

## **ULYSSES GB TRIP TO NETHERLANDS AND GERMANY; AUGUST 2018**

Some time back in the depths of last winter, Les Janes came up with a suggestion to ride across the northern part of Europe to Berlin. No one knows why he got this urge but having posted it on the website forum there was quite a bit of interest as there often is when the weather is grim, biking opportunities are limited and one sits pondering over past adventures and mulling over maps and possible destinations.

The website chat gathered momentum and plans were made to take in Hamburg and the Harz mountains as part of such a trip and our enthusiastic President Martin put together some routes and circulated them and as ever, the idea became a reality and ferries and hotels booked.

Sadly by the time of departure in mid-August, several prospective participants had had to withdraw but on a Tuesday evening, a little band of us gathered at the Pier Hotel at Harwich for embarkation on the night crossing to Hoek of Holland. We were met at the Pier by Pete and Mim Read who had come along to see us off and before long we were as usual... doing nothing but waiting in the boarding area of the Stena Hibernia which .. as ever... was delayed loading. It seems a peculiarity of this crossing that the ship is delayed either arriving or unloading but whatever the departure time, always arrives on time. Which is early. Very early if one has partaken of a night cap or two before bed.

We were a small group of 4 bikes and 6 people, Martin and Les on the ubiquitous GS's, Mick and Susan Burnett on the Goldwing trike plus trailer and myself and Caroline on the Tenere. Those familiar with the roads out of the Hoek area will know that one is soon wrapped up in a complicated series of motorways, interchanges and heavy traffic especially in the morning. It was thus not with great surprise that we became separated as a group. Losing the Trike and trailer (and its rider and pillion!), we three pressed on for our first scheduled stop on the Alfluitsdijk, the 30 km road over a dyke built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century across the sea in northern Holland. We stopped half way at a viewing point /café for the first of many good continental coffees with cake.

Pressing on, we re-joined the mainland and rode on small back roads through pristine and neat Dutch villages to the Dutch GP circuit at Assen. As luck had it, there was track day in progress and arriving at an open gate, we rode straight in and parked up next to an empty stand to watch erstwhile amateurs thrashing round at ...er breakneck speed, well sort of, but nonetheless, a lot faster than we would have done!





The afternoon saw us press on to our overnight stop at Bad Zwischenahn, just into Germany, a Beautiful spa town with many traditional and restored buildings, Mick and Susan arrived , having had their own traumas with sat navs, back roads and motorways. We also met up with Rudy who had been visiting relatives in Amsterdam and we all dined al fresco in the warm evening at a traditional local style restaurant. Staying in different hotels, we were able to stroll back by the lakeside to enjoy a few late hours' refreshments on the terrace of one of these.





The following day, we were aiming for Hamburg and Les decided to ride alone leaving the rest of our small group heading up towards Cuxhaven where we promptly lost the Trike and Mick and Susan again! The depleted group of three bikes headed to cross the Elbe near Wischhafen, undeterred by the fact that there was a small vehicle ferry rather than the tunnel that Martin had anticipated when planning the route!.



On the advice of a local restaurateur who had spoken to us at lunch, we skipped down the outside of the mile long line of waiting vehicles and were loaded onto the ferry within minutes for the 40 minute crossing. Dis embarking near Glucksatdt, the trusty Sat navs sent us spinning in different directions and our trio of bikes became a duo and a single for the remaining sweltering hour or so down into Hamburg.

We thus arrived dripping at the Reception of the Priz Hotel Hamburg and somewhat desperate for liquid refreshment. Despite the separations, we all arrived at a similar time and already at the bar were Barry Croft and Alex who had travelled via Belgium and France to link up. Alan Hilton also arrived in inimitable style.

Caroline and I spent a little time exploring the Altstadt before dining on local food whilst the others chose a nearer restaurant but a pleasant evening was again rounded off in the bar.

The following morning, we engaged in what was to become a regular speciality pastime... exiting a hotels underground car park without paying the exorbitant fees. Not difficult for the bikes but not so easy for the Trike.

A change of tactics followed with Mick and Susan deciding rather than being lost by the group again, they'd travel alone today whilst Alan and Les also set off independently and Ba and Alex made an early start. The remaining trio set off and once out of Hamburg, a pleasant ride ensued along the Elbe valley for a couple of hours on the A5. Stopping for coffee at the lovely little town of Ludwigslust (one can work out for oneself the explanations for the towns name), we bumped into several of our group also enjoying coffee and cake outside in the sun.





We then joined the motorway in order to reach Berlin in reasonable time for some sight-seeing before the evening. The temperature remained in the early 30s and again our entry into the big city was in uncomfortable heat and we made our way through the suburbs and centre taking in every red light before reaching the swish and er... 'funky' NHOW hotel Berlin. Situated on the banks of the Spree River, this was a trendy hotel themed on music. (Room service offered a guitar to be brought to your room if necessary, chosen from a rack in the foyer). The outside terrace on the river was popular in the simmering heat and we were met as arranged by our German Ulyssean friends, Christof and Petra and Andreas and Anna. We were taken on a fascinating stroll from the hotel, along by the remains of the Berlin Wall, over the beautiful Oberbaum Bridge. This led us to Kreuzberg, part of the old east city but now very bohemian area full of bars and pubs. We visited one such establishment known to Christof and Petra since their youth and famous for its one and only dish... fried chicken, sauerkraut and potato salad. And beer!! A very enjoyable evening was had and Alan Hilton's consumption of beer was estimated to have been in excess of the rest of the group put together.

Our return to the hotel was by various means, some by taxi, others on foot and others by SBahn. The pedestrian group included Alan who rather made a name for himself by accidentally (?) kicking over a beggar's money pot on the Oberbaum Bridge.

Needless to say, there was small re grouping on the terrace bar for a de brief before bed.

The following day was set aside for sightseeing and our local friends had made arrangements to take us on a river trip. We walked to the nearest UBahn station and travelled into the city to embark on a river cruise through the city, providing a fascinating insight into the historical buildings and geography. This was followed by our own individual sightseeing. Mick and Susan managed to blag their way into the Reichstag dome without the required pre booked ticket or photo ID, seemingly by promising that they weren't terrorists and here was nothing harmful hidden in the disability scooter. The rest of us took in the obvious spots including the Brandenburg Gate, Holocaust memorial, checkpoint Charlie, Alexanderplatz etc.

We gain rendezvoused on the terrace for the evening venture, this time by foot and bus to a lovely beer garden some miles away on the riverside. Unsurprisingly, the consumption of beer, wine and food followed to some excess. It's a tough job being away with a Ulysses group but someone has to do this vital work.



Our return in the late evening by bus through Kreuzberg again was enlivened by our rendition of 'the wheels on the bus' to the bafflement of the locals and the presence on the bus of the largest hornet ever seen outside of captivity! An interesting journey! We bade a sad farewell to our German friends who had made the visit to the city so memorable.





The following morning, in continuing good weather we made our way out of the city. Being a Sunday, the roads were a little quieter than when we arrived and we elected to get some distance covered by motorway in order to get some time in the Harz Mountains. As expected, now, some chose to ride alone and others in a group but the latter soon became stretched on the motorway sections. We nevertheless seemed to have a knack of finding each other again by leap frogging and service station stops and thus, most of us were in Bad Harzburg for lunch. This is another beautiful regional German town, on the northern edge of the Harz Mountains and earmarked as a possible base for a longer trip to the region.

Time being limited, we then rode across the mountains from north to south on a pleasant twisty forest road, populated by many bikers in what is clearly an impressive biking area. We had nowhere near the time needed to explore and for my part, I've made a note to plan to return here for a few days in future.

We pressed on to our overnight hotel at Ropeter on the outskirts of Göttingen which seems to be a pleasant university city.

The Park hotel, despite being a business type establishment near the motorway junction, was very comfortable with large rooms, bathrooms and a pleasant garden to sit and enjoy drinks. On the advice of the barman, we spurned the local Chinese restaurant and ate at a local steakhouse where sadly known of us chose to pay the King's Ransom demanded for a steak. Nevertheless, a pleasant evening was had and much conversation given to the following days route.

It's a feature of this trip that we needed to look at routes and distances each evening to decide the best option. The combination of largish distances and city destinations meant that we were somewhat torn between a long days riding or less time on the bike and more in the city. The latter meant perhaps more motorway riding than we would normally choose but we tried to do a combination of both that and smaller roads and still be arriving by 4 or 5pm.

Our next day's travel to Düsseldorf reflected this. Again in separate groups or individually we, covered some distance on the motorway system (usually trouble free but with more roadworks around the Ruhr conurbation) and again, we came across each other at times. Our little group took the lesser roads across country south of Hagen and Wuppertal, stopping for coffee in Marsberg and arriving in Düsseldorf after our first experience of rain en route and a shower just as we arrived at



the city centre Mercure. A quick change and we descended on the Altsadt down by the river to 'test' the local dark beer, consumed in prodigious quantities throughout the city. We did our bit to assist in this. A proliferation of restaurants are on offer and whilst some elected so satisfy their craving for red meat, denied the previous evening, Caroline and I dined in local beer hall where the renowned Haxe was on offer. Well I enjoyed it greatly whilst Caroline's goats cheese salad...well what can one say!

We rounded off the evening in by now timeworn fashion, sitting outside the hotel bar with a sleep enhancing nightcap.



The following morning saw us emerge, toll free (by now well experienced in this) from the underground car park to make our separate ways home. Martin, Rudy, Mick and Susan and ourselves took a northern route to the Hoek and the late evening ferry, stopping en route at Nijmegen and Arnhem and still managing to lose one of the group. A last coffee stop in a beautiful village south of Utrecht where they seemed to be celebrating every European country with flags and bunting... Except GB of course, made our final leg comfortable. The last miles to the Ferry port aren't pleasant with fast moving 5 o'clock traffic and motorway lane changes but we arrived in good



time for a short wait before boarding at a good hour. Food and drink taken, we all reflected on the miles covered, cities enjoyed and beer consumed. Would we do it again? Yes to the latter two without doubt. The consensus was that two nights minimum is needed in cities and that makes for a longer trip next time or less distance to be covered.

Our return to the UK was, as expected, marred by road closures, heavy traffic and a less enjoyable riding experience although the 6.30am disembarkation at Harwich allows for arrival home, even for us distant northerners at a reasonable hour.

We are all back safely. The whole trip was fun and the company fantastic. The Berlin experience was so greatly enhanced by our German friends and the bikes all performed well with no major incidents other than a headlamp bulb and broken electrical connection between trike and trailer which we fixed with Duct tape.

Where next???









