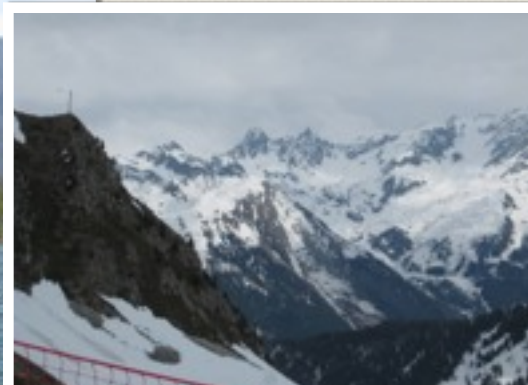


MA VIE EN FRANCE



ANNECY AND LES ARCS

Bonjour à Tous et Toutes !

March has finished with a whirlwind of emotions and events. Spring is in full bloom here in Leigneux, France, with gorgeous blue skies (even if there were a few weeks mixed in which were still cold and gray). I'm absolutely loving my time here - my host family is amazing, I'm closer

with my friends than ever, and I've had several fun adventures, including several concerts, a weekend of ski, Rugby matches, Rotary events, etc ! However, I find that sometimes it's hard to write on my adventures here, because they're the adventures of everyday life - it's not always

necessarily a vacation or a grand party with my friends, but I'm loving my everyday life.

Thank you for everything, I honestly don't know how to express all of my gratitude.



WEEKEND OF SKI, P 1-2



ROTARY WEEKEND, P 4



OTHER OUTINGS, 5

Weekend of Ski, Les Arcs

Weekend of Ski with the Bourgs, March 16-18

I have gone skiing three times now in my life - one time at the small station 30 minutes from my house and once with Rotary in January, and for both occasions I skied for perhaps 3 hours (because of the weather, the program, etc). This weekend, however, I went with my host family (host parents, brother, sister, and my host sister's boyfriend) to The Arcs, a large station about 4 hours from my house. (My host uncle has a small apartment there where we rested for the weekend.) It was my first real weekend of ski - we left the Friday afternoon after I and my host brother finished with school, and we arrived around 8:30 or 9pm there.

My host dad arrived after he finished with work, so we ate at midnight. The next day we woke up early to hit the tracks - we were all packed up and left before 9am. We skied until lunch (around 2pm), where we ate at a restaurant in the mountains. We continued skiing until 4pm, when we stopped to watch a game of Rugby. At the end of the day, I was surprisingly tired and my legs were sore. The next day we slept in a bit, left around 10am, stopped when it started to snow around 3pm. We lucked out with the weather - they announced for rain all the weekend, and instead we had grand blue the Saturday, overcast the Sunday morning/early afternoon, and after that we left for coming back home.

THE ARCS : INFORMATION

The Arcs have a maximum altitude of **3,226 meters** (nearly **10,600 feet**). It is located at **Bourg-Saint-Maurice**, 125 miles east of Lyon, and it has more than **265 miles of tracks** (pistes) skiable.



Adventures of Ski - Success?

Skiing is not for everyone, that is sure, but luckily I wasn't too horrible. In France (and perhaps everywhere, I have never gone skiing in the US), there are 4 levels of piste which are progressively harder - green, blue, red, and black. I started on the blue, and I didn't have too much trouble. In fact, for the first several hours, I didn't fall at all. Unfortunately, my luck didn't last - I had several small falls, in the areas where there was a patch with too much snow, the snow was iced over, someone cut too close to me, or I just simply fell. However, in addition to that, I had 3 what we will call «wipe-out,» and by wipe-out, I mean that there were three hills different that were steep (two were on the pistes «red,» and one on a piste blue), and I quickly

descended the hill on my back (luckily never on my stomach, because I imagine that hurts more). Luckily, I was never hurt (and I found that it was a lot easier to go down the hill like that - easier and quicker!). They made for some good laughs for my host parents. It's safe to say that at the end of the first day, I was worn out.

The second day went very well - I didn't fall at all (and I even did a little bit of a red track)! And it was extremely pretty, because we took a lot of paths that went through the woods; not necessarily the ones difficult with a lot of steep slopes, but the ones that were easier, less stressful, and prettier.

Outings at Ski

When you go skiing, it is of course not possible to ski for the entire day (even if you wanted to, because the pistes aren't open during the evening/night, and it's tiring!). With my host family, we watched a match of Rugby, we played a game of «yams» (a game of dice that is really fun that we play a lot), we ate (always an occasion which takes time if done correctly), we took our «gouter» (also called «*quatre heures*» ; snack) of pieces of baguette with nutella, jam, or butter, tea or hot chocolate, etc. At the Ski Stations, there are also always a lot of bars and clubs where you can go during the evening. With all of my host family, we went to a small bar where there was live music and everything. There were a handful of people who were dancing, but not enough that it was particularly fun to go dancing in it, but it was still a lot of fun.

Voyaging There

I have the luck that in this region, we're not at all far from the mountains. We left after we finished with school the Friday late afternoon, and we were unlucky - there were a lot of *bouchons* (traffic jams) on the highway, so we took more time than usual, but even with that it was around 4 hours. When we returned, we didn't have much luck again - it was snowing/raining (depending on the altitude), so we rolled slower than normal... but it wasn't a problem, because there were a lot of things to do in the car! We talked (*bien sur!* (of course)), and afterwards we listened to some traditional French music. My repertoire is starting to grow!



THE RACLETTE : TRADITIONAL FOOD OF SKI

Leaving early in the morning
in the snow

For every event or outing in France, there is a special type of food, and skiing is no exception. And in fact for skiing, there are a lot of special foods (all extremely delicious, if not a bit calorific) - the *tartiflette* (a delicious combination of potatoes, lard, cheese, and cream), the fondue (of which there are two types, one of cheese where you have a blend of three cheeses, comté, Beaufort, and emmental and white wine, and you dip pieces of bread in the mixture, and another of meats (*fondue bourguignonne*) where you dip the pieces of meat in an oil extremely hot and full of herbs), and also the *raclette*. The raclette is a combination of certain foods that the french love, mainly the charcuterie, potatoes, and cheese. First you go to the butcher and you find the choicest morsels of meat - the hams (raw, white, bayonne, fumed, etc), the *saucisson* (not at all like our «sausage»), etc. Afterwards, you buy the cheese - there is a special swiss cow cheese which is called «raclette,» but we also use various cheeses - *chevre* (goat), fumed, tome, etc. Afterwards, you use a special raclette machine (which you can see in the upper right-hand corner of the picture), which has usually 8 slots with a little spatula where you put the cheese, you leave it to melt, and you pore it over your potatoes and meat. With the *raclette*, you usually drink a good white wine.

The word *raclette* in french means «scraper» in english, homage at its swiss origin where they really scraped of the pieces of cheese next to a fire for making a fondue. It's perhaps a meal that is less refined than the stereotypical french cuisine, but it's something that is common for a good, hardy winter dinner.

INFORMATION ON ANNECY

Annecy is perhaps best known for its large **lake, which is the third largest natural lake in Europe**, with a surface area of approximately 17 square miles

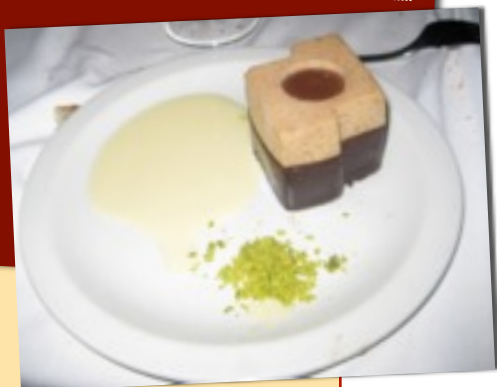
Annecy is in the same region as my city, that is to say the Rhône-Alpes, in the department of the Haute-Savoie.

Annecy has a history that dates back a long ways, with origins in the first century with the Romans

Specialty of Annecy

We ate one dinner with the traditional food of the region. Which regional specialty was my favorite?

The entire meal was delicious, and I'm not sure if they were all specialties, but I know that the dessert was a regional specialty, which consisted of a type of cake made with nuts and chocolate, with an extra bit of warm, melted chocolate in the middle.



Rotary Weekend

Annecy with all of the inbound exchange students in France. May 30-31, April 1.



1 GORGEOUS CITY. 400 EXCHANGE STUDENTS. 1 WEEKEND.

It's a good combination for a wonderful weekend. The last weekend in March, there was a weekend of Rotary in Annecy. Annecy is a gorgeous city that is about 3 or 4 hours from me. We left the Friday afternoon, and we arrived with all of the other exchange students at the hotel. Afterwards, we had a fun night with everyone, with a buffet consisting of a salad, the *tartiflette* (another dish traditional for ski, with cream, cheese, potatoes, and lard), and an apple dessert. Afterwards we danced the night away until the bus took us back to the hotel. The next day there was a round-table debate with several experts on the subject of the Olympics, because Annecy was one of the candidates for the 2018 Winter Olympics (but they didn't win, it will instead be in Korea). Afterwards we got to see Annecy a little bit - we walked to the lake where we took a boat for 1 hour, touring and seeing a bit of the sites from the boat, until we arrived at the «Old Annecy,» where we saw a park, we took a large group photo, and we got to walk around a bit. We didn't have the opportunity to go into the city (with 400 exchange students, I understand that could be a daunting class), but that means that we didn't get a chance to see much of the city, but it was still wonderful. There was a talent show and another night of dancing.

Throughout the course of the weekend, I had the chance to meet people who come from 31 different countries around the world. It was a neat experience, and I hope I have the opportunity to keep in touch with some of the people that I met.

«It's the little things that make living worthwhile.»

Some worthwhile moments.

I have become very close with my second host family, so even if I have perhaps not had a lot of time to travel (between school and Rotary events, there isn't a lot of time that rests), I have had some lovely moments with my family.

For two days, my host parents went to visit my host sister, who lives around 3 hours from here. It was during the week, so my host brother and I stayed at the house together. It was a lot of fun - we ordered Kebabs, made a pizza, and watched *The Jungle Book* (in french, of course!) and other french cartoons.

The lovely spring-fever has been affecting us here in the Alpes as it has been extremely lovely! Bright sunshine and warm days have allowed me start eating lunch outside with my family (we eat dinner around 9pm, so it's still too cold/dark to eat outside then). Because of that I was also able to walk around Leigneux, Boën, and go on some hikes with my host parents.

There was a soirée with Rotary, where we had dinner at the house of one of the Rotarians. It was with all of the other exchange students plus the Rotarians, so it was a fun way to talk with some Rotarians and the other students. (And like with all of our Rotary events, we ate very well!)

My host brother (who lives in Marseille) and his girlfriend came up

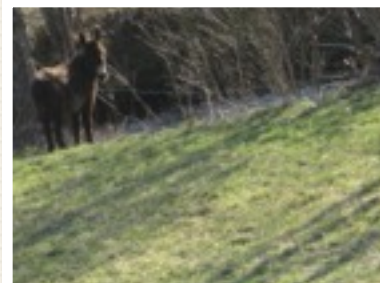
for several days, so I got to meet them for the first time. It was really nice, and his girlfriend likes to bake, so she made all sorts of french pastries and cookies (I have the feeling that I'm really becoming French - all that I talk about is food!).

During a free hour at school, my friends tried to help me learn how to pronounce the word «*agreable*» (agreeable).

This month was another *Bac Blanc*, so I passed the subjects of math and literature. It's cool to take the tests since I can't take the real test at the end of the year, but I'm glad nevertheless that I didn't have to take all of the subjects!

In France, if a teacher is not there, there isn't a substitute. Sometimes it's annoying, but other times there are some advantages - it means that I can stay outside with my friends, on the lawn. I have a friend who plays the guitar and is in a band, so she played and sang: a mini concert just for us!

I received an email from Pomona College (where I'll be attending this fall) about starting to fill out the housing forms, etc. It made me excited to go, yet scared and sad to think of needing to leave here. Yet, it gave me a new motivation to really make the best out of everything before I leave for college.



RUNNING ONE DAY, I
CAME ACROSS A DONKEY



LUNCH AT SCHOOL - NOT
TOO SHABBY!



EATING OUTSIDE



AT THE ROTARY
WEEKEND, I WAS AN
HONORARY GERMAN

Concerts and Movies of the Month

...

This month, I saw several concerts and watched several movies.

Come films, the most notable that I saw was the acclaimed *The Artist*. Recently famed its success at the Oscars (Best Actor, Best Music, first non-anglo saxon film to have Best Film, Best Producer, and Best Costuming), *The Artist* is a french film that shows the life of a famous silent movie actor deal with the change of film industry with the introduction of sound in the movies. It was a very good movie, and Jean Dujardin I found wonderful (along with the main actress, Bérénice Béjo), not to mention the music which was astounding. It was very strange to not have sound (in terms of voices) in the movie, which is of course the goal of a mute-film. While I enjoyed the film, I don't know if I feel it should have won Best Film (but without having seen the other films nominated, I can't say). In any case, I definitely recommend seeing it.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, PASCAL AND JEAN-FRANÇOIS !

This month has the lucky month of being the birthday of both Jean-François, my first host father (March 25), and my second host father, Pascal (March 24). The night of the 24th I had an outing with Rotary (see below), so we celebrated Pascal's birthday the Sunday. We were 21 in total, with my host family, my host uncles and aunts and cousins. It was a lot of fun. While it was a bit difficult to wake up early in the morning to prepare, it was definitely worth it. We cleaned and cleared the tables, prepared the food (a french version of pot-roast with beef, carrots, and potatoes for the main course; a *feuilleté* (I've never eaten in the US, but it's a type of pastry with cheese and ham) for the entrée; and a cake of orange with chocolate sauce for dessert (with of course a wonderful plate of cheese).

Everyone started to arrive at 12:30, and we drank our *appero* (wine, champagne, etc). It wasn't until after 3:00 that we even started to eat, and it wasn't until around 8 or 9:00 before everyone left. During the afternoon we played «petanqué», a french game, we talked, etc. It was a lovely way to celebrate my host dad's birthday, and it was also a convenient way to meet the family!

In terms of concerts, I saw a concert of Rousseau, performed by a local group along with certain people at the high school, and I view a concert of a group called the Maîtrise (there are only 9 groups like that in all of France, and one

of them is here in Montbrison! ; it's a center with lessons in the music, groups, etc - this particular one was a choir, accompanied by the orchestra of St. Étienne).

SOIRÉE CABARET: NIGHT WITH ROTARY AND FAMILY

A «soirée cabaret» is a night where there are comedians, champagne, and small desserts, and it was for the benefit of the exchange program with the Rotary Club of Montbrison. It was in our honor, so at the beginning we introduced ourselves. It's amazing how much it easier it is to speak in French now, which is a relief! There were two comedians, and in between the two they started to serve the champagne and various desserts.



Paella

It was neat that we got to meet the outbound exchange students (the students who will be leaving this fall on an exchange). It's amazing how already I feel jealous of them and the experience they're going to have. There are two who are going to the US (Texas and Montana), 1 going to Russia, 1 to Venezuela, and 1 to Brazil. I wish them all the best luck (and all the best to all of the people in Iowa who are going to be parting!)



Crema Catalana with the cakes

Tueries de Toulouse

The story in the headlines across France and many other parts of the world.

As many of you might know, there have been several violent killings here in France, in the region of Toulouse (a region in the south of France). There were three separate killings, starting March 11 and ending March 19, leaving a total of 7 people dead, ranging from 4 to 30 years old. The victims were 3 military personnel (Islamic men who had served in Afghanistan) and 3 students and 1 teacher at a Jewish school. The French police announced that these heinous acts were carried out by Mohamed Merah, who explains his acts as revenge for the Muslim children that were killed in Palestine (the Palestinian leaders and representatives of the three grand religions in France (Christianity, Islamism, and Judaism) renounced his crimes). It's a story that marked France for weeks - it was constantly on the news, the morning of the police operation to take Mohamed Merah was constantly live on the news channels, there was a minute of silence in all of the schools across France for paying a homage at the victims, etc.

It's a story that has affected a lot of people across France, and it's a problem that is affecting a lot of people throughout the world (Merah is suspected of being linked with terrorists groups like al-Qaeda). This event made me think about the importance of my exchange, and the values that an international exchange brings to us. While all of the traveling that I do, all of the concerts that I see, all of the new words that I learn - they are all wonderful experiences, yet it's not the purpose of my year here, and it's not the most important lesson. Instead, it's the idea of international cooperation and understanding, a comprehension of different cultures so that we can try to lessen and, in the ideal world, eliminate the horrible events like this that result in blood and tears shed. It's for that that an exchange year is even better than just traveling - this way, I come to understand a different culture, something that, little by little, will start to make a difference.

I would like to take this space to give a homage at the 7 people who were victims of this murder: Gabriel Sander (4 years old), Arieh Sandler (5 years old), Jonathan Sandler (30 years old), Myriam Monsonego (7 years old), Abel Chennouf (25 years old), Mohamed Legouad (24 years old), and Imad Ibn Ziaten (30 years old).

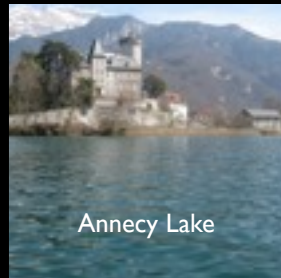
BOËN

I recently came to realize that I haven't seen much of Boën, the closest «city» to me right now, or really Leigneux, my current host town, so I decided that now that the weather is nice, it was the perfect time to go and explore the area. One day after school I took the bus into the city and I walked around. It is really gorgeous, even if it is smaller and less well-known than Montbrison. There is a lovely little church, it's easy to walk around, and there are a lot of small boutiques.

Le Boudin de Boën:

Normally, «boudin» in France is a type of charcuterie that is made from pig blood («black pudding», «blood sausage», or «blood pudding» in English). However, the *boudin* of Boën isn't anything like that - instead, it is a delicious, chocolate specialty. It is called boudin because it is in the same form (a long tube), but it has instead a type of cake rolled with chocolate, and it is extremely popular in the region and was created at a patisserie in Boën!





MONTH IN REVIEW

1. ROTARY SOIRÉE
2. CONCERTS AND FILMS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS - EAT MY FIRST FRENCH KEBAB
3. SKI IN THE ALPES
4. PRACTICE EXAMS AT SCHOOL
5. BIRTHDAY OF MY HOST DADS
6. ANNECY WITH ROTARY

Thank you to all of my donors for your support.

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Amy March

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