

Isle of Man-CC



With a Velomobile across Europe
to the IOM-Cycle Challenge

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Preface

(Stolen without permission from Stuart at "Yellomobile.net". I hope he will give me his consent when I get hold of him.)

In the deepest, darkest recesses of the velonaut brain there is a seed of madness. It is the seed of speed. It is the need to go faster, for speed at all costs, for absolutely unreasonable amounts of velocity.

It was not always so. We all started out very practically – choosing our new machine to commute in comfort, or its protection from the elements, or its stability, or its year round abilities, and of course its aerodynamic properties which allow us to do more, with less energy.

But that was back in the beginning. We all wrote our checks with trembling pens in trembling hands and submitted our order after long and torturous deliberation. This was followed (for most of us) by a long and torturous wait for the machine to be built. When at last we proudly beheld our shiny new addiction in all its splendor, we quietly vowed to protect it like a child – our lovely little time machine.

First, a ride round the block to set our mind at ease, a week to become accustomed to the enclosure, a month to get used to people looking at you like a madman (or woman), two or three more to gain recumbent muscles and feel one with the machine, and then – the speed. You didn't notice the change but it's been happening all the time – the way your heavy vehicle now whizzes by ultra-light upright racers, the way you don't feel the wind anymore, the way you can now coast forever, and the way the brick wall of max speed has magically transformed into something soft as a pillow – something that can be pushed and negotiated with. That's where the madness begins...

You didn't realize, but it has taken that long to break down all of the accepted 'knowledge' about human power and machines. Sure, you realized that you would go a bit faster in a velomobile because of something called aerodynamics but it isn't until you become one with the machine that you suddenly realize you are doing something... superhuman. You have the power to propel yourself faster than you ever believed possible. And once that belief is broken, well, there are no limitations anymore. You've found that the only thing chaining you to the past was your past view of reality. And all of that has been swept away by the seed of speed.

Once you accept your madness, you find yourself subtly transported into the future and are blissfully free... to dream again.

1 The Isle of Man Cycle Challenge

EVA, das bin ich! Eigentlich heiße ich EVO-R, ein Velomobil aus dem Hause Beyss. Ich bin das schönste Velomobil, das je gebaut wurde. Und es wird auch nie ein schöneres gebaut werden. Warum? Weil ich mit meiner Glaskuppel zwar wunderschön bin, auch wahnsinnig schnell aber nicht besonders praktisch. Besonders bei Regenwetter nicht, weil man dann nichts mehr sieht. Aber wer stellt schon eine Prinzessin in den Regen? Mein Besitzer (DYNAMIK) meint, ich sei auch gefährlich. Aber nur weil er nicht richtig fahren kann. Ganz so schlimm kann es allerdings nicht sein, denn wir waren zusammen im westlichsten Zipfel von Spanien, im südlichsten Zipfel von Italien und werden, wenn alles nach Plan läuft, sicher auch noch Australien durchqueren.

Dieses Jahr haben wir bereits eine Tour-de-Suisse unternommen. Das waren aber nur 750 km. Nun soll es aber an ein richtiges Rennen gehen und zwar auf der Isle of Man. Dynamik hat alles wie üblich vorbereitet, d.h. eben nichts vorbereitet. Dabei geht es ja - wie schon gesagt - um ein richtiges Rennen. Oder geht es eher um Nostalgie? Für Rennen hat Dynamik, soviel ich weiss, nicht viel übrig. Wen wundert's, er wäre ja ohnehin der letzte beim Zieleinlauf.

Dass wir uns überhaupt auf den Weg zur Isle of Man gemacht haben, ist einem guten Zufall zu verdanken, denn ursprünglich war die Pazifik-Küste auf dem Plan. Aber Ende Juni war das Transportproblem für mich immer noch nicht gelöst und da ist Dynamik eher zufällig auf die Website des Isle-of-Man CC gestossen und sieht, dass dieses Jahr erstmals auch Velomobile zugelassen sind. Die Pazifik-Küste rennt nicht davon, meint Dynamik und meldet uns sofort beim IOM-CC an. Zwei Tage später figurieren wir in der Rider's List, allerdings im Team der "Blazing Saddles". Begreiflich, dass Dynamik damit nicht einverstanden war. Er komme mit einem Velomobil und nicht mit dem Team "Bleeding Saddles". Schnell wird die Liste angepasst aber nun erscheint Dynamik unter den Frauen, was ihm auch nicht behagt. Laura Mears, die das ganze Event grandios organisiert, schreibt zurück: "Thank you for your very funny email and I am so sorry that your saddle is seeping and you have had an involuntary sex change. We will fix it tomorrow." Nun figuriert Dynamik unter den Veteranen in der Gruppe Velomobile.

Dynamik pflegt jeden Tag ein paar Notizen über seine Reisen mit mir zu machen. „ReiseTagebuch“ nennt er das. Wohl damit er nicht sofort vergisst, wo er gewesen ist. Diese Tagebuchseiten habe ich gefunden und hier zusammengestellt.

Dijon, 13 Sept. 2018

The Isle of Man is famous for cats without tails and for the TT motorbike races. The motorbike races (not the cats) were the reason that 44 years ago Karin and I set off to that famous island on our old BMW 500. Not to take part in the race itself but to watch others roaring with 100 mph through tiny villages. It's amazing what you do when you are young.



Visiting the Isle of Man on our old BMW 500

Now, 44 years later (and hopefully a little bit wiser) I'm again on the way to the Isle of Man. But this time for the IOM-CC, the Cycle Challenge. This year it's the first time that velomobiles are allowed to take part in this race. Being the only person in the category velomobile/veteran I'm bound to finish first in my category. Not a bad prospect.

To save me frustration already in the first hours, Karin (my dear wife) drove me and my velomobile to the Col des Etroits near Ste. Croix. With an altitude of 1253 m this was also the highest point of the entire journey. Thus it would be an easy run downhill until reaching the blue waters of the Atlantic shore. So far I've passed Salins-les-Bains (with a small lunch instead of a relaxing bath), stopped in Dôle (for cold chocolate instead of wine) and ended the day in Dijon (no mustard but they have a really wonderful historic centre).





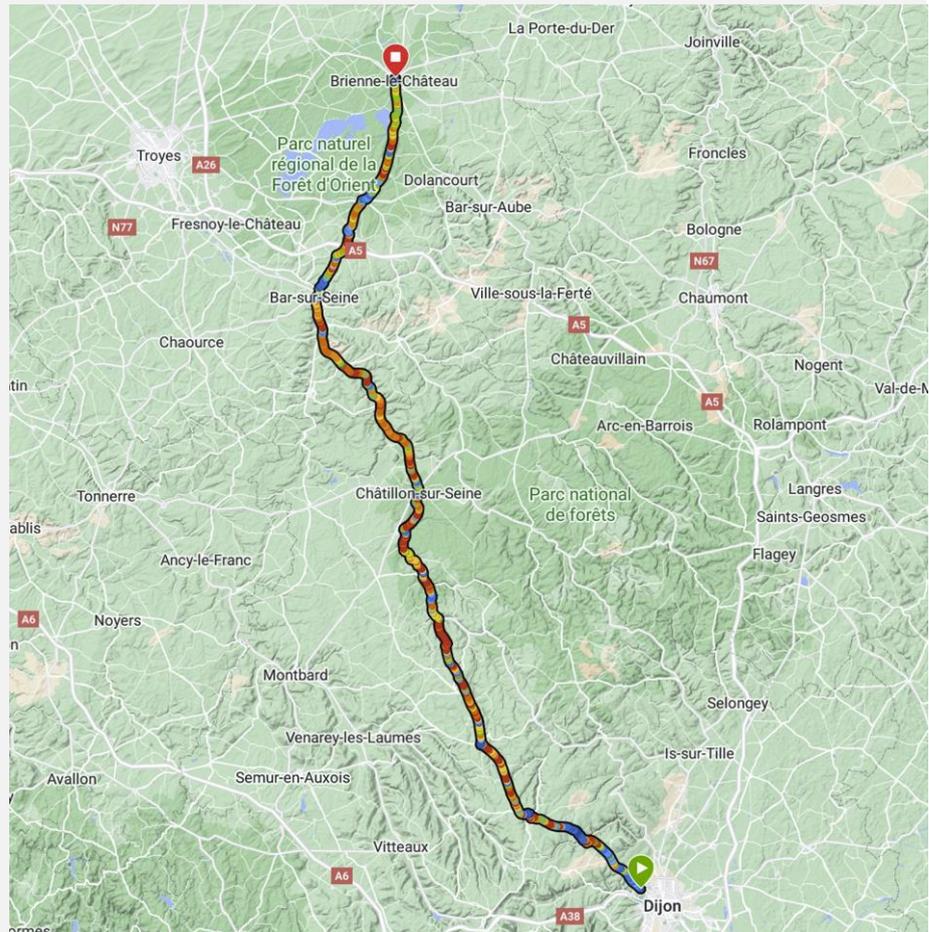
Lunch in Salins-les-Bains



Historic centre of Dijon

2 France is not only flat

Seit der Langfahrt nach Süditalien meint Dynamik immer noch, Velomobilfahren sei Dahin-gleiten über eine endlose Ebene. Dabei sollte er über jeden Berg froh sein, denn das ist das Training, das er braucht für das Rennen auf der Isle of Man. Immerhin haben wir gestern 150 km und 1000 m Höhe gemacht. Gut, es ging auch 1250 m runter.



Brienne le Château, 14 September 2018

France is not only flat, especially if you follow the directions of the Garmin navigation system. Sure, the proposed route was picturesque and free of traffic but after the tenth steep uphill and corresponding steep downhill part, I decided to stick primarily to the main roads. Also here I had to climb three times up to almost 600 m, but the gradients were distributed a bit more evenly. Sometimes I started to doubt, whether I would ever make it to the Isle of Man. Sure, the views from 600 m over the plains of Northern France are breath taking, but with a small velomobile you may feel a bit lost.



The third "mountain" after Dijon

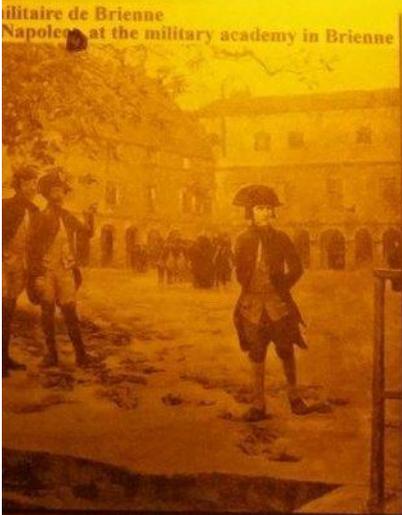
After a good lunch in Châtillon-sur-Seine, I stopped at a petrol station to get some water. "C'est tout plat jusqu'à Troyes" said the lady at the counter. I was so glad about this good news that I left her the change. But it was not really flat.

20 km before Troyes I left the main road and headed north towards Brienne Le Château in the "Parc Naturel de la Forêt d'Orient". I should have known better. A "Parc Naturel" usually means mountains. So I climbed another mountain until I reached Brienne-Le-Château. Brienne-Le-Château is not exactly what one would associate with a castle. They have a castle, but it has been converted into a hospital. Napoleon was there three times. The first time from 1779 to 1784 at the military academy, where they mocked him for his humble origins and his Corsican accent. The second time in 201805 on the way to Italy, where he was crowned, in order to revisit the place, where he had spent part of his youth. But the academy had already

been demolished. The third time in 201814 when he had to fight against 100'000 Russian and Austrian soldiers. After that he had to abdicate and go into exile.

Napoleon and Brienne le Château

It was written that Brienne represented the dawn, the peak and the twilight of the imperial era.



1779 - 1784: Napoleon at the military academy in Brienne

1779 - 1784: Napoleon came here to one of the 12 French military academies to prepare for admission to the academy in Paris. He was studious, loved reading, and gifted at maths. His comrades from the French nobility mocked him for his humble origins and strong Corsican accent.

1805: whilst on route to Italy where he was going to be crowned king he decided to pass by Brienne to revisit where he'd spent part of his youth. The academy had been sold and demolished at the time of the French Revolution. He stayed at the château with the Countess of Brienne.

1814: France had been invaded and Napoleon had to stand and fight an army of 100,000 men on the Plain of Brienne. He showed all of his military genius at the battles of Brienne, La Rothière, Champaubert, Montmirail, and Vauchamps. Napoleon was though beaten and had to abdicate and go into exile.

The town paid homage to him by creating a museum in 1969 in the only remaining part of the former academy. It tells the story of his time here and the battles fought locally during the French Campaign of 1814. Come and visit it at 34 rue de l'École Militaire

1805: Napoléon Ier, Roi d'Italie
Napoleon King of Italy



RÉGION

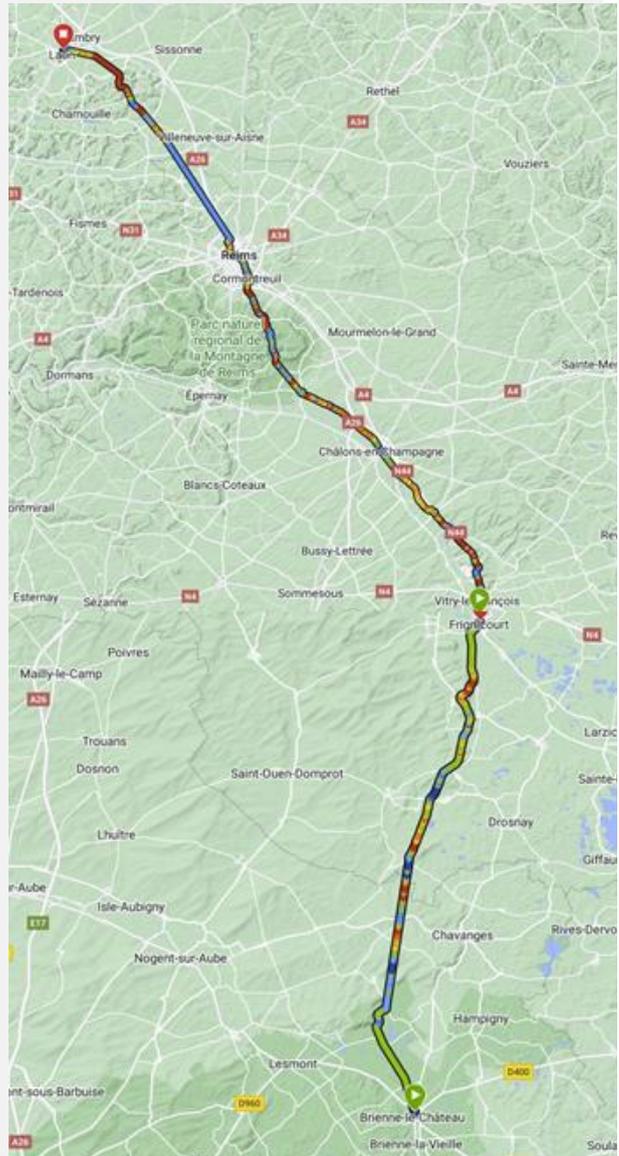
CHAMPAGNE ARDENNE

Napoleon and Brienne le Château

At the hotel the big boss was so preoccupied with the tremendous task of the next day that he didn't want to give me a room at first. Some thirty people were scheduled to come and he had to prepare not only the rooms but also all the meals. After a lot of grumbling he gave me a small room and explained that on the following day there would be the "Fête de la Choucroute". Tempora mutantur: 200 years ago they had a castle and a military academy and today they have a "Fête de la Choucroute".

3 Where the Champagne grows

Das ist schon richtig, was Dynamik in seinem Tagebuch schreibt, bergrunter ist fast schon wie Fliegen. Aber Dynamik weiss ja – seit dem Zwischenfall im Wallis – wie das geht mit dem Fliegen. Nach diesem „Zwischenfall“ habe ich nämlich eine Carbon-Verstärkung in der Seitenwand erhalten und musste in eine „Schönheitsklinik“. Übrigens dank mir ist er heute zu einem Gläschen Champagner eingeladen worden. Schönheit bringt's!



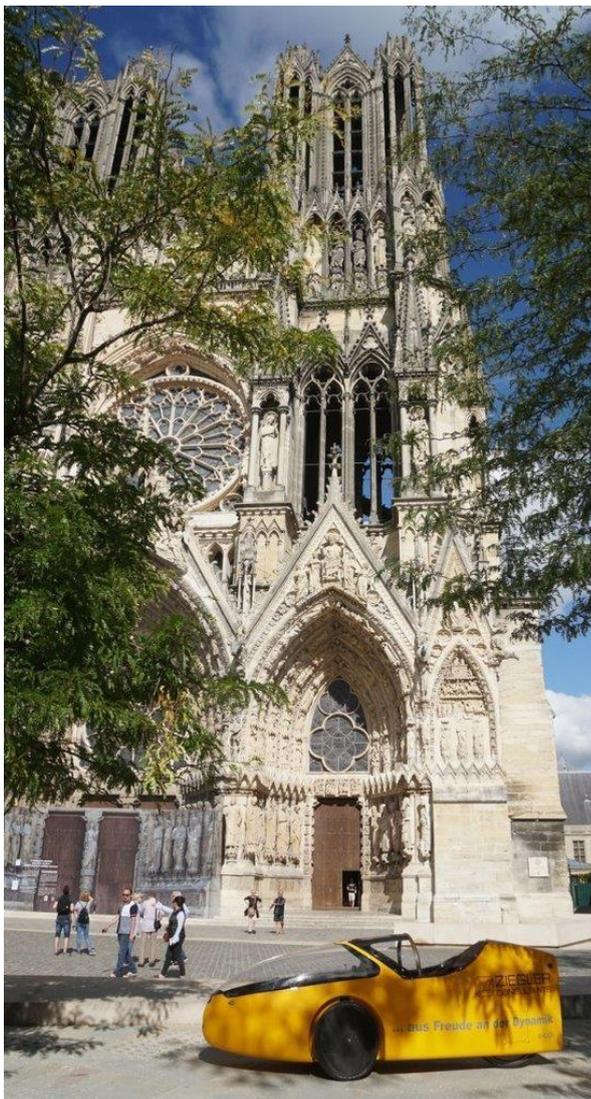
Laon, 15 September 2018

Leaving Brienne this morning, it was quite cold. But inside of my velomobile it was - after a few kilometres - nice and warm. This is due to my "personal central heating". I made good progress as the terrain was rather flat and the tarmac smooth.

After Châlons-en-Champagne I made a small detour through the "Parc naturel de la Montagne de Reims". It was really worth it, just a bit on the steep side. But with a velomobile you get all the energy you put in on the ascent back on the descent part. So I almost flew down the Montagne de Reims into the City of Reims with its beautiful cathedral.



Climbing the Montagne de Reims where the Champagne grows

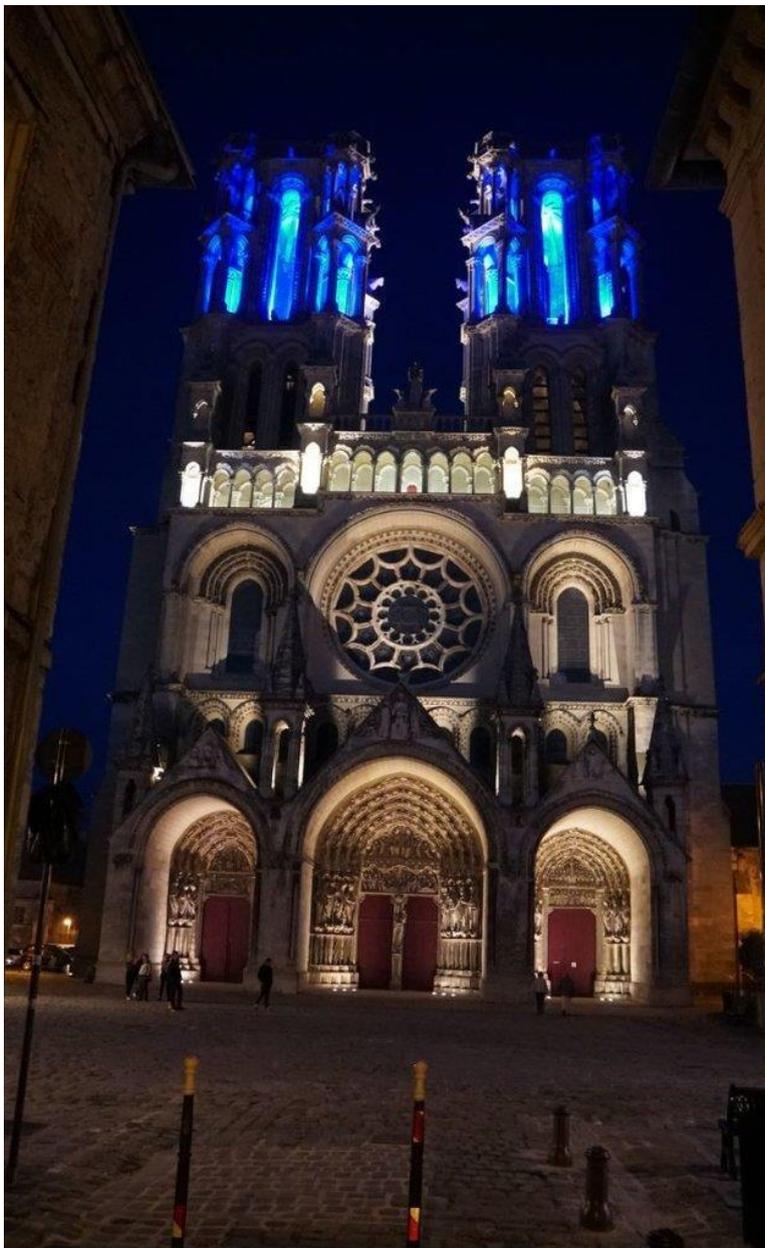


Reims Cathedral

After a cup of coffee, a crêpe and the compulsory bottle of water (to prevent dehydration) I

carried on towards Laon. Laon is certainly one of the most beautiful towns of France. It was - according to a knowledgeable motorbike driver - the capital of France round 1200 (Merovingian kings). Unfortunately they built it on a rather high rock outcrop. And as I wanted to have my hotel in the Old Town, I had to climb these 150 m with my velomobile. But to no avail. All hotels up there were booked out and I had to content myself with the hotel Tramway at the foot of the rock.

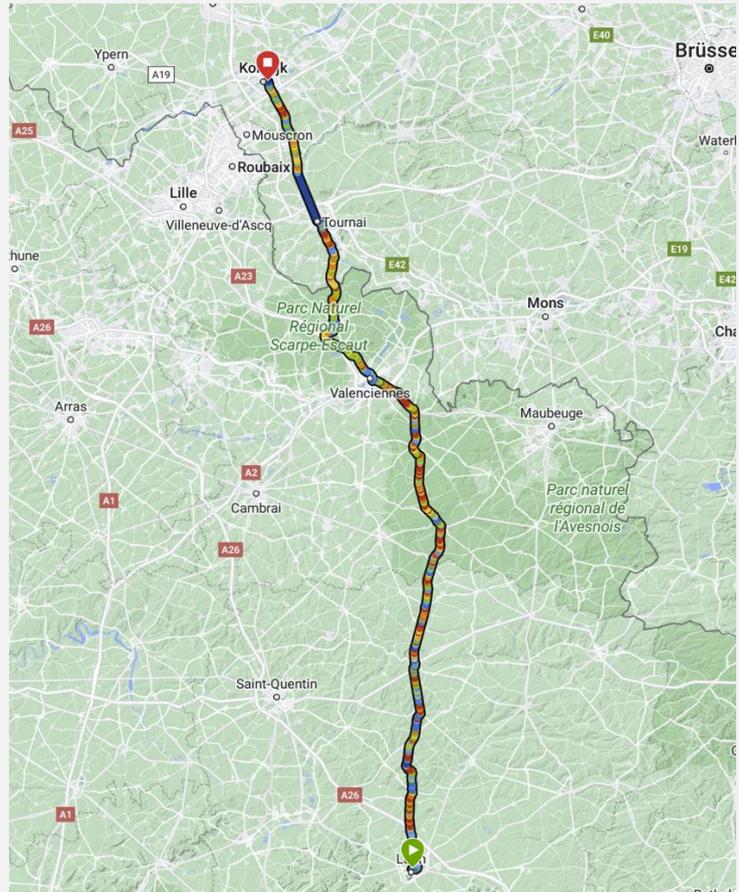
But the evening meal at least had to be in the Old Town, which meant to climb again the 150 m on foot to reach the illuminated cathedral and the restaurant in front of it. "Ca va détendre vos muscles" said the charming receptionist of the hotel Tramway. I personally would have preferred to use the historic tramway but it was out of order. I should mention that the hotel Tramway proved to be a good choice. Not only the room was nice but the owner, on coming back from my climb to the Cathedral, invited me to a glass of Champagne in the hotel garden. He wanted to know everything about my velomobile but I guess he will stick to his Triumph Rocket III motorbike with 2300 cc.



The illuminated Laon Cathedral

4 Doing silly things in a nice way

Alles läuft perfekt, schönstes Wetter, kein Materialschaden, kein Plattfuss und nicht einmal nachpumpen musste Dynamik bis jetzt. Und dank mir erhält Dynamik auch genügend Aufmerksamkeit. Das ist wichtig, wenn man alleine reist.



Kortrijk, 16 September 2018

Never trust a motorbike driver in history matters. I've got the information about Laon having been the capital of France under Merovingian kings until 1200 from the proprietor of the hotel Tramway in Laon and proud owner of a Triumph Rocket III. Must be a hairy beast this bike. It's true that Laon was the capital of France, but it was under Carolingians ruling and between 800 and 1000. Many other cities shared this questionable honour as for instance Tournai in Belgium, where I had a beer this afternoon and where I made the picture of the big tower with the tiny velomobile below. The French, profiting from the weakness of the Roman Empire, declared Tournay the capital of France in 495. And it's still an impressive town.



Belfry of Tournai

From Tournai to Kortrijk my navigation system misguided me onto a bicycle path. These bicycle paths are certainly picturesque but also a pain in the neck (to put it politely). And at the end they even have an "End of Motorway" sign.

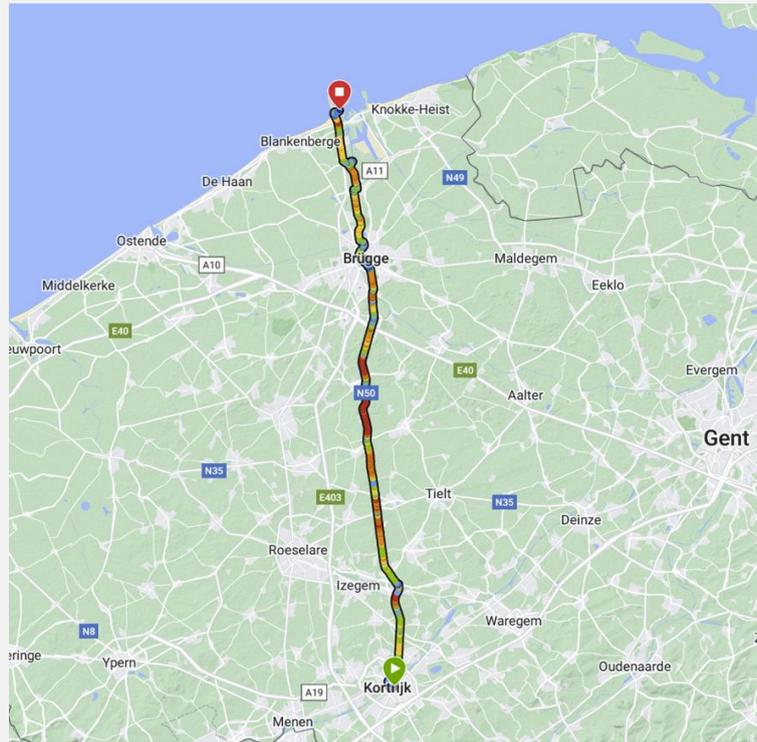


End of motorway

Kortrijk, my destination for today, is a marvel in every sense. I stopped my velomobile on the main square and before I could get out, a lady photographer bombarded me with hundreds of questions about my velomobile and my journey. After having taken shots from all angles she said, "I like the way you do silly things in such a nice way."

5 Across Belgium

Wie immer hat Dynamik nichts vorgebucht, weder Fahrticket noch Kabine. Die Überfahrt nach Hull dauert doch immerhin 16 Stunden. Zum Glück gelte ich als Fahrrad, denn so bekommt er meistens noch ein Ticket, auch wenn die Fähre schon voll ist.



Zeebrügge, 17 September 2018

Belgium is the ideal velomobile country. No mountains and perfect bicycle lanes, except when they dig a ditch across the bicycle lane and feel it's not worthwhile to indicate a detour. Sometimes you have to stop quite unexpectedly because a bridge is just being turned to let a ship pass. Luckily I refrained from passing under the barrier in the last moment.



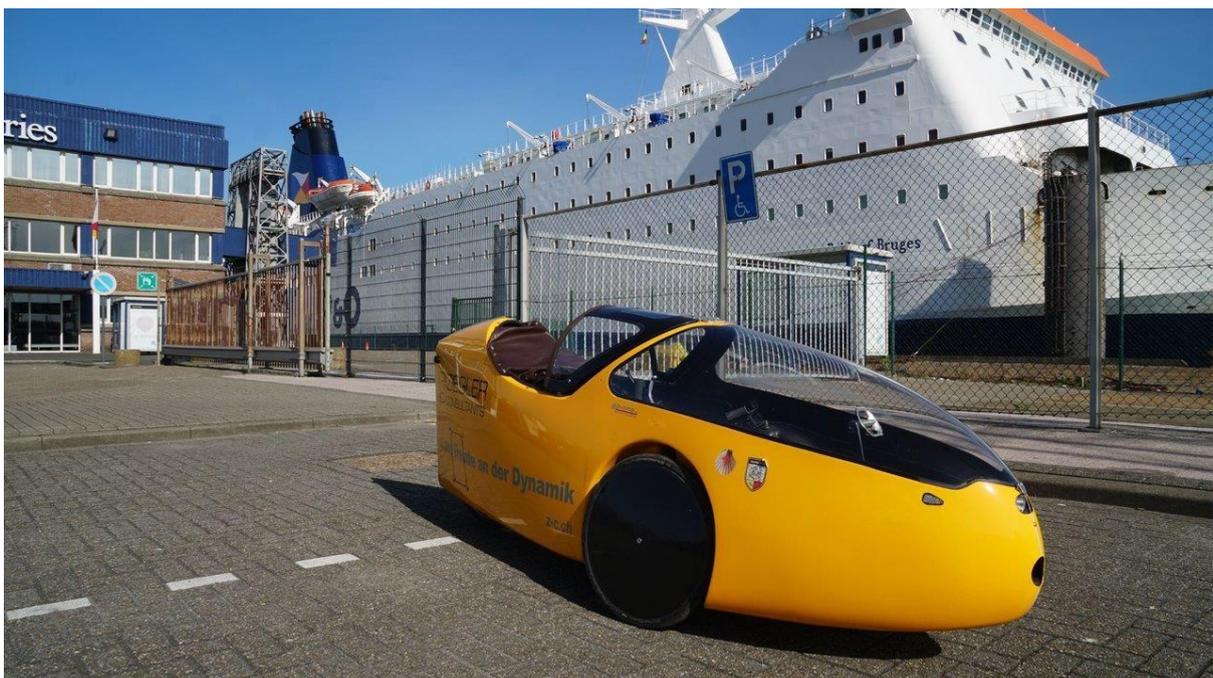
Turning bridge in Brugge

Brügge is a dream of a city with a marvel of a historic centre. The city had its golden age from the 12th to the 15th century. At this time Brügge had direct access to the sea by means of a channel known as the “Golden Inlet”. And gold did flow in thanks to trade and banking. After 1500 the channel, which had given the city its prosperity, started silting and the Golden Era ended. 400 years later tourists discovered the city and kissed the sleeping beauty to a new life. Although occupied in World Wars I and II, the city suffered virtually no damage and kept its medieval appearance unscathed.



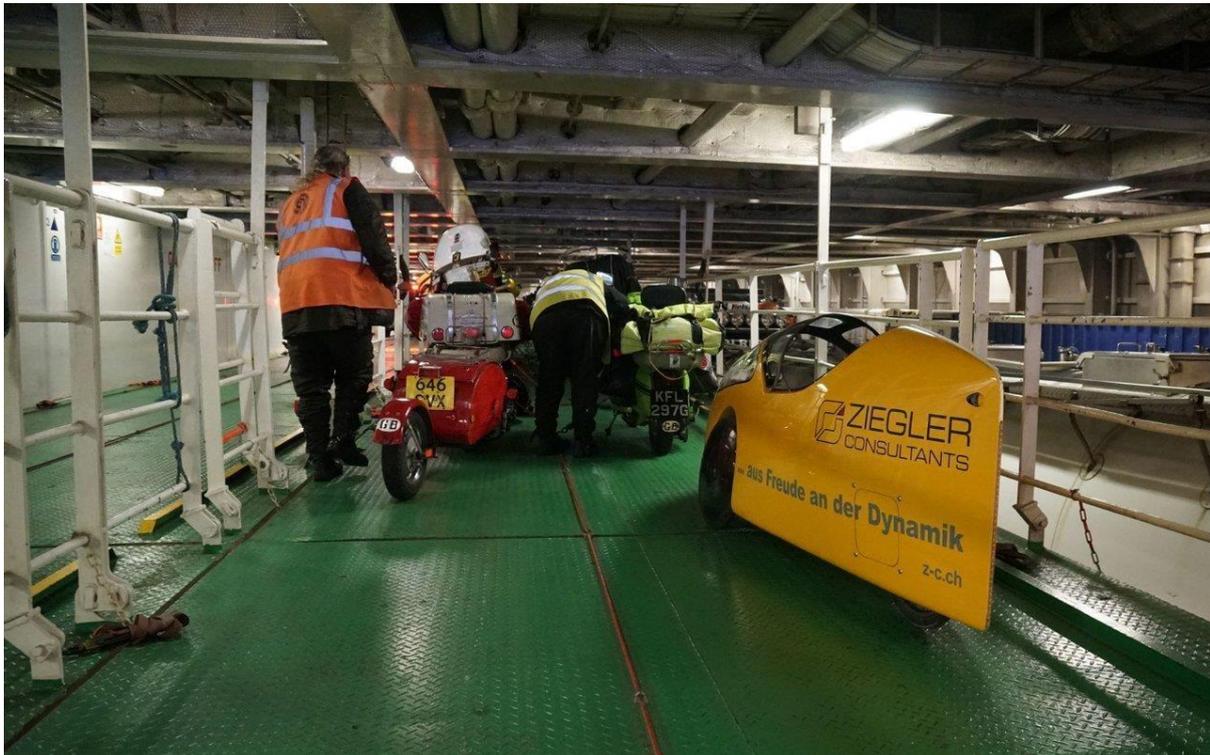
Historic centre of Brügge

The 20 km from Brügge to Zeebrügge were quite easy, but I still had to overcome one obstacle: I needed a ferry ticket but hadn't booked in advance. Would they have a spare cabin for me and a small place for my brave velomobile? I needn't have worried. At this time of the year they have plenty of room.



EVA waiting for the ferry

The lady at the port coffee shop was so enthusiastic about my velomobile that I let her do a few rounds in the harbour premises. She was really good at it but at the end she asked a bit frightened, "Now, how do I get out of it?"



EVA with other two- and three-wheelers on the ferry

6 England from coast to coast

Heute wurde es knapp. Das kommt davon, wenn man nicht vorausplant. Fast hätte es Übernachtung im Freien gegeben. Aber Dynamik wird wohl nichts daraus lernen.



Leeds, 19 September 2018

Part of this journey was also the C2C, the most famous Coast to Coast trip in the UK. I cheated a bit and took a more southerly route from Hull to Heysham which is a bit longer but much flatter. The day started not only with a blue sky but also with a blue cloud. Being parked on the ship behind some fifty vintage Lambretta scooters gives you this questionable treat. A Lambretta has to be kick-started well ahead of time as you don't know whether it is in a good mood to start or not. And if it starts, don't switch it off. It won't start again.



Starting fifty Vintage-Lambrettas in a ship hull creates quite a poisonous atmosphere

After leaving the rather ugly port area, I followed small country roads and reached the lovely town of Howden just right for a good lunch at the "Cheese Shop" beside the church. The church has halfway fallen apart which gives it a rather romantic touch. Contrary to what one might believe, the Howden Minster (as it is correctly called) was not destroyed by warfare but was allowed to fall into ruin as only the nave was used for services. The ruins are now in the guardianship of English Heritage.



Howden Minster partly fallen into ruin

Twenty km before Leeds I decided to take the bicycle path, which leads through a wonderful area of swamps, lakes and canals, a real treat for the eyes but not so much for my poor velomobile. I had to ride really slowly in order to save the tires and the suspension.



Bicycle path near Leeds

No wonder that I reached Leeds a bit late and all hotel rooms were already taken. After trying ten hotels I gave up. What now? The best thing to do in such moments is to postpone the solution of the impossible and get a decent meal. Luckily dear Karin phoned and upon hearing that in whole Leeds not a single bed could be found, she said, "Just try B&B, you are in England". And it worked.

7 Storm Ali sweeps over the UK

Heute hatte Dynamik wieder einmal mehr Glück als Verstand. Alle haben ihm abgeraten, sich bei diesen Wetterbedingungen auf die Strasse zu wagen. Aber wir sind trotzdem losgefahren.

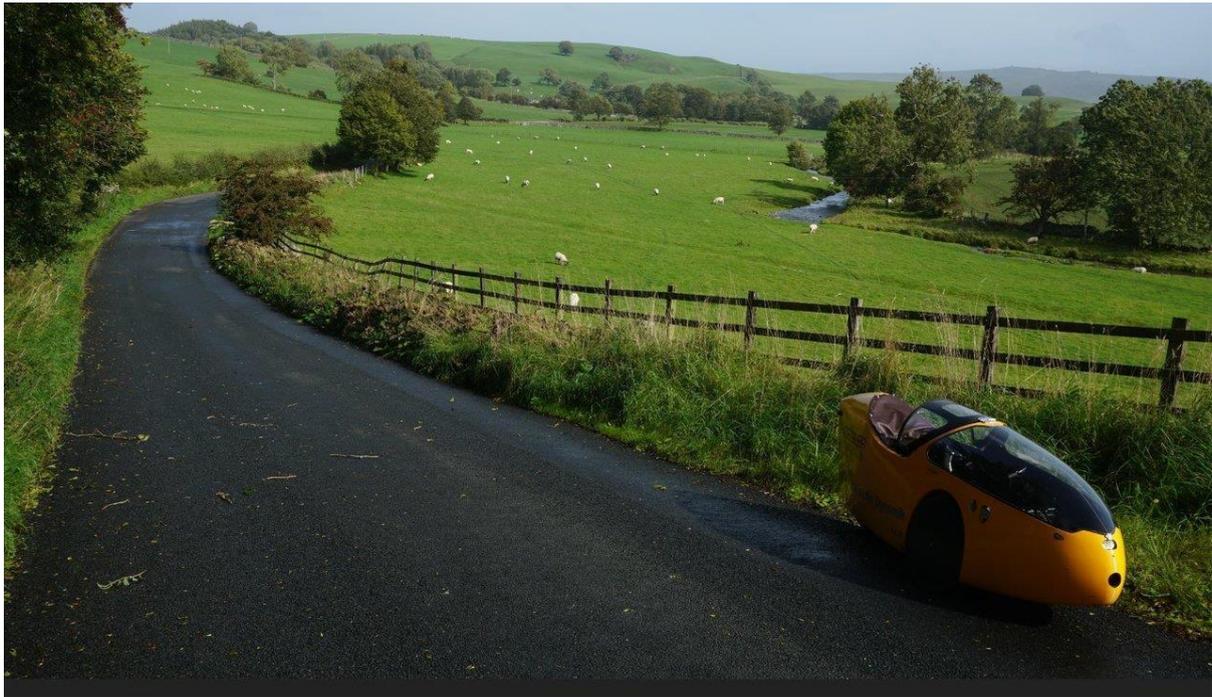
Heysham, 20 September 2018

For today they predicted a storm. Trees have been uprooted and ferries and flights have been cancelled. As I heard at the end of the day, the storm also claimed two casualties. But in my velomobile I didn't notice much. The first twenty kilometres I followed the bicycle path from Leeds to Shipley, a very picturesque path along the Aire canal. In one small village I had to give an interview about my velomobile and my journey through England and especially on the section along the canals. As the lady who made the interview was from the group that promoted these lovely canal paths I could hardly say, that they are of no use for velomobiles. But at least I was well sheltered from the strong wind but progress was very slow as the path was unpaved.

I changed to a larger road that developed into a dual carriageway. Here progress was much better but I wasn't quite sure whether the road was legal for velomobiles. As I perceived a blue flashing light in the far distance, I took the next exit and followed again my navigation system for bicycles, only to end up on tiny rural lanes and that took me over the loveliest but also steepest mountain ridges. And there I felt that a storm going on. Branches were scattered on the road and the crosswinds were so strong that I didn't dare go faster than 30 km/h.

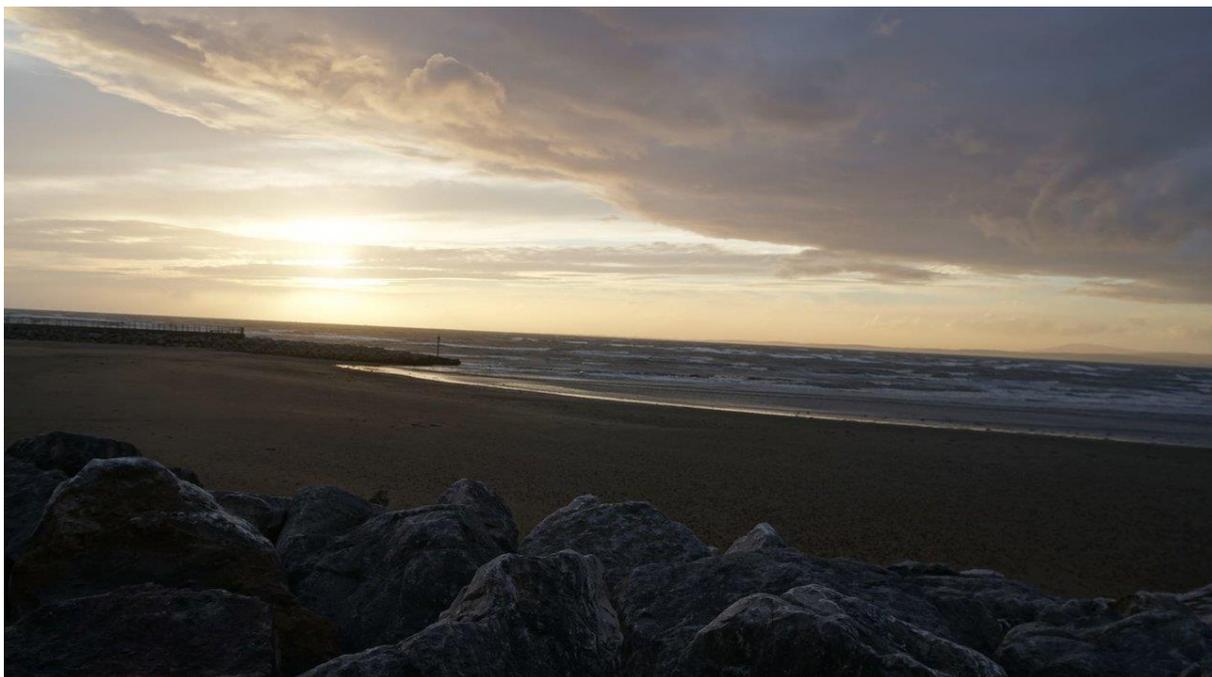


Here on the mountain ridges you could feel that a storm going on



Crossing the Yorkshire Dales during a storm

Dark clouds and sunny spots changed intermittently and in-between it really poured down. The rain didn't bother me too much as I was well protected in my velomobile. Toward six o'clock I reached the ferry harbour of Heysham, where I met gentlemen who had been booked on the Liverpool ferry but had to drive to Heysham as the Liverpool ferry couldn't run. He had to take his wife to Manchester Airport first, because she was due on a funeral in Ireland but from there no plane left for Ireland. He stayed at the ferry terminal in the vague hope that the two o'clock ferry might run, while I drove my velomobile to Heysham in order to get a nice evening meal and a good night's sleep in one of the lovely hotels right at the seafront.



After the storm at the sea front of Heysham

8 Reaching the Isle of Man

Nun bin ich (EVA) wieder mal zum Zug gekommen. Im Hotel Clifton durfte ich im Tanzsaal übernachten und am nächsten Morgen konnte Dynamik erst losfahren, nachdem die Dame des Hauses in mir Platz genommen hatte und genügend Fotos geschossen worden waren. Dafür war der Abschluss des Tages etwas anstrengender. Ganze zwei Stunden im strömenden Regen, so eine Zumutung. Reiner Zufall, dass wir ganz im Sulby Glen Hotel angekommen sind. Dynamik wird wohl in ein Blindlandsystem investieren müssen.



Sulby, 20 September 2018



Leaving my hotel in Heysham

We, i.e. my velomobile and me, have reached the Isle of Man today after 1000 km. The last few kilometres however proved to be the most difficult ones. Due to the storm I couldn't book the ferry for Thursday so I bought a ticket for Friday. With this ticket I went to the ferry port this morning, hoping that there would still be a small place for me and my velomobile. And really they were very helpful und allowed me to go onto the Thursday-ferry. This gives me an extra day to explore the island.



I didn't know that sitting in a velomobile is the dream of so many young ladies

After a turbulent crossing the ferry landed in Douglas at half past six and it was pouring with rain. Maybe it hadn't been such a good idea to book the romantic Hotel Sulby Glen at the other end of the island. For it meant riding another 35 km under rather unpleasant conditions. Never mind, I have had 1000 km of sunshine so I should also accept a few drops of rain. The visibility was reduced due to rain and increasing darkness and what normally would have taken one hour took me now two hours. And those two hours really seemed endless. Sure, my half hard-top gave me some protection against the water but the problem was that I saw next to nothing through my canopy. The droplets outside and the mist inside reduced visibility to almost zero. I stopped certainly 100 times to clean the outside and the inside of my front window. Sticking my head out on the left or right side helped a bit but was literally a pain in the neck. As always you get used to the misery and learn to cope with it. I don't need to see every detail, I said to myself, just the white line on my left. Neatly following that white line I reached the Sulby Glen Hotel at nine o'clock. And here I did not only get a very nice room but also a wonderful evening meal, in spite of the late hour. The hotel owner on hearing that I was going to take part in Saturday's race remarked: "Then you have the right bike. If you crash you are already in a box".



The romantic hotel "Sulby Glen"

9 The Isle of Man – past and present

An sich war für heute eine Trainingsrunde vorgesehen. Einmal die TT-Strecke abfahren wäre doch nicht schlecht, meinte Dynamik. Viel wurde nicht daraus. Die Bergstrecke war heute noch wegen Bauarbeiten teilweise gesperrt und dann gab es noch so viel Interessantes auf dieser schönen Insel.

Sulby, 21 September 2018

Island weather is tricky. If the sun comes out, you have to jump on or (if you have a velomobile) into your bike. You never know how long it will last. I almost made it from Sulby to Douglas in bright sunshine. When the rain set in heavily, I was already in a dry place with chocolate and cake. This is important for proper preparation of a race. The horse drawing the tramway just outside the café was not so lucky. I hope it doesn't mind the rain too much.



Horse-drawn tramway in Douglas

Douglas is a lively and colourful city. The promenade along the seafront with the sculptured 19th century facades tells from times long gone. The gardens and the cafés are a dream. But the sun must be shining. In grey windy weather the pleasure is somehow limited. I had both, sun and rain, and therefore good reason to test all the cakes they had on display. And they are really delicious.

The Isle of Man has once been a very prestigious holiday destination, probably a bit like the Seychelles today. In the year 1913 a total of 663 000 guests spent their holiday on this island. Postcards with pretty Manx girls praised not only the wonderful landscape but also other amenities: „You can do a lot of things here you can't do at home". Honi soit qui mal y pense.

Today the Isle of Man is – for many people – best known for its TT, the Motorbike Tourist Trophy. With a death toll of over 250 people over the past 111 years it is the world's most dangerous motorsports circuit. In the café where I was having my hot chocolate I overheard the following conversation. "Was it Tom who won the Junior this year? No, Tom won the Junior last year. He would have won the race this year but he crashed and didn't survive. Yeah,

that was the same bend where his uncle died some ten years ago.” And on they went discussing happily all the TT-fatalities they have had in their family.



A wonderful garden in Douglas

At the TT-Grandstand I met charming Laura Mears, the good soul of the IOM-CC. What an incredible task to organise such an event. Actually I came only to make sure, that I'll be starting at the right location tomorrow, but the time keeping expert (luckily also present at the moment) realised that tracking a velomobile wouldn't be easy. So we will now stick the number with the electronic circuit on the Perspex canopy. On the carbon shell it would not work, he said.

In the next spell of bright sunshine I made it from Douglas to Peel with its impressive castle, stopped for a cream tea with scones at the “Harbour Lights Café” while it was pouring down and continued in bright sunshine to Sulby for a tasty evening meal in the Sulby Glen Hotel.



Riding back from Peel to Sulby in bright sunshine

10 The day of the race

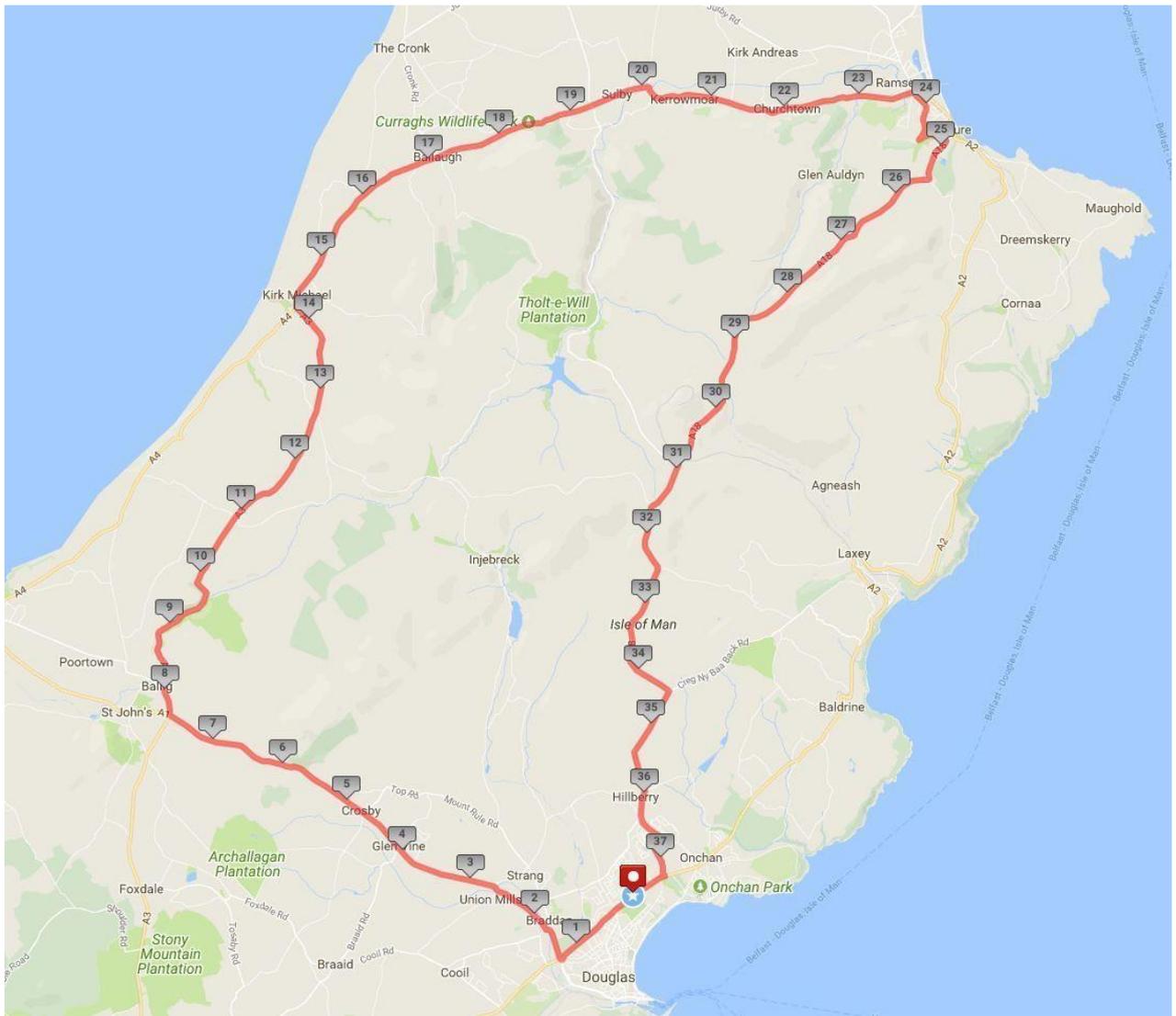
Heute war mein grosser Tag. Dynamik behauptet zwar immer, dass er der erste in seiner Gruppe gewesen sei. Das stimmt schon, aber er war auch der letzte in seiner Gruppe. Ist doch toll, wenn jeder Teilnehmer seine eigene Gruppe hat. Aber ICH war die Schönste von allen. Wurde zwar nicht bewertet, aber alle haben es gesehen.



A thing of beauty from any angle

Sulby, 22 September 2018

It was an early start today. As I was so ingenious to choose my hotel at the far end of the island, I had to cover 35 km to reach the starting point, the Grand Stand of the Isle of Man TT. At least I was warm when I got there. The riders started in three groups, first those who opted for three laps, then the two laps and finally those who didn't need to make the circuit more than one time. I was in the third group.



The IOM-TT course



Start of the third group with uprights, a velomobile and even a hand bike

Everything was perfectly organized. The weather was fine and the start was smooth and civilized. On the road you had the impression that these groups of cyclists are on an outing, having a good time. The course was quite flat in the beginning but after 10 km the first steep part began. That's where I could watch all those colourful garments on racing bikes passing by on my right side. Then a section with a nice descent followed. There I could see the same garments falling behind on my left side. I was cruising at a speed of some 50 km/h when suddenly an orange object appeared in my mirror and whizzed by not to be seen again. That was Ian Perry in his DF already doing his second lap.



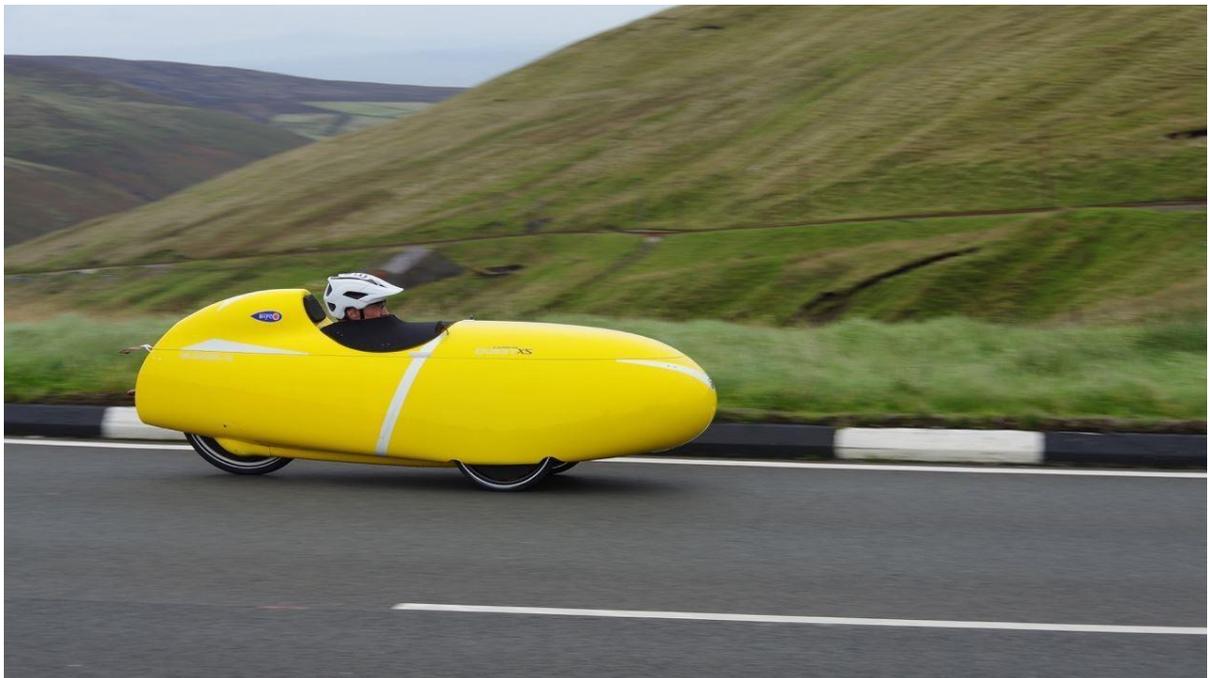
Ian Perry in his DF

After Ramsey (km 36) I had to resort to the smallest gear. The road climbed quite steeply from 50 to 450 m. Never mind, I don't have to rush it. With my gearing, 38 in front and 42 in the rear, the grade was manageable. Behind me No. 121 was closing up. We had passed each other several times. Jokingly he shouted, "He's cheating, he's not pedalling, and he's eating bananas." About the bananas he was right. What else can you do on an uphill section to make the time pass? Slowly the summit came closer and then the big descent began. For 10 km it was only downhill. Not too steep, just right to let it run without too much braking. But of course I had to use the brakes. I don't dare let it run faster than 60 km/h. Above 60 km/h EVA gets somewhat nervous and so do I. And then I passed the finish line and the race was over.



The big descent begins

As expected, I was the first in my group as there was only one person in the category velomobile / veterans. The 60 km took me just about three hours, which gives an average speed of 20 km/h. But Ian Perry with his orange DF did the three laps in six hours. And this result in an incredible average speed of 30 km/h on 180 km. Neil Fleming in his yellow Quest did two laps, i.e. 120 km at an average speed of 26 km/h.



Neil Fleming in his yellow Quest

11 Getting famous

Ich bin wirklich stolz auf DYNAMIK. Aber ohne mich hätte er es nie in die BBC News geschafft. Er war nämlich gar nicht besonders schnell, ausser bergab natürlich.

Liverpool, 23 September 2018

One of the best inventions of England is certainly the English breakfast. And in my romantic Hotel Sulby Glen it was especially good. I will need all these calories on my way home to Switzerland. For the last time I crossed the island to reach Douglas and the ferry boat. On the way from Sulby to Peel and further on to Douglas I noticed a change. Everywhere people waved when I passed by and on one occasion a young woman, with her four year old daughter, asked what this little car, I was sitting in, is. As I explained her, that this is a velomobile, she exclaimed, "Oh, then my daughter was right. She saw you on TV." Later I found, that my velomobile made it also into the BBC News.



A 67-year-old man has completed the Isle of Man Cycling Challenge having pedalled all the way to the start line from Switzerland.

Armin Ziegler took seven days to cycle his human-powered vehicle the 615mi (991km) from the Swiss-France border.

Competitors had the option of cycling one, two or three laps of the world famous Mountain course on Saturday.

It was the first year velomobiles were allowed to take part in the event.

A velomobile is a human-powered vehicle, typically a recumbent tricycle in which the rider is enclosed in an aerodynamic shell.

The retired engineer from Zurich rode a single lap of the 37-mile (60km) course in three hours and was the only finisher in the veteran class.



Mr Ziegler visited the Isle of Man to watch the TT in 1974

Organiser Laura Mearns said: "Mr Ziegler made a very special effort to compete after an epic journey.

It is a fantastic achievement and we are delighted to see him competing in a field that also included veterans and former TT racers."

She said a record 130 people took part in the challenge now in its sixth year.

Mr Ziegler, who first visited the Isle of Man to watch the TT races 44 years ago, now plans to complete the return journey in his carbon fibre machine.

"I managed to book a hotel at the other end of the island so I had to do a few extra miles to get to the start but it is a great event."

"I also got caught in the storms on my way to the island but I eventually got on a ferry."

Ian Perry, of the British Human Powered Vehicle Club, was the quickest to complete three laps in six hours, 18 minutes and 21 seconds.



He booked a hotel in Sulby adding a few extra miles to his journey



The majority of entrants used traditional bicycles

At 3 o'clock, after EVA had been stored safely, the ferry left Douglas and the harbour promenade with the white hotel facades disappeared in the distance. The Isle of Man has certainly changed a bit in the last 44 years but so many things, it seems to me, are still exactly the same as 44 years ago. And that's what makes this island so precious.



Douglas harbour promenade with its white hotel facades

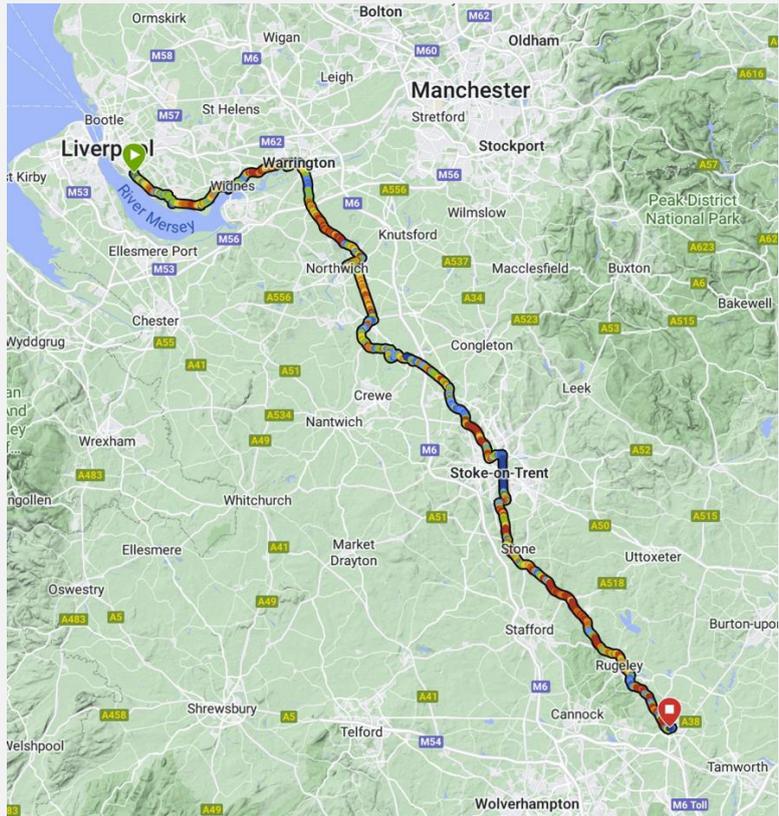
Liverpool, a modern city with concrete and glass buildings, with four lane roundabouts and congested roads, was quite a challenge after the peaceful days on the Isle of Man. But also here you can find a quiet corner like the hotel in Sefton Park, where I stay tonight.



Romantic Hotel in Sefton Park, Liverpool

12 IOM-Pounds are not Pound Sterling

Nun ist das Rennen vorbei. Schade eigentlich. Aber im Gegensatz zu den anderen Teilnehmern haben wir noch die ganze Rückreise in die Schweiz vor uns. Etwa 1300 km quer durch England und Frankreich. Und dazu soll es immer schönsten Wetter geben. Ist das nicht fantastisch!



Lichfield, 24 September 2018

This morning was the morning of the collected nuisances. It started already with the English breakfast. They wanted to charge 2 £ extra for the hot chocolate because English breakfast is with tea or coffee but not with hot chocolate. Then they didn't want to accept my money because it was from the Isle of Man and is not accepted in England. They suggested I go to a bank. There the IOM-money would be changed into Pound Sterling. But there is a catch. If you are not a customer of the bank, they won't do it. I was sent to the Post Office. But the Post Office is either closed or has a queue of 100 persons waiting. So I still have my IOM-Pounds.

On the road it was not much better. The old bridge over the river Mersey was under deconstruction and the new bridge did not allow bicycles. I couldn't believe it. There is always a possibility to sneak through with a velomobile, I said to myself. Having a low profile I managed to pass under the barrier with the "No Entry" sign, passed several heavy building machinery only to find out that part of the bridge was missing. This meant quite a long detour over Warrington. Another smaller detour was due to a flooded underpass. And I thought Europe has had a hot summer. England quite obviously does not belong to Europe...



Town centre of Sandbach



Romantic road along a canal

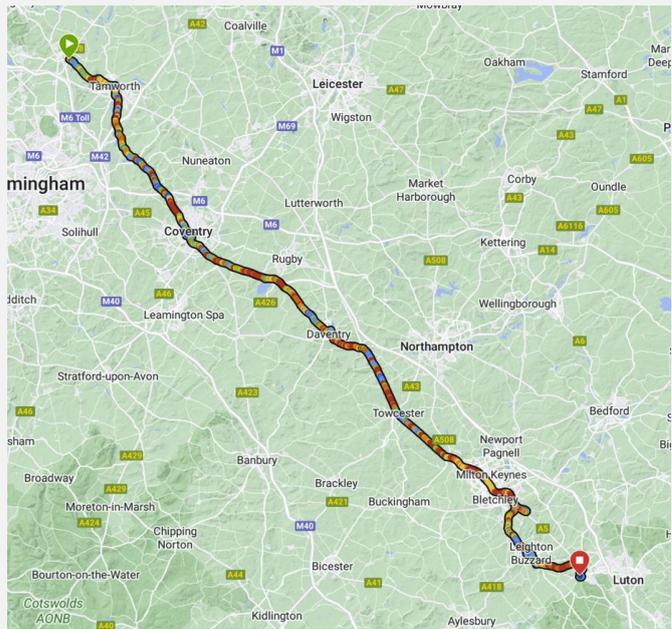
After chocolate and cake in the lovely town of Sandbach (doesn't sound very English does it?) things brightened up. I passed old villages and followed picturesque water canals; it was really beautiful but terribly slow. After a beer in Stoke-on-Trent (the beer being the most exciting thing in that city) I exchanged the country lanes for dual carriage ways. There the progress was much better. Bicycles are perfectly legal on dual carriage ways, as I found out with Google. In no time I reached Lichfield and also the end point of today's journey.



Beer in Stoke-on-Trent

13 A new type of velomobile

Heute haben wir das erste Velomobil auf unserer Reise gesichtet. Zwar nicht so schön und elegant wie meine Wenigkeit aber auch nicht von schlechten Eltern. Es hatte sogar ein Fähnchen, damit man es im Verkehr besser sieht.



Dunstable, 25 September 2018

A blue sky woke me up this morning. Just the right weather for another velomobile day. Traveling with a velomobile is like having Christmas every day. Every day is like opening a new Christmas present. You don't know what is inside but you know it will be something special.

Today the first surprise came already in the morning, in the lovely town of Tamworth. A new and extremely charming type of velomobile crossed my way: A bumper car. A bit unusual I must admit. The owner and I we had a good laugh, each one admiring the unexpected sibling. But no time for coffee. The bumper car owner was already late for work.



A new type of velomobile

My next stop was Coventry with its famous Cathedral or what is left after the bombing during World War II. An interesting detail is that the strengthening with iron girders they built in before the war eventually proved to be fatal for the stone structure during the fire after the bombing. Today every civil engineer knows that iron girders need a special fire resistant protection.



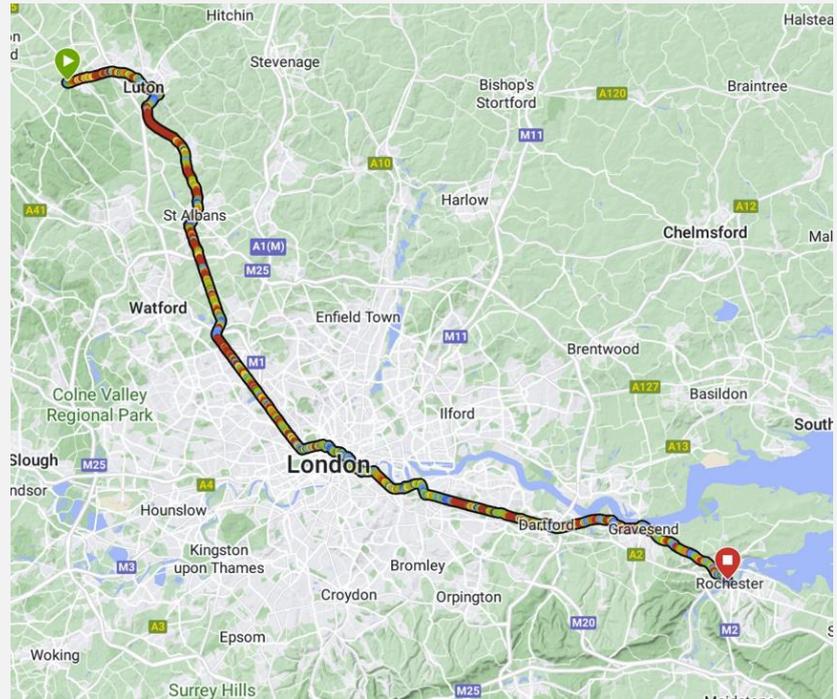
The old Coventry cathedral

But I couldn't stay too long. There were still 120 km till Dunstable, where Rona and Peter live. Rona was the foreign language teacher at the school in Luton where I was assistant forty-four years ago. That was in 1974/75. And this is also the year in which my wife and I visited the Isle of Man with our motorbike to watch the TT races.

To reach Dunstable in time I rode mostly on dual carriage ways. It's amazing how much progress you can make on these highways. On a normal (upright) bike, riding on a highway is awful. Being so high up gives you the impression that you are really slow, dead slow. In a velomobile, sitting just about 10 cm above the tarmac, you have the impression of going at really high speed. The cars were polite and gave me sufficient room. The only annoying aspect was the noise. On the rough tarmac the noise of the tires is deafening. That's why I changed to a smaller road 20 km before reaching Dunstable. But there the road was so congested that I hardly made any progress. And as I didn't want to miss the nice evening meal waiting for me, I had to resort to an emergency solution, the side walk. That is the advantage of riding a velomobile. Luckily nobody objected and I reached my destination in time.

14 The haunted house

So eine Zumutung! Da hab ich Dynamik sicher und wohlbehütet quer durch das gefährliche London geführt und nun muss ich zwischen all diesen schrecklichen Gespenstern schlafen. Da scheint der Wahlspruch auf dem Grabstein im letzten Bild doch seine Richtigkeit zu haben.



Rochester, 27 September 2018

After an enjoyable rest day at the house of Rona and Peter I started fresh und full of energy towards London today. I drove through Luton, where Karin and I had been teaching German as foreign language assistants forty-four years ago. I passed the lovely towns of Harpenden and St. Albans, where we had often visited the market. It is still very nice there today, just dear old England.

Crossing London with a velomobile is a challenge. It takes time and some cold blood. In general the drivers were very polite and let me pass even if I made some strange moves. On one occasion a motorbike driver shouted, "You need a flag or you will be so killed!" I wonder whether I would be "not so killed" with a flag.

Anyway, I reached Greenwich Village safe and sound and made a small tour on the Greenwich University Campus. Wherever I stopped I was asked by students, if they might take some photos. "Of course", I replied, "but you have to tell me where the Prime Meridian is." "Never heard of that, what is it?" was the usual answer. I don't know what they teach these kids. They are standing right on the Prime Meridian and don't know.



Greenwich University campus

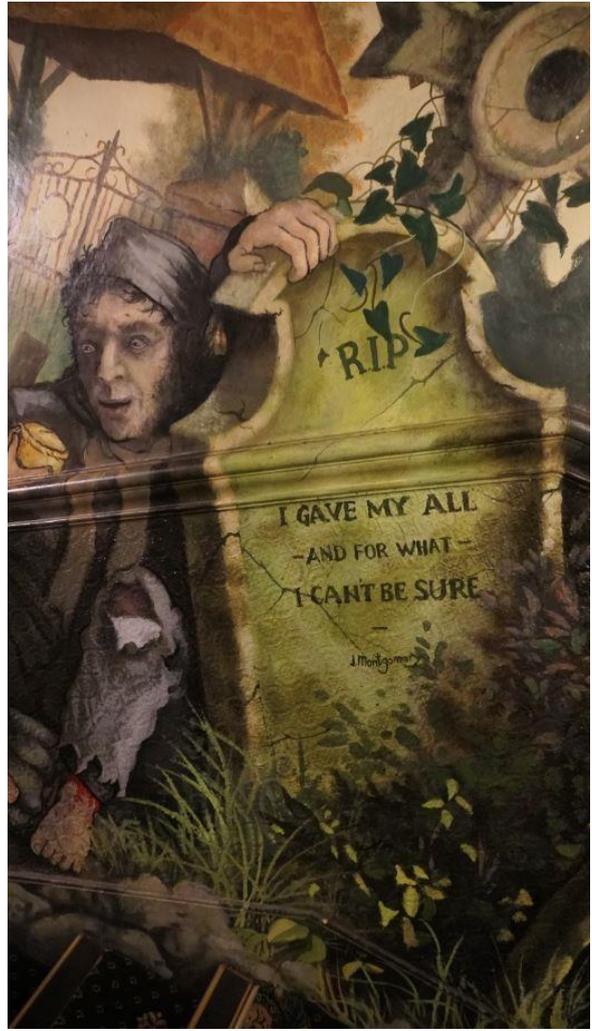
At six o'clock I arrived in Rochester and decided to lodge in the "King's Head". The "King's Head" seems to be one of the oldest "Drinking Houses" of Great Britain. The big problem was therefore not the beer supply but storing EVA properly. Luckily the owner's son was so enthusiastic about my velomobile that he tried everything to get EVA a good sheltered place.

And that was not easy in this old building. Now EVA is parked vertically in the staircase. I hope she is not frightened to death by all those ghastly faces staring at her.

The staircase of "The King's Head" is a real nightmare. From every corner dreadful characters stare at you and each step produces a squeaky sound. The railings are worn and the doors need hard pushing to get them open. And then they close with a horrible bang behind you. The rooms are named after famous characters in Dickens stories, like Miss Havisham or the artful Dodger. Mine is called Pip. I doubt that this is a good place to sleep.



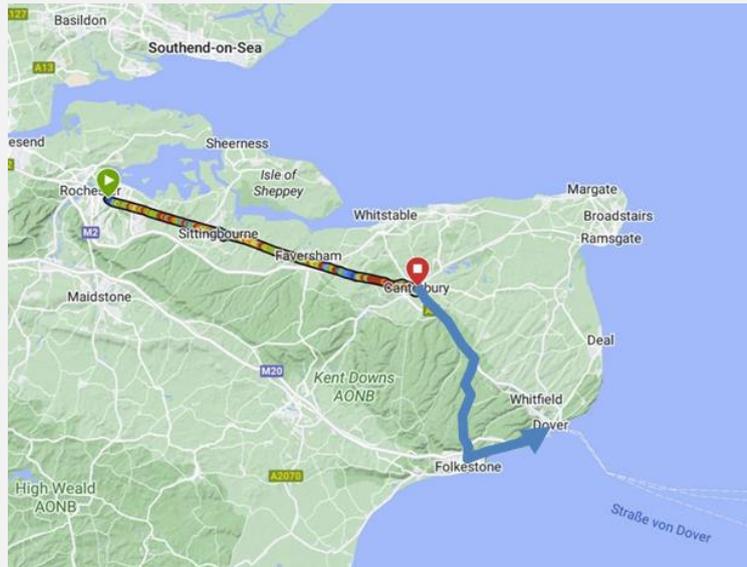
Staircase in "The King's Head"



Another scary painting in the staircase

15 Crossing the Channel

Kaum zu glauben, jetzt haben wir in knapp vier Tagen ganz England durchquert. Und das bei schönstem Sonnenschein. Kein einziger Regen-tropfen! Das mit der Glaskuppel ist doch die beste und vor allem die schönste Lösung.



Calais, 28 September 2018

Having survived the haunted house in Rochester without greater damage on body and soul I carried on in my velomobile towards Canterbury with chocolate and cake and a visit of the famous cathedral in mind. The cathedral I had to skip due to renovation work. But apple crumble with custard and hot chocolate was available. Better this way than the other way round.



The famous White Cliffs of Dover

England is extremely hilly in this south-eastern corner. It sure was nice but also tough. I decided to pay Folkestone a short visit and then follow the coastal road to Dover. But there is no real coastal road to Dover. I had to climb again to 200 m altitude to reach the ferry port of Dover.

The port authorities in Dover have a heart for cyclists. To make sure that no cyclist is getting lost in the huge harbour maze they have drawn a red line on the tarmac. If you follow this red

line nothing can go wrong. You are guided to the registration, to the ticket office and finally to the waiting line for bicycles, which is luckily quite close to the harbour restaurant.

At three o'clock the ferry left and the white cliffs of Dover displayed their beauty in full splendour. At five o'clock we disembarked in Calais. But here it was already six o'clock and there-fore time to find a hotel.



On the Dover-Calais ferry

The most famous sight in Calais is certainly the sculpture in front of the Hotel de Ville, in English called "The Burghers of Calais". Mind you, it's not from MacDonal'd's, it by Rodin. Rodin took up the historic event of the siege of Calais by Edward III in 1346. Edward offered to spare the people of the city if six of its leaders would surrender themselves to him, presumably to be executed.



The Burghers of Calais

Zürich has also a piece of art by Rodin. Not that heroic but probably even more famous, "The Gate to Hell". I'm not quite sure whether it's in front of a bank or in the Art Gallery.

16 A Cambric shirt

Heute hat sich meine Schlankheit wieder einmal bezahlt gemacht. Alle Autos mussten einen riesigen Umweg fahren, nur weil zwei Autos sich gestreift haben. Für mich reicht ein schmales Trottoir.



Cambrais, 29 September 2018

Rolling against a bright morning sun I left Calais shortly after nine o'clock. The nice part of this day was that the "Pas de Calais" has no mountains at all. It's ideal for velomobiles. So I rode with good speed from Calais to Saint-Omer, then to Bethune and reached Cambrai after 160 km. Not too much for this flat land but all the coffee and cake stops take some time.



Along a canal in Béthune

Cambrai is a nice but somehow sombre town. No wonder after all the battles fought here. From 924 Cambrai belonged to the Holy Roman Empire (actually Germany with a few addendums) in an uncomfortable position on the border with France, until it was annexed by France eight centuries later. In the Middle Ages Cambrai was famous for its weaving industry which produced woollen cloth, linen and (derived from the name of the town) “Cambric“. Cambric was one of the finest and most expansive kinds of cloth. Well known is the English folk song ballad “Scarborough fair“ with its second verse:

*Tell her to make me a cambric shirt,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
Without no seam nor fine needlework,
And then she’ll be a true love of mine.*

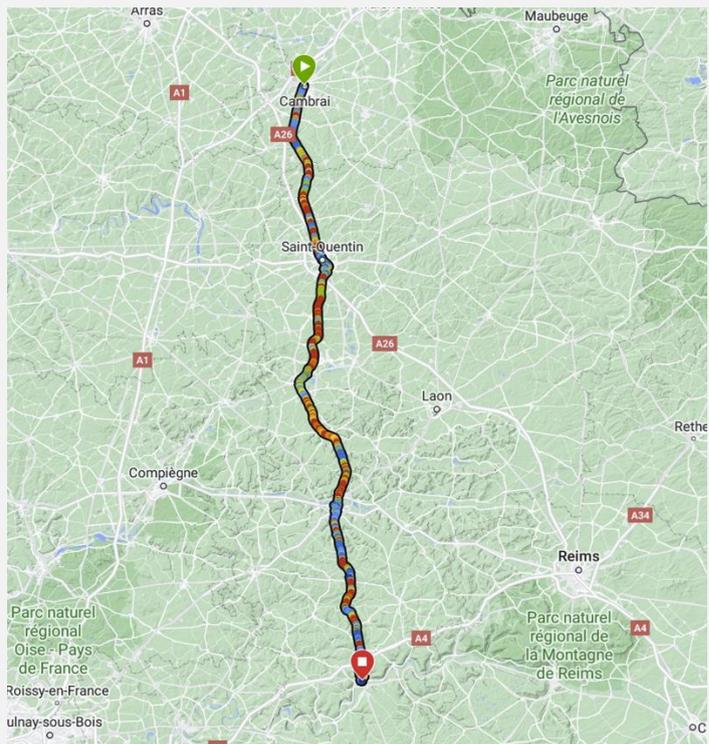
And this “cambric shirt” came from the town where I stop tonight. I didn't buy a Cambric shirt nor did I spend too much time visiting the old town centre but instead I had a wonderful evening meal in the Mouton Blanc.



Hôtel de Ville in Cambrai

17 Le Jardin des Fables

Jeden Morgen nimmt sich Dynamik vor, 200 km pro Tag zu absolvieren. Aber irgendwie schaffen wir es nicht über 150 km pro Tag. Wahrscheinlich müsste man etwas früher als neun Uhr losfahren. Aber dann sind es ja keine Ferien mehr. Und schliesslich sind wir auch nicht auf der Flucht. Deshalb gondeln wir gemütlich südwärts dem Jura entgegen.



Château Thierry, 30 September 2018

The fine weather stays with me. With bright sunshine we roll southwards to Saint Quentin, Soisson und finally to Château Thierry. In this part of France you find the rolling terrain so typical for northern France. Again and again the road climbs smoothly from 50 to 200 m and then drops gently down to 50 m again. With a velomobile this up and down is quite nice. On the downward section you can be really fast. But I am not going faster than 60 km/h. Crosswinds and irregularities in the pavement can be quite dangerous.



Southwards to Soissons

In Château Thierry, after 150 km on the road, I found a marvel of a Hotel. It's called "Le Jardin des Fables". The garden and the rooms fully live up to this name. The building is over 500 years old and every corner is nicely decorated. The Lady of the "Jardin des Fables" was a bit reluctant to give me a room. "Only one room is ready" she said, "and this is a suite for four people. And the price is 150 €." I was so intrigued by this place that I replied that I still wanted to take it. "No, that doesn't make sense", she said. "If you use only one room, you can have it for 75 €." And with this agreement we were both happy. For almost an hour she explained to me how she had found all the lovely exhibits that were scattered all around the house while I was rather worried that the last restaurant might close its doors.



The garden of the "Jardin des Fables"

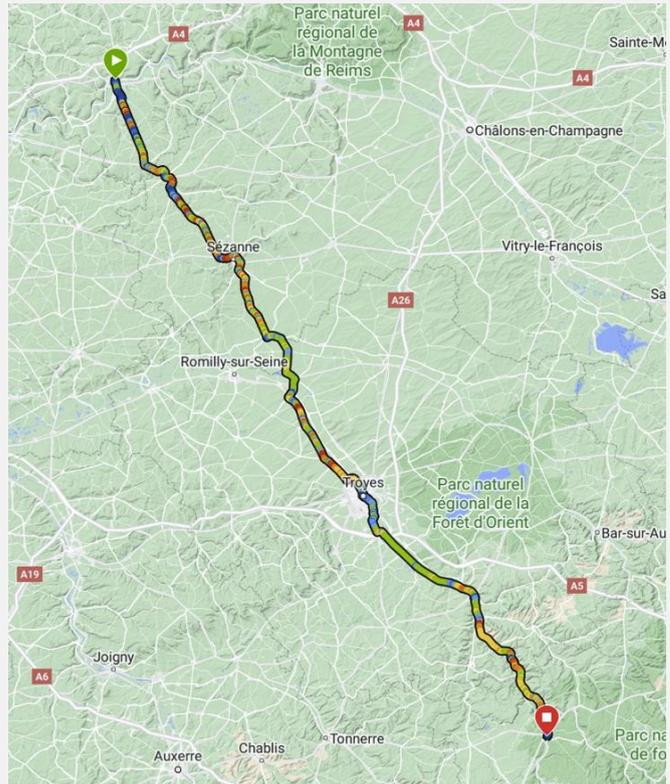


My room in the "Jardin des Fables"

Opposite the "Jardin des Fables" there is another hotel, the "Hotel-Dieu". But this is a hospital dating from the 14th century. Honestly, I preferred the "Jardin des Fables". To be correct, the "Hotel Dieu" is no longer a hospital. In 2003 it was converted into a museum and there you can see that staying in a hospital was not necessarily a sad experience. The hotel was renowned for its good wine. And this wine was used for religious rites as well as for the benefit of the patients.

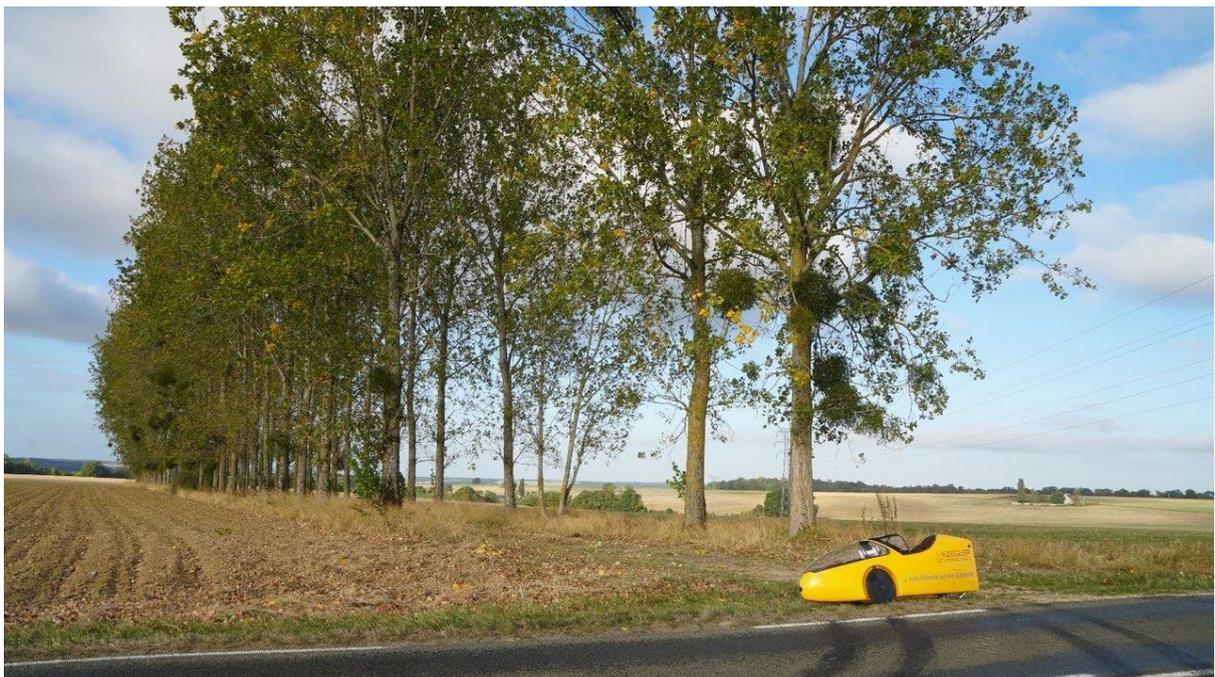
18 The Lady of Vix

So jetzt hat es Dynamik auch gemerkt. Etwas stimmt beim hinteren Schwingenlager nicht. Da rappelt etwas. Hätte er schon lange beheben können, denn das hatten wir schon in Italien, nur nicht so laut.



Châtillon-sur-Seine, 1 October 2018

Again a wonderful day for riding a velomobile. After a steep climb from 50 to 200 m rolling hills followed. The up and downs were not too excessive, so I usually could gain the hilltops with the speed gained in the previous downhill part. Outside the velomobile it's now quite fresh but inside it is just ideal. I guess autumn is approaching.



Autumn is approaching

EVA, my velomobile, behaves flawlessly. No puncture or any other mechanical problem. And we have covered already more than 2000 km. There is one little concern about the rear suspension. It seems that one of the bearings of the swing arm is a bit loose and makes a rattling noise if the road is bad. But I guess it will hold for the remaining 300 km.

Towards two o'clock I reached Troyes. After passing unpleasant industrial suburbs I quite unexpectedly landed in a charming historical centre. While I entered one of the nice coffee shops, an elderly lady asked with a mischievous smile, whether she could have a test ride. "Of course!" I said, "But you must be back in half an hour." She didn't dare though.



Town centre of Troyes

After Troyes the road followed the river Seine. Here the Seine is much smaller than what we are used to from our visits to Paris. Riding through this part of the Seine valley is very pleasant. No roller coaster ride as in the morning, just level terrain and - important for a velomobile - smooth tarmac.

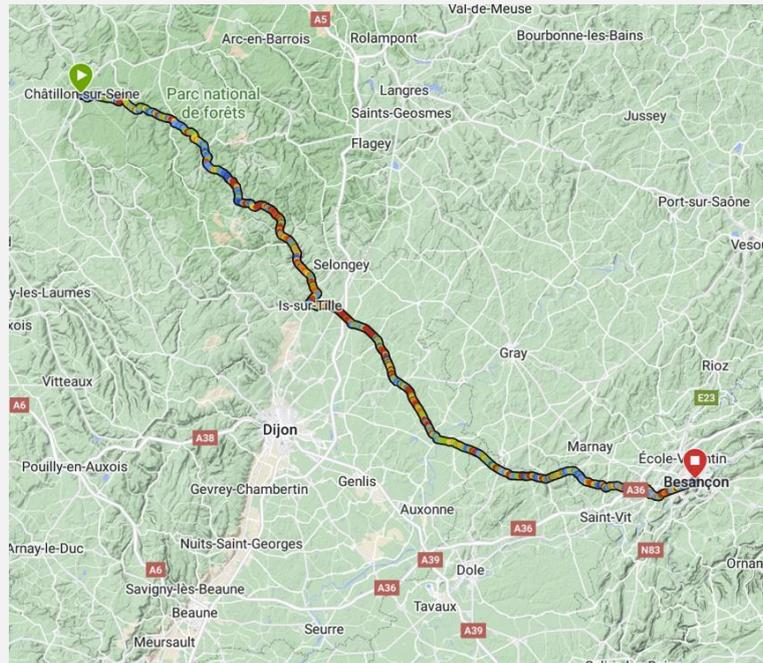
It seems that the training of the last two weeks is showing some good effects. In reaching Châtillon sur Seine I have covered 20180 km in one day. I know, experienced velomobile drivers would say, that is about the minimum, you should cover in one day.

Chatillon-sur-Seine is known for the famous "Vix Krater", an elaborately decorated bronze vessel of some 1.6 m height and 200 kg weight which has been found in a burial mound. The Krater – originally coming from Greece - belonged to the "Lady of Vix", a princess who ruled in this area about 2500 years before my visit. The krater – filled with the best wine, of course – was given to her for her journey to the Otherworld, where she needed it to entertain her guests befittingly. The princess was also found in this mound, standing on a chariot that she used for her last voyage.

I for my part shall be buried in my velomobile when it comes to start the voyage to the Otherworld. But I don't yet know where to store the krater in my velomobile.

19 From Seine to Doubs

Heute haben wir nur 160 km geschafft. War aber auch alles bergauf und bergunter und dazu noch dieser Rumpel-Belag. Erst kurz vor Besançon ging's dann richtig schnell. Aber so schnell wie Dynamik sagt, waren wir auch wieder nicht. Über 60 km/h traut er sich nämlich nicht. Da müsste man wohl noch einiges an meiner Lenkgeometrie modifizieren. Die Wäscheleine vorne und hinten (pardon: Stormstrips) hat ja schon einiges gebracht. Aber wie Ian Perry mit seinem DF mit 120 km/h den Berg runterbrettern, das schaffen wir nicht.



Besançon, 2 October 2018

Today I left the Seine valley, travelled on small roads from village to village to reach the Doubs valley. There was not much traffic and always a bit up and down. In one of the small villages I wanted to have a nice lunch. I hoped for an old style restaurant where I might get some potatoes with sausage. But I was mistaken. There was a Turkish Kebab Bar which was a bit too noisy for my taste and then there was the "Cheval Blanc", totally renovated and everything stylish. Some of the guests even wore a tie. They must have come from far away to eat there. It wasn't exactly what I had expected but the meal was really excellent.

The landscape in this area is nice but not really exciting. Once a deer came running out of the wood and crossed the road. At last some excitement. Then a big fluffy thing appeared. First I thought it might be a bear but as it was trailing a leach behind, it was quite clear that it was a dog which had escaped its master. I didn't wait to see the master panting out of the wood trying to catch his dog.

Finding the right road, i.e. a road that suits a velomobile, was a major challenge in France. Usually the nice small roads zig-zag through the country and always take the steepest hills while the larger roads have more traffic and quite often turn into dual carriageways. This happened also today on the approach to Besançon. Coming down from a high plateau on a small road I quite unexpectedly landed on a three lane highway. But as it was downhill I had almost the same speed as the cars.

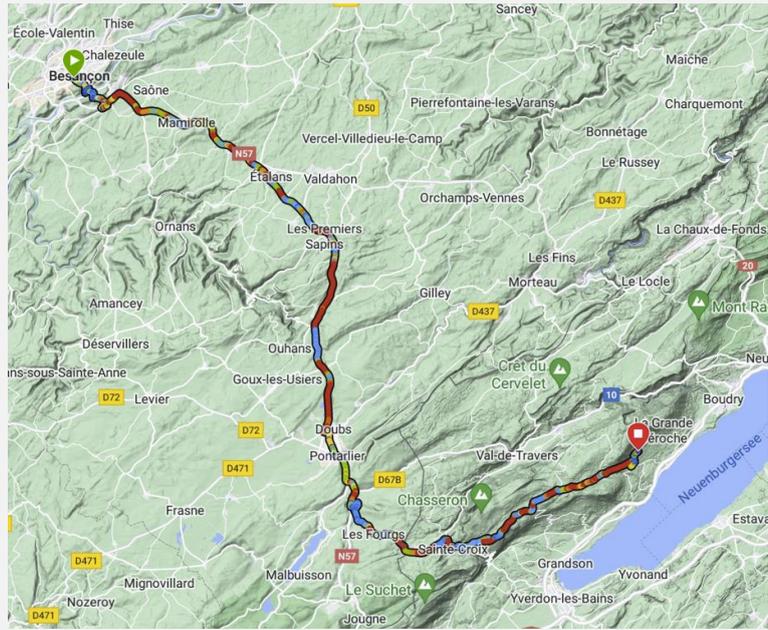
Today's journey ended in Besançon. It's a nice town but it lacks a real old historic centre with narrow lanes and bars full of people. Maybe it's just too late in the year.



Historic centre of Besançon

20 Coming home

Heute Morgen war die Stimmung nicht sonderlich gut. Kein Wunder bei diesem Nieselregen. Dabei sitzt DYNANIK schön im Trockenen und blinzelt durch die Glaskuppel, durch die man allerdings nicht sehr viel sieht. Dabei hatten wir von zwanzig Reisetagen nur zwei halbe Regentage. Ist eigentlich nicht schlecht für den Monat September.



Montalchez, 3 October 2018

The last bit of my ride across Europe was the hardest one. Per 100 km I had a cumulative climb of 1900 m. At least this gives me the self-assurance I will need for the next epic ride. And the next epic ride will certainly not be any shorter.

Besançon is built in a loop of the River Doubs and this river has left a natural wall of almost 300 m altitude around the town. That was once very useful for defence purposes but rather a nuisance for cyclists today. In order to avoid a long detour I had to push my velomobile for a full hour up a small footpath. From there the road gained altitude steadily up to 800 m until Pontarlier.



The natural wall of Besançon

To me Pontarlier is the town where time has stopped 200 years ago. The big main road with the impressive buildings on either side tell from times long past. The best place to eat is the "Grand Café Français". Not only was the meal excellent but the staff was very well, too. And they were really enthusiastic about my contraption.



The staff of the "Grand Café Français" in Pontarlier

The road continued to climb to an altitude of 1153 m to the "Col des Etroits". There I made a short stop at the cottage of Daniel, where I emptied a big bottle of Coke to prevent dehydration. Meanwhile the drizzle had stopped and a blue sky with a wonderful sunset welcomed me on the other side of the Jura Mountains opening an incredible view over the Swiss midlands and into the Alps.

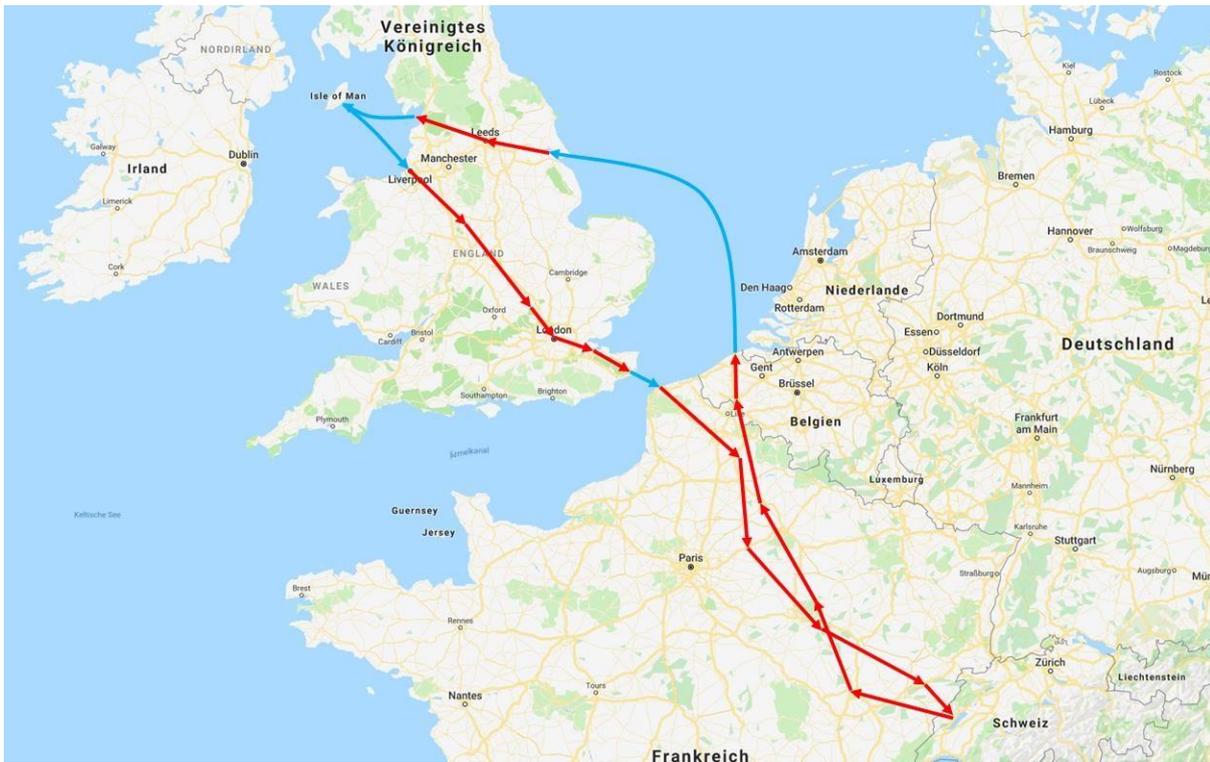


The last hurdle



Sunset on the other side of the Jura

After three weeks and 2500 km on the road I have reached our cottage on the south slope of the Jura, where my dear wife and a warm fire were waiting. It's good to be home again.



Our journey to the Isle of Man on a map