

England is a great place but France is a drag

By SHERYL WRIGHT

The first thing that I came in contact with in London was a double-decker bus which went from the airport to the city. It was a hectic drive into town. The bus seemed to lean into the curve as a motorcyclist does.

After we had safely arrived in London we set out to look for a youth hostel. The first one we went to was already full, which was remarkable, so we thought, considering it was only May. There were quite a few young North Americans there and I was amazed at the number of Canadians we ran into throughout the trip.

London was a beautiful, fascinating city. The most remarkable thing about it was its cleanliness. I had always been under the impression that London was a dirty city, but even in the lower class areas, the streets were clean and the houses were kept very well.

Downtown was irresistible. The stores, theatres, buildings, squares, and traffic were overwhelming. The cars were mostly small economy cars, with a Rolls Royce here and there. I was surprised to see Mercedes Benzes being used as taxis along with old-fashioned black bazoos.

We saw much extreme poverty

in London. While we were waiting in line outside a theatre a young man and an old man were playing guitar singing, and tap dancing for money, and a sick old woman was huddled against the building, drinking out of something in a paper bag, begging. An old man lived on a park bench near our hostel. He slept there, and his only protection from the elements was an arrangement of cardboard and plastic sheeting, which covered him. God knows what he does in the winter.

One morning we took a bus tour of London and saw the sights. The tour covered the most famous ones; the House of Lords, Trafalgar Square, the Tower of London, the Bank of England, Buckingham Place and the changing of the Guard, and Hyde Park.

Later on, we walked through the Tower of London. It's a big fortress, awesome and frightening because of its history. In Hyde Park is a six-foot wide road of sand where the royalty and millionaires of London ride their horses in the early morning.

We met some friends from home there, and went with them into the country. Driving on the highway on the "wrong side of the road" was a hair raising experience. We were in Somerset, where the scenery is beautiful. The country roads were only wide enough for two tiny cars

abreast. They were bordered by six-foot high hedges and dirt walls. There were typical old English manor houses and cottages with thatched roofs. At night we went pub-crawling around the countryside, from village to village and pub to pub. As you can imagine, it got pretty hairy at times, bombing through those narrow winding roads at night.

We took a hovercraft across the English Channel, to Calais from the white cliffs of Dover, which was exciting. At Calais we boarded a train for Strasbourg. We spent the next seven hours on that train with what seemed to be half the French army. They were on their way to a city past Strasbourg, into Germany. They were all over the train and the rest of us could not get a place to sit. As the ride was at night, my brother fell asleep in the hall of the first class coach where there was a rug, and I tried to fall asleep on our knapsacks. When we arrived in Strasbourg at three in the morning the clerk in the only open hotel was most obnoxious. It was an awful welcome to France after England had been so friendly and pleasant.

Strasbourg was a horrible place. I don't recommend it as a city to visit, or to be even passed through.

It was hard to get hostel accommodations, even in a little town like Nancy. All the hostels in Paris were full. We were directed to a small hotel where we were to get a view of Sacre Coeur. (As it turned out, we could see the topmost inch of two of the spires.) The hotel was run by a little old lady and her daughter, who, incidentally, were just about the only pleasant people we met in Paris. It was a cold city compared to the warmth and hospitality of London.

Paris was so incredibly busy. Some of the boulevards and traffic circles, particularly the traffic circle around the Arc de Triomphe were jammed with cars. They darted in and out of everywhere. Thank goodness for the subways. Without them we wouldn't have dared venture into the busier part of the city.

The subway station under the Louvre was a very surprising thing to see. Most of the stations are filthy places, dating back decades, but this one is a replica of the Louvre! There are copies of art works enclosed in glass cases in the wall, and the entire station looked "tastefully decorated".

The Louvre, of course, was breath-taking. The works were so beautiful. The Mona Lisa was a let down. It seemed so insignificant amid all those other treasures. There were other works, which were more captivating.

We took a boat tour of the Seine River and all the sights along it, including the bridges, the Cathedral of Notre Dame, and the Eiffel Tower. I was quite surprised to see the Statue of Liberty not too far away from the Eiffel Tower. Apparently the Statue of Liberty in New York is a copy of the one in Paris, which is interesting to find out.

From Paris, we went to Dublin, Ireland. We didn't see any antagonism or fighting while we were there, but we did see 'anti-English' and 'anti-this and that' posters around the streets. We went for a tour of the Guinness Beer Brewery, which was interesting and proved to be rewarding when the tour was over!

I didn't like Dublin very much although the people were nice. It poured every day we were there so it seemed like a dingey

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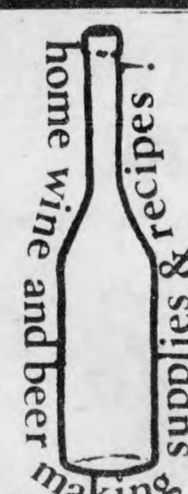
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