

Our European, U.K and Ireland Journey 1997

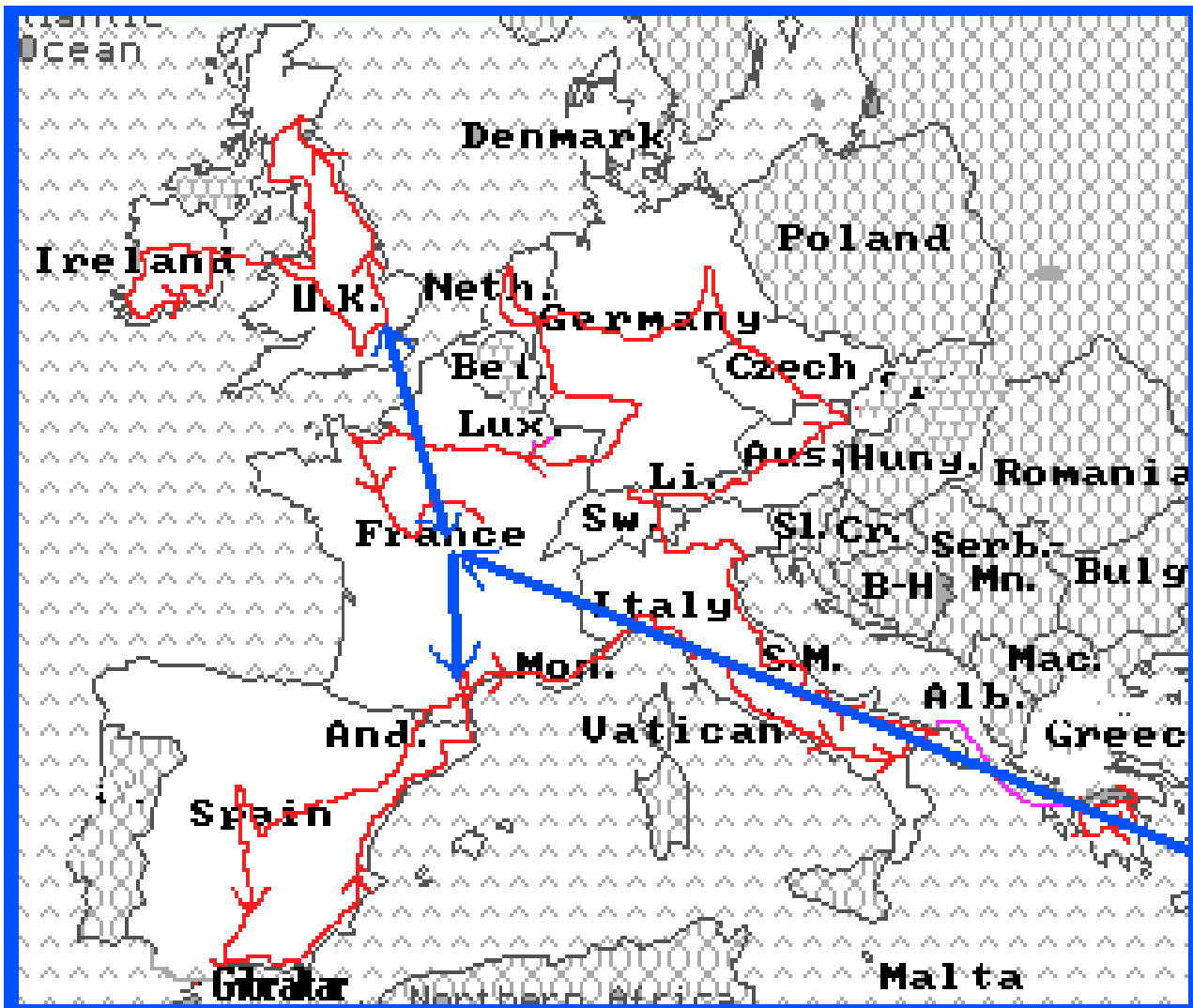
John and Marie D'Alton

Our Peugeot car we called Tiffany



The map of Europe, UK and Ireland

The countries that we travelled in are white, that is, they are not filled in with patterns.



This file I converted from MS Word 6 to MS Word 97 then to OpenOffice.Org 1.1 then PDF from OO.Org. Please forgive me as there are a few small changes that have taken place with all the translations from the different formats. JCED 3 March 2004.

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Foreword

This is our true story, facts and suggestions of our trip to Europe, UK and Ireland which we call “Our Journey to Europe, UK and Ireland”.

As our two families of our son John and daughter Maria live in Brisbane, they looked after our affairs and home while we were away.

Lyn, John’s wife tendered Marie’s cactus and succulent house and mowed the back lawn. Maria, who lives next door also did some watering but importantly checked our mail, ‘phone answering machine, banking etc.

All our grandchildren, Joshua, Grace, Laena and Christian also carried out little jobs to help. Marie and I thank them all so very much.

We did our homework well, reading, viewing TV and video tapes. Marie planned things and places to see while I concentrated on the routes to drive and languages. I also collected information that is not available in Australia via my connection to the Internet, mostly from the Web.

Many times I have spelt the names of countries, cities, streets etc as they are correctly spelt in that country. So the German city Köln is not Cologne as we spell it. The Spanish city Málaga is not spelt as Malaga and so on.

If anyone would like help and information, please write to us at:-

39 Agnes Street,
Toowong Qld 4066
Australia.

or if you have access to the Internet by E-Mail, my address is :-
jcdalton@ucaqld.com.au

The **Overview** section is for folk who do not want to read the main section called “Our Journey”. Perhaps you just want some ideas for your own planning. This is the section that I will be sending over the Internet. I point out that the Overview section applies to all countries but bear in mind that some text will not apply to a particular part of a country. Special points that relate to a particular city, town, region or country will be mentioned in the Our Journey. Included at the end is **Best and Worst**.

The **Our Journey** section is primarily for our families and friends. Of course also for other folk who would like to read it if desired.

This section is included in our photo albums

The **Driving** section tells readers our experiences and hints.

The **Statistics** section is just that.

We hope you enjoy and find helpful whichever section you read.

JCED Oct 1997.

Overview of our Journey

What a different world it is over there. So different that it's hard to explain it to folk. Australia is not much on the world scene, a bit like when we travelled in the USA. We are so remote that what we do is not going to influence the world very much.

One thing we noticed was the quaintness, daintiness and generally many things not really "solid". Things hung and fixed with small screws, tacks etc. This was reflected in the small flowers everywhere.

Much of our Journey story centres around us getting from one place to another. I drove two cars, not at the same time of course and my darling Marie navigated. We travelled about 17000km in Europe and about 6000km in UK and Ireland, so we believe we are in a good position to give our views and opinions. We were not like the usual tourist who travels by tour coach. We did our own thing. We did not stay in hotels with a rating higher than two stars. We are Youth Hostel Association (YHA) members and intended to stay at some hostels, but for three reasons we didn't. One, because we could not find any easily. Two, there was no good carparking and three, we were well within our budget so we could afford something better. YHAs are great for folk travelling by train or bus as they are often close to the bus and train stations.

Most hotels do not have car parking space so we had to park our car in the street. Even though it is advisable not to leave baggage in the car boot overnight, we did after the first few nights. Most rooms were one or two floors up so we did not want to carry our big baggage up stairs. But Marie did carry her cabin bag each night. I also carried my day-pack, backpack and our food box to our room each night.

We comment on traffic, autopistas, autobahns, roads, parking, signs and most other relevant items. We are RACQ members so I obtained my International Drivers Licence with my photo from them. Other than that they were no help whatsoever.

Except for a little coloured brochure showing international road signs they gave us no other information at all relevant to driving a vehicle.



Europe is a different world, in particular Spain, Italy and Greece. These are the poorer countries that we refer to as "southern Europe". Most travel agents do not sell the type of travel that we did. In fact many of the usual travel agents do not have the sort of information that we needed. We also studied many types of package tours before and after our Journey and conclude that if you want to have much of the worry done for you then that is the way to go. Most package tours are whirlwind tours, going from one tourist trap to another.

We did arrange in Australia before we went our airfares and the two cars that we used. The first was a leased Peugeot which was a brand new car for Europe and a rental Ford which we changed to an upgraded bigger car. We did this at Heathrow Airport and ended up with an almost new Mercedes-Benz car. It had about 7000km on the speedo-meter. What luxury. Although I had driven cars on the other side of the road in the USA, that was a few years ago in 1988. So I had to re-adjust myself again. It takes a week or so to get to the first level and about one month to drive without having to think too much, that is decisions come automatically.

Another thing that effected me but not Marie was being in the northern hemisphere. I drove with the sun acting as a guide, similar to a sailor at sea going by the stars.

Of course it was difficult when the sun couldn't be seen, so I used a compass.

The other things we booked were three resorts, and an accommodation by a contact on the Internet. We also arranged to visit some friends in two countries.

We planned our Journey to suit the weather. We were away during the northern hemisphere's

spring and summer. This meant starting in Spain , continuing into Italy then Greece before it was too hot. The only problem was that these countries offer the biggest culture shock.

Even though we did our homework well, we were not prepared for this culture shock. Looking back now we were surviving each day.

Nearly everything is so different and difficult to what we are used to in Australia. So much so that we both lost about 7kg weight in those first six weeks. We would not do that part again, but we are very glad we kept to our plans. Don't misunderstand me, we really did enjoy that time in those countries.

Our advice on accommodation is, do not book any in Australia or buy any of the "drive and accommodation" packages. When you are driving yourself (and navigator) it is almost impossible to find places. Even our new 1997 European Atlas showed only about 33% of the small towns, in all the countries. And it's impracticable to take super maps of the countries, you would have a suitcase just for maps. We did buy a few maps of cities but they were not accurate either. So you are on your own in most cases. Our ages and wisdom helped us a lot. At times we had to check our position with a compass. Most times we asked a local.

This brings me to the point that all the people in all the countries were very helpful and friendly. Contrary to what we were told, French folk were also friendly. Even if I tried to say a few words in French or Spanish. They were not rude. If someone was particularly friendly or helpful Marie would give the person a stick-pin or a handkerchief. I also gave away stick-pins. Marie usually wore an Australian broach and I my Australian cap so many conversations started when people saw these Australian items.

The EEC has pumped a lot of money into southern Europe and Ireland of which we could see the results. New and better highways and signs etc. But some people do not want their country to join it as it means higher costs for them.

In most towns and cities in all countries, many people live in apartment buildings, many above shops or businesses. This causes the streets to be clogged with parked vehicles. This means that there are many double parked vehicles. Then of course delivery and service vehicles also double park usually with the hazard lights flashing.

We found that motorists in most countries are very patient. We suspect that because the traffic is

so dense, they have to be patient. They are also better drivers and more courteous than most Australian drivers, Queenslanders in particular.

The two most important good points are :-

On the bigger highways, that is two lanes in one direction and two lanes in the other direction, most vehicles must travel in the lane nearest the kerb. When two vehicles are travelling in the same lane, motorist (A) wants to overtake another vehicle (B). Motorist (A) does the normal thing and changes lane to overtake. When motorist (A) has overtaken (B) he moves back into the lane which is the same one (A) and (B) were travelling in. This leaves the lane nearer the centre of the highway for motorists to use for overtaking.

The other manoeuvre is when motorist (A) is travelling in the lane nearest the kerb and sees a vehicle (B) entering the highway at almost the same speed, (A) moves over to the next lane nearer the centre of the highway. This allows (B) a clear way onto the highway, the lane nearest the kerb.

Motorist (A) is then usually ahead of (B) so moves back into the kerbside lane. This means that traffic keeps flowing, there are no holdups on the highway entry ramps. Of course if there are more than two lanes, a motorist (C) who may already be in the second lane moves over to the next lane nearest the centre of the highway. So there is a domino effect with both manoeuvres. Each courteous motorist gives another motorist space, not a "me against you" attitude but instead "we both need this highway so let's co-operate" attitude. These two main highway/road rules at least did make driving a little less difficult.

The quality of most highways and roads, from one lane (each way) types to the big four lane ones is superb in all the countries including the southern European ones. Even third grade highways are smoother, straighter and better than our Australian highways. I have in mind what should be our premium ones from Brisbane to Melbourne. Of course we realise that we do not have the big population to pay for really good roads.

So smooth that Marie was able to read maps without being carsick. I would not have been able to drive by myself in most countries because there are too many signs to read. A friend in England put it aptly, "visual overload".

The main problem is not that the signs are in another language but that there are so many.

Of course I did learn about fifty road signs in four or five languages which did help but I stress

again that driving a car around southern Europe is very difficult.

I did have a little reprieve a few times when we used other means of transport. We used taxis a few times. Even taxi drivers are saner drivers. One that we travelled in near Málaga (Spain) was so very relaxing. Another in Roma was nearly as good.

Train travel was excellent. All the trains we used were electric. The one we travelled in to Barcelona even had sound to add to electronic signs with information stating the next station stop, time and temperature. Trams, trolley buses and motor buses are very good. We assume that life in all the countries of our journey is perhaps safer than we are led to believe. We did not see any taxis with a divider grill or wall like some taxis in Australia.

In Our Journey I have shown the average cost of petrol as most men ask this question, "How much did petrol cost".

The three things on most travellers minds is finding **toilets, accommodation and food.**

Most folk know that travellers must search out toilets in restaurants, bars, shopping centres and petrol stations. Public toilets in parks are almost non existing. We found some Mac Donald cafes with signs warning people that their toilets are not for the general public but for their customers only.

The toilet culture in Europe is certainly different than what we Australians are used to. Cleaners of both sexes go into both toilets to clean them, sometimes while people are still in the toilet. The men's urinal quite often was visible from outside, very little privacy and we think embarrassing to women folk but we assume not to European women.

Particularly in the southern European countries men stop their vehicle on the highways and walk perhaps five metres or so and relieve themselves.

It's an interesting experience just using the toilets. They range from squat to the normal western type.

To flush you push, pull, press a pedal, push a lever with your knee, wave a hand or even a couple that flushed automatically after you close the door on leaving.

In southern Europe accommodation is very hard to find and some days we spent an hour or so looking. The easiest country in this respect is Ireland. B&Bs everywhere.

Remember that the siesta period in most countries, not just in southern Europe makes it

difficult to get lunch or dinner. Sometimes we had to wait until 7pm or 8pm. We did have a 240volt immersion heater to make hot drinks and also used it to heat up tins of soup, noodles, meat balls, vegetables and so on. We did this in our hotel room. But in southern Europe even buying such things was not always possible. They just do not have many of what we call normal tinned foods. Even milk was a problem to obtain. In southern Europe most milk is the UHT type which suited us as we had no refrigerator. Then in the northern countries, north of Switzerland, we could not buy UHT milk, just the normal type we keep in a refrigerator. Travelling is such a hard life.

We were told that in Spain, the vegetables that they grow are sent up to northern Europe and sold. Not that we saw much variety, usually tomatoes, cucumber and small leafed lettuce.

"Did you drink the tap water? is another often asked question.

Yes. We understood that it may not be safe to drink ordinary tap water in remote places of southern Europe so we had Iodine tablets and a 240volt immersion heater to boil water if necessary. But we did not. Yes we did drink the water and neither of us had any bad reaction. It was a bit funny tasting in one place in Spain but that was the only occasion.

Bottled water is usually drunk in all countries. It is sold in shops and supermarkets in shrink wrapped or carton lots. Many times we had to stress that we only wanted tap water not bottled or mineral water. People thought it strange.

Radio reception of course did interest me. In most countries there are not many AM stations. Some days we could not hear any at all. As in Australia the move is to FM transmission. Some days there were hundreds of FM stations to choose from. Some places we saw scores of satellite antennas (dishes).

In all countries except Scotland and Ireland there was a smoky haze similar to what we experienced in the USA.

This kept the temperature down a little as the sun is not as bright as it is in Australia. Of course the locals would not have us tell them so, they just said it was OK and not smog or haze. We told them how bright the sun is in Australia and that Queensland has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world.

Only in southern Spain was it a little hot otherwise it was comfortable driving and walking.

It rained about twenty days in all, but of course their rain is not like our Queensland heavy drenching rain. We could still walk about by using an umbrella or wearing our snow jackets.

In Our Journey I give the outside temperatures at about 8am. Sometimes I could not put the temperature gauge outside so I took the reading from the car gauge at about 9am.

One thing we did not see many of was the common ant. I guess we saw no more than about fifty in all our Journey. Yes, I said **ants**. Maybe someone can tell us why. Also common birds. We did not see any small birds in Spain and very few elsewhere.

We are a little disappointed that we did not go out many times at night, perhaps five times by ourselves. As I have already explained, it's just too difficult to find places let alone doing so in the dark. Of course once we left southern Europe moving into Switzerland it was May and sunset was later but in both cases I was usually very tired by 4pm and if we were in a hotel room by then I usually had a short one hour sleep.

Petrol stations are the places that we could think we were in Australia. More than any other place in fact. In southern Europe the pump was operated by an attendant but not so often in the rest of the countries. Italy is the trickiest country to get petrol due to their **siesta period**. I expand on this in **Our Journey**.

Diesel fuel seemed to be available at most stations. Our cars were petrol operated ones so we used normal un-leaded most times but occasionally more expensive premium un-leaded petrol.

We had no problems money-wise. We used our Visa Card perhaps ten times in all, otherwise we used Thomas Cook Travellers cheques in only two denominations being German Deutchmarks and UK Pounds. We did not use any ATM machines at all. Security at banks in southern Europe was tight, there's more about it in the Our Journey section.

I did try to use Cyber Cafes or Internet places so that I could receive and send E-mail, also edit my Home Page but because it was so hard to find places I was only successful six times. Computers and the Internet do not seem to be so advanced and popular as here in Australia.

The telephone system is surprisingly good in all countries. We did purchase two A\$50 Telstra

Phonaway cards before we left but this was inadequate as some calls cost \$20 for a few minutes in some countries. Most times I had to dial a certain number to even get into the local system.

This was the same in hotels or public phones. Very time consuming but well worth the effort once we could talk to our families.

We saw plenty of thick cables strung from poles of all sorts which I presumed to be cables for TV or data transmission. It was funny or cute to watch TV programmes/movies dubbed in the foreign language. Cartoons, popular shows, Columbo and even an old Australian show of a couple of decades ago called "Boney". Do you remember it?

It was strange for awhile that we couldn't pick another different thing. Most roads and streets do not have the electric power poles lining them.

In the countryside they wander across farm lands and in towns from house to house either at the front or at the back.

Car parking spaces are not sufficient for the mass of vehicles in all countries. Most on-street parking systems use the ticket system. You park your car, walk to the nearest parking ticket machine, select the amount of time and pay. A ticket comes out and you place this on the dashboard so that the parking attendant can check your time and issue a parking fine ticket if necessary. Off-street parking stations are similar to Australian ones, but spaces are narrower.

In all countries except Germany about 25% of cars are parked facing the other way. This is very frustrating and almost caused us to have a smash in a small Spanish town. The only driving or parking fine or ticket I received was in Köln. I parked Tiffany in the street next to our hotel where the hotel woman said it would be OK. I explain more in **Our Journey**.

Anyway it's rather confusing at times which adds to what I keep stressing, driving in Europe is difficult.

On the entry to some big cities along with the big road signs are the names of off-street parking stations together with the number of spaces vacant. Some streets allow parking on certain days, some streets have very limited parking and so it all adds to the difficulty I am trying to stress to the reader.

We were surprised by the amount of uses of solar cells.

Road signs, 'phone boxes and parking ticket machines were often operated by solar cell power.

We were rather surprised that we saw more trees than we expected. Perhaps not so in southern Europe. In northern Europe the highways were usually surrounded by trees so that we couldn't see the countryside.

In southern Europe the city plazas/squares are well used by people. They stroll around from about 4pm to 7pm or thereabouts waiting for restaurants to open. They are family orientated places where the children can play and are loved. Men usually push the pram or stroller. Refreshing to see compared with our western outlook.

The workmanship of buildings is not up to our Australian standards even in the new resorts.

I have edited the flags so people who have received Our Journey in MSWord .DOC format will not see them in their colours. This is to enable people who receive a photocopy to see them in shades of grey. All prices are for two, both of us, as for accommodation, otherwise for each as printed.

Best and Worst

Our favourite country	Austria
“ places	Olympia and Pompeii
Best highways	Germany
Best drivers	Germany
Worst drivers	Netherlands
Best highway signs	Ireland
Heaviest traffic	Italy
Most trucks	Germany
Best food	Ireland
Friendliest people	All
Poorest country	Greece
Most expensive road tolls	France
Clearest air/sky	Ireland
Worst air/sky	Athens
Cheapest accommodation	France
Costliest accommodation	Italy
Longest tunnels	Austria
Cleanest trains	Spain
Worst graffitied trains	France
Most tunnels	Spain
Most training cyclists	Italy
Most ordinary cyclists	Netherlands

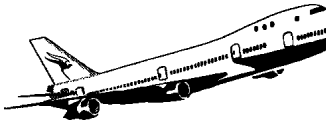
JCED 28 Oct '97 END

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4th of March and we're off

After about eight years of thinking, hoping, planning and more hoping we planned our dream journey to Europe, U.K and Ireland. This big day arrived on the 4th of March 1997.



Marie's suitcase weighed 20.5kg and mine 18kg. We were

taken to Brisbane International airport by our daughter Maria, Grace and Christian. Soon after we arrived our son John, Lyn, Joshua and Laena also came to see us off. Marie bought all morning tea and gave them a little gift each. At Qantas checkin we were told that our aircraft would be delayed about four hours so we were given free lunch vouchers each to the value of \$12.00. Our families did not wait that long so we said our tearful goodbyes and used our vouchers for lunch. Marie had fish and chips with a scotch drink, I had a steak sandwich and two beers. When we went through the security Xray machine I beeped as usual due to my metal hip replacement. This was to give me much fun on our Journey. We waited and waited near the loading area. I 'phoned Maria about 6.00pm to let her know we hadn't left Australia yet.

At 6.45pm we boarded our Qantas QF 051 for Singapore. In flight Marie watched Barbara Striesand in a movie called "Mirror Has Two Faces". My headphone sound unit was very bad on the video switch so I read. Outside temperature was -50c. We had a good flight as usual with the normal dinner meal up to Qantas standard. We arrived in Singapore rather late of course at 11.40pm.

Singapore

A\$1 ~S\$1.1
Population ~ 3,000,000

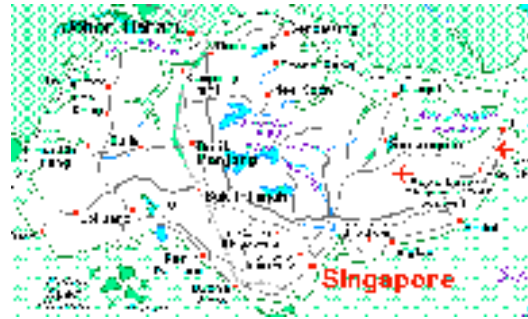


We had no problems at Changi Airport. We drove by taxi to Hotel Bencoolen. It was hot.

Of course it's always hot and humid there. Our room was 403, bed at 3am but 1am Singapore time.

Wednesday 5th March 1997

We were woken by workmen next building at 8.30am. I had to pay by Visa card as the hotel



receptionist said something about their Singapore Postal Agent would not cash the APO AMEX Money Order that I sent the hotel in January. Strange. We walked up Orchard Road to widow shop. We ate at an Asian food hall, we had noodles and a claypot, both with chicken. They still have some squat-toilets in Singapore. Back in our room by 3pm.

I 'phoned Maria and then Sodexa in France to confirm our Leased Peugeot car. All was OK. We made our own little dinner in our room then bed at 8pm, both tired.

Thursday 6th March

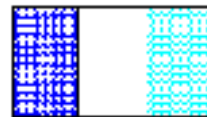
Up at 7am and had free breakfast in restaurant on the top floor. We paid S\$7.50 for extras as only orange drink, coffee and toast is free. We stayed in our room until 12noon then walked 50mts to the next corner and caught the Airport Bus which cost S\$5.00 each. We were at the airport early for our Air France AF257 so couldn't check our baggage in for about six hours so we just sat and waited in the cool. Singapore Airport is bigger than ever, there are two terminals now and a third being planned. The flower arrangements with a waterfall were magnificent.

We departed at 10.55pm for France and Europe on Air France AF257. What excitement.

France

A\$1 ~FF4.00
Population ~58,870,000
Petrol price ~ A\$2 p/l

Smoking for passengers in the aircraft is allowed only in the two designated areas. These are near the centre of the aircraft on each side. Definitely no smoking in the rest of the aircraft including the toilets.



Perpignan is about the same size as Toowoomba, approx 60,000 people, but that's about all the similarity there is. We managed to do a U-turn and after much fingernail biting came upon a petrol/service station. Problem A solved. I got reasonable directions, in French, to the AIHotel about 5km further on but we got lost a few more times. As I have stated in the **Overview** section, it's very difficult to drive around Europe. Anyway we eventually arrived at the AIHotel at about 8.30pm.

For the benefit of people who have not driven a vehicle on the other side of the road, the first hour or so is not easy. The trafficators and windscreen wipers are usually in reversed position. The trafficators are on the left hand side of the steering wheel. I had driven in the USA but that being in 1988 I had to re-adjust all over again. I say that it takes a week to become comfortable and a month for reactions to be automatic. That's what you need in Italy, automatic reactions!

Bed at 10pm.

Saturday 8th of March

We rose at 8.30am, temperature 16c. Had breakfast from a very good assortment as "help yourself". We took a few extra bread rolls, fruit and so on. Later Marie read in the lounge while I went out to Tiffany in the car park, studied the French language written manual then practised driving it but only in the car park. I spent about two hours, backing, driving around objects and similar movements. I didn't know at the time that Tiffany was a front-wheel drive and had a large turning circle, which was to prove a bad feature. More on this later.

Tiffany had "central locking" with a standard key and a remote control. The spare wheel was an "emergency wheel" which I had not heard of before. An emergency wheel has a narrower tyre fitted to the rim, a spare wheel just to get you to a service station and have the faulty tyre fixed or replaced. I found out later that this was common in new cars. Is it in Australia?

At dinner we were given a free glass of red wine. The meal was a buffet one. We watched a French news session then bed at 9pm.

Sunday 9th of March

Up at 7.30am and again a big self service breakfast and took some extra rolls, cheese and fruit. We checked out at 9.30am and only had to travel

about 20km to the resort past Perpignan. It is about 1km from the **Canet De Plage**.

We got lost and drove into a medieval village. This was our first big driving culture shock. These little villages of course have narrow streets, some only wide enough for one car. In a few minutes we managed to get out of there and we stopped to ask a man directions. He could not speak English or Spanish. Another man came along and we did converse in Español. This was my second time, what great satisfaction for me. This is what I had been waiting to be able to do for years. We found our way to the Plage (beach) which is very touristy and similar to the Gold Coast in Australia. There were only a few people around because it was early spring. Nice sandy beach but no surf. We had lunch on the esplanade. We finally arrived at Malabu Village at 1.30pm but too early so we had to wait by sitting Tiffany. We checked into the unit at 3pm. Very modern and nice. Marie put the two photos of our families on the table.

We attended the Welcome night in the bar at 7pm and "talked" a little to a French couple. The host gave us a free drink of which I can't remember what it was. We had dinner in the restaurant, I had spaghetti carbonara and Marie had chicken and chips. Yum. Bed at 9.30pm.

Monday 10th of March

Travelled today ~87km

Up at 8am. We drove to the beach firstly to go to a bank for more French Francs (FF) and bought our first groceries in Europe, FF1602 worth. Back home for lunch then back to the beach area again where we stopped and looked at the little museum area being constructed. It is a reconstruction of a fishing village of centuries ago. The houses are made from long grassy reeds so Marie took two photos.

Then a little southeast to Elne and photos of palm trees with the lower fronds bound up with hessian. Onwards past many vineyards and a photo of snowcapped mountain in the distance. This mountain is Mt Canigou, altitude of 2784mts and is part of the Pyrenees Mountain range. This range separates France and Spain.

Onto another old town of Milas where we walked and took photos of a narrow alley and portal of a church which has three bells. It was built in 1275AD. We passed many wine chateaus, fruit trees in bloom and vineyards. Also hundreds of white plastic greenhouses for lettuce and tomatoes. We did not see

any nice green gardens in peoples yards anywhere. Back home at 4.30pm without getting lost. Hurrah!

Marie cooked pork and vegetables for dinner while watching TV news. Yum. The resort had the BBC channel so we could understand it. We both washed our hair and to bed at 9pm.

Tuesday 11th of March

Travelled today ~244km

Up at 7.30am and left at 8.30am to go to the famous walled city at Carcassonne via Narbonne on N9. The outside of Tiffany was not clean when we collected her so I had been looking for a water tap and hose to wash her but this was another different thing that we experienced in most countries. It appears one has to take ones vehicle to a car wash. We did come across a petrol station on the way to Carcassonne that had a water hose. Now Tiffany looked great!

The third grade fourlane highway N113 soon took us there without problems as we arrived at 12 noon. On the way we saw Iris flowers growing wild on the roadside. We passed small towns and vineyards everywhere and the roads/highways are very clean. So far well signposted.

As this was our first visit to a walled city we parked at the foot of the city and walked up. We then saw a carpark so I went back down and brought Tiffany up and parked her there for FF5. We found that Europeans do not signpost carparks, entries etc to tourist attractions very well, if at all.

So far everyone was friendly but most do not speak English. Marie bought a small pottery cactus at the castle for FF35. On the return route on A61 and A1 we travelled on our first bigger highway which is a toll one, from Carcassonne to Perpignan which cost A\$36 for about 50km.

We arrived back in Perpignan and went to a supermarket and among other things bought a large bottle of Sangria which was cheap, we spent a total of FF329.73.

Back at our resort unit Marie cooked a pizza then wrote to John and Maria. Bed at 9.30pm tired but happy.

Wednesday 12th of March

Travelled today ~29km

Up at 7.30am and drove to Perpignan city and parked in a ticket controlled park. This was our first time we did this. We walked to Les Berges, De La Basse and Le Castillet which was our second castle. It is very small, about the size of a house and three or

four floors high. Nevertheless we got a good view of the city. We put in our first roll of 35mm print film from my camera to be developed and printed, quite expensive at A\$25 for 36 prints.

We had lunch in a park then walked to the Palais Des Rois which was built in the 12th and 13th century, entry was FF20. Then to the Royal Palace De Majorque. We arrived back home at 3pm. We spoke English to a young German couple in the next unit and they told us that they had their car broken into at the plage. A small window was broken and the thieves stole some paperwork including credit cards. The people said that they were stupid leaving things visible inside their car.

Tulips and primulas were growing in a park but no private nice gardens anywhere. Everywhere there was doggy poo and cigarette butts.

Our bed pillows were square but soft enough. The temperature was about 20c during the day but the locals were really rugged up. On street parking cost us FF20. We had not seen any trains or police on foot yet.

At the resort, Marie commented that Maria would love the water colour paintings on the inside walls. Bed at 8.45pm very tired and Marie had sore feet.

Thursday 13th of March

Travelled today ~102km

Up at 7am and drove to Tautavel on D661 which has a museum about findings of pre-historic human bodies and other items. The museum has an audio system that is an electronic device about the size of a hotdog. You switch it to one of three or four languages and hold it to your ear. As you move from one display to another a different part of the commentary is transmitted by infra-red ray. Very modern technology. Very well done displays, human like but we are not sure whether the evolution bit is correct.

On our way back home we called into a little Peugeot garage to find out how to release the bonnet so that I could check the motor. He showed me, no problem. Of course it would have been printed in the users manual but it is written in French. Home at 3pm and it was a hot day. The winter clothes we brought were not needed.

Stopped at a cemetery which to us is unusual. Most of the graves are big. They are like a small room, about the size of a toilet. Inside are various ornaments, china and flowers. Very beautiful.

So far we had driven around many roundabouts. Many times there are two lanes into a roundabout but only one lane out. This could be dangerous but most motorists are very slow and careful, not like Australian motorists. Bed at 8pm very tired.

Friday 14th of March

Travelled today ~5km

Up at 7.45am, windy and temperature 14c. We drove to the local beach and bank to get some Spanish pesetas. We cashed FF200 that we had plus DM100 and ended up with Pts7000. Also bought a hard crusty length of bread. All French bread that we saw so far was like that. We collected three seashells for Grace from the beach. Back home for lunch where Marie ironed two of my shirts. Then we arranged our baggage for our journey to Spain. We packed some items under the front seats. Put both our plastic rain pants in the door compartment. Tonight we watched the TV programme called "ER". I found another English speaking TV station which was the BBC station. Its programming is similar to CNN. Marie took note that I was eating bigger meals than I usually do.

Saturday 15th of March

Travelled today ~198km

Up at 7.30am and checked out at 10am. From now on we had to look for accommodation most days. We headed northwest on N116 and came upon a medieval city called Villefranhe De Conflent. Then our roadside lunch at Mount Luis where there is a 17th century fortress. Closeby were ski lodges because it is in the mountains. Then on through our first tunnel, 4.2km in length which cost us FF32. On to Andoora on E9 where by now was "wall to wall" snow and lots of skiers. The lifts and runs (pistes) are only 20mts from the highway. I would have loved to have skied there but I wouldn't take the risk. Family and friends know why I must not ski. The altitude here is 2407mts.

Andoora

A\$1 ~FF4.00 or ~PTS105
 Population ~58,000
 Travelled so far ~760km

People here use both Spanish and French currencies which is interesting.



We were not stopped at the border so kept driving but noticed there were scores of cars going the other way, into France being stopped.

The highway winds down to a valley, with many pretty villages on the way. Soon we were in the capital city of Andoora called Andoora La Vella. It is about the same size as Gympie but with much more traffic. We did not stop as we passed the duty-free shops because we just could not find a place to stop. We drove onto Aixovall Saint Julia De Loria and booked into our first hotel that we had to find from now on in our Journey. I spoke Español to start with but the woman in charge spoke a little English. Cost PTS3500 (A\$35). Tiffany parked offstreet next to the hotel. We walked up the street a bit and was lucky to come across a little tyre and wheel service place. I got two plastic caps that screw onto the tyre air stem because two were missing on Tiffany and I don't like driving a car with them missing. As there were no restaurants closeby, we used our immersion heater to heat up boiled eggs and sausages. We watched a TV talent show in Español then bed at 8.30pm.

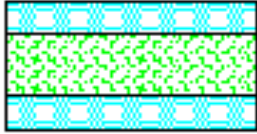
Sunday 16th March

Travelled ~300km

We were both woken at 6am by a loud noise which turned out to be one car smashed into another car. The drivers or passengers, men and women were yelling at each other in Español for about an hour. Our first thoughts were that it was Tiffany in trouble. Up at 8am, temperature was 6c. We departed and drove back up the street a little and bought some postcards. Onto the Spanish border where we were stopped to show our passports at 10.15am. Then I had to get out and open the boot so that the border guard could feel and press our baggage. He asked if we had any alcohol or cigarettes, I said NO.

Spain

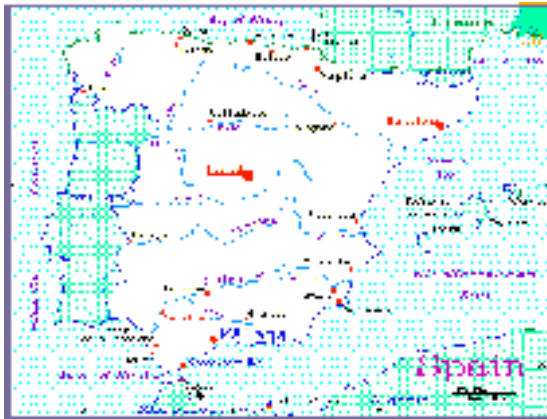
A\$1 ~PTS105
Population ~40,000,000
Petrol price ~ A\$1.5 p/l
Travelled so far ~800km.



Organya.

Sorry Spain flag
wrong colour

All was OK. We headed southwest on N620 and stopped at a flea market in



There were cactus plants for sale with fake flowers pinned onto them. Horrible!

Our roadside lunch at Cubells at 12.30pm then onto Lleida which is a big town about the size of Hobart. We were now seeing a dry country-side.

Onto Fraga on N11 and booked into Hostal Aribau. I spelt that correctly, hostel not hotel nor hostel, with Tiffany parked in the main highway/street in front of the hostel, below our window for PTS4800.

Since arriving in Perpignan (France) we have seen many catkins, wild blackberry bushes, sedum prealtum, agave Americana and aloes. Roads and highways are well signed but have deep ditches on the sides. Toilets not available other than at petrol stations.

We were in our room about three minutes when I decided to put the window blind up to let some light in. We had not seen this type of blind before, which is type is like a roller door. The horizontal slats are about 5cm wide and are joined together. I simply pushed up the bottom row of slats to the push/roll the blind up. It didn't. Some part came unclipped and came back down again. I went down to the bar and told the man and he went up to fix it. He didn't speak

English but we assumed he was a bit annoyed. He went away for a few minutes and brought back a screwdriver, stood on a chair and fixed it. He then showed us that to move the blind up and down, all you do is pull on the 20mm strap that comes out of the wall on the side. Has the reader seen this type of blind in Australia?

Another new thing was the long tubular bed pillows. By dinner time we walked around the streets for a meal but restaurants not open until 8pm so we walked some more then went to a restaurant called Meson Aragones. It is a typical tapas bar where we had braised chicken for PTS1300 (A\$13). Back home at 8.45pm.

There was a constant stream of trucks along the street so it was noisy which was made worse because a set or traffic lights was opposite the hotel.

Monday 17th March

Travelled today ~306km

Up at 7.30am and left at 8.30am. It was going to be a long distance today. Drove through smoky barren plains on N11 with lots of fruit trees all morning. We missed or bypassed Zaragoza then on E90 we arrived at Calatayud at 12 noon. We cashed DM500 to get PTS41,410 and went to a supermacado (supermarket) for food. Stopped at a small village called Santa Maria and of course took a photo. Onto Medinaceli which is another medieval town on top of a hill. We booked into a fonda. A fonda is the cheapest Spanish accommodation that is available except for YHAs. It was run or probably owned by an old woman who could only speak Español. Clean and tidy with the shower and toilet at the end of the hall. On the ground floor is the little bar. PTS2500 for the night which was the cheapest accommodation of our entire Journey There were no other people present while we were there. A very quiet life for her.

Maria noticed Sempervivums in a pot at the front. Then we drove up to the top of the hill to visit the old 16th century town. There were only twenty or so people around. We spoke a short time to a couple from the UK who brought their own right-hand drive old campervan with them. Besides the usual church, plaza mayor (main square) and old buildings there is a Roman Arch built around 5BC. Marie was happy to see many wild Euphorbia plants on the roadside. We bought Tiffany some petrol which was the first in Spain today at about A\$1.9 per litre.

We noticed that motorists, car and truck drivers did not tail-gate. Also “truckies” in particular kept to the speed limit so it was a pleasure driving without another vehicle “breathing down my neck”. There was a restaurant which was packed with truckies so we walked a short distance to a little cafe. We had two chorizos and potato quiche for A\$5. At a tobac (tobacconist) we bought postcards then outside spoke to two policemen, actually they were local district police. In some countries there is a difference. I spoke a little Español but switched to English as he wanted to practice his English. He said that it snows in the town every year.

We looked into a Baptist church in the square then back home at 7.30pm. The church bells rang every 1/4hour. Bed at 8.45pm.

Tuesday 18th March

Travelled today ~298km

Temperature ~0c

We rose at 7am and nice and cold, temperature 0c, yes zero. It was so clear and quiet as the church bells stopped at midnight. We departed at 8.45am. Still travelling on E90 in the wide open dry countryside, which seemed a bit like New South Wales. Petrol stations are usually on both sides of the highway. I point out that these highways have a divider wall or ditch so there is no way to turn back and drive over onto the other side.

We arrived at Guadalajara before noon. As Tiffany had clocked up over 1,500km it was in the Lease Contract that we must have it warranty checked.

We parked near the local police station and I went to the office and spoke Español to a police woman. She was very helpful but couldn't speak any English. She showed me on their wall map where the Peugeot service station was. We only drove a couple of km and found it OK. Hurrah!

They were also very helpful. We sat in the lounge for about an hour and Marie used the office toilet while they let me use the workshop toilet. Onwards to Segovia.

On the approach to Madrid, about 5km away, the E90/N11 highway became bigger, more lanes with more traffic. This was our first taste of what was to come, difficult highway driving. The Spanish signs are no problem but the amount of signs which are bigger than many Australian ones. So I chickened out rather than go into Madrid.

Madrid

I kept driving past the big city on A6/NVI. Then we got lost and asked a man directions which we followed to some extent. We eventually travelled around the Madrid airport and back onto the big E90 highway where we had been 20km before. Still I didn't go into Madrid and so arrived at Segovia at 4pm on N601.

Segovia

What a fantastic city. We drove around for an hour or so and finally booked into the Hotel Acueducto which is a three star three floor hotel and only two hundred metres from the famous Roman Acueducto. Cost A\$96.00. We had to park Tiffany in the cobble-stoned street next to the hotel which we worried about but we really had no choice. Even flash hotels don't usually have carparking. Our room was on the 2nd floor but there was a lift. It was great to be able to see the 2nd century Roman Acueducto from our balcony.

At 5.30pm we walked through it up the hill past masses of tourist shops, restaurants and offices to the Acueducto Cathedral which is being repaired. We ventured into the Plaza Major (main square), what atmosphere. Lots of tourists, mostly young folk, school children on visits and a few beggars. Then onto the Alcazar, which is a castle, but it was closed because it was late in the afternoon.

We found a little restaurant down a side alley and easily selected our meals from the photos of each plate. A\$16.00 for both was OK. I remind the reader that the streets and alleys are all cobble stoned. The big street past our hotel is also cobblestoned, the noise caused by vehicles passing over such is really loud.

Back home, Marie washed her hair and we watched a little TV then bed at 10pm.

Wednesday 19th March

Travelled today ~221km

Temperature ~1c.

Up at 7am and checked out at 8.30am to head southward to Avilla.

Avila

We arrived at Avilla using highway N110 and N501 before lunch time. Avilla is the worlds best preserved medieval city and also the city that is at the highest altitude at 1127mts and 2.5km long. The 12th

to 16th century cathedral is the most ornate that we saw. Please read the booklet in the album, having visited this one we can say we saw the best, perhaps even better than the Vatican's Cistine Church.

The 13th century Palace of the Davila Family ,the 16th century palace of the Amarza Family, the Convent of Santa Terea is are also magnificent.

One photo is of the Polentinos Family mansion which is in the Plaza Major. We took photos of nests belonging to large birds with their babies on top of a building.

We drove onto Elescorial on 505 and closeby to a huge Memorial building with a huge cross overlooking it. The memorial is dedicated to The Fallen Soldiers of the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. The mountain area that it is built into is called De Valle De Los Caidos. A booklet is included in the album. There were public toilets there which we gladly used.

Then on towards Madrid which by now I (we) were happy to bypass as it was approaching peak time traffic which was heavier than we had ever seen in Australia, not even Sydney. We were looking for accommodation and called into a place called, "Los Rozas Can Hotel". What a laugh. The buildings seemed rather small and only a few cars around. The people laughed and explained in Español that "can" is Español for "dog". It was a place for dogs as we would call a "dog kennel". The Español word for dog that I know is "perro" but not "can". I presume "canine" is derived from "can".

We had to continue along the highway towards Madrid and came upon a petrol station and a hotel next to each other. The Hotel Concordy in about 12km north/west of Madrid which cost us A\$96.00. Quite modern but with our room facing west it was very hot, the temperature was probably 30c at least. We could not open the window so I left the room door open for awhile to let a little cooler air in from the corridor. We saw blue and white electric trains and our first red poppies today but no more fruit trees. We watched the TV and it had an English channel. The petrol station sold some groceries so we bought bread, meat and milk to make our dinner in our room at 8.45pm.

Thursday 20th March

Travelled today ~232km.

Temperature ~5c

Up at 7.15am and cooler now thank goodness.

Driving southward on highway N401 we arrived in Toledo which has medieval buildings too. We parked

Tiffany in a carpark and walked around. We cashed DM600 travellers cheques. The cathedral is incredible so bought a booklet. A\$3.75.

Driving further on we stopped beside the highway and had our packed lunch. Yes as usual it was difficult to find a place to stop. We saw herds of sheep all with a shepherd, more fruit trees, vineyards and for the first time, olive groves. We were reminded of when we were in Arizona and Colorado the inland states of the USA by the many jetstreams made by aircraft at high altitude.

Then onto Cuidad Real using N401, which is Español for "King/royal City". We spent A\$20.00 for more petrol for Tiffany. We didn't get lost until we were given directions to a pension. A pension is better accommodation than a Fonda but not as good as a 1 or 2 star hotel. Usually with toilet and bathroom outside the room. We settled for the Hotel Elmolino costing A\$55.00. We drove to the town and walked around until 7pm when the restaurants open for dinner. We chose Pizza, not that there was much choice anyway. Back home at 8.15pm Bed at 9.45pm.

Friday 21st March

Travelled today ~306km

Temperature ` ~10c

Up at 7.00am and departed at 8.30am. Due to hotel being close to a big highway it was noisy. Temperature 10c, a big drop from last night's heat. Still headed southwest on E5 and arrived at Cordoba.

Cordoba

This city was more difficult to find accommodation than we had experienced so far. Little did we know it would be more difficult later on.. We arrived at 1pm and was very hot, temperature 31c as shown on an electronic road sign. When we booked Tiffany months ago, I didn't think we would have required an airconditioned car. That was the hottest time in Tiffany during our Journey. We parked in the street near the Mesquita De Cordoba (Mosque) and found about three hotels and a YHA but again no good carpark.

The Mesquita is very big, about the size of a soccer ground. See the folding card in the album. We drove around for an hour or so and on the outskirts of the city which appeared to be a rich area, I called into a hotel that had a 100mts circular driveway. Marie said "it will be expensive here".

It was. I think about A\$250. for two personas por enoche (persons per night). So we drove back to a caravan park that we passed earlier. It is called Elbrillante Parco. New people had just taken over the place and we put them in a bit of a flap. All they had was a tent. Now do not think that this would have been not good for us. It was great. The tent was brand new, made of thick white plastic with zip up everything, door, windows, clothes cupboard, food cupboard etc. They had not had time to make up the bed nor connect the gas bottle to the stove. They were really friendly and helpful. We waited for awhile to move in and later a chap to connect the gas.

This was not cheap at A\$45 plus a few pesetas for the gas for a total of A\$53.50. Electricity was included though. The park was like our Australian caravan parks, toilet, shower and laundry block on site. There was a sign about drinking water being available at a certain tap but I couldn't find it. I asked one of the Spanish park man and he said in reasonable English that "the water is safe to drink. I have drunk it all my life. Look I'll show you". He drank straight from the tap and didn't keel over in agony so I figured it was OK. We drove back to the city and visited the Alcazar and the Mesquita De Cordoba.

Back home (tent) we cooked dinner while the temperature was 33c.

Tonight we took both our suitcases out of Tiffany to get a change of summer clothes. Marie was by now picking up some more Español and speaking it. Great fun.

Saturday 22nd March

Travelled today ~236km.

Today Christian, our youngest grandson was four years old. Happy Birthday. Up at 7.30am and Marie didn't get much sleep due to the traffic which was mainly motorbikes and the stretcher bed was hard as the ground. We left at 9.30am and drove southwards on E5 and later N331. We found our way quite easily for a change. Now we noticed most old women wore black clothes which is what we expected in Italy. Another place we had difficulty in finding were post offices or equivalent. More petrol for Tiffany of PTS3000 about A\$30.00. Price per litre at about PTS116 or A\$1.15 p/l.

We were getting close to the resort that we had booked in Málaga and the highway traffic was heavy

again. We only made one wrong turn which took us in the opposite direction and to a standstill of traffic. The cause, a street march or demonstration for something. We arrived at the resort called "Club La Costa" at 1.30pm which is only a couple of years old.

Málaga

Unlike the French resort, we were allowed to check in early, unit 619. This resort is huge with about 622 units. It's as big as the Brisbane central. Our unit overlooked the E15 highway where Mar Mediterraneo (Mediterranean Ocean) is only 200mts away to the southeast. The unit was described by Marie as "it's like a mansion". Two bathrooms with baths, one a spa bath, three bedrooms, lounge/dining area, kitchen and balcony. Outside was a small spa type pool only 5mts away. There were lots of tea, coffee sachets and a whole packet of coffee for the percolator. A large cake of soap and tissues, all gratis (free). There is a private safe in the main bedroom but this one has to pay for. All the usual mod cons except, a telephone. We caught the little rubber tyred train over to the little supermacado for more groceries.

We couldn't forget Maria as her name is everywhere, even on a packet of biscuits we bought. Marie cooked dinner and we watched TV. There were a couple of English speaking channels which were good where we watched the movie "The Giant of Thunder Mountain" with John Candy and was funny.

It was good to have some vegetables and home cooking. Vegetables had become scarce in restaurants and shops, and this situation didn't improve for the next month or more. Bed at 9.30pm. During the night there were people talking loudly and shutting doors until after midnight.

Sunday 23rd March

Travelled today ~0km.

Up at 8.30am for breakfast then a knock on the door. It was a man named Jason. He was welcoming us, nice touch. We made a 'phone call from the main office to Maria but the family had gone to Fraser Island for the day. Ray Field answered so we gave him a message. Today was a rest day, no driving.

We rang home again later and the family were home. We spoke to Maria who told us that Grace lost

her first tooth. And we weren't there to see it. Back home to write the usual post cards then we attended a special night which also was for the second anniversary of the resort, up at a restaurant in the resort. We found out that we had been given a "Gold Level Apartment". It wasn't much of a welcome, really a bit of a sell. We were met by another man named "Gonzalos". We had wine and cheese for free then a small show with loud music. Three girls danced some Spanish dances, the compare sang then the girls had changed into brief costumes and danced some Las Vegas type routines. Then up to another restaurant called "El Tajo" where we had chicken with vegetables in hot sauce. Yummy!

Bed at 10pm.

Monday 24th March

Travelled today ~60km

Up at 7.30am then drove down to car wash place about 500mts away and not part of the resort. I had not seen this type of car wash before. Anyway I read the instructions and put Tiffany's antenna down flat against the roof. As the washing proceeded the washer broke the antenna off. Twang it went! We have no record of the wash cost but probably A\$5.00. So this was our second car problem. We would have to get it fixed.

Then on E15 to a place called Mabella. In Español it is pronounced as "marbeya" because two L's say "ya" a bit like "ninJA" in Ninja turtles. I must point out here that this part of Spain called the "Costa Del Sol" means the sun coast and is very upmarket (expensive) because it is popular with UK people. We walked in the old town part which is very touristy and bought gifts for our families. We ate our lunch in the little Plaza Major with orange trees smelling and looking so nice.

I have forgotten to mention before this that the restaurants in squares and streets like this put there tables and chairs out front as is now done in Australia. You can only sit on the chairs if you are a customer of the restaurant and it is strictly adhered to. Men waiters walk around, some with a cloth draped over one arm as we would expect inside a posh restaurant. Now the difference to what we have in Australia is that there is usually no other chairs closeby to sit on if you just want to have a rest.

We went into a very nice old church and as so often the case, there were two men beggars just inside the door. After 15 minutes or so we saw a policeman making them put all the money that they collected and put it into the church donation money box on the

wall then took them outside. We don't know what happened to them. Next to visit a Bonsai Museo (museum). See pictures in the album. Very well done but of course by a Japanese man and is the only one in Spain.

Marie had a new watch band fitted for A\$13.00. Before we drove back to the resort, we stopped at the petrol station that operated the car wash so that I could speak to the manager. He agreed that he would pay the cost to have the antenna fixed, that I should bring him the receipt from where ever it was done. Well now, where could I have it done? It seemed most unlikely that we would find a place. I point out here that we had not seen any telephone directories (books) at any telephones. So looking through a directory was out of the question.

Back home at 4pm for Gonzalos to drive us down to where we saw the dancing. His English was 90% but he spoke to us in Español a little for my benefit. He gave us lots of information, the main piece being the town to stop at on the outskirts of Barcelona. It is a place called Sitges. You will read about that later. We planned to go to Sevilla but he told us that due to the Spanish Santa Semana (Christ week) that there would be no accommodation within 100km of the city. He said he tried for us but to no avail.

Then he commenced the sales pitch. We stopped him after awhile and said we were not interested. He accepted that and was not rude.

This week was the event of the comet but we didn't see it. I did take notice that the moon also was in the southern sky. Back home for a short time then out again to the Welcome Night at another venue on the other side of the resort.

We watched the USA Movie Oscars on TV when the British took out a few awards and so too the Australian movie "Shine".

Tuesday 25th March

Travelled today ~84km

Up at 7.45am for a short trip to an old hillside town called "Ronda". We left at 9.15am and Marie wore a skirt for a change from slacks. We could see from our unit the traffic on the E15 which we had to drive on for about 1km was almost to a standstill. Also a helicopter was flying back and forth. There was a car crash on the highway further south. Two people were killed and another seriously injured at the crash which was about 10km south so we decided to wait for awhile.

We noticed before today that there were no frequent breaks in the concrete centre low wall to

allow diversion of traffic. We went to the little supermacado for more groceries and then decided we would try venturing out. We only had about 1km to go in the crawling traffic southward before we could use the “Cambio De Sentido” (u-turn over the highway) to head northward away from the traffic. It took a half hour or so then we were on our way to Mijas. We arrived in about an hour and walked and walked. We had our sandwiches in the Plaza Major where there was a sign advertising a bull fight next weekend. So heading back home and what should we come upon?

Surprise surprise. A Peugeot sales and service centre. The service parts storeman himself unscrewed the rest of the whip out and screwed a new one in. A ten minute job, cost A\$5.95 very cheap. By the time we neared the resort it was 2.15pm and the traffic was still very slow moving. We went to the petrol/car wash station and the manager was only too happy to reimburse me the money. Muchas gracias. At 2.30pm we had a small rain storm, the first rain on our Journey .

I spoke to a resort security man in Español and he said a traffic holdup like today's happens a few times every year. The big E15 runs all the way down to Gibraltar and there is no other road running parallel for people to use. Bad!

End of Album # one.

Commence album # two

Wednesday 26th March

Travelled today ~298km

Temperature ~18c

We rose at 7.15 and left at 9.00am to visit a little hillside town that a friend, Allan Shurety, suggested we should like. We again drove on E15 southward to a very run down town called "La Línea" which is on the Spanish side of the Spanish/Gibraltar border. It is a very depressing place. The unemployment rate must be very high. Buildings run down and falling to pieces. It was about 11am, we took two photos of "the Rock" which is quite impressive. Also across past Gibraltar is Africa. By the way, Gibraltar is a British colony where motorists have to share the road/runway with aircraft.

We passed through a tunnel. In Spain the driver of vehicles must switch the low beam headlights on before entering and switch them off when leaving. There are very good International signs to remind the driver. Some tunnels are over a kilometre long but wait until you read the Austrian section of Our Journey. We passed scores of unfinished multi-story buildings today. Some were destined to be hotels and resorts. Most have the iron work rusting away which is a very depressing sight. It is the result of the boom and crash years of the 1980s. We saw the same in all the southern European countries.

We stopped and took a photo of a big bird's nest on the top of a high voltage transmission power structure, see it in the album. Now we were travelling in very un-hospitable rugged mountains with lots of land slides near highway 341. We had not seen as many above ground highway structures before. Nothing like these in Australia. Very scary! But the highway surface was excellent as usual.

At Ronda by lunch time, we had an omelette for lunch. Then we visited the famous Bull Ring where the sport is still very popular but we gathered that the Toreadors do not kill the bull. The sport is to the Spanish as Australian football is to Australians. Then we walked over "The New Bridge". The original bridge fell down centuries ago and they built this new one in, wait for it, in 1751 to 1793. We also saw the Maria La Major Church and the Felipe U Arch.

Ronda was a much quieter town than others we had visited so far. Then southwards on another smaller highway to get onto the big E15 again and home at 5.45pm. We saw lots of Opuntia, aloe,

agaves, citrus and fig trees. One garden had Hen and Chicken Echeveria's, geranium, pansies, tulips, pelegonium. These flowers are usually grown in hanging pots or tubs. Still no real gardens.

Marie cooked dinner and on TV we watched more of "Santa Semana". These are the Christian Easter events where about thirty people carry the "float", for want of a better word, on their shoulders very slowly from a place to the local church. Some cities have two per day for the whole week of Easter. A woman sings from a balcony while this is going on. Quite moving.

Home at last and bed at 9.30pm.

Thursday 27th March

Travelled today ~382km

Up at 7.15am to go to Granada and as it is a fair way we left a little early at 8.45am. We travelled on N331 north of Málaga, then northeast on N321 and N342 through rugged hills for a start then open plains again. We arrived about 1.30 am and A\$30.00 petrol for Tiffany courtesy of a electronic talking petrol pump. We wondered why the traffic was not so heavy and the shops and banks were closed. We wanted to visit the famous **Alhambra**.

Granada

We drove on a highway that skirts around Granada up the hill to the Alhambra.

This is where the crowds of people and traffic was. We paid to park and walked down to the entrance only to find out, as hundreds of other people had, that there were no more billets de entrada (entrance tickets) for today. That was a big disappointment as this was one of the most wanted to visit places for Marie. We also found out that today was also a holiday, part of the Easter Santa Semana. We needed more Pesetas (Pts) so had to use an ordinary Cambio Change (money) place. This one didn't even want to see our passport and the exchange rate was not so good but we had no choice.

We walked around the outside of the Alhambra but due to the wall and trees it could not be seen. So we left at about 11am and were surprised that vehicles were still being let into the carpark. On our way down we observed opuntia and agaves probably planted on hillsides to prevent landslides. The mountains of the Sierra Nevada Range still with plenty of snow on them are to the east of Granada and they looked great. The highest in altitude is 3015mts compared to Mt Kosciusko of 2050mts.

There were signs telling motorists that parts of the highway were not good; I can't remember the words in Español but it certainly is a good idea although the bad parts were still better than some of Australia's good roads.

So far some toilets have had a small tin/bin to put used toilet paper into, we understood that Greece would be the same in this respect. So after this disappointment we drove on the same highways back home, arriving late afternoon. I must say here that we had many unplanned places that we visited which negated a few disappointments that did occur. This was due to us driving ourselves. We watched more Santa Semana on TV.

Friday 28th March

Travelled today ~0km

Up at 8am and a little cloudy. I took two photos of the sunrise which you can see in the album. They show just how bad the atmosphere is here. The dark part above the Mar Mediterraneo (ocean) is not cloud but smog. It was not until the sun was about ten minutes above the horizon that it was too bright to look at. Of course still not as bright as in Australia. Marie did some washing and we sorted out the cards, brochures etc ready for the next travel.

At 6.15pm we called a taxi which took us to the next town, Fuengirola about 3km away. What a friendly, casual and pleasant drive, in a taxi. We did this so that we could be present at the towns Santa Semana. When he let us off, I asked him if there would be taxis at the same place to take us home. He said "Si, aqui, no problema". (Yes here). Fuengirola has a Plaza Major and this is where the action would be. For dinner while we waited we had a pizza, what else is new. The "floats" came out of the church very slowly being carried by about thirty young people. One "float" had a model of Jesus while the other of Mary crying and both with lots of burning candles and very ornate trappings. After awhile a woman sang in soprano style from a balcony. It lasted about two hours then both "floats" moved down a main street.

So to return home. We waited and waited for a taxi to no avail. We walked the 3km or so distance back along the big E15 to home late, very tired so bed at 11.45pm.

Saturday 29th March

Travelled today ~291km

We rose at 7.15am, packed food box and departed at 9.15pm to commence our journey up the east

coast. As we were driving on the E15 bypassing Málaga we couldn't see the horizon where the ocean met the sky, it was like a foggy blur. That's how bad the smog was.

We drove through several tunnels, one was 768mts long. The E15 is very close to the ocean for the next 100km, some points within 20mts away. I walked down to the ocean at one point. Still no surf whatsoever but fairly light coloured sand. Saw lots more poppies, lampranthus and carbobrotus growing wild. Also farms of avocado and custard apple trees. We stopped at a roadside market in a town called Mesquitilla, well it **was** the E15 but that doesn't stop the Spanish folk from holding up the highway traffic for such a market. We bought a Flamenco music sound tape, two hand fans and some pears. Also some food for Tiffany costing A\$30.00 at Pts117p/l. She was worth it.

For about a distance of 100km this morning we saw thousands of clear and opaque flexible plastic sheeting plant houses. They are the usual half rounded type. Most about 2mts high by 10mts wide and up to 100mts long. There were so many at times it looked like the ocean. Most were growing tomatoes, cucumbers and beans. There were probably some other vegetables that we didn't recognise. So now we understood why we had not been able to buy some vegetables because they are sold to northern Europe. We also passed a couple of heaps of cucumbers that looked OK but had been dumped by the truck load. Why?

We were now seeing many Crux de Roja (Red Cross) buildings. Some small as a hut, we assume that they take the place of doctors or at least carry out primary care. We saw two oxen pulling a cart in a field which reminded us of Malaysia. Primitive!

We arrived at Almería which is a fishing town with its own Alcazaba in the old town at 3pm. We had no problem finding accommodation as we drove past the Hotel Solymay. We drove a bit further but found none other so returned to it. At first the man quoted A\$90.00 but as I said it was muy caro (very expensive) he dropped it to A\$60.00. So we accepted. We drove up to the old town and finally parked Tiffany. We started to walk around the back of the Alcazaba by mistake and were told in Español and hand movements by some women that we should be careful of the young men who could rob us. So we walked the correct way to the entrada.

The Alcazaba entrada cost A\$2.50 each, cheap. The 11th and 13th century ruins are not much but are being restored. See brochure and photos of it which

was once a walled town. We had trouble getting out of the place in Tiffany which is wider than most cars in southern Europe. Back home at 6.30pm and had to wait until 8pm before we could have dinner in their restaurant, we being the only patrons.

The meal was nice, chicken, chips in a wine sauce. From our room balcony we could see the Alcazaba lit up at night which looked good. It was only recently opened in 1989 to tourists. As usual it was noisy during the night as our room overlooked the E15.

Sunday 30th March

Travelled today ~391km

A big day. Up at 7am and checked out at 8.20am Tiffany being parked at the front of the hotel but back away from the highway. We drove past a 1km stretch of agaves growing wild. I point out that we did not see flower gardens in peoples front yards, they are probably too poor for such luxuries. We stopped in a village called **Vera**. We did this for our friend Vera. There is a big statue of Jesus on a nearby hillside. Tiffany had to wait for another place for more petrol as the town's petrol station could not sell us any due to a malfunctioning pump. We passed more fruit, citrus trees and olive groves. We thought that we would see more olive groves than this in Greece, but we didn't. Spain is a big country with masses of olive trees. We saw some gum trees in parks and beside the roads. Australia!

At Almedricos we saw artichokes growing. We also noticed in Spain so far no rubber strips or pieces of tyres lying beside highways as in Australia. No roadside billboards until Alicante which is close to where we continued onto the bigger A7 highway but also still also called E15. I should mention that this is a bit confusing too. The capital "E" means an EEC grade highway. The capital "A" or "N" means a national highway. In this case the A7 is also E15. The two have different coloured lettering and signage. Sometimes the numbers/letters are not the same as in our new 1997 atlas, another reason why it is very difficult driving in Europe. Tiffany got her food worth A\$25.00.

We stopped at a picnic place beside the E15 where there were toilets (hurrah) and a fast food caravan, (another hurrah). Our elation was short lived in the weeks ahead though. For lunch we had hot bacon rolls for A\$4.00 each. I spoke to a couple from England who bring their own right-hand drive car over most years. He said that the seat where the front passenger sits is called "the suicide seat"

because it is closer to the traffic going in the other direction. We had seen in the last week many right-drive cars and campervans that were probably from the UK.

At Alcante we changed highways because the E15 had a toll from here northwards so we drove onto the smaller but excellent N332.

Onto a town called Villajoyosa and waited for an hour outside a pension to book in but no one around so retraced our steps about 10km and booked into a hostel at A\$40.00 cheap. Downstairs in the bar we had scotch & lemon, a potato tapas with pan (bread) and chilli salsa (sauce). The lemon was in place of gingerale which we had not seen for sale so far. We watched a Spanish programme on the bar TV and guess what. It was of the 1997 European Ballroom Championships in France. It made us a little homesick I must say.

Up in our room while we were heating our dinner the power went off so I checked with the owner and he was very sorry and switched the fuse back into place. The hostel was very basic but was the first in Spain with a doble cama (double bed).

Today daylight saving commenced in Europe so we put our watches on one hour. We have still been seeing scores of old ruins of houses built of mud and stones, perhaps a century or two old. We thought of the families that lived and grew up in them. Babies probably born in them too. Very depressing. No electricity or running water either.

Bed at 9.30pm.

Monday 31st March

Travelled today ~291km

Temperature ~12c

Up at 7am to leave at 8.10am still on N332 with mostly citrus trees because we were approaching València. We bought a bag of oranges from a roadside stall, very cheap at A\$5.00 and they tasted great.

València

We arrived here at 11.15am and parked Tiffany in a street without problems because it was a holiday for something or other. We walked over an old bridge (what's new?) then back to Tiffany and drove through another old gateway named Tower of Serrannos to be closer to the old town. We walked to Plaza De La Virgen. The "La" means that the object is female, Virgen. There were lots of beggars, a very old woman in black among them. We had lunch in the

City Hall Plaza amongst a group of school students. The first group so far on our Journey. Then Tiffany took us through another old gateway called Cuarte.

Very cloudy and hazy this afternoon. Today was the first time we came across yellow/amber traffic lights that are about 30mts before traffic lights at an intersection. We do have these in Australia but we weren't prepared for them. They just warn the motorist that traffic lights are ahead. I stopped at some of these and after a few seconds was politely tooted by the motorist behind.

We also noticed lots of little groups of men in towns smoking and talking. We arrived in Benicasim at 2.30pm and booked into the Hotel Tramontana for A\$50.00. Naturally this was after much searching, we even tried at a caravan/camping park. This area is an upmarket seaside part of Spain. One resort I tried was for tennis people at over A\$200.00 a night. We walked down to the beach a bit like the Gold Coast and bought some gifts, a leather wallet for John. There were many very black men and women with stalls on the beach. We had dinner at a restaurant but didn't have to wait for night time, it was 5.45pm. Guess what we had? Pizza.

Back home at 6.30pm. Today was the first day for a week that we didn't see wild daisies by the roadside but still a few red poppies. We think of Grace when we see the wild roadside flowers, yellow bushes and shrubs, oxalis with their large yellow flowers.

We saw several walled towns on hillsides plus many castle ruins today. Castles and castles.

Tuesday 1st April

Travelled today ~262km

Temperature ~12c

Up at 7am and had the hotel's breakfast at 8.30am which was toast, croissants and hot drinks. The hotel people were extra friendly and wanted to know things about Australia. Their English was quite good. We left at 9.30am still driving on the N340 and passed more olive groves, peach trees and artichokes again until lunch time. A\$20.00 of petrol for Tiffany at Pts116 p/l. About 40km south of Tarragona we think we passed a nuclear power station. Again we saw several castles and medieval city ruins. We left the N340 at L'Arboc to drive around a winding mountain road, taking a photo of another castillette on mountainside.

We started to see road signs printed in both Español and Cataluña. Barcelona is spelt "Badalona" in Catalanian.

We arrived at the town that Gonzalos, the man at the Málaga resort told us about, called Sitges at 2.45pm. This was to be our base to visit Barcelona from. We found a hostel which had a sign on the door telling people to go up the street to a restaurant to pay and get a key. I did this and booked in for two nights at A\$45.00 per night but would have to park Tiffany in the public parking station. The front door was operated by an electronic code which had to be entered to gain access. A good security.

We walked to the tren (railway) estacion and supermacado which were only 200mts away. Out of our window we saw and heard poor sub-normal children in a church yard being looked after by people in uniforms. It was noisy here during the night even though it's not the main highway. We heated our dinner, boiled eggs, a tin of chicken and a tin of vegetables. The immersion heater worked fine as long as there was enough water in the food.

Temperature at 10pm was 12c. I was looking forward to two days of no driving. We knew that Tiffany wouldn't mind. We could see trains from our room. Bed at 10.15pm.

Barcelona

Wednesday 2nd April

Travelled today ~ 0km

Population ~ 1,670,000

Up at 7am. I must explain now that although I haven't mentioned it before but when we have our own breakfast in our room, I don't write about it. We usually made a cup of hot coffee, milo or milk. Marie had muesli when we could buy it and I had cornflakes or weetbix or the equivalents. Most days we bought UHT milk, in fact fresh milk was not available in Spain where we tried.

Today Barcelona. Firstly to a banco for more Pesetas then parked Tiffany in the special town carpark. It was going to cost A\$30.00 for the two days and one night while we went to Barcelona.

We caught a very modern electric train which ran every 30 minutes or so costing A\$6.50 each return. The journey took 25 minutes. At both ends of the double decker train is an electronic moving sign stating what the next estacion (station) is, time, date and temperature. There was also nice semi-classical music played with voice announcements where needed. Very modern.

The Barcelona estacion is quite big with many and varied bancos, shops and information points. We decided to take a city sights tour bus like most cities have. We caught it at the front of the estacion. We saw the old and new Santa Maria Del Mar church, Columbus Column, some houses built by Gaudi and the famous unfinished cathedral Sagrada Familia. There are photos in the album of this very unusual building. We did not realise that it has no roof and the inside is a long way from being finished. Maybe it will never be completed. At least the toilets were in working order. When we finished our bus tour we walked along the well known Las Ramblas which is like a big mall with no motorised traffic. Many little covered stalls, artist painters at work and so on.

Nearing the end there were rows of about two hundred chairs so I decided to sit and change my socks. Within a couple of minutes a man came along to sell me two tickets to sit. The seats cost us A\$0.50, what a surprise. It was worth it. See what I mean? Europe is different. Back to the estacion where we had dinner of fish & chips and a salad of only tomato and lettuce. No other vegetables.

Back home and we wrote more cards then bed at 10pm and temperature 12c.

Thursday 3rd April

Travelled today ~0km
Temperature ~10c

Up at 7am then checked Tiffany, she was OK. By train again to Barcelona and I add that there was no graffiti on the trains, inside or outside. In fact very little in Spain at all. Definitely **no smoking** in the trains and people obey but outside and inside places they sure make up for it. We caught the same city sights bus outside the estacion at 10.15am and this time it was crowded, full. We debussed at the 2nd or 3rd stop and walked up a hill along little streets for pedestrians only to the Poble Español (Spanish town). It's actually a construction of a town/village using different materials, different styles that shows the Spanish culture over the centuries. Very well done. We had our lunch there and managed to find the toilets also, Wow!

In Las Ramblas today were many artists and places selling small birds. Most were canaries and budgerigars. Some of the stalls were not open and so they had the sides closed up. We could hear the birds chirping inside, it seemed so cruel.

We caught the bus again and got off at the post office to post cards then telephone John from a street 'phone box. It was so clear, just as if John was in

Barcelona. Great for us both to talk to him. We caught the bus again then got off and walked up another hill to Park Guell. This is a Gaudi parco. We saw two handbags lying in the gutter which could have been the ones that were stolen the day before from two women tourists. The bus tour guide warned us this morning to be careful as this had happened to two women yesterday.

Back at the Barcelona estacion we had dinner in the same restaurant, a nice meal costing A\$8.50 each. Back home at 7.10pm and wrote on the back of the packets of photos that we had developed and printed at a place in the Barcelona estacion. We always put them in sequence and wrote on prints before we would forget where they were "shot".

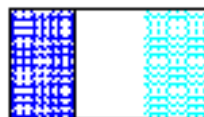
When I was making two hot drinks we were busy with the photos, when we suddenly heard a crackling sound. I jumped up to find the immersion and the container of water on fire! I had it on the enamelled bathroom wash basin so there was no real problem. I soon cleaned it all up. So now we had to buy a new heater. This was going to be a hard task I thought and it was.

Bed at 10.30pm.

Friday 4th April

Travelled today ~330km
Temperature ~14c

Up at usual time to leave Spain. We managed to get onto a bigger highway A16 into Barcelona. It was easy driving right through the city which I must mention is about the size of Sydney but with ten times more traffic. There



is no central shopping centre as in Australian cities so we assume many people don't ever get to go to the other side of Barcelona from where they live.

Now onto A19 with a change of scenery. The last Español petrol for Tiffany at A\$50. There are more, bigger and taller trees to see. Almost no motos (motor scooters) or bikes.

Notes for Spain

A poor, dry, big country. A little like NSW.

Very little green grass and no green lawns for picnic places.

Cheap wines.

Truckies do not tailgate.

The “Cambio de Sentido” is to make a U-turn over a highway, if you miss a turn and need to go back in the direction that you just came from.

Street intersection traffic lights have an amber or red flashing light about 40mts before to warn the motorist that there is a traffic light ahead.

Some highways do not have flyover exits and entries so the other road crosses it as a normal road does. In this case if you wish to drive onto the other road that is crossing the highway you turn to the right to exit then turn in an anti-clockwise direction so that you are stopped and at 90degrees to the highway. You then cross when safe to do so. This keeps turning traffic off the highway and motorists waiting to cross with better vision of the highway.

Two grades of Sin Plomo (unleaded) petrol is available, 95 the cheapest from green hoses, and 98 premium from blue hoses.

Diesel is available perhaps everywhere which is about 25% cheaper.

Not much music on radio stations, just a lot of talk. Not very interesting TV programmes.

Shops don't have awnings over the footpath. Old women mop the footpath.

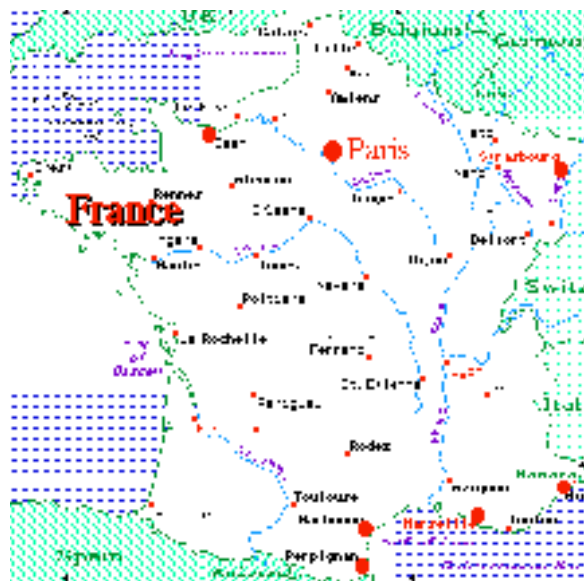
France

A\$1	~FF4.00
Population	~58,870,000
Petrol price	~ A\$2 p/l
Travelled today	~330km
Travelled so far	~5005km

We crossed back into France with no search or stopping at the border at 2pm. There were highway billboards again unlike in Spain. We were on N9 through Perpignan and it was like a home coming.

We still had to buy a new immersion heater somewhere so kept looking for likely shops

We were again in vineyard areas with some signs about “muscat tasting” in French of course. We did not visit any though as it was too risky driving and I was tired enough anyway. Also saw some beautiful flamingos in a swamp.



This time we stayed at a Formula One (F1) motel in Narbonne for A\$35.00. We had heard about the F1 motels but not the slightly more expensive ones such as Balladins, Fast Hotel and Villages Motels. There are about five different ones in an area of about 300square mts and within 1km of the town centre. F1 motels are cheap and very hi-tech but are closed from about 10am to 5pm so you have to wait until then unless you have a special card. When you book in after 5pm you pay and the computer generated receipt shows your entry code number so you can enter your room. This also applies if you are outside the building, you press the buttons coinciding with the code number on the front door and your room.

The rooms are very basic, CTV, aircon, a double bed, a single bed above the double bed and a 220volt power socket. The toilets and shower are in separate boxes in the hallway. When you finish in the shower and shut the door, it is automatically spray washed and disinfected. The price is always for three people whether there is one, two or three. Near the office is a small breakfast area for extra Francs but we had our own.

The more expensive motels but still cheap have ensuite units and are bigger.

In the hallway we spoke to two Australians for half an hour. They told us they found it difficult to find accommodation in France and some other northern European countries and that they were going south into Spain. What was it like there? We told them in strong terms that they would have more difficulty times ahead.

Close to the F1 was a MacDonalds so that's where we had dinner. There was a great choice of salads and five dressings to pick from. I had a Chef fish burger and Marie had a salad. Fancy having a choice of salads, unlike poor Spain. France has lots of roundabouts and there were many police at a couple near our F1 stopping some cars and possibly just checking that people drive through them correctly. We found that French motorists are most careful on them.

Back home where Marie sewed some buttons on one of my shirts. Bed at 10pm.

Saturday 5th April

Travelled today ~ 221km

Up at 7am to depart at 8.30am driving on the smaller highway N9 with most of the smog gone although still the usual haze, it was a little windy. Onto Beziers where we came upon a Mammoth supermarche (market) which is a big French chain of supermarkets. Their sign is of an elephant and the few we went into are bigger than K-Marts. Anyway we bought a new heater, changed the rest of our PTS into Ffs and cashed DM400 travellers cheques. The bank just doesn't look like a bank as the word "bank or banco" or any word referring to money is not displayed at the front.

France was one of the countries where we experienced this. Inside it looks like an ordinary business office, no stand up height teller desks and no grilles. We didn't know for certain even when we waited in a small que if it was a bank, strange. The women sit behind an ordinary low desk and take the money out of a small box. That's it, easy.

It cost FF2 (A\$0.50) each to use the toilets in the centre. We suspected that from here on today was going to really test my navigator because this part of France is low lying with many creeks and we decided not to travel on the big A9 and E15 but on smaller roads. Near Sète we saw more flamingoes. Onwards through Montpellier where we had lunch of a breadstick with cheese and meat. This was our usual lunch if we had it beside a roadway. We arrived at Nîmes at 2.15pm and visited the Roman Arena and a statue of Diana in La Fontaine Park. We saw two other Peugeot Leased 406 cars parked near the Roman Arena.

Onwards past many more vineyards and occasionally red poppies. There were perhaps twenty roundabouts which were filled with flowers, mostly pansies, beautiful, that we negotiated which were very well signed so we didn't get lost after all.

We saw two large black signs of smaller cows/bulls that have big horns so it is also a dairy district.

As we were travelling close to the ocean today it was strange that we didn't smell the usual salty smell, this applied also to Spain.

We drove behind a small truck that had a sign on the back, the whole of the back. So what you may say. Well the sign was a moving one. It rolled up like a roller door where that message or advertisement was displayed for about twenty seconds then the unit rolled down to display the other message for the same length of time. Then it was repeated on and on.

At 4pm we arrived at Rochefort Sur-Gard which is 6km west of Avignon and booked into the Motel La Begude for A\$50.00. We were the only customers all night.

It was becoming cold but we have no record of what the temperature was. I need to repeat that due to the good road signage, Marie had no trouble navigating today. I also noticed how good the drivers were by obeying the speed limits. In cities and towns it's usually 50km/h; on small roads and highways 70km/h and on the big highway 90km/h or higher. We were on the smaller roads where the motorists did keep to the 70km/h limit.

A few times I sped up a little to our Australian 80km/h limit only to notice that vehicles behind us were actually leaving more space between them and us. To put it simply, because we were travelling at 80km/h we were moving further ahead of the vehicle behind. Then I knew that we were travelling too fast. I have almost never experienced that in Australia.

There were many caravan and camping parks on the way that didn't look much different than our Australian ones do.

We watched TV and an episode of "ER" that was dubbed into French and was called "Ergencie". Bed at 9pm.

Sunday 6th April

Travelled today ~280km

Out of bed at 7.00am to drive the short distance to Avignon, another medieval city. We arrived at 8.45am so there wasn't much activity there. We parked Tiffany just outside the wall and walked in to see the Papal Palace and a church where there was a service in progress. An old woman who was just inside the door shook our hands, we said we were Australians. There was a small flea market in the little square, it reminded us of the Brisbane Markets one in that there was a lot of old and used junk on

sale. Outside the wall we took a photo of the Pont St Benezet (bridge) which was the first bridge to be commenced to be built on the river Rhone in the 12th century. It was commenced to be built then but was never finished, it does look funny, a bridge spanning half way across a river. See the photo in the album.

Then onto Arles, another medieval city so we walked to a 2nd century Roman Arena, the church Saint Trophime and a 1st century open air theatre where they still hold plays. There were about thirty school students drawing and painting the very interesting area. Petrol for Tiffany Ffs200 at about Ffs6.4p/l (A\$1.60) expensive! Also I washed Tiffany at a Blue Elephant car wash. This type is where one can use a high powered pressure long tube/wand that's a bit like a house washer. You put the money into the machine and it sprays for about five minutes. This one cost FFs10.

Onto Aix-En-Provence which is about 30km north of the well known city, Marseille. Then to Frejus on N7, avoiding the A8 where we booked into the Les 3 Chenes Hotel for A\$50.00.

It is a homely friendly hotel, the owners were looking after their grandchildren. There were hundreds of money notes of countries stuck on the walls from all over the world, including Australia. Tiffany was parked safely at the rear of the hotel. We had dinner in their restaurant for A\$A\$15.00 each, soup, salad, Marie duck and I steak. Then both of us finished with ice-cream. We were missing our families. Tired and bed at 9.30pm.

Monday 7th April

Travelled today ~102km

Temperature ~7c

Up at 7am and departed at 8.30am, our task today is to stop in Menton.

Still on N7 and a very affluent part in this part of France as we approach Monaco. Very hilly and pretty. We drove through Cannes but did have our picnic lunch there. The drive along the harbour was beautiful with big trees, nice gardens with the usual pansies, petunias and baby zinnias. onward to the famous film festival city, Nice and Monaco. Now the traffic was very congested again in this highly populated and touristy area called the Côte D' Azur (blue coast).

Monaco

In Monaco there were big tubs along the footpath with white cyclamens. People park their cars

anywhere on footpaths, on corners, the wrong way around with some hazard blinkers on. Very confusing!

Many people with dogs but all on retractable leashes.

Onto Menton at 1pm and the first hotel was too busy with lunch to check us in so tried another one on the next street called Hotel Claridges which is only 100mts from the gare (railway station), just what we needed. The man's name is Claude and he has a throat problem and he was **very** helpful and friendly. We paid for two nights at A\$141.00 which included a sleeping area for Tiffany. Because there was no street parking available, we should have paid to park her a couple of streets away. This seemed a hassle so he kindly let us park Tiffany in his car parking place just across the street. He gave me his key to the covered carpark for the two days, fantastic.

We walked around the beach town which would be very touristy in summer, put some film in to be processed then dinner in the hotels restaurant where Marie chose fish and salad; me steak A\$80.00 expensive. Oh yes, on the beach there were women topless sunbaking. We wrote the usual cards and bed at 9.30pm.

Tuesday 8th April

Travelled today ~0km

Temperature at 8am ~7c

Up at 7am and caught a train at 9am to Monaco so that we could do what we planned years ago. The journey was a short twelve minutes one, then we caught a taxi to the Jardin Exotique which is one of the worlds best succulent and cactus gardens. It is sixtyfour years old and situated on the northern side of a hill or mountain overlooking Monaco. It was very cloudy and windy so we were cold but this did not dampen our enthusiasm. I had put a roll of 35mm slide negative in my Pentax camera so I was ready to take plenty of photos. I had a second roll to do the gardens justice, some very nice closeups with the 70mm lens. The view from here was outstanding, overlooking the city and Prince Rainiers Palace. We could understand how Princess Grace had the car crash. We had lunch in the jardin, bought some slides, salt and pepper shakers and a set of cactus postage stamps. We left the jardin and walked down to the city then up another hill on which is situated Prince Rainier's Palace. It is like a medieval city but has no wall. We walked in the little streets where there are the usual tourist restaurants, shops and a

church. We caught a train at 4.50pm to take us back home.

Posted some postcards and collected a packet of processed film, very good with a white border around them. Claude at the hotel suggested we have dinner at a restaurant across the street which we did. The owners said that we were their first Australian customers ever. They spoke quite good English and were so friendly so Marie gave the woman a kangaroo stickpin. She told us a French custom where the giver of such a gift has to prick the receivers finger or hand to give the receiver good luck. So Marie did just that. The man then took us down to the restaurants below ground room which was decorated very nicely. On one wall he has many "stromphs" which is the French pronunciation of "smurfs".

Back home and bed at 9.15pm. We watched a little French TV and CNN news while another channel took its news from the Internet which was different. It was called "Net Info".

Wednesday 9th April

Travelled today ~176km
Temperature ~9c

Onto Italy today so we departed at 9.30am first visiting a bank for some Lira. I took a wrong turn and so we were heading north instead of eastward. We turned back after about 5km and crossed into Italy at 10.15am.

Italy

A\$1 ~Lire1230
Population ~59,000,000
Petrol price ~ A\$2p/l
Travelled so far ~ 5784km.

We were not stopped at the border. Within minutes we knew we were in another country as there were wall to wall motos (motor bikes). Within a half an hour or so in Ventimiglia we managed to park Tiffany for us to go to the toilets then myself to a bank and a post office postage stamps. The post office woman stuck the stamps onto our postcards by using a brush and brushing glue on from a bottle. Primitive!

We chose to travel on the ss1 highway not the bigger A10. This part is very highly populated with



more or less continuous housing, shops and businesses with the appropriate traffic. Motos coming from the other direction drove onto our side of the highway when their lane/s were full of cars and trucks. They treated our lane as theirs, very dangerous but I must admit, never did we see any "close shaves". Remember what I said in the Overview part that because the traffic is so dense, the motorists have to drive better.

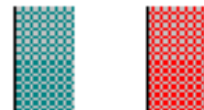
Most of the time we saw the ocean so the scenery was pretty. We had lunch at Imperia. At DM800 worth of Lire, about L984.000 which looks a lot doesn't it?

The bank security in the bank was similar in the rest of Italy, tight!

You approach the door, it opens, you step in, the door closes, beeps and tells you in Italian what the problem is. This means you have a metal object/s on you (a bomb or rifle etc) and you cannot enter the bank. If you pass the test OK the inside door opens to let you in.

The haze was rather thick from about Ventimiglia on. A trolley bus line operates from there to at least

Imperia which is about 40km. Like Spain we passed many plastic glass houses. About 25km southwest of Génova (Genoa) we



found a hotel in Arenzano called Eden Hotel, a two star place for A\$66.00 (L80.000) at 6pm. There is no dinner served in the hotel so we cooked our own three minute noodles. It has an unusual ensuite toilet

which was a little cubicle where the wash basin flipped up so that one can have a shower. The shower water washes over the toilet seat and everything else but dries within a few hours. Again, the hotel man was really great. He only spoke Italian so I tried Español but it was very hard getting my message across to him. Later a woman helped because she also spoke some Deutch (German) plus her English was fair. Great fun. During the day we saw many more medieval cities and walled towns.

Bed at 10pm.

Thursday 10th April

Travelled today ~195km

Temperature ~15c

We were woken by a garbage truck at 6am so we rose at 7am to have a small breakfast in their dining room. We had croissants, two slices of toast, Marie coffee and I hot milk. The toast is very small, about 80mm square and we suspect packaged in a factory so it's not fresh as we Australians like it. That's travel!

We drove off at 8.45am still on nn1 to Génova which has a wall 13km long and is supposed to be the longest outside China but due to the usual traffic density and problems we did not stop to visit it. We did see parts of it and a special painted wall. There were many aircraft jet streams in the sky probable going to Roma, Paris, Athens or wherever. We managed to stop and park Tiffany on the highway next to a railway line and had lunch in a children's play park.

An ambulance passed us with a different siren that what we are used to, a beep beep barp sound. L3000 worth of Italian petrol for Tiffany to keep her happy. Mostly slow mountainous driving at a maximum of 40km p/h so at Laspezia we got onto the E80. It is a toll highway with the 80km distance we travelled on it costing us A\$6.90. We saw some red poppies again and olive groves even on mountain slopes.

Where there is a likelihood of rocks and landslides occurring onto the highway there are big pieces of wire netting to stop the rocks falling onto the highway.

We left it where the country was a bit flatter at Viaréggio arriving there at 4pm. This town is a tourist beach town with a long promenade and lots of restaurants and shops. There is plenty of accommodation to choose from, we finally settling on a Pension. It was run or owned by an old arty woman who spoke some English. We had to park Tiffany

around in the next side street which seemed safe enough. Our room for A\$50.00 (L60000) was upstairs, what's new, wide old fashioned stairs, old fashioned room furniture and so on. The place must have been a grand old lady of the 19th century. Our room was at the back so it was very quiet. We walked and walked along the promenade and at 6pm finally had dinner at a restaurant. Yes, they served dinner at a reasonable hour. I had an omelette and vegetables, Marie salad and chips for A\$29.00 which included the service charge.

Today was one of the most stressful for us, the mountains, the roads not as good as we have been on and the great mass of traffic. The small motor bikes that have peddles that are used to start moving or when going up a hill are a real nuisance. They are slow and do not move over so that one can overtake them. Then there are the horse and carts, three wheeled took looks like in Thailand, all slowing traffic down. Boy what a headache.

Petrol stations usually close between 1pm and 3pm but if you have the special coupons you can use the auto selfserve pumps. We were lucky and found stations that were aperto (open) and also used their toilets.

Friday 11th April

Travelled today ~230km

Up at 7am and left at 8.15am driving on E80 arriving at Pisa about 9am. I was driving in a bus lane and was soon tooted by a taxi driver to tell me to move over to another lane. Another thing that makes it difficult driving in southern Europe is many of the white road markings and arrows are almost or completely worn away. We miraculously found the Pisa Touristica Officina and was directed to the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Naturally we missed a turn but finally arrived there twenty minutes later. This is a very touristy place of course but not overcrowded as it was only April. We took photos of us holding back the Tower, went to the toilets, checked out the stalls which charge high prices for souvenirs and morning tea at a restaurant.

We moved on at 10.30am on a smaller highway over pretty hills and valleys on a good road to arrive in Firenze (Florence) at 2.15pm.

Firenze

It is a big city so we became lost. I checked a couple of hotels but they were expensive and so kept

driving and ended up driving up the hill which overlooks the city. It was cold, windy and a little drizzle persisted. See photos in the Album that we managed to take. We used the toilets on our way walking a couple of hundred metres to a church. We decided to move on stopping for petrol L20000 at about A\$2.p/l. We arrived at Siena which is another medieval city and is where you may have seen on TV that they have a yearly event of men riding horses, bareback around the city's piazza (square).

Again much difficulty to find a bed, we drove around and around for an hour or so. We settled on a three star Hotel Moderno just below and outside the wall for A\$101.00 (L125000). During the day we saw large groups of petrol pumps with many cars lined up, the tail enders sometimes stationary in the road or street. This is another reason for traffic hold ups. Also the red traffic light is bigger than the amber and green lights. We left the rain behind as it was nice and sunny in Siena.

We knew that the hotel restaurant prices were high because soup was A\$8.00 each so we cooked our own dinner, soup.

Saturday 12th April

Travelled today ~311km

Temperature ~7c

Up at 7.00am to depart at 8.30pm and drove southwards on E78/ss323 to Grosseto which is in a low lying area. The highway is constructed above ground for a few kms. We took a wrong turn and did a full circle of the town to be on the same part of the highway as earlier. My navigator suggested I do a U-turn and illegally made a turn on the highway. We saw 3mt tall snow markers beside the highway so it obviously snows here.

The highway changed to ss1 until about 60km north of Roma (Rome) where we left it to get onto a smaller road.

We saw a three star pension called Hotel Miramare at Saint Marinella which is about 50km north of Roma but it was closed until 3pm so we kept driving where I checked out two more places but they were not close to a railway station. A storm came on and it was the heaviest rain we had so far so we turned back and as it was then 3.30pm we went back to the pension.

We booked into the three star pension called Hotel Miramare for A\$64.00 per night. Because it was only 50 mts from the railway station on a line to Roma we paid for three nights, L240000 wow! Tiffany was

happy because she was parked under cover at the back.

The woman who runs the pension with her husband, is an American from Florida who came to Italy forty years ago. She was very friendly and talkative, we assumed that she didn't have many English speaking people stay at their pension so was enjoying speaking English. She told us about the special train ticket to go to Roma and which of the four city stations we should get out at.

We walked around the town which is a tourist beach place. The beaches we saw have no sand just pebbles and stones. We bought our tickets for A\$10.50 each per day at the station ready for tomorrow.

I took a pair of my trousers to a cleaners so that I would collect them tomorrow. For dinner we had a pizza at a restaurant at the corner of the street at 7pm.

The carabinieri (police) from who we have asked directions have all been very pleasant and helpful. They all wear ornate black uniforms, some with gloves and some with a sash. Today we both had sore throats and hoped would not get worse.

Sunday 13th April

Travelled today ~0km

Up earlier today, 6am to catch an 8am train to Roma.

Roma

Population ~2,900,000

This mornings TV news, Israel's Netanyahu is also in Roma and the Pope is going to Sarejavo. While we waited for a train, the pension woman came over to the station and talked from the other platform to see if we were OK. Yes we were. That was a very friendly touch wasn't it?

The train carriages were not as clean and modern as the Spanish ones, the journey took 45mins. We departed at the Ostiense stazinóe (railway station) but because we didn't have a map of Roma we caught a taxi to the Spanish Steps. At an outside newstand type stall I purchased a map of the city for A\$15. As I was doing that a young Chinese woman asked Marie if she could join us as her tour was full or some reason. We were aware that you have to be careful if approached in this manner but we thought she was genuine so we said yes.

I now was our tour guide. We saw so many ruins and places. The Pantheon, Chisea Gesü

(Church), the Colosseum which was open and Saint Maria Maggoria chiesa to name just a few. It was rather eerie inside when we thought of the terrible things that happened in this place.

Outside I shook hands with a "Romano soldier" for A\$5.00. There were others like him who did not have any signs mentioning the cost but it was worth it. That's Italy! We saw so much, pillars here, arches there, it just goes on and on. Tram cars have a pantograph not the single roller as on the Melbourne trams in this big city.

We had lunch outside the Colosseum then a Bride and Groom appeared who had a photographic session on the lawn. See photo in the Album. We bought six adult T-shirts at A\$5.00 each, very cheap. We walked and walked some more and later the Chinese woman left us. We caught a train at 4.30pm from another station called "Termini", which is the end of the line. When the trains go through tunnels there is a change of pressure that almost hurt our ears. There is no smoking and very little graffiti inside.

Back in Saint Marinella we went to the same restaurant and had dinner of spaghetti and carbonara for A\$20.00.

It was too much for me so we got a doggy bag and gave the waitress a stick pin. Back home we both soaked our feet in the bidet as we must have walked five km today. There is only a shower in the bathroom and it wets the toilet and bidet but they all dry fairly quickly due to the low humidity of the Mediterraneo.

End of album # two

Commence album # three

Monday 14th April

Travelled today ~0km

Up again at 6am and caught an 8am train. Our colds were a bit worse. We got off at the Termini stazinóe where we rang the Australian Embassy in Roma in regards the problems in Albania. We were still not sure about going to Greece because of the problems there. Many people left Albania and came over to Italy. The woman said that they had not had any reported problems that would affect us although this could change at any time. Then we had morning tea at the MacDonald's that is across the street from the station, they sure pick the best positions. Then we 'phoned Maria from a public 'phone at the station but Grace and Christian were in the bath so we didn't talk to them which was sad.

Then we caught an ordinary bus to the Vatican.

Vatican

After waiting in a queue for half an hour or so we visited Saint Peter's Basilica and saw the big dome. We went up in a lift and looked down into the cathedral, the alter looked so small. We had our cut lunch on the roof of it where we could see over the square. A photo I took as in the Album shows the statues above the balcony where the Pope speaks from for special occasions. Very moving to be where people from all over the world for centuries have walked before us. The power of the place feels momentous. We also posted some cards from there.

Then we walked a few kms to find an Internet place but it wasn't there anymore. We caught a Metro train (underground) back to the Termini station. Very fast and efficient. We saw many women with babies and small children on church steps begging for money or we suppose for food. Both our feet really sore as we did so much walking, but this **is Roma**. We had dinner at Macs of chips, cheese cake and orange juice before catching a train back home. We soaked our feet again in the bidet. My left foot was sore enough that I bandaged it up with bandage out of our special First Aid kit. We had been keeping some 2ltr softdrink plastic bottles filled with tap water in case we needed to boil some and now we had four full bottles. We sorted photos and wrote on the backs. We put brochures and maps not needed anymore into a plastic bag and I put it in the emergency tyre area.

Tuesday 15th April

Travelled today ~256km

Temperature ~7c

Arrivederci Roma. What a city!

Up at 7am and Marie's cold not good so we must visit a chemist today. First we went to a bank which is just around the corner of the pension and was subjected to the tightest and strictest security so far of our Journey. As I described before about the two doors, I walked into the cubicle and the machine beeped. The guard near the door who was in a bullet proof cubicle showed by gestures that I could put my metal objects into a little box, he would give me a key to lock it then I could proceed. Well I didn't do that but gave Marie the objects, not my metal hip though, then I entered OK. Because of some problem I and some other people waited for about twenty minutes before we were served. All this for DM300 worth of Lire.

We drove into the outskirts of Roma where it was wall to wall vehicles, the densest of our Journey. The big A12 highway became ten lanes we think. I say that because the lane markings were faint and anyway the Italians don't keep within them but make another lane to fit more vehicles across the road. Vehicles were within 20cm of each other including us. We had never been in horrendous traffic like this before. But motorists were reasonably patient, no horn blowing as we expected. I managed to stop to ask a man in his car for directions and he started to tell me in Italian. Then he said to follow him. We did a U-turn and so we followed him for about 2km, we stopped and he said it is easy now.

Ha Ha!

We still had problems to get back onto the ss148 highway to head southward. It took so long to get out of Roma that we finally made it onto the ss148 at 12 noon. A\$25.00 of petrol for Tiffany at about A\$1.40p/l.

At Terracina we drove through a 2.8km long tunnel then took a photo of a walled city named Itri. We also saw many big recycling bins beside roads in towns. We bought a whole tray of fresh strawberries for A\$6.00 from a young man at a roadside stall who couldn't speak English. He said to Marie, "du bambino" pointing at her stomach. What a laugh.

We arrived in Mondragone which is about 50km north of Napoli (Naples) and checked into the Hotel D'Amore for A\$57.00.

We bought some cream in a little carton at a little shop. For dinner we heated up my doggy bag of spaghetti and ate half of the strawberries. Yummy!

We saw Bananas In Pyjamas which is an Australian children's show on TV with voices dubbed of course in Italian. Bed at 8.30pm.

Wednesday 16th April

Travelled today ~142km

Temperature ~10c

Up at 7am to depart at 8.30am still driving on ss213. We soon arrived in Napoli (Naples) but again, because it was morning peak time the traffic on the highway was very heavy. We were at a standstill for some time then all of a sudden we were at a toll gate. Like Roma motorists, they do not keep to the marked lanes but make an additional lane so as to fit more vehicles in. We could see down to our right Napoli city but no way were we going to get caught up in worse traffic so we headed away on the big E45 arriving at Pompeii.

From the E45 we could see Mount Vesuvio which is about 6km from the ancient city. We were directed by a man into a car park which turned out to be the driveway to a restaurant. We paid him A\$28.00 for a Pompeii booklet, parking and for him to take us in his car to an entrance to the city. It was a special day today so entry was gratis (free) instead of the usual A\$14.

Pompeii is big, about the size of Brisbane CBD certainly bigger than we expected. Just inside is a open air theatre where school children were preparing to put on a play but we didn't wait to see it. Only in the last year or so more bodies have been excavated, there are thirteen on show in a glassed case and are in positions that they were in when the volcanic ash buried them. Horrible!

We walked and saw so many remains of buildings and streets that the reader should read the booklet in the album to begin to comprehend the city's disaster which occurred 79AD. We had our picnic lunch in the main street and contemplated that two centuries ago people went about their business here. Very moving!

We got lost in the city and exited at the wrong gate where we bought some postcards and walked back to Tiffany. We drove on to Salerno where we called into a Peugeot Service place. I still didn't know where to top up the radiator and windscreen water. The men were very helpful, one was happy that he could practice his English. We arrived at a beach town named Litoranea Pontecargnano. On the way

we purchased more petrol for Tiffany, L20000 worth. As it wasn't summer yet the place was dead. We managed to check into the Hotel Mare (Ocean Hotel) for A\$57.00 after I was told at two other hotels that there were no rooms available. Other hotels we saw were closed. We again saw many multi-story building that were never finished, a similar situation as in Spain.

Their restaurant was closed so we did have a drink in their bar before we made our own dinner in our room. Noodles again and finished off the strawberries with what we thought was fresh cream but instead a sort of sour cream.

From our room window we could see the Mer Tyrrhénienne waves on the beach which has real sand not stones. The sounds reminded us of Casa de Grace.

I wore my Bombers football beanie because it was cold and I received a few "heehaws" but I had warm ears.

Thursday 17th April

Travelled today ~305km

Temperature ~8c

Up at 7am and checked out at 8.45am.

We were still not sure about going to Greece because of the problems in Albania. All the Italian army activity was in Brindisi and that's the city we planned to catch a ferry boat to Greece. The matter was shown on TV every day and it wasn't getting better so I rang the Australian Embassy in Roma again only to be told the same as when I rang from the hotel yesterday. We hoped that our families were not too worried.

We got hopelessly lost trying to get back onto the E45 and probably drove 10km out of our way and wasting an hour or so. This was another problem for us when we left a highway to see some place, find accommodation or look for food sometimes it was a major problem to get back onto the highway. We could see that this is the poor part of Italy. We arrived in Potenza where I went to the Banca Mediterranea for more Lire only to be told that it does not cash Thomas Cook DM cheques but to go up the hill to another bank. This I did and we could breath again with lots more Lira.

After we had lunch at a restaurant we had trouble getting back out onto the highway again. I asked a young couple in a car and the man told us to follow them. We did for only 200mts where we joined the highway again, thanks. From Metaponto the highway is E847 and ss407. We saw lots of yellow or yellow

centre and cream petal daisies and some more red poppies beside the highway.

The drive across the “ankle of Italy’s foot” is very mountainous, green and pretty through some tunnels and on some above ground highway sections.

Then onto flat coastal plains before Táranto onto E90 and ss106. Táranto has an oil refinery and a shipping port but is rather grubby. From here we were on the E90 highway arriving at Grottáglie at 5.30pm. We drove off the highway and within minutes booked into the Hotel Caesar at A\$A\$67.00 which was run by a couple of old Italian men, probably at least seventy years old. They kept our passports for the night as many hotels before had done. It is no big deal though.

By now it was quite cold so we took our snow jackets out of our suitcases ready for the ferry boat trip. Tiffany was happy with her accommodation at the rear of the hotel. We ate the bread rolls we bought at a petrol station today for dinner. The hotel has a bath which we enjoyed because the last few accommodations had only showers that wet the whole room. We miss the families so much and wished that they were here with us. We thought Grace would love the flowers, Maria the scenery, Christian and Joshua the trains, tractors and three wheeled little cars.

I took our first sunset photo from our balcony before going to bed.

Friday 18th April

Travelled today ~60km

Temperature ~1c

As we were not far from Brindisi we arrived there at 9.30am. The E90 goes straight into the town as the main street ends at the harbour. We parked Tiffany no problemo, walked to one of the multitude of shipping and travel offices and bought our return tickets to Patrai (Patras) which is the main western port on Greece. For the ferryboat we paid A\$590 total, for Tiffany, our cabin and including the A\$10.00 departure tax. Departure time was 8pm tonight. Great! I was so pleased that I was finally taking Marie to her childhood dream country, Greece.

On the way back to Tiffany Marie noticed a place with the words “Internet” on a sign. Fantastic! So as we had to wait a few hours I decided to use it, the first possible time so far. Marie kept Tiffany company while I spent 1.25 hours. The two young Italians spoke almost no English but I managed to edit my Home Page using Netscape Navigator. For some reason I could not receive my E-Mail or send any. It was difficult as many of the software

messages and menus were in Italian but I was so happy to be able to edit my Home Page which is on the Web for anyone to see and read.

The girl only charged me for one hour because of the problems being about A\$8.00. They closed at 1.00pm for the usual siesta period.

By then it was about 1.15pm and it was amazing to see the city all of a sudden become deserted so I took a photo and another time a photo when the town was busy. Unreal! We had lunch of salad rolls at one of the only restaurants open. Later we had our passports stamped at the Customs Police then drove around to the other side of the harbour, about 1km away and waited on the dock. There are no signs or lanes marked to indicate where motorists have to queue up so we stopped near where waiting trucks were lining up.

Notes for Italy

Very similar to the Spanish notes. A poor country with lots of motor-bikes and three wheeled vehicles, a nuisance on the roads and highways. The security at banks was the tightest on Our Journey. Italian motorists are not as bad as we were led to believe, in fact very good to withstand the pressure of the massive amount of slow and fast vehicles.

There was a lot of pollen floating in the air which is not good for people who are asthmatics.

No organisation at all and no movement of people in regards to the Albanian crisis which we were happy about. At 7.15pm after about fifty semi-trailer trucks were loaded the man directing vehicles came over to us, checked our tickets and passports and told us that the ferry boat Agios Andreas is an ex Australian Navy Ship, well that was a surprise. We had to drive up a steep gangplank part of the ferry at the stern and follow another man’s instructions. Tiffany was parked within centimetres of trucks and the boat wall. Very stressful for me. See the photo. Only one more truck was loaded after us on this high level but more were loading on the lower level. There could have been a hundred trucks, most being semi-trailers on the ferry, so this is no small ferry, Europeans do things BIG. We were shown to our cabin 204 which is at the bow, almost in the centre which has two single bunks and a small wardrobe.

Yes this was an Australian ship as we could recognise the power sockets, fittings, toilet fittings and so on. Each cabin would have been for two sailors. The shower and toilet for two cabins is just outside the cabins which is OK for a possible four people. It was a little like home. The Agios Andreas is one of three such ships owned by a Greek company so we were already on a bit of Greece. It was nice to see all the cabin staff wearing white uniforms and looking rather official.

We took a sea sickness tablet each and settled in. I walked around the ferry for a looksee and also to find the restaurant but as usual it was not open until 8pm so we ate our rolls and buns in our cabin. We couldn't make a hot cuppa as the power sockets were dead, I suspect all disconnected from the ferry's power but there were no European power points either. What a hard life travellers have to endure! We donned our snow jackets and went outside in front of our cabin and watched some crewmen work the anchor mechanism.

Then we moved off on our way to Greece. Ripper!

Bed er.. bunk at 9.15pm with just a slight murmur of the ferry's engines.

Greece

Saturday 19th April

A\$1	~Drachma 189
Population	~10,500,000
Petrol price	~ A\$1.25p/l
Travelled so far total	~7600km
Travelled today	~65km

Up at 7am and saw land in the distance which was Greece with the Ionian Sea beneath us. We both had no sea sickness feeling, especially good for Marie as she is very prone to have it. I didn't have a shave as I only shave with an electric shaver and there were no power points in our cabin. We went into the restaurant which would have been the mess for the sailors. The only breakfast available consisted of toast, a muffin and tea or coffee for A\$5.00 (Drm 5000) each. When we returned to our cabin the cleaners had already been and our door was wide open. A bit rude we thought. We arrived in rain at Patrai (Patras) at 11am making the journey fifteen hours allowing for one hour difference. We were now in Greece and in particular on the island called Peloponnisos.

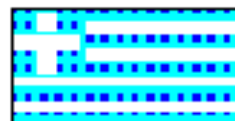
By about 10am we and a few other passengers and the truckies milled around the main office area



waiting for the time to go to our respective vehicles.

We drove through what we thought was Customs without stopping, through the city of Patrai and past a couple of dirt roads. Yes streets that are still not bituminised and sealed. We stopped at a small supermarket named Atermon for more provisions. Then eastward on the big E65 which is a toll highway that cost us Drm600 (A\$3.30). We had lunch at a chain restaurant called "Goody's" which also has telephones, carparking and very clean toilets. So they are an upmarket MacDonaldis type place which where we finally had some more vegetables, potato chips and salad.

This highway is not all two lanes each way and when it's not the rather wide side part to the gutter is used by the Greeks as a second lane. I did occasionally move into it to let vehicles pass. We drove off the highway about 1km and arrived in the little seaside town of Akratas at about 5.30pm and soon found a Zimmer Frei (German for vacant room) for A\$52.00 (Drm10000). I spoke over the intercom at the front door in English and the man told me to come up to the 3rd floor.



He could only speak a little English so he got his teenage son to talk to us to explain

the aircon and stove workings. This was to be the best Zimmer Frei of our entire journey. We suspect that they may get some German tourists hence the "Zimmer Frei" but we knew that many Greeks

sprechen Deutsch. It has a double bed, aircon, shower, CTV, a full kitchen and parking for Tiffany.

After settling in I went downstairs and talked to the man in his bicycle repair and hire shop. He was assembling a bike to sell or rent out. Even though his English was very minimal and my Greek was less, we managed to communicate OK. Later I spoke to his son about his future, university and so on and he said he would have to leave home and live near Athina (Athens).

Marie made some soup on the stove for dinner, a change from me using our immersion heater. The temperature was 10c which was much colder than we expected. Bed at 9.15pm Karli nikta (good night).

Sunday 20th April

Travelled today ~277km

Temperature ~11c

Up at 7.30am and I was going to 'phone John until I remembered the our Telstra Phonaway Card did not work in Greece. Drats! Nice sunny day.

We left at 9am and got back onto the E65 without any trouble unlike Spain and Italy. Before Athina (Athens) we stopped at a roadside stall and bought ten oranges for Drm300 (A\$1.80). There are lots of slender green pencil pines in this part which was a nice change. Also citrus, olives and red poppies. Again we saw many unfinished buildings as in Spain and Italy, we were told due to the 1980s boom time. Beside the highway were scores of little boxes on a little post. Some are made of metal or wood and glass with a little figure of Jesus or some other figure. Some with a bottle of alcohol, a photo, a lamp burning and flowers. We were told that these are put beside the highway in memory of a person or persons who were killed and are now in Heaven. Or the person or persons survived the crash and became well again. See photo. A man told us about thirty people are killed on Greek roads each day and yet we didn't see any very bad drivers.

Onward into Athina to go to Delfi but Athina is worse to get around than Roma so we were hopelessly lost. We saw signs to the Olympic stadium many times but we weren't going there. The second last man I asked for directions was a Frenchman. He was not rude but very helpful, his English was excellent.

Just before we finally approached the E75 highway we had to negotiate a dirt intersection. It reminded me of the Normanby Fiveways of old, but more traffic. We almost had a smash at this spot, it was terrifying! Even though the rain had gone and it

was sunny, there was a haze which was as bad or perhaps worse than anywhere so far.

A few kilometres we paid a toll of Drm 600 (A\$3.30) which is cheap. They are building and widening highways which we presume with money given by the EEU, and is necessary for Greece's future in the EEU and for the next Olympic games they will hold.

I must mention here that highway signs are printed in Greek and English. The first sign is in Greek and about 50mts to 100mts further on in English. I was sensible for teaching myself the Greek alphabet and some words in the last few years because it was very helpful. In fact I advise people who do want to drive themselves around Greece that it is **essential**. In Greek, some uppercase letters are quite different when written in lowercase, so you have to know the difference.

At Thire or Thive we passed slum houses made of pieces of tin, wood and whatever the people can get their hands on. Depressing! There was a sign for Delfi but it was broken but we quickly worked out which way to proceed. We arrived in Aliartos at 3.30pm and checked into the only accommodation in the town, the Hotel Tsaparas for A\$48.00 which is very basic, no TV but a carpark.

The man was very friendly as we were beginning to find out for ourselves that Australians are well liked. He told us in his good English that in their Town Hall there is a letter on display written by the town officials thanking New Zealand and Australian troops for the help given to the town during WW2.

We walked down the little street where of course the shops were closed. We bought hot chicken and potatoes from a little take away place that was open for dinner in our room. Yummy! The hotel man was shocked when we told him we go to bed at 9.30pm, he usually goes to bed by 3am. Greeks like nightlife too.

When using toilets in Greece you must not put toilet paper into the bowl but in a tin provided because their toilet system pipes are small. Marie is glad that she can not smell very much as some toilets are filthy. We decided to have our main meal at lunchtime in future while restaurants are still open to beat their siesta time.

Monday 21st April

Travelled today ~148km

Temperature ~10c

Up at 8am and left at 9.15am to firstly go to a bank for some more Drachmas. The bank staff

seemed slow because it took me 30 minutes to cash the cheques but absolutely no security doors or guards whatsoever. Still on highway 48 winding through mountainous dry country with snow on the mountains. The ruins of Delfi suddenly appeared as we drove around a bend on the side of a mountain. We parked Tiffany within 100mts and walked to the entrance, cost was A\$6.30. It was a bit too steep for Marie so we only got as far as the Temple of Appolo, not to the amphitheatre. The smog was thick up here in the mountains, rather a shame as the view would have been great.

We ate our picnic lunch among the ruins, where else? There were only about ten tour buses there because it wasn't summer yet. Then we drove to the new town which is about 3km further west, a very touristy winter skiing town. Beautiful. Then retracing our steps past the ruins and stopped at the next town which may be Aradhova that we passed through earlier. We stopped and bought some coffee, a bottle of wine and a small vase.

This town is also a skiing resort town and there was still enough snow in the area for skiing. So then back down the mountains again to arrive in Aliartos late in the afternoon. More petrol for Tiffany costing Dm3000 at about A\$1.18p/l.

We checked into the same Hotel Aliartos again, even the same room.

Tiffany was getting very dirty so I used a water hose at the back of the restaurant to wash her. She looked lovely again. Today was the first day that we did not get lost in a city or town as Aliartos is small.

Irish coffee is for sale in France and Greece in sachets that hold enough for two cups. There are no tins of food for sale that we can heat up except for tomatoes. No 3min noodles available here nor Spain or Italy. At least in Spain we could get tins of vegetables and meat. I needed a haircut but couldn't find a barber. For dinner we bought the same chicken and chips from the same takeaway at 6.30pm. Bed at 9pm.

Tuesday 22nd April

Travelled today ~217km

Temperature ~10c

Up at 7am and departed at 8.30am driving on the E75 hoping we might find accommodation near a railway station but not so. The railway system is rather primitive with no electric lines seen in Greece so far. We paid another toll fee of A\$3.15 and just on the Athina side we called into a petrol station to buy

a map of Athina. I bought one for A\$8 and when I asked the young attendant how to get into Athina he explained in fairly good English that part of the map was wrong so more hassles for us soon.

We drove onward through the various highway constructions which should be finished for the Olympic Games and got totally lost of course. We were stopped on the side of the highway looking at the map when a man and his daughter asked if we needed help. **Yes!** How do we get to the Acropolis? He was down from Delfi for the day and put us in the general direction. We drove on to within about 2km from it but couldn't see it so I asked someone else, we drove around a corner and there it was.

We always thought that being on a hill the Acropolis could be seen from a distance but it's not. We parked Tiffany in a side street only about 100mts from the entrance and paid A\$10.50 to visit one of the main sights that Marie (and I) wanted to see for years. We had our picnic lunch in the ruins and walked some more to the museum. The haze or rather smog pollution was terrible, I estimated we could only see about 3km away which was giving Marie her chest problems. We posted postcards and bought two Greek dolls for souvenirs.

We intended to stay one night in Athina but because of the smog we wouldn't. This area gave us the same feelings as when we were in Roma, the Segrada Familia in Spain and other places.

We drove away at 3pm to head southward back to the Peloponnisos (Peloponese) on E94 but not before getting a little lost again. Greek motorists are more relaxed than the Italian drivers and the traffic is also "wall to wall" in Athina. We bought 2kg of bananas that were imported from Columbia at a roadstall on our way south to the Peloponnisos.

The little piece of land that joins the Peloponnisos to the rest of Greece had a channel cut in it many years ago and is called an ismis. We passed over it again so quickly that we only just saw it. We arrived in Korinthos at 5pm and booked into the Hotel Ephira for A\$48.00 and had to park Tiffany in the street then walked the town where I had my hair cut by a woman. As usual I showed her my Drivers Licence photo so that she knew what I required. Her English was almost nil and was offered some translation help by another customer. Marie took our photo. Cost was about A\$10.00.

We had dinner after we walked around the boat harbour at a little restaurant of our first decent meat meal, pork chop with the usual Greek salad consisting of tomato, onion, capsacin, cucumber and

fetta cheese. It was so much we couldn't eat it all. We thought that after six weeks of very difficult but very enjoyable times things were becoming better. Back home at 7.30pm and we heard three different bells ringing, of which one was the Town Hall that we saw from our balcony. Just below we watched an old woman feeding her chickens, they appeared to live in her house so this stresses the point that Greece is the poorest country of our Journey. In the hotel the lift was different than usual. We pressed the 3rd floor button and when the lift stopped we saw a brick wall through the lift door glass. So we went back down to reception for help. We were told that the 3rd floor opening is on the other side of the lift. So we went up again but this time turned around and the opening was there. I should explain that in some lifts the door/s do not open automatically but you have to open the outward swinging door yourself.

We watched a movie on TV in English with Shirley McLean and Jessica Tandy. Bed at 10pm and temperature 18C. Some mosquitos annoyed Marie during the night.

Wednesday 23rd April

Travelled today ~155km

Total travelled so far ~8100km

Marie up at 7am but me at 7.30am to drive to Tripolis on the 7 highway. Soon we drove up the side of a mountain to the hilltop ruins at Acrocorinth. Then to Nemea to see a stadium where the Hellenic Games are held every two years, entrance costing A\$2.60. See Marie in the photo standing in the main arena. Onto more ruins at Mikines where we saw the Lion Gate, Royal Tombs and other ruins. Ruins and ruins and ruins is what the traveller sees in Greece. Fantastic!

We had lunch at a restaurant which was quite cheap even though this is a tourist place. Onwards through Argos seeing many wild yellow daisies and marshmallow plants then Naplion which is another coastal town and passing olive and citrus groves. From here over dramatic and desolate mountains to Tripolis. We arrived here at 5pm and easily found accommodation at Hotel Galaxy for A\$63.00 which is in the local square, Tiffany parked in one of the hotels five only parking places in the street at the front. We walked around and Marie bought a new handbag with compartments and a shoulder strap as her other one was falling to pieces for Drm19000 (A\$100). There were many Easter celebration things for sale, candles shaped like eggs, chickens and hens

but no bunnies. That was good to see as rabbits do not have much significance in their Easter.

We had dinner in our room of bread and bananas, not much as we had a big lunch. I went back out to find the Internet Cafe called "Packman Cafe" where the music was so loud and the cigarette smoke was so thick I could hardly concentrate. There was only one computer and no one to instruct me to get online. After getting past the Greek text to operate Netscape I couldn't reach my Home Page site or collect E-mail so I gave up in disgust after an hour or so costing only A\$5.00.

On my way back home there was a lot of activity at the church in the square with singing and bell ringing. What a fantastic day with more ruins of walled cities on top of three mountains and more to come yet. At bedtime, 9.30pm after the church event was over there was lots of noise, traffic and policeman with a whistle. There were pretty coloured lights in the square which were silent thank goodness.

Also I have not mentioned yet the fireworks and crackers that are let off anywhere and anytime. It appears that there is no ban on their sale or use but young lads let them off many times. I was even woken up during the night by them.

During the night and into the morning army men were setting up some sort of structure which was most likely for Easter, so we didn't get much sleep. Bed at 10pm.

Thursday 24th April

Travelled today ~178km

Up at 7am and could see the giant wreath the army men built during the night. The phone rang during the night (morning) but was a wrong number, drats! Today's target; Ancient Olympia. We stopped at a little petrol station for Tiffany and bought A\$20 worth and also had her washed for A\$8.00. All the smog, dust and tree flower pollen makes all cars dirty so she looked good again. We went to Megalopoli (big city) on the 7 highway which was the original great city of the Peloponnisos and was called centuries ago, "Ageo Nickoleos".

Further on we saw on a distant mountain-side a village called Karitena and decided to visit it. It is about 5km off the highway up the mountain side to Karitena where the stone houses are very old and run down. We took photos of an ancient Byzantine church but it was closed so we didn't see inside it. On

the way back down to the highway we took photos of big clumps of wild Opuntia and Euphorbia.

The country is mountainous and barren and not much traffic. The next town was Andritsena where we bought bread then onto Bassae. This was the second time that we had trouble buying more petrol as the local little grocery shop that also sells petrol did not sell un-leaded or diesel. The man said to go out of town a bit which we did, I became rather nervous because we didn't know how far it was. Anyway this petrol station was open and sold all types of petrol, a young teenage boy served us speaking good English. Then on further up the mountain to the Temple Of Apollo where we had our picnic lunch in the car park. Lo and behold there were about twenty ants milling around an ant hole, we put some bread near them but they just wandered around it, to us it seemed that they didn't know what to do.

The Temple Of Apollo is now covered by a big tent about the size of a big circus tent to protect it. We only had a quick look as it was cold, perhaps 5c and rain approaching. On our way back down the mountain we again saw many ancient terraced fields. People must have grown vegetables or fruit there long ago. We also passed two young herdsmen with their crooks like bo-peep, moving their goats along the road. This is the real Greece.

Back onto highway 76 and to Krestena where I pulled over to the side of the highway and had 15minutes rest, I was very tired. We finally arrived at Ancient Olympia at 3pm and had plenty of hotels to choose from as this is a major tourist attraction. We checked into the Hotel Kronion at A\$42. We booked two nights. Parking for Tiffany was in the street under our window so we thought it would suit her OK. We sorted out our washing and gave it to the hotel manager or owner to get laundered.

We walked down town where we had a nice time talking to a man in his souvenir shop. His English was good because he had worked on a merchant ship and was in the port of Brisbane for a couple of weeks some years ago. As we were talking a woman come out from under the counter. We were surprised, why? She was his wife and because they operate their shop from 8am until 10pm every night every day to earn a meagre living, she was very tired. His name is George and hers is Nickola. George invited us to come back another time and enjoy a cup of Greek coffee with them, so we said tomorrow.

We put three rolls of film in to be processed at a photo shop then had dinner at a little restaurant where the man had to ask his young son, about ten years old, to translate a little. Marie had Calamari and I my first ever Moussaka, both very enjoyable. Oh yes, also a small glass of home made red wine. Back home and more lads setting crackers off and church bells ringing.

Bed at 9.15 both very tired and happy.

Friday 25th April

Greek Orthodox Easter

Travelled today ~okm

We had breakfast in the hotel's restaurant of toast, muffin and even a boiled egg coffee and orange juice included in the cost of our room. Because I couldn't get our room 'phone to work, the hotel man offered us to use his at the reception desk. We spoke to Maria and Grace which made us all cry, it's been so long away now and so much more time yet to travel.

At 11.45am we walked the 2km distance to the Olympic area. **Wow!**

Ruins, ruins, ruins everywhere. The whole area is about 500sqmts in size and just too much to describe here so please read the booklet in the album. Events took place about 800 years BC here, very moving. We thought the Vatican and Roma were very moving experiences but this Olympia games place is outstanding. It is my favourite place. For Marie it is on par with Pompeii. We walked back to the shops and visited George and Nickola and enjoyed Greek coffee with them. They also gave me a packet of the coffee and Marie a vase. Very nice. I must point out that we Australians are well liked by Greeks and most of them have a relative living in Australia. Marie bought a stone necklace each for all four girls and calendars for John and David.

Back home I slept from 3pm to 4pm while Marie wrote on postcards. Out again to see inside the church across the street then had the same for dinner at the same restaurant. On our way back home we collected the photo prints, sometimes Marie managed to get forty on one roll. Back home I heard voices in the street outside our window so had a look. Someone had parked a car on the other side of the narrow street, facing the wrong way. The driver of a tourist coach wanted to drive through but the gap between Tiffany and the car but it wasn't wide enough. I saw him get out of the bus, turn the driver's side rear vision mirror of the car back to make more room. The side rear vision mirrors of modern cars can be

turned inwards so that people do not hit them and break them off, by accident or otherwise. Well the mirror broke off and a policeman who was there directing the bus driver didn't even say or do anything. The bus driver then got back into the bus and drove off.

This meant that the car driver, possibly a patron of the hotel, would have to have it fixed before driving the car as it was on the drivers side or not care about it.

We wrote on the backs of the photos which took a while for three packets but so enjoyable. Bath then bed at 9.15pm.

End of album # three