

Pyrenees divide 'striking contrast' of scenery

By MARIA WAWER

A few weeks ago, the Brunswickan carried the first part of my European junket, my stay in Spain. Now comes France...

The contrast between the Spanish side of the Pyrenees, and the French, is striking. In Spain, one could revise the ruggedness of the land mirrored in its pueblos and castillos. These structures were massive, heavy officers, with a poetry, not of romantic coquettishness, but of tragic strength, standing in a land of subdued greens, browns and yellows. In France, just 15 miles across the border - mon Dieu, quelle difference!

The hills were covered with trees so dark as to appear almost blue, much like a Fragonard painting. Dotting the hills were little jewels of luxury palaces, whose builders had apparently never heard the word 'fortification.' She had the appearance of having been built by this, that or the other duke, for this, that or the other mistress.

I was travelling by train, and since, typically, I had decided on my departure date approximately 24 hours beforehand, there had been no time to make a train reservation. It was August and the train was packed. Thus, I can honestly say I covered 1/3 of Europe from Spain to France, on foot - standing room in a train passage.

However, I was not suffering too much. The company was très agréable - a detachment of French Airforce paratroopers who cared for me in the finest tradition of French chivalry. I had a good talk with them concerning everything from what the French press was saying concerning the Quebec separatist movement (apparently very little) to what a Frenchman considers important in life (three guesses.)

At four in the morning, I mentioned I was getting hungry. This comment elicited from them immediate rummaging in their duffel bags, but the only thing anyone could find was a can of beans, which was quickly opened with a knife. One of the guys brought paper towels from the washroom to serve as napkins and we sat down to a rather messy but very inspiring picnic of approximately five beans each.

We got to Paris at six in the morning. The guys were to report to their camp right away, so after they took care of my luggage for me, we went for a badly needed farewell cup of coffee.

Paris! What a city! Many of the people I have spoken to in Canada insist on calling it a dirty, unfriendly, expensive place. Mais non! Of all the continental European cities I have seen, it is by far my favorite.

Cold? Unfriendly? I did not

meet one really unpleasant Parisian and most were extremely helpful. True, the city is besieged by tourists and all the personnel is tired to death (more physically so than anything else) from constant dealing with this onslaught.

What I found, however, is that the so-called Parisian coldness is often just a reflection of tourist's expectations. Tourists expect to be treated badly and withdraw into a cold shell. If one makes even a small effort to smile, they react with sheer gratitude that someone finally recognized their humanity. Your waiter, maid or store clerk needs to be loved as much as you do. In restaurants, the waiters bend over backward with suggestions for everything from dishes to try to places to visit. The hotel personnel in both places I stayed (I switched to be closer to the centre) were willing to spend hours answering and asking questions and these people were natives, not summer help from out of the country.

In the parks, on the streets, the people are great. It is a very cosmopolitan city, and also a conbergmopolitan city, and also a converging point for students from across the world. One night, as an Egyptian student and I visited the park around the Eiffel Tower, we ran into a group of Spanish students singing Spanish songs, a group of French youth playing guitars and some chaps from Tunisia playing national instruments and teach-

ing all passers-by their native dances.

It was very pleasant to see a grey-haired, distinguished looking Parisian gentleman join in with wild abandon. And this is a cold city?

It's fun being a girl on a Parisian street. In Spain, one got "Guapas". In France, it is more subtle - a quiet "Quelle est mignonne, la petite!" as one goes by. It completely destroys any illusions one has of looking sexy or sophisticated, but it does have class.

Cliche no. 2: The place is expensive as all hell. Hogwash! By European standards, I admit it's not as dirt cheap as some places, but by Canadian, it's a steal. Where in Canada could you get a steak dinner with a half bottle of wine, in a restaurant with candles and fresh flowers on the table, for \$2.00? One can find such restaurants all over town, as long as one looks for a "Prix Fixe" Menu posted in the window. These places are almost invariably clean, friendly, with food ranging from adequate to very good. A full course meal can cost as little as \$1.50. At the Cité Universitaire, one can get an edible meal for 95 cents.

As far as hotels go, I managed to get very adequate, clean rooms for \$4.00 a night, breakfast included. Neither place had marble floors; but provided more than the basic necessities. Anyway, one doesn't go to Paris to mope around a hotel room.

Paris is an enchanting city in many ways. (This sounds pathetically corny, but it is how I feel.) One discovers something new, or old, with each Metro stop, each side street.

I stumbled upon St. Michael and the Latin Master almost by mistake my second night in town. Coming back from Cite Universit-

aire (the student residence section for all Parisian Universities 4 colleges) I planned to hit Montmartre for an hour or so, but instead of the St. Michael stop and jump off the Metro.

I emerged on the bank of the Seine, just across the river from the famed cathedral, Notre Dame de Paris. It looked beautiful, golden lighted image reflected the waters of the river. (However, one does not visit a cathedral that hour, so I turned my attention to the maze of streets with their Tunisian delicatessans, bistros to my right. The place was alive, and crowded with many students, both French and foreign. I ran into an interesting looking group and together we visited several places, trying North African sweets and French wines.

Just a few blocks further I came upon "Shakespeare's London" - a bookstore specializing mainly in English books, literally piles of them, on the floor on the shelves, interspersed with Italian classics in Italian, Spanish masterpieces in Spanish, and posters everywhere. Nothing is catalogued, filed, indexed. You want a book, you look for it - don't worry, they've got it. The place seems to provide temporary employment for a motley crew of English and American students passing through Paris. They find it the same way I did, come earn some money piling up books to leave.

"Hey, wanna come to Florence next week, I don't feel like going alone." were the first words spoken to me in that joint.


The guy was very nice looking but fate just wouldn't let it be. "Sorry, I've already booked passage to Poland."

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