

Friends of Siegerland Newsletter June 2018

The visit to Siegerland was from 10-16 May. We flew from Luton to Dortmund where we were greeted by Gertrud and Edith. We then travelled back by minibus (smooth, modern, comfortable) to Siegen where there was a reception committee of 'Gastgeber' waiting for us. We had arrived!

On the first day we had a very interesting guided tour of the collection of the Upper Castle Museum. Our guide spoke excellent English and threw in a bit of German every now and again for the non-English speakers. The most surprising discovery was the existence of a 'show mine' built under the castle in the 1930s so that visitors could see what conditions in the mines had been like. A miner might walk 2 hours to get to the mine, work 10 hours and then spend 2 hours walking home again. The show mine had to be dug out of the rock, in itself a prodigious amount of work. We also had an explanation of Peter Paul Rubens' life and work. The symbolism of one painting 'Peace' was described in detail – an owl for wisdom, lion for strength, arrows for unity etc. It was very interesting. The tour was followed by delicious, traditional potato bread and coffee or cold drinks.

In the evening 36 of us assembled at 'Wandertreff' where a couple run a huge 'Grillhuetten'. The barbecue set-up was so enormous that 36 very generously-sized and marinated pieces of meat could be cooked at one time. A side barbecue had Bratwurst and Krakower sizzling. Along with 6 salads we were all well-fed. We handed out the packets of crumpets we had brought as a gift for everyone, together with careful instructions on how to cook this English speciality. (Toast them until very hot and serve with **lots** of butter!)

Over the weekend there was free time as usual with hosts and the group reunited bright and early on Monday morning for a coach ride to Koblenz. Our first stop was the Ehrenbreitstein, a massive fortress high up above the confluence of the Rhine and the Moselle. The walls are so thick that tunnels were built inside for the soldiers to pass through without being seen by any enemy. This visit was followed by a cable car ride high over the Rhine and then a chance to have lunch at Deutsches Eck, where there is a huge statue of Kaiser Wilhelm. We then had a cruise along the Rhine, returning to Koblenz where we visited the old town. In our group there were a number of children who had been given a day off school on the basis they would practise their English, which they duly did! It was altogether a lovely day out.

On Tuesday we visited the modern art museum in Siegen and then we all headed to Jurgen's garden for cake from 'Backes', which is the name of the traditional community baking house. This used to be the social meeting place for exchanging news while waiting for bread and cake to be cooked. We were all presented with a very dark, very tasty and very heavy loaf to take back to the UK. That evening our farewell dinner was at the Bismarckhalle – a very lively occasion with a lot of people enjoying the meal and get-together.

Many thanks to all in Germany who organized our stay. We are looking forward to seeing you in Barnet next year!