

## Mascaret 01

As I hurled myself into the murky waters of the Dorodgne, I was halted in my tracks by a cracking noise. I knew the inevitable outcome, but with hundreds of spectators watching over me around the jetty, I felt too embarrassed to check whether my fins were still intact after colliding with the submerged rocks. Besides, we were in a serious hurry, and Wizard was already stroking away into the distance. A verily large crowd of water users were already waiting over the two kilometre St Pardon stretch, and we wanted to get down to the top bend before the Mascaret arrived. Marco, our trusty captain, had organised a taxi, and got us back to St Pardon with utmost haste, but we had miscalculated the ETA of the tide, which was due at any minute. Out of sight of the onlookers, I flipped my board and was aghast to see that I now only had one of my tri fins remaining! But with the Mascaret rounding the top bend ahead of me there was no time to panic.

Exhausted from the paddle downstream, I sought a gap in the multitude of surfers, swung my board round and stroked hard. As I popped to my feet for my first ride at St Pardon in three tides, who should be on my outside but a recuperated Silver Surfer. On my inside was a huge oaf we had not seen before, with his shortie hangin down, demanding *a gauche*, to which I refused to respond, especially with Silver holding his ground on the left. Negotiating one fin was hard enough, and I didn't want to tangle with this Laird look-a-like either, so as we approached marker 12, and I spotted the second wave walling up, I kicked out, lay prone and paddled hard. But it was to no avail as I slipped over the back of the wall, only to be scooped up by a steep three foot face on the third wave. This was more like it, and having the wave to myself, I was able to trim across the face, cut back, put in a bottom turn, and eventually kick out to again be picked up by the fifth wave. Now I was really stoked, so much so that I failed to see the paddler in front of me as I ran aground on his head! Silver also scored some of the following waves, and Wizard, who also encountered *Mr Hamilton* and his zebedee action, succeeded in avoiding an untimely fate, and rode the second wave right up to the jetty where he pulled out for the next stage of our race to the Garonne.

It was so exciting running up the jetty past the crowds as the other surfers just stood around, and fighting our way through the multitude of dispersing spectators, knowing that the fun hadn't finished yet for us. We were strapping the boards onto the rack, when Philippe suddenly appeared through the foray. He was going to be absent on our final morning, and had commitments to his girlfriend that night, so had come to say farewell. Charged with adrenaline from the ride, I gave him a huge hug, we all proclaimed our deepest gratitudes, and we were off hurtling down the country lanes.

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I had decided there was going to be enough light to film again, and so, having conquered Spot X and the Garonne river that morning, I fumbled around in the back organising the camcorder, as Wizard spun us along the rickety French lanes. As we rounded a bend in the small village of Creon, we suddenly ran into Philippe's car. He had decided to put his girlfriend on hold for half an hour to join us for one last wave. The irony was that he was unsure of the correct route having only surfed at X a couple of times, and so after a brief discussion followed us. Now we felt like experienced Mascaret riders, because, after all, we were leading the locals to their own breaks!



Sadly my judgement was erroneous, and as I clambered along a barbed fishing platform to an advantageous filming spot, the evening light started to slip away, making the footage somewhat dark and hazy. I did, however, get a pretty clear view of another perfectly hollow four foot barrel, as Silver this time snuck outside Fabrice and his brother Anthony to ride the shoulder. It was Wizard who again rode the furthest, just stepping out onto the muddy bank as the wave backed off.

Some elderly French locals were somewhat taken aback as I came clambering out of the undergrowth, still donned in my wetsuit, announcing 'au revoir, ca va?!' in my stoke-fuelled delirious state. They just shrugged at one another and mumbled 'anglais!' Walking back to the other bank to rejoin the others, I passed Philippe and said another brief farewell as he hurtled off to meet his waiting girlfriend, somewhat later than planned. The previous night we had been cordially invited to Henri and Anne's house for a meal, and a freshen up. It was the first shower we had had all week, and I knew I needed it! Finally and reluctantly, I resorted to burying my tour tee-shirt in the depths of my ruck-sack and selecting some clean garb for the evening's dinner.



The hospitality to which we were treated was quite simply *magnifique*, and the added presence of Bruno and photographer Isabelle demonstrated the ubiquitous unity of the Mascaret riders. For Henri, Anne and their children are all boat users - kayaks, canoes and wave-skis. A unison of board riders together, something that has always been unfortunately absent on the Severn, where much rivalry exists between the different camps. Anne had cooked up another delectable French feast, with a delicious local *canard* dish, that had been prepared slowly, stewed in it's own juices with salt. This was complemented by a vegetable broth, legumes, and a lemon pie for desert, which all kept the Wizard well satiated. We feasted and delved further into the Mascaret, as Henri pointed out numerous spots where he had ridden the wave over his twenty year career, on both the Dordogne and Garonne. The presence of a french-english dictionary maintained conversation as we chatted into the early hours, and watched back some of the footage from the week on their television. Before we left, Henri presented us each with a bottle of Bordeaux wine, from his vast cellar under his daughter's bedroom. We also purchased another case to present as gifts to the other friends we had made during our stay.



And so, refreshed from our relaxed evening in comfort, on Friday 21st of September, with the morning light breaking over the horizon, we paddled downstream for our last ride at St Pardon. This was really our own personal farewell to the Mascaret, and we each did it in our unique ways. With minimal crowds and clear sight, Silver and I cruised several of the following waves, putting in as many manouveres as possible before they finally ran out of energy, clocking up our longest rides of the week. Wizard rode the same distance he had done on the evening he arrived, finally coming off the wave over a kilometre beyond St Pardon. As I toweled myself down on the bank, I was treated to the most glorious sunrise. A deep orange penetrating the skyline and breaching the thin line of overhanging altocumulus, bringing a renewed source of energy to this quaint river port, where nothing is done in a hurry. I also managed to capture the smiles of my comrades as they walked out of the river, radiating their own illuminous glow of stoke.

With a bitter taste of sadness in the back of my throat, I packed up my sleeping bag. We said our farewells to Christian, our landlord, and Ani, offering them both a bottle of wine as a token of our gratitude. I also passed on our thanks to Coco, who I had developed a personal rapport with during the week, and was sadly absent at our time of departure playing football for Vayres. Prior to leaving Bordeaux, we made the obligatory stop at the *Supermarche* to stock up on presents, tobacco and, of course, giant *pain au chocolat*.

We had a long journey ahead of us back to Cherbourg, and then across the Channel and homeward to Gloucestershire. But the journey gave plenty of time to reminisce. We had been welcomed into a local French community with genuine kindness and made many new friends. We had experienced the picturesque countryside that surrounds the meandering Dordogne and Garonne rivers, and we had finally surfed the renowned Mascaret. The trip had been a success! The faces, the stories, the food and the wine would remain with us for a long time to come, and the local's doors were open wide for us to return anytime. We hoped that perhaps, in the near future, we could return the gestures by welcoming the Mascaret riders to our own soil, to experience our own community and surf our own tidal bore.....

Philippe, Fabrice, Bruno, Henri, Anne, Ani, Christian, Coco, Pierre, Pascal, Daniel, Lionel, Kiki, Isabelle, Marco, Roger, Jean-Francois, Anthony, Alex, Marco, Florence, the *Association* and everyone else we met, thank you all very much...!

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