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22/06/07 Ardeche Trip - June 2007

Gerry and Cara McCusker, together with eight of Cara's friends from Yorkshire where she now lives, recently enjoyed a trip to the South of France to paddle the River Ardeche which is famous for having the best gorges in Europe.

Nine of the group left Halifax on Saturday and headed south in a minibus plus a trailer carrying 10 kayaks and 2 open boats, whilst Cara headed north to attend the wedding of an old school friend in Scotland. She caught up with the group on Sunday in Lyon where Easyjet's flight arrived dead on time. After a three hour drive the group arrived at Midi Bateaux campsite on the bank of the Ardeche, close to the famous Pont d'Arc - a massive natural arch spanning the river.

Following 36 hours of travel for the main group, and hanging around in Edinburgh and Stanstead airports for Cara, the next day was spent chilling out and having a short paddle upstream under Pont d'Arc to mess about in a



great play wave. There we bumped into Ray Goodwin, a very well known British Coach, who was in charge of a group of kids from Keith Steer's school. What a small world it is!!

Day 2 took in a very scenic 18 km paddle along Les Defiles de l'Ardeche from Vogue to Ruoms. Luckily, at the campsite, we had met a British guy who had been living in Germany for 22 years and he and his wife joined our trip with their open boat to mutually help with shuttling the boats. This was a great day's paddle which culminated with an exciting ride down a very long glissiere (chute) to avoid a massive weir just below Ruoms.

Our major trip of the week was down the fabulous Ardeche Gorge - a two day trip of about 26 km with an overnight stay at La Gournier, one of only two camp sites along the entire length of the Gorge. Access to the Gorge is strictly controlled as a permit is required to paddle it, and the two campsites can each take a maximum of only 600 people. Once you are committed into the Gorge there is no road access until the end of the trip. The scenery is fabulous - like a mini Grand Canyon with massive high walls each side of the river which sometimes narrows down to a very fast flowing torrent whilst at other times it is wide and flowing lazily through the Gorge. We passed a Naturist Campsite on the second day but as the day was somewhat overcast, and drizzly, instead of seeing yards of exposed flesh that we had been warned about we didn't even see a



goose bump. PGL, the British children's outdoor adventure company, operates in force on the Ardeche and we passed a number of their massive groups (30 - 50 kids per group) along the river. At such times English was definitely the dominant language in use on the river.

We finished our Gorge Trip about 4.00 p.m. then had to wait for the chap from our campsite to collect his sit-on boat that two of our group had hired, and take them back so they could collect our minibus and trailer. Three and a half hours later when the minibus turned up, the rain had been torrential for over two hours with little prospect of it stopping. So we dived into a local restaurant to fill up, and dry out, before heading back to the campsite some 30 km upstream. The intention next day

was to go over to Tarn, a gorge area about 100 km away, but as everything was wet including sleeping bags we decided to stay put, dry out, and have a relaxing day. In the evening most of the group did an 11 km paddle (instead of the 6 km trip that had been planned) which finished at our campsite at 8.00 p.m. This was slightly naughty as everyone is supposed to be off the river by 6.00 p.m. No wonder they got funny looks from the river bank during along the way.

Our last day (Saturday) was spent breaking camp and having a last paddle upstream under Pont d'Arc and up to the play wave. Being the weekend the whole river was full of boats, almost bank to bank plastic in places, with multiple boats heading at the same time for the narrow opening above the play wave. They were just like lemmings going over

the drop, with about 50% of them capsizing or getting stuck on the rocks on either side of the chute. It was absolute carnage but a really good laugh with the banks on either side of the river lined with walkers and paddlers alike enjoying the drama.

About 3.00 pm. we headed off home and 26 hours later we were back in Halifax unloading the trailer and minibus. A very long journey but well worth it as the Ardeche is just fabulous.

[Gerry McCusker](#) [Photos.....](#)