



Sicily and Florence 2012



The “Etna & Florence” Tour

21/04/12 At 8.30 the taxi arrives on time and we are off to Coventry Bus Station as the Tour begins. Then it's Coventry to Gatwick to meet the rest of the Ancient Britons at the airport. Without wasting time it was off to the Bar for the proverbial Gin and Tonic and a pint of Bass. Once all checked in and through Immigration, right turn towards the Red Lion for a couple of London Pride prior to flight. Once on plane, a couple of small bottles of red wine prior to early arrival in Catania, Sicily. We then had a long bus trip to Romano Palace Hotel (about 7 minutes) where we arrived just in time to interrupt a Wedding Reception. Jon Beale was a little concerned that the bus trip might be too long, but Phil said “as you are in the seat opposite the middle emergency door, you can ‘swang’ your legs to the right”. Swang – no such word, think you meant swing, Phil !! Did think that candles all along the walkway to the Hotel was a little over the top for the Ancient Britons, but perhaps Julia has more influence than we all thought. Maybe they were for the wedding, Phil !!

Once all checked in, yes they did want Passports, it was decided for most to meet in the Bar. They obviously struggle with British Tourists. Initially very impressive, as we had iced glasses to go with the cold Nastro Azzurro, even though €6 for a small bottle. Could have been worse, Gin and Tonic €14, albeit a typical European measure. It didn't take long for the iced glasses to run out, then the local Beer, “all we have left Sir is Heineken, Becks or Corona”!! The standard was set. Late night chat re Ancient Britons AGM and putting the world right – typical late night conversation.

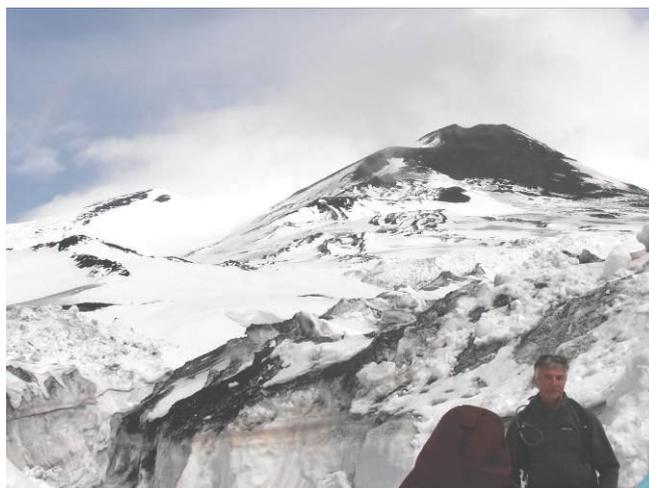
22/04/12 An enjoyable breakfast, Americano coffee ordered and received plus reasonable choice of cereals, juices and champagne. Today it was 10.30 meet for the first game against CUS Catania. A relatively short trip, just half an hour. We were a tad early so were treated to a very competitive game of hockey in which red cards flowed faster than confetti at a wedding! At one stage there were 3 reds awarded against one side, whilst the opposition had a few yellows. As the umpire held up his red card, the player took the card and began to leave the pitch. Just before exiting he decided to rip the card in half, then not satisfied he picked up the pieces and tried to rip it up even smaller. He did eventually leave the pitch but was not a happy bunny.

Our game that followed was against slightly younger opponents. In the first half Jon Beale missed a difficult half chance – it's behind you, but John Peirce created a penalty stroke which was converted by Colin Newman. We managed to hold out until near the end when a mishit looped shot evaded all to give them an equaliser. Keith Mulcock was named Man of the Match by skipper Tony Perryman. Afterwards an extensive buffet was enjoyed by all; “especially the prawns” said Marilyn Beale as they disappeared very quickly, and a complimentary beer. Very pleasant hosts but as with all good things it had to come to an end as the bus driver was ready. En route back to the bus Paul Sharratt had words with an umpire as a goal was awarded having been struck a foot outside the circle and the keeper left it. Fortunately the umpire from the other end wasn't from Worcester so didn't understand him, yet think he got the gist!

Back at the Hotel had quick nap then time for reconnaissance of the area. Everything to the right of the hotel was closed and locals said to go the other way. Found a roadside / beachside café for a beer and a Gin and Tonic. On way back saw a small restaurant La Barraca but not open at the time. In the evening Jon and Marilyn Beale, Clive Kendall, Tim Smaldon, John Peirce, Sandie and I caught the courtesy bus into Catania. Unfortunately there was a slight

traffic jam due to an accident. Found a nice restaurant up a side street which was after a sign saying pub. Very pleasant and helpful waitress, she moved the laptop, unplugged the sign, pushed tables together and so the meal began. Had 3 carafes of wine, main courses for all, and when the bill came it included a cover charge of €10.50 (€1.50 per person). "It's a biggie" said Jon Beale, - "€82.00". After such an evening it was a quick jaunt then off for taxis back to Romano Palace. Two taxis, second driver had to ask the first the price - €20 for a 7 minute drive. Then into the Bar for a quick nightcap, John Peirce, Clive Kendall and I chatting on the veranda.

23/04/12 Breakfast at 8.15, as there was a coach at 9.00 for trip to Mount Etna. It was approximately 1 hour to our destination. Once we arrived we took a cable car so far up and then should have caught a jeep to go even further up but they were cancelled. But this didn't stop several Ancient Britons from walking closer towards the top. Colin Newman can be quite clearly seen preparing to mount Etna! On the way down it was time for a quick beer before jumping back on the coach to Taormina for lunch. An enjoyable walk prior to lunch through the quaint streets.



A thoroughly appetising lunch was served at a little restaurant up some steps and on the left in a quiet little alcove. Would have been quiet but for a huddle of Ancient Britons. Inside was laid out a tableful of starters or hors d'oeuvres, Mr Beale. This was then followed by a pasta dish and a few carafes of red and white wine. Fortunately Tim Smaldon was on full time alert due to overhanging blackbird. He deftly swerved and the blackbird missed. Not to be outdone skipper Tony Perryman was taking pictures but then decided to sit down and give himself a rest. Swinging slowly back and forth led to the expected outcome as chair legs went from underneath and skipper was down. He was up at the count of 8 so was allowed to continue. After coffee and time to leave, there appeared to be the odd white wine that was untouched. Trevor Davies then noticed that the carafes of white were different in colour, perhaps a Pinot Grigio and a Chardonnay. On closer inspection he deemed that the Chardonnay was a tad on the warm side. At this point Bob Jameson decided to assist and the consumption became complete, apart from one person (who shall be nameless) but still had wine left in his glass. The waitress very kindly transferred the wine to a plastic cup and off he went. Once consumed what to do with the cup? Following the advice of the locals he was last seen standing on corners, approaching decent English tourists pestering them for the odd coin. In order to get rid of the problem Jon Beale kindly gave the beggar (sorry misspelt) 20 cents to move him on, but this only seemed to encourage him. Tom Darlington and Charles Cooper tried to entice him away with 1 cent each, but then noticed that his left arm appeared to be missing. Strangely enough it wasn't 5 minutes earlier. Now it was off to the Amphitheatre and more of Antonio's knowledge. Some people detached themselves and walked round and others like Mike Heywood tried the resonance test to see if he could be heard by shouting across to Colin Newman. It worked so Jon Beale shouted to Mike Heywood "Mike can you hear this, then Off" and that worked. After an enjoyable tour it was time to get back to the bus, after a stop for a Beer whilst watching a bride and groom leave the church. On the way back on the coach, there were several tired people as we got back at 4 pm.



Back at the Hotel decisions needed to be made regarding eating that night and five of us, Tim, Clive, John Peirce, Sandie and I duly set off from the Hotel towards La Barraca, soon to be known as Barak Obama, others said may see you later. On the door – Monday closed. Now what to do !!

So we continued walking until we saw a fruit and veg stall on the opposite side of the road with a tall fridge. Inside the fridge were large Beers and jugs of rosé wine. When asked for a Gin and Tonic – “non comprendi”. Several tables were outside, but the Boss invited into the covered section, removed his stuff, laid a fresh paper tablecloth, and we helped ourselves to Beers and wine from the fridge. The Boss then went to his stall and cut up some melon and gave it to us – FREE. He also had another fridge if we wanted to eat which contained meat. In the translation that followed – clip clop clip clop, assumed it was horse ! Also in the fridge was Jagermeister, perhaps needed afterwards.

Not long after Paul and Karen, Keith and Lorraine arrived saying have you seen Etna, it's erupting. “Boll....” was our reply. But we were wrong. The Boss man took us round to the back of his salubrious establishment and there on the horizon was the molten red lava for all to see. Then Richard and Diane arrived with Richard having got some quality pictures. Unfortunately someone needed to visit the Ladies and the Boss in his inestimable style ushered the Lady over to his car offering to take her! His offer was graciously refused and she walked to the Bowling Alley just up the road. Another enjoyable evening was punctuated with people talking absolute rubbish and the toast before leaving was “absent friends”! We then finished with the Boss man adding up the bottles and charging us €47.00, must have been the expensive rosé wine that did it. A steady walk back to the Romano Palace for a glass of Ben Rye where the Bar was closed, but not for long. Our friendly porter was on duty and service was duly resumed on the veranda before retiring at approximately 2 am.



Pictures below produced courtesy of Richard Boucher.



24/04/12 Breakfast at 9.15 as it was a free day, and eventually got the proper Americano, not the bitter coffee in the urn. The waiter was the Barman from the previous evening, oh what a smiley face ☺. Time for a quick shop to Auchan for water and juices, but cannot use the back door. Ten of us queued up for the shuttle bus to town, somehow to get onto an 8 seater. Was this the 12.30 or the one o'clock, who knows its Sicily time.

We all got on then into Catania, via the train station, time for a Beer before seeing the sights. Met a few Ancient Britons en route, whilst seeing the sights. Decided to have lunch in the same restaurant with the proverbial carafe of rosé. Then further sight-seeing which involved climbing up the hill via the Gardens, before meeting up with the Beales for an early evening aperitif. Back to the pick-up point, the Beales have already gone and are back at the Hotel.



Quick change then out to the Barak Obama restaurant renowned for its Kiddies Picture Book Menu. Marilyn Beale was assigned as Head of the Table and Jon Beale, Clive, Tim, John Peirce, Phil and Sandie Hall were duly appointed either side. Marilyn was the most popular of hosts as by looking in her direction it allowed all to look above and watch the Champions League game between Chelsea and Barcelona. We were soon joined by Mike and Chris, and Tom and Beryl.



Towards the end of the evening we were found by Paul and Karen, and Keith and Lorraine. There is a classic picture of Lorraine Wyatt caressing a candle, but because of the Data Protection Act and The Human Rights Act it is felt that it is not safe to print !! (copies are available at a price). A few decided on leaving to check the fruit and veg stall, but the TV was on but there was no other sign of the Boss-man, so it was back to the Romano Palace. Another bottle of Ben Rye was found, but this then ran out and a different local port was found before retiring at 3 am.

25/04/12 Breakfast at 9.15, the same usual problem with the coffee, but now we call it espresso. Who cares as long as it is proper coffee. Clive Kendall is suffering, was it the Beer, red wine, white wine or the Ben Rye port? No it was that poor shrimp in the meal last night. It was a hot day as we went off for the 2nd game. At 11 o'clock players were warming up prior to Skipper's Team talk. All listened carefully but unfortunately there was no overhead projector and screen, notepad and pens. The game duly began with Ancient Briton players all ready for their changes and substitutions but the opposition duly took the lead, even though they had no goalkeeper (subsequently found out had been in a car accident). Jon Beale equalised for the Ancient Britons, but they regained the lead just before halftime. In the second half the Ancient Britons produced the "Move of the Tour". Quality passing between Bob Grenside and Keith Mulcock opened up their defence and the final cross from Bob Grenside allowed Tim Smaldon to equalise from an acute angle – pure quality from all 3 players. Jon Beale then gave us the lead, but just before the end a first time shot gave the opposition a deserved draw. Phil Hall was named Man of the Match by skipper Tony Perryman and Tim Smaldon by the Supporters. Another quality buffet, with beers and champagne before trip back to the Hotel. Time for a quick afternoon nap before all off to town. A slight down on the evening was the news that Trevor Davies was not 100%, but the following day all Ancient Britons were relieved that he was down at breakfast. Clive, Tim, John Peirce, Sandie and Phil returned to Catania and to the same restaurant. No table for five but the female waitress was unperturbed as she duly sorted it all out. For a change we had "Tourist Menu" and good value it was too, especially with the wine and beers. Sandie was "chipless" but 2 from John Peirce and 4 from Clive Kendall rectified the situation, along with Lemoncello to follow. Two taxis back to the Romano, this time only €15. A last drink on the veranda before bed at 1 am.

26/04/12 Breakfast at 8.15 prior to trip to Syracuse, Trevor Davies fit and well – great news. A pleasant walk throughout the town followed by a lunch with a sea view. What more could you want. Well the view that was the plus, the negative was the first and the main course. Meat menu was 5 cheeses to start then no meat in the main course, courgette possibly. The fish menu was shrimp cocktail to start, then a lottery with some people having 1 shrimp, Mike Heywood had 3 but Tim Smaldon had 6, then had to pay for extra wine - €18. We then had a walk along the bay before a short boat trip round the island with local wine (rough Massala or was it rocket fuel) and hors d'oeuvres. En route Paul Sharratt allowed the locals to see more of his body, perhaps that was his answer to the lunch and then on the boat did his "Dalek" impression with the dustbin. Bob Jameson then regaled the story of 4 Quenelles from Frank Muir and Patrick Campbell. It was then back to the Romano Palace for the "hockey gift of wines" at 6.30, served by the Pool.

An evening back at the Barak Obama with Mike and Chris Heywood, Tony and Margaret Perryman. Others from the Ancient Britons were already ensconced. Another picture book meal was enjoyed by all, then slowly but surely people intermingled, and Paul and Karen joined us, as can be seen from the picture (Tony Perryman hidden by Mike Heywood – you can't say that very often). Quick brandy to finish then back to Romano.



27/04/12 Breakfast about 10.20, then a day by the pool. Didn't realise that the dressing gown was ideal for the poolside but what do I know. Just a shame I didn't have a camera to record who I saw modelling it, with trousers. Into Catania for the last meal and the local Beauty Pageant in the square, before back to Romano, bed at 12.30.

28/04/12 Slow breakfast before packing, then heard story re John Peirce having puncture, then being stopped by the Police, then being navigated into a field of cows! After relaxing by the pool it was off to the airport for short internal flight to Florence. Three different systems for hockey sticks, Tom Darlington using as a walking stick, Jon Beale for having his wrist smacked but getting through and Trevor Davies and myself and told to go to position 7, then being sent back with no ticket and pushing in and getting through with no penalty. Through to the airport Bar, and the Italian system pay first then go to different sections to collect your pizza, then for beer, then for coffee. Next stop Hotel Ambasciatori with the typical Passport problem, Richard and Diane Boutcher in a single room, Julia Greenhough kindly swaps, Colin and Kay Newman also have to swap. Quick nibbles in the Bar after changing for dinner, then off out to a restaurant with an internal garden and our own pet tortoise. Paul and Karen, Richard and Diane Boutcher, Charles and Anne Cooper, Sandie and myself had a quiet dinner, with Paul Sharratt having a plate filling steak. An evening of fun which sadly had to end but to prolong it, we continued in a small café near the Hotel. Unfortunately the owner said that he had to close at 10.30, but kindly stayed open for last orders, so Charlie could have his Ballantyne albeit with sparkling water! We adjourned to the Hotel bar for final drinks, but en route Clive Kendall was seen holding up the Hotel, fortunately John Peirce was there to cleanse the situation after Clive was seen going round and round in the revolving door.

29/04/12 Information was received that Kay Newman had broken the wardrobe door, but "not my fault" ! Perhaps hang-gliding off the wardrobe is a specialised art. Breakfast in the refectory or the elite area, seemed to vary day to day. The blood orange juice was worthwhile alone, then it was off for a walk around the picturesque Florence. A quick stop for a coffee at a restaurant with the friendliest waiter Franco, who asked if we were hungry but no pressure, just take your time. Brought the coffee, one for me and one for the Boss. Apparently Franco supports Liverpool who had just won 3-0 so he was happy. Then it was back to the Hotel, change and catch bus to Pisa. They had 8 players, no goalkeeper so we gave them Jon Beale and John Peirce. Typically John Peirce scored from 1 inch to give the opposition the lead, but Tim Smaldon calmly waltzed through at electrifying speed to equalise. The Ancient Britons then upped the tempo and 2 goals from Mike Heywood, another from Tim Smaldon and finally Paul Sharratt made it 5-1. Unfortunately John Peirce scored again to reduce the deficit but Alan Sutton, who had a superb game, kept a further goal bound shot out to leave the final score 5-2. Three games and undefeated. Man of the Match was Colin Newman. Afterwards and still on the campus the beer flowed and the lemon sodas were appreciated by Clive. The food was also superb, the lasagne I had was delicious but I know there were different starters but I was satisfied. The sweet was delicious and the wine flowed, but then as always it was time for the bus. A slight delay took place and Tony Perryman came back to remonstrate but this time the stragglers stayed calm, Julia Greenhough was in the queue at the Ladies, so no rush the bus will not leave without the Organiser! Back in Florence, 10 yards from the door and Paul and Karen, Tim, Clive and Phil had a late drink in the "Local" – a little café with drinks.

30/04/12 After breakfast it was time for a tour of Florence, an open top bus tour followed by a light lunch and ice cream, then back to the hotel for a siesta. In the evening there were local May Day activities throughout the town with South American pipe music and local acts on the streets. We adjourned to La Porcuspino where Franco welcomed us back with open arms.

A thoroughly good meal, the pork was recommended and justifiably so, then where to go to watch the football, Man City v Man Utd. Franco said turn right at the corner, go into the Dublin Bar and tell Sergio I sent you. We arrived and Sergio duly changed Channels on the TV so could watch the football. Afterwards back to the "Local" for a few last drinks, where we met with Paul & Karen. They took Sandie's gin, apologised and poured neat Gin into her Tonic can.

01/05/12 After breakfast a walk in the park away from the city centre and a mile long "Car Boot Sale". Then a walk alongside the River Arno back towards town and time for lunch.

We found a quiet little Trattoria Kalti on via Faenza where we had the typical pasta with a carafe of wine or two. Then back to the Hotel for short siesta before venturing out for dinner. Found another little restaurant in a side street where the service at first was slow but they redeemed themselves as they provided little tit-bits to start, but we apparently needed 2 mixed salads.

Slow walk back towards the Hotel, but a quick visit to the "Local" where we met Paul and Karen, and Charlie having a quiet drink. Classic faux-pas here when Paul Sharratt mentioned the Irish band in a film and Phil said "Yes the Commandants", no Phil the Commitments!!

02/05/12 Today after breakfast was the guided tour of Florence, very informative. Finished at the Palace before a few of us adjourned for lunch. Leaving the Palace we found a little alcove restaurant where they were persuaded to do jugs of beer. Pizza, spag bol and salad was the order of the day and this was ideal for Paul and Karen, John Peirce, Colin and Kay Newman, Charles and Anne Cooper, Sandie and myself. Tom and Beryl Darlington decided to eat in the garden area at the back. Then off for a further walk about town followed by a little siesta. Sandie did a bit of packing as tomorrow off to La Bagnaiia Resort for the conclusion of the tour. In the evening a few of us went with Paul Sharratt's recommendation to a restaurant just around the corner. A little Prosecco to start plus anchovies on toast as an aperitif, then several choices including fish filleted at the table. An enjoyable evening of fun and jocularly ensued, even name calling.

03/05/12 Breakfast at 8.20, coach departs at 10.00 for Siena. Several Ancient Britons try and find the restaurant prior to a walk round the "race-track". Tom Darlington studying map, but at least he is up and about again. On way back got lost but managed to eventually locate our lunch destination. A thoroughly enjoyable meal of tagliatelle, guinea fowl and cake all washed down with quality wine. More time to look round before back to the coach, delayed by Beryl Darlington, who decided to be Tom Daley and dive over a cliff ! Not Richard !





We then travelled off to our final destination where the Ancient Britons would be holding the End of Tour Dinner. Rooms were allocated down at Borgo La Filetta. We were fortunate to have quite a large room.

Quick change and down to the bar for a few aperitifs. The setting was such that we all sat outside to enjoy the view, until it became a little too cold as the sun dropped. Drinks were being served by staff, but Sandie asked Kay Newman if she was going to repeat the previous cocktail “are you having Sex on the Beach” to which Kay replied “Not currently”. An evening of beers and pizzas ensued until Ancient Britons decided it was time for bed.



04/05/12 An early breakfast as necessary for the golf triumvirate of Beale, Sharratt and Hall. It was here that Sandie said those memorable words to Paul Sharratt “do you play Municipal?” There was no obvious polite reply.

All duly caught the courtesy bus to the pro shop, got kitted out with clubs, balls and buggy and drivers “Tracey and Fanny” set off for the first tee, minus Mr Grenside, who had a prior engagement with Mr Bed. Phil loses 2 balls within first 3 holes – not looking good but Paul Sharratt smacking them down the middle. After the first nine the buggy drivers Karen and Sandie needed a drinks break, so all adjourned to the plush clubhouse for a Beer.



Back on the course with Paul Sharratt in the lead with Jon Beale being the only danger. Karen (caddy Fanny) tried to assist Paul Sharratt by running him over, then tried to tip him off the back of the buggy by driving over the kerb. All of which she denied but the evidence is conclusive.

Jon Beale subsequently put on the pressure and “took the Chair” only for Phil to upset the applecart and play well for a couple of holes. Paul then took a further point and on the final hole Phil surprised himself and his opponents to gain a point, but not enough to catch Paul winning on 2 points and Jon Beale and Phil tied on 1 point. Back to the Clubhouse for a few Beers, then joined by John Peirce and Clive, then Colin. After a few beers and a snack it was time to catch the courtesy bus back in order to get ready for the evening festivities.



An interesting layout of tables seemed to have different numbers and when other guests attempted to invade they were repelled by the “woad” of the Ancient Britons. The food was good but the service was attentive, almost to the point of removing one’s plate before finishing and putting down the cutlery for the following course. A quick word in the Restaurant Manager’s ear and normal service was resumed. After the meal it was over to compere Trevor (Aonoch) Davies. First off was a presentation to Tony and Margaret Perryman. It was then over to Tony Perryman for his Awards. Player of the Tour was Tim Smaldon and deservedly so, as Tim performed well in all 3 games. Other gifts were to Julia Greenhough as thanks for the organising of not just the Tour, but the people. As for entertainment, Phil managed to persuade Mike and Chris Heywood, Jon and Marilyn Beale, and Tom and Beryl Darlington to partake in a game of “Mr and Mrs”. “It is amazing what one knows about one’s wife, and I should do by now, it will soon be 55 years of marriage” said Tom Darlington. No wonder he won, but only by 1 point from the Heywoods and the Beales. The wine definitely flowed throughout the evening, as I am sure someone can confirm. No names, no pack drill, my lips are sealed so you will have to ask Sonia herself. There was a spate of story telling, then jokes from John Peirce and Trevor Davies to round off the evening. Several people retired for the night but a small band adjourned to the Bar, with Mukesh holding court for a final drink before preparing for the flight tomorrow.



05/05/12 Breakfast at 8.30, prior to checking out, bills to be paid, then onto coach to Pisa. John Peirce having slight memory lapse re the previous evening but a little cat-nap seemed to do the trick. On arriving at the airport Julia Greenhough organises the hockey sticks and they are all included in the luggage rate. Into the Bar for a last pizza and Champagne, beer for the boys and then onto the flight home. All safely back at Blighty, goodbyes to one and all at Gatwick as Ancient Britons make their own way home. For me it was a bus to Heathrow, break for a coffee then National Express to Coventry, then taxi home for 10pm. A long day, a long tour but most enjoyable. Our thanks to Julia Greenhough for her organisation, I just feel sorry for those of you that missed out on a fairly rain-free holiday.