

## Transcript of Podcast 066: Inter-Rail 2000

{Intro:

*Anthony Bourdain said: "If you're twenty-two, physically fit, hungry to learn and be better, I urge you to travel - as far and as widely as possible." But then he never met The Barefoot Backpacker.*

}

*{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}*

*{{Intro standard announcement:*

*Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a podcast looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Enby with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'whys behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}*

*{Music fades. Podcast begins}*

Hello :)

Well, I went to meet my friend Tracey, and had a great time doing a pub crawl of Hucknall. Apparently we did over 9,000 steps. Hucknall's not that big so I'm dubious about that. Regardless, it was probably several thousand steps more than I should have done with my dodgy leg. On my way there I met my friend in Sheffield who needed me to take a bag of hers back up to Glasgow because it contains items of a dubious nature. One of them started buzzing in a Meadowhall restaurant. Not intentionally, I may add. I have not looked in the bag to see what other items it contains but my friend gave me a brief overview and I know at one point I said 'ouch'.

Something something Full Swap Radio.

My Sheffield friend's friend gave me a big stick. It's, I believe, a broomstick handle and almost as tall as me. So since then I've been using it as a kind of walking stick. Or wizard's staff; on my way back to Glasgow I took a pic of me in the mirror and I did look a bit like something out of a very queer rendition of Lord Of The Rings. I do maintain that Bilbo Baggins was AroAce, and I suspect Frodo may have been as well. What better way to avoid familial responsibilities and expectations in a small-town community than to bugger off halfway across the continent and then write a book about it. Or, in my case, a blog. Never met any elves or orcs though. Probably because I didn't have a 'happy pizza' in Cambodia. Your mileage may vary on the definition of 'trip'.

Anyway. As you no doubt have guessed, I'm still injured. It would have helped had I not been walking on it so much at the start of February, but, uhm. I have now, at the risk of surprising and impressing my friends and my mother, been to the doctor about it, who poked around and sent me for an x-ray, which I've also had - results should be back next week sometime. What I will say though is the doc was very insistent the x-ray was 'precautionary' - he suspects a muscular issue rather than a stress fracture (which was my thought). The difference in recovery time is only a couple of weeks, so it probably doesn't matter too much. All I need to do is rest it as much as I can, and just elevate and chill it whenever possible. I've been mostly working from bed this past two weeks, it must be said.

It's irksome, but I'm not currently as stir-crazy as my friends expected me to be. I'm having fun rolling across the flat on my office chair; I suspect the carpets don't appreciate this quite as much. And I can go out, I just have to be very slow and very careful.

One thing I will say though is, waiting at Sheffield Meadowhall bus station for my ride back up to Glasgow, I was musing on the fact there's a large overlap between neurodiversity, mental health, disability, and the LGBTQIA+ community, and sitting there dressed quite enby-ishly, with a big stick as a walking aid, waiting for a cheap mode of public transport when there are far better and more comfortable ways to travel 250 miles, felt quite ... stereotyped.

The Flixbus was £14. A couple of extra quid for the front seat with more legroom. The train ... I booked it last minute and the split ticketing website I tend to use wasn't working, and while I could go back to checking manually, I only had my phone with me and I don't like doing that sort of thing on a small screen, so the cheapest tickets I could find were about £102. There's a reason I travel by bus a lot, even if I prefer the train.

Which is a nice segue, one of those words that looks very different to how it sounds, to the subject of this pod episode.

*{section separation jingle}*

I've always liked trains, though the tales of me asking my uncle to drive me around Merseyside and West Lancashire in search of dead railway stations is almost certainly a tale for another podcast. Despite rumours to the contrary in secondary school, I was never a trainspotter; my interest was always in the infrastructure than the trains themselves, and to be honest for me, one engine looks very much like another. Of course I had a model railway set. It probably still exists somewhere in my uncle's attic.

As a traveller though, trains are by far my favourite form of transport. I find them comfortable, I like that I can just get up and walk around if I want to, I get a decent amount of legroom, and I can spend my time looking out the window at the passing scenery, which is invariably far more interesting than what the view out of a plane window. It's also the only form of transport I can sleep on in my seat, never mind the trains I've taken in the ex-Soviet states with flat bunk beds.

It comes as no surprise therefore that an adventure using only trains is one that would appeal strongly to me. And given that I wasn't a mid-20-something in 1960s USA with a habit of sneaking onto freight trains and seeing the country for free, our reference point is Inter-Rail. An entire continent available to explore on a cover-all rail pass, where you can just turn up and go.

My next podcast episode will be more about Inter-Rail experiences in general, including my 2-month adventure at the back-end of 2019 that I felt changed the way I'd travel going forward. But I wanted to talk first about \*my\* first experience of Inter-Rail, and so you have a reference point to see how travel itself has changed over the years.

So, back in 2000, me and my then fiancée Laure (originally a penpal of mine from France) did a trip using an inter-rail ticket around Spain, Portugal, and Morocco. In those days the area covered by an Inter-Rail ticket was 'zoned', and this was one of the 'zones' you could buy a specific ticket for. There were eight zones in total, and you could buy up to 3 separate zones individually (we bought a 2-zone pass, the other zone we bought covered France and Benelux); if you wanted more than 3 zones, you defaulted to an All-Europe pass by default. Yes, Morocco was included on our rail-pass at the time. The ex-Soviet states, were not.

As an aside, when I bought my ticket for the 2019 trip, the types of ticket I could buy tended towards different validation periods (up to three months), each with a 'you can only use it for x days within y period', say, '8 days of travel in two weeks' kind of thing.

That wouldn't have sat well with me and Laure, who pretty much stayed in a different town every night for two weeks. With hindsight it was incredibly seminal for my travel style, and exactly the sort of trip that would become very familiar in the days of Barefoot Backpacker.

Bear in mind we were two mid-20-somethings travelling in the very early days of both the internet and mobile phones (and the two did not meet in common culture for a couple of years yet). We had a guidebook (I'm pretty sure it was the Rough Guide to Europe, a quite weighty tome whose listing for the city we lived in, the second biggest urban area in the UK, was precisely two sentences saying it was only useful as a base for Stratford-on-Avon. One day I will have to do a pod all about Birmingham, because it's probably the largest city I've ever been to that no-one really knows. This, again, is not that pod), and a vague plan, but we'd not really booked anything in advance and we knew not a lot about where we were going.

Aside from the guidebook we didn't carry any other admin around with us. At the time, European railway timetables were available in a huge book, bigger than the guidebook actually, and we just didn't ... we used it for

planning beforehand, and we made notes about whether railways even existed and what they were, but I don't recall actually taking the book itself with us. Largely we relied on station information when we got there. And, as you will no doubt gather, we had a tendency to 'wing it' somewhat rather than rely on any kind of formal itinerary or plan. We knew roughly where and when we wanted to go and had a route laid out, but that was pretty much the limit of our planning. We'd booked a couple of hotels ahead of time, by e-mail, but we knew we didn't want to do too much of that just in case everything went a bit to-pot and it'd be a waste.

Naturally we were carrying backpacks. Probably quite larger backpacks than we really needed; we were kind of over-packing 'just in case', because it was our first time, and, you know, we wanted to make sure we had too much rather than realise we'd forgotten something important. Something that I never made a note of anywhere was whether we did any clothes washing en-route. I don't recall doing so, and we never spent long enough in once place to make sure our clothes were clean and dry by the time we moved on, but equally it's very unlike me to have ever \*owned\* 18 pairs of underpants at any one time, never mind carry them all. I don't recall what else we took, but certainly a notebook and pen, a couple of travel games, bathroom products (at one point I specifically mention having a shave), I guess we took a book or two to read, but I think we envisaged looking out the window a lot on the journey and then just chatting in the evenings.

We'd left a few days before Easter, a fact that became quite important very early on. At the time we were just taking advantage of Easter being quite late so the Bank Holidays were close to the May Day Bank Holiday, meaning we got more time off for 'free', as it were. We'd not 'planned' our journey; in truth it was more of a very-last-minute decision because all the ideas we'd had had been far too ambitious, mostly involving Germany.

We wrote a travel blog at the time, and this pod is mostly going to be my ruminating on things we did, why we did them, and how different the trip would have played out had we been taking it in more recent times. What makes this interesting is that it would have been one of the very first travel blogs to have been published online, which makes me some kind of trailblazer. Of course, back then, we didn't quite grasp how powerful the internet was going to get. We wrote it as a kind of 'travel diary', a literal true 'blog' in the original sense of the word - this was pre-Livejournal even but it would have been exactly the sort of thing Livejournal was designed for. And we never thought to make many notes on exactly places to eat, things to do, etc, because we felt that was exactly what travel guidebooks were for, and why would someone visit a small website run by two naive mid-twenty-somethings when Rough Guide and Lonely Planet were Right There.

*{pause}*

That said, we'd've still have had to have kept the blog updated had we done that, and we weren't planning on doing this trip more than once. It's a long way from Birmingham to Marrakesh.

As an aside, while I won't mention it much on the pod, the notes we made referred a lot to the results of games of travel scrabble we played on the long train journeys. Somewhere en route (we \*think\* it was on the way to Leon) we lost one of the letter 'N's but once we knew that we played on without it. I probably also ought to mention we played it for forfeits -> the loser got tickled that night by the winner for a number of minutes equivalent to the number of points they'd lost by.

I didn't always play to lose, but I'm not saying it didn't happen.

Anyway.

*{section separation jingle}*

For reasons that I don't think I can explain now bar sheer bloody-mindedness, we caught a coach to Calais. I'm pretty sure even then that Inter-Rail users could get cheap Eurostar fares because that's how we got back to the UK, but we'd decided to get an overnight coach/ferry combo to Calais and then pick up a train from there.

So, most people, when travelling a continent for the first time at that age will, even then, head for the major cities. [Most people in our position wouldn't have chosen to take a ticket that covered Spain, Portugal, and Morocco, I'll be honest]. You know, they'd've gone to Madrid, Barcelona, Lisbon, Seville, and stayed a couple of days in each. We ... did not do this. Because I think for us, the joy was in the travel rather than the destination. We wanted to see as much as we could in the time we had (we both had full-time jobs, so we only

really had about 17-18 days, which is why we journeyed over Easter and the May Bank Holiday). So we arrived at our first destination about 7pm, after several hours on a slow and quite crowded train through the centre of the universe. Perpignan. Because obviously. And then we left again mid-morning the next day, because we were travelling, and that's what you do. Onward, ever onward.

Crowded, my notes say, by the way, enough so that the only seats we found were in the 'espace-enfant' coach. Child-friendly. At 9 hours 50 min this was the longest train we'd catch, with the exception of the overnights near the end, and even then, you know, it was close. There are quicker ways of getting from Paris to Perpignan but they all required paying a supplement, Good grief, the things you do when you're bloody-minded - it's not even that we couldn't have afforded it, because, you know, as I say, we both had full-time jobs. I think there's a whole podcast I could do about, well I've already one on privilege but this would be the act of travelling cheaply even though you don't need to. My friend Laura banned me from taking overnight megabuses from Glasgow to London because it's not healthy and I can afford the alternative (but only if I plan in advance, as can be seen from my recent adventure). This feels very much the same.

Anyway, yes, 'Centre of the Universe', is Perpignan. Blame Salvador Dali. But he was a rather odd bloke. There's a statue of him in the city. What was also odd was our hotel - due to a problem we never understood, the hotel we'd booked couldn't host us so they'd booked us a better room for the same price at a neighbouring hotel. That's what I call good customer service, You wouldn't get that on Booking Dot Com.

As an aside, Perpignan may also have been the first time I'd ever seen a palm tree.

Now, at this point we discovered an issue with Spanish trains that ... wouldn't happen now, but which followed us throughout the trip. For some reason, we couldn't book a reservation for the next day's trip to Barcelona, and the system said 'speak to the train guard'. Which we did, but on said train, neither the French nor the Spanish train staff really seemed to care, almost like a 'it's not my problem' thing, which suited us fine as we didn't have to spend money on a supplement, but people with anxiety may not be so placated. These days, well, there's an app for that. And anyway their website works properly. Yes they had a website in 2000. Yes it ran exactly as you'd expect a website in 2000 to run.

Interesting point of note - at the Franco-Spanish border, we stopped for a few minutes while the wheels were changed on the train; the Spanish railways have a different railway gauge to France so the position of the wheels needed to be changed. This gave us our first views of Spain, which were of mountains shrouded in mist, it looked quite picturesque.

Barcelona we spent two hours in while changing trains. We didn't manage to get the train we wanted (ah, gotta love not planning ahead), so instead of reaching our target of Orense in the west, or even Madrid in the centre, we overnights on that Saturday in Zaragoza, a short hop westwards. While we waited the hour or so for departure, we took the efficient metro to the "Las Ramblas" area, and had a wander round the stalls, saw a lot of touristy things for sale, flowers, jewellery, people making caricatures, etc. To this day this is the longest I've ever spent in Barcelona, one of those cities beloved of European backpackers. Look, I don't know what to tell you! But in those Twitter memes of 'cities you've been to', I don't count Barcelona as a city I've been to, even though I have.

As for Zaragoza, we arrived after a train journey mostly through vineyards. We managed to find a hotel without too much hassle (the guidebook said 'hotels here are rarely full'), We had good food and wine in a restaurant, and pretended we knew what we were doing. As far as I recall, Laure did not speak Spanish either. This confidence thing is something I seem have more when travelling with a companion, though remember at this point in my life, I'd only ever travelled solo to meet penpals. Speaking of which, the next day we'd planned to head west, towards a city called Santiago, where Laure had a penpal.

We never made it. Because the trains were full. We didn't understand why the trains would be full on a Sunday across Northern Spain, on Easter Sunday indeed. Like, surely everyone should be in church or something? We managed to get as far as Leon, where we had a wander around the cathedral, and had food in a cafe surrounded by very well-to-do elderly Spanish ladies in fur coats who didn't seem impressed with us being there. {pause} They're probably all dead now. Who's winning now, eh?

So, channelling future-me's ability to react quickly in the face of chaos, we compared the destination board with

a map, and ended up arriving about 10pm in the small town of Ponferrada. Never heard of it before. Isn't a place I've seen since on Instagram, not that I've looked. We got a room in a hotel near the station that opened after we arrived, because the owners had been on the same train as us coming back from a funeral. It was so close to the station we could hear the announcements. Mind you we purposely didn't go far - we'd literally stopped at the first hotel sign we saw. Everywhere has a hotel. Even feckin' Sutton-in-Ashfield has a hotel, though I've never understood why.

Easter Sunday. Santiago. Santiago De Compostela. Yeh, we'd never heard of the Camino de Santiago either at that point. Remember, folks, always do your research.

Incidentally, this pattern of late arrivals and early departures continued through much of our journey. We saw a lot of countryside, but not as much of the towns as you might hope. Kind of a weird cross between slow travel and fast travel that these days causes me to approach any question about 'slow travel' with a list of clarification requests longer than a D&D Rules Lawyer.

Anyway. From Ponferrada we caught an early morning train along the Sil valley to Vigo, an industrial port city that at the time I made a note to one day revisit because it vibed as one of those places that felt chronically underrated and underloved by tourists. My notes at the time state it reminded me of how Liverpool used to be when I was growing up. Note that in the decades since, I have seen travel bloggers go there, but it's still not high on the list of many people's 'hit lists' for Spain. The journey there was very scenic, it must be said, through miles of vineyards, or at least it was when the sun came up. It was also grey and damp morning so it wasn't an ideal day for it. For the record the river marks the boundary between Spain and Portugal.

Once again, I'm reminded as I re-read my notes that even back in 2000 I was clearly not a travel blogger. All I write for Vigo was that we saw the harbour and visited, and I quote, "some sort of fortification". 2019 me would have at least made a note of its name. I'm guessing it was the Castro Fortress, though I have no memory of it. I spend more time in my writeup of Vigo talking about the food we ate (toasted cheese/sausage sandwich, Spanish omelette, and 'strange mini fish pastries', whatever that means. And that they didn't have San Miguel beer, only Carlsberg). And that it rained, a lot. Definitely need to go back, evidently.

From here we got the train to Porto, in Portugal; despite being an international train it vibed like a local stopping service and didn't require any supplements. I think this was my first real experience of the joy of just being able to get on some kind of unpretentious, everyday, casual transport and, you know, cross into a different country. It's not something that occurs to me in the UK, given Eurostar is A Whole Event, and I very rarely go to the island of Ireland. Needless to say I made full use of this vibe on my 2019 Inter-Rail trip. Similarly, I wasn't at the time used to the rapid change of scenery a border crossing often provides; just like in World of Warcraft, the environment felt different across the border; the houses were more ornate, with tiling up the walls, and the landscape was mostly pine trees.

Now, Porto has divided opinion on Travel Twitter of late. Our brief impressions of Porto were of a city that looked pretty even in the rain; in addition we got happily lost in the streets by the waterfront that were narrow and very steep. We ended up having food in a cafe overlooking a huge bridge; mostly seafood (octopus salad and chips with huge, 10" maybe, tentacles) and wine that was cheaper than the food. If I recall correctly this is also where we had port that was as old as Laure was, which is always a bonus, though I suspect I wouldn't be able to affordably do it now. There's a huge difference between 22-year-old port and 44-year-old port. Equally tho, it's not something I'd easily be able to source at home, so this is one of the beauties of travel.

My notes suggest we were staying at a place called 'Pensao Monumental', but that we had to ask at the railway station where it was. When you have a device at your fingertips that has unlimited relatively-detailed maps and a good search function, the beauty of turning up at a railway station and not knowing where you're going has been mostly lost. Again, for my social anxiety, this is A Good Thing.

I also made a note of a strange TV programme we watched before we slept - where two women sang the results of a sort of lottery, following which some guy dialled the number drawn. Foreign TV is one of those strange things that, even if, and possibly because, you don't understand what's being spoken, you kind of get weirdly drawn into it. Like, a couple of nights later, in Faro, we ended up watching the Portuguese version of 'Who Wants To be A Millionaire', and because we had a reference point, it made it even more 'weird' in a sense - the top prize was 50,000,000 Escudos (£150,000), god I love the Euro, and the guy took about 40 minutes to

answer 5 questions, as there seemed to be a lot of casual conversation between the contestant and the host.

Anyway. Our night in Porto was a reminder of one of those 'accidental celebrations' you come across when, again, you don't do the research. When I went to Vanuatu, I already knew I'd be there for Independence Day, and plotted my trip accordingly. Two naive early 20-somethings with knowledge obtained from pop-culture (we had the Internet but this was pre-Wikipedia) weren't to know we'd timed our visit with the 26th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution that had overthrown the Estado Novo dictatorship. Just after midnight we were awoken with a huge amount of fireworks, and the next day was an unexpected (to us, at least) public holiday. The receptionist at the hotel the next morning suggested they needed another revolution. We didn't get involved in that discussion.

Our next overnight stop was Lisbon. My notes don't tell me how long the journey took, only that we shared a carriage with a troupe of Boy Scouts who regaled the passengers with renditions of Backstreet Boys songs. Something Something Cultural Experience. It being 2000, it wasn't even as if they'd released their best song yet ('The Call'). *{pause}* Don't @ me.

The weather had improved by this point, which was just as well for the procession we accidentally caught the end of, to celebrate said revolution, where everyone was wearing red carnations on their shirts. At least by this point we knew what it was all about. I remember once on a later trip to the USA, I'd visited Chicago in an October and been very confused as to why some of the roads were taped off and loads of people waiting around; they were waiting for the Columbus Day Parade to pass by. That had involved endless floats from local businesses and corporations. Not a proper march at all. And after a while it got boring to watch, leaving aside the dubious basis for the celebration in the first place. Although 2006 me was less political.

I've got very little information on Lisbon, save that we'd again arrived without pre-booking a hotel but found somewhere courtesy of the tourist office after a brief search only revealed 'shabby' hotels, and that we ate in a Chinese restaurant close by because, after a couple of trips on the trams, we couldn't find anything more appealing. My notes on the tram were only that it was 'old and bumpy', which is a damning indictment of a public transport system a century old that, at the time, didn't really have an equivalent in the UK. Apart from Blackpool. Which doesn't count.

Our next stop was Faro, about which I have even less notes other than we got lost in the backstreets a lot both getting there and getting around. Indeed we nearly missed our bus out the next morning. A bus, by the way, because there's no rail line connecting Faro to Seville, but there is a 'rail-replacement bus', Or at least there was in 2000, and not direct either; a seamless change at Ayamonte just across the Spanish border. And I say 'nearly missed' - we arrived at the bus station in Faro ten minutes late but that was all right because the bus itself was about 25 minutes late. Again, this wouldn't have been an issue if Google Maps had been A Thing. I don't know if this says more about me or about the Iberian public transport network.

Anyway, Faro seemed otherwise a pretty place and when we found the restaurant we'd seen on the way to the hotel, the food was awesome (seafood and pork, with wine) and rather large portions, The hotel receptionist even gave us an umbrella to borrow to keep dry in the rain, which soaked us as we ... couldn't find where we were going. As you know.

Normal backpackers and young travellers who would have taken the bus to Seville would have stopped there for a couple of days. We, as you probably guessed by now, did not. There's a whole host of places we passed through without really ever 'visiting', and to be honest because it was so long ago, I don't ever claim to have been to Seville. We caught a bus from the bus station to the train station, via most of the city and the technology park (for 150 peseta each, my notes helpfully tell me, which is very interesting for historical context but absolutely no use to anyone now), and bought a baguette. I'm sure there's a lot in Seville to see but 24-year-old me and nearly-23-year-old Laure did not seem interested by any of it.

Instead we caught a train to Almeria. Where we did not meet anyone called Francesco Vasquez Garcia. Any Pogues fans listening? The journey there was on a small train full of English tourists who all deboarded at Granada. Present Me is disgusted with Past Me at this point.

Almeria also ... is it a scam if you don't lose out on anything? We'd pre-booked a hotel called the Hostal Nixar but on arrival to find it the tourist information office told us it had changed names to the Hostal Estacion.

When we arrived at the Hostal Estacion they told us no it hadn't and the Hostal Nixar was the other side of town. The room price was the same and since we hadn't pre-paid for the Nixar, we stayed at the Estacion. Despite it having a bar and disco next door that we seem to have slept through. Almeria is a seaside resort town with a reputation for being a bit rowdy - kind of like the Spanish equivalent of somewhere like Margate (rather than the tourist hell that is Torremelinos / Benidorm / Skegness / Blackpool, but that's an observation for my next podcast episode!). It's also a good place for paella, apparently, or at least it seemed it since we had a huge mixed one (rice, shrimp, chicken, pork ribs, squid, pepper, petits pois) along with 12 dips (two mustards, two blue cheese, two hot & spicy, barbecue, tomato, raita, mayonnaise, tartar, and garlic) with which to flavour chips and sausage. You don't get that in Birmingham.

Our plan was to take a ferry to Morocco the next day, but we'd been told due to high winds, the in-day's sailing had been cancelled and tomorrow's was looking dubious, to which we appear to have shrugged. It's nice to know that even half my life ago, I was still very blasé about disruptions and potential changes to travel plans.

As it happened, the ferry did sail, though the sailing ... wasn't pleasant. The ferry (called the "Scirocco") had a central seating area that looked like a Starship Enterprise lounge, with an inverted funnel in the middle and plastic plants (and a ring of lights around on the ceiling). The ferry lacked entertainment, but then there were only 104 people to entertain. I have no idea how I knew that, but my notes are very specific with that number. The main problem though was the crossing - those high winds were still present, and despite distracting ourselves with scrabble, Laure had to take trips to the toilet every 10 minutes or so. My lack of need to do the same, she put down to a digestive system that could probably digest molten iron.

Now, as naive 20-something westerners, we'd heard tales in pop-culture about scams and whatnot in Morocco - and of course we had no way of verifying them easily. And so when, on the ferry, some chap came by asking for our passports so they could be stamped etc making our entry easier, our heckles were raised. He was literally some casual dude without any identification or uniform, could have been anyone. We declined. He went away going, 'oh well, see if I care'. On entry at Nador port, which for the record is nowhere near Nador, instead being about 13km away and just south of Melilla, one of those Spanish exclaves the Moroccans would quite like back, we went through the border and customs post. Guess who was sat behind the desk?! He was ... shall we say, unimpressed. Not a scam. Just felt like one.

In general, Morocco was an interesting experience; it was the first place I'd been to outside of Europe (I'd imagine for most Brits of my demographic, that would be the USA, or possibly Australia), and obviously this being me, well, us, because Laure had a very similar travel vibe, our first night was spent in that huge tourist hotspot of ... Oujda, in the east of the country and a couple of miles from the Algerian border that had been closed for several years. It was the first place I was introduced to mint tea, and it was also the loudest place I'd ever been to that point, especially with all the cars using their horns as a kind of punctuation device rather than a warning siren. And not always because of the many police roadblocks in the way. Apparently the police stop people looking for contraband, though given some of the vehicles we saw on the road even on that short journey to Nador, suggested That Was Not The Real Reason.

Getting to Oujda was our first introduction to a transport network that didn't run on timetables or standard booking systems; one of those things that other people might find completely alien but, interestingly, we just rolled with it. It involved ignoring everyone who asked us where we were going, buying a ticket from another non-uniformed person (possibly a kid - everyone looked about 14 years old to be honest) at one of the many many makeshift counters inside (but the only one that said 'Oujda' near it), and then having our luggage launched onto a roof rack of a coach that looked like it was about the same age as my mother. I could make a your mum joke here but that would be rude. She might be listening. No idea or indication when the bus would actually leave, nor when it would arrive, just ... we trusted them to sort out that sort of thing. This was also our first experience of people coming onto the coach to sell things like chocolate and yoghurt (in this temperature?), and sunflower seeds. Better than the stereotypical British Rail egg sandwich. And much cheaper.

As I say, Oujda lies only a handful of miles from the Algerian border (it is presumably possible to walk there), however it was a forbidden area partly due to the civil war in Algeria at the time, but mainly because of the cool relations between Algeria and Morocco (over, amongst other things, the disputed desert border which generally doesn't even appear on maps, and the Western Sahara zone). The border closed in 1994, and a once thriving trading post city had effectively become a dead-end. As of 2023, the border is \*still\* closed, by the way.

Consequently no-one comes here any more. Which does make it very easy to find cheap rooms.

One might also note that even back in 2000, I was travelling 'beyond the brochure'. I am aware Morocco is a popular country for backpackers; I've never seen any of them mention Oujda. Probably for logical reasons, to be honest - it's a nice enough city but too far out the way and distant from most more popular tourist sites.

For the record, our hotel room here was nice enough, clean, though the flush didn't work, and there was no hot water, which was standard for Morocco according to the guide. The TV had only one channel. We plugged in the radio and found one FM station; a sort of station for French-speaking countries that actually played French music (eg David Hallyday).

I'm going to also mention our first Moroccan meal, in a restaurant we'd accidentally arrived at during one of the daily prayers so had to wait to be seated and served. Harira (a spicy and strong-tasting tomato & vegetable soup, typical of the Maghreb region) and six beef kebabs each, chips, salad, and olives. Well, I didn't have olives. Obviously.

The call-to-prayer woke us up several times during the night, but we didn't find it unpleasant; rather it made us go 'oh is it morning already, oh wait, no, cool, we can stay in bed a bit longer'.

After making some phone calls the next morning, we ended up booking a hotel in Meknes, one of those more touristy cities in the central north of the country. Obviously this is yet again an example of how much things have changed - these days we'd just book somewhere online with no hassle. Though the very last-minute method of travel is still consistent. Wasn't a planner then, not a planner now.

The train journey was quite long, through a varying landscape of mountains, desert, large regions of stony ground, a few isolated farms, packs of sheep that we wondered what they could eat. Cart tracks for roads, lots of wadis with remains of bridges, a lot of olive trees. Sometimes around a lake or river the ground was dry, and then you had large areas of greenery in the middle of nowhere. The towns looked pretty much the same. We shared a compartment with an old couple (bright purple djellabah, man with typical toque), who didn't speak French but did offer us some of their food. Such is the way and the custom. Though we declined the yoghurt. Obviously.

I'd love to tell you more about Meknes, but my notes suggest we didn't do anything but eat and visit a cybercafe. The hotel we stayed in had gone for the 'paint splatter' style of wall decor. Also, not only did we meet a lone male American inter-railer who'd cast aspersions on Marrakesh, in the restaurant we spotted another chap using the same guidebook as us. These days backpackers are ten a penny but for some reason, we kind of felt it a bit weird to come across other people doing the same things we were. Maybe that's also reflective of our travel style though - no hostels and generally not the most touristy cities. As I say, nothing's changed much. I'm not sure why we didn't think to stay in hostels, but I suspect it's because we were an engaged couple and ... wanted private snuggle and tickle time. I'm not saying I didn't used to be Asexual, but it's entirely possible I am in fact Demisexual and she was the only one who has ever activated those vibes.

As an aside (quickly shifting topic), the reason we needed a cybercafe was to plan and pre-book our later journeys through Spain. I can't emphasise enough just how different this aspect of travel is now. The only way to book tickets, or indeed hotels, was either to phone up, to find somewhere with an Internet connection (probably slow and unreliable), or just to turn up at the office. And in this case, we failed since the Spanish railways (Renfe) website was proving hard to access. Speaking of hard to access, we noticed at the next-but-one terminal, two young Arab males were busy downloading a video file of porn.

Marrakesh was our next stop, again on a long train journey where we saw our first camels. When we arrived (and the station felt like it was on the very edge of the city; no doubt that is no longer the case), we felt it was very different from the towns we had seen thus far, the avenues were very wide in the French part, lined with trees, and the walls were pink as opposed to white or yellow. It was really hot, and there were an awful lot of tourists, sometimes in horse-drawn carriages. There were also typically western restaurants and hotels (Pizza Hut, McDonalds, Ibis). Now, this could have put us off, and maybe it did at first, but then I guess we realised that this was another aspect of Morocco that we had to see.

It's hard to say now what our expectations were, or if we wanted Morocco to be 'very different' to what we were



used to, or not. My notes don't get that deep or introspective. I suspect there's a certain amount of naivety here in all honesty, possibly heading towards some latent 'Westernism', passive racism even, of wanting to know I could say I'd been to places that are 'other', and which fulfil those stereotypes we're brought up with. Which don't include Pizza Hut.

We did not eat at Pizza Hut. Although I would say my travels since have led me to see this in a different way. Since even worldwide brands tailor their products for local markets, which gets annoying as it means most places have more interesting Kit-Kats than we do in the UK, going to, say, a McDonalds in every country you visit is a great way to compare and contrast, and also fits in with 'eat where the locals eat', because Travel Twitter can be sometimes a naïve place in itself where they assume everyone who lives in a place goes to local cafes and restaurants all the time. Listener, they do not. Anyway, for example, McDonalds in Philippines offer spaghetti as an option. Less easy to eat with your fingers, though.

Anyway. Marrakesh.

The concentration of tourists increased as we entered the Medina and approached the main square, the Djenna El Fna. It felt akin to the Place de la Concorde in Paris, with lots of cars (and bikes, and mopeds, and people don't wear helmets) and no road markings at all, and a pedestrian area. In the square were about 60 or 70 stalls arranged in a snail shape, with no.1 in the centre. People could sit and eat at them; brochettes, salads, fried fish, sheeps-heads, orange juice. The stallholders would hail you and almost command you to come and eat or drink. It was a windy evening so the smoke blew everywhere, but it smelt good.

We were staying in an interesting hotel nearby; the bedroom doors opened onto a balcony around the patio. The floors and walls outside were covered in lots of broken tiles in different colours and shapes, which gave a very nice effect, plus it was really smooth to walk on. At the top, above the roofs, there were terraces, from which we had a view of the town. It was possible to pay £3 a night and sleep on the roof terrace on a mattress under the stars. We preferred the slightly more expensive vibe called 'having a roof'; I've only ever slept literally under the stars twice - once for two nights in a hostel in Indonesia and once for one night on the side of a cow-populated hill in Leicestershire. The hotel also had 'Hole in the ground' toilets. I've never been terribly good at using them.

The hotel was in the souk area, with narrow and winding streets punctuated by the occasional moped screaming around the corners. Which is not a situation accounted for in the UK's Highway Code. The souk contained craft shops - polished wood objects, scarves, metal boxes and mirrors and nicely decorated teapots. Of course a lot of people hailed us into their shop. But then, as now, I'm not the sort of person to buy souvenirs; it also helps to have a travel partner who's more interested in filling their belly than their house. Indeed, Laure's only purchase was four nectarines from a man who seemed to have passed the age of retirement several lives ago. We had evening meal in the souk area too - the harira was more fuller-flavoured but less spicy than that in Oujda.

By the morning the Djenna El Fna was empty, the sky was clear, and the hotel toilets were ... not. We made our way back to the railway station via a cafe for breakfast. Now, this was where we lost a camera. Remember, this was the days of the film cameras rather than digital cameras and phones. I'm assuming in addition we were carrying mainly several disposable cameras, as my notes say the only thing we lost were a few pics from Marrakesh itself, and we had pics from both before and after. Could you imagine going on holiday with a small camera, having to load film into it, only getting a certain number of snaps (usually 24) before you had to replace the film, or, in the case of disposable cameras, getting a new camera. And then having to go to a shop (usually a chemist) to get the film developed, which itself took 2-3 days, all the while not knowing if any of the pics you'd taken were actually any good or not? On a three-week journey I took to China a couple of years later, I took 5 disposable cameras. That's no more than 125 pictures. On some days on my more recent journeys, I've taken more than that in one day, and that's not including anything I take on my phone. 'Oh but you're losing the quality moments, with a film camera you take more care' feck off. I take pictures to remember places by, and I also like to be able to take the right pictures.

Anyway.

I say 'lost'; it's one of those early indications of ADHD. It was in a shopping bag, we put the bag down in a cafe, we left the cafe, we got halfway to the railway station before we realised we did not have the bag. And while you might say 'someone nicked it', my point is we left the cafe without remembering the bag with the camera in \*existed\*. We have no idea if it was still there when we left the cafe, only that we left the cafe without it because

we forgot that we had a shopping bag with it in. You may also ask why we were carrying a camera in a shopping bag, That's a question whose answer is lost in the mists of time.

Our destination was Asilah, a town we only chose to visit because it, being on the railway line up the coast, was in the right place. Such is the way we travelled, and still do now. The trains we caught were pretty crowded - note at the time there were pretty much only three rail lines in the country (extending north, south, and west from the central point of Sidi Kacem) and the road network wasn't necessarily much better. At one point we passed a sort of fayre in the middle of nowhere; people selling hundreds of pottery dishes and the like. Asilah itself felt like a beautiful town, a quiet seaside resort, very picturesque; the station was a bit out-of-town so we took a short-cut across the beach.

Our hotel was more expensive than we'd been previously told, but we managed to get them to take off the inclusive breakfast from the price. We'd've been more irked but it was the best room we'd had on the whole trip, certainly the most spacious. There was one double and one single bed, sofas, three windows, a colour TV with several channels (my notes suggest we ended up that night watching a German-language shopping channel. As befits the theme of the trip, neither of us spoke German), a bathroom with bathtub and a pillar in the middle of it, and hot water.

A 15-minute walk took us to the sort-of cafe/restaurant quarter of Asilah, surrounded by people speaking Spanish (because colonialism) - we had couscous because (checks notes) it was cheap. And regional. The harira update (I mean, presumably there's an opening for a travel blogger to write about each Moroccan town's variations on harira - "Harira There Everywhere" looks available, no need to thank me) is that it contained noodles. This is unusual.

We decided the next day to take the coach rather than the train north to Tangier, because the train times were far less convenient (and services far fewer). We had a bit of confusion catching it, as we just missed one and waited around for the next one half an hour later which didn't come. What we ended up doing was catching what I describe in my notes as "an old blue van"; a windowless 'grand taxi', and a form of transport I got very used to taking a decade and a half later when I travelled around West Africa. This though was my first time on them, and it felt quite an odd experience. Obviously we were the only white people on it; our first impression was 'but it's so full, there's not enough room for us and our luggage'. Obviously, there is always enough room; indeed no-one needed to hang on to the door standing on the rear metal plate like I saw in Benin.

Then there was the issue of buying tickets, which, one of the first guidelines of travelling in a foreign culture is 'see what the locals are doing'. They were all paying 20Dh to a small kid sitting near us, and no-one was confused when we thus followed suit. +1 XP.

The trip was quick, as we were a small vehicle driven not entirely within legal parameters, and we didn't stop until Tangier. Obviously we'd no idea where we were going, so again, first principles, we got off where everyone else did. This, bizarrely, was at some petrol station near a roundabout somewhere in the southern suburbs of the city. Laure asked the driver where the ferryport was - he pointed to a road and said "one minute".

It turned out that he obviously meant one minute by Concorde. It was a long uphill road to the seafront and then a further long road round the harbour to the ferryport itself. It was also getting pretty hot, which didn't help. We took a ferry to the Spanish town of Algeciras - we were headed to Gibraltar but the direct ferry there wasn't till the evening. Point of note, we didn't encounter any hustlers or other issues leaving; we passed a youthful backpacking couple heading to Malaga who said they'd come in via Tangier and been hassled and ripped off upon arrival, so I guess we travelled the right way through Morocco.

The ferry trip was ... much nicer than the one we'd taken to Morocco, and quite cheap (my notes say the prices were quoted in French Francs (6 for a drink) for reasons we never found out, ahhh the fun of pre-Euro days). Tho we stayed inside most of the journey, it was fun to go onto the deck and take in the view of three countries on two different continents from the same point.

We spent only long enough time in Algeciras to note it wasn't pretty, and to yet again fail to book reservations for future Spanish trains, before catching a bus to the frontier town of La Linea de la Concepcion. We walked from the bus station, outpacing a traffic jam, towards the large rock of Gibraltar, a pretty imposing natural structure that we noticed even in the hot Spanish sun had a rather large dark cloud on top of it. How very ...

British.

Although I've done it many times since, this may have been the very first time I'd crossed an international border entirely on foot. Always a fun experience; here and then though it just involved showing our passports to the border guard on entry to Gibraltar. For geek purposes, we did ask him if he could stamp us in, just especially for us, which he did without any problem at all. The stamp didn't look particularly official, being GIB in big letters and a sun behind. Now, remember I said the rock had a cloud on top? Yeh, the locals say this is a standard feature, even having been given a name: "Levante". When you start naming clouds, that passport stamp feels like false advertising, not gonna lie. By the way, the whole border complex was basically two permanent portakabins on either side of the road, with a roof between them.

I don't know how much you know about Gibraltar, but the only road in/out crosses the airport runway. Not under, like at Heathrow or Manchester, but on the level of. They close it when a plane lands, which presumably causes issues at passport control. Especially at the time of podding. Growl.

As for the town itself, it had the vibe of a quaint English country town, just with more Spanish accents. It looked pleasant, quite busy, and was larger than we were expecting. We even ate at what was basically a typical English pub, called "The Clipper"; we ate there because everywhere else, including the restaurant in our own hotel, seemed to close around 6-7pm. The other thing we noticed was perfumes and alcohol and the like were actually pretty cheap, you could tell it's a tax-free haven. Our B&B, run by a Norwegian lady, was fairly nice - twin beds, no TV, shared bathroom with the neighbouring bedroom, but otherwise very comfortable. The walls were lined with paintings by Monet.

Next morning we had a nice English breakfast and toast with jam/marmalade. The only thing missing was an egg because "the grill was not working". Note that only when I was doing some editing of my writings three or so years later did it occur to me we could have asked to have them fried.

And no, we didn't do anything involving the monkeys. Or the rock. Because we were only there one night. Obviously.

For some reason, our onward journey the next day started with more unplanned panic; it seems we caught a bus from La Linea to the town of San Roque where we'd pick up the nearest train, but the bus station was several km from the railway station and we only had 17 minutes to do the trip. But a swift taxi did the job. Now, looking at Google Maps it seems the railway station is in a neighbouring town called 'Estación de San Roque'. And there is a direct bus that does the journey. Possibly the same bus. Maybe things have changed. Maybe we can blame not having Google Maps. Maybe we were just stupid.

Anyway. We caught a train crowded with tourists to the small town of Bobadilla - they stayed on to Malaga while we were headed to Cordoba. This was where we finally managed to have a resolution to our 'ticket reservation' problem for our onward journeys through Spain; sometimes it helps to speak to someone at a major railway station, rather than trying to do everything on a website that doesn't work. This, by the way, is not a problem restricted to the year 2000.

It was a hot day, about 32C, and after securing our backpacks in some lockers on the concourse, we walked round in the heat. It was quite a nice place, very obviously religious (lots of churches). It's also an old city with narrow roads and pavements, and a large traffic problem. We did encounter a random neighbourhood festival - a couple of squares with music and people practising dancing.

I have no notes on whether we did anything else in Cordoba, but I do know what we ate: noodle soup with a bit of meat and egg to start, then I had calamari in batter with mayonnaise, and bits of squid's tentacles, while Laure had "carne con tomate", possibly veal. There's also a note the wine was horrible. I have no idea what that means.

That night saw us take the first of two consecutive overnight trains; pretty much the backbone of inter-rail at times. This one left at 2am and while there were people sprawled out in the compartment we'd booked seats in, we found an empty one where the booked people hadn't turned up. So we did the same.

It was raining when we arrived in Madrid, less than seven hours later, joy. Madrid Chamartin is a little way out

of the centre it appeared, so we caught the well-indicated, efficient, swift, and comfortable Madrid metro. Breakfast was chocolate con churros - a bowl of very thick syrupy chocolate mixture and some long, thin, doughnut-like things which are very, well, Spanish. I've always wanted to recreate that vibe, usually without success, and indeed certainly me and my American friend Laura failed to find any hot chocolate of a similar texture on a visit last year to Paris.

I'm aware I've travelled extensively with both a Laure and a Laura. This reminds me of a time when I knew an Ann (no e), an Anne (with an e), and an Anna, which caused my friend Anne-Laure (good grief) to laugh when I told her this. Anne-Laure is the friend I went to Ireland with in a previous podcast. I do know and travel with people with other names. Just ... not often, you know? I went to Italy with a Sarah once...

Anyway.

One of my social anxieties about travelling alone is not understanding how simple things like cafes work, and Madrid provided an example of this. It's also quite telling that, even then, even with a companion, I had this issue. At a cafe called "El Museo del Jammon", we tried to buy 2 croissants with jamon and chips. It seemed to us as if you had to buy the croissant from one part of the shop and take it away, but the chips from the cafeteria part and eat them in, despite them both being advertised on the shop window. By the time everything was ready and we knew what was going on, the cafeteria was full so we had to eat out anyway.

Madrid was also one of the few places where we spent long enough at the right time of day to actually do some tourism. Shock. We visited the "Centro de Arte Reina Sofia", Madrid's modern art museum, on a square with a sculpture in the middle; two metal boxes; which announced what we'd find inside. It's a huge museum, much bigger than we were expecting, and covered pretty much the whole history of the Modern Art movement, including work by Mino, Dali, and Picasso. This includes the latter's famous "Guernica" painting, which is just as odd in reality as it is shown in books. We didn't go round the whole gallery, by the time we reached the 3rd floor we were completely exhausted, so we sat and had a drink in the cafeteria instead.

I have no notes on other activities in Madrid other than walking down the streets and looking at the outside of stuff. We caught the overnight train at 10pm, and this time we had couchettes; bunk beds, effectively, two banks of three tall, if I recall correctly, in a mixed-sex compartment. We were in the top bunks on either side - not a lot of headroom, plus it was very hot in there (no windows). The train was destined for the French town of Hendaye, but because our train back north to (eventually) La Rochelle was much later in the day, we'd decided to get off in Irun and walk to Hendaye. The train did this journey in a scheduled 5 minutes; we took a couple of hours and still had time to linger. We stopped for breakfast in the centre of the town, mainly to use up the last of our pesetas, and so we could sample the thick chocolate stuff again, this time with croissants. Nearly all the road signs were bilingual; this is the Basque region after all; and we did notice the tendency for Basque words to have a 'k' in them.

Anyway we followed signposts to "Francia", and walked along what at first was a nice residential road, which then slowly gave way to industry. We passed a small railway station that serves the independent Eusko train that runs along the whole length of the North Coast of Spain, to A Coruna, inter-rail tickets not valid, and then on a bridge over a river. There was a small disused brick hut with ghost-signs in the brickwork - 'France' written on one side and 'Frontera' on the other, and it didn't look as though it had been used for a long time. Nearby were the ruined residues of what used to be the customs post - while pre-Euro, this trip was post-Schengen, so Freedom of Movement was already A Thing.

It didn't take long to reach Hendaye railway station. Hendaye didn't cry out to us as an interesting place (a 'sleepy border town', say the notes). Everywhere is interesting, but all else my notes suggest is that the toilet facilities in the railway station were incorrectly interesting.

From here it was a couple of simple, and familiar (in style if not in location) trains back to Laure's hometown of La Rochelle and journey's end. I know we caught a train to Paris and then Eurostar to London, but I have no notes about that.

*{section separation jingle}*

It was interesting to look back over the notes we made, and how they were written for that proto-travelblog. Even though it's a page still on my website, it's not something I read through very often, because why would I?

One of the most apparent things is how very much not-a-travel-blog it was. There's no mention on it of even what most of the hotels were called, or the restaurants we went to. \*What\* we had is well-attested, but not \*where\*, which, I mean I guess no-one's going to try to recreate this trip 23 years later, but it makes it completely unhelpful for most people reading it at the time, or, rather, the three years afterwards when I finally typed it up and published it on the website (the gap being very much ADHD-related; my website existed from 1996). Not that that was our intention; we made the notes for our own future knowledge so we wouldn't forget the experiences we had, and should be seen alongside the photographs and, for a time, a box of stuff that we'd collected along the way. The box probably no longer exists, because no-one needs a faded receipt from a cafe in Spain that's long-closed, outside of social historians I guess. Of which I might be one, but that's not the point.

The other very apparent thing is how little we actually did. It's clear we did the trip to experience the journey, rather than with a desire to see specific ... stuff. We wanted to travel for its own sake, and see as much as we could as easily as we could. As far as I can tell, we went to one museum, and that only because it was wet and we had a lot of hours to kill between overnight trains. I don't think we regretted travelling that way, because we saw exactly what we wanted to see and did exactly what we wanted to do; this was, to get a vibe for many different towns and cities, eat a lot of food, and see the countries passing by. And you can certainly get a feel for a place by the food and drink they have, and the places in which they have it. I still kind of do this in my travels today, though I might spend one full day in towns rather than just a couple of hours. Enough time to visit some important local sites. Although as you'll hear next time, my 2019 trip had similar bursts of 'if it's Tuesday it must be Belgium' vibes.

And that brings up the comparison and development of my travel style. While not the first trip I did, it was the first I did with no specific destination in mind (previous holidays had been mostly to visit a penpal, or otherwise to a set destination). It was also the first trip I can recall where I did the whole concept of setting out a theoretical route but booking everything last-minute on-the-fly, and not being too worried if things go wrong, just changing plans without a care. It's something that's stayed with me ever since, as many of you are all too aware, sometimes to your own personal angst. That's a subtweet.

What has changed of course is the nature of travel. Even though it was the early days of the internet, and we did have mobile phones to make calls en-route, we still had to make them. They weren't internet-enabled. We didn't have easy, to-hand, availability of maps, of hotel listings or other ways of contacting them, of even things like rail and bus timetables. Everything we did still had to be done locally, or via a cybercafe whose presence and provenance was always a bit hit-or-miss. I mean we had web-based e-mail addresses so we could log in anywhere, but that relied on the cafe having a decent enough connection itself to be able to find what we were looking for in good time to send eg a booking e-mail request. No Google Maps (launched 2005). No Wikipedia (2001), WikiVoyage (2006, German-only), or Wikitravel (2003). Booking dot com was launched in 2000; I don't remember if it were before or after our trip but it's highly likely even if it was and we'd've heard of it, its coverage would have been very minimal for our trip. Hostelworld was around (launched 1999) but we were avoiding hostels. And it follows there were absolutely no apps.

There are many people who will tell you this was a better time to travel, a purer, more grounded way of travelling when you could see things with your own eyes and everything felt more real, rather than exploring purely through the lens of a digital device and be beholden to, and following purely in, other's experiences. These people are liars. Or, at the very least, mistaking nostalgia for idealism, as tends to happen when you get older. Don't get me wrong; I don't have to be connected to the Internet all the time and be continually, eg, posting updates to Instagram Stories. But that we did this journey without much issue or angst, that we enjoyed the trip and mostly had a great time on it, is despite primitive technology, rather than because of it. You might like the idea of idly wandering a city getting lost for three hours trying to find the perfect paella, failing, and ending up in Pizza Hut; I want to be in the pub I found in 5 seconds on a websearch.

I did not go to a pub on this trip, at least not one just because it was a pub.

*{end main body podcast jingle}*

Well, that's about all for this episode. Join me next time for a more general overview of Inter-Railing. Until then, remember, harira is a dish best served spicy, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

*{Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it}*

*{Outro voiceover:*

*Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.*

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*Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}*