

From France to the Baltic States



This is the third e-publication from Roger Hicks and Frances Schultz, and, like the others, it is something of an experiment. Part travelogue, part guide-book, it's about a third the length of a full-sized book, at 22,000 words and 50 pictures. But equally, as compared with a magazine article, it's a lot more in-depth and (we hope) rather more interesting.

The big advantage of e-publishing is that you don't have to distribute full-size books: you can sell a bit of entertainment, along with quite a lot of information, for the price of a cup of fancy coffee: which is what we hope to do. Compare \$1.99 (£1.25, 1.50€) with the price of a cinema ticket, or a glass of beer, and we think it's pretty good value.

Although I tried to do an abridged version, it was just too difficult. What do I leave in, and what do I cut out? The facts? The anecdotes? The reflections on the nature of Life, the Universe and Everything? So what I've done is condense it to a set of notes, with a very occasional extract. You may or may not like it. But given the financial risk, why not try it? And if you do like it, there will be more pieces later.

Roger Hicks

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Like our first two e-publications, this is designed to be read on Kindles and other tablets, but unlike the earlier ones, it's in colour. The colour doesn't look too bad when it's converted to black and white, and if you've got a colour reader (as will be the case for more and more people) it's prettier.

GOING FORTH

Cambrai: tanks and a tarts' convention – a selling point of not having en-suite facilities – age (of rider and motorcycle) no bar to touring – the massage effect of riding – never order wine in Turkish kebab joints – spas – the Haus Germania in Bad Salzuflen – French and German breakfasts – conversations with Serbs – 102 octane petrol



Magdeburg. We were constantly surprised (and shocked) at the enduring levels of ruination in the old Iron Curtain countries.

FROM GERMANY INTO POLAND

A difficult border crossing – Schengen – information at the border – hotel hunting – the Dolina Lesna hotel – up 54 stairs – 170 zloty (about £40, 45€, \$70) for room, dinner and breakfast – euros accepted – fish on a Friday in a very Catholic country – a mobile 'phone addict – very little English spoken – old Poland like stepping back in time: small shops on cobbled streets – a girl in the nude in a front garden – speed cameras – total disregard of speed limits – a surprisingly safe place to drive

Polish history – the Ostwall (Germany's 'Maginot line' against the Russians) – tank traps – souvenir hand-grenades – signs encouraging photography – deteriorating roads – *koleiny* – a very young Igor – tombstone vendors – finding a room in the wedding season – *noclegi* (bed and breakfast)

Just as we were getting desperate, “a good dinner, a couple of bottles of good Polish beer each, an excellent night’s sleep and a superb breakfast (cold meat, cheese, omelette) for 186 zloty, about 50€/ \$75/£45 “ – similar luck the next night – Agroturystyka (like a French *gîte*) – conversations with people too young to recall the Iron Curtain.



Tank, Ostwall-Bunkery. 'Za Pobedi' (painted on the turret in Cyrillic) translates roughly as 'On to Victory!'

The back road into Lithuania – a wise decision – a blown fuse – Kaliningrad too difficult to visit, despite being the home of Frances's great-to-the-nth grandfather – European currencies and the Free Market– the beginnings of the Greek financial crisis.

THE BALTIC STATES

Underwhelmed by Lithuania: flat and dull – a memorial to Frank Zappa – planning ahead versus taking what comes, and not much came –

surprisingly expensive – not very welcoming – the
luck of the draw – unlike many travel writers,
we're travelling on our own nickel without any
incentive to overstate the pleasure we get from
visiting a place – the Giant Flying Lithuanian
Scorpion



The sea! The sea! Our first sight of the Baltic

An indifferent hotel in Latvia – a general lack of
curtains in Eastern Europe – our destination
somewhat north of the Orkneys, around the same
parallel as Juneau, Alaska – wondering whether to

give up – sudden improvements – our first sight of the Baltic – a recommendation for an hotel in Paarnu – a very friendly, helpful Estonian motorcycle cop – blood alcohol limits – speed limits – 'threading the needle' – an increasingly bald rear tyre..



***Estonian motorcycle cop.** He could not have been friendlier or more helpful. And he spoke all but perfect English. Many Estonians do.*

PAARNU: THE ALEKSANDRI

The Aleksandri Pub and Guest House – “two nights accommodation, dinner each night, breakfast each morning, lots of beer, and some laundry done,

183.43€ (call it £160, \$260 at the time) “ – awash with Harley-Davidsons – poseurs and riders – Federation of European Harley Clubs Rally – memories of Daytona Cycle Week: 100,000 motorcycles and 30,000 motorcyclists



Nude with beer: *A whole new take on bad-ass motorcyclists, given the slatted seats of the chairs. But it shows how relaxed the Aleksandri is.*

“Attila the Stockbroker” – actually, very nice people – the elegance of our BMW among the Harleys – Sandra the brilliant receptionist – to buy or not to buy an Iron Age sword – a model Tourist

Office— eating and drinking with fellow motorcyclists – English the *lingua franca* – deep-fried pigs' ears – not as bad as stir-fried yak's penis – – Andres the brilliant proprietor – a tyre found, but a day's delay – paddling in the Baltic – an Edsel spotted – a departure delayed – no problem with a late check-out. “I don't know how a non-motorcyclist might like the Aleksandri, but I will say this: if you're a motorcyclist, and you're visiting the Baltic States, go there.”

TURNING AROUND

“Paarnu was to be the northward limit of our trip, and so, with 1863 miles (2981 km) on the trip meter, we set out on the homeward journey” – rush hour in Old Riga – a blocked street – poor signposting – Riga reminiscent of the best of Glasgow – beautiful Art Deco and Art Nouveau buildings, in well-proportioned settings – trouble yet again in finding a room

Soviet mentalities – a terminally gloomy wedding party – the Bauska branch of the National Transport Museum – still not impressed with either Latvia or Lithuania, though the wildlife is apparently fascinating – back into Poland on the main road: a mistake, as it was hellish crowded.



Transport Museum, Bauska: a 'must-see' if you are in or near Bauska.

Wonderful Polish hospitality – chilling reminders of Russian and Nazi occupation – a hitherto unknown photographic speciality – Stalin drunk when drawing borders – supper versus dinner

THROUGH POLAND TO GERMANY

Barbecue facilities at the Hotel Awis – a 24-hour shop that wasn't – Polish toll motorways – yet more fun finding hotels – awful roads – storks'

nests – the Ciao Ciao guest house – struggling in German – warm beer – an improbable Polish movie – how to find an air-line for inflating a tyre – the 33 metre high concrete statue of Christ the King at Swiebodzin – foundations relying on miracles – getting lost – appalling traffic – enormous tailbacks – riding on the other side of the road (the 'despatch rider lane') – back into Germany.



For sale at the side of the road, Kargowa

MAGDEBURG: SHADES OF THE GDR

Our sort-of-adopted daughter – looking for hotel rooms in the company of an attractive young

woman who is not your wife – excellent service from the Magdeburg Tourist Office – 135 euros for 3 nights, no breakfast – her 21st, my 61st – popping Champagne into the Elbe – libations to Apollo and all the gods – an unconventional rain-dance in the Pyrenees – memories of St. Petersburg – East German sushi – only German bank cards accepted.



***Ice-cream wagon, Magdeburg.** It would be fascinating to know the history of this old Citroën.*

MARTIAL ARTS AND DANCING

An invitation to a capoeira demonstration – a

Brazilian martial art – multiculturalism – the University sports clubs, “including rock climbing (on special walls), juggling, belly dancing, judo, unicycling and even ballroom dancing” – a reminder of our own university days – a liberal attitude to students and beer – extremely friendly students – a condom machine on the school wall – changing times and morals – Hungarian folk-dancers – remaining open to new experiences – mixing old and young – more East German hardening of the categories: “You MUST leave the room by ten!” – night-lights and mosquito-scarers – unexpected problems with a cash machine.

HOMEWARD BOUND

“We had decided to concentrate on minor roads, to see how much East Germany had changed since we first visited it a couple of weeks after unification in 1990. Our impressions were very mixed” – Eisenach – overpriced hotels – an image from the 1930s – the Hotel Frankenstein – a converted farmhouse – – improvised curtains – why do hotel rooms have medicine cabinets? – back into West Germany (traffic signs for tanks) – overpriced motorway toilets – a good hotel and a bad meal in Ligny en Barrois – an idea for a recipe (which worked very well and is given in the full version) –

should we stay away another day? (No)



Dancers. *It's all very well to say that riding requires 100% concentration, but the truth is that because conversation is impossible, you have time to think, and you think back on what you have seen, such as a beautiful girl ballroom dancing in a university gymnasium.*

Thoughts on fuel and oil consumption – notes written on a map I'd been using for nearly 20 years – riding too far each day – looking forwards to the next trip.