

France: No baguette beatings

◆ Adam Lucas recounts summer trip to Poitiers, France

BY ADAM LUCAS
Editor-in-Chief

"Parlez-vous francais?"

Well, no. But that wasn't supposed to be a problem.

I set off for my five weeks of summer school in Poitiers, France, with the assurance that my knowledge of the language—which extended only to French 101—would be plenty.

And it was. The things I needed to know, I learned as I went. It didn't take me long to be saying "croque-monsieur" and "crepe" with the best of them.

The truth, though, is that the Poitiers program wasn't really about language. It also wasn't about holding hands and singing songs, which explains why many professors and students alike seemed to sneer when I told them that's where I would be spending my summer.

"Poitiers?" they would say. "Why don't you do a real study abroad?"

Well, part of the reason was that the classes fulfill IDS and Humanities requirements. There were other, more tangible reasons, though.

Dean de la Motte, the Guilford professor who leads the program along with his wife, Karen, knows that at Guilford, any program that doesn't have some element of saving the

world is bound to take criticism. "I enjoy teaching a purely academic program," he said. "It's rewarding to teach a class about history and culture and also be in the place where that same history occurred."

Learning to live in France was made easier by the size of our group—only nine students. Picture "The Real World" taking place abroad and you've got the idea. We were able to talk to each other and compare experiences, learning what to expect from everyday life.

Two of the students, John Cocking and Nate Robinson, had also done the program in 1996. Nate quickly became appointed "camp counselor," meaning that it was his duty to point us in the right direction and prevent us from getting lost.

His job was made easier by the small-town feel of Poitiers. The town is situated about an hour and a half from Paris, meaning that it's close enough to the big city to be convenient, but far enough away to remain a small town.

"The typical French town isn't as cosmopolitan as Paris," said junior Kristin Huzzard, who also went on the trip. "I actually liked it much more than Paris."

The truth, as most of us found out, is that Paris is mainly made up of tourists. It's possible to accidentally stumble across a French person that has gone against their



Members of the Poitiers group dance at the castle of Saumur.

better judgment and come into the city, but for the most part, Paris is a haven for camera-toting American and Japanese tourists.

Smaller towns, though, are different. "I really enjoyed going to the smaller towns instead of the big cities," said senior Jessica Templeton. "It was more of a totally French experience, and allowed us to be completely immersed in their culture."

Ah yes, the culture. It took a little while to get used to the idea of four hours being considered a good length for dinner. And after hearing so much about the rudeness of the average French citizen, I was more than just a little scared of doing something that might suddenly cause a Poitiers resident to go berserk and beat me with their

baguette.

What we found out, though, was that they were just as afraid of us. After all, everyone has heard the horror stories about ugly Americans. "At first they made fun of us because we were American," senior Maggie Powell said. "But then, after they found out that we weren't obnoxious or loud, everyone was very nice to us."

Well, maybe there were a few times that we were obnoxious or loud. It's hard to sit around and quietly sip wine *all* the time. But for the most part, our group avoided any colossal faux pas.

Yes, I said faux pas—it's just another example of how I'm now parlez-vousing with the best of them.

France

On August 31, Diana, Princess of Wales, died in a Paris car accident. Henri Paul, the driver who was legally intoxicated, and her companion, Harrods heir Dodi Fayed, also died. Six photographers who were chasing the car at the time face manslaughter charges for their alleged role in the accident. Funeral services will be held tomorrow.

Port Diana?

Montserrat, a Caribbean British colony recently beset by volcanic eruptions, wants to name its new capital Port Diana, for the deceased princess.

Fast Facts

Norway

A United States proposal to exclude the Korean peninsula from a global ban on anti-personnel land mines met stiff opposition from 33 countries at a conference in Oslo, Norway. The treaty, endorsed by the late Princess Diana, will be signed in Ottawa in December by 98 countries.

Cambodia

On September 3 at 1:40 P.M. a Vietnam Airlines jet crashed in a

rice paddy 1/2 mile south of the Phnom Penh airport, killing 65 people. Rescue workers and fire fighters approached the wreck by a flooded small dirt road.

Algeria

Algerian security forces have killed more than 62 Algerian rebels early this week. About a total of 60,000 people have died since violence erupted after the cancellation of a general election which Islamic fundamentalists reportedly won.

United States

The U.S. Army may test a laser to hit a \$60 million satellite. This experiment would determine vulnerability of U.S. satellites and America's capability to attack enemy satellites.

United States

The Senate Governmental Affairs gave three Buddhist nuns immunity from prosecution for testifying on Thursday against Vice President Al Gore about alleged campaign fund-raising abuses.