

We were passing through a beautiful French mediaeval village, well I say passing, tentatively inching forward would be more precise. Having taken a side turning a few minutes before, we found ourselves in a positive warren of ever narrowing streets. We looked in vain for a clue as to which way we were supposed to go to get onto a major road. Worryingly as both Bri who was driving, and I could easily reach out to touch the warm, honey coloured stone walls of the buildings we were passing, our major concern was not to get our caravan wedged tight.

The road ahead branched into three equally picturesque, narrow, cottage lined lanes. Which one to take? Turning around if we chose wrongly, was not going to be an option and the thought of reversing through the meanders we'd already navigated brought me out in a cold sweat, and I was only the co-pilot!

Suddenly a person appeared. Hopefully help was at hand.

"Pardon, monsieur. Est-ce que vous nous aidez, sil vous plait? Nous irons a Beynac." The small, wiry man who turned towards us had a battered felt hat, with a red feather that had seen better days, tilted to keep the sun from his deeply lined, mahogany coloured face. He had an unlit cigarette in his left hand and a pile of brightly coloured fliers tucked under his right arm, which ended abruptly at his elbow.

He ambled towards us with a slightly halting gait, then looking us over intently he smiled revealing gapped, mottled teeth. As he came to the side of the car he flourished his cigarette, unmistakably requesting a light. Bri offered him the car cigarette lighter. He placed the cigarette between his lips, carefully accepted the lighter and puffed away for a few moments until he was satisfied it was successfully alight. Then returning the lighter whilst keeping the cigarette clamped firmly between his teeth, he handed one of his flyers over, before starting off down the road on the left, waving his arm to indicate we were to follow him.

Reluctantly we set off in his wake. He walked slowly, so we crept along after him in first gear, anxiously checking the close fitting walls we were traveling past. After about fifty yards he indicated we were going right. Unfortunately the road sign was canted slightly away from us as we turned, so we didn't realise until we were firmly committed that we were about to go the wrong way down a one way street.

The next hundred yards were hard. Bri was muttering various imprecations under his breath whilst I was trying to frame a suitable excuse should anyone official, like the police municipale, or heaven forbid, the gendarmerie, take exception to our motoring misdemeanour. Unfortunately I knew it would end up as a mixture of badly phrased Franglais. Silently I prayed they were elsewhere that morning.

The road started to widen and at last we began to encounter people. Our guide was obviously thrilled to gain an audience and he immediately slowed down still further and started to distribute his fliers as fast as his one arm could manage.

I glanced at the paper he had thrust through our window. The bright red and yellow colour scheme, had a large clown and a lion's head roaring through a flaming hoop. It was advertising Cirque Zavatta open from 2.00pm that afternoon, on land next to the sports ground.

Just then, to my relief, I became aware of a sign post just ahead pointing the way to 'Toutes Directions'. Almost instantaneously I realised the people our guide had encountered were smiling and waving at us in a rather strange way. A wave of mortification overwhelmed me as I realised we had inadvertently joined the circus and were thought to be part of the advertising procession.

"C'est la route ca." Our guide gestured in the direction we needed with a flamboyant wave of his hat.

"Merci beaucoup monsieur," I replied, as Bri handed over some coins to his obvious delight and so we departed, to my intense relief.