

Witch way in Germany

By Jim Walker

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Railfuture used Eurostar and Thalys trains for a week-long trip to Hannover in April.

The Thalys train to Cologne seemed a bit cramped after Eurostar, and with only one door per two coaches loading took a long time.

However it was good to see the extra two tracks to Liege for the new high-speed line almost complete.

In Hannover we met rail campaigner Ulrich Grunert from the German PRO BAHN group.

PRO BAHN is an independent group campaigning for a better deal for German rail users.

It is so independent its chairman is currently being sued by Die Bahn for saying on television that one in two of their customers was paying more than they should because of the complexity of the fare structure.

Die Bahn is no longer directly state controlled and is required to make a profit.

It has raised walk-on fares and customers buying Bahncards now get only a 25% discount, not 50% as before.

The high speed walk-on return fare Hannover to Berlin (150 miles) is £61, not excessive by UK standards, and there are some very good local deals.

One £15 ticket allows up to five people to travel anywhere in

Lower Saxony after 9am. As a result the use of the local trains has increased significantly.

A £20 weekend ticket allows one person unlimited travel on local trains throughout Germany.

Wednesday 30 April was Walpurgis Nacht, when all the witches in Germany gather to dance on top of the Brocken mountain, and that very day we went up the Brocken by metre-gauge steam train.

As we climbed through the beautiful forests the weather got wilder and wilder until at the bare summit we got out into driving rain.

Luckily the restaurant was open and selling plenty of hot food. By the time we got back down to Wernigerode, it was a beautiful sunny day, but sure enough the witches and devils were gathering to go up the Brocken by special train.

This was drawn by two Mallet locos with two devils sitting on the front engine. One of the party, last seen drinking a beer in the square, did not appear in time for the train back to Hannover. Despite rumours that he had been turned into a frog he reappeared on the next train.

The next day most of us went to the town of Goslar, a beautifully preserved world heritage site, and well worth a visit. One person went down the 1,000 year old copper mine, others saw the Romanesque palace and other sites. On Friday another group

went to Hameln but failed to find any ratburgers.

Hannover itself has an impressive main station and an extensive metro which really amounts to trams going underground through the city centre.

Hannover's main attraction is the Herrenhausgarten, a huge area of formal gardens and avenues, in wonderful condition and full of spring flowers.

The performing arts were not forgotten. Two members went to the Opera House to see Pelleas and Melisande, which like most good operas all ends in tears.

We were also impressed by "Brunnhilde" the blonde barmaid in the Gilderhof hotel.

When 10 drunken English squaddies got back at 11pm demanding drink, she shut the bar and sent them straight off to bed with no argument.

On the way home we spent a night in Brussels, travelling to our hotel via Metro line 3, another underground tram line, but with large stations obviously designed for eventual conversion to trains.

Some people went out to the Atomium, the symbol of the 1958 World Fair held in Brussels.

Although everyone has seen it on posters, it is only when you actually get there that you realise how absolutely enormous it is.

We got back to London on Monday 5 May after another very enjoyable Railfuture trip.

mittee plans to publish subject papers on a number of key policy areas.

Applicants for these voluntary positions should contact freight committee secretary Eric Layfield at: eric@layfield7eb.freereserve.co.uk

Franchise protest

Many members were surprised at the decision of the Strategic Rail Authority not to shortlist First Group for the Greater Anglia franchise, writes John Barfield.

Protests have been made by two branches of Railfuture. The feeble excuse given for not including First Group was that it had not filled in the forms properly.

Many local user groups have been aghast at the decision, because a train operator with proven ability and a good record has been excluded while troubled Arriva with a "dreadful" industrial relations record has been shortlisted for the franchise.

Trains not buses

Railfuture members voted to warn the Strategic Rail Authority not to try saving money by replacing trains with buses when it renews franchises, particularly in East Anglia where it has been hinted at.

A motion passed unanimously by the AGM reminded the SRA that people will not accept buses as alternatives to trains. Copies of the Railfuture booklet on bustitution is still available. It can be used to warn politicians and planners this idea has been tried before and failed. Send £2 to the Railfuture office at The Colourworks for a copy.

The AGM also condemned the apparent Government policy of a "predict and provide" policy on both road and air, both of which fail to pay their full costs.

Lottery winners

April: J Savage, Tring £40, C Rayner, Enfield £25, M Ross, Brighton £15, A C Boulwood,

News in brief

Edgware £10, Dr G B Herrmann, Gerrards Cross £5, M Peterson, London W3 £5.

May: E Edgell, Rotherham £40, Jenifer Adams, Stowmarket £25, R King London E9 £15, M Ross, Brighton £10, Mrs V Matthews, Hassocks £5, William Reynolds, Heston £5.

Freight future

Railfuture's freight committee has made it a top priority to invigorate its communications and stimulate new initiatives. An open invitation is made to Railfuture members and other activists who have the time, enthusiasm and relevant interest or knowledge of rail freight issues to become more involved.

The committee is also appealing to trade bodies, regional and local authorities and multi-disciplinary professionals to offer themselves as guest speakers and/or other support. The com-

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New members always welcome

Membership: £17.50 per year.

Pensioners, students and unemployed £8.50. User groups, community and parish councils £17.50 or £25 to include 10 copies of Railwatch plus other relevant publications. Other local authorities and companies £35. Families £2 extra per member, after £17.50.

New members and

membership queries:

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