



Return to Europe

The first four days.

The U.S. Army took us to Europe in the Spring of 1970. For the next three years, we lived in U.S. housing in the small town of [Butzbach](#), which is north of Frankfurt am Main (West Germany). While in Europe we explored a bit in Germany and other countries. We always had a desire to return. In 1999, we decided to celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary with a return trip, visiting some familiar places and extending our explorations to Italy.

19 August 1999

Our first leg was by automobile from Bellingham to Vancouver, BC, Canada. Thanks to our daughter Shannon who drove us there. At [Vancouver International Airport](#), we boarded a Canada 3000 flight. Because of a 9-hour time differential and approximately 12 hours of flying time (including a stop in Calgary, Alberta), we landed on



20 August 1999

at [Flughafen München](#), [Munich](#), Germany. We picked up a rental car – an Audi A4 turbo diesel – from [Auto Europe](#) and proceeded to cope with travel in Europe. We exited the airport and headed away from Munich, driving through Bayern (Bavaria).



Our first challenge was to obtain some local currency, in this case Deutsche Marks. We should have done so in the airport, but we were in a hurry to get going so we did not. We exited the autobahn near [Landshut](#) and drove into town. After a drive around town, we spotted a bank and (after a lap around the block to find

parking), tried to use the cash machine. It refused my “cash” card from Whatcom Educational Credit Union. [Tension mounts!] Another cruise through town and we found another bank with a *Geldautomat*. Success this time! Must be time for a beer.

We drove on from Landshut and found the quaint little town of [Vilsbiburg](#). We took a couple of pictures and found a local sidewalk cafe. Here we ordered a local brew. Refreshed, we drove on.



The stress of the travel was beginning to get to us, however. We arrived in the town of [Neumarkt - St. Veit](#) and found the Hotel Zur Post. Our first meal in Germany was a delicious Jägerschnitzel – with a beer, of course – after which we crashed.

21 August 1999

We started the day with juice and pastries purchased in Neumarkt, and then drove on to [Burghausen](#). Here is the [longest castle](#) in Europe. We strolled from one end to the other and back, before pressing on.



[REDACTED] We crossed to border to Austria and began anew our search for local currency – this time Austrian Schillings. We found [REDACTED] a *Bankomat* in one of the first towns we entered and easily obtained some cash.

We soon found ourselves in [Salzburg](#), the city of the “Sound of Music” and many other musical adventures. After finding a place to park (relatively easy, the white P on blue background means the same thing in Europe as it does here) and then figuring out how to pay for parking (less easy, there are few meters so one must find a machine that issues time-stamped parking passes), we strolled through gardens and shopping areas on both sides of the Salzach river. Lunch was obtained at an outdoor cafe in the shadow of *Festung Hohensalzburg*.

We left Salzburg and headed for [Berchtesgaden](#) (Germany). The route winds along a mountain stream before ending in this historic town. We

To see more pictures of the first four days of the trip, overlaid on a map, click: [Germany and Austria 1999](#)

parked (easier in small towns) and walked through the *stadtmittle*. Hot day: beer needed, located, and consumed.

On the road again, now looking for a place to spend the night. We found the Gasthof Edelweiß in [Siegsdorf](#), just off the autobahn we were planning to take the next day. [For those unfamiliar with German, the ß is not a funny “B,” rather it is a double-s, so the English spelling of the Gasthof would be “Edelweiss.”] After another excellent Bavarian dinner, we took a walk through the neighborhood. Siegsdorf is a small town with many well-maintained houses and yards.

22 August 1999

The next morning, we awoke to what would turn out to be the best *frühstück* (breakfast) of the trip. Almost all accommodations include breakfast as part of the price, usually a “continental breakfast” of rolls, jams, and coffee. The Edelweiß had that, plus cereal, sliced meat, cheeses, and juices.

Well rested and fed, we struck out for another day of adventure. The autobahn drives along the shores of [Chiemsee](#), a large lake with a castle and abbey on islands. We had visited them on our first “excursion” to Europe (courtesy of Uncle Sam) so we bypassed them on this journey.



Just beyond Chiemsee, the autobahn splits – we took the southern branch which leads into Austria. The road follows the Inn River as it passes through the mountains. The Austrians have planted trees and bushes on both sides of the autobahn, which does a great job of shielding the residents from pollution and noise – and also shields the view from the drivers. We soon got tired of bushes, and exited the autobahn to drive on the parallel secondary road.

One of the historic crossing points over the Inn is [Innsbruck](#) – literally “Inn Bridge.” Many of you will remember Innsbruck for the Winter Olympics (twice, actually). Innsbruck also has many interesting structures and museums and was the perfect place for lunch. We even found a few interesting souvenirs there and took our first “vertical hike” of the vacation, up the city hall tower.

We left Innsbruck with the ultimate goal of spending the night near the famous castles of Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. We intended to follow a secondary road but somehow got on a

tertiary (or less) road that did provide some marvelous scenery. This would not be the last time that we ventured into unexpected territory. [Note to future travelers: Invest in maps with a scale larger than 1:600,000, the latter don't always give the detail needed.]

We crossed the German border at the Bavarian town of [Mittenwald](#). This is one of the towns that you tour Bavaria to find. It is small, picturesque, clean, accommodating to tourists, and has its own brewery! Oh, and parking is relatively easy to find. After a nice walk through town and a refreshing beverage, we drove on to [Garmisch-Partenkirchen](#). This is another beautiful town, but you must take more time to see it because it is much bigger. We opted to continue our journey.

The quickest route from Garmisch to our evening's destination, Füssen, is back through Austria. So, off we went, crossing the border for the third and fourth times today. The road goes right by the Zugspitze, which at 2968 meters high is a dramatic sight (also ... a dramatic site!). Evening found us in a gasthof just east of [Füssen](#), with a view of Neuschwanstein outside our window ... but that is tomorrow's story.

23 August 1999

A short drive down the road from our gasthof were two of the more famous castles in Germany. Hohenschwangau was originally built in the 12th century and since modernized (up to 19th century standards). We walked up to it and strolled through the courtyards. On our previous visit, we had toured the museum and exhibits and found them

quite interesting. Looming over Hohenschwangau is the most famous of the castles of King Ludwig II: Schloß [Neuschwanstein](#). This one was built in the middle of the 19th century and looks like something out of Disneyland – it is rumored that the opposite is true: that the Fantasyland Castle was modeled after Neuschwanstein. The castle is perched on a hill overlooking Hohenschwangau and several lakes and valleys. If you have never been there, spend the time to visit this one. Then, whenever you see its picture on a travel poster or calendar, you too can say “been there, done that!”





We did not dally too long, however, since we had reservations in Venice the next day. After purchasing a few souvenirs, we hit the road again, crossing almost immediately back into Austria. Our path took us over Fernpaß, through a long tunnel, back through Innsbruck, and on to the Brenner Paß. This is the easiest route across the Alps and quite scenic.

You have a choice of autobahn or secondary road – we choose the secondary road. One of the more interesting things we saw on this drive was the incredible number and height of the bridges built for the autobahn. Very little of the road was built on the surface of the ground – almost all if it is either bridge or tunnel.

The summit of the Brenner Paß is the border between Austria and Italy. You enter the district of Trentino/Alto Adige, which was once part of the Tirol or Austria. Many of the signs are in both German and Italian. We drove through the cities of Bressanone, Bolzano, and Trento, admiring the scenery, architecture, and learning to cope with the Italian style of driving.



We did not see too many lodging establishments, however, and decided to start looking in earnest once we left Trento. As we approached the town of Calliano, we saw both a castle on a hill (Beseno) and a billboard advertising the Villaggio Hotel Aquila. We entered the courtyard, driving our Audi with Hamburg (Germany) license plates, and found a spot to park. We were quickly greeted with “Wunschen Sie ein zimmer?” or words to that effect, which we knew meant “would you like a room?” We found that our limited German vocabulary was much more useful than English in Northern Italy. We suspect that not too many Americans drive through these parts, but the road is the main route from Munich into Italy. We arranged for a room, which had a view of the castle, and dined in the attached restaurant. Our first meal in Italy was some very tasty pasta dishes.