

## My First Bike and Barge Trip

By Vince Kelly



We were sitting next to Carole Dinello at the club banquet in 2009 when she said she was going on a bike and barge trip down the Mosel River the next summer. The trip had been organized by the Naperville Bike Club. Because they had to reserve a year in advance to secure a charter on their barge, some folks had to cancel later which left some openings. “Why don’t you join us?” she asked. After much discussion and some trepidation Jackie and I said yes. When a few more cancellations occurred we asked others and eventually Paula Matzek, Al Gibbs, and Barb Pontrelli also joined us.

Initially I thought a bike ride in Europe with a bunch of strangers was beyond my imagination both logistically and financially. All that proved to be untrue. We not only did the week-long trip but seven more days on our own. All together it ended up costing about \$3,500 each. When you travel on one of these small barges which accommodate around 36 passengers the entire cost is usually less than \$1,500 per person.

On our first trip we were scheduled to leave from the town of Metz France which is less than two hours from Paris. Al and Paula joined us three nights early in Paris for some sightseeing and fine dining. Air fare is expensive, so it is well worth it to spend a little time exploring the areas where we started and finished. Visiting Paris remains as one of my favorite memories. Walking the streets, visiting the museums, and eating in the unique restaurants put me into a whole new realm of awareness.

The barge itself was low and narrow. The rooms were smaller than a tiny hotel room but adequate for sleeping, showering, and changing clothes. The real experience was up on deck where there was always a quiet place to read or someone to share a story with. Well prepared dinners and buffet breakfasts were time to savor the skill of the local chef and the experiences of the company we shared for a week. The bike trips began shortly after breakfast and finished mid to late afternoon. In the 20 to 30 miles we traveled each day we encountered awesome scenery, stopped and toured fascinating towns, and shared our lunches which we either packed at breakfast or ate at cute little wineries or bistros along the way. Every night included an optional walking tour of the town where we spend the night.

That first bike and barge tour wetted our appetites and led to taking four more. My biggest disappointment in dealing with the lock down during the Coronavirus threat is that we are unable to enjoy one this year.