

### **Monday 7th September Home to Aachen**

The alarm was set for 4.45, but after some initial sleep, I was awake way before that. I got up with the alarm to a dark but mild and damp morning. After a shower, breakfast, washing up and the usual checks I'm out of the house at 5.58 for the walk to the station to catch the 6.25 to Marylebone only which is spot on time and well used by commuters.

Bakerloo and Met to St Pancras in good time with no queues at check in and security and so there is plenty of time for the Times (from the Chiltern train) and the Independent. There are plenty of passengers around from Treyn and GRJ. The train is non-stop and busy but not completely full. The man next to me moves to a vacant pair so we both have double seats.

The train leaves on time. The uneventful journey gets us to Brussels on time. An enquiry at the travel centre tells me that buying the ticket from the last station in Belgium (Hergenrath) to Aachen would cost an extra 10€ on the train; as I have to change at Liege, it will be quicker to get the ticket there.

The train to Liege (-Eupen) leaves at 11.57 and turns out to be a two car EMU parked at one end of the platform and I could easily have missed it. It is easy to get the extra ticket at the travel centre in Liege for 5€. Arrival at Aachen is at 14.26 and in the station Vorplatz there is a map and a list of hotels with two within 100m. The Hotel Danemark has a pleasant, quiet room for 55€ including breakfast from 6.30 and a shower.

I'm settled in in time to hear the Archers repeat at 3pm before going out to look around and have a meal at the Brauhaus - Bratwurst, Sauerkraut, puree and Weissbier for 12€. The sky is a clear blue and it is warm for a stroll through the city centre to visit the Dom and another church and to view an open air political meeting. Then it's back to the hotel for a lazy time, including the evening Archers which comes crackling over LW after Just A Minute.

Soon after that to bed for a remarkably decent night, waking for half an hour at four and up at 6.45.

### **Tuesday 8th Aachen to Linz**

A shower and to breakfast at 7.15. The morning is bright and warm. Breakfast is decent with cereals, juice, meats, cheese, jams and OK bread. I realise that I can get any local train to Köln and so I go across to the station at 8.20. There is no earlier train but the 8.10 is 30 mins late and so I get it. It's a slow train and after some worry I consult the guard who is reassuring and I get to Köln at 9.40. The train to Passau is also late and as it is going to Vienna, I can stay on it to Linz and I have time to get a ticket from the machine from Passau to Linz (21.40€ incl ICE). There are plenty of people for the train, but plenty of room including in the 'cockpit'. It appears that the train is only going to Frankfurt with a connection across the platform - and so it is with little fuss. In the new train the journey is very pleasant and relaxed with a double seat and snacks, reading and snoozing. A lot of the time the train is about a quarter of an hour late. In south Germany and Austria the sky is clear blue with just a few clouds over the Bayerische Wald and alter over the voralpen. The train achieves the correct time in Austria; Passau to Wels seems a very slack schedule.

On arrival (on time at 17.43) in Linz, I check the times to Klaus (08.58, 10.36) and buy the next map that I need at the excellent station bookshop. Linz is the European City of Culture and seems to be thriving. After looking around several streets in 45 mins I find the Gasthof Wilden Mann which has a single with shower, no WC for 37€ with breakfast (the Ibis is 65€).

After a shower I go out for a meal at the nearby Bombay Curry Garden - mixed veg, pillau rice for 12.40€ with complimentary poppadoms and back to the hotel for writing and reading.

The wifi works well and emails to Pippa and CC. To bed at 9.30 but a restless night; too warm or too noisy.

### **Wednesday, 9th (Linz) Klaus to Molln**

Out of bed at 6.15 and to breakfast at 6.45. It's reasonable with cereal, coffee/chocolate from a machine. There are several workman finishing their breakfast (residents?) and a van

comes to collect them.

I go out for a very rapid walk around the city centre from 7.20 to 8.20. It's a handsome city but with plenty of building work. Part way around I find that the camera is set for lo res (how long?), 250€ from the A and L account (no problem) and back to the hotel. After packing and check out I leave at 8.30 for the short walk to the station. The automat yields a ticket for 9.20€ but the ticket says Linz to Schon; the info man I ask is puzzled but eventually identifies a small station just short of Klaus. I decide to take it to the train; there is no time for the bookshop so map number four will have to wait.

The train is made up from several EMUs, well filled with plenty of hikers. The ticket inspector says Klaus when he looks at my ticket, so that's OK.

A man comes to sit with me when he gets on and we chat. He was doing the coast to coast and SW path but had booked his accommodation in advance and found it expensive.

He is Austrian, from Steiermark and interested in my plans.

The train reaches Klaus on time at 9.51 and all is as I remember it except for a table in the waiting room; the waste bin has been emptied of my discarded clothing! The sun is shining brightly and it's a beautiful morning with good visibility. The road is busy to the bridge but after that it is quiet, but with plenty of noise from the dual carriage way. The way marking is patchy with a lack of signs where they count and they are there when they are not needed. I make two diversions from the route and see that I shall have to treat the amp more than the signs. The climb up to the Frauenkirche is steep but there is a welcome bench with a view. From there it is a grassy path down to the road which needs following to Molln; forget the signposts. It is a pleasant rural landscape and I am sweaty in the warm sunshine. At the junction on the road at the entrance to Molln there is a Gasthof, but 'ruhetag' I walk through the village to the Landgasthaus Klausner which is marked on the map and has a single for 40.60€ with breakfast which is available from 6.30 (and evening meal from 18.00). The room is bright and almost has a balcony. After a shower and laundry to the garden for reading, although a bit chilly, and eventually with a Weißbier. After an hour or so to the non-smoking room to finish the beer and to order dinner for six. Menü at 8€ (beer 3.20€): noodle soup, beef with fried potatoes and vegetable and a horse radish sludge and is enjoyable. To my room and after reorganisation to bed at at 8.30; dozing and podcasts and a fairly good sleep although a nightmare about RMP resigning and handing the headship to me.

### **Thursday., 10th Molln to Ternberg**

Awake at five and up at six for a shower and breakfast at 6.40. There are two groups already present. Breakfast is fine with plenty of good coffee, although the better bread only arrives towards the end and I take two rolls with me. Bill (41.60€), packing and out at 7.40 to a cool, misty morning.

The village is soon behind although the path along the river is closed - 'felsensturz'. So there is a bit of road up out of the valley before a path to the Errinene Mauer - water falling over the path to the main river, the Steyr and then ten minutes back to the main path. Again the marking is sketchy (it gets rather better in the mountains) and the map turns out to be useful. In the woods there are lots of cyclamens and on the sunny banks Autumn crocuses.

After a pastoral stretch there is a kilometre along the road and then up into the mountains at Dorngraben. For a short time there is a motor road (to a car park), then a forest road but soon onto a good but steep and stony path. It's a very efficient way of gaining the height.

At the bottom the sign says 1 3/4 hours to the Grünberghütte and so it is, even with a few short stops. Occasionally the forest road is used before diving back into the forest. There are few views but the visibility is poor anyway. There are a few other people on the path including a family with two girls and a boy who are resting on one of the few benches by a spring; I see them a couple of times later. Near the hut the path becomes more civilised before crossing an alp where I have a snack and try to dry a sweat soaked shirt. I pass the hut and climb up to the ridge through pasture and forest; the route rises and falls before a more substantial drop and climb to another ridge. on the way there is a beautifully situated

bench with a hazy view to the north. The ridge is mainly in the forest with a few grassy patches and the path is easy going to the end at the top of a ski slope which sees another snack with the last of the ginger cake. There are lots of insects so I don't stay long. The descent is down a steepish grass slope alongside the ski slope and forest. Soon there is a bench with a good view - so another halt. It's downhill all the way to Ternberg but there is plenty of time so I take it easy. The weather is now more like summer with warm sun. At the bottom of the slope there is a track which soon becomes a sealed road where there is a path through the woods. I stick to the road which is slightly longer but easier. Below the forest is farmland with lots of fruit trees along the road side, laden with small fruit, apples, pears and plums. For the last half hour there is a path through the fields which joins a suburban street to the station for a footbridge over the tracks. The road to the village is to the right but to the left there is an inn sign; they have no rooms but across the road there is a 'zimmer frei' sign. Soon I'm installed in a pleasant room with a balcony and a view across the river, facilities and breakfast for 26€. I book breakfast with coffee for seven. After a shower I put the sweaty clothes on the balcony and head for the village. There are clouds and it looks like rain which doesn't materialise. The post office yields stamps (65c) and the bakery will be open from 5.45. I get plenty of supplies for lunch at ADEG and then back to the station where the guest house next to 'my' house has a menu; Tagesuppe, Schnitzel, rice, salad and Weißbier for 9.90€. An early but poor night.

### **Friday, 11th Ternberg to Maria Neustift**

After a poor night (too early to bed and traffic noise?) up at six and shower and bag ready.

Down to breakfast at seven for immediate departure. Breakfast is OK, rolls, sliced bread, ham, cheese, coffee and jam. Fr Rabenhaupt stops to talk in fairly good English from school.

Her son was in Plymouth for three weeks.

I leave at 7.20 - across the bridge to the bakery for lunch and then to the start of the walk at the back of the village. There is a sign, reversed, warning of a blockage on the path, so rather than risk it, I head for another path up the valley, which is also signed 404. It's a good minor road to farms, getting steeper and then onto a steep path out of the valley to the Gasthof Koglerhof and the Brettmeisenhof both of which have rooms. It would have been a useful place to stay last night.

From here it's a rather confusing set of field and forest paths with only sketchy signs. It takes quite a long time and makes MN seem long way off. However out of the forest and onto a road by a farm things seem clearer and I determine to miss out the ridge over the Sonnberg and to take the road which contours around it. It is good move; there is little up and down, little traffic and excellent views over the misty landscape to the south.

About four kilometres later, the road and the path join at Wolfsgrub and the path and subsequently a farm road take a wide circular route to gain height gradually, initially through the forest and around a wind farm. Soon the path leaves the road to join a forested ridge which has decent walking apart from some muddy bits and a final slog up to the summit at 1000m: Spadenberg with a chapel and seats. Initially it is steeply down with slippery roots, leaves and mud but then there is a flattish sandy path through long grass. It ends with a small rise in the forest with a good forest track which ends at the Glasner H. which is open for food and drink, but there is no one there. There are several ski tows around but it is farming land now. Several roads and a path take me steeply down to the river and there is a path up to MN. The path is crossed by an electric fence and cows but after checking around to find no other path, I sneak under the fence and come out at the church. The owner of the Pension Ahrer is just walking into the house and there is a nice room with a balcony looking south and a small shower for 27€. I order breakfast with coffee for seven am.

After some rest and a shower I take a look around, buy some chocolate and get a meal at the hostelry across the road at six: soup, veg pancake and salad, 0.25 Sturm for 12.40€.

Sturm seems to be the local name for Federwiess. They forgot about me in the non smoking room and I had to go to the bar to order my meal. Later the Wirt came to apologise with a Schnapps. By this time the forecast rain has arrived; I'm lucky it didn't arrive earlier.

The rain falls heavily and relentlessly; all night apparently. In late evening there is plenty of loud thunder and lightening, some of it within five miles. Consequently another broken night.

### **Saturday, 12th Maria Neustift to St Leonhard**

Up at 6.15 for breakfast at seven - eggs, rolls, cheese spread, jam, coffee, sweet pastries and a pear. Another man (a regular?) comes and goes after a little breakfast. I take an extra croissant and the pear with me. The girl tries to find out for me if it is possible to stay in Sonntagberg but fails; she suggests the info in Waidhofen. I leave soon after breakfast at 7.40. The weather is very damp with clouds all around but not raining.. I leave the village up a minor road and then down a farm path to a stream, over which the bridge is very slippery and I fall in. The lower half of me is wet but not too much damage. With the 100% humidity it will take a long time to dry! All the ground is very muddy and soaking and the cows don't look too happy. After climbing through the field from the stream the way soon joins a minor tarmacked road and a lot of the rest of the day is on similar, which makes for more speedy progress. The kilometres go by and the land is pastoral with lots of large farmhouses. It is atmospheric but with none of the long views that I sense are hidden. At Konradshausen the way leaves the main road which is getting busier and turns along the track past the cemetery. Two boys up a tree don't fail to sing out their *Gruß Gott*. There are some more field paths and then along a minor road to Waidhofen at 11.30. On the way I see what I think is a badger crossing the track - with a large bushy striped tail. I walk through the town which is attractive but damp and I fail to find the info office and the banks are closed (I want to change some 100€ notes). The first part of the route to Sonntagberg is along a minor road alongside the river Ybbs, which is swollen and very muddy. After about 3km I decide to stop at a restaurant for lunch. The food is formulaic but tasty - turkey fillet with ham and cheese, veg, rösti tablets and salad, sturm for 12€. Unfortunately immediately after this there is a 350m steep uphill, across the railway, roads through the fields and then a path through the forest to the basilica at Sonntagberg. It's only 2pm and the sign says three hours to St Leonhard and so I decide to press on in spite of there being private rooms available. It's about 9km along roads along the top of a broad ridge. Again there is a feeling of missed views. My feet in wet socks begin to suffer (especially the heels) and it begins to feel like a route march. The last bit is steeply uphill to reach St Leonhard at 4.45 just as drizzle starts. The Konditerie and Gasthof Ettel has a free room for 35€ and I order breakfast with coffee for eight. The room turns out to be attractive and large overlooking the church. It's good that I ate lunch as they are catering for a wedding party - off the premises so no noise from them. Laundry and a snack in the room.

### **Sunday, 13th St Leonhard to Reinsberg**

An excellent night until three and then dozing. At six I'm glad I ordered breakfast at eight and eventually get up at 7.15 feeling well rested if stiff (and raw heels). Breakfast is better than average with OJ and a large jug of coffee and I accept the offer of an egg. After careful packing I'm out by nine and underway after a few photos of the small village. The morning is grey with lots of clouds in the valley and on the hillsides, but with a dry feeling and some brightness. I'm quite tired when the route goes uphill but there is more down than up (St Leonhard is at 7.20 and Gresten 407). Much of way is along tarmac roads joining farms; initially they seem deserted and only gradually does the area waken up and then there are a few cars. There is a spell of about 3km through woods where I obviously miss a turning and end up with a stretch of uphill road walking. The highest point is 817m at the farm Mitterreith. Soon after that I forgo the offer of a detour to the Grestner Hochkogel (it's in the mist) and start the descent, sometimes along tracks and sometimes on field or forest paths. Approaching Gresten there is a lane alongside a stream and finally a short main road through the industrial area. The small town is quiet and not helped by light drizzle. I arrive at 1.15 and decide to have lunch - Seelachs and Weizenbier for 12€. There are lots of children running about and it's obviously late for eating and most people are getting ready to leave. The waiter confirms that rooms are available in Reinsberg and I leave after about

and hour through the back streets, taking little account of the map. Eventually I find the correct, steeply uphill road. Gresten is 407 and the summit is 550m. After a level stretch, at a farm with a playful dog, a field path descends into the valley, via other farms to join the main road just below the village, 477m, at 3.30.

There are two Gasthöfe, neither advertising rooms. One closed after lunch so I ask at the other and there is a room available at 20€, breakfast at 7.30. The room needs making up and the washing removed from it and has the WC and shower across the corridor - Fam. Brandl, Gasthof Kirchenwirt. While I wait for the room, I have a Sturm for 2.20€ while a local eats at the next table. The to the room for a relaxing evening. The sound of the river hides most of the noise, but the church clock is only a few metres away. The evening passes pleasantly, mostly with Val MacDermid and a few puzzles, with remarkable success on the super fiendish, and of course diary and maps. To bed at ten.

### **Monday, 14th Reinsberg to Plankenstein**

Awake around 5, doze and podcasts to 6.30, shower, pack, luggage to breakfast at 7.30. By now it has started raining. Breakfast is OK with juice, wurst, cheese, two rolls, jam and plenty of coffee and plums. The daughter serves and talks about Folkstone. I'm out before eight; the rain is steady and gets heavier during the next hour. I decide to stick to the road to avoid the muddy field and forest paths to gain the height. It's a bit further, but I think it's a good decision and there is little traffic.

At the top of the first hill I'm in the mist so it makes sense to take the path around the Distelreith summit. From there, after a short level stretch it is steeply down through the forest to a forest road all the way to the Scheibbs valley. There are plenty of signs of Friday's rain washing a lot away. Towards the bottom there are some attractive gardens but they need sun; at least it's more or less dry now. At the main road there is a kilometre along the main road and under the railway into the town at eleven. The track goes along the river which is also swollen. In town I try two bookshops for the next map but there is a gap in the coverage that I need. I make do with the WanderAtlas 'Weiner Hausberge' and probably a change in route. I get 250€ from the cash machine (to be sure, but there are lots of villages with cash machines) and some snack food from the supermarket.

Then it is uphill again; initially along a field footpath and then a lane to a seat for a short lunch with a good view of the part of the valley under the clouds. After that there is about an hour of uphill lane, farm track and path. Then there is what appears to be an old transhumanance track, cobbled and protected from the steep drop.

Eventually the path joins a better track which comes up from Schiebbs, and soon, after a car park, becomes one of the ubiquitous farm roads on a belvedere but with the view to the east missing. After a few more farms the route branches out onto a path through the forest with a substantial Kalvarie with seats and a good view and even a hint of sun. A man passes by with four huge mushrooms. Then it is up through the forest to another high road, even past Himmel. Soon another road diversion calls to avoid another forest path in the mist and, at about 4.30, Plankenstien is reached, but everything is locked up. Plan B is the Forellenhof - 200m down along the forest path past the castle and across the road. A dog greets me and I eventually meet humans. Yes there is a room available at 25€ which I accept for two nights, but no evening meal; there is a restaurant five minutes away. Thirty minutes later after I've showered, she has changed her mind and I can eat a set meal 20 mins later and there are several others, families, perhaps long term guests.

It turns out to be very tasty; some sort of omelette with a deep fried cutlet, salad and sweet Griesssuppe with Zimt and chocolate. I have 0.25l white wine and water. There is plenty of time for reading etc and bed by 9.30 for a good night with few interruptions.

### **Tuesday, 15th September Rest day at Forellenhof**

Up at 7 for a good breakfast at 7.30, cereals, juice etc but no egg. Back to bed for most of the morning listening to podcasts followed by a snack lunch of bread, bananas, biscuits and chocolate. Out for a short walk of three or so kilometres in the sunny afternoon followed by

reading, firstly sitting in the sun and then the shade to finish the book by Val MacDermid which has a very satisfactory ending.

Then it's back to the room for revised route planning given the maps available. perhaps not too far tomorrow, along the E4 to just beyond Kirchberg with a fallback of Kirchberg.

Down to supper with plates of bread toasted with cheese, speck etc arrive. How many to take, what's to follow? I mange three before they are cleared away so no one misses their supper, and that seems to be it. I fill up with bananas and chocolate from snack food box.

The usual evening , bed at nine, reasonable but earplugs against barking dog and stir at five.

### **Wednesday, 16th September: Forellenhof to Kirchberg**

Up at 6.30 for breakfast at 7.30 which is much as before. I could have been earlier as some walkers are well into theirs. Back to the room and out by 8.20. It is a beautiful early autumn morning but it doesn't look settled; there is more sun today than in the last week. The route, away from the E4 is fussy and not too well signposted which leads to a few unnecessary detours as in the first two kilometres through the forest instead of a simple track. There are several people working around the farms otherwise no-one about.

Soon there is a steep climb across fields and forest paths but again two unmarked (or unseen marks!) junctions with a particularly steep muddy path called the Bertlsteig; later I avoid the Yeti steig. But the morning is fine, it's pleasantly warm and the views are much better without the low clouds.

At Jägerlache (very small) I briefly encounter the 04 which has come over the Grüntalkogel (but the hut is only open at weekends and holidays). After 2km with the 04 I start along winding descent, first on a forest track and then farm tracks with excellent open views.

At about 11.45 I arrive in the valley at Schwerbach. There are two guesthouses but it's too early, even for a meal. It's a long two kilometres on the railway side (the metre guage Mariazell line) to the sprawling village of Kirchberg an der Peilach. There is a supermarket (for picnic provisions) but little accommodation (it's mostly back at Schwerbach). The Gemeindeamt fix me up with a room at the farm Lehen (1.5 km up the hill to the south: use of a flat for 30€ with breakfast. I arrive warm and sweaty for a shower and lunch: tea (from my own bags and the flat's kettle), roll, bananas and cheese. The Frau makes me very welcome and makes the bed as I sit outside reading. It's warm but the sun is disappearing and it looks as though the rain is returning. There are lots of insects and the windows have meshes as yesterday; also there are wasps eating the fallen fruit as ever. I suss out a path for tomorrow and then inside for a while.

At 5.45 I go to the station Gasthof for a meal, where it's still pleasant to sit outside. White wine, water, Kurbissuppe, plaice (three larges pieces, too much really), potatoes, salad.

Then it's 20 mins back up the hill to Lehen at 7.15 and it is already getting dark. After sitting in the lounge for a while, there is the temptation to go to bed. As ever a mistake and I think I have eaten too much or something didn't agree with me; my stomach feels heavy and sleep takes a long time coming and then is poor.

### **Thursday, 17th September: Kirchberg to Lilienfeld**

I eventually get up at 5.45 to get ready, and down to breakfast at 6.30 as arranged.

Graubrot, rolls, coffee, sheep cheese, Wurst, home made jam and juice. The latter are made from Dirndl; not a dress but some sort of local sour cherries. The area is marketed as Dirndltal.

It's just getting light and there are rain clouds all around, but it is mild. Soon I'm away at 7.20 with a ham roll (encouraged by Fr). Also I have to fill in the guest book. Since everything is wet I don't take the field path but make the detour down the hill into the village and out along the Soisgegend (everything is -gegend around here). The rain has stopped

but the clouds are still down and it is mild and muggy; rain wear is too much and the umbrella is better for the showers that come all day with only slightly brighter intervals.

After about three kilometres along the valley road there is a left turning along a gently rising minor farm road to a group of farms at the highest point (520m from 400). Then the real climbing begins: along a farm track into the woods, a steep rough track through the woods

with a brief opening where land has been cleared and sown, and it's not clear where the path goes. On a shoulder another path joins and it is much better underfoot, but still relentlessly steep with another shower. There is some relief at the summit, the Schöngraben Spitz with a grassy top and some gentle downhill to a grassy pass which is very soggy. From here it is very steep again up a very muddy, slippery path though long grass and herbs and partly forest on a zig-zag line. Eventually I reach the summit of the Hohenstein at 1195 with its OeAV hut (Otto Kandel), closed during the week with a welcome Notraum with a self service bar; hence the Radler with the picnic lunch. There are no view toady and according to the guest book few visitors recently. The temperature is 15deg and it's very damp.

The path down is initially through lush vegetation and then through the forest but always on muddy, twisting, slippery paths. After two sections and one slip I elect to use a forest road and hope it goes where the map says. It does and is much easier walking and only a little further joins the main path in the valley bottom. There is another six or so kilometres along the river Traisen through Schaubach along an old railway which is now a cycle track with various showers. The number of buildings increases and one place says Zimmer but the house is being rebuilt. Eventually at four I get a room at the Weisses Hahn for 32€ with breakfast ordered for 7.30; a lie-in! The room even has a separate sitting room. There follows sock-washing and puzzles until six and then to the restaurant for the Menü - pancake soup, pasta with ricotta and salmon, salad, cake and a glass of Sturm for 13.70€; OK but under-seasoned.

Back to my sitting room for puzzles and reading, and dealing with the insects. Because of the latter I close the window and therefore warm and another poor night.

### **Friday, 18th September: Lilienfeld to Hainfeld**

Eventually up at 6.45 for breakfast at 7.30 (OK, juice, small pot of coffee) and away by 8.15.

The day is very misty but only a little drizzle during the morning. A day of two halves. First across the bridge and through the Schloß area with a view through a class room window and then just a little way along the valley road. A side road starts steeply upwards at a cemetery and after a while there is a path leading off it, initially carefully mown by the neighbouring house, but soon very muddy and steep in the forest, soon I escape back onto the road to the ridge where there is a farm and a track down the other side. Soon a path crosses a field and then there is track through the wood to a lane, rather like one in the Chilterns. All the tiem everything is shrouded in mist with a little drizzle on the way up. At the bottom, in the Wassern Bach Tal, there is a little road up the valley past the Hasenwirt with an appropriate sign before another lane to the east. Again it starts off as a paved lane but it soon is a muddy path emerging from the forest to an alp but the mist is so dense that it is difficult to see which way to go. A bit of work with the compass yields the right answer and there is a road to the next farm Hoch Reither, nearly at the summit. The path goes through the barn (what if it's locked?) and along a muddy lane which obviously sees more cows than hikers. The nest kilometer is a complex mix of lanes, field and woodland paths (and an oncoming hiker!) before reaching the start of the descent - steep grass, forest tracks, a track through a field with cows to a farm where a noisy group of girls is starting down the road. We share the track for a couple of kilometres and then I head for St Viet for lunch, the Menü for 6€ (soup plus Kaisserschmarren with plums) and a beer. A quick look around the village yields a locked church.

The second half sees me hobbling rather. The way starts along a cycle track up the Gölsen valley, a little along the main road but then it is a bit along old lanes but mostly on a dedicated track along the river side. The sun comes out! At Rohrbach I decide to carry on but Hainfeld yields no hotels and a passerby says that there is a Gasthof along the main road

about a kilometre east of the town.

And so there is and they have room for 38€. It is brand new one of several wooden ones in the grounds. Very nice, large with a large balcony although the road is noisy but I am assured that it will quiet after nine. I snack on the balcony and then laundry plus the usual activities. The balcony gets cool and I move inside which is no great hardship escaping the noise. I stiffen up and the feet aren't too good. To bed at nine and not too bad, especially the first half.

### **Saturday, 19th September: Hainfeld to Thenneberg**

I am up at 6.30 to a clear blue sky and I wish that I had booked breakfast earlier! I get to the breakfast room just as the man does (7.15) and start early a decent breakfast including Yakult yoghurt, juice, ham, cheese etc. Back to the room and away at 8.20. I hike the 1.5km along the road back to Hainfeld for the bank, bakery and supermarket but still no postcards. By 9.15 I'm on the path and soon it is steeply up through the woods but mostly decent underfoot. The way is quite a distance without any other paths, and once the height is gained, a lot of it is fairly level along the ridge. There are also good views for a change, but the atmosphere is still hazy. Again there are lots of farms around, and they look prosperous. There are a few walkers in the opposite direction. There are more paths as I approach Araburg and there are lots more people around (with a car park not far below). I have a beer (which seems strong at 5%) and a quick look around and then down by the forest path/road/farm track/path to Kaumberg where the church is open. A cycle trial is under way and there are jollities in the centre of the village.

After Kaumberg, the challenge is to avoid the main road. Initially there is a path along the river which ascends diagonally through the woods and again is the Via Sacra with all the signs being in reverse for me. A junction is unsigned, or I miss it, and so I take a forest road down to the Steinbach for a short walk up the valley and a farm road over a low saddle to the Hönergraben and it is a pleasant walk to the main valley and a convenient cycle track (extra to what is on the map and a definite bonus).

At the next village I start looking for a room and the first, the Gasthof Postl has one for 35€ with a balcony overlooking the village and I can have breakfast at seven. I turn down the sauna but after a shower head down for a meal at 4.45 - Via Sacra Pfandl (potatoes, mushrooms, Speck etc), salad, glass of red Sturm comes without choice for 10.70€ and is all very tasty. All the time the family is in the room with two little boys running around. Up to the room for the usual, but soon my right foot is sore and almost unuseable. After an hour or so in bed, cold water and antiseptic cream with paracetamol help but a poor night follows.

### **Sunday, 20th September: Thenneberg to Sittendorf**

My foot is rather better. It is a misty morning; more like an autumn mist that clears. The breakfast is good at seven with the items that I ordered yesterday, muesli, yoghurt, eggs scrambled to order, plenty of juice and coffee, rolls, cheese and ham, accompanied by the TV showing the weather webcams. I'm out at 7.45; the foot is rather better but not good.

The weather is ideal for walking; cool and misty. There is a lane turning to a wet grassy path along the railway line behind the guesthouse, and then onto the main road which is quiet at this time on a Sunday morning. Altenmarkt is along village along the main road with only a few side roads one of which leads to a path through the woods up the hill to Hainfeld which has a large baroque church. I've escaped the mist, which is still in the valley, to a clear blue sky and a beautiful sunny morning. There are large fields of maize and what looks like rape (but the season?) and clear views. A boy on a bike goes backwards and forwards with a cheerful greeting every time. After a farm/guest house there is a confusing sign but then a long straight path through the fields with wet grass to the Gasthof Holzschlag. There are plenty of people around - cycling and walking - and it feels like the best of Autumn. There is a well defended compound (someone important?). Now there is quite



a lot of downhill along forest paths and then roads but the right foot gets worse with blisters on toes and heel. It is warm like summer and I am surrounded by fields and gardens; the landscape is flattening out. At Mayerling one of the guesthouses is falling down and the other is upmarket. There is also a Seniorenheim with old people walking around.

After a short walk up the road it is through the wood, a pleasant escape from the sun. After a short detour through the wood there is a convenient path alongside the main road and then there are steps down to Heiligenkreuz, dominated by the Stift and lots of tourists. The shop is closed for lunch and so still no postcards. After a quick look around it's out along the road past the Stations of the Cross and then along a path to the cemetery, under the motorway and then along a dry sunny track alongside it with increasing views back to Heiligenkreuz.

A narrow path to the right takes off into the wood up to a low summit and then along a muddy path to a horse farm, Meierei, and then down the lanes to Sittendorf at about 2.15.

It's early but given the state of my foot the advertised Pension just out of the village is attractive. It has a room for 35€ but no breakfast before 7.45; I negotiate the room without breakfast for 30€.

I take an enjoyable late and leisurely lunch - Lachsforelle(2), potatoes, 0.5l Most, cocoa and Nusstorte for 17€, partly in the garden but then inside to escape the flies and the smokers. I go indie for a shower and a rest. The usual evening. The foot is sore again and I have lots of insect bites. At nine I go to the soft bed but a decent night until four and then up at 5.45.

### **Monday, 21st September: Sittendorf to Purkersdorf**

Up at 5.45 and after a shower out by 6.30, soon after it gets light. It's cool and misty but not so much as yesterday. Already there are cars on the road - commuters to Vienna? I go back through the village and then up the road, past the papers being delivered, to the Schloß Wildegg which looks good in the early sun. There is farmland and forest and forest roads and paths to the entry to the Naturpark Föhrenberge and for several kilometres there are excellent gravel tracks with a mixture of meadows with lots of Autumn Crocuses and stands of trees all of which is attractive in the low sun.

The signs are variable and I miss one before leaving the main track to turn left onto the #444, the connecting path. It's well made but narrower and steeper but only one stretch which is really steep and slippery. I'm glad I stayed at Sittendorf yesterday; there are no overnight opportunities before the bottom of this path. Here a radial road from Vienna is crossed near the village of Kaltenleutgeben.

Then it's straight up again to the Weiner Hütte, already open with a skilift advertised and then down through the woods to Breitenfurt Ost, another village with commuters, and up again through the woods to the Hundskehl and down to Laab past a large Kloster of the Sisters of Mercy (Barherziger Schwester) and through the village at noon in time for lunch at the Kirchwirt. There is a Menü for 5.60€ with tasty soup, Putenschnitzel, potatoes and salad and a piece of cake. I have Most and Kakao with it. The inn has rooms but it is too early.

The sun is warm, and my right foot is sore and it's hard work up the next hill. With my head down I miss the turning putting on two kilometres but along a track which is probably easier.

I reach the top at last for a rest and the last of the water which replaces only some of the sweat. The forest path down to the A1 motorway is quite steep and ends in a tunnel under the road to a village and a minor road through the pleasant Deutscher Wald Bach valley. Near to Purkersdorf I head towards the Hotel Sommer, but a woman coming out says it is closed and to wait until she has walked her dogs. 25 minutes are wasted because all she does is to ask in the hotel and to find that all the rooms are full. She directs me to another hotel but all their rooms are full. In the town centre I find that it isn't really a tourist place.

I arrive at the Tourist Office at 17.02 to find it closes at 17.00. I pick up a guide to accommodation and head another kilometre down the road towards Vienna to the Hotel Friedl which has a room but at 48€, and book in for two nights to include a day in Vienna. The man at the desk is helpful about times and tickets for the trains. Breakfast is from six, which will be useful for Wednesday, and the room has a bath which is very acceptable after a trying two hours and sore feet. Usual bed at nine.

### **Tuesday, 22nd September: Vienna from Purkersdorf**

Good night, up at 6.30 for breakfast at 7.15, bus to Vienna, maps, book, lunch. Return by tram and S Bahn. Used maps to post office and shopping in Purkersdorf, passing the Nepalese embassy.

### **Wednesday, September 23 Purkersdorf to Grinzing**

I am up at 5:20 and after packing and showering have breakfast at six. Already there are plenty of work men in the restaurant. I have a good filling breakfast and am adopted by the lady there including are giving me biscuits for lunch and she tells me about other customers where I have walked. The chef has to be fetched so that I can pay with my Visa card and I leave at 6:50. It is cool, 10°, and clear with lots of traffic heading for Vienna. I walk into the village and after the initial disorientation get onto the path which climbs steeply up the hill. The path varies in distinctiveness but settles down to a horizontal track through the woods to Buuchberg, 466m, and then steeply down, partly path, partly road to the next valley.

Then it's up to the next hill gently and then steeply alongside a ski tow. After about 200 m the track levels out and soon passes Moosalm, the first of lots of places to eat and drink. By now it's a beautiful morning with a clear sky and a breeze but not too warm although the temperature gradually increases. There are some wide open meadows before the forest closes in again. There are plenty of people around who are mostly runners and walkers. Some of the inns are closed for the day but eventually after avoiding Hermannskogel I arrive at Jägerweise about 1140 and already some are eating. Hi sit inside to avoid insects, smoke and sun, and it takes a long time for my meal to arrive but it's tasty with mixed fried veg, salad and Sturm for €9.40.

After an hour I am back on to the track which now runs through the warm woods with more and more people. I get to Kahlenberg with a church and crowds and fields and then around to Leopoldsberg with fewer people; the castle and the inn are closed but a there is a better, closer view of the Danube, the vineyards and the city.

The Nasweg down to the river is long and zigzagging with steps and a steep path but plenty of people are walking up. I reach the bottom at 2:45 and walk alongside the river with one stop for a snack. As I walk I realise it's a long way before other stopping places, so I head 'inland' to Nußdorf to look for accommodation. I don't see any and a woman in a car stops to help and says I will have to go to Grinzing, another 1.5 km. The Grinzingerhof has a room, smallish and noisy, but comfortable at €59. Then it's laundry, shower, rest and to the garden, which is attractive but again noisy, to read.

At sunset I go back to the room for the usual and bed at nine.

### **Thursday, September 24 Grinzing to Orth a. d. Donau**

In spite of the noise I sleep quite well and certainly until 4.45 and then doze. I am up at 5:45 for breakfast at 6:30 and another party of four have bought an early breakfast. It is quite reasonable but not up to the price of the room, and then I pay and am away by 7.30.

It is another clear morning but not so cool as yesterday. It is about 2 km down the street (Grinzinger Straße) to the river and there are lots of children going to school getting off the trams and buses.

At the bottom of the road there is a tangle of railway lines, motorways and main roads, but a

well signed set off cycle tracks gets me to the bridge over the Danube canal and onto the Donau Insel. Route finding is no longer a problem; I just count the bridges overhead. Towards the end of the island there is any question as to whether that last crossing is available (it turns out to be) so I take the previous one and do the last stage on the 'mainland' which takes me through a naturist area, and when in Austria...

There follows an industrial area where the path crosses between lots of oil tanks where tankers on the river are unloaded. Afterwards the path is soon into excellent woodland at the start of the Donau National Park with frequent maps and information tablets. In a few km the Gasthof Uferhaus supplies a very welcome Radler for €2.80. The next section is well signposted with good tracks through the woods and along the dam parallel to the river, but out of sight of it with trees in between. Schönau an der Donau advertises a Gasthof with rooms but all is locked up and the place looks run down.

There are lots of signposts to places in Mannsdorf, one of which has a Ruhetag and so in spite of aching feet I set off across the fields, about 3 km. At Mannsdorf I find the place with the Ruhetag; it is all locked up and even the post is still there, but no sign of the other. There is an advert for private rooms in Schönau!

So it's another 3 km along the road to Orth a. d. Donau. There is no answer at the first Pension but at last night come up trumps at the Steuer with a modest room for €30 with breakfast. The shower is very welcome and I go into the centre for a meal pass the Schloß. Pork schnitzel, salad, a quarter of white wine, water and a cup of cocoa costs me €12.40. By the time I leave it's dark and I make my way back to the room, slowly with sore feet. I try to charge the PDA, but with no success. It's been problematic for several days and I don't know if it's the machine or the charger that's the problem. I go to bed at 9:30 and I have a not bad night with just half an hour awake at 2 AM.

## **Friday, September 25**

### **Orth a. d. Donau to Hainburg a. d. Donau**

I'm up at 6:45 and after a shower have a very good self-service breakfast of juice, cereals plus all the usuals and drinks from the machine: two coffees and one chocolate. Back in the room I find the radio is also dead as I left it on which means nothing to listen to. I get out by 8:30 and find the brightness has largely clouded over but it is mild. At the shop I buy a pack of eight batteries for two euros and post cards.

Eventually I leave the village which obviously has plenty of tourists and a coach is leaving the Danubius at 9:15. The path is mostly well marked and initially parallel to the road alongside a stagnant creek. It crosses the Marchfelddamm and heads for the Donau. Before I know it I am heading downstream having seen nothing of the two cafes and ferry which forms a mystery. The path is very close to the river but with a line of trees between and so the view is intermittent. A couple of hydrofoils passes but there are no goods barges. The sun comes and goes and there is a reasonable breeze. Eventually there is a path away from the river to Eckertsau which has a Schloß but seems a mean village with no sign of somewhere for an early lunch.

After Eckertsau there is a path to the Damm and then 8 km before arriving at a well-surfaced track on the outskirts of Stopfenreuth. It's quiet with only a few cyclists and I left the clouds behind and the temperature has risen. The cyclists have to turn into the village but I head to the right, back to the edge of the river and then along the bank to the Road Bridge high above the river. There is a scary cycle track/pathway along the bridge with 101 steps up and 60 down.

After that it's a pleasant walk into Hainburg alongside the fields with a bright blue sky and autumn leaves. At the beginning of the town a cottage advertises Zimmerman. An invalid lady in the garden suggests no; it looks a dump with three yelping little dogs.

After that there are no signs of private rooms and after a half hour tramp through the streets of the attractive town I find nothing except a hotel room at €50. I eventually find the information office and a helpful lady rings the pizzeria, el Pirata, and they have a room for €35. It's on the edge of town towards Bratislava and the room is small and warm with a

skylight but modern and comfortable. After a shower I head out to look around the mediaeval town with its walls, interesting buildings and a castle on top of the hill. I go back to the pizzeria via the supermarket and have Quattro Stagione and a quarter of white wine for €10.10. I go back to the room and am able to charge the PDA. Bed by 930 for a mostly good sleep but awake around two.

NB1. There are Roman remains nearby.

NB2. Austrian radio one at 2 PM: "Guten Nachmittag meine Damen und Herren...": shades of Smaje.

## **Saturday, November 26**

### **Hainburg to Deutschjahrendorf**

I'm up at 6.30 and after a shower and packing I get to breakfast at 7.30 and it's just about ready. Apart from the lack of cereals it's good with all the usuals and plenty of coffee and juice.

I get away at 7.50 to a clear blue sky (although the tourist info said bedekt), with a nip in the air so that shorts and T-shirt are only just warm enough. It's back to the edge of the town to pick up the path along the riverside, past the Donau Cafe and along an excellent path through two tunnels with good views up and down the river. The Röthelstein Castle overlooks this strategic corner of the Donau. There is a stretch through the woods to avoid various creeks and then it's back to the river, around the corner and looking across to the picturesque village of Devín in Slovakia. The path along the river is fine for two to three kilometres with various boats including a double barge passing but there is a noisy quarry on the other side. The views are otherwise excellent.

I go 'inland' for a last time on schedule at 10am to Wolfsthal for a quick look in the church before walking along the main road with lots of buses going to Bratislava. There is a short stretch along the the Damm and then the E8 continues into Slovakia and I go along a side road with an industrial estate not marked on the map. There is a small vineyard and the waymarks, which have been good up to here, disappear at a high metal stile. I cross it and make my way up through the trees along faint tracks to the extensive ruins of the Dottenburg and further to Königswarte. This has lots of communication dishes and a high wooden viewing tower with plenty of children and cyclists. It's 344m, way above the river at 130m. The track down to Berg is through autumn coloured trees and Berg is on the plain. I go past the landscaped Kläranlage onto a series of cycle paths through large fields with a lot of maize, and the sun beats down. It's not far to Kittsee which is a long village with few signs of life. Then I follow farm roads with very little traffic apart from cyclists. I pass under the newly built motorway to Slovakia and follow the railway line, which has one train an hour each way.

Near Pama a man is pruning a fruit tree (it's Marillen) and he advises me on the route to DJ and to ask there again for the path to Nickelsdorf. It's too early to stop at Pama (2.30) and so I go on with the hope of a hotel in DJ although I'm prepared to go on to Nickelsdorf. The road is a straight one for 5km, with about two along the border with Slovakia. There is more corn, more strong sun and a little wind. Half way along there is a Pilgerkapelle with an advert for the Altes Landgut in DJ which is a good sign.

Indeed they have a room, for €46, but I get a flat for that. There is some sort of celebration going on, and after a shower and laundry I sit in the garden at about 4.30 for a supper of baked Zander, gemüse nudeln and a quarter of white for €14.10 and very good.

A stroll around the village gives some photographs in the evening sunshine, and I get €300 from the machine (3X€100 unfortunately) and then I go back to the room for a brew of Rotbuschtee and have some biscuits as a sweet course, relaxing on the settee. After reading I go to bed, probably too early at 8.30, but it's not too bad with only a few awakenings.

## **Sunday, September 27**

### **Deutschjahrendorf to Frauenkirchen**

It is another beautiful morning with a clear blue sky and cool to start but getting warmer later, up to about 25° and feeling warmer in the sun.

At 7 AM I have breakfast which is okay with juice and am away by 750. Given that I don't have the map for the Dreiländer Eckertsau which and the signage is not good around here I decide on the direct route to Mickelsdorf which is a quiet lane with just a few cyclists. The sun soon warms the air and it's back to shirt and shorts. After a few kilometres there is a side road which leads back onto the E4 through a mix of woodland and fields. There is a canal, River and railway all near to the Hungarian border before arriving at Michaelsdorf where church is convening just before 10. I don't see any rooms, but I don't go looking.

From Nickelsdorf there is a welcome change to a path for a few kilometres and any few metres climbing through vines to a very dry area under the new motorway too Hungary and distant views over the plain. Soon it's back to the tarmac and a couple of kilometres to Kleylehof and then onto a gravel road for lots of kilometres. Attractive trees and fields line the road which has little traffic and in the warm air the PDA with podcasts is welcome! There are a couple of chapels and a farm before the approach to the Schloß at Halbturm, which is the Barock extravaganza with pleasant grounds. The village of Halbturm is carefully laid out with lots of trees.

The 5 km to Frauenkirchen is tediously along the main road with only the view of the great Kloster church to aim for. Eventually I reach the place at 3:30 and it becomes apparent that it isn't over endued with accommodation. There is only one guest house by the station and they have a room for €30 with breakfast at seven. It's a fine big room and as always a shower refreshes and I am out for photos of the church and supper at the China restaurant with spring rolls, vegetables and rice, a quarter of red, water and something gratis - tasty. I go back to the guest house Weisz for a reasonable night.

## **Monday, September 28**

### **Frauenkirchen to Mörbisch am See**

I have a good breakfast and little before seven. There are three places said and a young man comes in at 7:15. I'm away by 745 to another beautiful morning although sunrise is getting later and today it was quite dark at six.

I go back to the main road and then west along a newly surface Road as are a lot around here- it seems the European money is being spent. The route zig zags along several lanes where there are plenty of cyclists and fewer and fewer vehicles. After an hour or so I get to the Zichsee where there is a large Feriendorf with caravans and wooden houses which are mostly well-kept with good gardens. Past the site the lake side is very attractive with trees and bathing places and seats. At the far end is another holiday place and then various tracks lead across country to the Langelache, another lake. It's interesting to note that, as yesterday, there are plenty of bangs generated to scare birds away from the vines on one side and on the other side there are protected areas for birds and other animals. There are plenty of people across this open area, many looking at the birds. As with the last few days the sun is strong and feels warm but the air temperature is in the low 20s.

The road leads through the streets of Apetlo, and as it's 12.15 lunch seems in order but the eating places all seem to be closed. Another 2 to 3 km takes one to Ilmitz along the main road which has a good cycle track to walk on and there are lots of vines around. Ilmitz has lots of places to eat in and I choose one which has a menu at €6.90 with soup and stuffed cabbage. There is no Sturm, but a very nice glass of Jungwein costs €3.20. All is eaten in a pleasant garden in the shade of the vines; what the Italians would call a grotto.

After leaving the village it's about 4 km to the lake. The road has cycle tracks on both sides and gets quieter the further I go along it, and also feels more remote and eventually only has a few cyclists. Initially there are lots of vines, then some trees and then reeds with patches of water. I reach the lake at 2:50 and buy a six euro ticket for the 20 minutes crossing and the boat leaves 10 minutes later. The lake is flat calm and another boat crosses in the opposite direction.

At the boat landing there is a large arena for a Festspiel including large models of for example

Tower Bridge. There are lots of police with dogs; perhaps there is something on tonight? After a large hotel (Mörbischer Hof), there are various rooms advertised. The one that offers a free single room doesn't answer the bell, but the info office gives me a map and a list of accommodation and identifies which Pensions have free rooms. The first doesn't answer the bell but a private house does. A friendly woman keen to practice her English, offers a room for €24 with breakfast at eight and then 730. There are two lively children but she assures me they are her sister's and only visiting. While she gets the room ready I go to the local Spar for provisions.

Back at the room laundry, shower followed by lots of sleep

## **Tuesday September 29**

### **Mörbisch am See**

Rest

Breakfast at eight

Heimathaus

Supper at Gasthaus Lang: Schweinsmedallions, white wine, €13.90

## **Wednesday September 20**

### **Mörbisch to Draßburg/Sopron**

I'm up at 6.30, have breakfast at 7.30 and am out by 8.20 to a dry morning with lots of cloud with a forecast of a rain shower. It's clearer and cooler. The way is due north to Rust and the ground is gently rising away from the lake and the lane is between vines above the main road and so there are wide views across the lake and far across the plain.

It is about 5km to Rust which is a little bigger than Mörbisch but with very few people around - very much out of season. After a turn it is 'inland' through the suburbs and using the map and cycle routes as there is little signage. For a while I walk with a Nordic walker who thinks that the 20km to Draßburg is a long way. I go via various lanes to the top of a quarry (stone for the Stefansdom) and the Kogelkapelle on top of a 224m hill with a wide view and lots of sculptures set into the hillside. Then it's down towards St Margarethen in Burgenland via someone's back garden and back to the fields of vines. St M has a passion play but has no particular attraction.

After that the way is through vineyards, heathland and along the edge of a wood, and the sun comes out making the weather feel warmer. From time to time there are way marks, but usually when they are not needed and rarely at junctions. The next village is Siegendorf, again unremarkable; I guess it has a lot of commuters, with a Gewerbe zone on the outskirts. Across a disused railway line is the more attractive Zagersdorf with its Zweisprachiger Weinwanderweg; there can't be many of those! A spell along the main road takes me to the station at Draßburg. I have been hatching a plan to check the trains to Sopron in Hungary to have two nights there. Draßburg has no immediately apparent accommodation, and there is an hourly service so I get the 1539 (49 minutes wait) which is a modern electric train. As I wait I chat to two ladies on the station, resting during a walk. They live locally and the elder speaks Croatian and German, but has forgotten her Hungarian. I ask her about Sopron; it is dirty and they speak German. The train is on time and takes 15 minutes to Sopron. Immediately outside the station is a sign to the Bianco Pansio, 1000m, and I get a decent room with a balcony overlooking the garden with a balcony, with breakfast and Internet for €30. The Internet is slow with Windows 98, but allows me to catch up with emails and The Archers. I have a shower and go out for dinner.

The town turns out to be delightful with churches, walls, fine buildings and squares in the old town. The first ATM denies me forints but the next gives 30 000 with no trouble. The Zander restaurant has a menu for 1790 (soup, Zander and potatoes, cake and cream, 2dl wine, schnapps for a total of 2490. I have another walk around town and then back to bed for a mixed night.

## **Thursday October 1**

## **Sopron**

I'm up at 730 for a breakfast which is good except for the bread in a pleasant sitting room overlooking the garden. I use the Internet and spend some time reading on the balcony. It's out for sightseeing at ten, taking in the post office, fire tower, synagogue and after lots of photos have lunch at 1145 at the Danubius. There is a Menü for 1250: pea soup, beef stew with mushrooms and rice, pancake with 2dl white wine and an espresso for 1800 and very good.

I spend the afternoon sitting in the downstairs room, reading and using the Internet. I'm out by 3.45 to walk up the Hausberg for about a couple of hours. It's strange to see ski tows at such a low altitude.

I have a by poor disturbed night.

## **Friday October 2**

### **(Sopron) Draßburg to Kobesdorf**

I'm up by 6.20 and am down to breakfast which is ready at 7.15 and away at 7.45 with plenty of time to get the €3.80 ticket and catch the 8.11 train, spot on time, to Draßburg and underway by 8.30.

It was raining at daybreak and now it is cloudy and damp, with forecasts of showers and cooler. A lot of today is through forests, with variable signs which are usually frequent when unnecessary and often absent at junctions. However the tracks are always good with road walking near the villages - Rohrbach and Sieggraben. The section between the two is fine with some good oak woods on a long, well graded ascent to the Herrentisch, a picnic site. From there are long, looping tracks down to the Sieggraben, with, when leaving the woods, long views across the valley.

It's clouding over and there's a cool breeze. Sieggraben is a rather dull village and after it there is a climb to cross the Schnellstraße and the path largely follows the road. After a few kilometres a right turn takes me down into Kobersdorf with its Schloß. One Pension is closed, there is no answer at the private room, but the Pension Am Waldhof has a very nice room for €28.

After a shower I go back to the village for photos and a supper of Pork medallions with a mushroom sauce, beer, hot chocolate and then go back to the room.

## **Saturday October 3**

### **Kobersdorf to Lockenhaus**

After a mostly decent sleep, I'm up at 6.15 for breakfast at 7 which is modest with no juice or cereal but more coffee.

I'm out by eight to a beautiful morning, but the temperature is 7 and the clouds soon appear. The way is initially well signed with a mixture of forest roads and paths. The paths are overgrown with wet vegetation and fallen trees which are easily avoidable. The last path is down into the valley then steeply up to the Landsee medieval castle at 627m. It's worth the €2.50 and is well explained in German and English. There are good views, especially from the top of the keep which is reached by wooden and then metal spiral steps.

From the castle to the village is about a kilometre. The former has a restaurant but it's too early. The signs seem good but I'm lulled into false security and I have to retrace a kilometre; there are two 07s!

The correct way is easy going, gently falling across fields and through the forest. the map isn't 100% accurate and the signs vary but it's easy to find Weingraben. The situation is good but the village seems soulless, with several pretentious new houses. Of the two eating places one is closed and the other has no warm food. I go back to the route and again poor signage and map. It's initially across fields and then into the forest checking the direction with a man I meet. The compass is definitely useful with all sorts of path appearing and disappearing. After a particularly faint track it is surprising to see the 07 sign and to be spot on course emerging from the forest. The views are good along the lane which gets better.

Any jogger tells me that I shall get a bed at the guest house Meyer in Piringsdorf. It's at the bottom of the track but the chef isn't around and can't be reached by phone. After half an hour and a Sturm, I resign myself to walking over the hill to Lockenhaus. I try at Hochstraße, but with no luck and so go down the hill to the village and through to the Hauptplatz. The guest house advertised on the main road is closed for holidays but the information office and a pleasant and efficient lady finds me a private room back along the road I came along at €27 with no facilities and breakfast at eight am.

I pass on the Feuerwehrfest and go to the Hauptplatz and have Goulaschsuppe, toast and a quarter of red for €10.40; an odd meal but I feel full. I walk back to the room and have a reasonable night.

## **Sunday October 4**

### **Lockenhaus to Köseeg**

After a long night I am up at 7:15 and after breakfast at 8am, which is reasonable, I am away at 8:45. It's a glorious morning with a clear sky a nip in the air but that disappears after an hour. I go back to the square and before the main road there is a cycle track alongside the river which flows around the base of the wooded hill on which is the Burg. There are plenty of photos with the trees beginning to change colours. The cycle track goes behind the village of Teich and back to the main road. There is a path of uphill for about 100 m and then 2 to 3 km through the forest to join the E4 at Rotes Kreuz. From there there is a fair distance along a forest tracks and then a shortish but unpleasant stretch through the forest undergrowth with a marked, but pathless, route.

It emerges at a cottage and then it's back to reasonable tracks which eventually emerge to farmed fields and the sunshine, and after a couple of kilometres into the village of Liebing. The Gasthof is closed but the one across the valley at Rattersdorf supplies a Menü for €5.50 and quarter of wine at €2.10 (garlic soup, pork schnitzel with rice and salad). There is some function going on with lots of dressing up.

Next there is a stretch along the main road across the border into Hungary. The two border stations are there but no manning, and everyone just drives through. Gradually Köseeg develops with extensive suburbs and the road eventually reaches reaches the mediaeval walled town where the information office is closed. I find three hotels: one looks expensive, the second doesn't reply to the bell and the third offers a room. The bar is sleazy though the hotel is respectable and the room, which is small with a balcony, costs 7150 with breakfast from seven.

After some laundry I go out for some photos before the sun disappears; the town is very photogenic. A trip to the station yields no timetable, but Spar on the return is open until six and I get some picnic food. Back to the room. The Internet is kaput and so bed at 9.50 for a reasonable night.

## **Monday October 5**

### **Köseeg**

I'm up at 6.30 for breakfast at 7.10. Two girls are smoking and leave with ill grace as I have my white bread, sausage, cheese and two coffees.

I'm out by 7.50 to a cold, clear morning and the old town looks beautiful. Children going to school look sloppy and some are smoking. The tourist information office is closed although it should be open at eight. I start on the path which is marked with blue and white flashes.

There are plenty of these all day, but no signposts.

After leaving the town, the path heads up into the forest to the Austrian border for a kilometre or so and then a straight section along forest roads. They are good with very little traffic but lots of flies except when the wind blows. The temperature is increasing and the wind is welcome; the sky is largely clear. There are plenty of well marked forest roads, and then some field paths to Törmöd, a pleasant village although the restaurant on the main road is closed as it is Monday.

The next path is through old woodland, a little farmland and then back to forest roads to



Kösefalva from where it is 0.75 hours to the next train but there is a bus along the main road for Ft 210. I head to the library but they are closing early, although I manage half an hour on the Internet for Ft 200 for emails and train times. I get a map of Hungary and a map and enjoy the last of the sunshine on the balcony. The Hungarian map seems very accurate and precise, down to forest look outs. I go out for a meal but a cheap vegetarian meal is disappointing, but with a decent glass of wine.

## **Tuesday October 6**

### **Köseg to Budapest**

Again the day dawns fine with just a little cloud on the horizon. Breakfast is as before at seven and after finishing packing I leave at 7.30, paying in Euros and charged for the extra coffees. I shake the dust from my feet and reach the station in good time where it is pleasant sitting in the sunshine and still pleasantly cool. The train is a two car DMU, spot on time and comfortable.

At Szombathely I buy a timetable for Ft 900 and enquire about the supplement for the next train, in German. I'm sold a Ft400 ticket. I stroll down the street, buy a chocolate croissant and espresso back at the station. There are coaches at the platform without a loco, perhaps waiting for more from Vienna. About fifteen minutes later a diesel locomotive arrives and we leave. The guard doesn't want my supplementary ticket. The countryside is pleasant although nothing special and largely farmland. We arrive at Nagykanizsa about twenty minutes late but with plenty of time for the connection. This time the lady speaks no German but a little English; no extras are needed, and it's the same class of train, from Zagreb, as the other was. I stroll down the street, but it's not clear where/how far the centre is, so I go back to the station to sit and watch a little of the world going by.

The local train to Budapest is parked in the bay and there are various announcements about my fast train. A man waiting on the platform has no English or German, but signals that it is 20mins late and it turns out to be more like 35. There is plenty of room, some AC and some non-AC and I choose a part where I can enjoy looking out of the window and snacking. The train runs along the whole of Lake Balaton, but because of ribbon development, little is to be seen. A lot of the line is single track and waiting for oncoming trains and engineering work means that we lose more time, although we pick up time and arrive in Budapest about 35mins late. The guard doesn't worry about a supplementary ticket.

There isn't a tourist information office at the station; I should have copied some pages from the guide. I eventually head townwards, I hope, towards the Danube. One hotel is €150. I buy a map and spot an Ibis which has a room for €66 (plus €9 for breakfast) for a good room and fast internet connection. The man on the deck, from Romania, speaks excellent English and agrees that Hungarian is difficult.

After a shower and laundry I feel human again, although after the exchange on the BBC world service I'm not so sure. The desk recommends a restaurant that is more expensive than I'm used to, but it is the capital city. The beef stew and pasta is tasty and a half litre of beer welcome and I have a hot chocolate with 'schlag obers' - Forró Csokí.

After a walk down to the river I'm tired and go back to bed for a good night with the AC humming.

## **Wednesday October 7**

### **Budapest**

I have breakfast at 7.30 and go out exploring at 8.30 to a mainly overcast morning, there having been rain overnight. There is no sign of the information office marked on the map, but the weather is fine for strolling around and I see the opera house and then St Istvan's Cathedral, rather like a smaller version of St Paul's in London. There are large hotels on the riverside, some in grand old buildings. Across the Chain (Marlow) Bridge and past the funicular, I can walk up to the parliament and museum on top of the hill, with lots of renovation going on. I start looking for lunch but all the places seem to have inflated tourist prices. Back over the river and near to the hotel there is a cheap Chinese place.

After a couple of hour's internet rest, I'm out again with the sun lowlight in the sky. I find the synagogue which is the largest in Europe and on the edge of the ghetto. It is a magnificent building, with its museum and memorial tree. Then I go past the opera house to the Heroes' Square along Andrassy and to the park and museum.

The station tells me that there is no supplement on the train to Vienna - just get on. At the shopping centre I see Tesco (very busy) and M and S (no one). Back to the hotel for a quiet evening.

### **Thursday October 8 Budapest**

It's another day of sightseeing after a leisurely breakfast. The weather sports a clear blue sky and is initially cool before getting warmer. I see the market, the river and the new bridge and the Gellert hotel. I walk up the hill to the citadel which has a marvellous view all around but the atmosphere is somewhat hazy. I go back down to the coffee and large a long established house where I spent some time reading and drinking coffee. I go up to good old town with an extensive walk around including the terrace facing West where there are lots of tourists around. I walk down and across Marloe Bridge but fail to find the Railway Museum. However I do find a book shop for maps and a novel.

It's back to the hotel and then supper at the same place as two nights ago. I have pork medallions, fried potatoes, lathos dear, cream cheese dumplings and glass of Tokaj wine, all of which is very good. Back for a poor night.

### **Friday October 9 Budapest to Ljubljana**

I get up on the 530 alarm, amount by 615 for the train at 7:10. There is some confusion in the subway; I must be half asleep. At the station I also see the tourist office - but it's too late now!

The train is an OBB Railjet which is very smart. I finish my forints to get orange juice, hot chocolate and a Shoko croissant. The ride is very smooth apart from a problem with a passenger. There is a 10 minute connection at Wien Meidling for the train to Villach which is quite quiet except towards the end with schoolchildren going home from school or perhaps on weekend trips.

The train to Slovenia is waiting and leaves 10 minutes late and I'm in a Croatian coach, the train going forward to Croatia and it has a Croatian timetable leaflet. We arrive in Ljubljana 15 minutes late and there is an efficient information office and they fix me up with a Pension room at €45 without breakfast which is 20 minutes away. It's a quirky place with a kitchen, Internet and a restaurant downstairs. After settling in I have a meal there sitting outside with a good spaghetti and porcini and tiny prawns with their special and large cake with a glass of wine.

I go out for a walk in the old town where there are lots of restaurants with outside areas which are candle lit and alongside the river from which I see the floodlit castle above.

I have a mostly good night but am disturbed by some talk.

### **Saturday October 10 Ljubljana**

I have breakfast at Le Petit Café down the road with an American couple who are staying at the Pension. For eight euros I get yoghurt, muesli, fruit, fresh juice, omelette, decent bread and jam and coffee.

It rained heavily during the night and now it's showery and misty. I spend the morning in the market shopping and visiting the castle. Then it's lunch followed by a rest and a walk in the Tivoli Gardens and in the woods. Then I check the train times and back to the hotel for the Internet, tea with the cake left from yesterday evening and a much better night.

## **Sunday October 11**

### **Ljubljana to Bolzano**

I'm up at 5:45 and out by 630. There has been another night of rain which stopped conveniently before I left to walk to the station in the grey half light. I get coffee and provisions at the station and the train is spot on time and has come from Beograd with some coaches from Split. The sun comes out and the scenery has clouds hanging around with the mountains and sun in a clear sky. There is an efficient change at Klagenfurt to the DB intercity train from Klagenfurt going to Dortmund; I use it to Rosenheim. In spite of the track work before the change which delays us by 10 minutes I have plenty of time. As we pass through Bad Hofgastein I am reminded of the holiday with DWT. It was just as grey then.

Rosenheim is not a good place for lunch so I have a quick snack and then get onto the EC Leonardo da Vinci to Bolzano; the train runs from Munich to Milan. The Brenner pass is disappointing. The Italian guard tries to charge me eight euros. Bolzano is attractive but a two star hotel charges €55.

I go out for a walk around town and have supper consisting of salad, tagliatelle with steinpilzen, white wine and hot chocolate and go to bed.

## **Monday, October 12**

### **Bolzano to St Anton**

A leisurely day. After breakfast a trip around town is curtailed by a heavy shower but I go out later and eventually checkout at 9:30. There is a local train at 10 to Brenner with a change then to the EC train to Innsbruck and therefore I will have no hassle with a request for a supplement, less waiting around and a chance to look around Brennero. The pass at 1300 m has little to see although there are some snowflakes and the real snowline is not very far above the pass and the temperature here is about 7°. BEC arrives on time for a smooth ride down to Innsbruck. The route seems more attractive than yesterday - perhaps the sun helps and at Steinach I think of Mum, Dad and Eric.

At Innsbruck the train for the trip over the Arlberg pass is 30 minutes late which puts paid to my plan to stop off for lunch at St Anton, but I get off there none the less. It's snowing heavily and is slushy underfoot.

Checking the departure list I see that I can stay overnight and get the 750 tomorrow morning. The town is dead but very few phone calls gets me a good rate for €33 and they will do breakfast at 6:45. After leaving my bag at the hotel I spend the last two hours of daylight walking in the snow which is settling but still wet. At six I have dinner and although few places are open I get a good Zweibelrostbraten.

Sometime during the night it freezes but it isn't at six and about 5 cm of snow has settled.

## **Tuesday, October 13**

### **St Anton to Arlon**

I have my breakfast at 6:40 and at 7:15 start walking through the darkness, with wet snow underfoot, from the hotel to the railway station. I make my very gentle way to the station arriving in plenty of time with the train running 10 minutes late from Innsbruck. Everything is picturesque covered in snow and serious snow is also now falling.

The train arrives at eight and then leaves into the Summit tunnel, reappearing into a snowy landscape which extends quite a long way down. The guard confirms that the train from Feldkirch to Buchs will wait - as it does with a cross platform connection. At Buchs a similar move gets me to Sargans just in time for the train to Zürich an hour in advance, giving me an hour and 20 minutes there where the sun has come out to a crisp clear day. I shop for cocoa on the bridge at the Co-op.

The train arrives from Chur on time and we are soon away for a sunny journey to Arlon but with no restaurant car; the train has been downgraded as the guard tells me at length. Our arrival at Arlon is 10 minutes late because of engineering work after Luxembourg and I'm soon in a decent room with a double and a single bed for €55.

I remember the last time I stayed here and have supper at a Chinese restaurant and go back to the hotel for a good night's sleep.