

A Second

Delaforce

Ancestor Trip

May 2004

By Ken Baldry

The background to this trip was the receipt of the material for the second volume of Patrick Delaforce's "Family History Research" & the subsequent assembling of this into a printable book by Ken, who then went on to check on some of the material (assembled by Patrick around 1980) against more recent research. This revealed more locations associated or even, once owned, by members of the direct ancestry of the Delaforces. One curious factor in checking the ancestors was that almost everyone that Patrick thought was an ancestor actually was, although not necessarily in the same position in the family tree that Patrick had them. This was because of the many cousin marriages, both close & distant, among the Dark Age aristocracy. (No change there, then).

This picture book comprises photographs taken by Ken and excerpts from his diary of the trip, augmented by some more family history material. The trip started with a flight to Carcassonne...

Sunday 9th May 2004 Carcassonne Trip

We were away at 0830, had a simple drive to Stansted, checked in early, had breakfast at Garfunkles in the shanty town that sits in Norman Foster's posh airport building & the Ryanair flight left a little early. It arrived 20 minutes early at Carcassonne, which had no other aeroplanes, so we were through quickly. We picked up the Opel Corsa & drove off in unexpected sunshine & it was a very pleasant day in France, which the internet weather forecast had not lead us to expected. We stopped to look at the damaged Bishop's Palace at Alet les Bains.



Left: The bridge at Alet
This & next two pages:
The Bishop's Palace







Lower Gorge de St. Georges



However, when we got to Quillan, the hotel was shut up! So we carried on, as it was not long past 4, went through the dramatic Aude Gorge & turned off up the even more dramatic St. Georges Gorge at Axat. This was an exceedingly twisty road with no habitations that looked inhabited but, when we went over the top of a pass, with snow still on the surrounding mountains, we found a village, Formiguères, with hotels. This gorge formidably guards the French entrance to Cerdagne (or Cerdanya, when it becomes Spanish).

(Formiguères is not the 'top'. That is the Col de Quillane, some miles further). The first hotel was shut but the second, Auberge de la Tutte, was sort of open. On hammering the door, a charming lady appeared, who gave us a room, B+B for Euros 50.60 but the restaurant, which looked very pleasant, was shut. The lights in the room did not work at first but she found us a 'man' who fixed them. On this side of the pass, the valley is quite open, a startling contrast to the valley up from Axat. However, that was filled with beautiful trees in their first foliage in the sunlight, which was enchanting. Dinner was a superb French Onion Soup & inferior veal steaks for Euros 29 for two at La Tapenade.

Upper Gorge de St. Georges



**As with many marginal ski resorts,
Formiguères is a sad little dump in
the Summer**



Monday 10th May 2004

Breakfast at 08:15 after the landlady had been into Town (such as it is) to get some fresh bread. This was very nice with jam & yoghurt. This is a ski village & evidence of runs could be seen on the hill sides, some still apparently complete. Grey day.

**Hotel de la Tutte, Formiguères,
with a shivering Avis**



The bleak Col de Quillane, with the peaks surrounding Cerdagne appearing



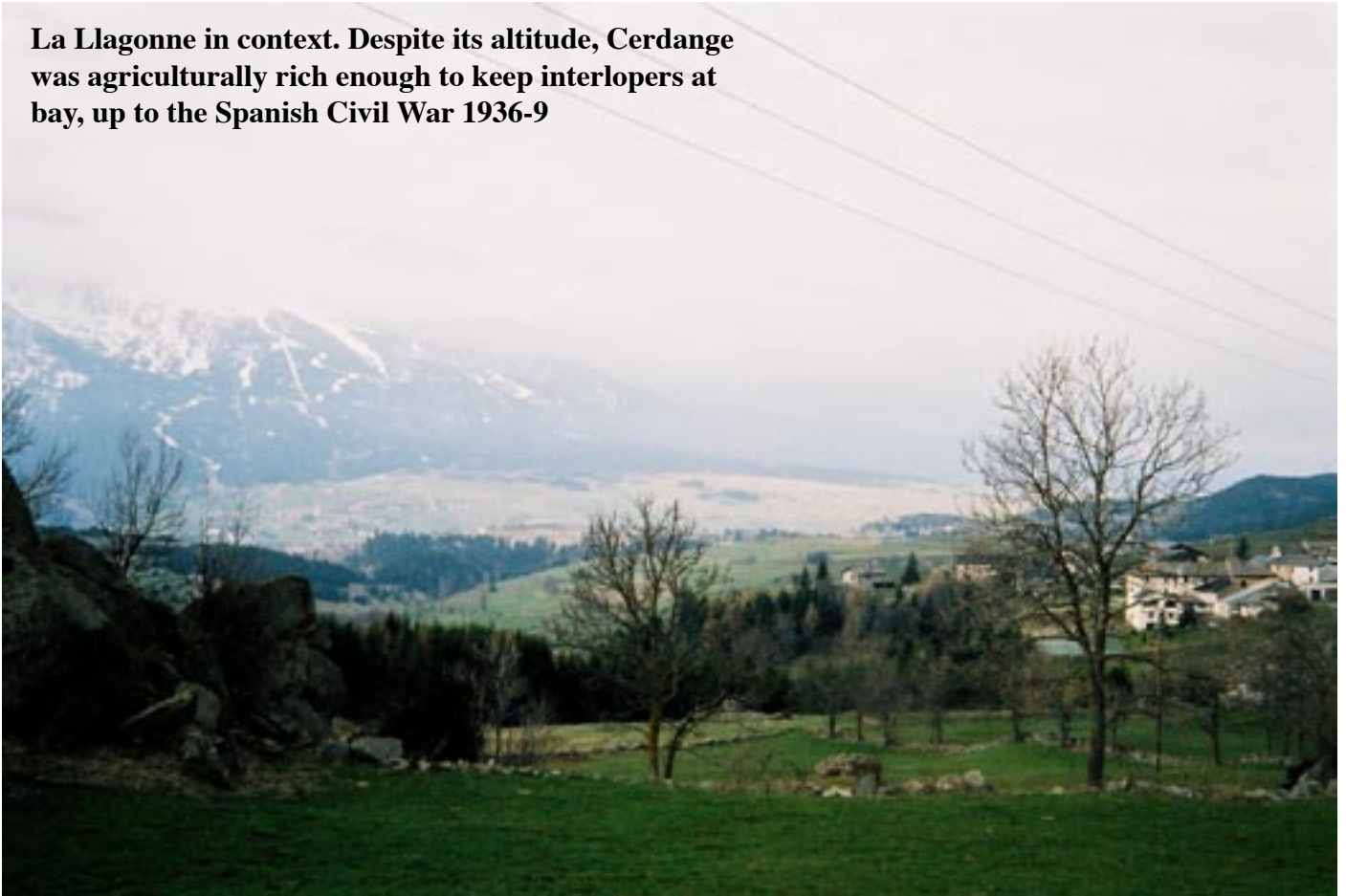
The Col de Quillane is 1713m after a dammed-up lake but this is a bleak scene. La Llagonne is the first village in Cerdagne. We ran down to Mont Louis, which is where Cerdagne proper starts with snow covered mountains forming its South wall. The valley is as impressive as I had expected.

Our interest in Cerdagne stems from the fate of Poor Auntie Lampagie. She was the daughter of Eudes, Duke of Gascony, born in 665 or thereabouts & duke from 714. The Moors invaded Aquitaine in force in 731 & Eudes, who had thrashed them at Toulouse in 720, no longer had sufficient power to defeat them. In 731, he married his daughter Lampagie off to Othman Ibn Abu-Nusa, Wali of Cerdagne, previously Emir de Cordova, who controlled these Pyrenean passes, which would have solved that problem had the Moorish King of Spain, Abd-al-Rahman-al-Ghafiki not immediately defeated & killed Abu-Nusa, then sent Lampagie off to Damascus as a trophy.

La Llagonne, the 1st village in Cerdagne



La Llagonne in context. Despite its altitude, Cerdagne was agriculturally rich enough to keep interlopers at bay, up to the Spanish Civil War 1936-9



We avoided Puigcerda but stopped to have a good look at Bellver, which has much of its wall still extant & work seemed to be going on to tidy it up. Then, the valley closes in & there is another impressive gorge, which must have assisted in keeping interlopers out from the Spanish side. This goes down for some distance before it opens out rather towards La Seu d'Urgell. The guidebook makes big claims for this town but we could not find the old part at all driving into it.

Bellver de Cerdanya





Bellver de Cerdanya. Above: the citadel Below left: an old street Below right: the citadel close up





Above: The gorge out West of Cerdanya Below: La Seu d'Urgel

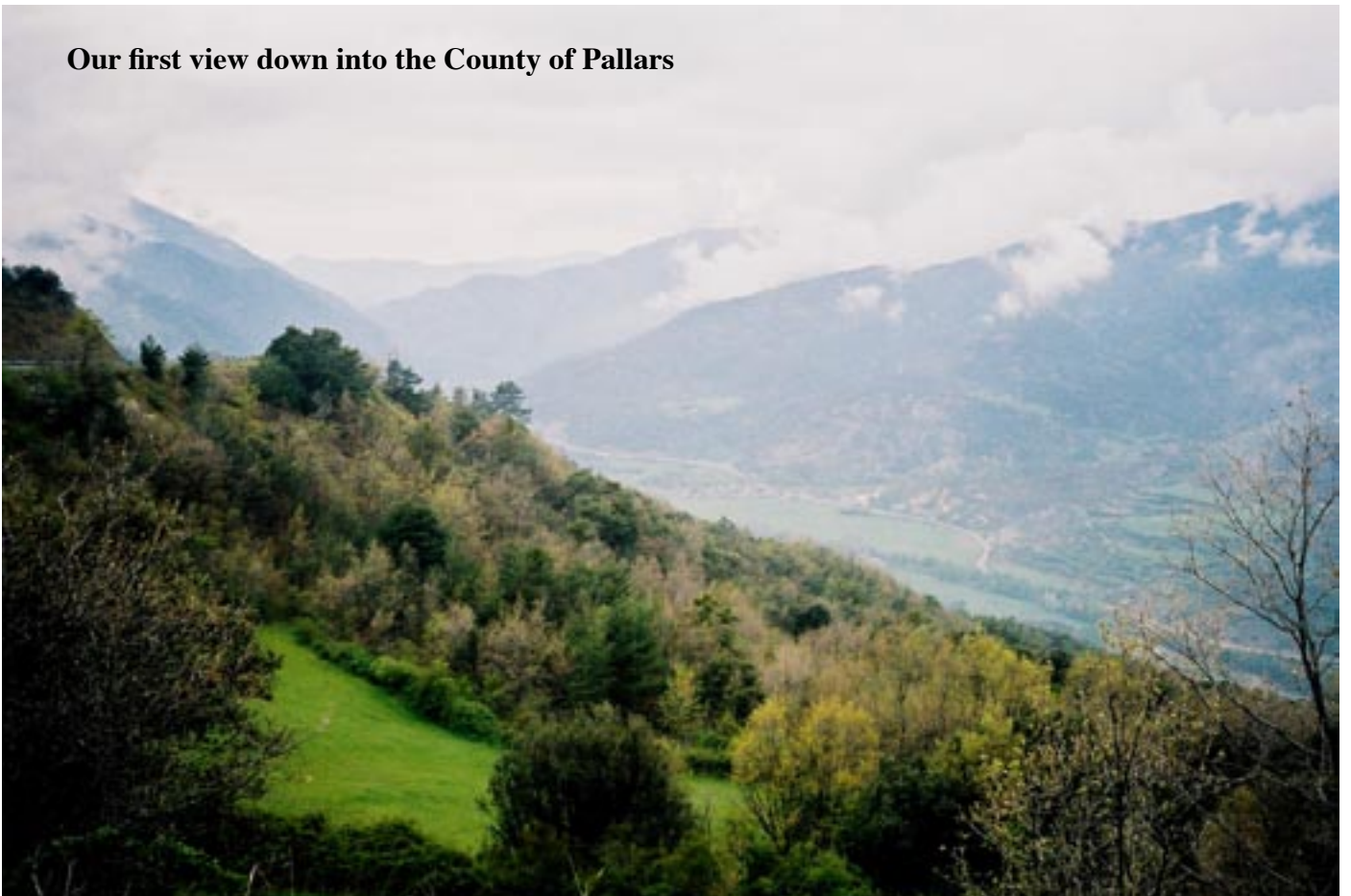


The big zig-zag over to Pallars (behind us)



Family interest: Aznar Galindez d'Aragon (?775 - 839) was Comte d'Aragon, Gascogne, Urgel, Jaca & Cerdagne & the great-great grandfather of Aminiana (Munia) d' Angoulême (?862 - aft 904), who married Garces Sanchez "Le Courbe" (?850 - ?920), the Duke of Gascony. Their son Guillaume I Garcias, Count of Fezensac (906 - 960) was the great-grandfather of Bernard Baron de Fourcès (1005 - ?1062).

Our first view down into the County of Pallars



A little way South, the road, which still keeps the number N260, turns off to the right at Adrall for a tortuous climb over the Colle del Canto. This was the border with Pallars. Dadildis of Pallars was the daughter of Lope of Bigorre (?830 - ?870) & the mother of Sanche Garcis (865 - 11/12/925 San Esteban de Resa), the 'Optimo Imperator' & King of Navarre. Why she was 'of Pallars' is obscure, as her mother was the daughter (name unknown) of Raimon of Rouergue, the Count of Toulouse. While Bigorre is on the other side of the Pyrennees from Pallars, it is not an easy crossing. The road ran down in more zig-zags to Sort, the capital of Upper Pallars.

Sort from above



The ravine through Sort



Sort Church

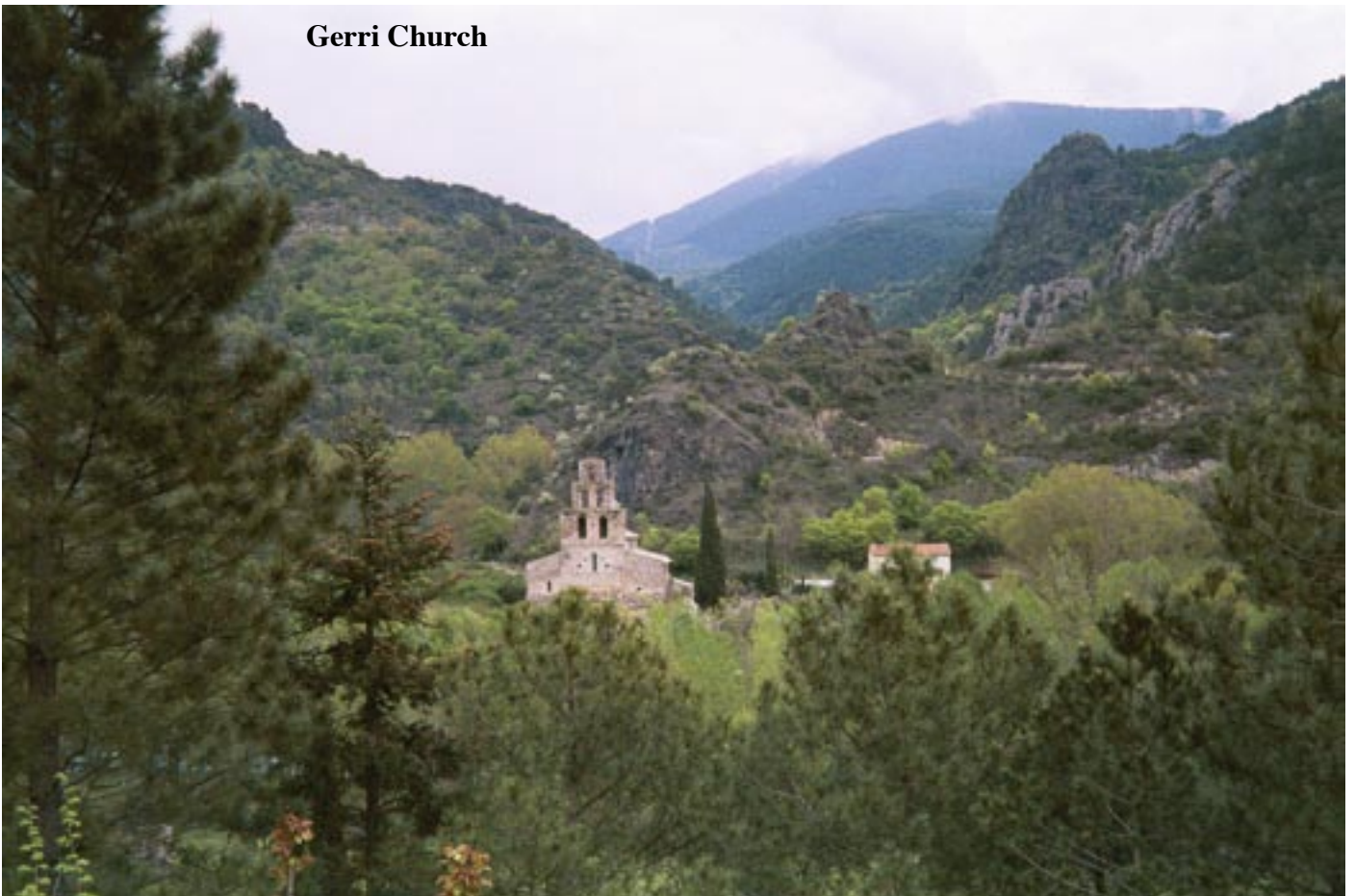


Gerri



We stopped for coffee. The town had an unexpected layout, the main street being across the valley with a sort of shallow gorge on its South side. Rather attractive. Pallars seemed not to be anyone's first choice for agricultural production, being very rocky. Before long, we stopped in a very pretty place called Gerri de la Sal, which had a huge church across the valley. This is rather more recent than our period of interest, having been built in 1049.

Gerri Church



Gerri Church

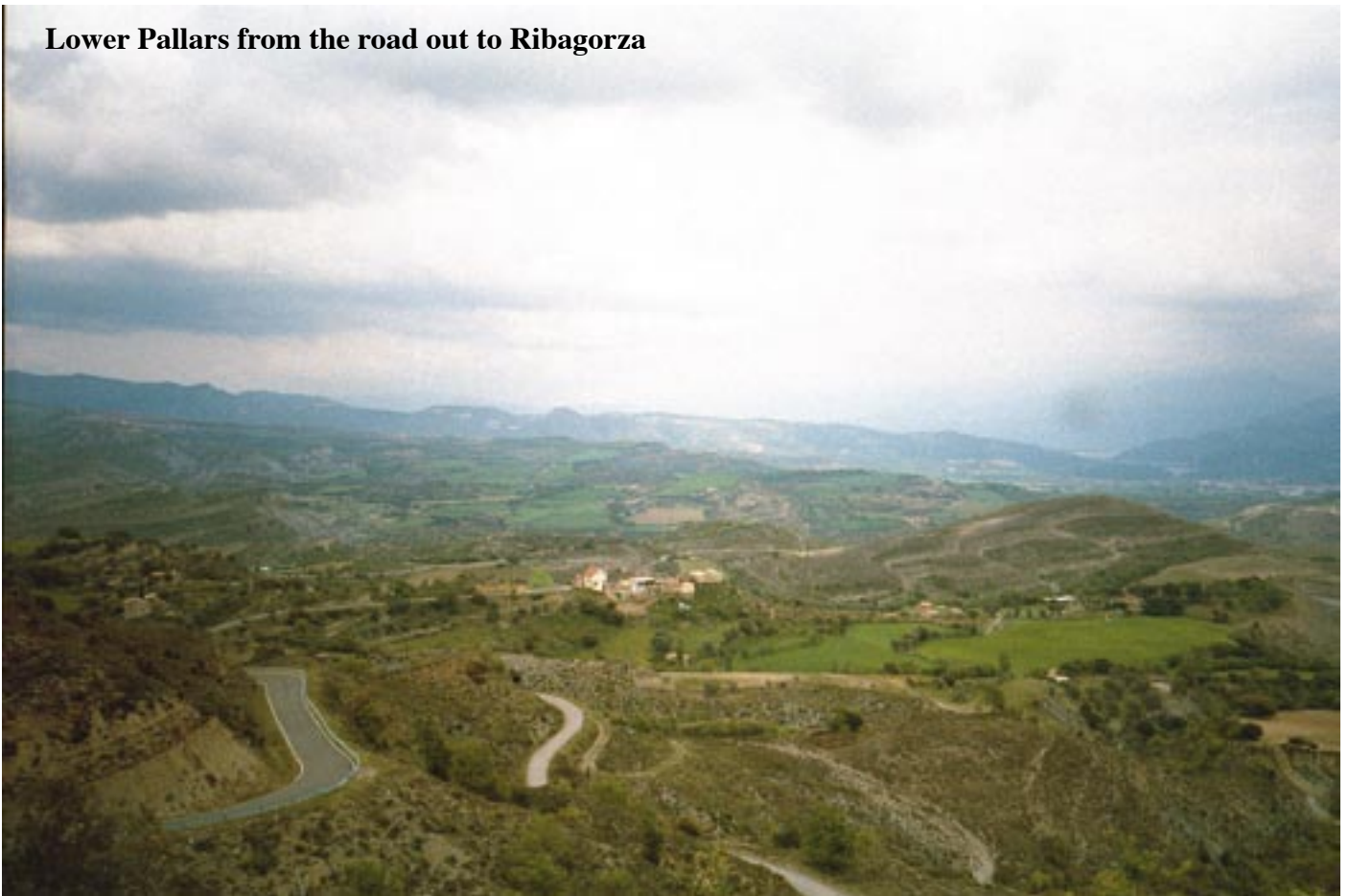


The road ran south to La Pobla de Segur, an industrial place at the head of a dammed lake. Before Tresp, the road was being much improved but we had to drive on uncovered base soil in parts. We had hoped to have lunch in Tresp but it was not very nice & there was nowhere to park, so we carried on for a mile & turned right onto the C1311. This is another pass road & wound pleasantly up through land which was grand but not at all productive, to the pass. Up to here & all the way so far, apart from the road works, the road had been of excellent quality &, given the slight traffic, seemingly better than could be justified by economics. However, the road from what appeared to be the boundary between Pallars & Ribagorza, was rather rough. There were surveyors around in bright jackets, though, so maybe it is due for a birthday .

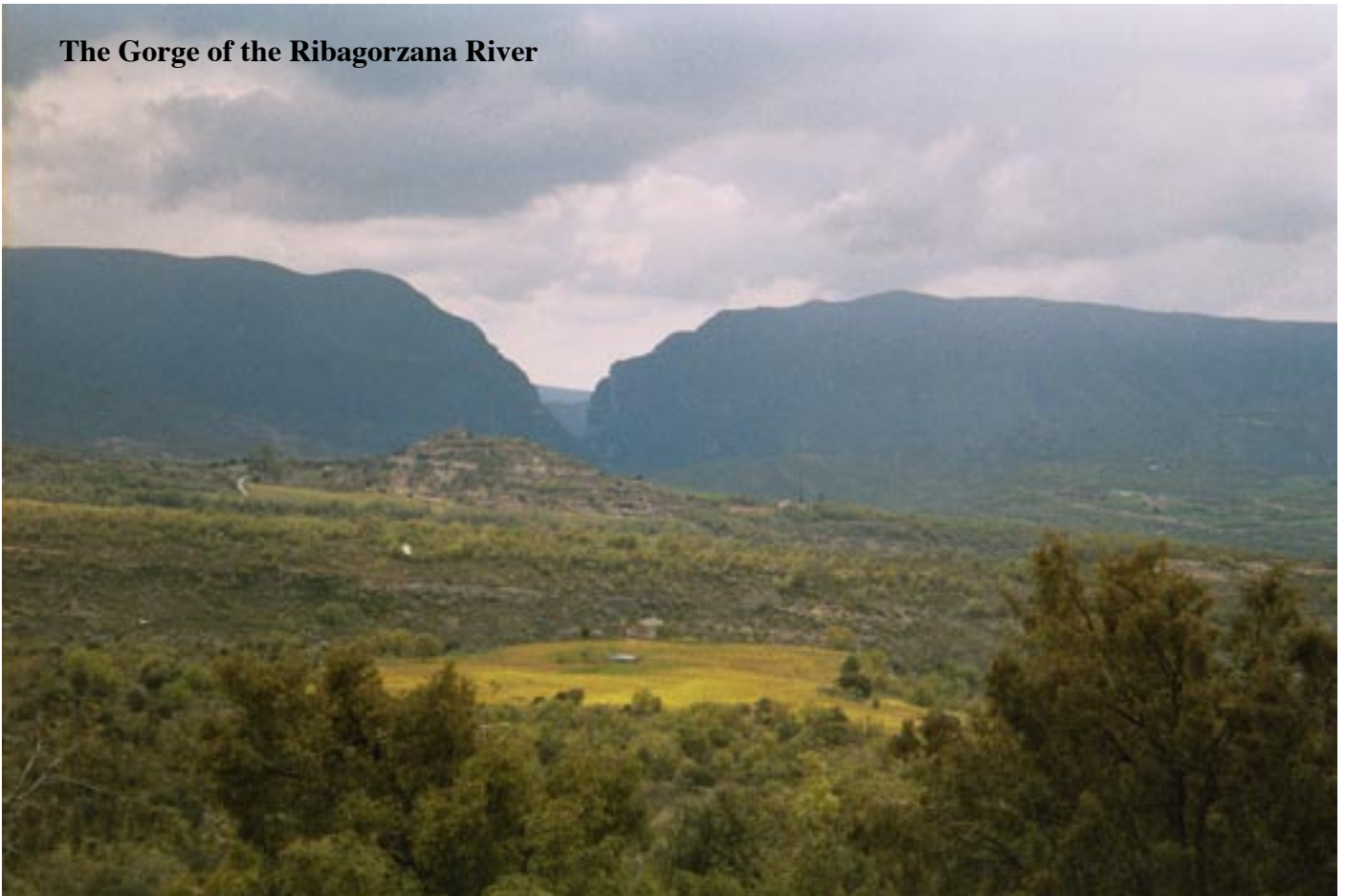
Lower Pallars



Lower Pallars from the road out to Ribagorza



The Gorge of the Ribagorzana River



Puente de Montanana & the Ribagorzana River



The road meets the valley by the Noguera Ribagorçana river at Puente de Montanana. Here, at 1420 & after two restaurants claimed to be closed, we managed to get lunch, salad & rabbit, at the Hostel Isidro for Euros 26.75 = 29 with tip. The girls had a book with the names of foods in six languages, so ordering was not too difficult. We had over one-third of the day's driving to do still but the roads were no longer demanding. There was some rain but nothing to ruin the day, as there was now also sunshine. Benabarre was worth a photo & then, it was very pretty along by the Embalse de Barasona, then dramatic down to the Cinca River, with many tunnels (far more than marked on the map - there had been several tunnels in Pallars as well). The Cinca was very spread out across its valley. The County of Ribagorza does not seem to have been in the family tree, although the two Avas of Ribagorza occur in cousinly family trees.

Benabarre



Then, we were able to avoid Barbastro, which looked grotty & had a pleasant, fast & undemanding drive to Huesca, where we soon found the Hostel San Marco, with a very welcoming girl on the desk, although like everyone so far, she had no English. Generally, the Spanish are rather dour. We went for a walk into the Old Town. There was a lot of new flat developments (shades of Islington!) & a gloomy cathedral. There was nowhere resembling a café, as the term is understood in the rest of Europe & we found that restaurants do not open until 9, so we bought cake at the supermarket (as we did not need much after the superb lunch) & ate that. Avis was not impressed by the day, especially by the typical Spanish lack of a sense of hospitality. .



**Above: the
Embalse de
Barasona**



**Left: A
glimpse of the
Pyrennees**

Left: The Cinca Gorge looking up...
Below: ...and down



A few views of Huesca. Below: St Peter's Church



(Here & next two pages) Huesca Cathedral











Tuesday 11th May 2004

Lousy night's sleep, as I could not get really comfortable. Grey day at first but looked as if it would get better. Hmmm. Breakfast was strictly portion controlled but not expensive. We were away at about 08:45

Zaragoza:
Four views of the Aliferia Palace -
the Town Hall for over 1000 years





& soon found the free motorway to Zaragoza. This was forty-odd miles & we were soon there & quickly found a place to park on a housing estate about ten rainy minutes walk from the Aliferia Palace, which we looked at. There was not much point in 'doing' Zaragoza, as there were no traces left of really early times & the Palace, to my delight, seemed to be a working municipal building still. Zaragoza was the capital of the Banu Qasi, a grouping of Visigoth Muslim converts & Basques, who had kept the central Muslim





authority in Cordova at bay by a well-timed conversion. The first leader was a Goth with the Romanised name of Cassius Fortunatus, Count of Meark. Obviously a slippery customer, he was a Delaforce ancestor. His son Fortun married Aisha, the daughter of the Moorish King of Spain, Abdul Aziz (thus bringing the blood of Mohammed the Prophet into the family tree) & Egilona, who was herself, the daughter of the last Gothic King of Spain, Roderic.

Getting out of Zaragoza was sheer murder. The road signs are totally confusing & inconsistent. It took about an hour to work out just how to get out to the West with much bad temper. It needs careful plotting beforehand! When on one's way, the N232 is at first labelled as the A68 motorway but the 'real' A68 is parallel. One might as well stay on the free N232! We filled up with our second cheerful Spaniard, fluent in very good French (our car has French plates, of course). The route to Soria takes the N122, which passes

Villanueva de Cameros



Villanueva de Cameros



several attractive towns, the best being Tarazona, which rain prevented exploration. Soria was no great shakes but the lunch at the Restaurant La Parrilla was superb: fish & potato soup, followed by a leg of lamb done even better than a kleftico (E37.25 for 2). Then, on to the N111, labelled a 'green' road all the way. At first over plainer land, it was just nicer farmland but then, it climbed to the Puerto de Piqueras in thick mist, requiring great care on both sides. This is clearly, a beautiful road & we had unclear intimations of it all along, stopping to take photos at Villanueva de Cameros, despite the rain. This held off for a few minutes when we turned up to Viguera by a ghastly cement works.

(This & the next
two pages)

Viguera









Above: Viguera Church is more recent - 13th century

Below: The gorge opposite Viguera

Next page: The gorge a little to the North of Viguera





Viguera village looks none to prepossessing from the outside but is interesting inside. More to the point, it has strong family connexions, as Sancho Garces, the 'Optimo Imperator' conquered the Rioja area, fighting at least two battles here. His son, Garcia Sanchez, set his son up there as the local king. His name was Ramon Garces, King of Viguera & his sister Urraca is a Delaforce grandma, as her second husband was Guillaume, Duke of Gascony. One of Ramon's grandsons was Fortun, Vicomte de Larbourd, which had me

Entrena



examining this family closely. The valley is full of striking rock formations & there is a noted viewpoint above Viguera but not in this weather! We went on, dodging Logrono by turning left by Entrena & left again at Navarete for Najera.



Najera - Above: Looking across to the Old Town

Below & next pages: The Monastery of Santa Maria de Real where the Kings of Navarre are buried









**Above: The sarcophagus of one of the queens
Below: The Monastery is built into the rock**





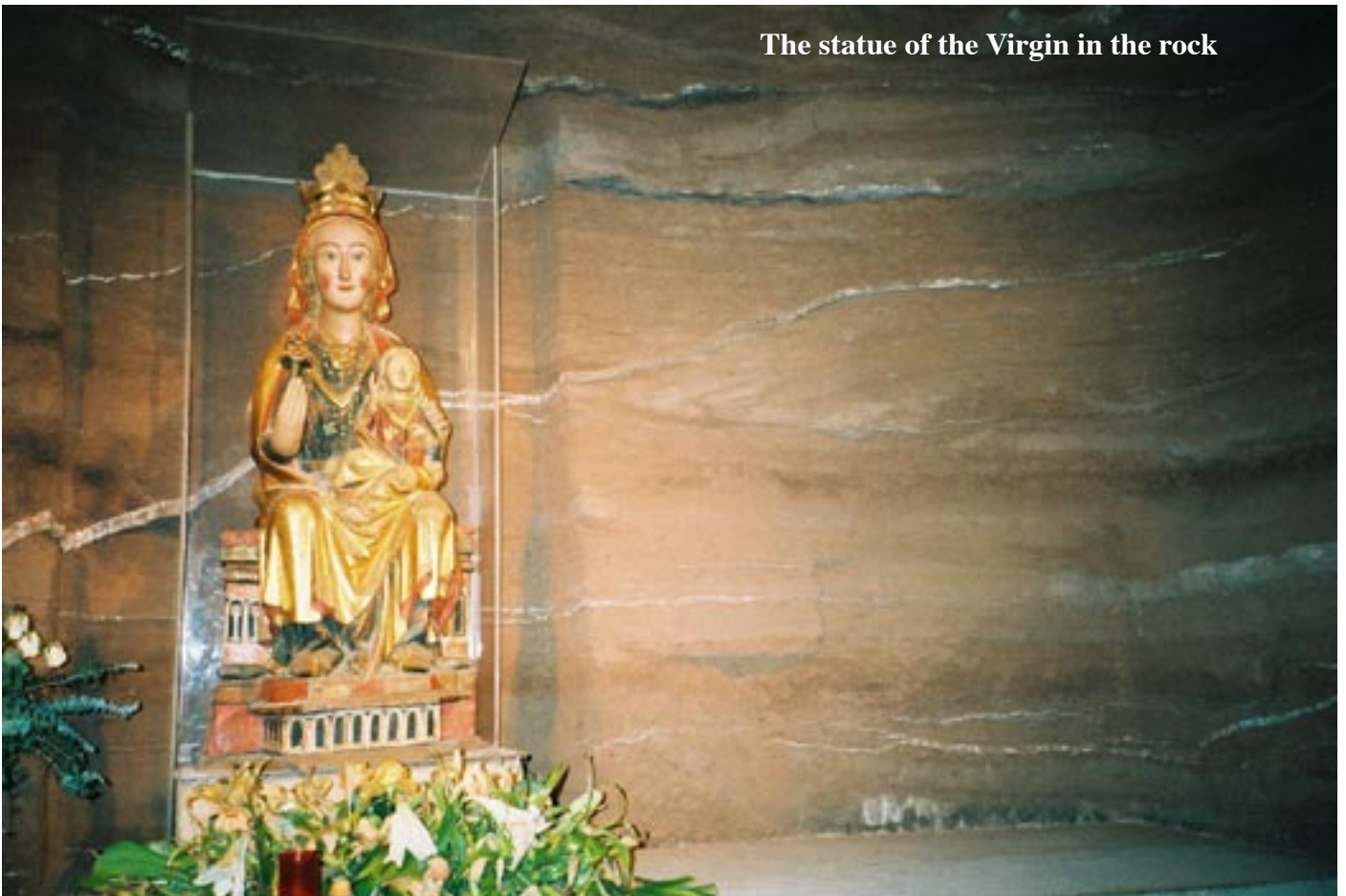
Above: Great-x-uncle Sancho Abarca
Below: Urraca Fernanda of Castile, Sancho Abarca's Queen.



Ken & Sancho Abarca



The statue of the Virgin in the rock



Left & next page: In Najera Old Town



The outskirts of Najera are grottilly industrial (a good thing, economically-speaking) but the middle is rather nice, with the river flowing through & the Old Town, to which we walked, on the other side. We went into the Santa Maria la Real & looked at the tombs of the Kings & Queens. The oldest was that of Sancho Abarca. He was the other brother of Granny Urraca Garcia who married William of Gascony. Avis said that Sancho Abarca looks just like Ken.

It was clear that we had time, rather to my surprise, to get to Bilbao. This Rioja country is obviously more prosperous than the other areas we had been through & the villages were better kept. We went back to the N232 (!) past Haro & on a very good road towards Vittoria, rather than take the expensive & not much shorter motorway. North of Vittoria, there were some natural lakes & it was a welcome change to see some water. But we did not realise they were at the top of a considerable hill & the road wound down many zig-zags for 17 km towards Bilbao. From Bedia onwards, we were obviously in the real economy & the road (N634) took us to right above the Guggenheim Museum, rather to our surprise. We drove into the traffic jams, parked, worked out a hotel, Hotel De Deusto in Deusto, just across the river, found it & booked in for two nights.



Najera Old Town



Above: A Rioja Mesa
Below: Growing Rioja wine grapes



Wednesday 12th May 2004

Superb breakfast as one would expect in an expensive hotel but gloomy, drizzly weather. We walked across the bridge & round what seems to have been a railway yard, in the East corner of which sits the Guggenheim, a fantastical contraption of exotic shapes. As we were too early, we walked over the bridge by it to photo it from the NE side. Inside, it was just as shapely as outside but in different ways. We gather that the shapes are computer controlled, which made cutting the stone cladding much easier & cut the cost massively. The normal Crumbly rate is E6 but we got it for E4.50 because of a shut floor. Unfortunately, most (this is generous) of the art inside is crap. They were putting in a James Rosenquist show, which will also be crap. It took less than two hours to go round it & the conclusion is that the building is a great work of art or sculpture & should, but is not, house great art. We had coffee (E1.43 each) & walked round the river bank to the Old Town, which we explored, including the Market, which was like the one at Cadiz only bigger & full of enticing-looking food. Then, to the Basque Museum, which was full of Basque antiquities & well worth the E2.50 each. We found a café, Bar Brasil, for toasted sandwiches & coffees (E13.30 for 2), then walked back up the main street, Grand Via Don Diego Lopez de Haro, buying postcards & diverting to the ultra-slow service post office for stamps.

Bilbao & principally, the Guggenheim Museum









Below: One of Louise Bourgeois' spiders







Notice the steam coming out from under the footbridge along the river bank.





Above: St. Anthony's Church
Below: Streets in the Old Town







The covered Market is a delight.





By our bridge sits the excellent Art Museum, with a much more extensive & better collection than the Gug. And it was free for Crumblies! There was a special show of fantasy paintings of cities, starting with ones from Pompeii. This was good, as it included artists we had never heard of. Another special was of Jose Etchebarria, a local hero they can keep. We left that at 1730, worn out, having started out at 0930ish. Bilbao is much better than it is cracked down to be. We asked at the hotel for a dinner recommendation which was Basque. They sent us to the Casa Vasca, nothing to eat before nine, as is usual in this weird country & we ate quite well, me having a local cod thing after Cantabrian fish soup. The bill, including a bottle of Rioja, was E55.75, which was a bit steep by local standards.



The Basque Museum (& next two pages)



The Bilbao Town Arms in the Basque Museum





Above: The Opera House
Below: Grand Via Don Diego Lopez de Haro - a tree-lined Regent Street





Above: The main (round) square
Left: Peeping the Guggenheim from the West

Thursday 13th May 2004

The bill for two for two nights was E299, with breakfasts, parking & telephone calls included, which is reasonable by English standards for a four star business doss-house. It was very easy to get out of town, as I had plotted it carefully. Grey start but it was not & had not been raining. We stayed on the 'old road' (N624) to the turning for Gernika & had to go over a pass to get there. The town was full of interest. We walked up to the Town Hall, the Henry Moore memorial & the mosaic of Picasso's "Guernica". Given Picasso's political sympathies, this was appropriately in a Council Estate.



Gernika









Above: The view from the Parliament
Below: The Basque Parliament building



The monument protecting the remains of the traditional oak tree under which the Basque Ferias were granted & which was burned by Franco, surely the worst of a bad bunch of 20th Century dictators.





Above: The town arms
Below: The Henry Moore memorial





Above: The Le Corbusier memorial
Below: Town centre



The drive to Leteikio on the coast was very winding but very pretty & so was the village, although it is getting 'development' behind the old shoreline.



**Above & below: Leiteikio
Left: Avis**



It was even more winding to Ondarroa, which was a great surprise. The outer part is a fishing port & with a designer traffic jam built in but this is on a bend in the river & it is only on heading out that the inner harbour is appreciated & very pretty.



Ondarroa Outer harbour





Ondarroa Inner harbour





Ondarroa Inner harbour put together

From here to Deba, a grotty place, the road is easier & so on to San Sebastian, where we admired the vast beach but did not stop. We found the motorway to Iruña (Pamplona) easily enough & it was free & empty. Just as well, as we were soon in cloud with occasional rain as it climbs like a goat over the mountains. At the top was a service area, where we filled up with salad, escalopes & fuel. There should be good views from this road but not today. On the way down towards Iruña, occasional splashes of sun appeared, in time to photo the villages of Sarasate & Sarasa after coming off the motorway just before one has to pay.



Sarasate above & Sarasa below



Iruña is large & there is a long, grotty modern string of flats & factories on the run in. Finding a hotel is a joke, because the signs peter out & in fact, we later found some on the other side of either pedestrian areas or roadworks. However, we found the charming Hotel Eslava near the Wall, which has its public space fitted out in ethnic style. The landlady spoke French as bad as mine but, apart from being given single beds, we managed ok. It was now time to explore this city thoroughly & we meandered to the main Castle Square (no castle these days), then to the Vauban-style fortifications, which are in very good shape & vast. Back in the old town, we found coffee with some difficulty, as most bars seemed to be shut. Most buildings on the narrow streets have balconies & there is a great variety. However, there is little trace of anything as early as my ancestors, except bits of the old walls. I foiled an attempt to rob my rucksack & then, we headed to the East Wall, where the old walls sit on top of the Vauban walls (i.e. he built in front) & walked round them back to the hotel (which is by the NW corner).

The family interest in Iruña is considerable, as it was the capital of Navarre. Indeed, Iruña is Basque for 'city', as it was the only one they had. All the various boss men of Navarre down to King Garcia I Sanchez (919 - 22/2/970 died at the Pequeña Gate, Church of San Esteban, in Castillo de Monjardín) from Jimeno Sanchez de Navarre 'El Fuerte' (?764 - ?) who was a Basque. There are kings in both the male & female lines. Why Jimeno Sanchez was called 'The Cruel' is unknown but he must have been pretty bad to be so labelled in those times. Maybe, he was a bit rough in keeping the Moors at bay. His grandson was Iñigo Arista de Pamplona considered the first King of Navarre (?790 - 851).

Views in Iruña





Iruña Town Hall





One family member not forgotten





Castle Square - no castle any longer





Above: The Navarra regional parliament building
Below: Castle Square





Above: Avis & the excellent Vauban-style walls of about 1600













Left: The oldest part of the wall, i.e. the Vauban walls were built outside the old ones

Above: Looking towards the Cathedral from the walls

Below: The Pyrennees are the other way







Our Hotel Eslava



Vauban's moat makes a good wildlife park



Friday 14th May 2004

Portion-controlled breakfast but the whole bill, including the telephone call was only E60.55. The day looked a little brighter & we had no trouble in getting out of town to the Roncesvalles road. This went over a smaller pass first & the whole route was very pretty. We passed many walkers coming our way & I tumbled that they were on the St. Jim route. At one point, we saw the path coming in from the side with walkers who turned out to be Australian & confirmed (I asked if they were on the 'Jim walk') that they were on the way to Santiago de Compostella, very muddily.



Above: The Road ro Roncesvalles Below: Pilgrims on the Old Road



We stopped at Roncesvalles, which is tiny &, as it turned out today, very cold, so we had coffee.

Looking South-West from the pass road below Roncesvalles





Above: Roncesvalles Monastery
Below: The monument to the battle



The Old Chapel at Roncesvalles



The top of the pass is not much further & even colder. I got out &, hopefully, was photoed by a Dutch cyclist by the phony Roland memorial.

Below: Looking back down the pass from the top into Spain





Above: Looking South to where the ambush actually took place on the Old Road
Below: Looking back to the pass from the North-East. The old pass is off to the left.



Ken on the phony Roland Monument



The ambush of Charlemagne's rearguard was very much a Delaforce family internal affair. It was organised by Loup II, the Duke of Gascony after Charlemagne had trashed Pamplona in irritation at his proposed alliance with the Emir of Zaragoza had come to nothing when the Emir got a better deal from Cordoba. Both Charlemagne & Loup are family. In connexion with Urgel, we have met Aznar Galindez. His daughter Toda Aznarez married Lope Sancho, the son of Loup II. Lope Sancho was the great-grandfather of Aminiana of Angoulême & Charlemagne was her great-great-grandfather but he also feeds into the family by two other routes, as well. The route was as delightful on the way down, still in Spain.



Above: Luzaide
Left: Last chance to buy booze
at Spanish prices

At the last village, I filled up with bottles of wine for our Chateau Socialist friends. The border is not marked by other than a change of road number & gradually, although we are still technically in Navarre, better quality building maintenance. We stopped in St Jean Pied de Porte for a good look round the ancient village, which is parallel to the modern one but behind the walls. These become very complicated at the top, where there is a formidable Vauban-style castle we walked to the top of. Lunch at the Café Navarre at the bottom (elaborate salads, mineral water & coffee for E29).

The bland entry to St. Jean Pied-de Porte conceals the treasures behind











Above: In the church
Below: Above the town is a Vauban-style donjon, with this zig-zag path up to it





Above: From the donjon looking West
Below: From the donjon: towards Roncevalles





The New Town of St Jean from the donjon





Above: From the donjon entrance looking into the Old Town
Below: Avis & the school in the donjon



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PILGERBÜRO**

Then, a leisurely drive with only one major road works before the on-going one in St. Palais, where this year, we found the elusive D11, a very attractive green road to Bidache. There, we went left to avoid Peyrourade & cross the river at Urt. I had told Martin we would be at St. Luc by 3 & we were only ten minutes late. The day had gradually improved & we had tea in the sunshine in the grounds. We were visited by the two chickens, property of Stephanie & the cats. For dinner, we went to Restaurant "Chez Petiole" at St. Martin de Seignanx, where we had a thick vegetable soup & pork for the men & duck for Avis, which had been cooked & stored in fat for six months (no accountants involved, obviously). Meat very good but the saute spuds & lettuce were a bit ordinary. E51.40 for three, including puddings & two coffees. I had laundry to do when we got back.

Saturday 15th May 2004

Martin supplied a copious breakfast. Avis had this yen to see Biarritz again but, as by the time we had finished chatting, it was still only 11:30, I set off to the river at Urt by a different, single track road & we went South-West to explore first, the old County of Larbord, where the Vicomte who died in 1062 was called Fortun, so I had examined him for possible ancestry before getting Patrick's vol. 2 notes. The Bastide Clairence is absolutely charming.



The Adour Valley above Urt



La bastide Clairence



The Mairie of La bastide Clairence



We carried on to Hasparren & Cambo on the way to St. Jean de Luz, which we avoided & took the main road round Hendaye back into Spain at Irun & turned off to Fuenterrabia/Hondarribia, which where Richard Perkin addressed his letter to Sir Bernard de la Forssa. The old part is very pretty & there was a demo. by, I assumed, ETA asking for the release of political prisoners & a huge sheet of passport-sized photos of them. To check, I asked an older man in French & he confirmed it, so I told him, "Nous sommes dans Euskadi pour mon ancetre etait Basque". I should had said Euskadunuk but he appreciated the gesture.

In Fuenterrabia





In Fuenterrabia

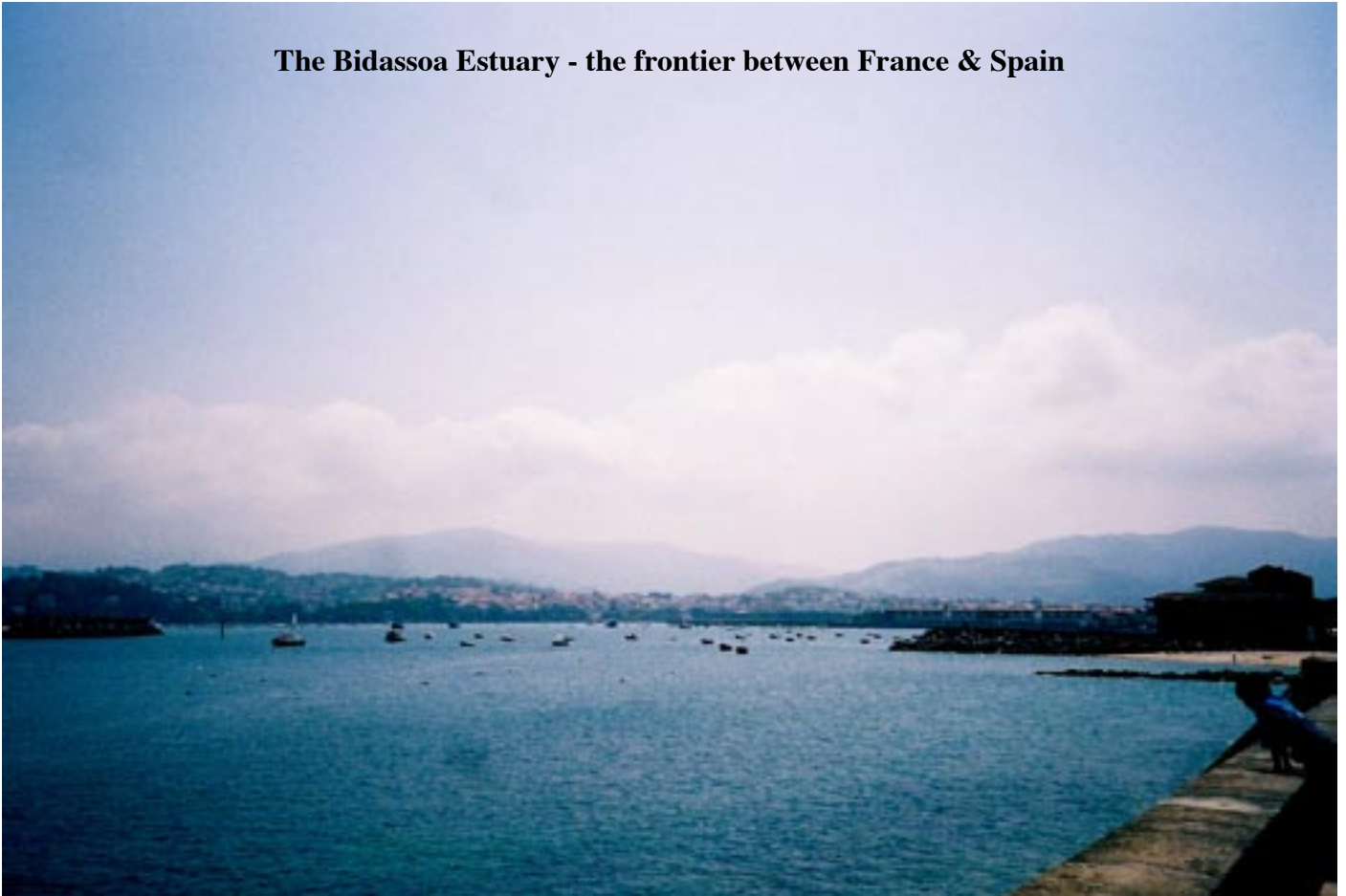




Below: The ETA demo in Fuenterrabia

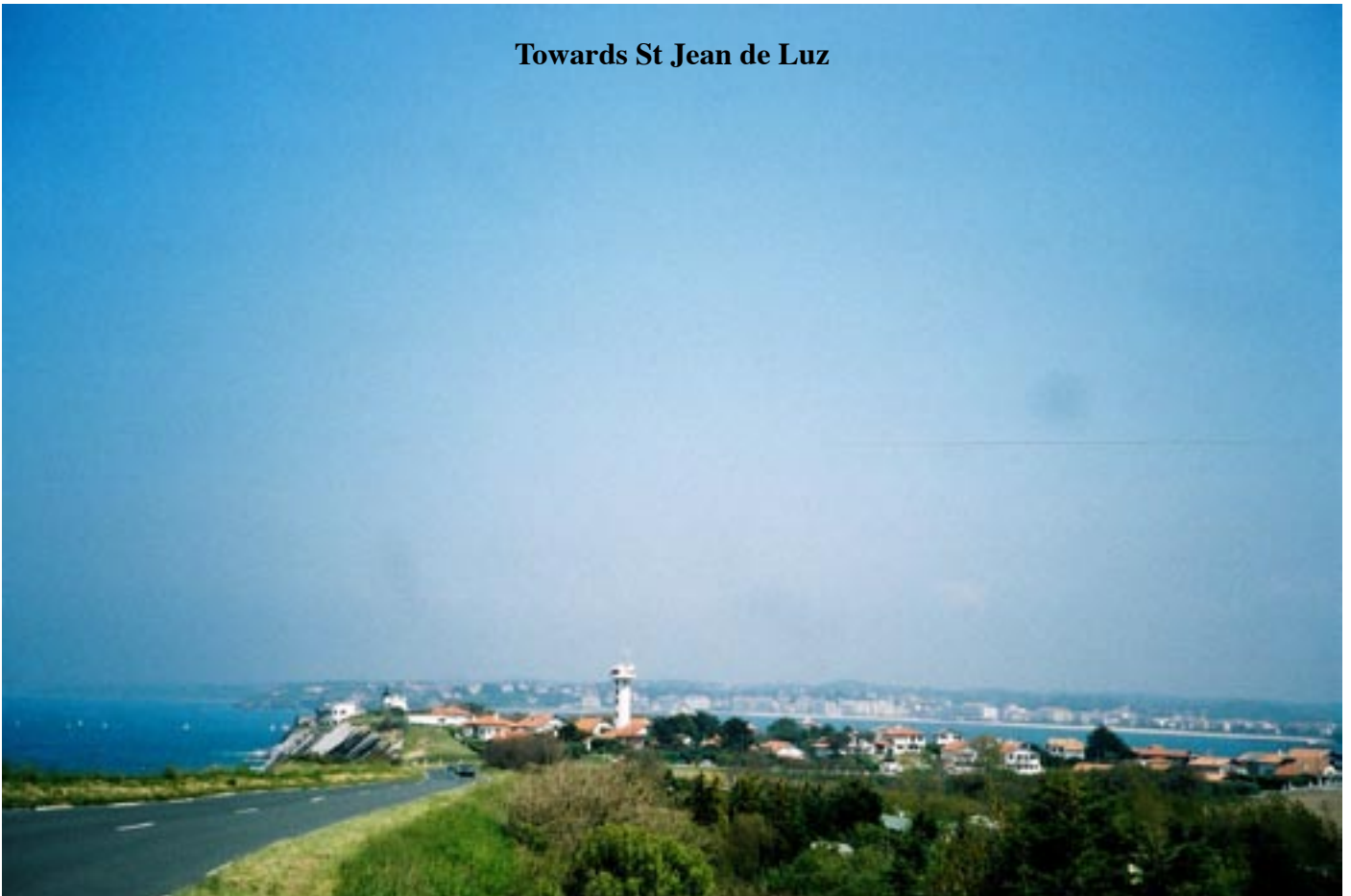


The Bidassoa Estuary - the frontier between France & Spain



None of the eateries looked particularly appetising, so we went back to France & ate on Hendaye Plage at the Miramar: more elaborate salad, beer & wine & coffee for E28.20. We stuck to the Coast Road as far as Biarritz, exploring interesting St. Jean de Luz this time after Ciboure opposite.

Towards St Jean de Luz



Ciboure



St Jean de Luz



We parked 50m from where we did last year in Biarritz but this time, it was hot & not windy. After an explore of both littoral & town, I had the usual misery of getting out of the Biarritz-Bayonne complex, which is still plagued with road works & bad signage (no road numbers on the signs) until we found the Adour River & drove delightfully along its right bank to Urt again & so to Martin's chateau, where we had tea. Martin cooked dinner for us, Jeff & Stephanie. Fish soup to start with & duck with spuds & beans, prepared quite exotically. Then, a Basque cake from the supermarket.

Biarritz

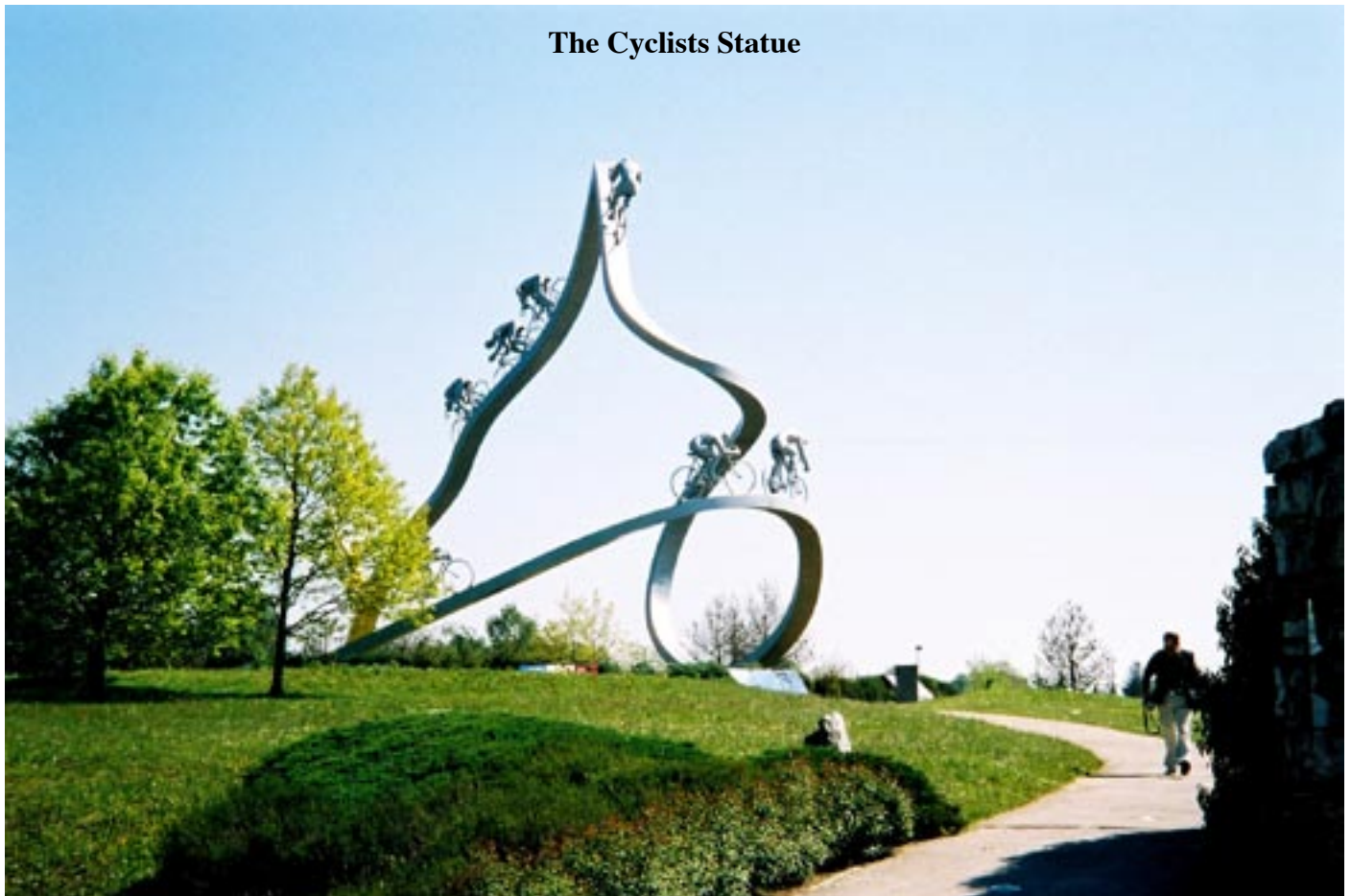


Biarritz



Sunday 16th May 2004

Boiled eggs for breakfast! We left at about 10:10 & got onto the motorway from an unmarked new road West of Peyrourade & roared along this for 131km, stopping twice, once for photos of the Pyrenees & once for fuel but there was a splendid sculpture of cyclists doing the passes.



The Cyclists Statue

We came off West of St. Gaudens, which might have been worth exploring but we did not have the time. There was a spectacular chateau (castle-type) on a hill at Prat but St Giron, which looks on the map as if it might be interesting, wasn't.



Chateau de Prat

We stopped for lunch at Rimont at the Bar-Restaurant de la Poste (E32 strongly recommended). Rimont again is very pretty & so was la Bastide de Serou.



Above: St Lizier
Below: La Bastide de Serou



Going down to Foix, more snow-capped peaks appeared which we did not see on the Cathar trip but which cannot be seen from the town.

Foix



We used the motorway up to the Mirepoix road &, after passing through it, I decided we had enough time to go to the Aude La Force with its oval bastide. It was a rather poor-looking place & we don't know if there is any family connexion but I will put the pictures on the Force Scrapbook web-page.

Looking towards the Aude La Force



La Force on its slight, but defensible, rise



La Force Church



Inside the La Force Bastide, which is oval









It was not too far to Vicky's, although Sorrèze is a bit bigger than I expected & we had to drive round twice before the village idiot told us where it was. It is an enchanting, ancient town which was much sacked in the past, partly for being Protestant but there are many old buildings including Vicky's, which is much bigger inside than it looks outside, last restored 17thC (after the last sacking) but originally built between the 10th & 12thC. Vicky's house has a lovely little courtyard, in which we later had dinner, a small chicken, which was all that was available in the village today but her cookery is very good. The top floor (2nd), is open-plan at the moment & shows the wooden frame clearly. We all had too much to drink before bedtime.

Monday 17th May 2004

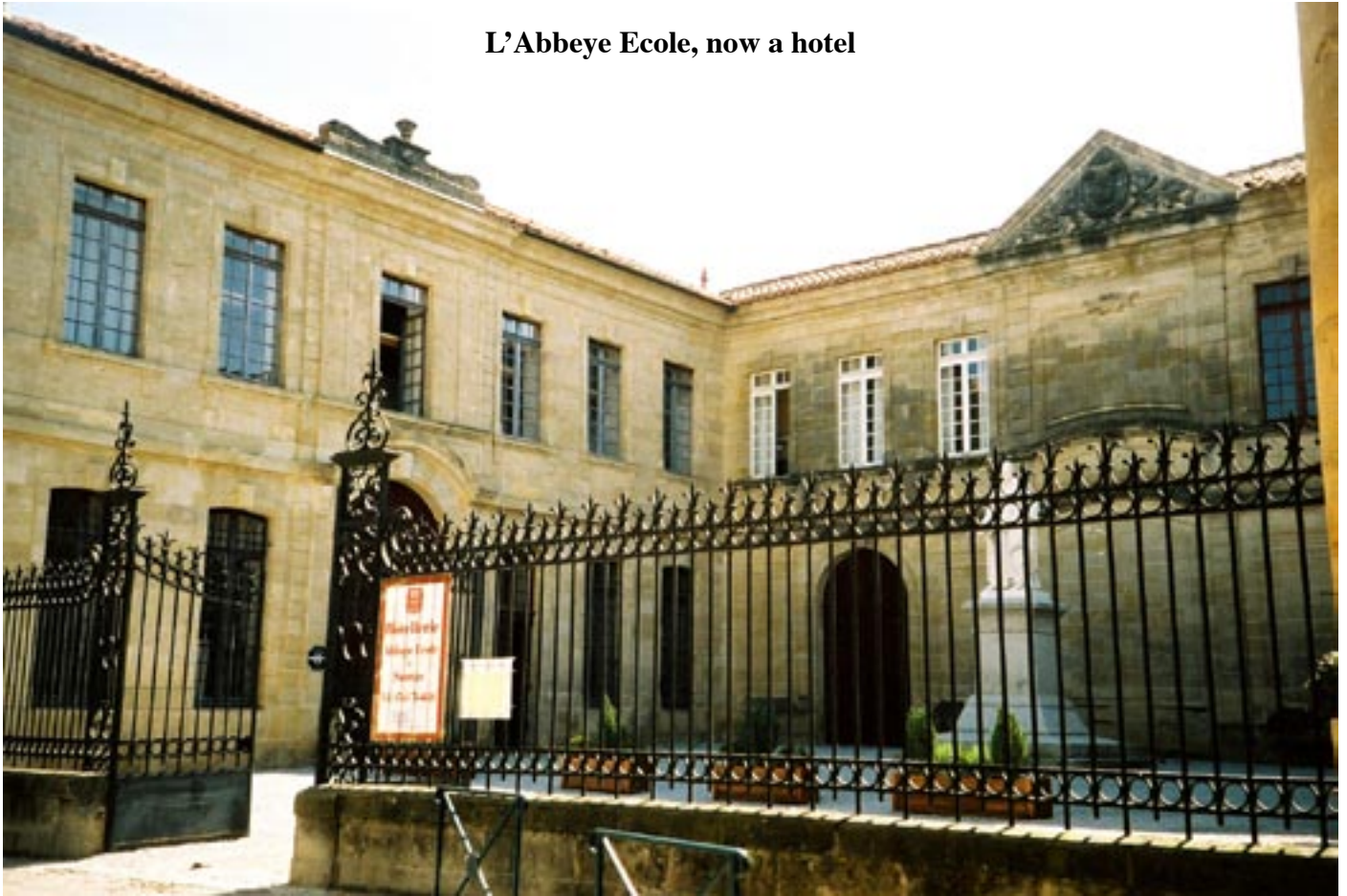
Continental breakfast, quite enough. We thoroughly explored Sorrèze in the morning, finding the old Abbaye Ecole, which was famous in the past as one of the best schools in France but is now a hotel. This was colossal. There was quite a bit of bad art in the few shops & the streets are similar to London's before the Great Fire, one imagined.



Top: La Force Bastide from outside
Left & next pages: In Sorrèze



L'Abbaye Ecole, now a hotel





The (relatively) new church, a window opposite







The Main Square looking North (above) & South (below)





Above: The Square outside the bastide
Below: Looking towards the Black Mountain









Vicky has a French class at 14:00 on Mondays, so she drove us to Castres, where we had a splendid lunch (paté de foi gras & salmon on spaghetti at the Café de l'Europe for E65). She left us for her class & we explored the old town. Everything was shut, it being a Monday but there was more than enough to see. I particularly liked the old buildings overlooking the river & the new ones there built in the same spirit. This had been a Protestant town & while there was only one Protestant church, only open occasionally in the summer, the street names reeked of left-wing spirit. It was the birthplace of Jean Jaures & his statue dominates the main square. The catholic churches were exceedingly gloomy inside & all their pictures could do with a jolly good clean. Vicky collected us at tea outside the Bar Europe at 15:40 & ran us back to Sorrèze. Boiling hot day at 27°C. Vicky went off in the evening to see an artist friend in the village, unable to take us as the friend did not answer the telephone. A woman called & affected to have difficulty with our French. The gist was that she was Angeline & Rosa's daughter (Rosa is Vicky's cleaning lady) was having a baby, the impression we got was 'right now'. We said we would tell Vicky. I read the Goths book & later, fiddled with the web site & my lecture notes.

Various views of Castres











Jean Jaures

When Vicky returned, we went for a walk halfway up the mountain at the back but turned back before getting to the top, as it would be dark if we continued & the path was pretty awful. Vicky produced nibbles when we got back & wine. Alas, we ate them.

Below: Sorrèze from the Black Mountain



Tuesday 18th May 2004

During breakfast, Angeline reappeared, rather hyper again & after she left, Vicky told her story: her son's girlfriend was pinched by another guy &, in a confrontation, he killed him. This happened a year ago & she has not come to terms with it. Not surprising. We did rather wonder what an apparently well-off foreigner living in a small picturesque town might find themselves involved in or what the expectations of the not-at-all well-off locals might be. We bought reinforced wine for Philip at the village supermarket, which was quite well stocked & left at 11:20, taking a pretty way to Carcassonne by side roads with beautiful villages like Saissac (below). Cassoulet in the airport restaurant after a buffet starter & a buffet pudding left little time & I forgot my umbrella. The plane was early & things went smoothly, so we were back before 6.

