



A Return to Bavaria

By T.J. Conrads

The walk from the bed and breakfast allowed me to savor the countryside: Lush woodlands and wildflowers, open glades and rolling hills. Several homesteads peeked out from behind deep, dense woods, displaying an old world style and masterful craftsmanship. Seeps oozing sweet, clean spring water passed beneath my feet as I made my way across a grassy swale and up to an old brick barn.

“Good afternoon, T.J.! Did you sleep

well? Want something to eat? A beer?”

Alois Hofherr, a good friend from my first trip to Germany in 1999, welcomed me as I swung into the barn, which served as cafeteria, meeting room, and general gathering place for the 15th Traditional Bowhunters of Germany’s (TJBD) Rendezvous. I sat down, rubbed the sleep from my eyes, and Alois slapped down two hot sausages, potato salad, and a cool beer. The Bavarian hospitality was just beginning ...

My long flight from Idaho to Munich had wore me down, but after Alois and

Johann Glasser picked me up outside of Customs, we headed to Regensburg, where Alois walked me through a lovely Bavarian butcher shop and we picked out several lovely items: white sausage, wurst, and smoked pork steaks. A quick stop at the local bakery for some bread, and we had the makings of a true Bavarian breakfast ... minus the coffee I so desperately needed.

It had been nine years since I had last been a guest of the TJBD when they held their Rendezvous at Wieshof, a small burg near the Czechoslovakia border near Falkenstein. But there had



Johannes' Mongol yurt.

been problems with the landowners, electricity, plumbing, and other things so they had to find a new place to have their annual Rendezvous. Through a little luck, and some inside help from another member, Hartmut Hahn, they secured a lovely place in St. Otzen in northern Bavaria.

Hartmut works for the Division of Forestry and had known the families who owned several farms in St. Otzen, a byproduct of his hunting the area for

Roe deer and wild boar. Besides the brick barn, which had water, electricity, cement floor, and lots of room, there was ample space for camping, novelty shoots, and land to place two large 3-D target rounds throughout the forest. And there was the bed and breakfast, which was perfect for housing their guests ... like me!

The TJBD runs their shoot a little different than what I have been accustomed to in the U.S. The first three or four days is a time for fellowship: campfire gatherings every night, bow building classes, axe and knife sharpening workshops, presentations by guests, and a chance to build and solidify friendships. On Saturday, everyone shoots one round with field points, and on Sunday, all arrows must be broadheads on the second course. Scoring is five points for a kill zone shot, minus five points for a hit anywhere else, and zero for a miss. Awards are given for achieving certain point levels: bronze, silver, and gold pins. However, to date no one has ever earned a gold pin!

The name is ironic, The Traditional Bowhunters of Germany (Traditionelle Jagdbogenschützen Deutschland), since bowhunting is illegal in Germany. And although it has become a little easier in the last ten years to pass the courses and tests required to hunt with a gun,

the bow and arrow has yet to be accepted as a hunting weapon.

Several years back, many of the TJBD members wanted to pursue the legalization of bowhunting in their own country. Some members did not, whether for monetary or personal reasons, and the TJBD split into two factions: those who want to legalize bowhunting in Germany, and those who don't. Unfortunately, this bitter division ruined many long-time friendships; however, the club is quite strong today under the leadership of Alois and others, who are tireless in their quest to get the bow and arrow recognized as a hunting weapon.

Several of the current TJBD members have been working with the government and state departments on establishing a bowhunting season. Ludwig Himmelstoss, the TJBD secretary, is also the current president of the German Bowhunting Association, and has been able to establish a strong report with many important people in German hunting politics. Along with Alois and Hartmut, these series of meetings have started to open a few doors.

Starting in January 2007, the TJBD met with Dr. Lammel, the Agriculture Secretary, and the highest ranked non-political figure in the German government. He was open to the idea of

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The two ranges the TJBD set up are designed for ethical — and quite challenging — shots at 3-D targets.



T.J. and Chad after an all nighter around the campfire waiting for the broadhead shoot to start.

Photos by Manfred Pache

bowhunting and told the TJBD that they needed to find one hunting official in any of the 16 German states who would allow them a season. He also said that the TJBD must launch a positive PR program promoting the bow and arrow.

In October 2007, Ludwig and Hartmut met with the then President of the German Hunting Association. He said he had no problem allowing a bowhunting season for small game as a start as long as the TJBD did more to promote the idea of bow and arrow hunting. This, he told them, had to be aimed at each and every hunting federation in the country if they wanted it to be nationwide. The other option was to try and get a test season for Bavaria. Roughly 90% of Bavaria's hunters (70,000 to 80,000) are members of the Bavaria Hunting Association (BHA). So in March 2008, the TJBD met with the BHA and brought their bows and arrows and had a productive meeting.

"There are a lot of problems in public parks and swimming pools and other areas with ducks, fox, and rabbits. We have stated that we would like the opportunity to hunt these with our bows. All it takes is that one opportunity ... one landowner ... to allow a hunt and we will have an opening to promote

and expand bowhunting opportunities in Germany," Alois told me during a meeting one evening. The next meeting is scheduled for later this year. Hopefully, something will come from it to allow German bowhunters a chance to finally, legally, hunt in their home country. Only time will tell, but the

work of Alois, Hartmut, Ludwig, and the rest seems to be starting to shift an age-old prejudice against bowhunters in Germany.

Singer/songwriter Chad Slagle was the other American at the Rendezvous. He taught a selfbow building class during the week to a multitude of people



Each evening several dozen members sat around the great campfire, played guitars, and sang late into the night and early morning.



Approximately four kilometers from St. Ötzen lies the little settlement of Flossenbürg. This shot of the town, taken from the castle grounds, shows the Flossenbürg concentration camp's tower in the upper right behind the town. On the farthest hill is an old Czechoslovakia border tower. Since the opening of the borders between the two countries, the towers are not manned any more.

who wanted to learn this ancient craft.

“He doesn’t yell at students like the other guy we had before did,” one of the bowyers-to-be said to me while I was photographing the folks whittling functional bows from native woods. “He is very good at teaching us. I plan on shooting this bow Saturday.”

Chad was in München doing an interview on a radio show where he played several of his original songs and answered several questions from callers and the host. It is amazing to me that this program, which airs only for two hours a week, is dedicated to country western music, an American creation.

In the evenings Chad, Johann, and a few others would strum songs around the main campfire all night long. I had to admire the fact that even though many of the members could not speak or understand much English, they knew almost every American song by heart! Tunes like Van Morrison’s *Brown*

Eyed Girl, Jimmy Buffett’s *Come Monday*, John Denver’s *Country Road*, and several more were vocalized in such perfect English and with so much heart-felt rhythm, I had forgot that I still could not communicate — vocally — with so many. I guess I should have finished my German language studies in school!

Away from the campfire several smaller groups cooked meals, played guitars, harps, and their musical instruments in front of their tents. Johannes Limbrunner and Günter Zerk invited Chad and I into their Mongol yurt for a few night caps.

Tepees, wall tents, lean-tos, and other tents graced the glade that encompassed all the general activities. Next to one tepee on the highest point of the rolling hill was a totem pole.

“This is where the original St. Ötzen church was located,” Hartmut later explained to me. The site looked down

upon the few Bavarian homesteads that are now the burg of St. Ötzen.

The third morning I awoke and put on my walking shoes. I needed a little exercise and wanted to see some of the countryside. I climbed up hills and down valleys, through several picturesque farmlands with quaint homes and huge barns.

As I rounded a bend in the road I came upon a small park. It was well groomed, with large boulders placed in odd places, a stone path that ran from one sign to another, and in the middle a strange, circular metal disk surrounded with designs. In the middle was a raised ball. I walked around and tried to decipher what this place, which was out in the middle of nowhere, was all about. From what little I could read, the middle ball of the round disc was the center of center Europe. Many countries lay claim to owning the same spot: Austria, Russia, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia,



Photo by Peter Voith

Saying goodbye is never easy, so a picture to remember is appropriate. Left to right, front row: Chad Slagle, Johann Glasser, and Peter Voith. Back row: Alois Hofherr, Ludwig Himmelstoss, the author, Irmgard Himmelstoss, and Hartmut Hahn.

Belarus and others, I was in Germany.

I stepped on the center of center Europe and called it good; I was there.

That night Chad, me, and Martin Marzinkewitz stayed up all night. Just as the pink light was appearing to the east, Chad rolled into his tent and Martin and I went into the forest for a walk. Several hundred yards down a logging road, I looked up to see a tree-stand made from saplings strapped onto a pine. We climbed up and waited to see what wildlife would appear in the field in front of us.

Within a few minutes a roe buck growled down below us in a steep, sharp ravine. Then another roared farther up the hill. For ten minutes we listened to the diminutive deer run around the woods, roaring back and forth. I thought they would show up, but by the time it was almost sun up they were gone.

It was back to the barn for coffee.

From the campground you could see the remains of a castle up on a promi-

nent rocky hill. Peter Voith and another fellow took Chad and me over to the castle one day. Originally built in 1105, it had been added on to several times by different groups of people until finally being abandoned around 1777.

From the top of the castle we could see one of the guard towers of a concentration camp behind the town of Flossenbürg. Peter told me that it is now a tourist site and war memorial. All that is left besides the tower is one of the ovens used to incinerate bodies, and one of the barracks. We made plans to make the guided tour on Saturday as that was the only day they had an English speaking tour guide. However, we never made it back because of other commitments.

It was an eerie feeling seeing that tower rise behind the town. I must go back some time.

The last evening in Germany, Chad and I were the guests of Martin and Tanja Marzinkewitz in their home in Prien, down along the Austrian border.

We had a lovely dinner out, a glass of wine, and quick sleep before heading back to Munich and the long jet flight home.

I had plenty of time to reflect on the past week's activities ... reacquaintance with old friends, fine Bavarian food and hospitality, hiking through a 900-year-old castle, seeing a tower of a concentration camp ... the feelings overwhelmed me as I made my final entry into my journal, put on my headsets, and fell back to listen to a jazz station while the jet skimmed across the Atlantic toward home.

T.J. Conrads has authored two books on archery: The Traditional Bowhunter's Handbook, which is into its third printing, and a collection of stories called Campfire Reflections.

