

Great adventures high in the Alps

Part two of a motorhome travellers' tour through the spectacular German and Austrian landscape

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The view from Ehrenberg Castle over Reutte and the Lech valley



Carol Kubicki...

...and her husband, Anthony, use their Devon Tempest to pursue their hobbies of walking and cycling while exploring historical and natural environments

FAR RIGHT Attractive alpine wooden building in Westendorf

BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT
Fernstein Castle; Traditional Austrian brass band; Cycling on quiet lanes near Westendorf

After heading east through Germany for a couple of weeks, exploring the country and its medieval history, we were now returning westward. We'd been having so much fun that we didn't want to leave the mountains. However, we did want to circumvent the mayhem created by world leaders' meeting and so decided to head into Austria.

Before we crossed the border, there was one final thing to do. Klamms are rocky river gorges, accessible along walkways and steps. They are found along the Alps and generally incur a small admission charge. As well as a cool place to walk, the Almbachklamm near Berchtesgaden has the last water-powered marble-making mill (kugelmühle) in Germany. For hundreds of years, this scenic valley was lively with the sound of this medieval cottage industry until mass-produced glass marbles became available.

A kugelmühle takes a lump of marble and grinds it down to a perfect sphere using water power from the gorge and grinding stones of progressively smaller concentric circles. I found it impossible not to buy a couple of souvenirs, a link with medieval Germany that I could take home.

Climbing through the klamm was a delight in every sense; the thrill of the cold water on my hot feet when we stopped for a paddle, the all-consuming sound of rushing water, the fresh smell of pine trees, seeing the pair of dippers flying low over the stream to their nest in one of the caves and the delicious taste of coffee with a scoop of ice cream from the café after our walk.

I live under the illusion that Austria was created as a playground especially for me, with good walking, excellent cycling and scenery that is cleaned by elves every night. It is a beautiful and relaxing country.

We made our way to the Tyrolean village of Westendorf, near Kitzbühel. Equipped with only a leaflet from the campsite, we were able to spend an enjoyable day following well-signed cycle routes.

The highlight was finding musical entertainment in the handsome village of Hopfgarten. We stopped at a café opposite the imposing twin-towered church and, while sitting in the sunshine, a brass band in traditional costume lined up opposite and played a series of cheerful and rousing tunes while wedding guests, many in traditional lederhosen and dirndl, came out of the



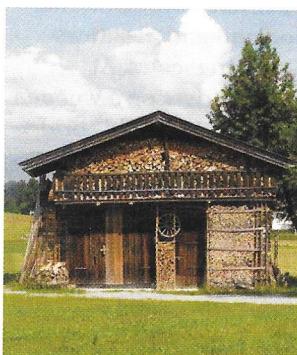
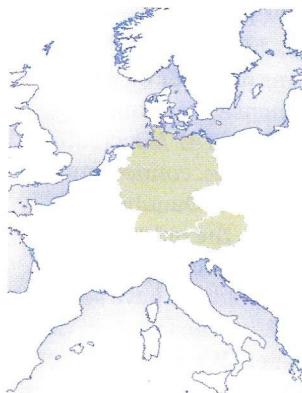
church and mingled in the square.

From here, we cycled over a typical covered wooden bridge and onto gravel paths along the Windauer valley to Rettenbach. The track climbed at a steady pace and we stopped and picnicked on a shady bench overlooking the lovely river and enjoyed the peacefulness. A lane back to Westendorf took us high above the river and through the golf course to well-deserved ice creams in the village.

A well-kept secret about Austria is that it makes very good fruity red wine that is so delicious the Austrians mostly drink it themselves and very little reaches the UK. Fortunately, our 'van has some bottle-sized nooks and crannies.

The other taste of Austria that is harder to bring home is käsespätzle. This tasty, light and fluffy version of macaroni cheese is generally the only vegetarian option in traditional Bavarian and Austrian restaurants. On a cycling holiday through tiny Bavarian villages in our pre-campervan days, käsespätzle was our only option for four evenings in a row!

The European Champions League final tempted us to try the campsite restaurant



for a night of football camaraderie, remembering a previous final in Germany when a restaurant owner gave out glasses of home-made schnapps to celebrate every goal. It turned out that football is less popular in Austria and we watched the match alone.

Pushing on further west, the traffic was busy and we crawled over the Fern Pass – an Alpine crossing since the Romans built the Via Claudia Augusta. At the top of the pass is Fernstein Castle, which overlooks a blue mountain lake.

We both enjoy scrambling around a ruined castle and one with a view is unmissable. Ehrenberg Castle is a steep climb above the Austrian town of Reutte and is well worth a visit, not just because it is free but also because its elevated position gives a spectacular view over the town.

The labyrinthine complex of towers and ramparts is fascinating to explore and there are information boards in English about battles fought here. Within the complex there are attractions you can pay for, including a museum about the medieval history of the castle and, if your nerves can take it, a metal suspension bridge strung ▶



Trip summary

OUR MOTORHOME

2015 Devon Tempest on a Renault Master MWB 2.3cc Energy DCI. Our Tempest is our second Devon 'van. At 5.3m we think it's enormous and, with a bathroom, also luxurious



2015 Devon Tempest

THE JOURNEY From Germany, we drove to Zeebrugge for the ferry to Hull via Saverne, Nancy, Sedan and Belgium. We returned home to Salford along the M62. We spent 10 nights on sites in May/June

THE COSTS

Fuel average 34mpg (€137)	£108.30
Ferry Hull - Zeebrugge return including evening meal	£440
Site fees (€202)	£159.68
Tolls 10-day vignette for Austria (€8.70)	£6.87
Attractions Two adults: Almbachklamm and Zeppelin Museum (€22)	£17.39
Public transport Two adults, including Bodensee boat (€25)	£19.76

901 miles

Total £752.00

TOP TIP

The boats on **Bodensee** can take bicycles, usually for a charge of €1 (79p) or €2 (£1.58) per trip

high across the valley. However, we thought €8 (£6.22) each was a bit steep!

It took the Romans just over 60 years to complete the immense job of building the Via Claudia Augusta in 47 AD, creating a passage through the Alps, connecting the Adriatic with the River Danube. The proximity of this road is the only reason I can imagine for the most camp-looking sculpture of a Roman soldier I have seen this side of *Up Pompeii* at the fountain in the pretty hamlet of Rieden. We were cycling along the River Lech from Reutte and, after stopping for the fountain, we continued to Weissenbach for coffee and excellent cake.

The Lech becomes a wilder mountain river strewn with boulders beyond and we cycled through woodland and meadows grazed by caramel-coloured cows. At Forchach, we crossed the river on a wooden suspension bridge built in 1906. This bridge with rotten boards and rusty fittings was much more terrifying to cross than the modern construction at Ehrenberg Castle and it didn't cost anything.

BELOW The River Kinzig in Wolfach

Moving on, we chose to camp within 15 minutes' walk of lively Friedrichshafen on the shore of Bodensee (Lake Constance). The CAP Rotach campsite proved a good choice; it had a lovely atmosphere. It wasn't just the friendly staff, the other campers were also helpful and chatty. We eventually worked out that the campsite offers work placements for people with disabilities and this inclusivity creates a positive ambience.

Friedrichshafen has a number of attractions, but a must-see was the Zeppelin Museum housed in the tremendous 1930s building on the harbour. Ferdinand von Zeppelin launched the first hydrogen-filled airship in 1900 on Bodensee.

Airship development had many ups and downs until 1928 when the Graf Zeppelin was built and flew across the Atlantic, followed by the Hindenburg in 1936. The latter was designed to be filled with non-flammable helium following the British R101 disaster. However, this wasn't available, so hydrogen was once again used, with fatal results when landing in





INFORMATION

-  zeppelin-museum.de
-  blackforest-tourism.com
-  bodensee.eu/en

ABOVE CLOCKWISE Colourful houses tumbling down to the lake in Meersburg; Cows sitting by the River Lech; Boats in front of the Zeppelin Museum

BETWEEN Rottweiler statue in Rottweil's colourful main street



America in 1937. The museum has plenty of interesting exhibits, including games to convey the physics of airship flight. The highlight is the full-sized replica of a section of the Hindenburg, including the stylish passenger lounge and bedrooms with what might be a familiar-looking fold-up sink.

Airship construction attracted engineering firms to Friedrichshafen and so a beautiful area that appears to exist solely for tourism has numerous engineering firms. Try and imagine the shores of Windermere dotted with factories.

This German dichotomy is fascinating. The nation preserves its romantic medieval past in pretty towns and vast forests as well as being at the forefront of technology.

Bodensee has a cycle route around the entire lake and we chose to explore by cycling to Meersburg. Although we were on dedicated cycle routes, the first 10km (6½ miles) of cycling was along a busy main road. After Immenstaad the route was more peaceful, taking us through the pretty wine village of Hagnau.

In Meersburg, overflowing cycle parking suggested every cyclist on the lake had chosen to visit. It is so pretty, who can blame them? Meersburg has both an old castle

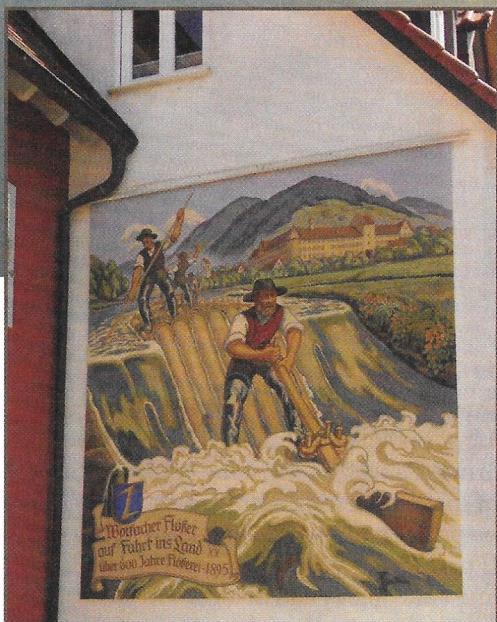
from the medieval period and a Baroque 'new' castle. The former is stuffed with armour and dungeons; the latter is a mass of sugar-pink frills. The town is a tangle of colourful buildings and cobbled alleys and is perfect for wandering or sitting at a café and enjoying a glass of local wine.

That evening found us climbing the steps of the harbour observation tower to watch the sun disappear behind the town. To add to the romantic scene, we were accompanied by a pianist playing in a bar along the waterfront. We watched the last ferry leave the harbour for Switzerland, holidaymakers promenading along the shore and swans gliding over the still lake.

We'd had so much fun in the enchanting Black Forest on our journey east that we decided to return to another part of this vast forest for our final days in Germany. En route we stopped in Rottweil, which gave its name to the Rottweiler. These dogs were bred to herd livestock and pull carts for local butchers.

This proved to be a perfect halt for a couple of hours. The town is dotted with sculptures of the famous dogs and has elegant and colourful medieval buildings along its steep, pedestrianised main ▶

"A delight in every sense: the thrill of the cold water and the fresh smell of pine trees"



street, many of which have elaborately decorated three-sided oriel windows where neighbours have tried to outclass each other. We used our tourist cards to get free train travel from the campsite to the pretty town of Wolfach. Celebrating its log-rafting tradition, Wolfach is dotted with sculptures, colourful murals and other memorials to the trade.

In the past, tree trunks were attached to rafts up to 600m (1,968ft) long to transport them along the Kinzig river to Strasburg until trains proved more efficient.

Exploring the town, we found an unusual fountain with 11 figures, each in carnival costume. Wolfach continues the medieval custom of having a lively carnival before Lent and the figures represent the traditional carnival costumes of demons and jesters. I was amused to read that, on Ash Wednesday, local men wearing top hats wash out their wallets in this fountain to show that they have no money left after the festivities have ended!

WE STAYED AT

Panorama Camping, Mühlthal 70, 6363 Westendorf, Austria

0043 53 346166

panoramacamping.at

1 All year

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From €23.00 (£18.18)

Camping Reutte, Ehrenbergstrasse 53, 6600 Reutte, Austria

0043 6641 858279

camping-reutte.com

1 All year

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From €22 (£17.03)

CAP Rotach, Lindauer Strasse 2, Friedrichshafen, Germany

0049 754170 077777

cap-rotach.de

24 March – 30 October

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From €26.00 (£20.55)

Trend Camping, 80 Schiltacherstrasse, Halbmeil, Wolfach, Germany

0049 7834 859309

trendcamping.de

1 April – 18 October

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From €26 (£20.55)

ABOVE Sunset over Friedrichshafen on Bodensee; The log rafters are pictured in a wall mural in Wolfach

BELLOW Attractive shops in the main street of Wolfach



After learning about the traditions of the town, we followed trails into the hills, taking in another ruined medieval castle. A thunderstorm caught us out and we sheltered in the woods while it rumbled on.

It soon warmed up again and we were able to enjoy two of my favourite things before leaving Germany. High in the woods we found the town's Wassertreten and were able to play uninhibited in the cold water of the hydrotherapy pool.

With fresh feet, we found a café on the town's attractive main street opposite the impressive town hall and ordered extravagant ice cream sundaes. Sitting in the sunshine with an ice cream often prompts me to reflect and this was no exception.

Although almost four weeks is nowhere near enough time to explore the whole of medieval Germany, we had made a valiant attempt and we certainly had plenty of ideas for our next visit to this fascinating and beautiful country. **WWW**