



Aude Ouest and Ariège July 2024 Newsletter

Welcome to our Summer Newsletter. The last 3 months have seen a range of events and activities, hopefully appealing to different tastes and interests. We started with a guided Botanical Walk and ended with a Parachute Jump and a Well-being Summer Fair; see the full reports and photos below.

Many of us will be taking some time off over the summer, possibly visiting friends and family, or receiving visitors 'chez nous'. The regular CSF events will continue throughout the summer months, so do drop in for good company and a chat if you are able.

There are some early plans for activities during the autumn, with more details to come in the October Newsletter and of course regularly posted on Facebook.

Your suggestions for future activities, topics and/or contributions for the Newsletter will always be welcome.

Janice Pickering sud-janice@cancersupportfrance.org

Dates for your Diary

Regular Drop-Ins, Coffee, Cake and Conversation Exchange of paperbacks in good condition. *A trained volunteer is always available at all our events.*

Aude Ouest Coffee Breaks at Les Marguerites, 11580, Alet-les-Bains. 10h00-12h00, first Wednesday of the month: **7 August, 4 September, 2 October.**

Ariège Get-Togethers at the Mad Hatter Café, 09500, Mirepoix, 14h30-16h30. Last Thursday of the month: **25 July, 29 August, 26 September.**

Ariège Book Events at the Covered Market, 09600, Bastide sur l'Hers, 11h00-13h00. First Saturday in the month: **3 August, 7 September, 5 October.**

Book Exchange at La Salle de Fête, 11240, Cailhau. 10h00-12h00 **Wednesday 17 July, 18 September.**

Cold Water Dip Following the success of the Cold Water Knees up in February a Cold Water Dip is being planned for mid-November at the Parc St Bertrand, Quillan. It will link into the 'Movember' promotion, which seeks to raise awareness of men's health, especially prostate and testicular cancers, mental health & suicide prevention. Full details nearer the time.

Ariège News

Our regular monthly events in the Ariège, the Book Event on the first Saturday at Bastide sur l'Hers and the Get-Togethers on the last Thursday at Mirepoix, have been well-attended and will continue throughout the summer.

In addition there was a sponsored **Parachute Jump** held at Les Pujols airfield, near Pamiers, on 16 June. On this lovely sunny, calm Sunday two of our intrepid members, Jane Beck, CSF Sud president and Lesley Wisson, departmental representative for Aude Est, successfully completed tandem jumps. They were well supported by 26 volunteers who thoroughly enjoyed the spectacle.

Corinne Bryan, Departmental Representative for Ariège



Aude Ouest News

Botanical Walk

A bright and sunny Monday morning in May saw a group of 18 gather at *la gare*, Alet-les-Bains for a guided botanical walk, led by a local French botanist, Laurie Beaufigli. She introduced the group to a selection of the huge range of plants found in Aude - a region particularly rich in botanical biodiversity with over 3000 known plants. The 'Atlas de la flore patrimoniale' features over 300 of these plants. Armed with magnifying glasses (and instructions on how to use them effectively for close-up observation) we climbed the gentle hill stopping to view particular plants on the way.

Laurie described the varied uses of the plants and flowers - for medicinal use, those with traditional healing properties and the edibles. For example thyme infusions are good for coughs, the digestion and other stomach complaints; the white-flowered anemone hepatica (common name liverwort) is useful for liver complaints; the essential oil of lavender (lavande aspic) soothes bites, stings and general skin irritations. The pretty blue flowers of Aphyllanthe de Montpellier are edible, recognisable as its stems have no leaves. Some of the more unusual plants we saw included the homme-pendu orchid whose flowers look like a tiny person, hence the name and the erodium bec-de-grue (cranesbill) with its sharply pointed seedheads.

After a very interesting couple of hours we left being determined to look more closely at our feet when next out walking. Many thanks to Laurie.

Janice Pickering

Apologies for the lack of photos due to technical difficulties.

The monthly **Coffee Breaks** at Alet-les-Bains have been well attended with some new members joining. Antoinette's usual lovely choice of homemade cakes have been much appreciated with the Strawberry Shortcake being a particular favourite.

Margaret Peace offered hand massage to visitors at the June event, which proved popular. She will continue to provide this at alternate monthly sessions, starting in September (please bring 2 small towels if you're interested). Back and neck massages will be available from Joan Ogden at the alternate meetings (ie October).

Cailhau Book Exchange

Our next Book Exchange at Cailhau (11240) is on Wednesday 17 July, between 10h and 12h. As well as over 1000 pre-loved English paperbacks to choose from, there'll be a yummy cafe offering tea, coffee, cold drinks and lots of home made cakes and biscuits. In fact, it's worth coming along, even if you aren't a big reader! Also on July 17th, one of our members is returning to the UK and needs to dispense with her collection of over 2500 cookery books - there'll be a selection of these books available, as usual for a donation to CSF.

A final reminder - I'm afraid we don't take hardback books or DVDs as they just don't sell. Please do not bring them to Cailhau as they will likely end up in the recycling.

Phil Mercer



Wellbeing Summer Fête 29 June, Les Marguerites, Alet-les-Bains

Several months of planning and many hours devoted to organising this event only to discover the weather forecast for the date was dire - thunder storms and heavy rain!

What to do - cancel or go ahead as planned?

The publicity had been circulated far and wide - but would people just assume it would be cancelled due to the weather?

Our wellbeing and fundraising event was looking set to be a non-starter.

Being an optimistic bunch of volunteers (but sensible with it) we eventually opted to forge ahead and hold the event - with plans B & C up our sleeves.

We were fortunate in having a marquee at our disposal (erected by some of us a couple of days beforehand in temperatures around 34C) and some of the activities were to be situated in the main house.

.... But several of the other activities were due to go ahead in the garden - including a sit down lunch for about 40 people.

The day dawned and an amazing number of volunteers appeared on site, each with allotted tasks - worker bees and ants had nothing on us.

Cakes appeared from all directions and it was obvious everyone we knew was having a clear out (or moving house) by the amount of bric-a-brac piled up at one end of the marquee.

There was the inevitable initial chaos of sorting out tables, floats, raffle tickets, etc but by 10am (after several cups of coffee) we were ready to go.

The Wellbeing events: slots for reflexology, hand & arm massage and back massage were soon filled up and the morning sessions of guided meditation, pilates and yoga went well too.



Peoples's purses were soon a lot lighter after visiting the tombola, guess the name of the Teddy, bric-à-brac, book stall, a very scary pirate lady tempting us to find the buried treasure and an overflowing cake stall ... to name but a few ... and fortunately all under the marquee.

We had people sketching and children trying out their artistic skills, alongside enthusiasts attempting to toss hoops over a huge number of bottles - none of which seemed to get won but people still came back for second attempts.

A steady flow of visitors drifted in to see us but as the morning progressed so did the approaching clouds, rolling ever closer.

Refreshments were available all day and a delicious and healthy lunch was prepared to be taken al fresco ... but just as the tables were set up ready, under the trees with everything looking perfect, the heavens opened.

Plan B to the rescue and an astonishingly fast removal of tables, chairs, crockery, etc to drier parts took place.

It all came together in a matter of moments and everyone got to eat their lunch in the dry and in comfort.

The afternoon was inevitably quiet, due to the weather, but in spite of the outdoor activities coming to a halt, a small trickle of visitors still came to see us and enjoy homemade cakes and indoor sessions - and spend some money.

Huge thanks to the many good hearted and hard working CSF volunteers here in Aude Ouest and even bigger thanks to the generosity of all those who visited the event and helped to raise money for CSF.

Our hope is that people went away having enjoyed their visit and knowing a bit more about CSF both locally and generally.

Jo Hayes



We haven't previously included anything specific about cancer in the Newsletter, but it has been suggested that we should do so. Screening for cancer in France and Signs and Symptoms to look out for will be in future editions. This month starts with personal testimony from recent cancer patients in Aude, which gives some useful pointers and guidance for navigating the system.

Lessons learnt from our French cancer treatment journey

And things we wished we had known beforehand

(Patients testimony not representative of CSF)

- Treatment plans and actual side effects can be very different from one cancer patient to another. You may be expecting to lose your hair and save a few euros on a haircut, but it doesn't always happen.
- Recognise that many members of your cancer medical team cannot speak English - don't forget you live in France.
- Prepare for meetings with consultants and specialists. If French is not your first language write the questions in English and then translate.
- Take someone with you to the meetings who can listen, take notes and ask questions that you forget to. It helps if they can speak French. [Cancer Support France \(CSF\)](#) provide this service on request.
- If you are scheduled to have some treatments or check-ups at home you may need to contact your local nurses or district nurses office (*cabinet d'infirmières*).
- Although the specialists counselled against researching cancer on the web, and they are right to a degree, we did and this on the MacMillan and Cancer Research UK sites. It helped us understand the cancer, the questions that should be asked, the possible side effects of both the radiotherapy and the chemotherapy and the longer term consequences. (Never take for granted the accuracy of google searched information.)
- Don't check or focus on survival rates. Try and stay positive even if you are feeling emotional.
- Hospitals can offer counselling and alternative treatments (e.g. massages) to help with side effects.
- Blood tests are normally required before most scans so check with the specialists. If they haven't said anything we would suggest you ask. Make sure you have an prescription (*ordonnance*) for each test.
 - Blood tests before chemo starts and during your treatment, can be carried out at home by a local nurse. Your blood test centre (*laboratoire*) may have already provided you with identification labels .

- Sometimes specialist tests have to be sent to Toulouse or Paris for analysis which can delay the results for a week. It was always best to ask when the results would be available.
- Do upload your blood test results to your “*votre assurance maladie*”, as all specialists can view them, including your own doctor.
- Do check your “*votre assurance maladie*” for notes of the consultations. You will get an email alert if something is added. This is where you can find out what stage your cancer is at, as it wasn’t mentioned at any meeting.
- Keeping a record of how you are feeling after the treatments and identifying side effects and giving details of weight, temperature, etc is important.
- As many of the radiotherapy (*radio*) and chemotherapy (*chimio*) team and nurses didn’t speak any English, and if your French isn’t good enough to really explain what your issues are, produce notes in English and French and then pass them to the team. This helps a lot and we know that the specialists appreciate the notes so they could recommend changes or medications to deal with the side effects.
- Keep to the dietary advice given, e.g more regular smaller meals than the normal 3 meals a day. For one person, a diet during bowel cancer treatment was protein based to reduce weight loss. The advice was not to eat spicy foods, salads and raw vegetables or fruit and no shellfish although fish was OK. But dietary advice should be specific to your cancer, there is no one size fits all approach so just follow the advice of the dietician.
- Cancer is a long-term illness (*affection de longue durée, ALD*). This means that if you have a *Carte Vitale* you will not have to pay for any cancer treatments or related prescriptions. It also means that free transport to the hospital for your tests and treatments can be provided, but you will need an special prescription (*bon de transport*) from your specialist for this.
- If the *ALD* is not automatically processed for you, your specialist or oncologist may give you the paperwork to take to your local doctor (*généraliste*) for signing and submitting to the local health authority. Strangely oncologists are not among the healthcare professionals able to sign this paperwork.
- Try and keep positive and take exercise as much as you are able. Talk about your cancer - it’s not contagious!

Compiled by recent cancer patients in the Aude who have benefitted from CSF support.

CSF have leaflets available at all their events, as well a trained volunteer.

Phone helpline : 0800 240 200

e-mail: helpline@cancersupportfrance.org

A member, Yoshi Terashima, donated some jars of this delicious pickle to the Plant & Produce Fair in April and several people asked for the recipe.

Daikon Tsukemono (Japanese pickled Mooli)

Ingredients

Daikon (Navet blanc, Mooli) 1 medium size roughly 250g

Sugar 30g

Salt 20g

Vinegar 30dl (white balsamic vinegar, rice vinegar, cider vinegar)

Put all ingredients except daikon in a plastic food bag.

Dissolve sugar and salt.

Peel skin and cut the daikon into 5mm slices.

Put the sliced daikon into the plastic bag.

Put the bag in the fridge for approximately 24 hours. Try to take the bag out of the fridge four or five times and shake and squeeze the contents before putting back in the fridge.

Transfer to a jar.

Consume within 1 week.

Ingredients are general quantity,

If you want to reduce or add sugar, salt or vinegar to your preference you can

You can also make it with carrot, cucumber and celery. You may even want to mix them.

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