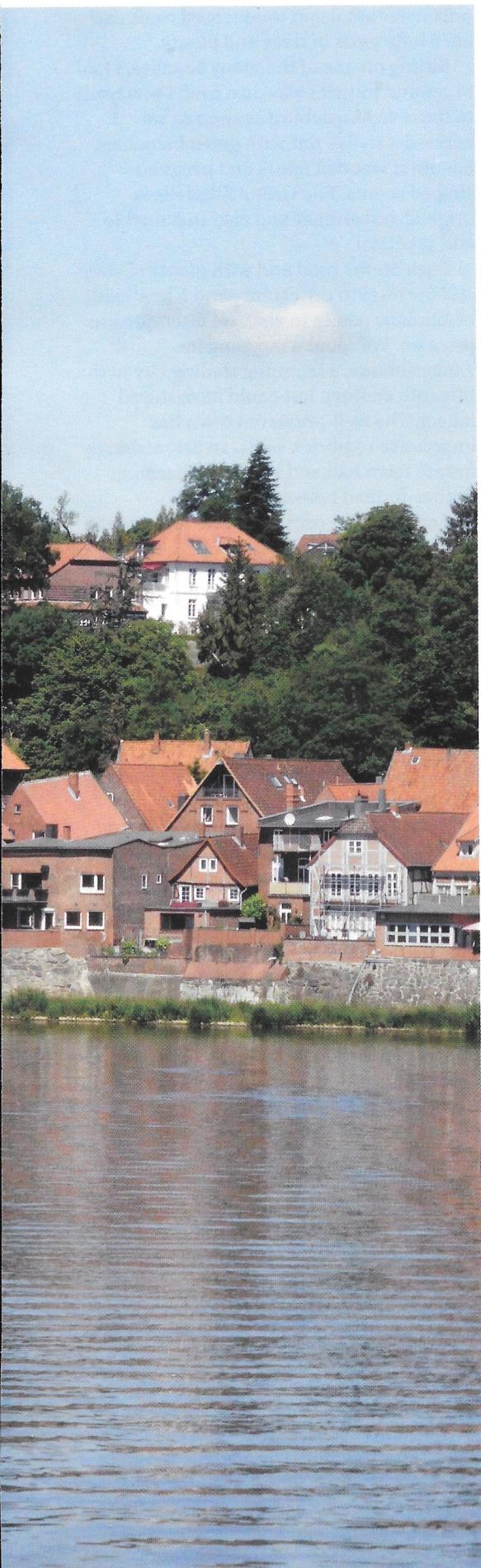


Following THE RIVER

The second part of this German tour follows further along the River Elbe from Magdeburg to the North Sea...

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki



Having warmed up our cycling legs on the southern section of Germany's Elberadweg (cycle path), we felt fit enough to tackle a 37-mile ride to Jerichow (not to be confused with the Palestinian city of Jericho)! Our geographical confusion is understandable. The day before we had driven around the slopes of Kalimanjaro, this play on Kilimanjaro being the popular name for a potash spoil heap that towers over the lowland near Magdeburg.

Our campsite, which showed no trace of the Engels holiday camp it was in East German days, gave us direct access to the radweg. The route took us under tall pine trees and around fields of cereals dotted with cornflowers and poppies.

Sharing a church doorway during a shower with some German cyclists, we were glad of our flask of coffee and the wind-blown waterway rippled with waves as we crossed the ever-widening Elbe on the ferry. Along the dyke to Jerichow's walled monastery, the headwind slowed us down and we needed hot chocolate and cake in the café before we had the energy to admire the impressive red-brick buildings.

We were in the Middle Elbe Reserve, a sparsely populated, wildlife-rich strip of land left undeveloped when it formed the East and West German border. A stroll from our campsite and we were in open riverside meadows where lapwings soared and sedge warblers sang in the reedy pools. On a sandy shore we sat among a pink carpet of chives.

Back on the bikes, we visited Burg, a town with a history of tanning and textiles that has retained some eye-catching sections of its thirteenth century walls with narrow cobbled lanes, fairytale towers and attractive cottages.

Magdeburg has been on my list of German cities to visit for over 20 years after meeting two enthusiastic residents, but my must-see sight wasn't even built then. The Grüne Zitadelle is a striking pink edifice that stands out from everything around it.

Designed by Hundertwasser, a world-renowned artist and architect, it includes flats, offices, a hotel and kindergarten with shops on the ground floor. We checked out the building's tour times before having ➤

US AND OUR 'VAN



Carol Kubicki...

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



2015 Devon Tempest on a Renault Master MWB 2.3-litre. This is our third blue campervan and we have called them all the Blue Bus

LEFT The stunning view of Lauenburg across the Elbe

"Lauenburg was a stark contrast to the peaceful meadows but the view of the red-roofed town across the river was stunning"

coffee in one of its quirky courtyards.

With the afternoon tour arranged, we were free to visit Magdeburg's other sights. We wandered along the Elbe promenade dotted with bronze statues and through the market to the large and airy Gothic cathedral. This replaced a tenth century building that burnt down, but some of the enchanting cloisters survived.

Sweet-smelling lilac and vivid wisteria brightened up the stone Romanesque archways, the cathedral towering overhead. Hearing a screech, we both looked up in time to spot two peregrines.

Hundertwasser designed people-centred buildings that reflect nature, are colourful and shun straight lines; the Grüne Zitadelle, completed in 2005, was his last project. We would certainly have misunderstood much of the German tour except for the good fortune that one of our group of five was translating for her American partner.

Beginning outside, our guide explained that no window or quirky pillar is the same as another. Climbing to the top of the tower was thrilling, opening up the large building's

INFORMATION

Read the first part of this trip in last month's issue (February 2023)

 motorhome.ma/mmm

 [The Elbe Cycle Route](http://elbe-cycle-route.com)

 There is a lot to see in Magdeburg and the town's website will help you decide what to do

 [Information about the fort at Dömitz](http://festung-doemitz-museum.de)

 [For information about things to do in Lauenburg](http://herzogtum-lauenburg.de)

 [Tourist information about Hamburg and the Altes Land](http://hamburg.de)

unconventional and fragmented roofs that are a lofty oasis of trees and plants.

Sitting on one of the many benches, I had to remind myself I was on a roof. I was ready to move to Magdeburg as soon as we entered a stylish flat with green balconies, beautiful wooden floors and irregular-shaped rooms. The Grüne Zitadelle is original and elegant and also sustainable and practical.

Back on the road and with plenty of river still to travel to the estuary and a boatload of fabulous places to visit, we attempted to press on. We spent a morning in Tangermünde, a booming trading city in the fifteenth century, but could have stayed longer. The well-preserved town has impressive red-brick walls, an astonishingly ornate town hall and scores of charming timber-framed houses.

Continuing downstream, we reached the island town of Havelberg where the River Havel joins the Elbe. A shipbuilding centre from the seventeenth century, Havelberg has an imposing hilltop cathedral.

On the riverside is a water museum (Haus der Flüsse) and we spent longer than perhaps two adults should playing with the imaginative scaled-down model of locks, sluices and a waterwheel, filling the channels from two large taps and adjusting sluices to alter the water's direction.

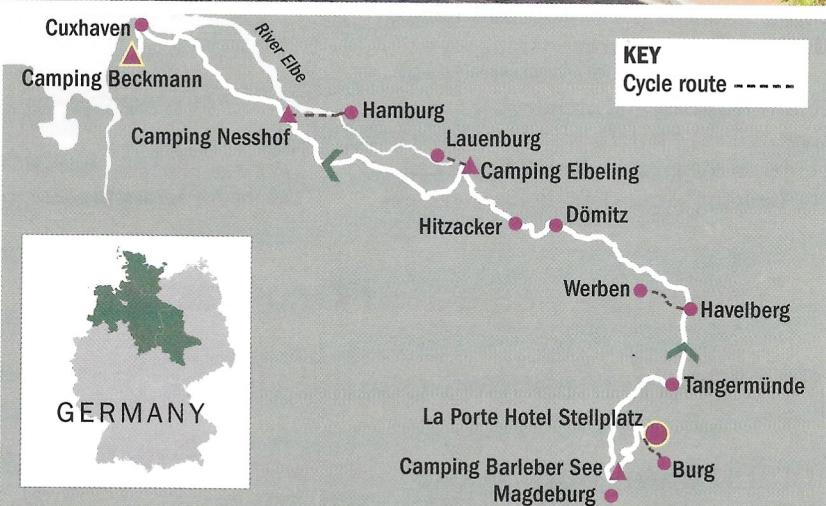
From Havelberg we had an outstanding day out to Werben. We joined other cyclists crossing the Elbe on a slow ferry that used chains and currents to navigate. We were spellbound by a hooded crow that repeatedly came on board, sidled cautiously behind a crew member into a control box and flew off with a chunk of bread.

The path along the dyke, surrounded by flourishing meadows and pools, was delightful, and entering Werben was like going back in time; it is packed with picturesque corners where quaint timber-framed houses line sleepy cobbled streets. The village celebrates its storks and has at least 13 nests. We spotted one immediately and checked the board for the dates the storks returned and how many fledged over the last few years.

Climbing the gatehouse's shadowy and steep staircase, we found a volunteer with a telescope trained on a stork's nests with adorable three-day-old young and two attentive parents.

We chatted in halting German-English and he recommended a café that served us delicious cake in a sunny garden.

During East German times, the Elbe town of Dömitz was within the border zone. As we set off to see the impressive seventeenth



THE JOURNEY

We travelled from home in Lancashire to the Elbe via the DFDS Newcastle to IJmuiden ferry, then through the Netherlands via Lelystad and picking up Autobahn 2 to Magdeburg at Nordhorn. We returned to IJmuiden via Bremerhaven and Meppen. Our total trip was a return distance of 1,931 miles; this part was 310 miles. On this segment of our trip, we spent 17 days touring on the northern section of the River Elbe with 16 nights on sites in May and June. Our total trip was 50 nights in May and June

THE COSTS

Fuel Average 37mpg	£173
Ferry DFDS Newcastle to IJmuiden return with outside cabin and all meals	£705
Site fees	£308.82
Attractions Two adults: Grüne Zitadelle in Magdeburg, Gatehouse tower in Werben, Dömitz fort, Stade Open Air Museum	£31.45
Parking Stade and Cuxhaven	£5.10
Public transport Trains to Magdeburg and various ferries across the River Elbe	£36.21
Total costs	£1,259.58



1,931 miles

ABOVE INSET Waiting for the ferry across the Elbe to Jerichow

FAR LEFT The streets of Lauenburg invite you to wander

BELOW LEFT Magdeburg's Grüne Zitadelle stands out against the surrounding buildings

BELOW RIGHT A barge in the huge boat lift at Scharnebeck

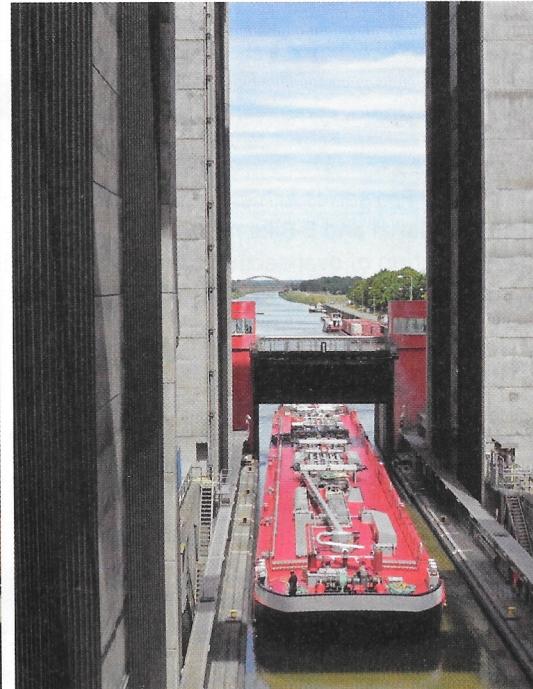
century star-shaped fort, the campsite owner encouraged us to try the DDR softieis (East German ice cream). This turned out to be a delicious and creamy middle ground between Mr Whippy and Italian ice cream. It was served in a tub-shaped cornet with spoons that had names printed on the handle; mine said Emma and, in the past, if you picked a spoon with your own name you got a freebie.

Our Elberadweg guidebook described Hitzacker as a crowd-pleasing destination with 'artfully decorated half-timbered buildings', so we parked up to take a look. Popular with border tourists during the Cold War when Hitzacker offered a view across the water and frontier to East

Germany, today visitors flock here for the charming streets and smart shops.

Somewhat relieved to have booked a pitch on a Dutch-run campsite directly on the Elbe Radweg near Bleckede for the second German holiday weekend of our trip, we rolled up in glorious weather. Despite being busy, the Blue Bus was allocated a secluded spot where even the nearby church bells chimed in muted tones and, in the evenings, we would stroll to the river to admire the sunset.

We had been away for almost four weeks but it was only here that we met our trip's first British motorhomers. Stopping to say hello, we all laughed when we found we lived within a few miles of each other and ▶





were soon sharing travelling stories.

Under blue skies we cycled to Lauenburg on a country lane that passed rustic farmhouses and pretty cottages, many with thatched roofs and each one a photo opportunity. A farm café with comfortable outdoor seating and delicious homemade sweet almond cake was a perfect cyclist's rest stop. The holiday traffic along the Elbe Bridge to Lauenburg was a stark contrast to the peaceful meadows but the view of the red-roofed town across the river was stunning, making Lauenburg another highlight of our trip.

After the Second World War, the town became the start and end of a transit route into East Germany and it bustled with travellers. Today, its quiet cobbled streets are lined with picture-postcard houses, many sharing their stories on information panels. Finding a narrow alley, we reached the waterside promenade that wound between the backs of the houses and the broad river and found a tall sign indicating the peak level of different floods, the highest being in 1855.

Over the weekend we took the bikes to Bleckede, catching the ferry to see the squat, ugly border watchtower that remains, and along the Elbe Lateral Canal to Scharnebeck. Spotting a crowd, we realised we were in luck and had timed our arrival at Scharnebeck's huge boat lift just as a barge was loading. We watched it slowly manoeuvre in, tie up and then rise above us.

TOP TIPS

We used Part Two of the Bikeline cycling guide to Elbe River Trail for this part of our trip; available in English it includes info about the route, ferries and campsites

Most cycle routes were paved, but there were sections of gravel and bone-shaking cobbles. Our road bikes were fine on all routes used

Germany has two holiday weekends in May/June (depending on when Easter is). Ascension Day (Christi Himmelfahrt) is a Thursday, 40 days after Easter. Many make a long weekend of it. Pentecost Monday (Pfingstmontag) is the seventh Monday after Easter. Campsites fill up on these weekends, so it may be worth booking early

On the Elbe's west bank, opposite the port of Hamburg, is the Altes Land, a fruit growing district drained by Dutch engineers in the twelfth century.

In the thriving and attractive town of Stade we visited the small museum to see the collection of local buildings. Information panels explained that the wooden crossed swans we had noticed on the apex of many farmhouse roofs signalled a landowners' affluence, as did the large decorative doors intended to be used only for weddings and funerals.

We had planned to do the sensible thing from our Altes Land campsite and catch the train to Hamburg at the nearby station; however, I woke from my slumbers hankering to cycle to Finkenwerder and catch the ferry. Even though this would involve 45km (28 miles) on the Elberadweg a boat felt the most appropriate way to reach Hamburg. Fortunately, Anthony agreed!

After acres of orchards, with occasional stalls selling cherries and strawberries, the roar of an airplane and the whiff of aviation fuel indicated we had reached Finkenwerder's massive Airbus factory.

We lost the cycle paths in the urban streets but eventually were sat on an open deck on a 30-minute cruise along the river. The pastoral Elbe had changed into a wide, busy shipping route with barges, tugs and huge container ships that overshadowed our ferry as they powered by. The views of swanky riverside houses, the city and the ➤

ABOVE CLOCKWISE Glorious cycling through meadows along the dyke; The harbour and fish market in Stade; Camping Nesshof – The farmhouses in the wealthy Altes Land are masterpieces



vast freight port were thrilling. Hamburg and the Elbe go hand in hand and this is without doubt the best way to arrive.

We disembarked at Landungsbrücken, the historic St Pauli Piers, into lively crowds and made for the Portuguese Quarter for tasty food and local beer. There is plenty to see in Hamburg, but we have visited many times and so lingered over lunch before strolling back to the riverbank.

We descended the stairs to the Old Elbe Tunnel, two narrow single-lane tunnels that were opened in 1911 joining the Landungsbrücken with the port. Completely tiled and with decorative friezes and watery themed relief tiles, these tunnels have a timeless atmosphere. On our last visit, it was winter and the tunnels were empty. This time one tunnel was being renovated and the remaining one was packed with pedestrians and cyclists. On the opposite bank we picked out landmarks of perhaps my favourite German city across the river before backtracking through the tunnel for the return ferry.

After more than four weeks of driving along the Elbe and 286 miles of cycling, we reached Cuxhaven, where it flows into the North Sea. The Kugelbake wooden beacon marks the wide river mouth and the end of the 1,300km-long Elberadweg.

On the North Sea there are sandy beaches packed with colourful *strandkörbe*, the covered beach chairs German's like to hire, but it was difficult to reach the riverside. The Elbe had led us to so many special places, I was determined to dip my toes in

ABOVE Campinginsel Havelberg – Havelberg's campsite sits on an island next to the town

one last time before it dispersed into the sea. I scrambled over rocks and found a spot to quietly say farewell.

We then bought chips and mayonnaise from the beach café and toasted the river with a small German beer before pointing our campervan west. **mmm**

WE STAYED AT

**La Porte Hotel Stellplatz, Im Wald 3
39517, Berlingen, Saxony-Anhalt**

0049 39366 979000
hotel-laporte.de/wohnmobile/
All year
£ Two adults and pitch: From £10 (£9.22) plus metered electric

**Campingplatz Barleber See,
Wiedersdorfer Str 30, 39126 Magdeburg,
Saxony-Anhalt**

0049 391 503244
cbs-md.de
April – October
£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £23 (£21.21)

**Campinginsel Havelberg, Spülinsel 6,
39539 Havelberg, Saxony-Anhalt**

0049 3938 720655
campinginsel-havelberg.de
1 April – 31 October
£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £28 (£25.82)

**WasserWanderZentrum Dömitz,
Werderstrasse 25 D (An der Schleuse)
19303 Dömitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern**

0049 151 52 019020

wwz-doemitz.de

April – October

£ Two adults and pitch: From €23 (£21.21) plus metered electricity

**Camping Elbeling, Hinter der Höfen 9a,
21354 Radegast, Niedersachsen**

0049 58 57555 elbeling.de
15 March – 1 October

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £22 (with ACSI card)

**Campingplatz Nesshof, Nessstrasse 32,
21720 Guderhandviertel, Niedersachsen**

0049 4142 810395 nesshof.de
All year
£ Two adults and pitch: From £23 (£21.21) plus metered electricity

**Campingplatz Beckmann,
Wanhödenerstraße 28, 27639 Nordholz,
Niedersachsen**

0049 47 418588
nordholz-camping.de
All year
£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £17 (£15.68) with ACSI card