

The Kipling Motoring Diaries

August 1911

This tour comprised a circuit of Normandy and a visit to their American friend Julia Depew (née Catlin) at her home at the Chateau d'Annel, at Compiègne, north of Paris.

*It lasted 14 days, 4-18 August.
The Kiplings took Elsie and John with them.*

[The area in Normandy covered by this tour was the favourite stamping ground of this editor 70-75 years later, and it has been necessary to exercise severe restraint to prevent personal reminiscences being allowed to intrude.]



Julia Depew



Max Aitken

For the first two days, Max and Gladys Aitken accompanied them.

The diary started with a list of hotels, possibly ones which they might use – not necessarily the ones at which they stayed.

It was followed by a more detailed daily itinerary which gave the daily distances in kilometres and miles.

<i>Place</i>	<i>Hotel</i>
Boulogne	Bristol
Dieppe	Royal Hotel
Rouen	de la Poste
Bayeux	Hotel de Luxembourg
(Mont) St. Michel	Établissement Poulard
Falaise	Hotel Normandie
Les Andelys	Hotel du Grand Cerf
Erreux	Hotel du Grand Cerf
Lisieux	Hotel de Normandie
Caen	Hotel d'Angleterre
St. Lo	de l'Univers
Mortain(e)	de la Poste
Vire	St. Pierre
Alençon	De France et de la Poste
Coutances	De France
Valogne(s)	St. Michel
Pont Audemer	du Pot d'Étain
Avranches	d'Angleterre

		K	M
Boulogne – Dieppe	Aug. 5	135	83
Dieppe via Caudebec to Rouen	6	112	70
Rouen: via Honfleur and Caen to Bayeux	7	158	100
Bayeux - Mont St. Michel	8	140	86
M. St. Michel – Falaise	9	136	84
Falaise – Les Andelys	10	143	88
Les Andelys via Beauvais & Clermont to Annel	11	128.5	80



Aug. 4

Left for Folkestone in evening and picked up the Aitkens at Metropole Hotel

Aug. 5th

Arr. Boulogne 1.25 with 9 cars. Déj. Bristol - Chrystal. Got away 3.15 to 20. Hot, muggy day. Touched Aitken's car coming out of Boulogne.

Country all in leaf and all burned up. Abbeville at 5.10 – 77 Km. Stayed at Tête de Boeuf. Left 6.10 reached Rouen City 8.20 but 15 mins finding Hotel de la Poste in the dark. Good accommodation but warmish all day. Total 50 miles to Abbeville, 67 to Rouen: total 17 miles or 167 Km.



It would seem, perhaps, that the itinerary given above was no more than an outline plan – at all events, they did not stay at Dieppe, but went direct to Rouen.

The cross-channel steamers carried cars as deck cargo. They had to be craned on board. We think that 'Chrystal' may have been the name of the proprietor of the Hotel Bristol in Boulogne.

Britain and much of northern Europe were in the grip of a heatwave which had started in early July and which continued until mid-September, with its associated drought. The highest temperature recorded in the UK at this time was not exceeded until 1990 (36.7°C on Aug. 9th at Canterbury). It is of interest that Carrie's diaries make no mention of the extreme weather (or if they did, neither Carrington nor Rees thought it worth-while to retain the record).

It is also worth remarking that in the days before 'daylight saving' (introduced during WW1), it was clearly dark at about 8 p.m. at this time of year – today, we would expect it still to be light until about 9 p.m. six weeks after mid-summer day.

Aug. 6th.

Left Rouen after seeing Cathedral 11 a.m; took wrong turning to Caudebec through Maromme and Barentin to Duclair. Déj. Caudebec in crowded hotel – blue wide Seine in front and multitude of motors. Caudebec church. Thence Lillebonne where saw Roman amphitheatre. French players. Luce (?) in curl papers who had been shepherd to Oedipus in Mounet-Sully's Co. week before. She had too big shoes. Going to London. Thence to Tancarville to Frascati's queer cabin-like hotel and all the ships of all the seas. Parted with Aitkens 10 p.m. who embarked *Lydia*. About 65 miles. Hot fine weather.



Caudebec-en-caux, Seine Maritime

Caudebec lies on the north bank of the Seine, north-west by west from Rouen, the river making several wide meanders on its way to the coast at Le Havre. Caudebec's church is a fine gothic-looking structure. Lillebonne lies due west of Caudebec, and is just north of the river. The banks of the Roman amphitheatre are largely grass-grown today.

Jean Mounet-Sully (1841-1916) was a well-known French actor, and a pillar of the Comédie Française, who had made a speciality of the role of Oedipus, and had first performed it in a Roman amphitheatre in Orange, just north of Avignon in 1888. It would seem that they happened on a performance in Lillebonne's amphitheatre, We have been unable to identify the actress 'Luce'.



Jean Mounet-Sully

Tancarville today is the site of a major road bridge over the Seine. We are not sure about "all the ships of all the seas" – Tancarville lies on the Seine, and many ships go up to Rouen, much of it deep-sea shipping – but Le Havre was the French Southampton, and the great ocean liners

went in and out of the docks there, and they were 14 miles further on.

Aug. 7th.

Left Le Havre at 10.20 for Quilleboeuf. Moore left bag behind so had to telephone from Lillebonne for it to be sent to Bayeux. Crossed Seine by ferry through Pont Audemer, thence Honfleur where wooden church, on to Trouville thro' Devonshire lanes, then to Cabourg (small Trouville) where no room. Cabourg to Caen: road crowded, 76 auos in 31 mins. Dust and riot. Caen at 6 p.m, Hotel d'Angleterre: square courtyard with motors coming in and out all night: trains whistling in the background. About 134 Km.

Quilleboeuf is on the opposite side of the Seine to Le Havre. At that date there was no bridge over the Seine below Rouen (today, I can think of three). Pont Audemer was so named because it had a bridge over the river Eure, a tributary of the Seine, which entered the Seine at that point.

Trouville and its sister Deauville, on the Baie de la Seine were the French equivalent of Brighton in its Edwardian days, being the Parisian's seaside playground. Cabourg is still as Kipling described it, a small Trouville, and remains very attractive. The countryside behind this coastline is, indeed, like Devonshire, with deep lanes (the Norman bocage). (It is well described in the novels of Mrs. Robert Henrey.)



Aug. 8th.

Sweltering hot. Took L & E out to Église de la Trinité: and Hotel-Dieu, maze and view. Thence lay up until 3.30 p.m. Left for Ouistreham, Riva Bella, Lion-sur-mer: Luc-sur-mer, Langrune, St. Aubin – long cross-sections of French life as lived at seaside in heat. Refreshing by sea, but not fresh inland. To Bayeux at 5.50. Hotel de Luxembourg: still hot and close.

It would seem from this entry that Landon was with them, as well as John and Elsie. The Église de la Trinité was a former Abbey, established by Duke William the Conqueror in 1062. His wife is buried therein. The facilities of the original Hotel-Dieu, a hospital, had been transferred to the cloisters of the abbey in 1823.

Today, Ouistreham is the ferry port of Caen, at the mouth of the river Orne, and the string of villages named were all associated with the D-Day landings (more prosaically, the village of Langrune is rather half-heartedly 'twinned' with this editor's home village in Sussex).

There is still a Hotel du Luxembourg in Bayeux today.



Hotel du Luxembourg, Bayeux

Aug. 9th.

Still hotter. Saw tapestry in morn. C & E bought laces. Very good déj and dinner, but heat something awful. So left at 2 p.m. for Granville (Grand Hotel) a hell of a place. Garage smelt of stables which it truly was: dogs yowled in streets: trains: heat: but full moon. Went to harbour in evening and saw gay private yacht. Bayeux to Granville only (97 Km). Orchards and meadows chiefly. Small fields, high hedges and earthworks covered with bracken.



The 'Bayeux Tapestry' is, in fact, embroidery, rather than tapestry. But it is a wonderful artefact. It celebrates the victory of William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy over the Saxon King Harold, of England, in 1066. Granville lies on the western coast of the Cotentin peninsula, and today is the main ferry port for crossing to the Channel Islands from France.

Aug. 10th.

Fled early: 9 a.m. from Grand Hotel de Granville (may Allah confound it) and by Avranches to Mont St. Michel where found rooms up 150 steps facing W. Amazing place, but of vast beauty. C. better. Carts trekking over dove-coloured sands: straight line of road through orchards.



Mont St Michel

Mont St. Michel is an amazing place, but today is best admired from afar, or inside the Abbaye itself. Today, visitor's cars are not allowed on to the Mont. And in 1911, this editor is doubtful if the Rolls could have managed the main street: we imagine that Moore must have had to carry their bags up the 150 steps. Clearly, their stay in Granville had not been a particularly pleasurable experience.

Aug. 11th.

Promise of a still hotter day. Left M. St. M. at 9 a.m. to Mortain in growing heat and fears of a tyre burst. Arr. Mortain 11.15. Visited grim granite church (heat worse than anything yet). Lay up at the Hotel de la Poste till 2 p.m. and sailed out in raging heat to Domfront where went round the walls of the old town and saw new house built into them. Two small kids in chairs singing "Avant l'heure de séparer". Then Falaise and a most awful looking little inn which was red hot.

Met there Mr. and Mrs. Mullyon and Mr. and Mrs. Marriott and a small thing of 3½, very articulate, called “Nanette”. Girl at Hotel knew J.B., etc. Talked to English artists in courtyard after surprisingly good but hot dinner. Then to bed in red hot rooms – all things considered this was the hottest night of about five unimaginably hot nights. Walk in lower town in evening of great beauty with William’s castle overhead – tannery and Arlette’s well. In spite of heat, repaid for visiting.

M. St. M to Mortain	55Km
Mortain to Domfront	25
Domfront to Falaise	<u>61</u>
	142Km
	<u>5</u>
	8) <u>620</u>
	78 miles

As written, Kipling’s arithmetic immediately above is suspect. Maybe he was rounding the figures up to get a whole number answer. They were now returning eastward along the southern leg of the flattened irregular oval that was the shape of their tour. Falaise was the birthplace of Duke William, and the castle was the ducal ‘seat’. Duke William’s birth was, in the eyes of the Church, irregular, though not by Viking tradition. His mother, Arlette, was a daughter of a tanner in Falaise; the tannery and Arlette’s Well are tourist attractions. His descendants have been Kings and Queens of England ever since.

We think that the Mullyons and Marriotts were merely ‘hotel acquaintances’, and of no particular significance. Nor can we identify J.B.

Aug. 12th.

Got away (awake at 5 a.m.) at 9 after superb coffee and rolls, made good time to Lisieux where saw market place in Place Thiers and church, etc., old houses in Rue aux Fèvres. Also watered her wheels. Thence to Evreux by Paris road, reeling off miles in great state. Dèj. at expensive and meretricious Hotel du Cerf. Saw Cathedral and belfry. Away at 2.35 for Les Andelys. Got a drink at Hotel du Cerf there and saw little church in Petit Andelys and big church (a glory and delight) in Grand Andelys. Thence 5 p.m. via Gisors (of which a glimpse) to Beauvais which reached at 7. After our spring visit it felt like home but crowded with people and motors.



Beauvais today

“Watered her wheels”. In the extreme heat, there was a risk that the air in the inner tubes would expand so as to burst the tyre, so an attempt was made to cool the tyres. Les Andelys, south east of Rouen, lies at the apex of one of the meanders of the Seine, under some dramatic cliffs, and an ancient castle, Chateau Gaillard.

	Km	
Falaise to Lisieux	50	
Lis. to Evreux	70	
Evreux to Les Andelys	35½	
Les Andelys to Beauvais	<u>66</u>	
	222½	139 miles

Burst a tyre under Chateau Gaillard 3.30 p.m.

*The watering was, perhaps, not entirely successful.
Clearly, Kipling was not very good at arithmetic.*

Aug. 13th.

Beauvais to Chateau d’Annel. 60 Km. Awfully hot.



Chateau d'Annel

They spent the next five days with the Depews at Chateau d'Annel. Kipling was worried that a threatened national railway strike would also stop the railway steamers, and that they might be unable to get home. He kept in contact with Howell Gwynne, who advised that the strike would not affect their travel arrangements.

They returned home on the first day of the two day strike, Aug. 18th with no problems. Carrie recorded in her diary, "Arrive home 1.45, tired but oh so thankful to be back. No strike troubles."

[R.K./A.J.W.W.]