


DAY 5 – Southward to Limousin under Fog-Softened Skies

 Sunday, 9 November 2025

 Weather: Thick morning fog that hid the landscape until Civaux — but rather than obscuring our journey, it seemed to wrap the world in softness and anticipation, as if the road itself wanted to keep its secrets a little longer.

Leaving Angers in Quiet Mist

We slipped out of Hôtel d'Anjou at 8:30 a.m., the city still wrapped in grey, shutters drawn, the streets hushed. Our coach waited gleaming in the half-light, and our driver, the quietly attentive Jérôme, eased us into motion with calm precision.

The fog was so thick we could barely make out the church spires or the trees along the Loire. But the absence of a view had its own charm — a rare invitation to listen, to think, and to let imagination paint the unseen landscape.

Conversations en Route

Inside the cocoon of our mist-bound bus, conversations took on a softer, more reflective tone.

We began with the story of French education, tracing its roots from Jules Ferry's reforms of the late 19th century — free, secular, and compulsory schooling for all — to today's five-stage system of maternelle, élémentaire, collège, lycée, and supérieur. Gwen evoked the image of the hussars noirs de la République, those "black hussars" of education: stern schoolmasters in black coats who carried the ideals of civic duty, literacy, and moral instruction into every village of the young Republic.

From schools to psychology, we shifted to the French art of saying "no." A recent article had caught Gwen's eye, describing how the French often begin by refusing — not out of negativity, but reflection. Saying non gives time to think, to weigh, to preserve control before offering a measured oui. A linguistic pause, and a cultural one.

Through the mist, flashes of orange appeared — hunters moving across the fields. We discussed the French hunting tradition, both rural ritual and social network: regulated seasons, community breakfasts, and the long-running debate over safety, heritage, and ecology. A timeless tableau, even in near-invisible weather.

By mid-morning, the fog thickened, our view still a white blur. It seemed fitting, then, to tackle another kind of opacity: France's nuclear energy controversial topic. More than 60 % of national electricity still flows from nuclear power — a source of pride for some, controversy for others. The group exchanged questions about safety, waste, and the country's future energy mix, proof that even without scenery, there's no shortage of things to see with the mind.

Entering Emerald Limousin

Just past Civaux, a pale glow began to seep through the mist, and by the time we crossed into Limousin, the fog finally thinned. The world returned in slow motion: first the silhouettes of barns, then red-tiled roofs, then the unmistakable deep-chestnut coats of Limousin cattle grazing on soft green hills.

This was Resistance country, where forests once sheltered the maquis. Gwen spoke about the 1940 demarcation line and the divided loyalties of Vichy France — a prelude, perhaps, to the story we were heading toward.

Oradour-sur-Glane – Remembering to Prevent

By lunchtime, the sun had begun to win its quiet battle with the clouds. Still, a small tension rippled through the group when Gwen worried the restaurant had forgotten us — the doors were locked, the lights out. A few moments later, relief: the owners had simply locked the doors to open the restaurant just for us.

We soon settled in to a warm meal of beef cheeks or salmon, followed by crêpe Suzette or profiteroles, dishes that felt almost symbolic of comfort after the morning's obscurity. Laughter returned easily, and with it, the hum of conversation.

Then came silence again — this time, chosen. We walked to the martyr village, where the story of 10 June 1944 still hangs in the air. On that day, an SS division massacred 643 villagers and burned their town to the ground. Charles de Gaulle later ordered the ruins left untouched, a permanent memorial to the cost of forgetting.

The Centre de la Mémoire was closed for renovation, so we walked directly into the preserved village itself — now open under bright, gentle sunlight. The weather, so different from the usual rain that veils this place, seemed to throw every detail into sharper relief: the rusted sewing machine on a table, the melted bell in the church tower, the tram tracks leading nowhere. Nature had begun to reclaim some spaces, grass softening the edges of stone, yet nothing could blunt the weight of that silence.

No one hurried. Every step felt deliberate, as if walking not through ruins but through a collective vow. When we finally regrouped at the entrance, words felt too fragile for the moment. The sunlight lingered over the village — peaceful, but unforgetting.

Home-Hosted Evenings in Heritage Homes

As evening approached, we divided into smaller circles, each bound for a different guesthouse. Some of us settled at L'Ancien Couvent des Carmes with Ika and David, others at Château de Ribagnac with Colette and Patrick, or Le Jardin des Lys with Delphine and Andy.

Each home carried its own rhythm — stone walls that once echoed with prayers or harvest songs, tables laden with regional dishes, laughter blending with the clink of glasses. The warmth of conversation rose easily, stories flowed, and the day's heaviness gave way to something gentler: gratitude, connection, and the quiet privilege of being welcomed into real homes.

The day began in fog and ended in light — a journey from the unseen to the unforgettable. We had travelled not just across France, but through layers of its memory: education, energy, endurance, and empathy.

Tomorrow would bring new landscapes, but tonight, in the heart of Limousin, we rested in stillness — reminded that even the quietest days can leave the deepest imprint.

Bonne nuit, et à demain.