



Wednesday 13 September

Descending through semi-open meadow, the sun breaking out and falling now on fresh wet plough the colour of the fen, steam rising as the sun's delicate fingers light upon the earth. The soil is black from generations mucking and remucking it, a rich seed bed, thick and coarse with all its roughage.

I lunch in the shade at Rochegude and paint below the chapel which sits on the highest point here: then the path drops, steeply winding round pine trees and Titanic-sized boulders, the thin soil badly eroded and roots running like tripwires across the path.

At the end of the descent is a broad gorge, in which lies Monistrol. I swim in the river here and find a cheap room in the almost empty hotel. Monistrol seems a sad place somehow, dominated by an apparently disused power station and lately overshadowed by a new road bridge which soars high above the power station's roof; the road seems so insensitive, completely ignoring the houses below, the shiny new asphalt a snide elbow to an apparently ailing settlement.



Thursday 14th September

Walking in the heat, everything is a haze; horizons narrow and your angle of vision closes up so that you don't really take anything in. Everything becomes passive, neutral. Flies cease to annoy with their crawling and their buzzing, they just are. In fact flies and the stirring of a breeze are almost the only things the senses register. The dogs are suffering too; they lie unconscious in the shade, unable to contemplate even the mildest of barks.

I settle in the shade for another painting, delaying the descent to Saugues until the sun has a kindlier presence, entering the town in the early evening and taking a bed at the first place I find: it's a strange chalet, the result of cross-breeding a garage with a flat-pack sauna. The handrail to the stairs seems merely decorative, the wiring is extremely suspect and the beds have

