

From French Fleas to English Horses

When eventually came out from the [Eurotunnel](#) I was disappointed: there was nothing special. Of course I was in Folkestone, England, but there was nothing welcoming us: we were simply sent away our train and met no special buildings, nothing but for an anonymous road leading us to more trafficked one. I already wrote about driving in England, to The North, and you can read my impressions [here](#), I love that sign by the way! Today, I will concentrate on what happened in around Stanstead Airport, I think it was there, mile more or mile less, I remember planes flying low over my head.



While waiting for my train, at the Eurotunnel, I noticed some dark brown dots among Briony hair. “Unfortunately”, I have been a parasitology intern for a whole semester, which means I know more than I wish to know about all sort of nasty bugs infesting pets. The combination black dots + dog + hair, therefore, elicited quite an alarming reaction, but I

desperately tried to be positive. Briony had been bathed, cleaned and groomed before I left, to make sure she was not going to travel around Europe carrying any clandestine bugs. She hardly had any parasites during all her life and I am quite picky in these things, I really had no reason to fear the worst. My inquisitive mind, however, was looking for detailed answers. It was afternoon when I decided to stop at a service station: my sat nav told me that there was one (and road signs said the same) so I followed their advice and I got lost. I know it might sound stupid, but in Italy motorway’

service stations are ON the motorway, not elsewhere. Since you pay to access the motorway here, you are not supposed to leave it until your trip is over: they basically lock you inside, together with everything you might need. You do not need to leave the motorway to buy some food, or some gas. So, as naïve as I can sometimes be, I could not believe my sat nav was taking me away from the motorway. I ended up in a small village, at a small village Country Club to be more precise, very pretty but no service stations. I stopped the car in a corner, recollected myself and persisted, eventually landing in a giant parking lot surrounded by supermarkets of all sorts. I badly needed a toilet (I drank so much water on the way!), something fresh to drink and a dinner for the night but... it was incredibly hot, too hot to leave the dog in the car for a prolonged time. I ended up leaving the car semi-open and having multiple- short- trips the shops.

After the first trip – toilet -I went back to the car, took Briony out, walked her and then dug among bags and suitcases to find the “grooming bag” and the medicines case. Flea comb came out first confirming my fears:



the dog was carrying hundreds of bugs. I could not believe it: she was bug free when we left from home and now she was covered with fleas! I do not like chemicals and I know the less toxic products against fleas are not 100% effective but, I had to do something! I decided to adopt a multi-step strategy: part first consisted in looking for any single bug and smashing it, to be sure of its death. It took more than an hour... I then took Frontline spray, Neem spray and Scalibor collar (I travel heavy for a reason!) and placed all of them (these molecules can be safely used together) on Briony... I am an holistic vet in progress, I try to avoid medicines and chemicals at all costs, but I was so shocked by all those fleas that I opted for heavy artillery! I did not want to carry all those fleas around much longer.

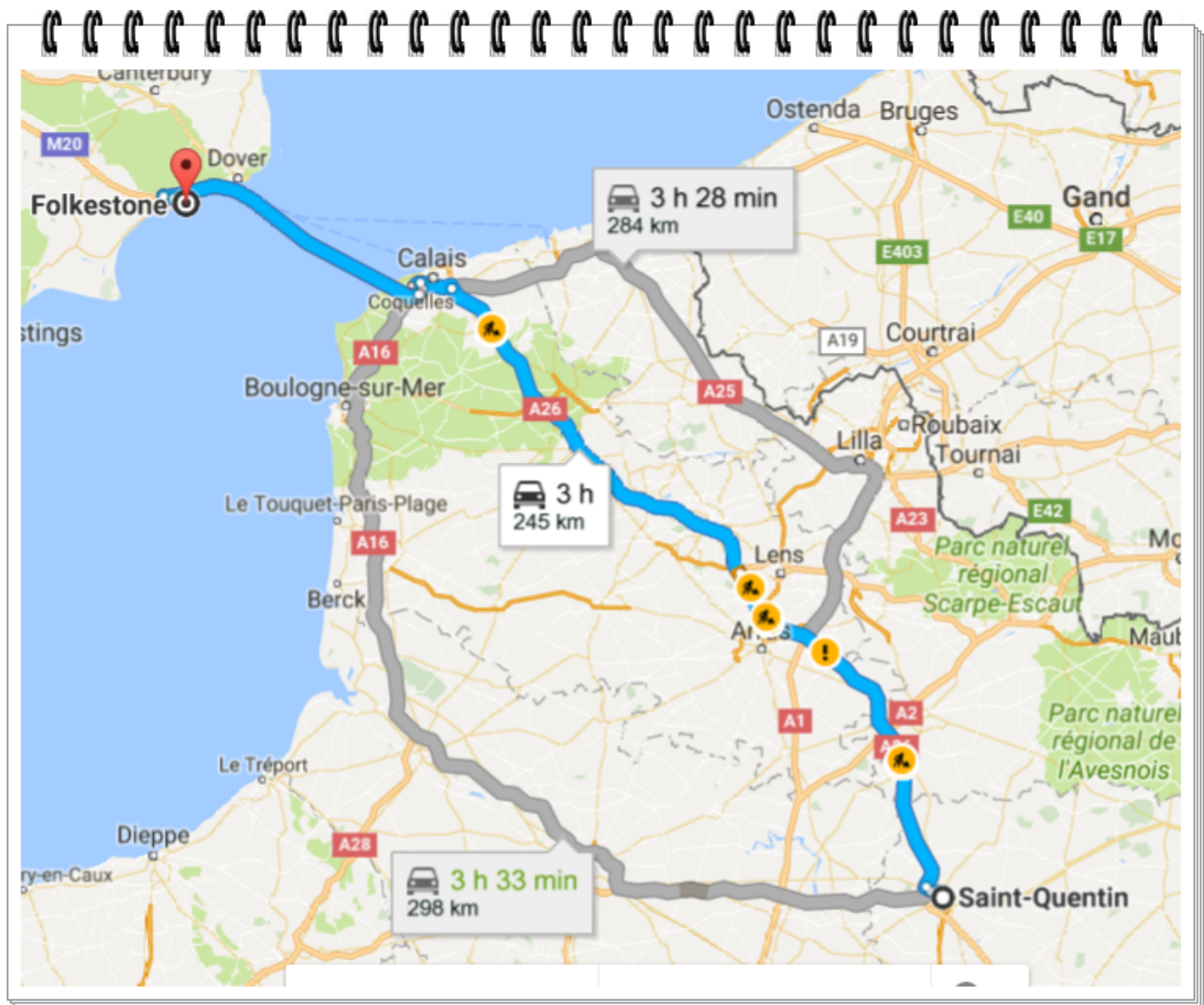
As soon as she looked cleaner, I sprayed Frontline inside the crate and inside the car and left, in the hope to reach Woodland, in County Durham, my final destination, before the sunset. I think I parked in my B&B yard at around 9 PM, it was the golden hour and the place looked peaceful and welcoming. The owners were as well, I immediately loved that small “farm” with stone walls, surrounded by horses and paddocks, an ideal temporary home! (Slideshow with pictures below).

Ps. If you wonder where did the fleas came from... I think they were a gift from some French cats roaming around the [French hotel](#)...

Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).

Under the Sea: The Eurotunnel

On the following morning, right after waking up, I realized I had a new roommate: a cockroach was trying to get into Briony’s bowl! I did not want to get into a fight with the bug, but I was not so positively impressed by its presence. Anyway, I left it and Briony alone and went to the main building to have breakfast. It was Saturday morning, early for my standards, and the only people there were male British bikers travelling in small groups. “[Hagrid](#)” was not there, but his colleagues were scattered in different tables: I was the only woman, and most of all the only woman travelling alone!



Barbed wire...

I quickly re-packed everything, but for the bug, and left, heading towards Les Coquelles, where the French side of the Eurotunnel is located. It was early, but I was afraid of being

late: I was told it takes time to go through the Pet Reception Area. The motorway was, again, virtually empty and the sun was casting dull grey rays. Why the tunnel? As I have always reached England by air, I wanted to reach it by sea to see the "White Cliffs of Dover" (school memories) hence the ferry was an interesting option until I found out that pets must remain in the car. Here in Italy, the opposite happens: you CAN'T leave a dog in a vehicle on a ferry. You are not supposed to do so because it is deemed too dangerous, and rightly so: I know of dogs, illegally left there, who were found dead, probably killed by gas exhalations. Our ferries provide kennels for dogs but you are also allowed to keep the dog with you. British Ferries, instead, follow another policy and dogs must be left in the car: whereas it is true that the trip is quite short, during the summer months temperatures could be too high. Indeed, I investigated and it came out that some pets had died, while crossing from France to England in the summer, cause of death was heatstroke. This is how I made my decision.



Inside the tunnel

The Pet Reception Area was almost empty, outside there was a van full of horses and I thought it was going to slower things but, everything was very quick: they checked the dog's microchip and passport and gave me a badge. Outside of the building there was a fenced dog park and I brought Briony there: its ground was made of plastic grass! A bit odd but reminded me of my childhood: I spent my first 8 years of life living in the city centre, right in the cathedral shadow. Roads were paved with stones and granite and I suffered that,

I wanted grass and I thought I could have had lawn made with plastic grass... But anyway, she quickly made friends with a Greater Swiss Mountain Dog. Her owners were British and going back to England on vacation: they told me they now lived in France where they were running a B&B, apparently they were much happier in France. While they were talking I noticed some tiny black dots between Briony's hair but I did not want to think about the "worst case scenario", put her back in her crate and drove towards the train.

"How was the tunnel?" is the most frequent question I get asked. People are really curious and, most likely, imagine something else. *"Can you see fishes?" "No, just sea monsters!"*. Seriously, I have never answered like that but... I had the fishes question asked several times. When I describe the tunnel like an underground, people get disappointed! But, in reality, it is not much different than Milan, London or Paris underground! It looks the same, but instead of featuring seats, these trains feature parking spaces for cars. That's it, once you get inside the tunnel you see nothing but grey walls. The journey is very short: to go from France to England it took less than to go from one side of Milan to another on the underground. Not as beautiful as the White Cliffs of Dover, but very convenient if you are travelling with a pet!

[You can read about our arrival in England here.](#)

A Shocked France

A Shocked France: From Basel to Saint Quentin

How was that? Creepy, one of the weirdest trips I ever had. As said [earlier](#), I did not want to be in France on the 14th of

July feeling something was going to happen. Well, I was right but being there on the 15th was even worse. As soon as I crossed the border, French radio stations went on and it was awful. France was shocked about what just happened and did not try to hide it. There were almost no cars, nor trucks on the road and radio stations had no music, only endless talks about terrorism and death. It was surreal: harsh sunlight, empty roads and Italian like sceneries. Alsace and Champagne could be home: same light, same heat, same fields and hills surrounding the motorway. I stopped a couple of times but I do not remember much, just the heat, the harsh sunlight and the occasional farmer driving is tractor on the horizon. France was trying to anesthetize itself, unsuccessfully. I reached my "hotel" right before dinner time: it looked like one of those American motels you see in movies and it was full of British bikers. I highly respect bikers because... they know how to travel light!



I was given a room on the ground floor and I managed to park the car right in front of it. A giant motorbike was parked in the nearby spot. The hotel receptionist gave me a keycard lock, instead of a plain key, this is fairly common now and

usually convenient unless, you have a dog, there are cats everywhere and the door locks by itself. So... It kept happening that the door locked itself while I was bringing stuff inside. I ended up being locked outside a couple of times and the receptionist lady developed a "magnetic" dislike for me. I am not the smartest person when it comes to keys, I know, but, this time, it was not completely my fault. In the meantime, I discovered who the owner of the large motorbike was: a giant grey haired, bearded man who looked like Hagrid. I got quite familiar with him as he spent hours on his parked motorbike (placed right in front of my window) chatting over the phone with several women. Once he had finished with one, he would start with another one. I was not trying to listen him, but he was not exactly a silent critter and I had to walk in front of him!



Speaking of back and forth, since the parking lot was filled with cats, I decided to walk Briony in the neighbourhood: bad idea, it was full of rabbits so I moved even further and ended up in front of a war cemetery, just to put some more creepiness to the table. When I went back to sleep, the images on TV were still showing and shocked France and the British biker was still chatting with a woman.

[And then the cockroach came...](#)

Switzerland and Team Bond :-)

Somebody asked whether I forgot about the “ A Month on the Moor” section. No! I did not, I am just busy with so many things to do at the same time, like always! This is why I am “taking advantage” of Tok Mostert writings on training but... I still want to tell my tale.

So, let's try to be brief and remember some things about the day [I left](#) from Italy. It was July 15th and I had set this date because I did not want to be in France on the 14th. I somehow felt something was bound to happen on that day, France national day. I was going to go to bed on that night, when the TV announced there was an ongoing terrorist attack in Nice. I was sorry, worried and moved but not surprised.

On 15th morning, I had to finish to load the car: I have never completely grasped the concept of “travelling light” and UK 2016 trip was not an exception, my “packing” issues will be told in another story . I passed Milan swiftly, and stopped at a service station near Varese, right before the Swiss border. I had a coffee flask with me: my plan was to be smart and save money. Bad idea, the temperature was already around 30°C and my coffee was still steaming! Why did I stop then? Because... people told me that when you travel with a dog you need to stop every two hours, which I stupidly did on all my way to England! While trying to sip some coffee, the service station man came to greet me and look at the dog. It was the same man I met on my way to Switzerland, a couple of years ago, while I was travelling to meet Briony's breeder. He did not remember

me of course, but I did as he told me again about his Maltese dog and about his love for these four legged critters.



Team Bond

What astonished me the most, however, were two cars parked by mine: they were wearing a Scottish plate! I have never seen any Scottish plates in Italy before, so I took it as a good sign! These cars ended up being three, not two: they were expensive cars, Audi or Saab if I am not wrong and, weird thing, each of them had a driver and no passengers. Drivers were two middle aged men and a girl, I know this for sure as they sort of escorted me until the French border. I was missing them, finding one of them again, miss them another time and so on. I crossed Switzerland with these three unusual travel mates, which, for no rational reasons, reminded me of James Bond... and British spies!

How do you travel in Switzerland? Are there any breathtaking sceneries? Yes there are, you drive through mountains and lakes, but you cannot really enjoy them as you need to be well focused on the road. There is much traffic, as many car drivers and truck drivers favour Switzerland over France because the Mont Blanc and the Frejus tunnels are very expensive (while the Gottahrd is free). Also, French and Italian motorways are much more expensive than the Swiss ones: in Italy and France you pay according to your mileage and your vehicle, in Switzerland you pay about 40 Euros and you can travel as much as you like for one year. Driving in Switzerland is cheaper, but equally demanding: speed limits are really tight, these roads are not made for high speeds and

speed limits keep changing constantly. Beware of them and of all the cameras set to trap incautious motorists. We stopped before the Gotthard, again , having been told that you must stop frequently when you are travelling with dogs...



South Gotthard service station

We were right in the middle of the Alps this time and it was pleasantly cold. Past the Gotthard tunnel – full of Belgian cars – we enjoyed bordering the Luzern Lake (in the midst of a thunderstorm and still escorted by Team Bond). We finally reached Basel when we stopped again for lunch. I had food with my but I went inside the service station to see what else they had: very cute cakes, 7.50 Euros (6£) a slice! I therefore opted for my homemade “piadina” which was consumed under a tree. My neighbour , under the next tree, was a Swiss man with a wirehaired Dacshund. And then... in the blink of an eye, [I was in France](#).