



In the third article of Alice Griffin's series following a young family's European road trip, Noggin the farm dog engages Milla in some horseplay, and the family makes hay while the sun shines...

Milla's away from home...

Fate was always going to play a part in our search for a new and unknown destiny and it definitely seems to have had a hand in where we find ourselves now: on a small horse farm in the midi-Pyrenees with views of rolling hills to the right, snow-capped Pyrenees to the left, and Milla playing happily in the hay with her new-best-friend, Noggin, the very lovely farm collie.

I read a book set near Toulouse and it made me want to visit, so I announced to my husband

that I felt a strong urge to go. We checked out distances but decided it was quite a detour and agreed instead that we would continue towards Spain via the south coast of France. However, the combination of wanting to meet inspiring people as well as experiencing a different way of life led to my looking for volunteer opportunities on a farm. Eventually, I found an advert on the internet and when I discovered the farm was located near to where I had previously wanted to go, I knew it was meant to be.

Now we find ourselves living on 32 acres of rolling countryside in the complete luxury of a static home, which, after living in a camper without running water for four months, is akin to a penthouse apartment at the Ritz. We are helping the family who live here with hay-making, logging, cooking and gardening, while Milla spends her time hanging out with cats, chickens, horses and, of course,



her new playmate, with whom she enjoys endless hours of fun.

We weren't too sure how Milla would react to this menagerie of animals, but she seems to have slotted right in to the rural way of life. Cats she is already used to and, surprisingly, she is not fazed in the slightest by the chickens, probably because she is following Noggin's lead. The horses, however, are a different story.

At the last campsite we stayed on, near St Tropez, there were some donkeys. Being the inquisitive

little soul that she is, Milla decided to say hello - but failed to realise that there was an electric fence separating her from the donkeys she was trying to reach nose-to-nose. She got buzzed and now thinks that any large animal that looks remotely like a donkey is going to do the same thing! We hadn't realised how much she had been affected, so were surprised when, on our first evening at the farm, we headed off to meet the horses. No sooner had we reached their paddock than we turned to

find Milla low down to the floor, skulking back to the house. She now appears to have developed a fear of all large four-legged creatures.

Life on the farm has been an excellent experience and we are learning lots of new things, in particular hay-making. After a few days of rain, everyone was starting to lose hope of a good run of weather to start the process, but the warm weather finally arrived last week and the grass was cut in preparation. Milla had lots of fun running around as we turned it to dry and then even more fun chasing everyone around the field when the bailing started. As the bails were being loaded up into the hayloft, she even managed to clamber up the flimsy barn ladder, frightening the life out of everyone when she appeared at the top!

Apart from hay-making and other jobs, our days are spent

waking up to the most magnificent views, going for walks and riding horses in the beautiful countryside, eating wonderful home-cooked meals with the family, and watching Milla and Noggin play-fight for hours. We have never seen Milla so contented and have certainly never seen her so in love with another dog. The same could be said for Noggin, who appears at our door every morning and knocks as if to say, "Can she come out to play?"

Our destiny may still be unknown, but one thing I have come to realise is that when you don't know where you're heading or what you're going to do, something always happens along that takes you where you are meant to be. Chance, luck, fate - call it what you want - for us, it seems the only way to travel and as we head off across the Pyrenees to Spain this coming Friday, we hope to find a whole new set of unknown adventures. ::

Travelling with your dog to Europe?

YOUR DOG MUST BE:

- Microchipped
- Vaccinated against rabies
- Have had a successful blood test following vaccination to confirm that he is now immune to rabies
- Be in receipt of a PETS passport based on the above

PLAN AHEAD

- Make sure you speak to a vet in detail about where you are heading so that they can provide you with a travel plan and the right medicines to cover everything from ticks to heartworm.
- When you do travel with your dog, you must get him treated for tick and tapeworm 24-48 hours before returning to the UK. It is therefore advisable that you organise a vet at the return port in advance.
- If you are worried about communication difficulties, the DEFRA website has some useful 'vet' phrases in various languages that come in handy!

REMEMBER

- Your pet cannot return to the UK until six months after the date of the successful blood test. It's worth speaking to your vet as early as eight months before you want to travel to get everything in place.
- Some countries' rules differ, so make sure you contact DEFRA (www.defra.gov.uk) in plenty of time to make sure you have all necessary documentation in place.
- Get your vet to check that your dog's chip number works and matches all documentation before you go, to ensure a return journey together.



Alice Griffin is a freelance writer, dedicated dog lover and willing victim of wanderlust. These things combined, along with the addition of an equally willing husband, led to the birth of a dream to pack her family up and travel Europe in search of a new and unknown destiny. Next month, the family moves on to Granada, Spain. You can follow their travels at: www.familysmudge Travellingtails.blogspot.com