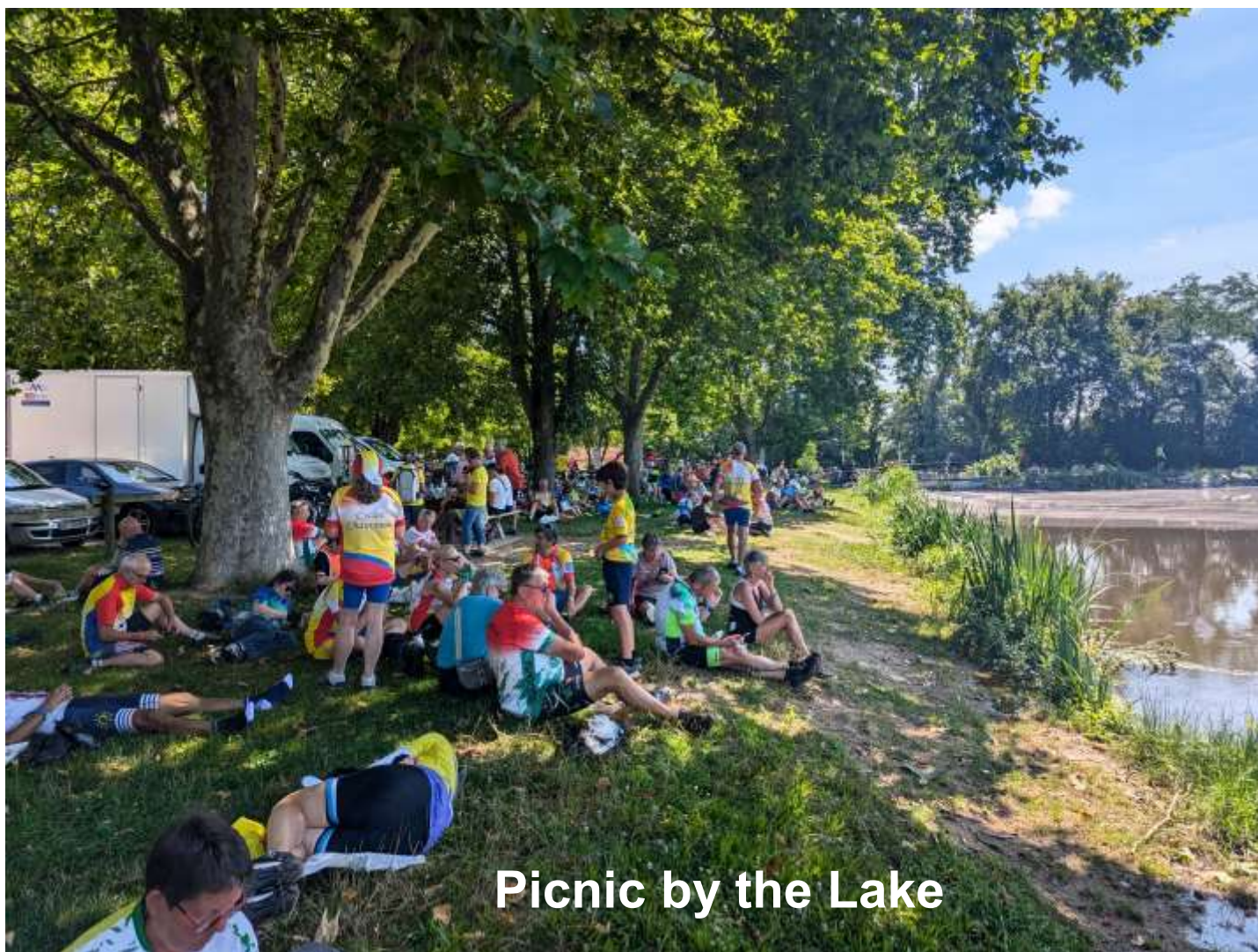
All in all it was a very nice atmosphere and well organised. Next year is in Orléans, much easier to get to.



- Daily coach trips to tourist destinations for those that don't wish to ride.
- A massive camp site including tents, camper vans, motorhomes and caravans.
- The camp site has many toilets, showers, sinks and wash basins. There are also disabled toilets with easy access.
- Basic catering is available on the camp site with a reasonable choice of food. In addition there is a daily on-site food market. As a pointer I never needed to go into the town to go food shopping!
- Daily entertainment at no extra cost. This was "pop band" style, mostly singing French tunes, great fun with many attendees and lots of dancing!
- An exhibition of cycle related services and products.
- A gala dinner on the last night which did cost 40 euros extra but was amazing value considering the food and excellent entertainment.

Above all though it's a wonderful opportunity to spend quality time with friends old and new!

Interested yet? Read on...



Picnic by the Lake

Some facts and figures

Sarah: We were given a copy of the local French newspaper at the Semaine Fédérale that included these statistics:

Semaine Fédérale in Numbers:

5,599 - The number of French participants.

245 - The number of British people present. They make up the second largest community of attendees.

19 - The total number of nationalities represented.

425 - The number of cycle tourists visiting from abroad.

57 - The percentage of men present.

67 - The average age of participants. It is slightly higher for men: 67.4 versus 67 for women

70-79 - The age category most represented, including 1,577 men and 1,017 women.



Cycle Parking at a rest stop.



Boulevard des Anglais

How much does it cost?

The event is run by volunteers organised by the FFCT (Fédération Française De Cyclotourisme) which I guess is the French equivalent of Cycling UK. As such it is incredible value for money and a great way to get quality camping in France even if you are not a cyclist!

Costs of the week long event are –

Semaine Fédéral Registration fee = €40
Repatriation insurance = €24 (refundable on proof of your own travel insurance)

Camping Pitch Costs (per week)

€37.00 for cars and camper vans under 8m in length

€74.00 for camper vans over 8m

Cost per person camping (cyclists)

€35.00 (aged over 18)

or

€17.00 (aged under 18)

Evening meals are available:

Fri 19 July €15 per person

Sat 20 to Fri 26 July €22 per person

Gala meal Sat 27 July €40 per person

In my case I paid as follows:

Semaine Fédéral Registration fee = €40

Repatriation insurance = €24 (refundable on proof of your own travel insurance)

Cost per person camping

€35.00 (aged over 18)

Gala meal Sat 27 July €40 per person

Total Euro 139 or about £120 for a week's quality camping and a good meal at the end!

If you don't want to use the campsite there are the usual local hotels, B&B, etc.



Chateau de la Roche, St Priest la Roche



Anyone for ice cream?



When is the next Semaine Fédérale?

Next year it will be in Orléans which is a lot closer than Roanne and there is already a website for the event:

<https://sf2025-orleans.fr/>

Your browser should be able to translate the French.

In 2025 it will be from 3 to 10 August and registration opens from January 2025.

The dates are already in my diary, what about you?

Susan: WOULD ANYONE LIKE A ZOOM EVENT TO TALK ABOUT NEXT YEAR'S EVENT? Email newsfromthealc@gmail.com