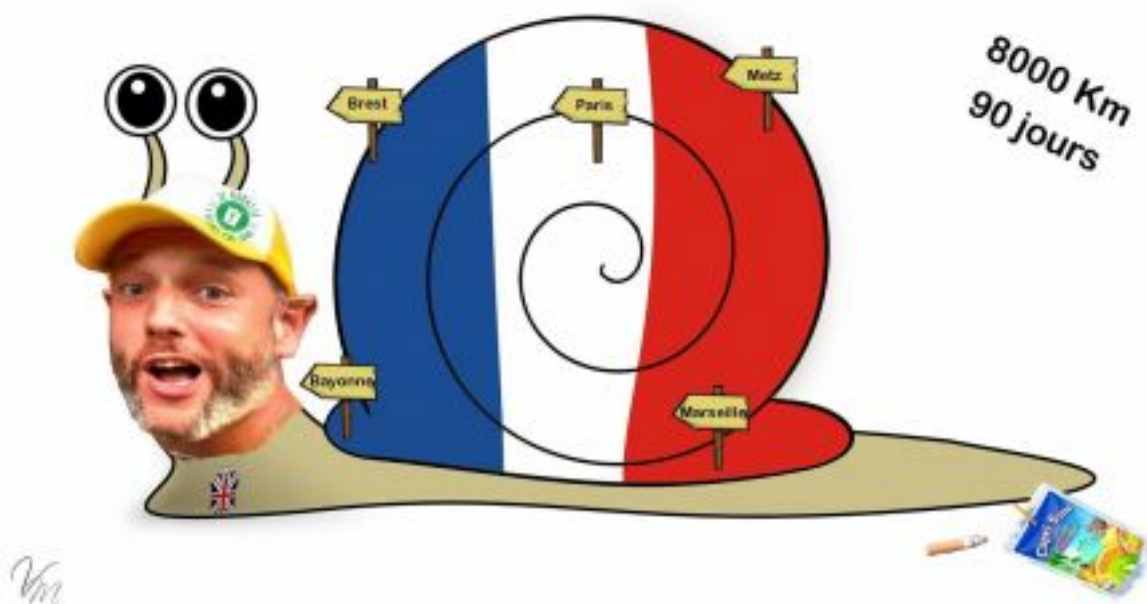


L'Escargot Anglais



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Thursday 29th June 2017

Marseille - Villesèque-des-Corbières - 305 km

Do you eat kebabs?

Let's Go Disco! Blow me, I was pumped up and ready for the off. The first person to pick me up as [L'Escargot Anglais](#)¹ on my 8,000 km hitchhiking adventure around France was my mate Julien. He drove me to the Joliette neighbourhood of Marseille where the A55 autoroute snakes west out of the city. We'd agreed on a fake pick-up for the journalists and their cameras so that I could leave on time and get into a better hitching position where my unknown adventure would begin. I left the 1 Piece of Rubbish (1POR) team, my friends, fans and press on rue de Rome, where one of my sponsors, Carrefour, had provided an *apéro** *départ* at 11 am. Julien and I shared a joint as we passed the Cathédrale de la Major in all her striped criminal splendour. Moments later, I stood at the penultimate set of traffic lights before the motorway with my cardboard sign saying 'Perpignan'. Never for the life of me did I expect this 90-day adventure to change my life forever.

I waited 30 minutes before my first official driver turned up. His name was Adam, a medical student and a good lad who dropped me off in Salon-de-Provence. Then Loïc, a father of two, took me closer to the *péage**. The next guy was Mika, from Azerbaijan, who delivered frozen kebab meat between Montpellier and Menton for a living. Delivering 700 sticks of strange processed, off-the-abattoir-floor, chewy stuff for us to eat at €3.30 a pop. I asked him if he ate the kebabs that he delivered, to which he declared, - "Never!"

He went on to state that the only decent kebabs are in Azerbaijan or Turkey.

We spoke about our lives and I explained the nature of my trip. He told me that he'd paid 20,000 USD for a passport to get his wife out of Azerbaijan. She had Armenian nationality and no official identity in Azerbaijan, so she needed a fake passport for 20k. What a horrific situation to be in. When Mika told me this, the reality of the corruption throughout our human race slapped me in the face. Has mankind always been corrupt like this? And out of interest, who put the word 'kind' in mankind anyway?! That all happened back in 2010 but Mika said he now had a good situation for his loving wife and family of three young daughters, and that he enjoys his job and living in the south of France.

After Mika dropped me off, I walked 3 km along the motorway outside of Montpellier. Which is illegal and highly unpleasant, of course, not to mention dangerous with hundreds of cars and lorries rattling past non-stop. The highway litter at the side of the road was disappointingly consistent, but nothing compared to what it was in Salon-de-Provence two hours earlier. Where most roundabouts close to industrial and commercial estates and motorway entrances were all shockingly filthy. Tons and tons of our consumer rubbish thrown from cars in the name of convenience and tons and tons of excuses made like, - "I pay my taxes for it to get cleaned."

- "It's only one can, man!"

- "I'm creating employment."

And the world-famous provincial,

- "*Je m'en bats les couilles !*"

Which translated means 'I don't give a toss!'... Seriously who the fuck are ye' man?!!!

After two more rides, and seven hours later, I was at Maxime Gratacos' house in Villesèque-des-Corbières, about 30 km from Perpignan. Maxime had seen my trip on Facebook and invited me to stay for two nights to do a river cleanup. It was the perfect start to *L'Escargot Anglais*! Maxime said he hated litter and seeing his countryside treated so disrespectfully by a small minority of people constantly. So with his brother Théo, and mates Hugo and Gaulois, we did a cleanup and filled six bags with rubbish and three bottles with cigarette butts from their favourite spot, Les Campets. You can't begin to imagine how beautiful the environment was and the extent and variety of wildlife which flourishes there. I was amazed and this was just the beginning of my trip around the most perfectly beautiful country I know. I wonder if the people who treat France like a dustbin, know how incredibly rich and charming this country actually is? Sadly, I guess not, but I hope they soon will. Great Britain is bloody awesome too but with 10-15 degrees difference in temperature, France takes the gold as my country of choice.

After the cleanup, we had to wait until the *Gendarmes** had gone because I'd just enjoyed a congratulatory reefer. As we waited, Max told me that he didn't know who to vote for in the local elections because the politicians constantly fail to deliver on ecological issues. He said it's time for politicians and civilians to wake up and smell the coffee with regards to pollution and the current environmental crisis. My river cleaning friend was mega enthusiastic about becoming a defender of the planet and wanted me to give him a

certificate so that he could spread the message in schools throughout his region. Maxime's enthusiasm was infectious, and I couldn't have agreed with him more when he said, - "If we don't look after this wonderful countryside, then what will there be left to look after?"

For the following three nights I slept in a caravan in front of Éric Malafosse's house in Canet-en-Roussillon eating *magret de canard**, drinking beers, local whisky & *rhum arrangé**. Éric was the founder of [Citeco66](#)², a litter picking association and was my associative partner for our cleanup in an operation organised with the shopping centre on the Sunday 2nd of July. The goal of partnering with Éric was to give him more media coverage, but also to show the people following 1POR that lots of litter picking movements already existed before we whooshed on to the scene. I've always felt that part of our role as an association was to put the spotlight on other litter pickers, especially considering the amount of press and visibility we were getting. Before the Sunday cleanup however, I had to do my first 'Awareness Saturday' with a stand in the Clairia shopping centre. Maxime - *le King* of les Corbières, was free to help me for a couple of hours, which meant that together we could penetrate the brains of twice the number of people with our message. We made a great team.

The sponsorship deal with Carrefour was very simple. In return for €20,000 towards the running costs of our association, I would visit six shopping centres during my trip to do a day in store on plastic awareness, generally on a Saturday and a cleanup operation the following day. My friend Patoche had introduced me to Bertrand Swiderski, the company's sustainability director in early 2017. One day over lunch in Paris, Bertrand bought into the crazy idea of supporting a mad Englishman on a mission to loop-the-loop around France with a dustpan and brush in hand. It was great meeting with Bertrand and it reminded me of my salesman days, getting deals and drinking champagne with my teams. The supermarket giant agreed to produce 3,000 cotton bags and 3,000 cotton bracelets with our 1POR logo on, to be handed out over the six weekends as follows;

- 1st July in Perpignan - Clairia,
- 15th July in Angoulins,
- 29th July in Berck,
- 5th August in Geric - Thionville,
- 7th September in Ormesson - Paris,
- 30th September in Orléans.

I was mega excited about being face to face with the consumer public, feeling like Scrappy-Doo, '*Lemme at 'em, Lemme at 'em*'. For your information, five million transactions take place every day in our sponsor's supermarkets, which now makes me think that I should have asked for 40k instead.

I kid you not, it was a huge buzz being able to chat with so many people about plastic pollution, all agreeing that together we can be part of the solution. Most shoppers agreed that picking up at least *1 Piece of Rubbish* per day for cleaner streets, cleaner cities, and a cleaner future would be a good habit to incarnate. Anyone who picks up trash, anywhere in the world, is part of the vital human barrier between all this pollution and our precious fragile nature.

The stand donned with the reusable cotton tote bags, bracelets and presentation screen was strategically positioned at the entrance to the supermarket for maximum footfall and impact. Vanessa from the 1POR team had chosen mega eye-catching images of trash in the streets and oceans, people picking up trash, and of course - animals with trash in their noses, around their necks and in their stomachs. SHOCK images highlighting the state of our planet and the need to act urgently to preserve it. The people we spoke to were really receptive, and we handed out over 400 cotton bags and bracelets to local residents and tourists, mainly from the North of France and Belgium. We directed them to our website, asked them to like or follow the 1POR Facebook and Instagram pages, and of course, to pick up some trash and nominate their friends in the challenge. I hoped we had a positive impact on the public and that they now think about the plastic in their shopping trolleys, where it comes from and where it ends up. Although education and awareness are important, the real aim of the stand was to get people involved for the cleanup operation the following morning at 10.

After speaking for over six hours to over 500 people, can you guess how many people came to the cleanup the next morning...? Nine! Yes, nine! But if you take Maxime, Éric - his son, and me out of the equation, that leaves five people from the general public, including a local English teacher @engels.kai. Meaning our conversion rate was a championship-losing 1 % turnout... This meant only one thing however...we could only do better at the next events!

The nine of us were battered by the valley's strong westerly winds, which didn't help matters as we attacked a field of vines ram-packed with trash on the edge of the Clair commercial zone. We removed so much trash that would have otherwise ended up in the Mediterranean Sea. We filled two big wheelie bins full of McDonald's, Domino's, Burger King, KFC, wrappers from toys and sweets, promotional balloons, water bottles; tons and tons of plastic, all caught, twisted and decaying on the juicy wine fields of the Languedoc-Roussillon region. Éric explained that trash dropped inland, or blown out of bins, or from landfill sites, can be carried 40 km down the Têt River valley and into the Med. This is why cleaning around villages, towns and cities - and everywhere really, is fundamental to the health of our planet's seas and oceans. Diane Sabouraud from *L'Indépendant* came and did an [article](#)³ about the operation and rumour has it that the owner of the land wasn't happy with us cleaning his property... miserable old sod. Thanks for this fantastic moment, everybody!

Here are some reader's comments translated from the above article with my thoughts:

- *“90 % of waste comes from products sold by large retailers, it is, therefore, their problem to deal with.”*

I particularly like this one because it's this typical 'passing the blame' bullshit that is rampant in our society. Yes, the big retailers are a large part of the problem, but that doesn't

remove our responsibility to make better choices. WE ARE ALL FREAKING RESPONSIBLE, every last one of us. We all consume, so we all participate. If we stop buying their shit, they'll stop selling it. Simple.

- *“There is an alarming quantity of waste all along the river Têt and the right bank of the Ganganell ... but what are the local authorities doing...? ...Tourism is clearly going to suffer in Perpignan...!”*

This one is interesting because tourism is one of the leading causes of frivolous consumption and waste. Careless people at home care even less when they're away on holiday, and the local authorities are doing everything to cash in on the golden goose of tourism regardless of the environmental and social impact. Without doing anything to safeguard the nest and habitat, the profit of the golden goose will be short-lived, and the long-term repercussions for all of us disastrous.

Some friends of Éric's invited Max and me for Sunday lunch. We were 18 around the table, where a generous feast was served in front of the first day of Le Tour de France on the TV. Interestingly, a debate ensued about drug-taking professional athletes and how much trash this world-famous sporting event produces each year. According to Hervé Pighiera, who walked 996 km from Aix to Paris picking up litter for his association [La Marcheterie](#)⁴; [14 million goodies](#)⁵ are distributed throughout the event each year, each with a plastic wrapper which is too often thrown on the floor by the participating plebby public. WTF or WHAT THE FUCKING FUCK more like!!! Is Tour de France gunna wake up one day and make changes to the direct negative impact it has on our planet?

Anyway! What a superb first weekend with Max and his crew, and Éric and his family. The following day I had to get to a lunch date with Jean-Christophe Torres who runs an association called *Kilomètre Net* in Perpignan, then it was off to the Pyrénées mountains I went with no fixed abode, total freedom, total bliss.

Can't wait to tell you all about it!

Notes:

¹ *La Provence*: The Tour de France of Citizen Initiatives by Eddie Platt, the Englishman from the Basket (via Dailymotion)
(*La Provence : Le tour de France des initiatives citoyennes d'Eddie Platt, l'Anglais du Panier (via Dailymotion)*)
<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5s5zjw>

² *Citeco66*: Environmental Guard
(*Citeco66 : Sentinelle de l'environnement*)
<https://citeco66.blogspot.com/>

³ *L'Indépendant P.-O.*: Collect Waste English Style, One Per Day and Per Person

(L'Indépendant P.-O. : Ramasser les déchets à l'Anglaise, un par jour et par personne)

<https://www.lindependant.fr/2017/07/02/p-o-ramasser-les-dechets-a-l-anglaise-un-par-jour-et-par-personne.3030795.php>

⁴ *Une marche pour l'environnement: 'A walk for the Environment' in the Press
(Une marche pour l'environnement dans la presse)*

<http://unemarchepourenvironnement.com/ils-parlent-de-nous/>

⁵ *Téléstar: Tour de France 2014: 14 Million Goodies to be Won on the Routes!*

(Téléstar : Tour de France 2014 : 14 millions de goodies à gagner sur les routes !)

<https://www.telestar.fr/sport/tour-de-france/tour-de-france-2014-14-millions-de-goodies-a-gagner-sur-les-routes-35545>