

Ladies On Tour in France and Belgium

Well, the recent Solstice weekend saw Thames Valley's LOH putting in some serious mileage over the weekend. Whilst 'Team LOH' were adorned in their purple high viz riding east to west across the country for the Dawn to Dusk, Josie Evans was in her red high viz completing the Ironhog Challenge and I was in an orange high viz tailing for Gary France's Tour1's commemorative WW1 Ladies only trip to Belgium and France.

I think we boosted Thames Valley's effort for the H.O.G Chapter Challenge Mileage Programme!

So whilst 'Team LOH' were dodging the rain showers in the UK, I was fortunate enough to be riding in glorious sunshine and working on my usual bar and shield tan on the back of my hands. It was a bit strange being in Europe when it was announced we were 'out' of Europe. I guess that in years to come it'll be one of those 'do you remember where you were on such a such a date?'

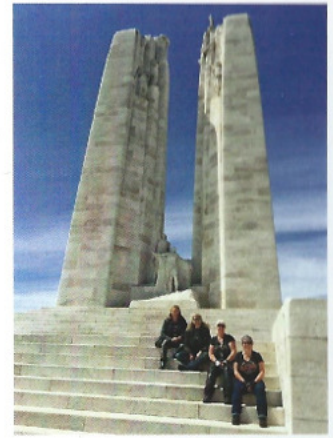
But to be experiencing a WW1 battlefield tour during the centenary events was extremely poignant, to be 'there' exactly one hundred years later was a powerful thought to take on board. We met a brother and sister at Vimy Ridge who were visiting France, to visit the place where their uncle's name was etched in stone for

his bravery. They paid their respects exactly 100 years to the date where he fell, can you imagine that?

Yes, this tour was an emotional one, to be able to stand alone with four others to read a verse as they lay a wreath at Thiepval Memorial for the missing 72,246 British Empire servicemen of the Somme will be a memory to reflect on for a very long time. Truly astounding!



During this long weekend trip we also visited other key sites: Menin Gate, Tyne Cot cemetery, Newfoundland Memorial Park, Lochnager Crater, Hooze Crater, Poziers Tank Memorial & the Christmas Day Truce. We also visited Fricourt German war cemetery, quite a contrast to how others are tended, it's starkness felt very different to anywhere else we visited.



But to get to each of these locations we rode some of the most delightful roads Belgium and northern France have to offer. Between each town and village those sweeping bends had us tweaking the throttle and the smiles on our faces grew....and grew. After one particularly delightful stretch of road I was pleased when the group pulled to the side of the road at the edge of town to hear Gary say to the others...."do you want to do that again?" That's the quickest we'd turned around all weekend!

We enjoyed many coffee stops along the way, but an afternoon of sightseeing in Amiens with lunch by the river, whilst admiring the architecture of Amiens Cathedral was a perfect way to while away a few hours on a Saturday afternoon. To walk off lunch we explored the Cathedral, all the more impressive because it was built in a time of no electric, no power tools, no hydraulic lifting gear, toe-tectors or hard hats.

All of this was topped off with pulling into comfortable hotels at the end of each day, being able to go for a short walk around, enjoy some scrumptious meals, partake in a drink or two in the bar and generally chill out enjoying good conversation and MUCH laughter with the other ladies and Gary.

**Regards
Elaine**

