

WEEKLY NEWS

Craig | Joanne | Peanut

Stained Glass in Noto's old cathedral



Balance & Harmony

This week feels really good. We're naturally getting up at sunrise and managing to have a shower, get dressed and have breakfast without an ouch or a tut. Bruised toes are becoming a thing of the past and living in Homer is becoming easier. We are moving out of each others way without thinking about it and its making life a lost easier. This means we're ready to start the day by 8am and therefore make the most of what lies ahead. Also we've had a good balance of time with a few days in and around towns then a few days at the beach. I've managed to chill and read (finally) whilst Craig's switched off and organised the photo's and movies. Peanuts also nicely chilled and content with his new range of Aldi dog biscuits.



Misc



Wednesday 28th May: Avola to Noto

Last night was interesting. Craig went to bed early and I stayed up to watch some documentary on US war crimes. The read up sounded pretty good but it turned out to be as dull as dish water, so the slightest noise outside caught my attention. As I mentioned this place is full of teenagers and as soon as dark fell, like cockroaches they came out of every crook and cranny. The one's arriving by car parked up and straddled the 1st scooter in sight. Then they zoomed up and down the coastal road or side streets until they spotted a potential partner and then did a quick change over before heading off to find a quieter spot. Quieter being under one of the coastal trees or between two parked cars. The highlight of the night was the chap who arrived on his own. He drove up the street to find a parking spot about 3/4 the way down he all of a sudden slammed in to reverse. Like a screaming maniac he reversed back up the street, in anything but a straight line and did a sort of hand brake turn in to a small parking slot. Only it wasn't a small parking spot, it was taken by a little black Panda parked between two people carrier vehicles. Crunch. He jumped out the car in complete amazement. He stared at the car for ages whilst scratching his head, he couldn't believe what happened. The look on his face was so funny. He really believed that the little Panda had dropped out of the sky. Fortunately with all the scooter noise no one heard the smash and his ego was left in tact. A quick glance around, he kicked his own car as if to say you bloody stupid car, why did you do that and jumped back in his car and drove off. Guessing he went home with his tail between his legs!

By early morning we were in the centre of Avola. Not for any other reason that Peanut had chucked up on the bed, which caused a flurry of early morning activity as we quickly ditched the bedding in a bucket of water.

We had a quick cycle around Avola town but it was pretty small and not much to see. On the way back an old chap stopped me to look at our Brompton bikes. We did a demo and he was amazed. He wanted one. He spoke no English and we spoke no Italian but somehow we managed to have a half decent conversation and he even offered to take us to Noto for free. What a lovely gentleman.



We took a spectacular winding road up to Cava Grande nature reserve and gorge. We were one of the 1st to arrive and it didn't open for another half an hour, so good time to have breakfast. We kitted ourselves up and put on our hiking boots and packed plenty of water. Unfortunately the walk was too rough for

Great Nephews

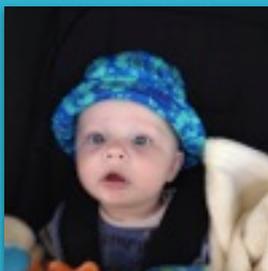
I got to log on and see some photo's of my 2nd great nephew, Lucas. Born on 25th May, a few weeks early but just like his ma and pa he is fit, healthy and beautiful.



Oliver on the other hand was too busy enjoying himself in his new carrier, which will of course become the new portable paddling pool in the very near future.



However, he did get to say a few words before he went off to catch some rays "Hey bud, welcome to the clan. I was hoping you'd be a full on ginger then I could pick up. Anyway I am 6 months older and my mum gave me permission to duff you up when I get the chance. She reckons it is sweet revenge for your dad picking on her."



Peanut, so we had to leave him with Homer. We logged in with the gate keeper, read the danger list and off we set. It's like the grand canyon with sheer rock walls and inviting river way down yonder.



You start at the top and clamber your way down a very steep path. Its a natural path with steps cut out the rock or fallen boulders that act as steps. The steps are very



steep and I don't recall any notice saying "all short arses beware". Craig seemed to just stride his way down whilst I had to get on my hands and knees. It was blinking hard work. Craig was adamant the steps were OK to just slowly stride down and me being a gullible sort believed him. After about 3 steps I nearly killed myself. The step was that high that my foot hit my arse and like a spring board jettisoned me half way down the bloody valley. Thankfully no one around, so I dusted myself down and carried on. I reverted back to the bum slide method, it was safer. The opposite valley wall had a

number of caves that were no longer accessible

All the way along the path are different trees and wild plants, which makes the walk very beautiful but fraught with danger. The insect world decided my sweaty body was much more attractive than the sweet nectar. Every 2 minutes, I was eeeaaahhing and hitting myself senseless. After an hour and a half we finally reached the bottom. Was it worth it? Yes it was, it was just one of the most beautiful





settings ever. The river flows through the valley and about half way it has created these tiered pools of flowing water. The pools of water are different colours of blue and green and look very breath taking against deep vertical rock walls. We walked down as far as we could, clinging on to tiny ledges and wading through water. We wanted to jump in but the water was freezing, so we opted for dunking our feet instead. It was nice down here and only half a dozen people it made the place feel special. On the way back up we met a 5 people from Lancaster - they were scientists out in Sicily for a week doing a bit of research. The trek up was hard work but the thought of chicken and chips for lunch kept me going. The 11km round trip down 400 ft valley was certainly an active day.

We couldn't really stop at the reserve, so we took the single track road around the top of the valley. It was so quiet up here and beautiful. At one point, we pulled in to check the route and I spotted a really old Alfa Romeo in excellent condition. Craig on the other hand spotted a sign post with bullet holes. I was feeling very chilled until he said that and then all of a sudden I thought, Mafia. Maybe this is the place they shoot everyone and chuck their bodies down the gorge. Maybe a night of isolation up here is not such a good idea.



We drove to Noto Antica, which is basically an abandoned town with loads of ruins. On the way down an Italian family had parked up on the corner of a steep, single track road. As we approached they sat in the car and looked at us. Clearly we couldn't squeeze through but you could tell they didn't want to move. As we edge up to their car and they could see we weren't going to turn around and find an alternative route, they finally moved the car. They moved it all of 2 feet to a point where we had to inch our way through. Lazy bugger wouldn't drive another couple of extra feet to the lay-by. We had a good old rant about Italian drivers before getting out and exploring the entrance to the ruins. We didn't stay too long and although this place is steeped in history, it just wasn't grabbing our attention. Back in Homer and we set off just in time. Both of us were like giddily



school children. Go Go Go. Craig even put his foot down to set off a little quicker. The family that would not move their car were now stuck behind us on a single track road. We drove at a snails pace for a good half an hour and together we enjoyed our sweet revenge, laughing at the raging family behind. That will teach them to be more courteous.



We still needed to wash the bedding, so we found a family run campsite just outside Noto. €13 per night which included the brother running you in to town and picking you up as many times a day as you wanted. The campsite spots were segregated by lemon and lime trees and you could pick as many as you wanted. There were only a handful of motorhomes and with so many spots to chose from, Craig drove round several times. Each time the other motorhomes wondering what the heck we were doing. Craig as usual was sussing the best spot for shade, sun and of course level ground. Craig has to be perfectly level otherwise it messes his head. He even has a spirit level tucked in his drivers door. One day I am going to pinch his bubble.

We found our spot, filled in the paperwork, put all the washing in the buckets for an overnight soak and then got out the BBQ. Homer sat admiring his neighbour, a huge motorhome called MAN. He sure towered over Homer but by gosh I wouldn't like to pay the petrol bill.



Thursday 29th May: Noto

Another day of cleaning. To make it fun we turned up the tunes and shuffled around humming away to a variety of tunes. I cleaned inside and Craig did outside and between us with did the washing. It felt like we had loads of washing. I was pegging out some washing and all of a sudden I had a flash back to my teenage days. I remember mum showing me how to hang out clothes for optimum drying time and minimal creases. As I pegged out each item of clothing I could hear her voicing telling me how to hang it. It was a nice moment and filled me with warm feelings. Gosh I miss mum so much, think I will call her later.



We were busy making the bed, which is no easy task when the bed is suspended from the ceiling when Peanut started whinging. We'd left him outside in the shade, so he didn't get under foot. We shouted to him to be quiet but no, he kept on whinging. Eventually, we went outside to shut him up only to discover he'd tied himself up in knots. Not any ordinary knot, oh no, he'd somehow managed to wrap his lead around his little

winkle and every time he tried to move it just got tighter. Poor Peanut was in pain but he was also dying for a pee. Craig rescued him and after a much awaited pee, he was back to happy doggie mode.

One of our neighbours is a chap from Holland. He came over to have a chat with Craig and by god he just sounded like Sean Connery. I had a quick glance through the window and he even looked like him! He was a really pleasant chap and he told us about some secluded beaches in the south.

Other than cleaning not much to report. Oh I nearly forgot, this made me chuckle. Our bed is located above the two front seats and at night you simply fold the chairs forward, unclip and pull the bed down. Its a great idea and keeps everything tucked away nice and neat. Craig closed all the blinds, had a shower and then pulled the bed down. However, he hadn't quite folded the drivers seat correctly and when the bed dropped down, it pressed on the chair which in turn pressed on the horn. It made him jump out of his skin

but more that that he could get the bed back and the horn just keep honking. There he was in his birthday suit flapping around trying to shut Homer up.

Friday 30th May: Noto



This morning we got Antonio to run us in to Noto. Its a lovely town, full of limestone buildings and quaint little streets. Over the years they have carefully restored all the limestone buildings, so everything looks new and clean. It works on somethings but in the churches, I prefer it when it original as it adds to the feel and character. We spent all day just cycling around going in and out of churches and museums. For lunch we went in to one of the cafes at the side of the main piazza. Craig had pizza and I had seafood risotto. Very good. Not long after we sat down, a large

group of teenagers sat down to dine. They were very well behaved and clearly enjoyed their food.

As we wandered back through the cobbled streets, I heard English voices. Craig had gone for a mad cycle up a steep road, so I stopped the bike and discretely listened. Sure enough a middle aged couple were strolling by. She was talking gibberish to her husband, Richard. She needed to buy some more tights for under her trousers. She didn't like to go bare foot



because the heat made her feet sweat and mark her new sandals. Richard was clearly not listening to a word and every so often he just smiled and nodded. Richard was more interested in the young totty sat on the museum steps. It then dawned on me, we're probably

similar in age but clearly our outlook and approach to life was years apart. Pop socks are much more stylish than tights lol. Back at the campsite we got bit to death, damn mosquitos. These huge bites will last for ages. I really wished citronella worked outside. I finished update no 8 (several days to update) as well as name all the photos.

Craig fell asleep again in the chair but this time he woke up wanting to



sweep up the dog. I asked him what he was on about, he wanted to make sure it was tidy for the Africans. God knows what he was dreaming about.

Saturday 31st May: Noto to Marzamemi

We paid Antonio our camping fees, filled Homer up with water and then went on the hunt for GPL. We were told the closest station is back in Avola but we found GPL just outside of Noto. Yippee that means we save about an hour searching for gas. As we pulled in the petrol station Happy by Pharell was playing on the Ipod. I was sat in the front seat, feet on the dash with my toes dancing away. As Craig stepped out of Homer, I cranked up the volume and started to do a bum shuffle dance. Its such a great feel good summer song. As I looked toward the pump a Sicilian guy was toe tapping and nodding his head to the beat. Every so often he stopped and peered over his sunglasses to check no one was looking then carried on discretely enjoying the beat. I am not sure he needed sunglasses as he had a cracking bushy monobrow that provided ample shade for his upper body never mind his eyes. By the time we left about half a dozen Sicilian drivers all doing their own little jig...and if your happy lalalala. We hit the southern coast in search of a hidden gem. This part of Sicily is undeveloped and full of excellent coastal villages and beach coves.

As we drove to the coast we passed a number of large properties. They clearly belonged to the wealthy Sicilians and they were situated in a beautiful but remote countryside. It was difficult to see all of the property due to high walls and security devices surrounding the property. Some of the properties even had double security gates. We drove right to the South cape of Sicily...next country is Africa!

We pulled in at Noto Marina and what a charming little place. Unfortunately we couldn't find anywhere to park as a local wedding attracted crowds (and cars) from miles around. We travelled a couple of miles along the coast and we pulled in to Marzamemi. At the entrance we passed a number of small two storey apartments, which looked like summer or weekend places. After the apartments came the marina full of mid range yachts. I am guessing is a little retreat for the rich Sicilian



families.

We

parked on the side of the marina on a little sandy beach area. After half an hour we'd had enough. It was hot but windy and the fine sand was blowing everywhere in Homer. We'd just spent a day cleaning and certainly didn't fancy spending any more time trying to get rid of sand, so we moved to the other side of the marina. Newly laid sandstone flags were must more Homer and dog friendly. We pulled out the deck chairs and enjoyed an afternoon of reading and watching the world go by. By 4pm Craig was bored to tears and he disappeared in to Homer. You guessed it, he'd been tinkering. He'd made basil our plant a new home and relocated Pooh Bear, Tigger, Daisy and Freman. To be fair it looked good. He'd also made dinner, fresh lasagne and garlic bread. For anyone who doesn't know Craig he is a fantastic cook and makes everything from scratch. His bread is wonderful and constantly contributes to my ever expanding waistline. Craig served dinner with a nice glass of red just as the sun was setting over the marina. Truly a lovely chilled evening.

Sunday 1st June: Marzamemi to Marza

We woke nice and early just in time for sunrise. Sunday is cycling day across Italy and quite often they close the towns and villages to traffic to host the weekly event, so we made a dash before the cone people arrived. We travelled along the deserted coastal road and what a Sunday drive. They say its the journey that counts and not the destination and today that is especially true. It was like driving through a huge market garden.



Firstly fields upon fields of orange trees then vineyards then loads of poly tunnels with the famous Sicilian tomatoes. Occasionally you came across the odd kilometre of allotments which provided an array of colour from their small but extensive variety of produce. The strawberries and anchovies proved popular the further south we travelled. We also passed marsh land with all sorts of birds and wildlife but for us marshland is a no go area. They prove to be a favourite hatching place for mosquitos and the little devils have had their fair share of our blood this week. At that moment, my 1001 bites all started to itch at once. God they itch like mad once they start. I know you shouldn't scratch them but when the little buggers have chewed you all over it drives you mad. I was going nuts scratching and in complete desperation a grabbed a bit of basil and rubbed it on a bite. I rubbed until the sap released from the leaf and to my amazement it stopped itching. That was it, I covered myself in basil sap, it was heaven.

We drove through a little village in the hope we would find a bakery but it was too early for the shops. The church was interesting with a metal swordfish on top of the spire. We tried to drive back to take a photo but the one way system sent us in the opposite direction, so we skipped the town and carried on. Eventually we pulled up at a little campsite in the middle of no where. It has room for about 4 motorhomes and is straight on the beach. Craig asked how much, €12 a night, which will do us just fine and we parked up Homer. I went to complete the paperwork and asked Michel the owner if we could have a discount if we didn't use the electric. He chuckled and said no. I looked at him all shy and he said OK, €10. At that moment, I looked at my arms and saw green blobs. I was covered in random green measles all over my arms and legs. Michel frowned and asked if I was OK. I wasn't sure, I felt OK but the green blobs said I should feel ill. Next minute I was on the floor pinned down by a huge dog. Michel smiled and said "Meet Willy, he is OK. You like?" The huge, brown heinz 57 variety was clearly bred with a great dane. Willy was sure friendly and enjoyed slavering all over me. As I got to my knees and wiped the dog



spit off my face, I realised my green spots were disappearing. It was at that point I remembered about basil, it was blinking basil juice. Willy kindly escorted me by the arm back to Homer but Peanut didn't approve of our guest and told Willy to do one.

We spent the day on the beach enjoying a warm but overcast day. Peanut even dipped his paws in the ocean, not by choice of course. Towards the end of the day we had a short cycle along the coast road before heading back for a shower. We also soaked our feet (like two old folk) as they get really dirty with wearing flip-flops all day. Craig also opted for get rid of his hard skin by using a vegetable peeler. Yes you heard me correct, I vegetable peeler to scrap the skin off his feet. He never ceases to amuse me at times, who in their right mind thinks to use a kitchen utensil on their feet.

Monday 2nd June: Marza to Modica

The weather has turned again and it is really windy. Yesterday the kids were playing in the turquoise calm sea and today you could hold a surfing competition. We had hoped to stay here for a few days but didn't see the point of paying camping fees to just sit in Homer. So we got ready, said good bye to Willie & Co and set off down the coast. Its a shame cause its really nice and friendly here and certainly recommend it to another passing this way.



The coastal road is so quiet. Literally nothing here but the odd house every so often. We stopped at number of villages and had a wander. It was so quiet and then we realised it it was a bank holiday and everyone was celebrating with their families.

I was pretty tired due to a bad nights sleep (itchy arms, mum you know what I mean), so I had 40 winks whilst Craig went for a walk in the rock pools. I remember doing a right big snore and making me jump out my skin. Lucky enough I was well dopey and nodded straight back to sleep. After an hour (ish) we moved on to Seimpre but we couldn't find any shelter and the wind was just battering poor Homer. Nothing for it, head to Modica. The fridge is empty, so makes sense to head to the supermarket, stock up and then we are ready to explore Modica first thing in the morning.



€87 lighter but fridge, freezer and cupboards bulging we went in search of a parking spot for the night. It was pretty busy in the town centre but we managed to find a great spot just 1km from the centre. We parked up and then cooked dinner - steak and chips! it was so good, I enjoyed every bit just leaving a little crispy fat and steak juice for Peanut.

Tuesday 3rd June: Modica

We opened the blinds and the 1st thing we noticed was the sand and dust. Homer was absolutely covered in filth from yesterdays wind. At some point we'll need to hose his down but not today.

After a bowl of yogurt and granola we cycled off to see Modica. Its a UNESCO site and well deserved. Its the size of a big town and there is an old section which it on top of the hill and a new section which is at the bottom. If you stand back from the town you can see the zig zag road that winds through up to the San Giorgio Church. It was a slog to get the San Giorgio and the outside was certainly more impressive than the in. They are doing some restoration but the pale blue walls with over weight stone & gold leaf cherubs makes the overall interior look a little tacky. Outside is the complete opposite with grand stairs leading up to the impressive dome entrance. From here you get fantastic views of the town and in many ways it looks quite medieval. Cycling down is much easier than cycling up and having the wind blow in your face is a just a wonderful



feeling especially when its hot and sticky. We zig zagged our way down through tiny cobbled streets and admired the lovely little balconies covered in summer begonia's all of which were supported by frightening gargoyles and weird beasts. At the bottom we peaked in to San Pietro , which was a lot nicer inside. Found it slightly strange they had a casket with the bones and ash of some historic priest. Catholics only believe in burial, so not sure why this priest was cremated?





Now for the moment I'd been waiting for...chocolate. We wandered around and found Antica Dolceria Bonajuto up a tiny back street. The oldest chocolate manufacturer in Modica, Keith you'd have loved it. Craig took a pew outside (wise move) whilst I went in to dribble. I opened the door and as soon as the old fashioned door bell (bell on pulley) chimed, I entered another world. It was like stepping back in time to a wonderful time, igniting all my senses to when I was a child. At the counter an umpa lumpa serving all sorts of goodies. It wasn't really but the intense smell of chocolate just made me think of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. On the counter, little silver and pot bowls with all the different chocolate types and flavours. I many varieties they had in total...circa 30 and I Lemon, ginger, vanilla, pepper, 100%, 80% etc etc.



don't know how sampled everyone. My favourite 1880, which happens to be the original recipe from when the

shop opened in 1880. I also opted for a 70% bar which wasn't quite as harsh as the 100%. Modica chocolate is famous because it is made from only cacao and sugar, no diary. It is a little grainy at first but once the cacao warms to body temperature, it just melts all over your mouth, leaving a



lovely taste and desire for more. By the time I had finished scoffing all the samples I felt rather sick but equally very satisfied. The lady at the counter wore a gleaming white overall and talked endlessly and passionately about chocolate. Someone shouted to her from the back and she opened the door behind the counter. The kitchen! I could see several people making all the chocolate, all with traditional methods. It was wonderful. 1 hour later I went outside 1 stone heavier to be reacquainted with my lovely hubby.





Right now we are sat in Homer and parked on what we call market street. All around us are market stalls selling their local produce. Most of it we know but there are some varieties that we have no idea what they are. It is also strange to see vegetables 'unprepared'. At home, we mainly shop at the supermarket and they often cut off the bits you don't eat but here they leave everything on. It is like a guessing game trying to recognise fruit and vegetables full clothed!

Oh I nearly forgot, they have a large statue of Jesus perched on top of the hill. It would be good but for the fact they have stuck a massive red light on its forehead. Both of us recon Tommy (Stuart's dad) been here with his night time head torch and installed his bedtime reading device on the statue.



A couple of gargoyles for you...



Barrie & Michelle



Ruby & Freya



Mandy, Shikha & Joanne

We've started to debate where to visit after Sicily...any thoughts or suggestions welcome! Email craigandjoanne@me.com