

GREAT VALUE BEST-SELLING MOTORHOME MAGAZINE



NEW MODEL

BÜRSTNER'S LUXURY A-CLASS

MMM

THE MOTORHOMERS' MAGAZINE

WONDERFUL TOURS

**Fascinating Falkirk • Iconic Hadrian's Wall • Colourful Essex
Fun-filled Pembrokeshire • Intriguing Romania
Spectacular Spain • Appealing Alsace**

PLUS

Sites in Britain's glorious national parks

GREAT DEALS

Save over £9k on end-of-season motorhomes

BUYING ADVICE

Perfect gadgets for TV on the move

£4.50

SEPTEMBER 2018

TESTED

Sunlight's budget island bed low-profile
First look: 2019 Dreamer family campervan
Owner review: Devon Tempest high-top

TECH Tyre pressure monitoring • Payloads & overloading



Appealing ALSACE

Lovely lakes and mountains, medieval towns and wonderful food and wines; you'll adore this part of fabulous France

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Melanie and Stuart Gill



Mel & Stuart Gill...

...gave up sailing for motorhoming about five years ago and have never looked back. Mel is a lecturer and student support tutor and Stuart is a retired training manager

Almost inevitably on our trips to Europe we find ourselves drawn to lakes and mountains, partly because that is the scenery we love. It's also because lakes and mountains offer the opportunity to keep cool if temperatures should climb too high for our liking.

As we enjoyed sampling white wines on our way through the vineyards and hills of Alsace, the rising summer heat turned our thoughts to the higher reaches of the Ballons des Vosges nearby. However, we promised ourselves one more day in one of the many beautiful medieval villages along the wine route before heading for these hills; our choice was Colmar.

It was a Sunday and so unrestricted parking was on offer. Finding a parking spot near the 'Little Venice' area in the old town, we set off to explore. Taking advantage of the boat trips on offer we had a relaxed

25-minute tour in a small wooden vessel. Colmar is a typical Alsatian town with half-timbered buildings – many of which are fine merchants' houses – and cobbled streets and squares bedecked with flowers. The town is built upon fine food and drink and, though it was hard to avoid sampling a variety of local chilled wines, we succumbed to ice creams instead.

We then felt ready to escape the heat and head for some unspoilt scenery at cooler altitudes. Driving on the winding road into the mountains we eventually found ourselves approaching a col in the Parc Naturel Régional des Ballons des Vosges.

Its 3,000km² are characterised by round-topped granite hills (ballons) with a maximum altitude of 1,424m (4,672ft) at the Grand Ballon. Mostly wooded and with granite outcrops, there are also many lakes.

Having read a feature (Summer 2017,



p68) by *MMM's* Travel Editor, Helen Werin, about her trip to the Alsace and the Vosges, we pulled up at the aire at the Col du Calvaire which marked the end of Helen's article. We know this area from previous trips, but the aim was to spend longer here and visit places we hadn't been to before as well as revisiting one or two favourites.

After our hot day in Colmar, we appreciated the cool air as we climbed to 1,100m (3,609ft) along the windy road, dodging the masochistic Lycra-clad cyclists. We struck lucky on this busy Sunday afternoon and pulled into the last parking space by Lac Blanc to enjoy the view of heavily pine-clad hills and granite outcrops that surround the lake – a typical Vosges landscape.

Although you can get quite high here (altitude, that is), the hills and mountains are of a manageable variety compared to

the Alps. We watched as families swam and played on the stony beach and could see braver souls scrambling on the vertiginous Hans Rock with its summit statue overlooking the lake.

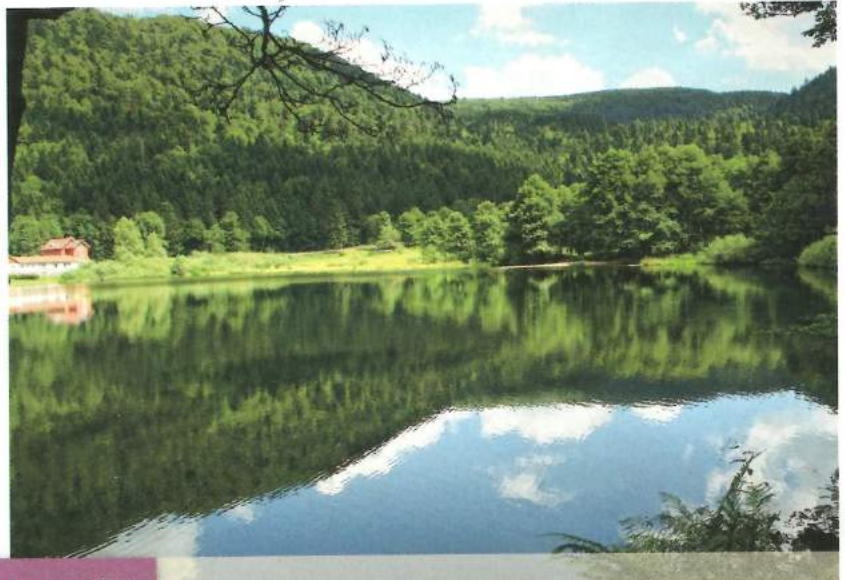
We continued the short distance from the lake car park to Les Terraces du Lac Blanc, a hotel and restaurant complex with a large car park/aire with hook-up for eight or so 'vans. It wasn't cheap as aires go but we had great views and enjoyed the sunset with a drink on the terrace.

Our plan the next morning was to pick up the Routes des Crêtes via the Col de la Schlucht. The road was constructed by the French to move troops and equipment without detection during WWI just below a ridge on what was then the border between France and Germany. The 55km (34-mile) route is often closed during the winter and we saw some spectacular pictures of deep ►

ABOVE FAR LEFT Evening at Lac de Longemer

ABOVE Boat trip in colourful Colmar





Trip summary

OUR MOTORHOME

2015 Marquis Majestic 125 on a Peugeot Boxer base and 2.2HDi engine. It is large enough to live in comfortably for a month or more at a time and small enough to access most narrow mountain roads and villages. It is also economical



THE JOURNEY

We spent five days in Alsace as part of a three-week trip in France in July and August. This article focuses on our travels from Colmar up into the High Vosges

THE COSTS

| | |
|---|---------|
| Fuel just for Alsace, average 30mpg..... | £25 |
| Ferry Dover-Calais..... | £120.45 |
| Site fees..... | £44.06 |
| Attractions Two adults: Berchigranges gardens and Colmar boat trip..... | £30.90 |

2015 Marquis Majestic 125

83 miles

Total £220.41

ABOVE LEFT Grande Cascade de Tendon

ABOVE RIGHT Lac de Retournemer

TOP TIPS

Visit **Colmar** on a Sunday for easy on-street parking

We highly recommend visiting one of the most beautiful gardens in Europe,

Le Jardin de Berchigranges
berchigranges.com

snowdrifts at the hotel adjoining the aire.

It is also a popular skiing area; indeed, as we approached the col summit, we saw two Nordic skiers coming uphill towards us. Was this a mirage? No, they were using in-line skis on wheels and propelling themselves up the hill quite efficiently! There is a lot of activity on this route in summer months, with cyclists, motorbikers, cars, caravans and, of course, folks like us in 'vans, so we can now add skiers on wheels to the list.

The scenery remained dramatic so we stopped at the Réserve Naturelle de Tanet-Gazon du Faing. A short walk saw us at the viewpoint at 1,300m (4,265ft) overlooking the Lac des Truites below with the ranks of the stunning blue Alsace hills and dramatic mountains receding into the distance.

We had noticed a lot of people lurking low among the small bushes on the hillsides

with plastic pots and it was here that we finally found out what they were up to. Picking myrtilles (blueberries/bilberries) is a popular pastime in the Vosges during the regulated season. The season had only just started (mid-July) and there is a limit per person of 2kg a day. Widely regarded as 'superfruit', you'll find myrtilles served everywhere in this region, especially in delicious cakes and tarts.

Heading down towards Gérardmer and its large lake we saw signs telling us the road was closed for repairs. We decided to ignore the sign and see how far we could get as the detour looked a bit long-winded on the map. This turned out to be a fortunate decision; as we approached the resurfacing works, we were waved through with caution and saw that there were several campsites to which we could still get access.

Spotting the glint of sunlight on water, we pulled over for a lunch stop on the banks of Lac de Longemer. Sandwiches made, we sat by a slipway and admired the lake, setting our sights on a campsite that we could see on the opposite bank. We had been aiming for Lac de Gérardmer; instead, we decided ►

*"The ranks of the **stunning** blue Alsace hills and **dramatic** mountains **receding** into the distance"*



that the Lac de Longemer setting looked very desirable and peaceful and there seemed to be a good selection of campsites.

We were looking for the chance to use our inflatable canoe. Luck was on our side; Camping Du Lac was right on the beach and had pitches with hook-up.

We stayed a few days and it was nice to pitch up, plug in and relax. The beach offers some shade and there are good cycling and walking trails nearby, not forgetting the bar/restaurant at the campsite and another right on the lakeside a short stroll away.

Our canoe was pressed into service for a couple of delightful trips. The lake is especially pretty as the sun goes down over the hills behind. As our canoe drifted in the evening breeze and the temperature cooled, we could hear live music wafting from the bar (La Clairière). It is possible to hire pedalos from here if you don't have your own means of getting afloat and there are tables on a pontoon on the lake where you can enjoy meals, ice creams and drinks – a great place to watch the sun go down.

It's possible to cycle around the lake in an hour or to take one of the trails through the forest to Lac de Retournemer, a quiet, unspoilt and picturesque place with a stream and small waterfall.

We'd visited Le Jardin de Berchigranges at Granges-sur-Vologne a few years before. It was – and still is – one of our favourite gardens. It isn't a grand, stately or formal garden, rather a family's labour of love on a rough granite hillside. We lost ourselves in

ABOVE CLOCKWISE Le Jardin de Berchigranges; evening ice creams at Lac de Longemer's café; horse and cart ride at Grande Cascades du Tendon

the succession of different – and often quite rare – planting schemes. We marvelled at the hard work and thought that has gone into creating this green oasis on the hillside.

While we were using Lac de Longemer as our base, we visited the larger Lac de Gérardmer. There are boat trips, pedalos and a rather more bustling atmosphere here, together with a lively town. However, after a short walk along the prom, we soon decided that we preferred the more relaxed and tranquil nature of Lac de Longemer.

We enjoyed one more sunset with a drink and ice cream at the lakeside bar back on Lac de Longemer perusing our map and contemplating our onward itinerary, the 'making it up as you go' being one of the joys of motorhoming for us. Aware that there was a free overnight stay on offer for motorhomers by booking a boat trip to the Saut de Doubs waterfall on the Swiss border, we sat back and enjoyed the view thinking about the route we'd take in the morning. [M.M.M.](#)

WE STAYED AT

Terrasses du Lac Blanc aire, Station du Lac Blanc, 68370 Orbey, Alsace

☎ 0033 389 865000 🌐 les-terrasses-du-lac-blanc.com 📅 All year

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From €7 (£6.36), electric extra

Camping du Lac, 3400 Route du Lac, 88400 Xonrupt-Longemer, Hautes-Vosges

☎ 0033 329 575291 🌐 campinglaongemer.fr 📅 15 April - 15 October

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From €9 (£8.18)