

The Harz Mountains and Saxony

Apart from Berlin, and a couple of train journeys to and from the city I'd never been to the former East Germany. There were some obscure railway lines that I'd like to visit, a quick look at maps and guides suggested the scenery would be worthwhile, and I could add in some opportunities to drink decent beer. Off the bear and I went to explore for ten days in late October 2016, and this is the result.

The Harz Mountains

The trip starts at Düsseldorf airport, where the weather is miserable and Ted and I begin the journey by heading towards the Harz Mountains. The first train is a packed double-decker Regional Express and I have to stand for the first half-hour. It travels through the endless cities of the Ruhr, Duisburg, Essen, Bochum, and Dortmund, to Hamm. From there, a local Eurobahn train, also full (by this time it is rush hour) takes us to Paderborn, where I'd chosen to break the journey for the night. I didn't see much of Paderborn – the rain was so heavy there was no option but to take a taxi to the hotel. The Galerie Hotel, in a sixteenth century building opposite a park in the old town, doubles as an art gallery for the works of owner Anne Ewers and was welcoming and comfortable. The rain did not stop pouring down until the morning. Fortunately, a few minutes paddle from the hotel, I found the Paderborner Brauhaus, which was fine for a couple of beers and a wiener schnitzel. The rain had slackened off to a drizzle in the morning, so I could walk back to the station and have a very quick look round the old town, which despite some unsubtle redevelopment seemed pleasant enough.



Three local trains, operated by Eurobahn (pictured), Deutsche Bahn (DB) and Abellio, took me in less than three hours via Warburg and Kassel to Nordhausen, the southern gateway to the Harz Mountains¹. The trains are quiet, I have a window seat on each, and I can see some of the surrounding countryside between the heavy rain showers. Throughout the journey there is a mixture of rolling farmland, villages and towns, some industry and wooded hills. I gain the impression, which applies to the remainder of the trip, that the tree cover starts at a low altitude and continues above the level which would be

moorland in the UK. I check and the proportion of forest cover in Germany is 32%, compared to 12% in the United Kingdom².

I've passed through Kassel twice before by train, in 1973 and 1989, and nearby, on the north-south main line, it was possible to spot the wall and fences marking the border between West and East Germany. Near Eichenberg we cross the former border, now the area where the *länder* (states) of Hessen, Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony) and Thüringen (Thuringia) meet. Though it is 27 years since the border was opened, and 26 since German reunification, it intrigues me to see whether any noticeable differences remain between the former west and the former east. Unsurprisingly there is no physical sign of the border, but it soon becomes clear that there are some subtle differences,

¹ For a brief overview of German railways see Railway Buffery 1 on page 18

² Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010, Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, quoted on www.gabrielhemery.com

though these are no more marked than those between regions of the UK. In a few kilometres it resembles travelling from Surrey to, say, Blackburn. To the West each town has prospering engineering works and factories, while to the east (though there are some modern factories) it is much more common to see the rusting and derelict buildings and yards of industries which haven't survived the transition to a Western economy. It is also clear that East Germany (the Deutsche Demokratische Republik or DDR) relied heavily on its railways for transport, and rationalisation has left an abundance of derelict freight yards and semi-derelict stations. Throughout the trip, even in the most scenic areas, there are former stationmaster's houses and signal boxes rotting away – in the UK they would have been sold off as homes or holiday cottages. From the train I can see relatively little sign of recent building and I wonder whether the population has declined. I check this out and between 1991 and 2013 the population of the former DDR *länder* dropped by 2,011,000 or 13.9%, while the former West German *länder* increased by 2,477,000 or 4.1%³. Every village and town has blocks of standard DDR-era five-storey blocks of flats, without lifts (they must be hardy folk – this is one storey more than people were expected to manage in Glasgow or Edinburgh). I suppose, they are comparable to the small council housing schemes on the edge of every Scottish village, and they look perfectly fine to live in, particularly where they have been modernised, but to my eye they look out of scale in small villages.

Nordhausen station is far too large for the current level of passenger and freight traffic, and much of the area is dilapidated. The station buildings have fewer facilities than you would expect (including a



lack of toilets, which I soon find out). It is too wet to wander around the town - the main shopping street leading to the station is prosperous looking, but very quiet for a Thursday lunchtime. I find a stall selling *Original-Thüringer Bratwurst* for 2 euros (the first of many) and eat it in a doorway, getting mustard everywhere, until it's time to head for the Harzer Schmalspurbahn station.

The Harzer Schmalspurbahnen (Harz Narrow-Gauge Railways) (HSB) operate a 140km network of metre-gauge lines through this part of the Harz Mountains⁴. It relies mainly on steam trains and elderly railcars, and while it still provides a public transport function, much of the route is principally a tourist railway today. I had expected more visitors (although it is the tail-end of the October schools are on half-term holiday in some areas of Germany) but the station is virtually deserted, though to my relief, it does have toilets opened by a key from a nearby shop in return for 50 cents.

When the 1225 HSB service to Quedlinburg pulls out, on board there is the driver (who also checks and collects fares), two of us travelling the whole route, two women with shopping trolleys, and the driver's girlfriend, who is all over him like a rash between bites on her hamburger. The women and the girlfriend get out at Ilfeld. As far as Ilfeld Neanderklinik⁵ the line is shared with an hourly

³ In the three main *länder* visited on this journey the decline has been 20.5% in Sachsen Anhalt, 16% in Thüringen and 13.5% in Sachsen. Source: 25 Jahre Deutsche Einheit, Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2015, page 12, www.statistikportal.de/Statistik-Portal/Deutsche_Einheit.pdf (in German)

⁴ For additional background about the HSB see Railway Buffery 2 on page 19

⁵ This is nothing to do with Neanderthal. Ilfeld was the site of a monastery until 1545, when it was converted into a school, under the rectorship of one Michael Neander. It is now a forbidding- looking nursing home for the elderly.



Nordhausen tram and we pass it at Ilfeld⁶. The journey of 70km takes just under 3 hours. The railcar, which could seat a maximum of 20, looks like a museum piece, but was built in 1999. Beyond Ilfeld the three of us (plus Ted) travel through a forest with occasional clearings and small settlements. We pass an old mine which is now a tourist attraction. At Eisfelder Talmühle, the main line continues to Wernigerode while we turn eastwards and cross the border between Thüringen and Sachsen Anhalt. At the junction station of Stiege we reverse and pass another railcar heading for Nordhausen, this time with four on board – just a guess but they look like Brit trainspotters to me. For the following 20km we hug the side of the narrow and steep Selke valley. At Silberhütte

The Quedlinburg Flyer

there are signs of former industry – the mines produced an ore containing silver and lead, and there is a network of artificial ponds to supply water to the works. At Alexisbad a few people board the train - the small village is a spa town and health resort due to the iron rich water. There is a row of hotels, converted from DDR-era trade union sanatoria, including the former Deutsche Reichsbahn (East German State Railways) recreation home. Shortly afterwards we pass a steam loco hauling the afternoon train to Hasselfelde. At Gernrode, terminus of the HSB network until 2006, we emerge from the hills, and from there it is a (relatively) fast run into Quedlinburg.



Quedlinburg (pictured above and on next page) is a medieval town, a forgotten backwater in DDR days, then in 1994 the *Altstadt* (old town) was declared a UNESCO world heritage site. The *Altstadt* is a large area mainly of timber-framed buildings, which largely escaped wartime damage. After gently rotting away (though some restoration began during the DDR years) it has been spruced up and has become a tourist destination. Though the town is very impressive, it seems to me that this rapid prettification and gentrification have not been without some negative results. My impression is that

⁶ The link to the town tramway in Nordhausen opened in 2004 and trams run through to the city centre and the hospital. The trams are diesel-electric hybrids, running under electric power in the town and diesel on the HSB. This model has been followed by several German towns and cities to link the city network to local railways.

some people have been able to buy medieval homes cheaply, renovated them and live a very comfortable existence. I'm less clear how many of the inhabitants from DDR days have fared. From 1990 to 2009 the population dropped from 28,663 to 21,203 today as local industries failed to make the transition to the new economy and unemployment rose⁷.

I managed to walk the 20 minutes from the station to the hotel during a dry spell between showers, though I became heartily sick of the racket my wheelie case made on the cobbles. The hotel was pleasant in a slightly chintzy and camp sort of way. My bed was tiny, but the cheap minibar and free fresh coffee were a bonus.



The gentrification process has resulted in there being very few traditional pubs, cafes and restaurants, but no end of expensive bistros and wine bars. The *Altstadt* has plenty of expensive shops but I see nowhere in the town centre to buy basic foodstuffs. There is an 'Irish' bar which was never open when I passed and a brewery/restaurant/hotel, Brauhaus Lüdde, which looked too upmarket just to wander in for a drink. However, I find one place – the Wispel Pub - a survivor from DDR days where the beer and food is cheap and good, and pass the time there.

The following day the plan is to explore the main tourist line of the HSB, from Wernigerode to the Brocken, which is worked entirely by steam trains. First there are two short journeys by local trains via Halberstadt to Wernigerode. HarzElbe Express (HEX) operate a network of lines centred on Halberstadt. Once an hour, two-coach diesels from five different directions converge, split up, reform and shoot off and then peace descends once more on Halberstadt. The countryside is flat and unexceptional, the drizzle is heavy and constant, it's cold, and I manage to leave my bunnet behind when I change trains, so it is not a good start to the day.

However, things soon improve. As soon as we leave Wernigerode HSB station we are into the mountains and the train begins to climb, belching smoke everywhere. The train is busy – the Brocken is a well-known tourist destination and easy to reach from a wide area of northern Germany. The carriages are small and I end up sharing my space with a large dog called Baloo while Ted made friends with Baloo's owner's bear. The train calls at Drei Annen Hohne, junction for the line to Eisfelder Talmühle and Nordhausen, and at Schierke, where it takes on water for the final push to the summit. 1 hour 40 minutes after leaving Wernigerode we are at the top, having climbed from about 250m above sea level at Wernigerode, and 542m at Drei Annen Hohne, then circling the mountain 1.5 times to reach the summit station 1152m above sea level. I had been hoping for some decent views from the top, though the rain made it unlikely. In fact, as we climbed the rain turned to sleet then snow. It was a whiteout at the summit and it was clear that none of the passengers had expected this. After watching the loco run round the train, along with everyone else I scurried from the station to the summit hotel and into the huge canteen-style restaurant (it had the appearance of a barracks and may indeed have been one⁸) and had a bowl of hot *gulaschsuppe* and a bottle of the

⁷ Source: Bevölkerung der Gemeinden nach Landkreisen, Statisches Landesamt Sachsen-Anhalt 2009 (in German). Figures from 2010 onwards are not comparable due to boundary changes.

⁸ According to Wikipedia the hotel and restaurant is located in the old television tower – see the following paragraph

local dark beer, Hasseröder Fürstenbrau Granat, a *märzen* beer brewed in Wernigerode. By this point I was thoroughly enjoying the day.

At 1141m the Brocken is not very high, though it is the highest peak in the Harz and the whole of northern Germany. It has an important place in German mythology and literature as the home of witches and devils - for example Goethe based his play *Faust* on these legends. Wikipedia reveals that this has continued to the present day, with the Brocken being featured in a remarkable number of German heavy metal tracks which I've never heard of. The railway to the summit was constructed in 1898-9 as a tourist attraction (the witches already had personal broomstick transport). The more recent history of the mountain is also interesting. In 1935 Deutsche Reichspost made the first television broadcast in Germany from the summit using a mobile transmitter. In 1936 the first television tower in the world was built, and carried the first ever live TV broadcast – of the Berlin Olympics. The Brocken summit lies only 2km from the East/West German border and, during the DDR years it was an off-limits military zone, surrounded completely by a high concrete wall. There were two listening posts, one used by Soviet Military Intelligence (the GRU) and another by the DDR Ministry for State Security (the *Stasi*). The trains kept running to supply the installations and the military and security personnel on the mountain. The mountain, and the railway line re-opened to the public in 1991, and today it is a tourist attraction, walking area, nature reserve (the unique climate and lack of access led to the survival of endangered flora and species), and remains home to radio and TV masts.



On the downhill journey we are shunted into a siding, to allow the next uphill train to pass. It appears through the mist and snow and makes an impressive sight, belching smoke as it uses all of its power to climb the hill. By the time we reach Wernigerode the weather has cleared, and I get off the train at Westerntor, one stop before the end of the line. This is the location of the HSBs main depot and works and it is also used as a crossing place for trains. I am able to get some good photos of the Brocken-bound train as it arrives and departs. I'm convinced they use the dirtiest coal possible to create the maximum amount of steam. Westerntor is closer to the centre of Wernigerode than the main station, so I took the chance to explore. I managed to buy a replacement bunnet and a scarf in the local C&A, then find a decent pub, the Ratstübchen, for a couple of beers. Wernigerode is picturesque, with plenty of half-timbered buildings and a thriving tourist industry. It appears to me to be more of a working town than Quedlinburg, where I have a quiet evening.

Thüringen (Thuringia)

It was time to move on and a regional day ticket takes me from Quedlinburg in Sachsen Anhalt to Saalfeld in the state of Thüringen (Thuringia), 240km for 23 Euros. The first train is once more to Halberstadt, followed by a second HEX train to Halle. We reach electrified lines for the first time since Nordhausen on the outskirts of Halle. All goes well until the approach to the station, where we stop for 20 minutes, next to a railway museum in an old locomotive roundhouse⁹. I miss the connection to Naumburg, so have to hang around Halle until the next train, which itself becomes later and later. There is no information about the reason for the delays - my guess is that there is a major problem with the signals. It is after noon and a beer to pass the time would be welcome, but as is usual even in main stations in Germany there is no such thing as a bar (the serious plonky can usually get a can of something in one of the shops or in a pizza or kebab outlet). The baker is selling *bockwurst* for 99 cents so that keeps me going instead.

The train to Naumburg is a DB Regional Express double decker so I'm upstairs for the view. South of Halle we pass through the enormous Leunawerke (Leuna Works). I remember it from a transit train to West Berlin in 1989 – on that occasion thousands of workers were pouring on and off trains at the two stations in the middle of the works. The works are still there, very much modernised, but there are no workers in sight and the stations are deserted, though the air pollution is still as bad¹⁰. We are now following the Saale river and the scenery gradually improves – there are even a few vineyards (too close to the works for me to be interested in trying the local wine). Late arrival and another missed connection means a 45 minute wait in Naumburg. On a Saturday afternoon the town is deserted and closed. This includes the bar and restaurant and the *imbiss* fast food shack on the station square, and the station *gastatte* promised by Google maps is closed permanently. The only sight of interest was a tiny, ancient tram that pootled off to the town centre every half hour with two or three people on board.



On the final journey of the day, shortly after leaving Naumburg we enter Thüringen. We call at Jena which looks like a pleasant city - the main station is called Jena Paradies (Paradise), but that is a bit of an exaggeration - apart from one horrendous circular skyscraper like a sore thumb in the city centre and an enormous high-rise *plattenbau* (system-built concrete flats) workers suburb to the Southeast¹¹. We arrive in Saalfeld an hour later than planned and I trundle with my wheelie-case across the River Saale, up to the main square and my hotel for the next two nights, the Anker¹². I have a huge but bare and cold room overlooking the Markt square where preparations are underway for an autumn market tomorrow.

⁹ The DB museum in Halle is dedicated to rolling stock inherited from Deutsche Reichsbahn (DR), the state railway company of East Germany. See www.dbmuseum.de

¹⁰ Leunawerke is one of the largest chemical-industrial complexes in Germany, though employment has dropped from peak of 35,000 in the 1940s to 28,000 by 1978 to 9,000 today. Wikipedia article on Leunawerke (in German).

¹¹ The skyscraper (pictured) is the JenTower office block, completed in 1972, though it looks much newer. It is the tallest building in the former East Germany and was built as a symbol of its vibrant economy. It was originally intended as offices for Carl Zeiss, the major (nationalised) local employer, but instead occupied for many years by the local university.

¹² The hotel website, www.hotel-anker-saalfeld.de, says there has been a guesthouse on the site since 1543, though the detailed history of the past half-millennium mentions nothing between 1935 and 1994, when it was modernised.



Saalfeld – the beer delivery for the autumn fair has arrived

The least enjoyable journey of the trip is followed by a reviving early evening walk around town. Saalfeld has a pleasant *altstadt* which is nowhere near as over-pretified as Quedlinburg. The first pub I try, the Bayrische Bierstuben, is busy at 5pm, with regular drinkers in the bar, birthday parties in the side room, and the Gambertbräu beer is flowing. The second, Klosterstübl is less busy, run by a formidable woman, her man banished to the

kitchen. Though the beer is excellent, a young couple who come in to use the poolroom order a *colaweizen* and a *bananaweizen* – a 33cl bottle of wheat beer topped up with coke or banana juice. To me this is the equivalent of drinking malt whisky with Irn Bru, and I look horrified. The landlady agrees that it is disgusting but it is trendy among young people¹³. In the corner the TV is switched to teletext (Yes...it still exists in Germany) and a couple of regulars sit watching one of the scores change on average every twenty minutes. A fine place.



A German beer cocktail

Close to Saalfeld, the Schwarza (a tributary of the Saale) Valley is an area of the Thüringerwald (Thuringian forest) that doesn't seem to be well known outside Germany. By coincidence it also has a small network of unusual railways. I remember reading articles about them many years ago, and online research confirms that they are still in existence, renovated as a historical monument and tourist attraction by the state of Thüringen.

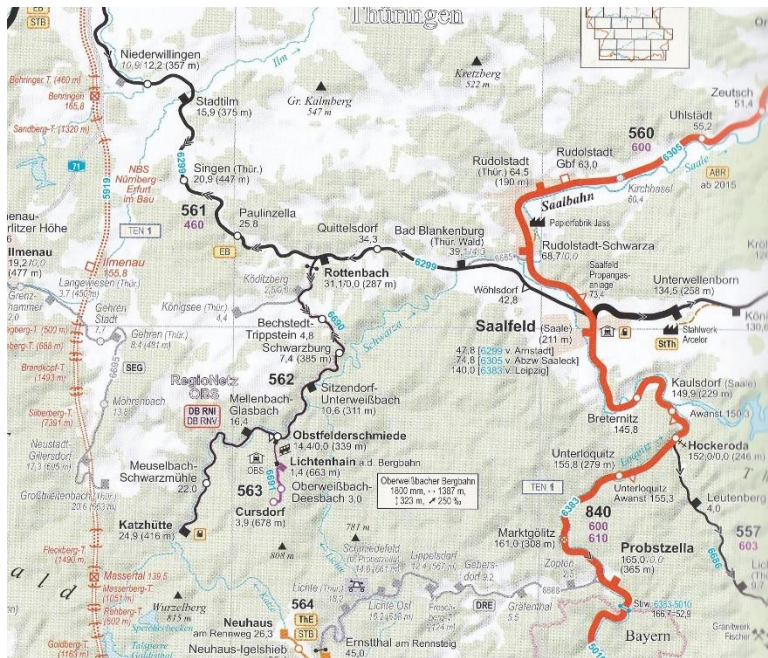
It is Sunday and, once the mist clears, a reasonable day, so I set off to explore. On the way to Saalfeld station, I pass a local bus going

to 'Krankenhaus und Feengrotten' (hospital and fairy grottoes). It transpires that Saalfeld is marketed by the local tourist office as Feengrottenstadt¹⁴. The fairy grottoes are show caverns of a former mine, which have become a tourist attraction due to the colourful mineral formations in the caves¹⁵. Sounds interesting (honest), but I stick with the original plan and I have a train to catch.

¹³ I assume this is a local thing, but when I Google it, there are recipes for the perfect *colaweizen* and *bananaweizen*, from various parts of Germany and from expats who miss the drink. Good grief.

¹⁴ www.saalfeld-tourismus.de (in German).

¹⁵ Incidentally, Saalfeld's other claim to fame is as the ancestral seat of the Saxe-Coburg and Gotha branch of the Saxon House of Wettin, renamed the House of Windsor in 1917.



There are three lines in the Schwarza Valley (see map) operated as the Oberweißbacher Berg- und Schwarzatalbahn (OBS). A standard gauge line opened in 1900 runs along the valley, linking the villages between Rottenbach at Katzhütte and railcars currently provide an hourly service. On the plateau on the eastern side of the valley are several villages which were difficult to reach and often cut off in winter due to the steepness of the gorge and the height of the plateau. To link them with the valley communities the two other lines were opened in 1923 – firstly a funicular from Obstfelderschmiede in the valley,

up to Lichtenhain, then an electric railway along the plateau to Cursdorf. Uniquely, goods wagons could be transferred between the three using turntables at either end of the funicular and a platform on which the wagons could remain level on the funicular¹⁶.



To reach the Schwarza Valley lines I take an Erfurter Bahn local train to Rottenbach, ten minutes away, where I change to the OBS. Unlike many local lines in Germany, is still operated by DB (Deutsche Bahn - German State Railways). The valley train is a bright red modern single railcar (with a driver, conductor, woman selling coffee and tea and nine passengers). The area is pretty, the valley is in a deep wooded gorge and it looks like excellent walking country. On the funicular, the turntables and wagon platform are still there, and the wagon platform is used by a passenger coach

(pictured) which alternates with a standard funicular car. From the top the electric train pootles along to Cursdorf. The trailer car plays birdsong and has a 'smell the herb' box. More interestingly by pressing a button you can add the sounds of other animals such as deer and frogs, which keeps me, Ted and a four-year-old amused. There is time for a lunchtime beer In Cursdorf where Café 'Zur Biene' (the only place open) is churning out vast plates of meat and potatoes, and another in the station café at the foot of the funicular. The return valley train turns out to be a museum piece, a genuine DDR era '*ferkeltaxi*' (piglet taxi) light railcar built in the 1960s to replace steam on rural branch lines, and well known for being utterly uncomfortable, which I can confirm¹⁷.

¹⁶ For further information on the OBS network see Railway Buffery 3, on page 20.

¹⁷ I can't find out whether the use of the preserved *ferkeltaxi* is routine, or only used on Sundays or special occasions.

All of this excitement for an OBS day ticket costing 12euros. It seems quiet for a Sunday and I hope it is busier in the summer. Obstfelderschmiede station has leaflets about the lines in various languages and a range of souvenirs. The area and the trains deserve to be better known.

I'm back in Saalfeld by four and the autumn fair is in full swing in the market square. The inevitable bratwurst stall was doing good business, and the local Saalfelder Brewery had a bar selling their *kellerbeir* very cheaply, so I helped them both to use up their stock. On the stage a duo was murdering country and western songs to keep the punters happy. A pleasant couple of hours was rounded off by another visit to the Klosterstübl.

Bamberg

Monday and the next stop is Bamberg, a direct train journey of less than two hours by Regional Express, so I have a late breakfast before setting off. Bamberg is in Franconia, the northern part of Bayern (Bavaria), and therefore was in West Germany prior to reunification. The railway follows the upper Saale valley and then its tributary the Loquitz, until it reaches Probstzella. Probstzella was a border crossing point on the Inner German Border between West and East Germany and there are all the signs that it was once a much more important station. I've been here before, on a transit train from Nürnberg to West Berlin in 1989, and there is now no sign of the floodlights and watchtowers with border guards pointing rifles at the train to encourage passengers not to leave the sealed train, or their companions and their dogs searching the roof, inside and beneath the train. I remember the nervousness and fear on some of the passengers faces, while the loudspeakers welcomed us to the DDR and hoped we enjoyed our journey¹⁸.



Just after Probstzella we cross the border into Bayern (Bavaria), and continue uphill for a few more kilometres until, at Steinbach, we cross the watershed between the Elbe basin and the Rhine/Main basin. From there the route follows the valleys of the Haßlach and Rodach rivers, small tributaries of the Main. Beyond Lichtenfels we are joined by the route of the new north-south high speed line from Erfurt to Bamberg, which will speed up greatly the journey time between Berlin and München (Munich), and the route into Bamberg is one long construction site.

Bamberg is a small university city with a population of 73,000, famous for its historic old town (it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and for its beer. For some inexplicable reason it is twinned with Bedford. I'm expecting a lively place, leave my case in a left luggage locker and set off to explore. I'm not disappointed. The town has three sections – Gärtnerstadt, by the station, originally an area of market gardens, the largely nineteenth century

Altes Rathaus (Old Town Hall), Bamberg

¹⁸ There is more information about the East/West border in the Wikipedia article 'Crossing the Inner German Border' and a comprehensive article 'Inner German Border' detailing its history and operation.

Inselstadt, the centre of town, on an island between two branches of the River Regnitz (one of which is part of the Main-Danube canal) and Bergstadt, the old town. Bergstadt is a warren of medieval streets with half-timbered buildings and a large cathedral and monastery, built on a series of hills. Between Inselstadt and Bergstadt the river has a series of locks and dams to control the water, and the sound of running water permeates the area. Between showers I cover much of the city centre, and buy some cheese, cold meat, bread and fruit from a small supermarket to give me a break from sausages and potatoes.



Bamberg still has around 10 working breweries, though this is many less than in its heyday. It is a beer drinking city and the first sign is the large Weyermann maltings beside the railway on the way into town. In particular, Bamberg is well known for *rauchbier* (smoked beer). During my recce, in Gärtnerstadt I stumble across the Fässla brewery and have a glass of their dark lager which slips down a treat. Directly across the road is Brauerei Spezial and I have one of their classic *rauchbiers*, the *märzen*, created using malted barley over open fires made of beechwood logs and poured straight from a wooden cask. It tastes like smoky bacon crisps and is so good that Ted and I have another. Then I set off to find my hotel, which is hidden in a back street in the Altstadt, and from my window I can see another brewery (Klosterbräu) across the road. Later I have a walk through the Altstadt for a beer at Schlenkerla, probably

Special Brew, but not as we know it, Bamberg

the best known of the breweries. At 6pm it is packed with both locals and tourists, spilling out into the street, drinking the draught Aecht Schlenkerla Rauchbier. By contrast Klosterbräu is much more of a restaurant – it is Monday and the separate taproom is closed - but the black Klosterbräu Schwärzla is a fine drink. Back in the hotel there is an honesty fridge with half- litre bottles of Fässla for 1 euro so, the perfect accompaniment for the salami and cheese.

Sachsen

I head back to Bamberg station in the morning. Two days of too much beer have their revenge and I discover that the toilets, while expensive, are immaculate. They have rotating self-cleaning seats for entertainment - if you have never seen one there are some fascinating educational videos on YouTube. I'm heading for Sachsen (Saxony) and its capital Dresden by a series of regional railway lines via Lichtenfels, Hof and Chemnitz. The first stretch turns out to be part of the Ludwig South-North Railway, the first railway constructed by the Royal Bavarian State railways¹⁹. We pass the large Kulmbacher brewery at Kulmbach (where else?) and the German Steam Locomotive Museum at Neuenmarkt. The countryside is the usual rolling, wooded hills. A few kilometres from Hof we pass Gutenfürst, the former transit station on the Inner German Border. The region has been industrial with evidence around and between the cities of Plauen and Zwickau of textile mills, mines and foundries and a former network of freight railways. We pass by a large Volkswagen plant at Zwickau, built on the site of the old Trabant factory. There are more foundries and mills, many now derelict, on the approach to Chemnitz, where I stop for a break.

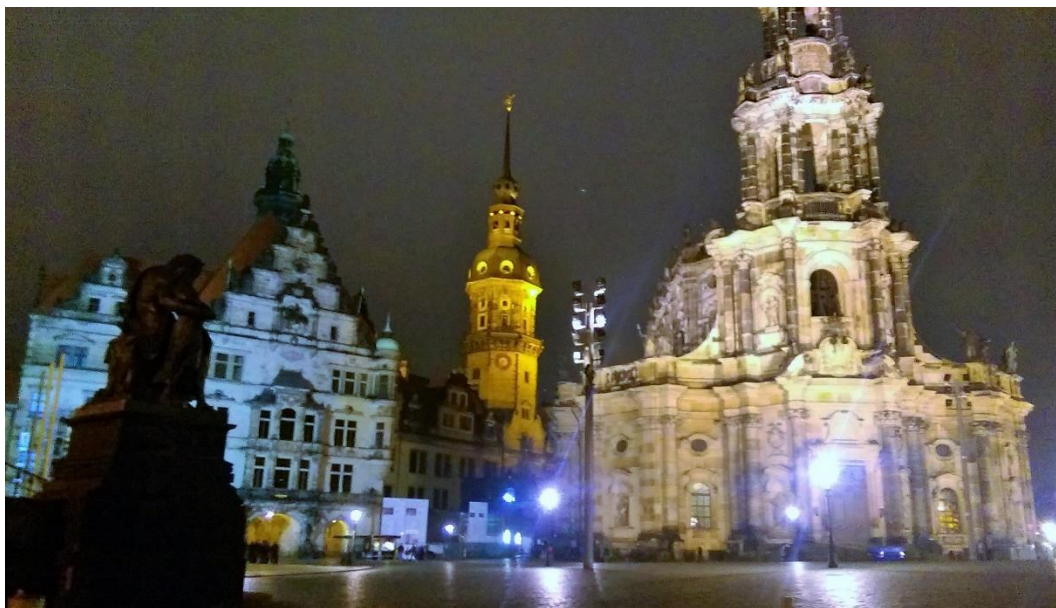
¹⁹ For those interested in the detail of railway history there are articles on Wikipedia on most lines by searching, for example, 'Hof-Leipzig railway'. In English many are stubs or short versions of the German language articles which can be found by searching, for example 'bahnstrecke Hof Leipzig'



From 1953 to 1990 Chemnitz was known as Karl-Marx-Stadt. It has also been referred to as the 'Saxon Manchester' and has been twinned with Manchester since 1983. As an industrial centre it was badly bombed during the war, after which it was decided, apart from a few historic buildings, to level the remains and rebuild from scratch. In true Eastern European style the city consists of wide open boulevards and blocks of high-rise flats...it looks like Warsaw on a bad day. This was a slow process and former city centre was still an open space at re-unification. The city centre was not re-built (as shopping malls) until 1999-2010. Despite some sectors of the economy thriving, Chemnitz has lost 20% of its population since 1990. In front of a block of flats an enormous statue of the head of Karl himself remains (pictured), with 'Working Men of All Countries, Unite' in German, Russian, English and French sculpted on the front of the flats. These days Uncle Karl is looking out at a new skyscraper Mercure Hotel. In a shopping

centre I find the Turm-Brauhaus brewpub for lunch before making my way back along windswept avenues to the station. There's still a bit of work to do before Chemnitz becomes a thriving tourist destination, despite the efforts of the local authority to promote it as 'the City of Modernity'²⁰.

Another hour or so by train and I reach Dresden and check in to the InterCity Hotel across the road. It is uncannily quiet for a major city - apart from trains and trams all the traffic is in an underpass and out of hearing. An anonymous city hotel has its plusses – there is none of the chintziness and kitsch of the town house hotels, it is warm, the bed is big and comfortable, and InterCity hotels provide free city transport for the length of ones stay.



Dresden by night

²⁰ www.chemnitz.de



Only 9 currywurst to go

an attractive camp young thing (another sign I am in a proper city.....I don't think the social development of the good folk of Saalfeld has got beyond country and western yet). I am now the proud possessor of a loyalty card stamped with a sausage – ten stamps for a free currywurst, and only nine more to go. I make use of the free transport by catching a tram back to the Hauptbahnhof and the hotel.

In the evening I walk through the city centre, from the station along the main shopping streets, Pragerstrasse and Seestrasse, to the Altmarkt and finally to the bank of the River Elbe. Of course much of it is relatively new, but it is a vibrant city, and not at all like Chemnitz. There are still some blocks of DDR-era flats on city centre prime sites, but it looks as though others have been demolished to make way for new shopping centres. The shops are bright, the streets are crowded and it is difficult to distinguish from any other western city centre. The key buildings in the baroque *altstadt*, the Residenzschloss and Zwinger palaces, the Semperoper opera house, and the Hofkirche and Frauenkirche churches, have been beautifully rebuilt. The vintage-1969 DDR Culturpalast is wrapped in scaffolding and tarpaulins and I can see only a few fragments of the 'Path of the Red flag' mural on the side – though it is out of place amongst the old buildings I hope it is not being demolished. I check and it is due to reopen in 2017 as a cultural centre and concert hall. I find a currywurst stall by the Residenzschloss where my sausage is lovingly cooked by

The following day I visit another railway relic, the Zittauer Schmalspurbahn (ZSB) close to the Polish and Czech borders, 90 minutes and 105km by train from Dresden. The regional train to Zittau is operated by Trilex – the company run services from Dresden to Liberec in the Czech Republic and, from this year, Wrocław in Poland, and the signage on-board is bilingual in German and Czech. It is another misty morning, though it eventually clears to become a pleasant afternoon.

The ZSB is a narrow gauge network, mainly operated by steam, linking the main line at Zittau with two small health resorts in the surrounding hills - Kurort Oybin and Kurort Jonsdorf. Like the HSB (and unlike almost all heritage railways in the UK) it has operated continuously. In DDR days it was the public transport in the area, and though nowadays most locals have cars and the line is mainly used by visitors, I can see that a few locals still use it²¹.

As the train leaves Zittau we pass a road sign stating 'Republik Polen 1km'. I'm a bit confused, as I thought it would be the Czech border here. I check the map later and there is a small corner of Poland which stretches south around the town of Bogatynia. To reach the Czech Republic from Zittau, the railway and road cross a kilometre or two of Poland²². On the map the Bogatynia area is largely blank, which suggests it is either a military zone or opencast mining has destroyed any natural features. Google Earth reveals that it is the latter, the huge opencast Turów coal mine feeding the neighbouring power station.

I also discover from the map that, en route to Zittau between the stations of Neusalza-Spremberg and Taubenheim, the railway line passes through 1.2km of a little pimple of the Czech Republic

²¹ See Railway Buffery 4 on page 21

²² In 1945, when the new border between Poland and Germany was agreed as the Oder/Neisse line Bogatynia (Reichenau in German) became the only municipality in Poland which until then had been part of Saxony.



Railways and borders near Zittau

projecting into Germany, so I can now add it to the list of countries in which I've travelled by train (top left on the map). Further research reveals that this is the Fugau(German)/Fukov(Czech) Tip. There were proposals in the 1950s to transfer the area from Czechoslovakia to East Germany as part of a rationalisation of borders. Negotiations between the two countries broke down and, apart from the railway line, the border was closed. The only settlement in the pimple, the aptly named village of Fukov, did just that, it was demolished and vanished from the map, leaving an uninhabited area²³.

Finally the map also reveals that, just north of Zittau, the line to Gorlitz wanders in and out of Poland twice, one stretch of 1.4km and a second of 11km. The German village of Ostritz (Krzewina Zgorzelecka in Polish) is served by a station located in Poland and reached by a footbridge over the Lausitzer Neiße river. These lines are covered by special agreements covering transit traffic between the governments involved. In theory these are still in operation, though in practice any customs formalities have disappeared since Poland joined the Schengen agreement in 2007.²⁴

To return to the journey on the Schmalspurbahn, on the outskirts of Zittau there are large estates of DDR *plattenbau* and the steam train seems a bit incongruous. At Bertsdorf there is a junction - a connecting train heads off to Jonsdorf while we head on to Oybin. Oybin is a pretty place, surrounded by the Zittauer Gebirge (Zittau mountains) with strange rock formations overlooking the village. The daytrippers head off for walks in the hills while I watch the loco run round the train, walk through the village, then have a bottle of beer in the station café. The beer is St. Margarethen Klosterbräu *dunkel*, brewed locally at Eibau. I return to Bertsdorf on the next train, aiming to get a photograph of the two steam trains to Oybin and Jonsdorf departing simultaneously. The light and the photographs could be better, but the two locos oblige with as much smoke as they can manage. It is impressive and I'm pleased so I celebrate by having another bottle of *dunkel* in the *speisewagen* on the return train to Zittau, before catching the train back to Dresden via the Czech Republic.

²³ Sources (in German): German Wikipedia articles Bahnstrecke Oberoderwitz-Wilthen and Fukov

²⁴ Anyone interested in this arcane but mildly fascinating subject can start with the short Wikipedia article 'privileged transit traffic' or the much more detailed article 'Privilegierter Eisenbahn Durchgangsverkehr' (in German).



The Jonsdorf and Oybin trains depart from Bertsdorf

Evening is an excuse for another stroll around the heart of Dresden to try a few pubs. Most places in the city centre have very little character and are principally restaurants. There is some decent beer to be had in the Radeberger Spezialausschank, owned by the Radeberger brewery, one of the largest brewers in Germany, but brewing unfiltered zwicklbier on the premises and located on a prime site by the riverside. The Watzke Brauereiaussschank am Ring is another brewpub. The only basic boozery I find is dreadful – it is a smoking bar, reeks of cigarette smoke and they assume all you want to do is watch football on the telly or gamble. Back at the hotel a salad from the station Lidl supermarket is wolfed down in seconds – it is the first greenery I've had in a couple of days.



On my final full day in Germany I use an all-zones day ticket for the metropolitan area to rattle round the transport curiosities of Dresden and nearby. I set off by tram for Schillerplatz in Blasewitz, an upmarket suburb of Dresden by the River Elbe. A diversion due to road works takes us over the river to Neustadt then back again over the next bridge. Neustadt looks worth a look visit later. From Schillerplatz I cross the river for the third time in half an hour on foot to Loschwitz, another riverside suburb. This

bridge is known as the Blauen Wunder (Blue Wonder) – it's not that wonderful, nor is it blue – though it was both when it opened in 1893. The beergardens on either bank suggest that this is the place to go for a day out at the weekend.



The Schwebebahn departs Oberloschwitz. The Blauen Wunder bridge across the Elbe and Dresden are in the distance.

On the hills above Loschwitz are some very high-class suburbs of enormous nineteenth century villas straight out of the Addams Family, built for their views across the city. To spare the inhabitants the climb there are two short railways. These are now a combination of ordinary public transport and tourist attraction (though there not many locals or tourists around this morning). Opened in 1895, the funicular from Körnerplatz in Loschwitz to Weißer Hirsch rises 96m in its length of 547m. Across the side valley is the suspension railway or *schwebebahn* (monorail), built in 1901 as a suspended funicular. This unusual feat of engineering rises from Körnerplatz to Oberloschwitz, and climbs by 84.2 m in its length of 274m. It was designed and built by Eugen Langen, who was also responsible for the Wuppertal Schwebebahn²⁵. Ted and I have a coffee from the café at the upper station of the monorail, take in the view for a while as the mist clears, and watch a paddle steamer call at Blasewitz below.

The return by tram to central Dresden and the Hauptbahnhof is by a different route to see more of the city. Most of the suburbs survived the wartime bombing and firestorm largely intact, and there are many streets of large, late 19th/early 20th century detached houses, now mostly subdivided. As we get closer to the centre the housing is from the postwar DDR-era. There are some very smart and substantial blocks of flats built in the 1950s, which are at least as good as the best UK council housing. However, the buildings from the 60s and 70s are mainly system built *plattenbau* blocks and the quality looks poor. Some blocks have been modernised well, others not, and some have been demolished, leaving substantial gap-sites. In the city centre three neighbouring high-rise *plattenbau* blocks have become Ibis Hotels, with over 900 rooms between them. In some respects the pattern is similar to UK cities and the rise and fall of decent social housing. It would be interesting to learn more - which housing is most desirable, whether people been moved out to suburbs reluctantly or not, how difficult is it to obtain a decent apartment, what the rights of remaining tenants are and so on. Dresden is one of very few areas of the former DDR where the population is growing (though this may be down to students), creating a housing demand which may be unmet.²⁶

²⁵ Sources: Wikipedia articles 'Dresden funicular railway' and 'Dresden suspension railway', 'Flying high with Dresden's cable cars' (leaflet), DVB Dresden Verkehrsbetriebe AG (the Dresden transport operator), July 2015, and the DVB website www.dvb.de

²⁶ Wikipedia suggests that, in East Germany generally, the *plattenbau* were a popular solution to the severe postwar housing shortage, seen as more modern than the older housing stock which was in disrepair. More recently a combination of decreased population, the renovation of older buildings and more modern housing being constructed has led to an increasing number of empty or unpopular blocks. In Dresden the city sold its

My VVO day ticket takes me on the *S-Bahn* (suburban railway) out of the city through industrial suburbs, past the Panometer, a huge panoramic painting inside a former gasometer, and a mixture of derelict and modern factories, with large housing estates in the distance²⁷. The conductor's badge says she is called A. Ay which is pretty concise as names go. 17km from Dresden the line reaches the River Elbe at Pirna and the landscape changes to a mixture of unspoilt riverside towns, a few vineyards and woods. The sandstone hills have steep bizarre rock formations, popular with masochistic climbers. The area is known as *Sächsische Schweiz* (Saxon Switzerland), has been popular with tourists since the nineteenth century and much of it is now a national park²⁸.

The railway line runs along the south bank of the river and Bad Schandau is on the north. Despite there being a bridge nearby, the public transport option across the river is a ferry, which battles the current as it heads towards the pier. Bad Schandau has been a spa resort where people came to take the waters for many years and the river frontage has a row of large hotels. Behind them the town centre is older and very pleasant. On one building the high-water level of various floods have been marked – recently there have been serious Elbe floods in 2002, 2006 and (further downriver) 2013.



Bad Schandau

From the town park, a tram makes the 8km trip to the Lichtenhein Wasserfall (waterfall) every half hour, built in 1898 to take tourists to this wonder of nature. This is the Kirnitzschtalbahn, operated by the snappily named Oberelbische Verkehrsgesellschaft Pirna Sebnitz mbH (OVPS), and my day ticket gives me 50% off the normal return of 8 euros. The current rolling stock dates from

between 1925 and 1968 and the tram consists of a motor car and two trailers. The single line runs along one side of the (fortunately quite quiet) local road – this is known as ‘gutter running’ among tram buffs. This means that in one direction it is running against the oncoming traffic - the locals are used to it but a couple of motorists panic when they see a tram hurtling towards them at 20km per hour. The waterfall is not very impressive – they were easily pleased in the 1898 - but the scenery en route is fine. In the hotel beergarden at the terminus there is one *bratwurst* left on the grill – it is after 2pm and the cook is closing up - so I eat that before heading back to Bad Schandau.

public housing organisation, WOBA Dresden GmbH in 2006 to the US based private investment company Fortress Investment Group. Sources: Wikipedia articles ‘Dresden’ and ‘plattenbau’.

²⁷ VVO (Verkehrsverbund Oberelbe) is the regional transport authority and covers the city and a large surrounding area stretching to Bad Schandau and the Czech border. See www.vvo-online.de

²⁸ There is tourist information in English at www.saechsische-schweiz.de and www.bad-schandau.de



Also in Bad Schandau is the 50 metre high *historischer Personenaufzug* (historic lift – pictured), built to take people from the town to the hilltop settlement of Ostrau and the network of walking paths on the hills above the river, and it is still in regular use. The return ticket is a postcard – a different card for single, return and child fares. At the top there is a (very) small viewing platform and a narrow path through thin air to reach land. There is a café selling beer where it reaches solid ground, which is a very good idea. I pick up courage for the return journey and we plummet down to Bad Schandau, on to the ferry and the train to Dresden.

In the evening, I take a tram across the river to Neustadt. It suffered little wartime damage and retains the old layout of tenements. Außere (outer) Neustadt is a student area and is full of life – plenty of bars and cheap restaurants. I try a couple of student bars and the excellent Zum Bautzener Tor pub, in the interests of research. The area is definitely worth another visit. Innere (inner) Neustadt by the river is more upmarket –

my map tells me it is known as the baroque quarter. The quiet streets are lined with very expensive designer shops, except for a Czech Style beer hall full of party groups singing along to an oompah band. Back in the city centre I explore the lively area around the Frauenkirche – part of the area is still being rebuilt. I complete my visit to Dresden with an alfresco extra-spicy currywurst and a bottle of beer, instead of the planned salad in my hotel room.

On Friday morning I'm up early and in the station by 5a.m. There is time for a quick coffee before the train leaves at twenty past. It is an Intercity train and it is full (at that hour!), but I have seat reservations for the homeward journey. There is four minutes to change trains at Leipzig. It is an advertised connection and the train is waiting on the adjoining platform, so I don't need my Plan B. My second train is an Intercity Express (ICE) via the recently opened high-speed line to Erfurt (though it is still dark at that stage and I see nothing) and Frankfurt Flughafen where I have time for breakfast (last night's uneaten salad). Number three is another ICE through more familiar territory via the high-speed line to Köln and Brussels. It is the third occasion in six weeks that I've done this leg of the journey, but without 30-plus people in a tour group to look after I have more opportunity to look out of the window. There is time for a Leffe and a sandwich at the Eurostar terminal in Brussels before the train to London departs. After a couple of pints in the Parcel Yard at Kings Cross I catch the train to Durham and I'm in the Colpitts by 2030 – 16 hours since leaving Dresden, 12 of them actually travelling.

I've thoroughly enjoyed the trip. Other commitments meant it took place in late October. About six weeks earlier and the weather would (I hope) have been better, and the beergardens would have been open. Like many large cities I've visited I feel that I was just getting to grips with Dresden when it was time to leave, and Saxony is definitely worth further exploration. There is a lot more beer in and around Bamberg to be tried, so that is also added to the list. And now to start planning 2017's adventures.

Railway buffery

1 German railways

The early German railways were constructed and operated by a combination of private companies and the pre-unification German states. By the late nineteenth century most railways were owned by the states and in 1920 most railways were nationalised as Deutsche Reichsbahn (German National Railways). From 1949, in West Germany the railways were operated by Deutsche Bundesbahn AG (German Federal Railways- DB) and in East Germany the Deutsche Reichsbahn (DR) name was retained. Following re-unification the two networks were formally combined in 1994 as Deutsche Bahn (German Rail - DB). There was a small number of local and private railways in the West.



Today, virtually all Intercity and long distance trains are operated by DB through its long distance arm DB Fernverkehr, though there is a small amount of private sector competition. Responsibility for regional and local railways has been transferred to the *länder*. Groups of services have been put out to competitive tender by the *länder*. Many contracts have been won or retained by DB's regional arm DB Regio, but others are now operated by other companies.

This is not the same as franchising on the UK model. It is more akin to a concession where the routes are operated to standards specified by the *land*, similar to the London Overground concession in the UK. The operating companies include DB Regio and its local subsidiaries, local publicly owned companies, for example Erfurter Bahn, and subsidiaries of large international transport companies. Some of the latter operate under their own name, for example Abellio and National Express, while others use a local brand name (for example the Harz Elbe Express is part of Transdev). Apart from tourist and heritage routes, regional and local lines use and accept DB fares and tickets and those set by the local *verkehrsverbund* (transport authority), though some companies offer their own fares in addition.

Sources and further information:

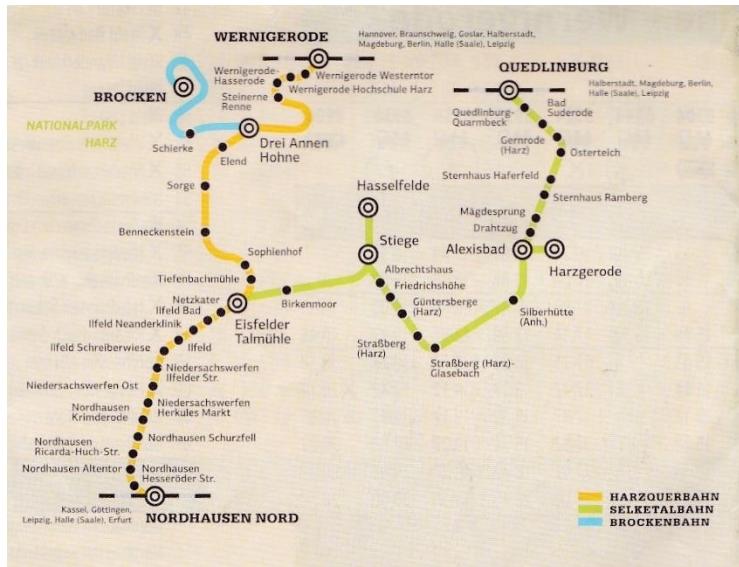
Wikipedia articles: History of rail travel in Germany, Deutsche Bahn, Erfurter Bahn, Abellio (transport company), Transdev

www.nationalexpressgroup.com/about-us/our-businesses/germany



2 The Harzer Schmalspurbahnen (Harz Narrow Gauge Railways)

Harzer Schmalspurbahnen GmbH (HSB) operate a 140km network of metre gauge (3ft 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ in) lines through the Harz mountains, in the German *länder* of Sachsen Anhalt and Thüringen. Today, there are three lines:



The Harzquerbahn - from Nordhausen via Ilfeld, Eisleben, Talmühle and Drei Annen Hohne to Wernigerode

The Selketalbahn – from Eisleben via Stiege, Alexisbad and Gernrode to Quedlinburg, with short branches from Stiege to Hasselfelde and Alexisbad to Harzgerode

The Brockenbahn - from Drei Annen Hohne to the summit of the Brocken

The lines were built between 1887 and 1899 by the Gernrode-Harzgeroder Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft (Gernrode – Harzgerode Railway Company) and the Nordhausen-Wernigeroder Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft (Nordhausen – Wernigerode Railway Company) to open up and develop the Harz area. In 1946 the lines were expropriated by the people and in 1949 became part of Deutsche Reichsbahn (DR). After reunification DB decided not to maintain responsibility for narrow gauge and tourist lines. HSB, which is owned by local authorities, was formed in 1991, and took over operation of the lines on 1 Feb 1993. The Selketalbahn was extended in 2006 from Gernrode to the mainline station at Quedlinburg, along the route of a recently closed standard gauge line.

Today HSB owns 25 steam locomotives built between 1897 and 1956 (10 are required in-steam to operate the summer timetable), 6 diesel locomotives, built between 1964 and 1990 for freight and engineering trains and 10 diesel railcars, built between 1933 and 1999 to operate the non-tourist-focussed public services on the lines. The Brockenbahn is entirely steam hauled while the others are a mixture. There is some remaining freight at the south end of the line between quarries and Nordhausen, where standard gauge wagons are carried piggy-back on narrow-gauge flat wagons to and from the DB network

Sources and further information:

Wikipedia article: Harz Narrow Gauge Railways

HSB website: www.hsb-wr.de

HSB Sommerfahrplan 2016 (Timetable leaflet – in German)

3 The Oberweißbacher Berg- und Schwarzatalbahn (OBS)

The valley line from Rottenbach to Kätzhütte was opened in 1900 by the then state of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt. The funicular and plateau line were opened in 1923, with the aim of reducing the isolation of the plateau villages. Ownership passed to DR in 1949 and then to DB in 1994. DB continues to operate the OBS network as a separate business unit. With support from the state of Thüringen the lines were renovated in 2002. The valley line continues to operate as a public transport service. The funicular and plateau line lines were declared a protected monument, and are primarily a tourist service.



The valley line is standard gauge, and an hourly service is operated using modern Class VT641 single railcars. The line is also home to a preserved 'ferkeltaxi' 1960s railcar which is used from time to time. The funicular climbs 323m in a distance of 1.38km, with a gradient of up to 25%. The line is broad gauge (1800m) though the turntables and freight platform allowed it to carry standard gauge wagons piggy-back on the freight platform. The 18-minute journey operates every half hour. Though the cars have been renovated the 1923 chassis of the passenger car and the freight platform are still in everyday use. The driving plant at the upper station uses modern three-phase technology with driving discs at right angles to the direction of travel, the only design of this kind in Europe. (No, I don't understand that bit either, but they make a big thing of it). The level



A plateau line train at Cursdorf (rear coach for birdsong), top, and the ferkeltaxi at Obstfelderschmiede (bottom).

track section on the plateau is standard gauge, electrified at 600V DC, runs every half-hour, using class ET479 railcars built specially for the line.

Sources and further information:

Up a 25% gradient to the summit. The Oberweissbach mountain railway and Schwarzatal railway after the regeneration process (leaflet), DB (OBS), undated.

OBS Bergbahnlandkarte. Erlebnisse gesucht? Geheimtipps finden. (leaflet, in German) DB (OBS), undated

Jahresfahrplan 2016 (leaflet, in German) DB(OBS), 2016

www.oberweissbacher-bergbahn.com, OBS site (mainly in German, some English language)

www.oberweissbacherbergbahn.de, DB site (in German)

Wikipedia (German) article 'Oberweißbacher Bergbahn'

4 The Zittauer Schmalspurbahn (Zittau narrow gauge railway)

The Zittauer Schmalspurbahn (ZSB) from Zittau to Jonsdorf and Oybin was constructed by the Zittau – Oybin – Jonsdorf Railway Company and opened in 1890 to promote excursion traffic to the spa and health resorts of Oybin and Jonsdorf. It was subsequently nationalised, passing via Royal Saxon State Railways and Deutsches Reichsbahn to DB. DB indicated that they wished not to operate narrow gauge lines and in 1996 operation of the ZSB passed to the Sächsisch-Oberlausitzer Eisenbahngesellschaft mbH (the Saxon Oberlausitz Railway Co - SOEG). The track gauge is 750mm (2ft 5½in). The weekday operation involves 2 steam trains connecting at Bertsdorf 4 times a day, with at weekends further services operated by historic diesel railcars.

Sources and further information:

Wikipedia articles 'Zittau-Oybin-Jonsdorf Railway' (very brief), 'Schmalspurbahn Zittau – Kurort Oybin/Kurort Jonsdorf' (in German)

www.soeg-zittau.de (in German)



Planning a trip by rail.

Germany has a comprehensive railway network from high speed Intercity Express (ICE) services to local lines. Most lines have a frequent and regular service, often hourly or better, many trains run to the same timetable each day of the week and services are timed to maximise connections. DB's online journey planner (www.bahn.de) and the phone app **DB Navigator** are excellent for planning trips in Germany (and across Europe). The summary timetables in the **European Railway Timetable**, produced by the former compilers of the Thomas Cook European Timetable are adequate for most purposes and the timetable is available from www.europeanrailtimetable.eu. Full timetables for each line are available online, with a bit of effort. (On www.bahn.de click on 'Booking and Timetable' then 'Contact and Timetables' then '**DBs online timetable**'. You are then taken to the German language site and the '*Elektronisches Kursbuch der Deutschen Bahn*'. Click on the '*Zum elektronischen Kursbuch*' button, enter a station name and press '*suche starten*' (search) and you get a list of the timetables of lines calling at that station. Click on the route you want).

The only resource which is essential to take with you, unless you are likely to change plans en route, is the DB Navigator app. It is kept up to date, for example when there are delays.

Fares and tickets

Interrail tickets are available which cover the whole of Germany (except for tourist and heritage lines) and will save on high fares on Intercity services. There are cheap advance fares available, though these restrict you to specific trains. Much cheaper fares are available if you do not use Intercity and express trains (branded ICE, IC, EC in timetables). This may not be a sensible option for the longest distance journeys, for example Hamburg to Munich, but regional express services (usually branded RE) are an option for most journeys. Regional and local trains are modern and comfortable modern electric or diesel multiple units, with double deck trains near major cities. There are no reservations on these trains and you cannot expect a buffet car or trolley. The only Intercity trains I used on this trip were on the return journey from Dresden to London.

Bargain **day tickets** for use on regional and local trains are set out below. They can be used on any local or regional train. On Monday to Friday they cannot be used before 0900, but any time at weekends:

Quer-Durchs-Land-Ticket: for travel throughout Germany. 44€ for one person, up to 76€ for 5 people travelling together

Schönes-Wochenende-Ticket: for travel throughout Germany on a Saturday or Sunday. 40€ for one person, plus 4€ for each extra person travelling on the same ticket.

Länder-Ticket: for travel throughout the specific state. Prices vary but range from 23€ to about 30€ for one person, with reductions for groups travelling together. An excellent bargain is available in Sachsen Anhalt, Sachsen and Thüringen, where the regional day ticket permits travel across all three states for 23€ for one person up to 38€ for four people travelling together.

Prices correct at December 2016. Details of these tickets can be found on www.bahn.de by clicking on 'offers'. The DB journey planner and DB Navigator app have an option which will find only trains on which these tickets are valid.

Local day tickets are available within the local transport authority *verkehrsverbund* areas, usually based on zones and often with substantial discounts for 2 or more people travelling together.

The ticket machines in stations and platforms include all these ticket options, and are easy to use (if the English option is working) once you get used to them. It is often cheaper to buy tickets from a machine than the ticket office.

Some of the non-DB companies which operate regional and local trains offer their own cheap fares, which may not be available on the DB machines or website. They are available from conductors on the train or the company's own machines on board trains or at stations. An example is a set fare Hopper ticket for short journeys. I only discovered some of these during my trip, but they only undercut the DB or regional tickets by two or three euros. There should be information about these offers on the company websites – those on this trip are:

Eurobahn:	www.eurobahn.de
Abellio:	www.abellio.de (in German)
HarzElbe Express:	www.hex-online.de (in German)
Erfurter Bahn:	www.erfurter-bahn.de
Trilex:	www.trilex.de (in German and Czech)

Tourist and heritage railways, for example HSB, OBS and ZSB can set their own fares, but these are cheap compared to UK heritage railways.

Taking my journey as an example an Interrail ticket for eight days would have cost 312€ for eight days. I paid approximately 230€ euros for the journeys on which Interrail is valid. This would be significantly reduced if I had been travelling with other people (bears like Ted go free). In both cases approximately a further 85€ is needed for the tourist/heritage lines, most of which is for the HSB Harz network.

Hotels and tours:

The hotels I used were: Galerie Hotel, Paderborn; Hotel Domschatz, Quedlinburg; Hotel Anker, Saalfeld; Hotel Molitor, Bamberg; InterCity Hotel, Dresden. I'd happily use all of them again. The first four are all in historic buildings on town centre sites and the rate included a good buffet breakfast. Only the Anker was a bit of a disappointment – though comfortable and central, it didn't make the best of the building and the customer service was in a 1980s time-warp. The InterCity chain of modern business hotels are located close to main stations, and include free city transport for the duration of your stay. This was room only, but very comfortable. The Galerie Hotel was booked on their website www.galerie-hotel.de, where the booking page has an English language option, the InterCity through their website www.intercityhotel.com and the remainder through booking.com.



*Hotel Domschatz,
Quedlinburg.*

My trip was planned independently. For anyone interested in organised tours to the region Great Rail Journeys run the following tours:

Berlin, Dresden & Prague: 11 days, including 3 nights in Dresden (including a walking tour and free afternoon).

Harz Mountains and Rhine Gorge: 10 days, including 4 nights in Wernigerode (including journeys by HSB to the Brocken and Selketalbahn, a visit to Quedlinburg and a free day in Wernigerode).

Saxony by Steam: 8 days, including 5 nights in Dresden (including a trip on the ZSB, and a city tour and free time in Dresden).

No doubt, some of the specialist railway tour companies that provide trips to obscure railways for the serious enthusiast will visit the area, if you fancy midnight visits to freight yards to watch the shunting. Some will feature opportunities to photograph steam trains or hire special trains using historic rolling stock.

Maps and atlases

The most appropriate maps I could find at Stanford's (12-14 Long Acre, London WC2E 9LP, www.stanfords.co.uk) were published by Freytag & Berndt and were (in English):

Thuringian Forest, Fichtel Mountains, Franconian Switzerland, Road and Leisure map, 1:150,000, 2012

Saxony, Road and Leisure map 7, 1:200,000, 2019(!)

Saxony-Anhalt, Road and Leisure map 10, 1:200,000, 2011

As well as being light enough to carry with me, they show railway lines clearly and it is easy to identify scenic areas and journeys.

For anyone interested in railways the **Eisenbahnatlas Deutschland** (Railway Atlas of Germany), Schweers+Wall, 2014 is essential, though too heavy to include in my small case.



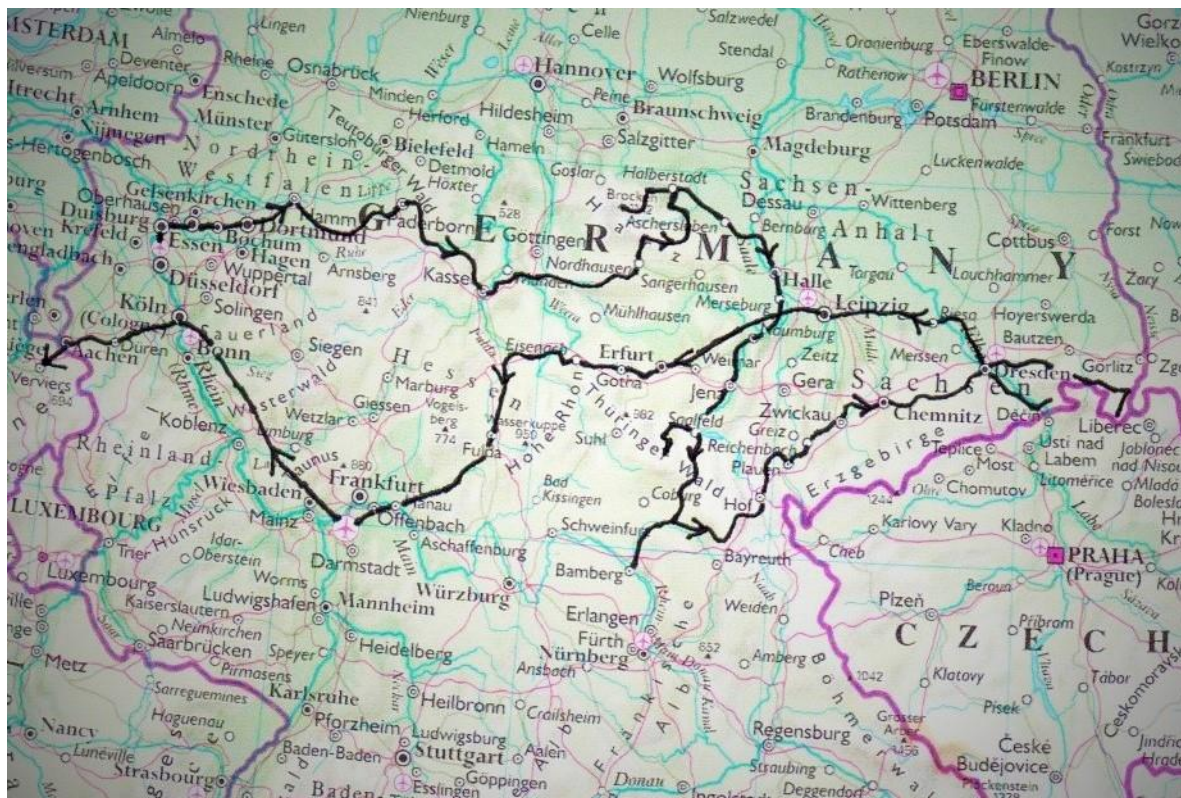
Beer and pubs

I was pleasantly surprised on this trip to Germany how easy it was to find different beers from the standard *helles* and *pils*, including dark, unfiltered and/or unpasteurised beers. The www.ratebeer.com and www.europeanbeerguide.net sites (the latter doesn't seem to have been updated recently but it remains useful) are both useful sources of information on beers, breweries and pubs. In particular, they helped to identify places to visit in Bamberg and Dresden where there is more choice – in the smaller towns I just followed my nose. More generally, **The Oxford Companion to Beer**, Garrett Oliver (ed), Oxford University Press, 2011 has many interesting entries on German beers and breweries.

Sources and References

The **Rough Guide** is my guidebook of choice when planning these trips, though this time it was of limited use due to the focus on railways. For checking out information en

route and post-trip research and fact-checking the main sources have been **Wikipedia** articles in English (www.en.wikipedia.org) and German (www.de.wikipedia.org). Any facts which haven't been referenced are from these sources. The usual caveats apply regarding a source which anyone can edit, but they are usually accurate. I don't read German so I have had to rely on the vagaries of Google Translate. There were some bizarre translations, but the general sense was usually clear. Other sources, and Wikipedia articles which were less easy to locate have been referenced. There may be some rewriting and airbrushing of history going on as it often seems (not only on Wikipedia) that absolutely nothing happened during the DDR years. All sources quoted are in English unless it states otherwise.



The route



The HSB at Wernigerode Westerntor

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The ZSB at Kurort Oybin

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