

“PASSING THROUGH OBERVOGELGESANG” - THE P3A FRIDAY WALKING GROUP IN GERMANY

by David Greensmith

Twenty-three intrepid P3A walkers, plus three non-walking wives, descended upon Saxony in June this year for a week's walking in the wonderfully scenic area known as the 'Saxon Switzerland', south of Dresden. We were based in the delightful, well preserved historic town of Pirna (see picture below) and accessed all the walks by train (plus buses in some cases). It seemed that every train trip passed through the wonderfully named village of Obervogelgesang, which should surely really be a fairytale village from a Brothers Grimm story !



Historic Pirna, taken from Sonnenstein Fortress

Following a briefing on the evening of our arrival day (Wednesday June 20th) by our excellent holiday organisers Christiane Liedtke and Andrew Oliver, walking began the next day in moderate style with a 2.5 hour easy walk from Rauenstein to Stadt Wehlen, followed by the inevitable Bratwurst mit Brot for lunch (herby German sausage and bread – Germany is not the place for weight-watchers !) then in the afternoon a walking tour of Pirna with a local guide. Highlight of the day, however, was a group evening meal at a local brewery restaurant. Substantial quantities of dandelion and burdock were consumed, plus some excellent food.

Having softened us up on Thursday, the lovely Christiane clobbered us all on Friday with a tough walk from Stadt Wehlen to Hohnstein, via the spectacular Bastei bridge near the Elbe. There was much weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, plus the occasional profanity, as we scaled 502 metres of steps and ladders. It was well worth the effort for the marvellous views.



Up the ladder to the roof of Saxony ! Anne breathes a sigh of relief.



Views like this make all the effort worthwhile !



Some just cannot resist hamming it up for the camera ! Well done Yasmin.

After the rigours of Friday, Saturday offered a welcome easier morning walk among vineyards and 'broom pubs" offering wine and snacks. Unfortunately the weather, which had hitherto been excellent, turned wet and windy, spoiling the chance of an alfresco lunch at Schloss Wakerbarth afterwards. Needless to say, it reminded us all of walking in England !

Sunday was a free day, when most of the group opted to visit impressive Dresden with its many fine historic buildings, museums and smart restaurants. Completely gutted during the second World War, Dresden rose from the ashes in spectacular style. It also hosts the world's finest fleet of historic paddle steamers, taking passengers up and down the Elbe.



One of the antique Dresden steamboats



One of Dresden's elegant squares.

Suitably rested, the Group tackled another very tough walk on Monday, 14km with 671 metres of climb, up and over the Schrammsteine mountains to the tiny village of Schmilke on the Elbe. Very demanding with lots of steps and ladders, but also some marvellous views.



It's a long, long way down ! Not one for vertigo sufferers.



An incredible natural bridge at the top of the Schrammsteine



Happy walkers at the top of the climb. Left to right – Alf, Andrew, Christiane and Sharon. Time for a short rest before the descent.

Our final walk, on Tuesday June 26th, was our longest one at 17km, and began at Hrensko in the nearby Czech Republic. Your scribe was pleased to note no border controls or passport checks – I am an internationalist so just my kind of border ! Although long, the walk was far less arduous than the earlier two, with spectacular water scenery and a boat trip in a narrow gorge. A complete contrast to the other two, but every bit as enjoyable.



Yet more phenomenal scenery !



The inevitable group photograph.



Through the narrow gorge by boat.

Finishing the week in the time-honoured manner, the Group headed to the excellent Anke restaurant for a farewell dinner of typical German dishes washed down with beer or wine. My plate of sauerbraten groaned under the weight of the dumplings, so some visits to the gym were required afterwards.



Eat, drink and be merry !!

Everybody headed off in various directions on Wednesday June 27th, having enjoyed a wonderful week's walking in great company. A huge thank-you to Andrew and Christiane for the huge amount of work they did to plan the week, reconnoitre the walks, advise on flight options, etc. I must also mention here Marion and David Lewis, who joined Andrew and Christiane on the recces.

The Group heads to Ireland for its next overseas jaunt, in June 2019. Germany will be a hard act to follow.