

AFB Schools Involvement Lycée Notre Dame Du Roc & AFB Volunteers combined visit to the J Mourat Vineyard May 22nd 2024



J Mourat Vineyard

One of the benefits of belonging to the AFB is the opportunity to meet people & visit places that are outside our daily life. The Vendée is a paradise of little pockets of hidden interests. I have come to adore my exposure to the French educational system through the AFB. It is always fascinating, so different from what I have known before. Each trip is an adventure.

This year instead of the AFB visiting the Lycée in La Roche sur Yon, Richard Guilloton (Lynn Scully's contact at the Lycée) asked if we would take part in their educational trip to the Mourat vineyard in Mareuil-sur-Lay. The students were on a two day gastronomy trip to the Ile de Ré & would visit the vineyard on their return journey to La Roche. We were invited to join them as part of their "English" experience. In broad terms our aim is to help & encourage the students to speak English. The key is to try & give each of the students lots of positive encouragement with their English language development. This year we got a free vineyard tour. That's a great way to pass a Wednesday afternoon.

Richard asked to us meet up for a picnic lunch before hand, so just before midday that Wednesday morning eight AFB volunteers gathered in the Jardin Dumaine in the centre of Luçon. We chatted away, making introductions, enjoying the beauty around us, anticipating the students arrival.

Then suddenly they arrived.

Myself, I'd expected a few European Studies students & a Professeur. Instead, a tsunami of young people poured out of a large bus, clutching paper lunch bags from the camping site that they had stayed at. They flowed around us whilst the Professeurs & twelve European Studies students made their introductions. After a few moments everyone settled into place & we finally started eating.

The European Studies students (I met Charlotte, Lili & Aurélie) had proudly prepared vineyard guides for us in English. Discussing these along with the sharing of our Marmite sandwiches, coffee & Tiffin broke the ice. Soon the scholars were chatting away in English, searching for the right words to explain where they had visited & stayed on the Ile de Ré, answering our questions about where they were from, how many nights a week they boarded at the Lycée & what career paths they wanted to follow. All of students that I talked to lived in the Vendée, lodging during the week at the Lycée. The majority were undecided about their career paths, wanting to finish their course before deciding. One young man however had already decided to become a Bar Man, almost a non-professional job in the UK but a respected career in France.

M. DURAND floated around taking photographs of the event for the Lycée. He was impressed (astonished in fact) by how many students were talking to us in English, & by how interested they were in us.

Time was passing & Mme LEROY managed to hustle the students back onto the bus to get to the vineyard before 14h30, the pre-arranged time to start the visit. Lynn, Karen, Erika, Helen, Jackie, Adrian, David & myself gathered our belongings up, found our cars & followed suit.

The J Mourat Vineyard is situated on the main road out from Mareuil-sur-Lay-Dissais towards La Roche Sur Yon. Parking is excellent outside the modern bright shop. The wine production takes part in the same building.

The Lycée's tour guide was Audrey SFREDDO (Chargée d'accueil dans le tourisme et les loisirs - or just call me "wine seller" she said). Audrey has worked there for three years now & does the tours in either French or English. (The tours are not available using both languages at the same time as this becomes too complicated & time consuming.) We were joining in an educational tour for the students so French was spoken. The European Studies students stayed close to their AFB J Mourat Vineyard counterparts & translated what they thought was necessary, asking us polite questions about our comprehension. They were pretty fab, polite with lovely manners.



Audrey Sfreddo & David Roseblade

The Cellar Tour lasted for about an hour.

Audrey led us through the cavernous rooms, stopping in each one to impart knowledge & ask questions. To the uneducated (me) the rooms were a mystifying series of temperature & light controlled huge chambers filled with enormous containers. Audrey carefully explained the proud history of the vineyard, how the make up of the soils influence the taste of the wine, the age & history of the actual vines themselves, the vinification & ageing process, the bottling & labelling on site, the packing & distribution. I understood that 40% of all the vineyards wines are exported, & that the wines are the official Puy Du Fou wine. The production is fascinating & very mechanised. One AFB member was surprised by the automation, cleanliness & lack of smell. Another by the idea that wine is a living organism, affected by the shape of the container that it matures in.



Lynn Scully & M. DURAND

I believe that Audrey stated that the Mourat wines are organic & bio. However I truly understood only about 20% of what was being said due to my ignorance about the subject matter, the size of the

group & the fast fluent French used. Audrey's priority was in educating the students however she kindly explained certain things in English when she saw the need.

After passing through the series of "production rooms", then through the delightful Salle du Clos (a private meeting room for hire with a magnificent view over the vines) we finally came to the good bit - the wine tasting in the shop.

Audrey organised the students & professeurs to pour tasting portions of a white wine in glasses & ensured that everyone had one. She detailed the three tasting tests (the colour, the scent, & finally the taste), asking what flavours could be sensed. As soon as my friend said grapefruit I could taste & smell it, but not before. Audrey explained that everyone's olfaction (smell) & gustation (taste) senses are different & so a variety of different personal opinions could be expected.

The students were underage for drinking so they used the crachoirs* (spittoons) after tasting. The AFB seemed to have no problem with a longer tasting experience & found that they had no use of the crachoirs. After a white wine, we moved to a red. The French discussed it in depth, the AFB discussed & drank. After tasting the two different wines the Lycée tour was officially at a close as the students & professeurs had to return to the Lycée. The students were delightful, searching out the English speakers that they had spoken to & thanking them.

With her audience now diminished Audrey was free to answer our questions, which she did with great patience & interest. Some of us were curious about a dark rosé in the shop so we got a tasting & explanation. Several bottles of various wines were purchased. Eventually we all left too, leaving the vineyard behind with a very satisfied sigh.