

Velo Teifi Cycling Club

Tour of France 2009

The Chairman's Diary

(Le journal intime du Chairman)

Friday 24th July 2009

Day 8. Transfer to Valence. *Au revoir Mdm Harpie*

Weather: Hot

The morning is spent cleaning and tidying ready for the barrack room inspection by Mdm Imperial. We finish our chores and wait. As if by magic, Mdm appears silently at the door (how does she do that?).

We're very proud of our efforts.

She's very stern faced.

We attempt friendly French conversation whilst showing Mdm the fruits of our labour.

She's tutting and starting to make noises about *la ménage*.

A trois? No, my illiterate pigeon-French speaking Welshman – the housework. She's not impressed. Could a face carry more frowns without actually folding in on itself, I wonder to myself. I think she senses my insult. Part of me feels as though it's turning to stone. Could it be possible?

We finish the tour. Mdm says she needs to clean the chalet as our efforts are so piss-poor (or French words to that effect). Oh well, *bon chance Madam et au revoir... Pardon? Quatre-vingts euros?* I'm sorry guys, my French is failing me; I think she's just said we need to pay her 80 Euros for the pleasure of her cleaning our clean chalet. Clearly I've got it wrong...

We pay the extortion fee and hoof it. We're not confident enough to arm wrestle her for a reduction.

So to Valence.

We arrive late afternoon at the next phase – a luxurious Campanile just off the motorway near Valence. Now we're living the French dream.

Rooms are divvied up. Somewhat heroically, Cynan volunteers to share with Baron von Snoring Bean. We can't believe the bravery, the sheer guts of the man. He must have good drugs in his bag.

That evening we dine at the Campanile. They have a buffet *entree* arrangement and, like Brits at a wedding party, we each reconstruct Mt Kilimanjaro on our woefully small plates. The other [French] guests are agog. Half a pig, a brood of boiled eggs, a plot of boiled potatoes and a bagful of cornichons later, we're preparing for the main courses.

French mothers are shielding their children's eyes. French grandmothers are fanning themselves furiously. French *hommes* continue to look non-plussed.

And so to bed for a 7a.m. start out for the great Mont Ventoux. The biggy. Feel the excitement, the anticipation.

We just can't contain ourselves, we'll never sleep.