Eau de Vie

a wine, spirits, and travel newsletter

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France's Engineering Marvel: The Canal de la Marne au Rhin

As many of you know Sara and I recently completed our first two weeks of canal boating on our new boat, the Relax Companion. The route we chose for this premier spring adventure was an ambitious journey from our home port in Strasbourg to the capital of Lorraine, Nancy.

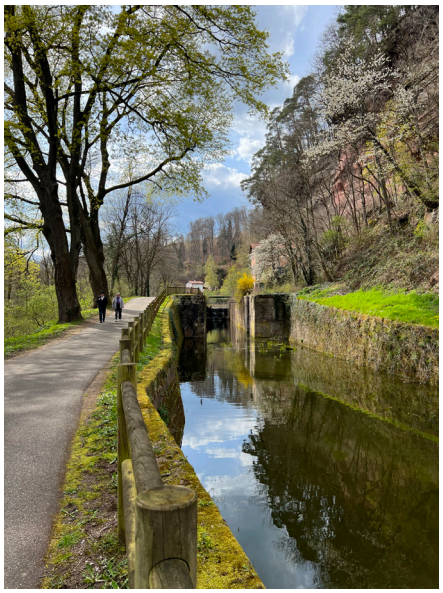
The route from Strasbourg to Nancy took us along 154 km of canals, up 33 locks, down 20, up a boat elevator, through two tunnels and down the deepest lock in France. Our second week's crew, from Nancy to Strasbourg, did the opposite. For Sara and I, in two weeks of travel, we plied 308 km, did 108 locks, rode the elevator up and down, and navigated the narrow one-way tunnels twice. We got to experience the French countryside in spring and share this engineering marvel with our friends.

Canals are interesting because they are waterways through the land. While rivers are also waterways through land, rivers flow down the contours of the land while canals, which are artificial, are made to go where rivers can not. To change elevation, canal builders use locks, called *ecluse* in French. An *ecluse* is placed in a section of rise in elevation and this allows watercraft to traverse the land. Sometimes in places where the elevation rises quickly, a lot of locks are placed close together. This means you can travel up a staircase of locks, sometimes two in a row, or three, or the locks are very close to each other, such as the section we just completed from the town of Saverne to the Arzviller boat lift which has 13 locks in 13 kilometers.

The route here is steep and mountainous because it follows an ancient foot path through the Vosage Mountains and going over mountains in a boat is a bit difficult! When the canal was first finished in the 1850's, the route from Saverne to the tunnels (that actually bore through the summit) had 30 locks to traverse in 16 km! The last 17 locks all coming in a flurry of just 3.6 km and it would take over 10 hours to go up or down. To alleviate this burden a design competition was held. In 1969 the winning design was built and the Arzviller Incline Plane moved its first boats. The travel time is now just 25 minutes.

The new incline plane completely cuts off the old 17 locks to lift or lower boats 44.55 meters (145 feet) up the side of a mountain to a canal which was chiseled into the cliff side and then into a pair of one-way tunnels.

The old route's locks, canal and lock keeper houses are now abandoned but a pleasant bike path / walkway now follows the old tow path to the summit.



To see this marvel of French engineering in action, click the photo below to watch as our first week's crew travels up the incline plane.

Relax Companion's 2024 Schedule

If you'd like to travel with us on the Relax Companion in 2024 please check out our planning guide linked here.

We will be traveling from Strasbourg to Sarreguemines along the *Canal de la Marne au Rhin* and the *Canal de la Sarre*. This route will take us from the German border on the Rhine to the German border on the Sarre, all while traveling in rural France. It will include the classic Alsatian village of Saverne as well as the Arzviller boat lift, the tunnels and the charming town of Sarreguemines.

For 2024 we are offering 4 trips, two weeks in the spring and two weeks in the fall.

Here are the dates and current availability:

- April 22 to 29, ~4 spots available
- May 4 to 10, ~Full
- September 6 to 13 ~4 spots available
- September 16 to 23 ~4 spots available

Dîner en Blanc 2023

Back by popular demand, we will be hosting the third annual, ***Dîner en Blanc*** on **August 12th**, rain or shine or fog.

RSVP required!

If you are unsure what this is please read the May 2022 edition of the *Eau de Vie*.

This quirky French picnic, *Dîner en Blanc ~ Duluth,* will be at our house, 2620 E. Superior Street, in the yard.

Here's what you need to know:

It is BYOE: *(Bring Your Own Everything.)* Literally everything. Food, chairs, drink. You can make this as fancy or as simple as you like ~ table and chairs or a blanket.

Dress code: all white. Really. This is a fancy, dress up picnic. Although my tux has some black on it. I did say it's quirky.

RSVP: (*respondez s'il vous plait*) to david@savvynomad.com.

August 12th, 2023. Come set up between 6-7pm, share in the *Votre Sante, (to your health)* toast at 7pm. Eat and drink at your leisure.

Will you join us for ***Dîner en Blanc***?

Les Cigognes

Storks *(known as cigognes in French)* have been part of Alsace for centuries. They are thought to be symbols of happiness, faithfulness, fertility and good luck, after all, who else delivers all those babies? To see some stork babies follow this link to a stork nest webcam in the French village of Sarralbe.

Summertime French

Sara and I are hosting a limited Summertime French language learning club. This is a free club and open to anyone reading this newsletter. Here are the details:

12 Meetings on:

Wednesdays from 3pm to 5pm

June 7,14, 21, 28
July 5, 12, 19, 26
August 2, 9, 16, 23

The format is casual, with an emphasis on learning practical conversational French. We will be using the Michel Thomas Method. If you are interested in attending please email me at:
david@savvynomad.com

More Photos of France:

If you'd like to see more photos of our spring trip, Sara made a Facebook Album.
You can check it out here.