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It has by now become a tradition for the U.C.C. Geography Department to hold a foreign field trip during the Easter break. This year the destination was La Rochelle, a town situated roughly one hundred miles north of Bordeaux on the Atlantic sea-board of France. The group departed on Saturday 21st of March led by the legendary Drs. Flanagan and Devoy.

We departed from Ringaskiddy at nine o' clock p.m., rumour had it that Dr. O'Flanagan had 'missed the boat' but this, as it turned out, was not true. It was all 'plain sailing' except that some had a beverage too many, some suffered from 'malade de la mer' and others being unsociable (sensibly so) went to bed early. The crossing was exceptionally calm and the ferry docked in Roscoff at 2.30 p.m. the following afternoon. After disembarking and following the usual formalities of customs we were greeted by our bus-driver for the week, Joeseph, a native of Roscoff.

The characteristic boccage landscape of Brittany was evident along our route: houses with steep gable ends, intensive market gardening, and the very distinctive nucleated settlement pattern. After a rather tiring bus journey we arrived in La Rochelle at eleven o' clock that night.

The main aim of the field-work was to study both the historical background of La Rochelle and it's contemporary state. In the past it had been a major Atlantic trading city. It's function in recent times, however, has changed, our main interest was to find out how the city itself and the area in general had adapted to it's new role.

On day one we vistited Bordeaux where our hosts were the history and Geography Departments of the University of Bordeaux. Bordeaux is extremely well connected to the remainder of France. One of the main groups to settle in the area were the English and the port initially thrived on the export of wine. With the opening of the New World it's position on the Atlantic sea-board was further strengthened as it began to link up with the West Indies and America. Following the French Revolution, the trade networks were severely disrupted and Bordeaux lost much of it's former importance. Today, the port of Bordeaux has declined and is left with only a relict function. In contemporary terms however Bordeaux is a thriving centre of commerce. Tourism has also become important to the area. The city centre reflects largely the city's past with it's narrow streets and old buildings. These have now been transformed into shopping areas, bars and restaurants. Before leaving for La Rochelle we were given a tour of 'Chateau - Haut - Brion a renowned vineyard and each received a glass of wine with the compliments of the house.

The next few days were spent in La Rochelle and it's hinterland. Like Bordeaux, La Rochelle is a city with a long tradition of marine associated activites. The town originated as a trading centre and up to the time of the French Revolution, as with Bordeaux, trading activities thrived. From the eighteenth century on, however, France

lost her colonies and La Rochelle was left with nothing but her fishing industry. Except for a boom period for the fishing industry in the early twentieth century, the port went into decline and fishing itself began to decline due to over-fishing, a lack of modernisation and a lack of dredging in the harbour. Despite the construction of a new port traffic is limited.

As the city declined and the level of unemployment increased, the area turned to tourism as a means of economic survival. Today tourism is perhaps the single most important activity in La Rochelle and the surrounding area. The importance of tourism was evident in the land use patterns of the towns. In smaller coastal towns sixty kilometres from La Rochelle camping and recreational facilities were of a high standard. Landscaping, which was evident in all the towns, added greatly to their scenic attraction. Shops were small but specialised, geared to meet the tourist's needs. The area seems to have been quite successful in supplementing its economy by developing the tourist industry.

On Thursday night we had our final round of beverages in what had by now become our 'local'. On Friday morning we set out on our journey back to Roscoff. This time we travelled on the coast road making stops at Carnague along with two other towns. After a meal in Roscoff we headed for the terminal and boarded the ferry. Apart from a force nine gale, a consequently rough sea and constant queue of sea-sick companions, the homeward trip was rather uneventful.

As the sea calmed, most of us were glad to see the Irish coastline appear on the horizon. On behalf of the 1987 La Rochelle field group I would like to thank Drs. Flanagan and Devoy for the great effort which they made in organising and making the field week a great success.