

NEWSLETTER - July 2007

FF Cornwall to FF Vogtland, Germany June 2007

On 23rd April 2004 the Cornwall club had the pleasure of hosting new friends from eastern Germany. It was the German club's first ever exchange outside their own country and what an unforgettable experience it was for all concerned! Gert and Ingrid Pohlmann from the Saxony club were determined to reciprocate and in June of this year we finally made the trip to renew old friendships and make new ones.

Vogtland is a region in the German states of Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia bordering on the Czech Republic with a population of over 250,000. It is renowned for its green rolling hills (over 70 towns and villages have green in their name), pretty villages, ski slopes (but no snow when we were there!), musical instrument making (Yehudi Menuhin played on a violin from the region and Bill Clinton's saxophone originated from Vogtland), spas, folk music and the iconic German car, the Trabant.

Our hosts had the daunting task of looking after 19 of us despite their club membership totalling only 22. To add to their problems, 3 of their number were ill and could not host or participate in the exchange. Despite these headaches, we all had a truly unforgettable experience in Germany. The week started with a visit to the largest brick built bridge in the world, Goltzschtalbrücke, an awesome railway viaduct carrying trains between Leipzig and Nuremberg. The facts speak for themselves – it is 78m high, 574m long, with 81 arches and contains no fewer than 26 million bricks. This was followed by the traditional welcome party which set the tone for the whole exchange. Home made German cakes and pastries supplemented by good German ale, or maybe coffee for some, in the middle of the magnificent countryside. Nothing was ever too much bother for our Vogtland friends.

Zwickau is the birthplace of the composer Robert Schumann and the Trabant automobile. It is also a delightful town to which we were given a short guided tour and visit to the mayor's parlour. We listened to his fascinating talk about his region, its turbulent history, its economy and his faith in the young generation before giving him our gift and letter from our patron, the Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall. The visit to the Horch and Audi automobile museum was an insight into the history of the German car making industry. In humid conditions, the one abiding memory I will take from this is the photograph taken of a resplendent August Horch (well, an actor really as he would have been at least 130 years old!) who set up the factory at the beginning of the last century and our very own Moni McMahan, who did such a fantastic job interpreting for us.

The visit to Dresden, capital of Saxony, was a truly memorable experience. The city, almost completely bombed by the Allies in 1945 had undergone a remarkable resurgence since the fall of communism in 1989. Many of the buildings had been faithfully restored from plans and photographs taken by Hitler during the war. The result was magnificent buildings mainly baroque-style, looking just like they must

have done. I loved the trams, a reminder of days gone by, but here and in other cities, still core to the transport system. A visit to the castle gardens at Pillnitz and paddle steamer trip on the Elbe River completed a wonderful day in hot and humid weather.

Other trips included visits to the museum of musical instruments at Markneukirchen and a lace making factory near Plauen. All club members had plenty of opportunities to go with their hosts and share many different experiences. The week finished with the traditional Farewell Party. A warm feeling was felt by everyone as we tried to entertain our German friends with our unique rendition of two Cornish songs and an unforgettable scrum that wasn't too far removed from the Cornish Flora Dance. Singing and dancing from our hosts, an excellent accordion player and plenty of local food and drink ensured the evening finished on a high.

Europe are becoming very popular, since they are relatively inexpensive and offer a taster experience to new members.

Your committee is actively exploring the possibilities, in particular with FF Limburg in Belgium.

Terry Hopkins, the UK representative on the European Advisory Committee, gave advance notice of its next conference to be held May 2008 in Bratislava, with add ons in the Tatra mountains – could be very enjoyable. We will keep members informed.

It was encouraging to learn that FF Cornwall is one of only a few clubs steadily increasing its membership. We should make it our aim to emulate FF IOW, who have boosted their membership to 75 in a few years. The final workshops centred on ideas to stimulate interest, including a National campaign. However, it appears that word of mouth remains the most reliable, so do keep on talking about Friendship Force to your friends, colleagues and acquaintances!

Vogtland Exchange

We are about to embark upon yet another fantastic Friendship Force adventure! Our party of 20 departs from Bristol airport for Prague on June 12th. We travel on by coach to Zwickau in Germany to be home hosted by their club members for a week. Then we return for a short stay in Prague before returning back to Cornwall. Details of our hosts have been received & we are in communication with friends old & new in Germany. As ED, it really is exciting to see for the first time the list of hosts & ambassadors when they arrive by e-mail. You know then that it is definitely all systems go! A draft programme for our stay has also been received & the final one will be known shortly.

The hotel, a boat trip and seats for Swan Lake Ballet have been booked. I am concerned that ambassadors have every chance to decide what other sights we visit and that we do not organise something which is more or less intensive than people

feel happy with. Accordingly I persuaded Brian Smedley, who is an expert on Prague and is helping me with the organisation, to agree to visit us on 13 th May so that he can tell us more, show us pictures and we can make final decisions on exactly what we want to do when there. Please do make every effort to attend. Maureen and Michael Cole have very kindly agreed to host this. You are welcome to bring a picnic lunch to eat in their magnificent garden from 12:30 on. If you prefer, simply turn up to listen to Brian at about 2:30. After that we will have the pleasure (?) of practising our singing and dancing!

Outgoing to Central Arizona, USA and Comitán, Mexico , suggested October 2008 .

The clubs are situated in Phoenix and near the Guatemalan border. Both offer exciting opportunities for new experiences. The first step is to appoint an exchange director and small committee to progress the exchange. If there is anyone willing to help with this, we would be delighted to hear from you and give you all the support needed. Quite a number of members have expressed a keen interest in participating and we will keep everyone informed as things develop. It is anticipated that the cost will be in the region of £1600-1800pp for 17 to 18 days, door to door.

Incoming from the Sunshine Coast, Australia April. 2008

The club will also exchange with Izmir in Turkey.

In September **Lake Hartwell, USA** will spend a week with us.

In order for all these exchanges to be successful, we will need Exchange Directors, so please give it a thought!

Visit to the Minack 2pm Wednesday 25th July

The New Cornwall Opera will be performing Bizet's Carmen. This is proving very popular and group bookings (which give you the best seats and at a discount) are already possible only for three of the seven performances. We therefore decided to reserve 20 seats for the afternoon of Wednesday the 25 th July. This production is traditionally staged and features the very best of Cornish soloists: Louise Merrifield will take the title role and be joined by Matthew Eva, Gary Tucker, Kate Wood and John Hobbs. Brian Odgers leads a production team which promises the use of innovative design aimed at capturing the very essence of Spain.

Tickets will cost £7.65 each and will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. Please contact Robin or Josie (01726 75339) as soon as possible if you would like to go.