

## TALES OF FRANCE 1975-1976, 1980

Chris Eastoe

### How it started

In 1974, I enrolled in the doctoral program in the Geology Department of the University of Tasmania with the intention of undertaking a research project on the large copper-gold deposit on the island of Bougainville (see *Tales of Papua New Guinea*). The study was to focus on fluid inclusions, which appeared to be abundant in some material that my supervisor, Dr. Mike Solomon, had collected from the deposit. The equipment for making fluid inclusion measurements at the University of Tasmania was rudimentary, however. I had expressed an interest in studying overseas, mainly by applying for the Rhodes Scholarship given each year to a Tasmanian applicant, but I emerged from that process as a runner-up. The Head of the Geology Department, Professor Carey, subsequently drew my attention to the existence of Rotary Foundation Fellowships, offered by the international organization of Rotary Clubs, that would fund an overseas study visit for an academic year. The geochemist in the Geology Department, Dr. Jan van Moort, suggested I should aim for a year at the Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques (CNRS) in Nancy, where there was a highly developed fluid inclusion laboratory at a specialist branch of the CNRS, the Centre de Recherches Pétrographiques et Géochimiques (CRPG). The arrangement seemed perfect for my purposes, because I was already fairly fluent in French. My application to the Rotary Foundation was successful. On the strength of an essay the Rotary Foundation asked me to submit in French, I was to be allowed to begin laboratory work immediately in Nancy, without having to undergo any intensive language preparation.

For reasons that had nothing to do with my application to the Rotary Foundation, I had had plenty of opportunity to practice spoken French during the year before my stay in Nancy. Two Masters students from the University of Lille, Bernard Pierson and Francis Leclercq, had come to Tasmania for a year of study with Dr. Max Banks, our specialist in Stratigraphy. They were traveling with their wives, Sabine and Claudie respectively, neither of whom spoke English on arrival. I was somewhat shy about using my school French with them at the beginning. Sabine Pierson took a part-time job washing laboratory glassware in the Geology Department. One day, she was working while leaning across a chair that I needed for microscope work in the same room. I had to summon my best French and ask "*Est-ce que vous avez besoin de la chaise?*" So began a delightful friendship. I would often go home from an evening of conversation with the Piersons, unsure of which language we had all been using.

## Arrival

Bernard, who by that time had returned to France, came to meet me at Orly Airport after my 30-hour Qantas flight from Australia. It was early September, 1975. There had been stops in Singapore and Bahrain, where I alighted and bought a transistor radio with short-wave capability from an Arab man. He had a table of electronic items in a passageway of the transit lounge. I was a little nervous about the purchase, but it was a packaged Toshiba shortwave instrument and seemed like a legitimate item. It was to be one of my joys in Nancy as well as my link to the English-language world, and was to serve me until the 1990s.

Note regarding photos: I returned from my year in France with a large collection of slides. From these, I separated about 20 that I considered to be poorer in quality, and I had prints made of about a dozen of the best pictures. In 1985, burglars broke into the house that I had just bought in Tucson. In addition to the usual items, they stole four large boxes of my slides. As a result, I have only the poor-quality pictures and the prints from my stay. Some of these are included here, along with some pictures I took in Nancy when I returned to the city in 1988 and 2004.

The tedium of the protracted flight had been eased by the exotic places where we landed, and not least by the last hour of the flight. I gazed from my window seat out over eastern France for that last hour. It was a clear day, allowing me to see the verdant landscape of farmland and villages with orange tile roofs interspersed with belts of woodland. I was about to take up residence in that beautiful countryside.

After mistakenly trying to get into the driver's seat of Bernard's car ("Tu vas conduire, alors?" he teased me), I was on the road to the home of Sabine's parents, *les Martin*, in the suburbs of Paris. There seemed to be a family gathering,

with Sabine's brother Dominique and one or two other siblings gathered. After lunch, we all drove into the center of Paris and I found myself gazing up at as many sculptures as I'd ever seen in one place, on the façade of Notre Dame cathedral. We stayed at the Martin house for a couple of nights, going to a live theater performance (*Boeing, Boeing*) and out socializing with all the Martin siblings one evening. On Sunday, the whole family drove to a beech woodland area north of the city. I was given my first taste of *eau de vie*, a *vieux marcq*, and although it burned all the way down, it seemed that it would be worth persisting with that kind of beverage during my stay. At the end of the picnic, Bernard, Sabine and I packed into their car for the drive by way of Laon to Charleville-Mézières where they had an apartment, and where Bernard was working as a geologist.

## Training Camp

I spent the next ten days with Bernard and Sabine, who were living under non-ideal conditions in an apartment tower; their abode was beautifully kept, but irresponsible residents commonly left messes in the common areas. They tutored me in French table manners and encouraged me to improve my wardrobe. They lent me a bicycle so that I could go shopping and explore

Charleville-Mézières. The city of Charleville has a beautiful square flanked by buildings of warm-coloured stone topped with steep, grey roofs of Ardennes shale. The conjoined city of Mézières claims the poet Arthur Rimbaud as a native son, and maintains his house as a small museum.

Bernard showed me where he was working around the gorge that the Meuse River cuts through the Ardennes. I was coming to realize that misty air, presumably polluted in this heavily industrialized belt of northern Europe, was the normal state of affairs. Bernard decided to obtain a poster of the Ardennes forests for me. He had to park illegally outside the tourism office that sold the posters in Charleville-Mézières, and left me in the car. Some policemen came along very soon after he left. I decided that it might be possible to delay getting a parking ticket if I pretended to be unable to speak French. This seemed to work, because the policemen didn't know what to do in such a circumstance. Bernard reappeared and expertly talked them out of the ticket.

Bernard gave me my first lesson in driving on the right-hand side of the road on a quiet road in the Ardennes. He seemed disturbed that I did not know which pedal was the clutch and which the brake (fortunately it's the same in all cars, regardless of which side has the steering wheel). I had had no reason to think about driving in France up until that point, because I had not even imagined owning a car during my stay. The lesson was soon to be put to practical use. He arranged for me to buy a Volkswagen beetle from his cousin in Lille for 300 francs, and I found myself driving it back to his father's house in Douai along the biggest motorway I'd ever seen, four lanes each way. That was after we stopped at a petrol station in Lille to fill the tank. I was already so nervous about my first solo drive on the right-hand side of the road that I carelessly addressed the attendant as "tu", to Bernard's great chagrin. Bernard's father was an insurance agent, so I was able to arrange a year's coverage easily for an amount of money that was the same as the price of the car.



Central square  
of Charleville

Having survived my first solo drive, it remained for me to drive the car 400 km to Nancy, now with a car full of loaned linens and other useful items lent by Bernard and Sabine. I followed Bernard who was driving a truckload of furniture for his sister Françoise, a student in agriculture at the University of Nancy. It was a day to remember. At one stage, I somehow got ahead of Bernard without realizing it, but thought I had fallen behind and so was trying to catch up. Eventually, he caught up with me from behind! We drove through the World War I battlefields around Verdun, where trenches and other earthworks were still readily visible. We reached Nancy by evening, found parking for the vehicles, and joined Françoise and her room-mates for dinner at their attic apartment on the fourth and fifth floors of 12<sup>bis</sup> Rue de Metz, an address I was to become very familiar with. I was so tired after the drive that I managed to enter one of the architectural gems of Nancy without even noticing where I was.

### **Getting established**

The apartment at 12<sup>bis</sup> Rue de Metz was the abode of a small group of women including Marie-Pierre and Béatrice whose long-term boyfriends lived in another downtown apartment on the ground floor at 4 Rue des Jardiniers. As I left the women's apartment the morning after my arrival to set about finding my own lodgings, the women asked me to return for dinner on the following Tuesday evening.

My arrival in Nancy coincided with the beginning of the university's academic year. Therefore, accommodation was almost impossible to find. I searched the area of town below the ridge on which Vandœuvre-lès-Nancy and the CRPG were located, and my only possibility seemed to be a university dormitory. I moved there for a few days, realizing that such accommodation would be far from ideal; I had had quite enough of such living arrangements at the University of

Tasmania. On the appointed evening, I drove back into the city center for dinner with the women, and was pleasantly surprised to meet their boyfriends Renaud and Bruno. The first activity of the evening was unexpected. The women looked out a window and noticed that residents of the Rue de Metz were piling unwanted furniture on the sidewalks; “*Tiens, on fait la grande poubelle!*” one of them announced. It was large rubbish night. We descended quickly to the street and carried every discarded item that looked usable in a student household into the capacious carriage house on the ground floor of their place, filling much of the space. Within a week, it would all be re-allocated to grateful homes. The women asked me to have first pick, but as I couldn’t foresee needing large items of furniture, I contented myself with a couple of dinner plates and some books.

During the course of the evening, Renaud and Bruno proposed that I consider occupying their unoccupied bedroom at *4 rue des Jardiniers*. They suggested that I could move in on Wednesday, try it until the weekend, and then make a decision. By the time I had unloaded my car on Wednesday evening, meeting their housemate François (who preferred to be called Toto) in the process, I informed them all that I had every intention of staying. I happily spent the following nine months with them. Their apartment and their company were everything I could have wanted, and made all the difference to my stay.

Nine months spent in the city yielded many stories, too many to relate here. Instead, I’m intending to give my main impressions, writing almost 50 years after an experience that changed my view of the world and my professional prospects.

### **Nancy**

Prior to 1975, I knew Nancy only as a name (but one that stood out) on the world map my parents had placed on the wall of my childhood bedroom. Once it became clear that I would be visiting the city, Bernard Pierson obtained a postcard photo of the *Place Stanislas*. I immediately asked him if it was an old photo, because the cars in the square looked rather antiquated. No, he said, those were the current cheaper models, the *Quatrellle* and the *Deux Chevaux* manufactured by Renault and Citroën. The *Place Stanislas* was not far from the *rue des Jardiniers*, and was to become part of my daily experience of the city.

Much of Nancy consists of dwellings typical of Lorraine, grey-brown two- to five-storey conjoined houses with terracotta tiled roofs, abutting the pavement with no open space in front. Gardens, if they exist, are hidden behind the houses. The first impression is rather cold and forbidding. Social life in Lorraine is indoors for a long interval of the year because of the gloomy climate. Nancy lies among the eastern ridges of the Paris Basin, west of the Vosges Mountains. The high country accumulates a bank of grey cloud extending back across Lorraine for much of autumn and winter. The gloomy weather lasts until snow falls in the winter. The few fine days after my arrival in mid-September were, with little relief, the last I was to enjoy until the snow arrived after Christmas. It seemed depressing, damp and cold to one

accustomed to the alternation of sunshine and cloud during a Tasmanian winter, an impression intensified by the shortening of the daylight during October and November.

Nancy was the capital of the Duchy of Lorraine and Bar, a remnant of Charlemagne's division of territory into French and German sectors with Lothringen (Lorraine) wedged between them. Of Lothringen, only Luxemburg remains as a sovereign state. Nancy had risen to prominence only in mediaeval times, when it was a small town in the ecclesiastical orbit of Toul and its Gothic cathedral. A group of buildings, dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and grouped along the curved mediaeval *Grand'Rue*, is Nancy's heritage from this period.



Medieval Nancy: the *Grand'Rue*, the Ducal Palace and the *Porte de la Craffe*, 1988.

The city would have remained largely uninteresting in architecture but for two later flowerings of inspiration. In the 1730s, when the line of dukes ended without issue, Louis XV began engineering the incorporation of the duchy into France, finalized in 1766. He installed Stanisław Leszczyński, a Polish nobleman, as Duke Stanislas, on the understanding that Stanislas would be the final Duke before Lorraine and Bar became provinces of France.

Louis provided Stanislas with a generous purse for the beautification of the city. Stanislas spent the money admirably on a harmonious group of three squares designed by the architect Emmanuel Héré de Corny. The *Place Stanislas* (surrounded by civic buildings including the *Hôtel de Ville*, an art gallery and an opera house) adjoins the *Place de la Carrière* (residential buildings with a palace at the north end). The two squares communicate through a triumphal arch bearing the inscription, dedicated to Louis XV: *Hostium Terror, Foederum Cultor, Gentisque*

*Decis et Amor* (terror of enemies, forger of alliances, adornment and love of the people). In the center of the *Place Stanislas*, a dynamic and heroic statue, now lost, of Louis was placed on a



Contemporaneous drawing of the original centrepiece of the *Place Stanislas*: a statue of Louis XV, the work of Guibal and Cyfflé, set among basal figures representing four Virtues.

*Bing Images*

pedestal. After the French Revolution, it was replaced by an inferior bronze depicting Stanislas. The *Place Stanislas* was adorned with two fountains (Neptune and Amphitrite, accompanied by putti and monsters), ornamental grilles and lamp-brackets. The *Place de la Carrière* has a central garden with statues of putti confronting grotesque monsters. The style of the whole ensemble is rococo, with gilded "seaweed" flourishes on the metalwork throughout. A smaller square, the *Place d'Alliance*, was added at a small distance to the east of the *Place Stanislas*. It is surrounded by an ensemble of uniform hotels, and contains a garden bordered with lime trees around a fountain supporting an obelisk surmounted by a statue of a putto blowing a trumpet.





Pictures of the *Place Stanislas* and the *Place de la Carrière* (top right), 1975-76.

It was my pleasure to cross the *Place Stanislas* almost every day on my way to dinner at the *Restaurant Universitaire* located behind the northwest corner of the square. Eventually, I came to appreciate the “perfect” relationship between the proportions of the square and the façade of the *Hôtel de Ville*. They combined as a space that intuitively felt comfortable to occupy.



*Place Stanislas* (top left and below).  
*Place d'Alliance* (top right). 1988



The second flowering occurred between 1900 and 1905, at a time when Nancy was the commercial center of eastern France, Metz and Strasburg having fallen under German government after the Franco-Prussian War. *Art nouveau* arrived relatively late in Nancy, where it flowered in several fields: the plant-themed metalwork adorning the exteriors of many houses, wooden furniture, much of it decorated with wood-inlay, glasswork expressed in household objects or stained glass windows and ceilings, and architecture, including an entire development (*Parc de Saurupt*) built in that style, but also many houses and commercial buildings scattered elsewhere in the center of the city. Many beautiful, and some grotesque, examples of the work of Nancy artisans of the can be seen in the *Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy*, in a fine house of the style. At 12<sup>bis</sup> rue de Metz, I had managed in my weariness after driving from Charleville-Mézières to climb a flowing *Ecole de Nancy* staircase decorated with brass flowers in the banister rails, and lit by a large stained-glass window in which arum lilies made a radiating pattern. It wasn't until I woke the following morning to light streaming in through an attic windowpane divided in a way suggesting the branch of a tree that I began to see my surroundings. My bedroom at 4 rue des Jardiniers contained a wardrobe in which the corner posts were sculpted as irises, and the doors were inlaid with a pattern of cyclamens and dragon flies.

In Tasmania, I had been interested in European *art nouveau* in picture books, and thought that there was little to see near home. I came to realize, years later, that the newer part of the church I had attended as a child is decorated in a reserved *art nouveau* style, and I found a small piece of *art nouveau* stained glass in the door of a house in Longford, the neighboring village.



Ecole de Nancy architecture, photos from 1988.



The Sphinx Moth  
bed in the *Musée  
de l'Ecole de  
Nancy*

*Bing images*



Ecole de Nancy  
architecture, ,  
Parc de Saurupt

*Bing images*

## My housemates

Renaud F., Bruno du M. and François D. (Toto) were all chemical engineering students. They and two girlfriends who lived on the *Rue de Metz*, Marie-Pierre and Béatrice, were a good reason for me to work on proper pronunciation of the French “r”, something I had never accomplished in Australia. They all provided me with wonderful company during my stay; they and their friends did more to make my time in France enjoyable than anyone else. Renaud was a Parisian, from a family steeped in the arts, music in particular. Bruno was from Anneville-en-Saire, near Cherbourg; he was heir to an aristocratic title. Toto’s family was of Basque descent but lived in the *Département du Nord*. Just before I left, I had a photo taken of all of us sitting in front of the Neptune fountain in the *Place Stanislas*. Sadly, that photo was among those stolen from my house in Tucson.

We rented only the bedrooms and bathroom of 4 *rue des Jardiniers* from Dr. and Mrs. Pernet. Occasionally, when we wanted to throw a party, we could ask to use the living room or the

garden once the weather warmed up in Spring. From time to time, M. Pernet, who was a member of the Board of Directors of the local chamber music concert series, would host a visiting musician. The guest would stay in one of the rooms we weren't using. M. Pernet did not consider the level of heating that students could survive to be adequate for such guests, so in winter we would suddenly find that the thermostat for the whole floor had been turned up. Of course, it was turned down again upon the guest's departure, leaving us students to re-adjust as well as we could.

Our daily routine during the week often included a get-together after dinner in Renaud's room, which was larger than the others. We would listen to music and drink a small aliquot of *eau de vie*. Renaud and Bruno had a fine supply, in many flavours: *quetsch, mirabelle, Calvados, poire Williams, framboise* and *vieux marcq*. So I became accustomed to drinking hard spirits neat for the first time in my life. The house rule was one drink per evening (for the sake of the liver) unless there were visitors. Being chemists, they measured our aliquots in white ceramic crucibles, about 4 cm high. I soon discovered that the shot of spirit in the evening helped me greatly with feeling warm in the grey dampness of autumn in Nancy. On Saturday afternoons, if Bruno was present, we would buy a batch of mini-croissants and eat them with quince or currant jelly, accompanied by smoky tea.

The favorite party food was Swiss fondue, which could be prepared without sophisticated kitchen facilities, but just before I left, we had a raclette barbecue in the garden as a farewell. On one occasion, we had a fondue party the evening before Bruno had to rise early to catch a train to Paris. He excused himself early and went to bed. I suggested to the remaining guests that I tell him bedtime stories in English, so all of us, 8 people at least, adjourned to his bedroom to hear Goldilocks and the Three Bears and Little Red Riding Hood. This was not part of Bruno's plan to get enough sleep before his trip and he was very angry, but couldn't show it in front of everyone. So, when he got up at 4 a.m., he came to my bedroom and tipped me out of my bed.

Being a foreigner, I wasn't supposed to have a command of French beyond a certain level, one which I exceeded to some extent. This came up from time to time, for instance at dinner at the *restaurant universitaire*. One evening I asked someone to pass me the water using typical laboratory lunch-time language (*Passe-moi la flotte, s'il te plaît*) and Bruno was shocked: "You're hurting our ears!" At dinner on a different day, Renaud and Marie-Pierre were taking me to task over the Imperial system of units of measurement. I kept my straightest face and rejoined: « *On garde le pied d'Henri II à 32 degrès Fahrenheit dans la Tour de Londres comme étalon.* » (The foot of Henry II is kept as a standard at 32° Fahrenheit in the Tower of London.) They failed to disbelieve me (automatically considering me incapable of expressing such a falsehood in French) for just a split second, after which Marie-Pierre remarked that they should be careful about believing everything I said. That probably led to Toto's response on another occasion. He'd asked me for the English word for a frog larva. When I told him "tadpole" he said he was going to check in a dictionary, because I might be just telling him anything. As a final example,

there was the question at the slide show about Papua New Guinea that I gave for people from the laboratory in our living room. Someone asked me what the mining company did with the mine waste. Without hesitation, I responded in laboratory French: “*On le fout dans la rivière*” (They chuck it in the river). That was apparently bad enough to make the room fall silent, apart from a cough at the back.

One event that hurt my feelings concerned the disappearance of a pair of pistols that had been mounted on the stairway wall at *12<sup>bis</sup> rue de Metz*, between the landlord’s floors, through which we had to climb whenever we went there to visit. The landlord threatened to evict the women students if the pistols could not be found. I suppose they all felt they didn’t know me very well, and my own housemates kept asking me whether I had them. Of course, it is impossible to show that one has not done something. Fortunately, some of the landlord’s own friends owned up to the theft, not too many days before the eviction might have taken effect.

Shortly before I left Nancy, Françoise Pierson, who had passed her *stage* (internship) at a vineyard in Alsace, organized an expedition for about a dozen friends including Renaud, Bruno and Marie-Pierre. For the *viticulteur*, the aim was to sell some *eau de vie*. He received us very hospitably, providing an Alsatian meal that included a meat torte containing a great deal of garlic, and apple torte for dessert. On the table, he placed seven kinds of *eau de vie* and three white wines. He also provided accommodation, so that we were able to try many of the drinks without having to drive home. Between us, we bought about 120 bottles of *eau de vie*. Such a large purchase made a great deal of work, because each bottle had to be provided with paperwork to show that excise tax had been paid. I bought a bottle each of *framboise*, *quetsch* and *mirabelle*, wishing to contribute to the supply for our house in Nancy, but also wanting to take a sample for my parents, to whom such spirits were unknown. About half of the bottle of *framboise* eventually arrived in Tasmania.



Rue des Jardiniers, Nancy. No. 4 is the grey building in the center. Photo taken 1988.

### Food--*Restaurants universitaires*

My status as a visiting researcher at the CRPG might have made it difficult for me to eat at most French university students do, at large university restaurants that serve subsidized and plain, but nourishing and large, meals. The CRPG was able to convince the authorities that I was a student, and so I obtained an identification card that enabled me to eat subsidized meals at the student restaurants in the center of the city, and also at the lunchroom of the CRPG, for which the *restaurants universitaires* were the caterer. One of the in-town restaurants was located at one corner of the *Place Stanislas*, next to a sex shop and behind an impressive set of crush-bars. Mostly, my housemates and I ate there, just a 10-minute walk from home. The dreariness of the dark building and its communal tables were offset by the joy of crossing the *Place Stanislas* each evening to reach the restaurant. From time to time, when the establishment at the *Place Stanislas* was closed, we would eat at a cheerier student restaurant on the *Cours Leopold*.

The food at dinner time invariably included three choices of protein course, to which diners could add various salad or cooked-vegetable courses and as much of a starch offering like pasta, rice and mashed potatoes as desired. I marveled at certain students' capacity to consume the starch option. Small bottles of wine were available at extra cost, but my housemates and I agreed that these meals were not worth dignifying with wine; we had better ideas for consuming our daily ration of alcohol as I've recounted above. Concerning the protein courses, there was always at least one I considered edible, but there was often a dish that I wouldn't touch. Such included black puddings, half a grilled beef-brain and beef tongue. The last was served with skin and roots intact (providing me with an unexpected pictorial definition of the French verb *arracher*), and smelled dreadful to me. On the other hand, I greatly looked forward to certain meals. My favorites were couscous with a tasty tagine on Wednesdays, and sauerkraut with thin, spicy sausages and parsley-garnished boiled potatoes on Thursdays. Being in Lorraine, the kitchen served *quiche lorraine* from time to time. This was a

disappointment: stodgy pastry with a smear of egg and cheese mixture on top, and nothing like the gourmet quiches real men aren't supposed to eat.

Eating at the "*Restau-U*" wasn't all smooth sailing. The reception staff at the *Place Stanislas* restaurant, a bitter group of people who had dead-end jobs and who disliked students in general after the 1968 student demonstrations and riots, decided that I was different, and took exception to my wearing an Australian army-surplus great-coat when it was cold. They decided that I was an interloper, not eligible for subsidized meals. It proved very difficult to get the management to speak to the staff about this, despite repeated requests. This led me to discover that I could yell at someone in French. One particularly unpleasant old woman decided not to accept my meal ticket one evening, and when I protested, she yelled "*Ça suffit!*" I yelled back "*Ça suffira quand je pourrai manger ici en paix!* (It will be enough when I can eat here in peace!)" I thrust my meal ticket towards her, and she refused to take it. I told her that I would eat there whether or not she took the ticket, and proceeded to do so after she refused. Another time, Toto took my part with a disagreeable young man, not much older than me, who often took the tickets. He asked an impertinent question, to which Toto, behind me in line, responded "*Ça ne vous regarde pas!*" (That's none of your business.) Eventually, Marie-Pierre pointed out the manager, who happened to be in the serving area one evening. I succeeded in getting him to inform the staff that I was a legitimate customer. I had no problems afterwards. One night, I passed the young man as he was walking home near the *Place Stanislas*. I glared at him and sensed fear, and will admit that I was tempted to turn and follow him to see how fast he might be able to run.

My other negative experience occurred while my house-mates were away for a few weeks completing their *stages*, experience employment in chemical factories. I ate alone that whole time; even some students I knew somewhat would eat at other tables.

I met some American students who had had a far more negative experience of the *restaurants*

*universitaires* in Strasbourg. One of them noticed a student of Arab appearance advancing towards him with a broken bottle as a weapon. The American said he broke a wooden chair over the attacker.

From time to time, all of the restaurants would be closed during university holidays. I had a small *Camping-gaz* stove and rudimentary equipment to cook simple things in my room at such times. I didn't consider eating out at commercial restaurants to be a regular part of my budget.

Years later, in Tucson, my husband James and I were celebrating the 14<sup>th</sup> of July (which is also the anniversary of our meeting) at *Le Rendezvous*, a pricy French restaurant in Tucson. Once the Bastille Day meal had been served to those lucky enough to have obtained a reservation, the chef came to speak to his guests. We spoke French with him, leading him to ask how we had learned the language. My story included my time in Nancy. He responded that he had had one of his first jobs at the *Restaurant universitaire* by the *Place Stanislas*. The world is indeed small! I was glad to learn that he had escaped and risen so far in the culinary world.

There was a small restaurant called the *Oxebon* (*Oh que c'est bon*; I liked to call it the Oxbone) just up the *rue St. Jean*, and it had a very reasonable *prix fixe* offering, but even that cost several times the subsidized price of a student meal. I had other plans for whatever money I could save.



### The Centre de Recherches Pétrographiques et Géochimiques (CRPG)

The CRPG occupied a modern building atop an escarpment looking over the basin in which most of Nancy lay. It was near the ancient village of Vandœuvre-lès-Nancy, effectively a suburb of the city. Alain Weisbrod agreed to my request to spend an academic year as a visiting researcher, but it was Bernard Poty who took me under his care. The laboratory provided me with the use of a Chaix-Méca heating and freezing stage, an excellent, locally designed piece of equipment that far outshone anything I had had access to in Tasmania. Before I left for France, my adviser Mike Solomon had told me that it wouldn't matter too much if I didn't get much done. By that, I'm sure he meant that it would be a perfect time for a Tasmanian farm boy to absorb some European culture and broaden my horizons. However, when I saw the equipment, I realized that I had been granted a fine opportunity to get my research done, one not to be wasted. I was perfectly happy to spend five working days a week at the microscope, and devote weekends to absorbing the culture.

I was one of several foreign visitors; others came from Canada (Ron Openshaw), Iran (Hashem Eminan and Firouz whose last name I've forgotten) and Turkey (Nuri Terzioglu). In addition, there were several French researchers and students using the laboratory during my stay. Hashem was undertaking a project very similar to my own, a fluid inclusion study of the Sar Cheshmeh deposit in Iran. The laboratory was managed by Léon Jachimovicz, who not only maintained the physical plant, but also kept an eye on the welfare of visitors such as I. He

introduced me to the manufacturer of the Chaix-Méca stages, whose company was in Nancy and had designed the equipment in consultation with the laboratory. The CRPG staff also helped me assemble a set of photographs of my fluid inclusions. Michel Denis obtained a set of ion-ratio analyses on leachates of crushed quartz, a dataset whose full implications I only realized decades later.

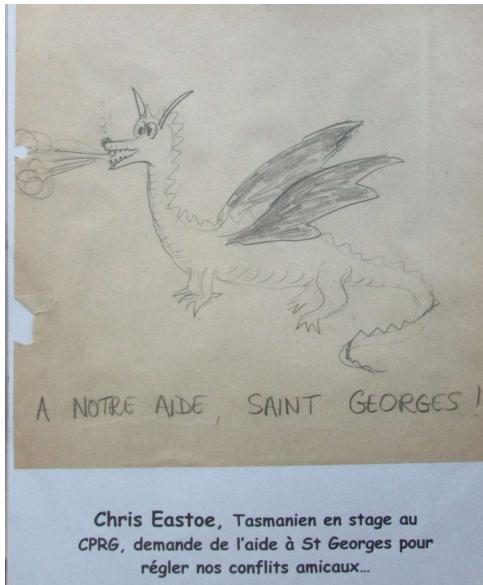
I had full use of the fluid inclusion laboratory for my entire stay. I arrived with a box of quartz specimens in the form of doubly polished slabs up to 1 mm thick, kindly prepared by the Geology Department at the University of Tasmania. It turned out that I had more specimens than I could finish during my 9-month stay, but I managed to complete a very large amount of work, and send the data safely back to Tasmania (on paper in those days). The work I finished in Nancy made my project the success it eventually became. I was able to undertake it in the company of experts with whom I could discuss the aspects I did not understand.

The potential tedium of such a large amount of microscope work was alleviated by my being in an exotic place, but also by the beauty of the objects I was studying. The following paragraph is from my *Tales of Papua New Guinea*, also presented on my web site.

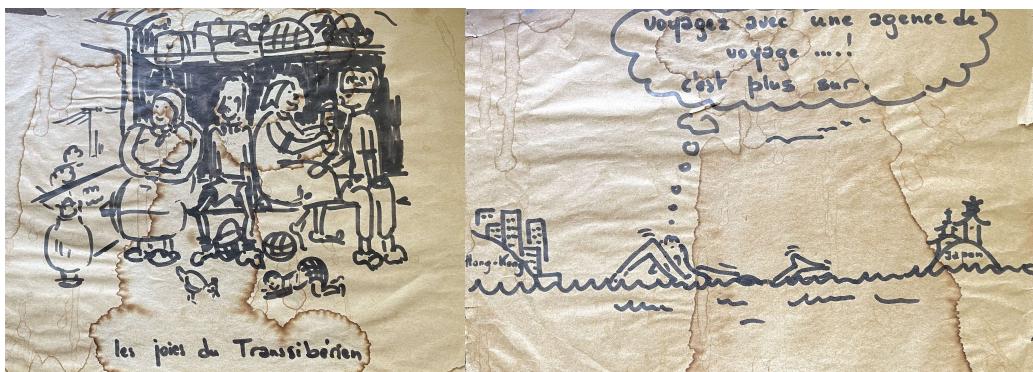
*I never tired of looking at the inclusions in the copper-bearing quartz veins. At their peak of perfection, all too rarely achieved, the salt-rich kind were microscopic marvels, collections of near-perfect geometric forms. The cavity itself would take the form of a quartz crystal, a hexagonal prism capped at each end with a six-sided pyramid. Within, I would find a dark sphere (the gas bubble formed as the cavity contents contracted on cooling), a well-formed cube of halite standing out against the liquid phase in high relief, a more rounded cube, lower in relief, of sylvite, a box-shaped crystal of anhydrite, a blood-red hexagonal flake of hematite and a more-or-less tetrahedral opaque crystal of chalcopyrite that would appear as a black diamond or triangle, depending on the angle of view. Some inclusions contained several smaller crystals, some colored yellowish and probably consisting of a sodium-iron salt. These salt-rich fluid inclusions represented a boiling liquid, containing at least 50% and as much as 70% salt, that had invaded the deposit at a temperature of 400 to 600° Celsius. Interspersed with them were fluid inclusions consisting mostly of vapor, and a third kind consisting simply of liquid with a vapor bubble.*

Another form of alleviation, practiced by almost everyone associated with the lab, was humour. Some was typically French—a *contrepèterie* or a pun on the lab. whiteboard, a list of suggested names for Poty's newborn son. Someone brought the innards of a small music box that played the melody of *Für Elise* and resonated beautifully on the wooden table in the middle of the room. After too many hours at the microscope, one of us would leap up and crank the handle of the music box. It disappeared after a couple of months, and we suspected that one of our office neighbours, tired of hearing it, had spirited it away. Jacques Leroy contributed expert cartoons celebrating various events in the laboratory. I have two of them, comments on the

difficulties I had with my arrangements with the Soviet tourist agency on my way back to Australia. I decided to try my less-talented hand at a cartoon one afternoon when the laboratory's Administrative Secretary, Mimi (Michelle Seguin), seemed to be frustrated with everyone and locked herself in her office. My offering was a dragon with an inscription, which I taped to the glass panel beside her door. Mimi emerged later in the afternoon complaining "*On me traite de dragon!*" ("They're calling me a dragon!"). The drawing disappeared, and I was a bit worried that I might have offended her.



Over the years, I've kept in touch with Mimi, and eventually went to Toulon to visit her in 2015, forty years after my stay in Nancy. She clearly treasured the years she had worked at the CPRG, and showed me an album of photos and other memorabilia. I was astounded and overwhelmed with emotion when she turned a page, and there was my dragon. I hadn't expected ever to see it again, though I'd remembered the story clearly and related it numerous times. I wouldn't have had the image to share here unless she had kept it all those years.



Jacques Leroy's cartoons concerning my return trip to Australia.  
They have accumulated some wear over the decades.

Some of the humour did verge on getting me into trouble. One day at lunch, I was commenting on the crush-bars outside the *restaurant universitaire* at the *Place Stanislas*. Someone said jokingly that they reflected the evolutionary struggle for survival of the fittest for the students. I quickly rejoined "But in England, the struggle is intellectual." Just at that moment, the lunchroom had fallen silent for reasons unconnected with our conversation, and everyone must

have heard what I said. The silence persisted uneasily. On another occasion, Ron Openshaw and I decided to sing “Waltzing Matilda” at the generously lubricated celebration after a thesis celebration. Madame de la Roche, the wife of the CRPG director (Hubert de la Roche), asked me to her table and sing more Australian songs, plying me with wine as I did my best to comply. Singing and drinking together are not a good combination for maintaining sobriety, and I eventually spilled a glass of wine. I had to ask someone to drive me home, leaving my car at the CRPG; fortunately my housemates weren’t at home when I was delivered there. The next morning, I caught a bus to work and was walking up the hill to the CRPG when Mme. de la Roche drove past and stopped to ask how my head was feeling. I had the impression that such an incident would be tolerated only once at the laboratory!

### **Music**

As I mentioned above, our landlord Dr. Pernet was involved in organizing the chamber music concert series for Nancy, held in the main hall of the *Hôtel de Ville*. Therefore, his tenants were encouraged to attend. Renaud and Bruno, but not Toto, were subscribers, and arranged for me to obtain season tickets too. I remember particularly a performance of Mozart’s flute quartets, played in the beautiful, ceiling-frescoed space dating from about the time of their composition.

A city of the size of Nancy is regularly on the circuit of many travelling European musicians. I’m sure that I didn’t hear about many performances I could have attended. My regular evening walk to the *Place Stanislas* led me past the cathedral, where events were advertised. The ones I did find out about were spectacular. The baroque cathedral is a great stone barn of a building, cavernous inside, with relatively little decoration to modify the acoustics, apart from the ornate case of a magnificent 18<sup>th</sup> century organ. The organ seems to have been well designed for the space it serves. The concert of heroic music for trumpet and organ that I attended was therefore a memorable experience. Not so the concert of baroque music given by a touring chamber orchestra, however; their music was completely confused by the reverberations of the building. What were the organizers thinking? I no longer remember who performed in either case. The *Eglise de Saint-Fiacre* also had a concert series that included a most memorable performance of Bach violin sonatas by Eduard Melkus (violin) and Huguette (harpsichord). They were top-rank artists offering a stunning performance for relatively modest admission in a small neogothic space.

When Renaud, Bruno and I went together to the cathedral for concerts, there would be a crush of people trying to enter the building; people don’t form queues in Nancy. They showed me how to get through such crowds as fast as possible. They would go to the edge of the crush against the building wall, flatten their backs against the wall and move along it towards the door. It worked!



The great organ of Nancy Cathedral

*Bing Images*

### **Rotary Foundation contacts**

One of the local Rotary Clubs had been designated as my host for the stay, and I went to visit a representative soon after I arrived. Very little happened between me and the Rotarians in Nancy. I believe they didn't quite know what to do with me, and were relieved when I soon made my own arrangements for lodgings and so on. One of the members invited me for family dinner twice. Eventually, the club asked if I would give a slide show for them, one evening not long before I left. Unfortunately, there was a mix-up on my part and I missed the event. The one engagement I did have was a slide show on Papua New Guinea for the Rotary Club in Toul, a small medieval city just west of Nancy. That was well received; it turned out that one of the members had spent time in the New Hebrides and knew some Pidgin English. I think it was he who invited me to dinner at his house a couple of weeks later. I dutifully took along a gift for my hosts. He came to the door when I rang, and I presented the gift as "for Madame." He said that there was no Madame, and I found myself eating dinner with a group of six bachelors. I've wondered since then whether I missed something that ought to have been rather obvious—had they noticed something about my sexuality and tried to make contact? I was too "new in town" to be responding to such occasions, which in retrospect was sad, because it might have added a dimension to my stay that I would have welcomed.

The regional organization of Rotary Clubs did much better than the local ones. The two other Rotary Foundation fellows in Nancy (Dave from the USA, Americo from Brazil) and I were invited to various events. There was a tour of an iron mine just south of Metz, after which we attended a *degustation* of snails, and spent the night in a beautiful country house. It was May, and I remember waking to a voluminous chorus of bird song in the hedges behind the house. Another time, the Rotary Club of Metz invited us and other students from the region for a weekend. I was able to attend on the Saturday, when we were provided with a beautiful lunch. I had been in France long enough to have favorite cheeses, and I was giving my opinions at a table of Americans. When I mentioned Alsatian munster as an excellent, if smelly, cheese, they thought I was going on a bit, and decided to see if I was serious. They persuaded a waitress to bring the largest piece of munster the kitchen would part with and set it in front of me. I found it to be the best I had yet had; and under the circumstances I didn't feel I needed to share a morsel of it!

The best outing was organized by the Rotary Club of Epernay, in Champagne. Rotary fellows from all over the country were invited to spend a weekend in Epernay, with several social events including a drive to Rheims to see the cathedral. I stayed with M. et Mme. Claude Nomblot. Mme. Nomblot cooked a tasty meal of *bœuf bourguignon* and kindly gave me the recipe, which I still have in the original French and use frequently. The Nomblots sent me home to Nancy with two excellent bottles of champagne in my pack. One of them provided the toast for my coming travels at my farewell *raclette* party. My clearest memory of the trip is the Gothic cathedral in Rheims. We were able to contrast the reconstructed west end of the cathedral with photos of the destruction that resulted from a fire in scaffolding erected during World War I in a misguided effort to protect the mediaeval sculptures there. The fire became hot enough to melt the lead roof, and the liquid lead poured through the gargoyle mouths, freezing there. Some of those gargoyle are preserved with their frozen streams of lead. As we climbed through the tiny west-end door, a small aperture in the large doors that would have been opened for the coronation of the kings of France, my attention was diverted for a moment until I found myself in the vastness of the interior. I had a spiritual experience that has seldom come my way since: I felt as though I was picked up, expanded in some way, to adjust to the grand proportions of the nave.

Thirty or so years later, my husband James and I bought a piece of munster cheese in a village in Alsace. We took it back to the house of our friends in Germany by which time it had developed a very mature fragrance. They didn't want it left in their fridge, so sent it with us on a train ride to Paris. We didn't dare eat it in the train, but when the SNCF network broke down, leaving our train in Metz for two hours, we were able to consume the cheese safely on the platform of the railway station. So it was that I had my second experience with munster cheese in Metz.

## Club Alpin Français

I joined the local chapter of the Club Alpin Français soon after arriving in Nancy, hoping it would help me to explore the local landscape. The Nancy chapter was small, with about 15 regular members, who welcomed me warmly despite my strange lunch habits. I regarded a *demi-baguette* with some good cheese and salami as a sufficient lunch on a hike; they didn't! The club had a most interesting project: visiting all of the numerous castles in three *départements* within easy driving distance of Nancy. There were 130 of them, if I remember correctly. So I was introduced to the fairytale landscape of Alsace and the Vosges Mountains in spring. Spring seemed to come earlier in Alsace than in Nancy by about two weeks. In 1976, it was a long, sunny spring with little rain—bad for farmers, but a delight for us hikers. Consider driving to a village of half-timbered and stone buildings set in rolling vineyards, setting out along a trail by about 9:30 a.m. and by 10, reaching a sufficient height above the vineyards to hear church bells from numerous surrounding villages. In May, the path would be festooned with wildflowers, and cuckoos would sing in the woods. The ascending path would lead us to the first ridge-crest of the Vosges on the Alsatian side, where

Being mistaken for a German seemed a risk one had to take so close to the German border. Later in the Spring, my blond friend Dave (an American fellow of the Rotary Foundation) and I were hiking in the Vosges and were stopped by some people who asked us for directions in German. I was about to answer in kind, but Dave had heard their French accent. They had assumed that two fair-skinned people so close to the border must be Germans.

One of the picture-perfect Alsatian villages we visited was Hunawihr, noted for having one church shared by Catholics and Protestants. After I returned to Tasmania, I visited the apartment of my American student friend Scott. There on his wall was a poster-size photo of the church and vineyards at Hunawihr. "I've been there!" I informed him. He had thought the place so beautiful that it couldn't possibly be real.

as many as five castles could be visited in a single outing. On one such outing, on a Sunday, we finally reached a place accessible by car with restaurants not too far from parking. As we walked down, gentlemen in Sunday suits were strolling towards their Sunday lunches. I was walking with a woman friend whose hair was straw-gold in color, and mine is red. One of the gentlemen therefore made a wrong assumption. I distinctly heard him say in French "That would be typical of Germans to go walking on a Sunday dressed like that." My fellow club members were indignant when I told them.

On another occasion we visited the Haut Koenigsbourg, a Vosgean castle that had been refurbished by Kaiser Wilhelm when Alsace was

German territory. It was November, and a cold, grim day. Few leaves remained on the trees, but we were able to gather chestnuts on the ground. The castle stands complete, the only one I saw in the Vosges that was not in ruins. My French friends disapproved of the somewhat Wagnerian style of the restorations.



Hunawihr in Alsace

*Bing Images*

On the November 11 public holiday, we decided to visit Trèves/Trier with its Roman heritage. We drove down the Moselle River in fog, emerging into bright sunlight at the border. The day's activities included visiting a sumptuous Roman mosaic floor at a village called Nennig and seeing intact Roman buildings in Trèves itself. For me, they also included a vehicle breakdown. My VW beetle just wouldn't start after we parked for lunch in the city. Luck was with me, however, and there was a Volkswagen dealership just over the street. While everyone else had lunch, I accompanied my car to the dealership. The repair was simple: a broken wire in the distributor as a result of an amateur repair undertaken before I bought the car. The mechanic was outraged: "*Das ist schrecklich!*" he exclaimed.



Roman mosaic, Nennig

*Bing images*

At my last meeting with the club, one of the members kindly brought along a large basket of delicious cherries from her tree. My association with the club had been another high point of my stay in Nancy, introducing me to people who were not academics, and to a landscape I still wish I could revisit.



Wissembourg, in northern Alsace, from a spring Club Alpin trip in 1976.

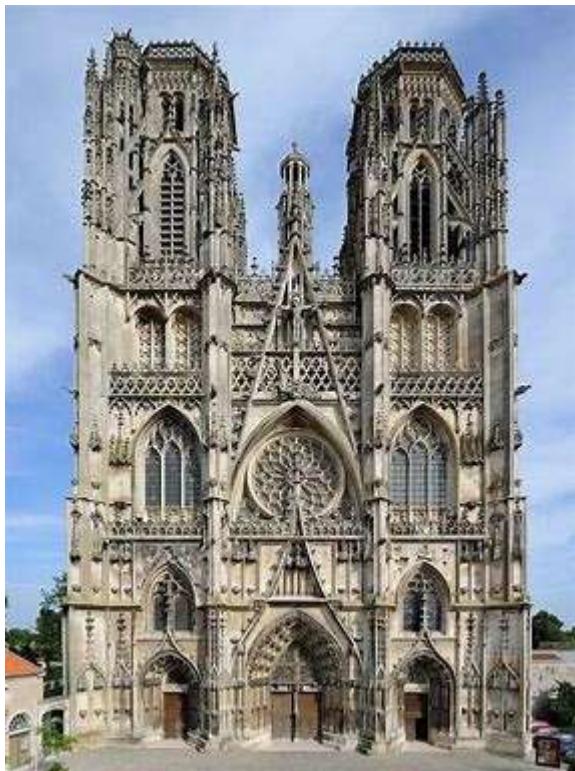
### Rural Lorraine

Lorraine and Alsace are very different regions. Alsace occupies the west side of the Rhine graben, from the crest of the Vosges east to the river, Lorraine lies on the uplands of the Paris basin, west of the crest of the Vosges, and sloping gently towards the valley of the Seine. The gentle slope is broken by arcuate ridges formed from the more resistant sedimentary rocks in the Paris basin. Rural Lorraine is a rolling landscape of farmland and carefully-managed woodland sprinkled with small villages. The villages all look similar, consisting of grey-brown walled houses and their terracotta tile roofs, and traditionally smell of livestock dung-heaps. One of the villages, Domrémy-la-Pucelle, preserves a house that is said to be the birthplace of Joan of Arc. The rural landscape is interrupted by the Moselle River, which approximately coincides with a north-south industrial axis including the cities of Metz and Nancy. The effect of this landscape on me was dismal once the grey weather of autumn set in. I remember few sunny days between mid-September and Christmas; one sunny afternoon in October, at the time of autumn color in the woods, I was in no mood to waste an opportunity to be outside. I abandoned my measurements in the laboratory and went for a drive in the *Forêt de Haye* on the west side of Nancy. I almost got the car stuck on a back road, but escaped by using the jack and placing rocks under the wheels. The grey weather returned, and persisted until snow fell just after Christmas.

Spring arrived in mid-April with a sunny afternoon and definite first signs of greening on the boughs of deciduous trees. The seasonal demarcation was clear, and clearly felt by everyone working in the laboratory. By 3 pm, I was the only one left in my area of the building. I experienced the release, too, even though I had no previous experience of the end of a European winter. Joy and tension penetrated my very core. Could there have been a genetic memory, still alive after 120 years? From that day on, spring proved to be a beautiful sequence of fine sunny weeks with little rain. By that stage, I had been in Lorraine long enough to appreciate its beauty, all the more after the grey of autumn and winter. My Brazilian Rotary-fellow friend Américo and I went exploring in the woods to see how the onset of spring was

unfolding. Our first walk, in the *Forêt de Haye*, was in mid-April when the trees were still largely bare, but clumps of purple flowers already dotted the woodland floor, along with a few lily-of-the-valley. The second excursion was a picnic in woodland further southwest of Nancy on May Day, when the new foliage was at its brightest green, and it was sheer joy to be outside on a warm, sunny afternoon. Later, several friends and I went driving in sparsely-populated countryside northwest of Nancy. I remember a field of dandelions, the photo my friend Denis W. took of me sitting among the flowers, and the adder I nearly stepped on. Nearby was an ancient farmyard with a picturesque, tumbledown barn that one of our company stopped to photograph from the driveway. The peasant farmer, indignant at such urban, artsy behavior, rushed out yelling "*Mais c'est foutue!*"—it (the barn) is wrecked, or words to that effect

One of the jewels of Lorraine is the city of Toul, on the Moselle River. Nancy, a few kilometers to the east, has overshadowed Toul in population and economy, and so the smaller city has retained a medieval aspect, albeit with somewhat reconstructed fortifications. It is best viewed from the main road to Nancy. The city wall, virtually complete, surrounds a cluster of buildings with terracotta roofs. From the field of terracotta emerge the dark Gothic forms of two churches: the greater is the cathedral of St. Etienne, and the lesser the church of Saint Gengoult. When I tried driving my VW beetle inside the walls, I would invariably find myself squeezing the car through one extremely narrow mediaeval alley.



Cathedral of St. Etienne, Toul

*Bing images*

The Vosges in Lorraine are spectacular, particularly the higher peaks to the south. In summer, high grassy meadows are adorned with multi-hued pansies. One of the *Club Alpin* hikes took us across such a plateau, where I, and possibly my French companions (who had brought lunch), were surprised to find a small restaurant that catered to hikers. In autumn, the woodland colors are brilliant. In winter, the snow sparkles in the moonlight on frosty nights in pine forest, and the few small lakes are frozen. Toto took me and a friend to *Lac Longemer* with its picturesque chapel on a point. Toto misjudged the strength of the ice and finished up with wet socks, unwittingly revealing to our noses how infrequently a student's socks might get washed in those days. In spring, patches of brilliant green return to slopes that were orange in autumn.

### **The Alps**

Images of the Alps, mostly associated with Switzerland or Austria, were familiar to me as a child: yodelling and alphorns, the *Sound of Music* movie and above all Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*. The only place where I had seen mountains of comparable stature was New Guinea, and those mountains were a very different matter. I badly wanted to go to the Alps, and I had two chances during my stay in Nancy.

The first, more of a passing view of the Alps, came during the All-Saints Day holiday, when Renaud, Marie-Pierre, her sister and I set off in Renaud's car for a driving trip. Our route took us through one of the southern passes of the Vosges, where autumn colors were at their peak. As we crossed into Alsace, we passed from the overcast sky of Lorraine into sunshine. We continued across southern Alsace, through Basel where we stopped at a fair to buy Magenbrot, along the south bank of the Rhine past the *Rheinfall*, the great cascade of the Rhine, and through towns and villages of houses with colorful, highly-detailed mural paintings. We stopped at Augst to see a Roman amphitheater, at St. Gallen to visit a baroque monastery church with pale blue plaster decorations, and spent a night in hostel accommodation near Zurich. At one point, Marie-Pierre wanted me to ask whether a craft shop had any wooden mice. My German seemed to be more functional than my friends'. "Leider nicht," said the lady in the store, but she did have very beautiful hedgehogs and I bought one for my sister Helen. The following day's drive was spectacular; the weather was clear and sunny, and we could see across the north Swiss farmland and its picturesque villages, past the autumn-tinted lowland woods to the snow-covered high Alps.



Wattwil, Switzerland

November 1975

Our route took us into Liechtenstein, which we crossed without stopping. The road passed through a gorge in which the sunlight lit up a forest in peak autumn orange; it was as though we were driving through a fire. We intersected a corner of Austria and rounded the Bodensee, stopping to see the ancient harbor at Lindau in Germany in foggy morning weather. The remainder of the trip took us across the Black Forest with a stop at Freiburg im Breisgau before we returned to France.

Bernard Poty had bought a chalet in Chamonix, and needed to transport some antique furniture that was being stored by a friend in *La Bresse*, a region in the French Jura, to his new house. He asked whether I could come along to help lift the furniture in and out of a rented truck. We would spend two nights in Chamonix. The best route between *La Bresse* and Chamonix passed through Switzerland near Geneva, but we had to drive around through French territory because my passport was at the Soviet Embassy in Paris, for issuance of a visa. During our full day in Chamonix, Bernard said that he would drop me at the foot of Mt. Blanc so that I could take the train to the *Mer de Glace*, the great glacier flowing from the mountain, while he worked on the chalet. He gave me strict instructions not to walk on the glacier. A train left every 20 minutes, and each one at that time of day seemed to be full, probably carrying 400 people. At the top, there was a terrace café where people could sit with a view of Mont Blanc, and there was a walk to an ice cave with carvings of animals.

Of the thousand or more people arriving at the terrace each hour, very few were attempting to go beyond the terrace café. I was almost alone as I went to the ice cave, and completely alone as I clambered a little further to find a place to admire the *Mer de Glace* in its curved valley sweeping down from the mountain. The view was one of the most beautiful I had ever seen, the curvature of the glacier accentuated by longitudinal streams of rock fragments on the ice. It was a pleasure to sit in a stillness that was punctuated from time to time by the falling of a rock on the surface of the ice stream. I eventually realized that I was witnessing the creeping movement of the glacier, which caused ice to heave into steep ridges down which a stone would topple from time to time.



The peak of Mont Blanc, seen from the Mer de Glace, May 1975.

The magnificent sweep of flowing ice that I enjoyed watching from my viewpoint in 1975 is no more. The glacier has retreated far up its valley because of climate change.



*Bing images.*

For my ultimate Alpine experience, I was to wait until I visited Zermatt during the weeks I spent travelling after leaving Nancy. That story will appear in a different place.

### **Easter in Burgundy**

The Pierson family, Bernard's parents, owned a vacation house in a small town (whose name I have forgotten) on the banks of the Yonne River, at the northwestern extremity of Burgundy. The whole family was to be there for Easter, and I was invited to join them. I drove there in my VW beetle, and must have taken about three hours each way across beautiful French countryside. I haven't remembered many details of the weekend, probably because the trip turned out not to be the happiest venture of my stay in France. I arrived to find some family problems in play. Bernard took me out one afternoon to see the Romanesque abbey church in Vézelay. It's a magnificent 12<sup>th</sup> century limestone building full of sculpture, surmounting the ridge on which the city stands, and we had a glorious afternoon for the visit. Walking up the main street of the town towards the church at the summit truly elevated the spirit. I hadn't realized at that point the entirety of what was happening at home, or that he was escaping the difficulties. Over the following day, the situation became much clearer to me. It was difficult to know how to react; how much should I notice or pretend that I wasn't noticing? Abruptly fleeing the situation of my own will did not seem appropriate. Fortunately, Mme. Pierson finally gave me permission to do so, suggesting I should drive on my own into Sens and see the cathedral there. Afterwards, I returned to the vacation house and took my leave as soon as possible.

## Paris

I travelled back to Paris twice during my stay, once by train for a conference and another time by car just to see some sights. I didn't have any desire to drive my car within the city. I asked to stay at the Martin's house in the inner suburbs, not far outside the Boulevard Périphérique, the ring road. Thus, my experience of Paris traffic was limited to driving around the Périphérique from the eastern side of the city to the southwestern side, and that was quite enough. My laboratory colleague Chinh accompanied me, so I had a navigator.

The detailed recollections of Paris that I want to include here come from a later visit, in 1980. That's the year in which the ten-yearly International Geological Congress was held in Paris. The meeting was a marathon among professional conferences, a full two weeks of meetings. It was considered an important affair by the French Government, to the extent that the French President, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, addressed the meeting for nearly an hour one afternoon. The organizers also reserved the cathedral, Notre Dame de Paris, for a concert of heroic music for brass and organ late one afternoon. The performers were one of the titular organists, probably Pierre Cochereau at that time, and Roger Delmotte on the trumpet. It was a top-class event, but not well attended as I remember.



The Congress commemorative medal,  
a heavy piece of brass about 4 inches  
in diameter.

My talk on alteration zonation in the Cambrian volcanic rocks of western Tasmania was late in the schedule. I was still too young to be able to relax much until my talk was over, so I did relatively little in the way of exploring the city until the last day. By that time, I was thoroughly tired of lacklustre offerings from Communist-bloc earth scientists; also, the sun had finally emerged after a long cloudy spell. More of that below.

The Congress met in the large convention center not far from the *Bois de Boulogne*. I was staying at a *cité universitaire*, a university student residence, on the other side of the old city and used the metro every day. I soon realized how careful I needed to be in the metro. I happened to lower my left hand towards my trouser pocket one day, and met an African man's hand headed in the same direction. He didn't get even close to stealing anything, so I just glared at him. The *cité universitaire* was cheap, but far from ideal because there were some very noisy foreign students still in residence for the summer, and they seemed to have nothing better to do than drink and carouse all night. Using the showers was also interesting. The

shower stalls provided incomplete privacy, and the room was frequented by some tense, unhappy homosexual men looking for contacts. It was nothing I felt remotely drawn to, but also nothing I couldn't handle, and I did not feel threatened.

Early in the stay, I noticed an advertisement on a station wall: *La Cage aux Folles* was playing at a theatre. The movie had just appeared in Tasmania before my departure, but I had been too busy to go. I noted the address of the theatre, and made my way there on the metro one evening. I was surprised and delighted to discover that I was about to see not the movie, but a live production. At live theatres in Paris, one must use the services of an usher to get to one's seat. I did not know that this service was provided for a ten-franc tip. The usher pointed this out to me and I apologized for not knowing, saying that I was a foreigner. "Ça se voit," the usher responded. ("That's obvious.") Such formalities dealt with, I settled in to watch an excellent, riotously funny production. I saw the movie (also a French production) some months later, and it was good, but lacked some of the punch of the live version, particularly where the restriction of the play to a smaller number of sets/scenes led to different approaches to expressing the humour of the story.

My Ph.D. supervisor Mike Solomon arrived a few days into the conference. The convention center dining room provided lunch, a poor affair at which vats of institutional stew were on the menu, not my idea of eating in France. I found an alternative and decided to show Mike. An épicerie was located about 10 minutes' walk from the convention center. It was one of very few in that part of the city, but it offered just what I wanted for lunch in France: demi-baguettes, cheeses and salami that could be bought in small portions, some flavorful yogurt in small pots and fruit. These we took back to the convention center, found a table and enjoyed them under the envious gaze of those around us.

One evening, I took Mike and a friend of his into the city center for a meal. We found an Algerian restaurant offering couscous. Our entry seems to cause some anxiety to the management. I asked for a table, but was told that we couldn't eat there; this establishment was for blacks and Arabs only. Looking around, I saw that the clientele was indeed uniformly dark-skinned. I was informed that the restaurant had another branch for white people just around the corner, and that would be an appropriate place for us to eat. So we had our first lesson on race relations in Paris.

My friend Hachem, from my days in Nancy, was at the conference. At our first meeting, he approached me with an urgent question: could he move to Australia with his family? He wanted to leave Iran because of the war with Iraq and the likelihood that his son might eventually be drafted as a child soldier. I decided to make an appointment and accompany Hachem to the Australian Embassy to discuss this, thinking that he would be taken seriously and treated courteously if accompanied by an Australian. The staff member who met us assured us that Hachem's qualifications as a geologist would give him a strong case for immigration.

Once back in Australia, I did my best to help Hachem find out about available geologist's positions. It was necessary to be cautious, to avoid the possibility of negative repercussions from the Iranian Government. Hachem was a valued scientist who had discovered a large porphyry copper deposit in Iran. I took the Positions Available pages from the *Australian* newspaper, used them as wrapping for something innocuous like an old book or a film-box, and mailed them to Iran. For a while, I heard nothing. Then one day, I was at my desk at the mine offices in Queenstown, Tasmania, when the tea-lady delivered a post card sent from a motel in Perth. Hachem had arrived! That evening, I went to the public phone at the post office and rang to welcome him to Australia.

As we were in the diplomatic district of Paris, Hachem decided to take me to the Iranian Embassy after our meeting. It was nearly five, closing time, as we walked in, and we encountered a man who was padlocking chains over a pile of carpets in the entrance hall. Seeing humour in the situation, I asked him: « *Est-ce que ce sont des tapis qui volent ?* » He rejoined in a flash: « *Non, ce sont des tapis qui se volent* » ("Are those carpets that fly?" "No, they're carpets that get stolen."). I'm sure he had used that fine French pun many times before. It was very funny and I appreciated it greatly.

My evening of release from the conference eventually arrived. It was a Friday, a warm evening, sunny to begin with, and Paris came alive. I discovered this bit-by-bit, beginning by stopping at the *Arc de Triomphe* where a *breton* Gaelic instrumental band was performing. Generally encouraged, I decided to walk all over the city and see what I could find in the way of street life. The entertainment lasted all evening; the city was simply buzzing with energy. Street musicians were everywhere. The acts I remember best were a group playing an oudh and other Arabic instruments outside the Pompidou Centre and some South Americans playing Andean music not far away. My tour finished late in the evening in the Boulevard St. Michel, watching a fire-eater.

The following day, I packed and left the *cité universitaire*, none too soon, and reported to the *Gare d'Orléans* for a ride on the overnight train to Madrid. Another adventure awaited, at Rio Tinto in Spain this time.