

A Saturday in Péchabou: The marché au gras

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– Natalie Pope



Dickinson students and their stand at the marché au gras de Péchaou

Saturday November 14th, Dickinson in France traveled to the small village of Pechabou for their 20th Marché de Gras. This event showcases fresh products such as fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and of course foie gras! Everything was homemade, made by hand, by the residents of the area. In addition, all the students of Dickinson in France, even Mme Raynaud and Julia, made a dessert for us all to sell at the market. Throughout the day, I was reminded of markets and fall festivals at home, but I also noticed many cultural differences between this one and that.

We started the day at our table to sell our cakes and cookies that we had all made. We offered a true variety of cookies, brownies, cereal-marshmallow bars, and of course a few cakes. At first, it was really difficult to explain our American recipes to the French, but I found that they were in general all very interested. Maybe it's a generalization, but I think that at American bake sales people are more likely to buy cakes and sweets that are familiar, but I found that that wasn't the case at Pechabou. The majority of people who passed by us seemed happy to interact and listen to our explanations of American recipes and even more about our experiences in Toulouse.

At noon, we shared a meal with the other people who had come to shop at the market. A very French menu, it consisted of lots of duck, fresh vegetables, and the very good dish called aligot. To explain to the American audience, aligot is a hot plate made of a mix of pureed potatoes, cheese, and garlic. Next to a duck sausage, you have an authentic taste of the Midi-Pyrénées, but the real experience was eating with the people of Pechabou. At my table, we shared a bottle of water, which initiated conversations between everyone. I found that even

the people much older than us, the students, were very excited to meet us and ask us questions about our studies.

Sharing was a theme that came up throughout our experiences that day. At lunch, we shared a bottle of water with our neighbors, and they offered to share some cookies that they had bought. Also, our neighbors at our table offered us a bottle of wine to thank us for being there, even after they had bought some of our cakes! I was very impressed by their generosity and interest in meeting us, which reminded me a lot of American small towns. The culture of Pechabou was really different from Toulouse as a whole, just as small towns in the United States are so different from New York. All in all, I'm very glad that we had this chance to experience a whole other side of Toulouse.