

Letter from Adam Cross  
ANZ Mortgages Scholarship winner  
School Year Program from Australia to France 2005-06 (AUSYPscFRANH05)  
13 September 2006

It's been a long time since I got back now as I've been childishly putting off having to write this letter. As much as I enjoy talking about my experiences it's difficult to put them into writing without going on and on about things that will always seem special to me but are impossible to convey to others. The time has flown by. Time has a tendency of doing that as it has proven right through my stay, especially the last few months. The school term ended quite a while before my return date so I tried to make the most of that time.

To start off with I went to the Pyrenees mountain range for a week with AFS (the exchange organization). It was amazing. We were a fairly small group of about 20, coming from host-families all over France and homes all over the world. I went up with two friends from my local region by train and bus and finally arrived at this really neat lodging place. Normally the Pyrenees are full of ski resorts but we went during summer and the mountains looked amazing. We went for walks everyday and although everyone was tired and complaining about sore legs we had a really good time and got some great photos. One of the days Lloyd (Australia), Martins (Latvia, and yes the 's' is intentional) asked our guide if we could break off from the group and go up the mountain. We got all the way up to the top and managed to get an amazing view of the valley below. The whole walk took us 7 hours up and down. We slept well that night. It was sort of sad to have to all split up again at the end of the week, but we all knew that we would see each other again at the Departure Camp in Paris.

About two weeks before my return my host-sister Coralie came back from Italy. We got on really well and she ended up helping me do my gift shopping seeing as I'm a hopeless shopper. We also went into the city to watch the Italy-France World Cup Final on the outdoor big screen that local council had set up. It hurt when we lost but what can you do. As we were going home Coralie's host parents called her from Italy. She of course broke into very loud Italian while we were on a tram surrounded by annoyed and disappointed fans. Luckily we had French flags painted on our faces.

The day before I left my family and I went to an attractions park called Puys de Fous. It's full of shows and spectacle based around different historic epochs. For example a gladiatorial show in a large, mock colosseum or a Viking invasion on a fake river. It was really fun and the weather was really good (as it had been for some time, coming back to Melbourne winter was a bit of a shock.)

The next day I finally finished packing (it had taken me over a week of worrying about airline weight limits) and said goodbye to my family. I went to the Nantes train station and met up with the other departees and a mate of mine who'd come down to see me off. There were many tears both from us departees and the families. Not a lot was said on the two hour trip back to Paris, everyone more or less wrapped up in their own thoughts.

In Paris we went back to the same camp as we had when we arrived. It was different though. People were more willing to split off from their own country and speak to everyone else, and this time we could all speak in French. I met up again with all the people who had been to the Pyrenees and the other Australians. It was fun, because everyone had a story to tell, and we were all going through the same thing. On the last day the buses to the airport started leaving at 2.00 in the morning up until that evening, depending on which flights we were taking. Everyone soon realized that there were people that they wanted to see off on each bus out. We spent a long sleepless night saying goodbye to our friends as each bus rolled through.

After a long flight back I finally saw my family again after nearly a year. My little brother is now bigger than me and my sister can now annoy me while making me laugh at the same time. I keep in contact with my host family and the AFS girls that lived in my area and have received a few postcards from my friends' travels in Europe. It's sort of weird being back, but it's been good having a few kids at my high school who have done an AFS trip as well.

I've definitely changed, as everyone had said I would, and my outlook on the world is starkly different to it was before. There are so many more places that I wish to see, and I hope to one day do a tour of Europe and revisit the people I met over my year. I thank ANZ once more for allowing me to do this and I encourage anyone who gets this opportunity to take it and use it to the best of your ability.



Me, Martins, Lloyd, Victor and a pony in the Pyrenees



An ill-fated attempt to make a human pyramid. Spain is a few kms behind the waterfalls.