

Season 2 – Part 4. Up the St. Lawrence towards Montréal.



Mo 21.9.2015, day 71. Against the wind to Mont Jollie and Mr. Lobster Camping

After a big Müsli and McDonald's coffee in the motel room, we headed off for a wonderful ride along the Matapedia Lake. We cooked spaghetti on the pedestal of a Jesus statue in front of the church in Mont Jolie and had a quick stop in Tim Horton's (where else?) for internet and coffee.

We were not really sure where to spend the night, but quite soon after joining the St. Lawrence we saw a camping sign with a big lobster wearing a moustache. The campsite was empty and there were wonderful sites all along the St. Lawrence where we could pitch out tent in glorious sunshine. Even though it was still early and we hadn't done a lot of kilometers, it was the perfect decision to stop here and enjoy the sun. We played the guitar and ukulele a bit, and I went for a short run.

We met a very interesting guy, who used to administer all the canteens of the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal but then suffered a burn-out. So he quit everything and started walking up the St. Lawrence with his back-pack. When we met him he seemed full of beans with a nice long beard. He had been on the road for over 1 month now and was having a fantastic time, meeting a lot of nice people on the road. For him it was clear that he would never be going back to Montreal.









Tu 22.9.2015, day 72. Against the wind up the St. Laurence

We got up very early and were on the road before 7AM. There was no one around at the campsite to collect the 20\$, so a free night for us! The weather was still beautiful but the wind was in our faces. We slowly slowly made our way, stopping for quite a long time in Tim Horton's (naturally!). The ride was very nice, the farming villages looking almost like out-door museums. Beautifully kept with nice trees, gardens, old buildings and shops. In summer the place is probably crawling with tourists but at this time of the year it was very quiet indeed. I think this is surprising as I would have thought there would be lots of people on holiday looking to enjoy the autumn colours. We finally ended up in Trois Pistoles and found the municipal camping to be closed for the season. We actually knew this but decided to risk it all the same. So we arrived at the closed doors of the camp site. The sun was just setting and we decided to pitch our tent right on a small patch of lawn right at the gates. We cooked dinner and soon a number of cars pulled up at the locked gate. Siria of course got a bit nervous, but it turned out it was the village assembly that was having a meeting in a building inside the camp site. Of course we asked if it would be OK to pitch our tent in the campsite and of course they said: "No problem at all!". We could even use the toilet facilities while they were having the meeting. It is really funny how up to now every single time we didn't have a place to stay something good popped up and we had some sort of special experience. For me this is a sort of exercise in letting go and not trying to control everything. Just go with the flow, take what comes and seize the opportunity.



We 23.9.2015, day 73. Some great beer at a Micro Brewery

Again we were up at the crack of dawn and left just when workers were arriving at the camp site to do some work. It was quite cold in the morning, glove weather actually and the sun was taking its time to evaporate the misty clouds. We stopped outside a small Épicerie to make Müsli and then pushed on to Riviere du Loup for a stop at the local (you guessed it?) Tim Horton's. We spent the night at Camping St. Germain some kilometers further along the road. Right beside the campsite there was a Micro Brewery. It was a very nice evening indeed, first lounging around having some delicious beer, and then moving over to the campsite just as the sun was setting.







Th 24.9.2015, day 74. Record 120 km in one day!

Next day we didn't do much else except bicycling. We finally made it all the way to Montmagny, where we stopped for some shopping and then went on some kilometers to Camping des Erables, that was open, but no-one was around. So we cooked some spaghetti and went to bed quite early, exhausted after biking a record 120 km in one day.



Fr 25.9.2015, day 75. Arrival in Quebec City.

We had only about 50 km to do to get to Quebec City, the first big city really since Germany! It was again very cold and misty in the morning. Again we stopped at a small Épicerie where we bought some coffee and hot chocolate and made our Müsli. We biked on and slowly came to the suburbs of Levis, the city on the south side of the St. Laurence, adjacent to Quebec. We got on some very nice bicycle trails along the river and soon caught the first glimpse of Chateau Frontenac, the landmark of Quebec. We biked as far as the terminal of the ferry across the river and went for some internet and coffee to find out where exactly our motel was. Siria started reading on Trip Advisor and found that the Motel had terrible reviews. This would be interesting! We crossed the St. Laurence at about 1PM and found ourselves in the middle of Quebec! We bought some tomatoes, cucumbers and strawberries at the market and cooked Couscous on some stone steps the middle of a busy park.

Then we took the bike path along a river out to the motel. It turned out to be quite OK, even though Siria found some stains on the towels. Funny how reading bad reviews colours your opinion of a place.

We had a lot of stuff to organize in Quebec, so after freshening up a bit we headed off down-town. The most urgent thing that we needed to do was to find out how we were to cross Canada. By bus? Plane? Or train? We had a long chat with a lady from VIA at the train station. We had pretty much decided on taking the train. But it is going to be expensive and an administrative head-ache with all our luggage! I personally think we should simply continue biking... One other thing to do was to replace my mattress that had the “blow-out”. We went to the MEC for this and bought a new one for the wrong (cheaper) price. After that some nasty Asian fast food and Starbucks, then off to bed, but not before stopping off for some chocolate bars. This really is the good thing about bike & kite, you can eat as much as you like without getting fat.













Sa 26.9.2015, day 76. A day in Quebec

Got up, shaved, and then headed off down-town. We stopped at an outdoor shop and bought all sorts of stuff: socks, new pants for Siria, new sporks, a toasting rack for the stove, a gas bottle for emergencies, two little collapsible glasses, etc... total over 200\$, then off to the post-office to send my mattress back to Transa. After a first shock of a cheapest price of 70\$, the lady re-measured the size and brought the price down to 21\$ but with a delivery time of 2-3 months. So we did this. Then went for some baguettes and cheese in the park. After that we split up so we could spend the day however and planned to meet again at 8:30 in St. Patrick's pub for a Guinness.. I for my part didn't do much, biked around a lot, didn't find a place to buy a Kindle and also didn't find a place to buy new underwear, so I ended up in Starbucks to do some writing.

We met up again at 8:30, I finally got my underwear and then we went to the St. Patrick for some Guinness, Nachos and discussions about how to continue our trip. It somehow looks as if we will not – after all- take the train to the west coast, but rather will continue down, maybe Boston – New York - ?? and eventually take the plane across. For me this makes a lot of sense as 1) it is certainly cheaper and easier than the train and 2) the west coast will probably be very wet in October and November.



Su 27.9.2015, day 77. Off towards Montreal.

First on the list of things to do was laundry. After a quick nip down to the supermarket for washing powder, chocolate milk and three chokolatines, we filled three machines and found a nice café to kill the time until the wash was done. Then back to the motel to pack our stuff and we were off again. We quickly stopped at an electronics store, so I could finally buy myself a Kindle. We then headed towards

the bridge out of Quebec choosing the road leading past a large shopping mall complex which apparently is the second biggest in Canada, so we could replenish our food stores. The shopping complex was absolutely huge! But also absolutely not made for bikes. And the one thing we were looking for –namely a normal supermarket- was nowhere to be seen. So finally we found two locals that were actually walking and not driving a car and they directed us towards a small supermarket away from the complex. After shopping we took the old bridge to the south shore of the St. Lawrence, had a nice meal of baguette, cheese, humus spread and some tomatoes and were finally on our way towards Montréal. We had chosen the south shore as there are bike trails there, that follow abandoned railway lines, very similar to what we had found in P.E.I. Soon we were on the bike trails and enjoying a wonderful ride in warm sunshine through the forests that were starting to turn all sorts of shades of red. The sun soon started to set and we simply stopped at one of the many rest-places to pitch our tent. By 8PM it was dark and by 8:30 we were already fast asleep.

The call of nature forced me to nip out of the tent sometime around midnight and I was lucky enough to be in perfect time to see the lunar eclipse that was forecast. The full moon was a deep dark red on one side with the other being a bit brighter, as it was probably no longer in the earth's shadow. What a spectacular sight!









Mo 28.9.2015, day 78. A stopover at Domaine Fraser

We were on the road quite early, noticed that we had forgotten to buy oats for breakfast and so had to go on for 20 km until we found a shop. We also still had to make the decision if we wanted to visit Sandra and Jürg, two Swiss ex-pats who left Switzerland in 2002 to open animal experience farm. Siria knows the two via Andrea, who was the social worker at her former school at Ruedistetten. We finally decided to go there for the experience and also because by coincidence Andrea happened to be there with her boyfriend. Also the weather forecast was very bad for the following day, and I found the idea of spending a nasty rainy day in a cozy farm very tempting.

We finally arrived at the farm entrance where a nice Swiss flag was waving next to the Canadian and Quebec flag. We finally came to some sort of a camp house and soon an old rusty Dodge Ram full of barking dogs pulled up and out jumps Jürg. We spent a very nice day there first with some horseback riding after finding, cleaning and brushing and also saddling up our horses ourselves. Then we finished off having some nice hamburgers and ice cream down at the local Casse Croute in St. Ferdinand. Siria even got to drive the Dodge!













Tu 29.9.2015, day 79. An unexpectedly warm and sunny day in St. Ferdinand.

Late in the morning we went up to the farm and said goodbye to Andrea and Felix and Sandra and Jürg as they were taking a short holiday up towards Tadoussac leaving the farm in the hands of their two apprentices Chantal and Silvana all of 15 and 19 years of age.

The weather was far far nicer than forecast. We headed down to St. Ferdinand, bought some bread and hummus spread and sat down at the lakeside in the sun for lunch. Then we went to a posh hotel for coffee and internet and finally back to the farm. I went for a quick run through the fields and the forest. When I came out of the forest I saw a black wall of rain approaching making the scenery absolutely sublime. Suddenly there was a gust of wind that was at least 10°C colder than ambient. It felt as if someone had switched on the air-conditioning. The temperature literally plummeted and I sped up and got back just when the rain storm hit us.

We then wondered if we should cook spaghetti and turn in for the night or if we should go up to the stables to see how the girls were getting along. We finally decided to put on our rain gear and go up to have a look. This proved to be one of the best decisions ever. Silvana, who was only fifteen years old, took us along on her evening round explaining all the jobs she had to do. Starting with weighing and checking the Alpaca babies, trying to get one young little one, who was constantly losing weight to drink some milk, counting all the geese and chickens, checking up on the rabbits and hamsters who were there on “holidays” and trying to ignore the pack of dogs that were prancing around, barking, playing and generally having a good time.

The last thing we did was to go up and milk the goat. This was a first for me and a very nice experience. Also the goat seemed quite relaxed and happy which I guess is a good sign. We then filtered the milk and had a taste. It was very nice indeed, smooth and creamy and didn't taste of goat at all.

It was really a magic evening. The girls called their work at the farm their parallel universe. I can really understand why. You completely forget that there is a world outside with technology, news, internet, wars and pollution. You are completely engulfed and absorbed in this fascinating world of Alpacas, horses, chickens, cast, dogs and all sorts of other furry or feathered creatures.

Then we wolfed down a big pile of spaghetti that we cooked on the deck outside and went off to bed.



We 30.9.2015, day 80. A warm shower with two bicycle nomads.

For the following day we organized a warm shower in Drummondville. It was pouring rain and about 6°C (not -3°C and snow as forecast by WeatherPro). And so we headed off, first on the main road, being showered by every truck that passed by, then on the bike trail, with our bags and the trailer getting splattered with dirt and grime from the gravel road. We stopped to warm up and dry out a little in Tim Horton's (as usual) in Victoriaville after about 40 km and then pushed on the next 50km or so almost without break reaching Drummondville at about 6PM. Robert and Josée were there to welcome us and had an absolutely divinely delicious Tajin waiting for us that we washed down with a bottle of wine we had brought along. The evening was spent listening to their accounts of all their adventures. They really have done a huge amount of bike touring in all sorts of interesting places and we learned many small but very good little tricks about travelling by bike, camping rough, bike bags, bike stands, etc... Small things that can really make a difference. By the end of the evening we were dead tired and when we crawled off to bed we fell asleep immediately.







Th 1.10.2015, day 81. A very unexpected and very warm encounter with Vlad and Eva.

We set off in a crisp cool and sunny morning, waving good bye to Robert and Josée. We didn't get far as we both were in serious need of a quiet sit down and some time for ourselves, to relax and decide on the day's route.

We hadn't made any plan of where to stay and were thinking of getting further than the Parc de la Yamaska and maybe roughing it somewhere on the bike trail. But it was another one of those days where we simply didn't manage to make good progress, with the road having more hills than expected, the tail wind not really helping much and the road conditions slowing us down. Also our energy level was very low, probably due to not having had our usual huge bowl of Müsli for breakfast.

And so it was getting later and later when we finally arrived in the Yamaska Park, where there was a camping. The Park warden caught up with us wanted to extract 8\$ pp from us for crossing the park. I wanted to push on a bit, I'm not sure what Siria wanted and we played the ignorant tourist game and got away without paying, saying we would leave the park immediately. This of course meant that we could also not camp in the park. Siria wasn't happy at all with this decision and started complaining that my decision didn't make sense, it would be getting dark in 1h and we wouldn't get far anyway, whether I knew where to spend the night, it would be my responsibility to find a place and so on. And so with tensions high we continued on. I of course had no idea where to spend the night and decided to simply stop right at the side of the bike trail at a very nice spot close to a lake just before sun set. I sat there and watched the sun disappear wondering what to do. It's incredible how quickly the mood changes after the sun goes down. It struck me that it would be a rather difficult and maybe unpleasant evening staying there as the path was highly frequented by bikes, joggers, people walking their dog. We'd have to wait in the cold until it was really dark and even then we'd hear people passing our tent and could not be sure if they wanted to cause trouble. Also it was too dark to push on and we were right at the fringe of the town.

But then, as so often, we had a wonderful surprise. A gentleman, who was standing in the background also watching the sunset starting chatting, asking us where we were from, what we were doing and asked us where we were spending the night. I said "here" straight out and he immediately asked if we wanted to come round to his place. It turned out to be an absolutely wonderful evening, with his wife Eva, the cat called The Cat, some delicious home baked bread and butter and a bottle of wine.

Their story really made me think. Vlad had fled from the communist regime in Poland in the 80ties and landed in Switzerland. Finally, after 3 years or so, his wife managed to escape with their only son and they were looking forward to making a life for themselves in Switzerland. But the Swiss authorities turned down their request for asylum and they had to leave Switzerland. They cried for days. And so they came to Canada where Vlad made a good career for himself as electro technician in the machine industry commissioning machines used for composite materials in the aerospace industry.

How ironic, that in the current time, when Switzerland is again being seen in a very bad light due to its right wing, xenophobic policies with the ongoing refugee crisis in Syria, we should be hosted so warmly and generously by exactly such rejected asylum seekers. In spite of what happened to them they are not holding a grudge against Switzerland and the Swiss people, but are rather looking back on the good memories. What a glowing example. And what an eye opener it would be for all those petty little Swiss

nationalists to leave their little house and garden and go out into the world for some travelling. All their fears and prejudices would quickly crumble.