

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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# May we sample your cheese? May 13, 2022

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[Photos](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Index](#)

It's just four of us again. We said our fond farewells to Mike and Liz. We helped them shuttle their bags down in the tiny elevator, one bag at a time. They had arranged for a ride to the airport. So now it's the two of us, plus Ron and Nancy, who flew in yesterday.

Step one is to move them from where they stayed last night, a hotel less than a block away, into the apartment. They'll sleep one night where Mike and Liz have been staying. In their nice hotel we ride the elevator up to the top floor to help them with their luggage. We're also there to check out the hotel (as a possible place to stay next time) and to abscond with all their Nespresso coffee pods, soap, and Q-tips. The hotel is very nice and the breakfast spread looks amazing.

Once they're settled into our apartment we head out and hop on the metro. We ride to the M1 metro (the main east-west line) and transfer to a train headed towards the Chateau de Vincennes, the easternmost station. As we ride an elderly man gets on with his full rolling-shopping cart. Ron gives up his seat to the man and the two become fast friends (even though neither speaks the other's language). He tells us that the Chateau de Vincennes is the oldest chateau in Europe, or some such brag. We explain we're going to see the chateau and then hike over to see the Parc Floral.

Off the metro we head in the wrong direction and the man gets us back on the correct path. In one of the hallways is a big plaque commemorating the RAPT (metro) employees who died in the wars. We just passed 'Remembrance Day' and there are lots of wreaths and bouquets for the fallen. We all (including the old man) stop to admire and pay our respects. The old man explains some things about the plaque. We consider getting a restraining order on him.

Finally in daylight again we head for the Chateau. You could hit it with a croissant from the Metro station, it's so close. The entrance involves us crossing a bridge over a huge (dry) moat and into a room to have ourselves, and our bags, checked out, as if we were getting on an international flight. We are required to show ID and empty our pockets and walk through a metal detector. Inside we find many buildings and a very old keep and barracks and a huge church. None of it looks important, lived in, or even in use. It's nice. It's well maintained, but it's vacant. We're not sure why it needs such protection. We admire it and move on.

Our next stop is the Parc Floral. We've been there many times, but this is Ron and Nancy's first visit. We pay the modest 6 euros. We could have paid less if we had our official papers from the French government that confirms that we are old, but not being French we do not. We're OK to pay 6 euros. The bathrooms alone are worth it.

We wander around. There are some flowers, but not that many. There's a place for ducks, but it seems they're still mid-migration from the south. We see a few glass buildings labeled 'Bonsai' and go in. Inside there were many impressive trees. We squint to read the dates the trees were started, many seem quite old. A lone gardener there, an older Japanese woman all of 4' 8", answered some questions for us, in French. She tells us the age of the oldest bonsai tree and we puzzle over what we were just told. That can't be right. She leads us over to a very impressive tree and we look at the date... 1796. Wow! We ask how many gardeners care for the bonsai trees. She says "One", very proudly. We congratulate her on her great work.

The next glass building is labeled "Jurassic" and we go in. Humid and interesting. Another is labeled "Dessert" and we feel like we're back in Austin. Finally we head beyond all the buildings to find a bench in the shade where we eat our sandwiches and chips. While relaxing and eating we see young French parents stroll by with their young child in tow. Family is so important to them. Across from us we see so many enormous rhododendron bushes, all in full bloom.

After lunch we wander past the rhododendron bushes to see how many there are. They were seemingly endless, in number and color. And all are happy and healthy and accompanied by azaleas and countless other big and small blooming plants. The further we go, the more we realized we had never seen the whole extent of the Parc Floral, it's amazing! On the west of Paris is the Parc de Bagatelle in the Bois de Bologne, and this is on the east. What a city!

Exhausted from our discoveries we stop for a beer and iced tea before heading back to the Metro for our ride back to Paris proper. Confident in our Metro-riding abilities we stick our tickets in only to be told we can't go through. The nice man at the ticket counter checks each of the ten tickets I have and replaces the two that have gone bad. I'm admonished to keep the tickets away from my iPhone and from any credit cards. I promise to be a good metro rider.

On the train some twenty-something is giving a boisterous condemnation of how the French government is treating the French, letting the immigrants take all the jobs, when it's really the French who made France, and blah, blah, blah. He wasn't asking for anything specific, but he also wasn't stopping so we relocate to other seats further away. We see him disembark after a few stations.

From there, Ron and Nancy go for a walk through the Tuileries gardens, to try to stay awake. Scott and Karen go back to the apartment to pack for tomorrow's relocation to the Dordogne.

Later Karen and Ron go grocery shopping at the Bon Marché. They find everything on their shopping list with the exception of ready-made buckwheat crêpes. A small army of Bon Marché employees fly into action scouring the store, but to no avail. Karen and Ron get in line to check out with what they were able to find. Shortly thereafter they're pulled from the line. The crêpes have been found!! They hurry over, verify the find and add a few packages to their cart. They're escorted back to the checkout line and, like royalty, are put at the front of the long line, tickled at such treatment.

We metro to dinner. It's on the west end of Paris, in Neuilly-sur-Seine, where we used to live. At Le Chalet Scott and Ron get fillet of beef with a ridiculous amount of Béarnaise and au poivre sauces. Nancy gets four big lamb chops (lamb pops), and Karen gets a big pot of cheese fondue. It's all wonderful and preceded by a delicious salad with endive, walnuts, blue cheese and vinaigrette, which itself is preceded (and succeeded) by lots of wine.

At the table next to us the trio is having Raclette, where a portion of a wheel of raclette cheese is set up like a teepee, pointing skyward, under a pair of electric heaters to melt it sensuously. Inhibitions out the window due to the wine, and knowing our neighbors have much more cheese that can be eaten, Scott leans over with a small piece of bread and asks for a taste of the raclette cheese (in French). They're initially surprised but quickly oblige, and later offer us two more tastes, unsolicited. When we get more wine, we offer and fill their glasses. It's a fun evening. Scott and Karen will again be back in Paris in a few weeks. We agree we'll go back to Le Chalet.

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## Photos









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[Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Index](#)

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