



# Harz Attack!

Beer Scooping in the Harz  
region of Germany,  
November 2006

By Gazza

## Harz Attack - death by Grünkohl.

Harz Mountains, Germany, November 2006.

November seems to be developing into a routine for us; every year we seem to book a long weekend somewhere in Germany to coincide with Sue's birthday in order to drink some beers, eat excellent pub food and see different regions of this varied and fascinating country. We'd already done Bamberg and Berlin so this year was to be the Harz mountains in the North of the country for the varied attractions of amusing little steam engines, Gose beer, brewpubs and Grünkohl – although not necessarily in that order.

As is the norm for our flights to Germany I'd booked us on [Air Berlin](#) – my favourite budget airline – into Hanover from Stansted which unfortunately meant, in combination with the early departure, yet another relatively sleepless night and a 02:00 departure followed by a soul-destroying cruise along the A14... look, I really can't think of anything else to say about this road; I've said everything (and more) about it previously than I care to repeat, so if any strange person really wants to read more about it then get an AA manual or something.

**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2006.**

### ***Pass or card?***

Our journey to Essex went to plan and we were soon waiting for departure in what seemed to be the German area of Stansted; all the flights were departing for some point or other in Germany and some gates seemed to have two flights departing at once – ours included! After a rather confusing boarding process, which was devoid of the usual easyJet/Ryotscare scrum as a result of Air Berlin assigning seats before boarding, we were aboard and away on-time towards yet another airport scoop and, hopefully, four solid days of exploration and beer ticking...

[Hanover airport](#) proved to be quite forgettable (in fact, I can't remember much about it at all now) apart from the connecting rail shuttle to the city being situated underneath the arrivals hall. We made our way down to the platforms to find we'd just missed a train and the next one would be in 25 minutes; at the time we were slightly miffed but, considering the shambles we were to have with the tickets, maybe it was a good thing we had that long!

Let me state something here; German airport links are usually well-run, frequent and easy to use – seeing as many nationalities will potentially be using the service, this could be seen as an essential attribute – but not Hanover! A choice of ticket machines was the first hurdle, and then we had to work out what ticket to get... the zone maps weren't obvious and actually varied dependent on whether we wanted a pass or a card, and we didn't know which we wanted! I failed to find any information in English to point out which we were after and it was only the kind assistance of the train driver, who I presume felt sorry for us, that showed us that a *pass* is for one day and a *card* for two or more.

Finally we were equipped with a day-pass for the city's transport system and so, with only a few minutes to spare, we boarded the waiting S-Bahn into Hanover to do some exploring of the

city's tram system which, unfortunately, runs mostly underground apart from one remaining route (10 and 17) from Aegidientorplatz to Ahlen and Wallensteinstraße. The railway station was typically German in that it was immaculate, full of shops and bakeries selling delicious-looking produce and had all the information you could possibly need for a journey, whilst the outside was a riot of castellations and a particularly impressive example of post-war reconstruction.

### ***Down to the serious business.***

Unfortunately, the same couldn't be said of the immediate area around the station which was a soulless concrete wasteland with similarly constructed high-rise buildings, although the setting up of a Weihnachtsmarkt outside the station brought a hint of cheer to an otherwise very grey and unexciting expanse. A tram soon arrived, a bright green example of what I think is a TW vehicle, and so we spent a couple of hours riding around on the trams – both above and underground – to get a feel for the city centre and its environs.

It's usual for the centre of cities to be a lot more interesting than the suburbs but, here in Hanover, neither seemed to be particularly out of the ordinary and I felt that there might be nothing to see here – a first for our visits to Germany? I was wrong, however, as I soon discovered as we took a walk around the reconstructed *Altstadt* and saw the half-timbered houses looking as if they had been there for hundreds of years clustered around a hulking great brick-built church. We also found the city's only brewpub and had a look at some of the other recommended bars in Ron Pattinson's guide, although none of them really grabbed us that much; we might be in for a night on the room bottles, I thought to myself!

The preliminary exploration completed we took a tram to the hotel – they passed right outside the door, although our room faced the other way – and checked in before going through the reams of gear we'd brought with us in order to work out our best move for the evening's scooping. Our first target was the old Gilde brewery, fairly recently taken over by the insidious InBev multinational corporation, not the obvious first choice for a scooping trip but Hanover wasn't exactly over-endowed with brewpubs or good beer bars and so it would have to do – and, anyway, surely the best place to try the beer would be the brewery tap which would surely also have the rare *Lüttje Lage* available...?

Sadly we were wrong on both counts: the bar itself was sociable enough but there was no sign of the low-strength *Altbier* and, even worse, the Gilde Ratskeller pils I drank was one of the worst beers I've had the misfortune to consume in the last few years; a very poor chemically-bitter fluid with a contrived metallic taste, more chemically bitterness and a taste of malt essence in the thin aftertaste... I sincerely hoped that the rest of our evening wouldn't be as bad as this as, grimacing, I struggled to consume the tiny flute of "beer".

The Gilde brewery itself was beavering away making multinational swill and, in the way of all breweries no matter what absolute crap they churn out, managed to smell of delicious maltiness – even if very little malt seems to be used in the actual process! The building had an attractive castellated edifice and looked as if, given the correct owners, it could brew some decent beer; unfortunately, knowing who owns it almost certainly precludes this in my opinion!

### ***Now for something completely different.***

Our next move was a tram move right across town to the Herrenhäuser brewery tap where we

hoped for some better luck with the beer. Two changes of tram later we were alighting at Herrenhäuser Markt stop to see the very 1960's bulk of the brewery lurking across the road with its tap immediately opposite; the tram journey had made us thirsty (at least that's my excuse) and so into the pub we went. Inside all was quiet and peaceful; the landlord was chatting to some regulars propped against the bar, more elderly locals were playing dominoes and dice on the rear tables, and I was enveloped in the feeling that this pub hadn't changed for many years. It was what I'd imagine a bar fifty years ago to feel like and, as if to reinforce this view, there were photos of Hanover on the nicotine-encrusted walls both before and after WW2 had its destructive way with the city.

We seated ourselves at a formica-topped table and I approached the bar with some trepidation; I didn't imagine any English would be spoken out here in the suburbs - especially in such a traditional place - and my German still wasn't up to a lot! Happily, with a combination of my basic German and the landlord's fundamental English I managed to ascertain that Lüttje Lage wasn't available here either and my choices limited were pils or weißbier. Deciding that we may as well score both beers with so little choice I returned to the table with a small glass of pils and a 50cl bottle of Herrenhausen's own weißbier which I hoped wouldn't lean too much to the hideous bananary Bavarian style...

The Weiß was a hazy beige colour and luckily, as I'd been fervently hoping, it was more in the Northern German fashion of a dry, grainy and slightly wheaty brew with hints of bubblegum and a dry finish. The pils, on the other hand, was a revelation with its rich malty aroma, excellent grainsack flavour with fresh hops and gentle hoppy dryness in the finish which ended long, lingering, malty and bitter - a top beer for drinking under any circumstances, but I think made to look even better by the pathetic showing of Gilde's products! It was so good in fact that we did something we don't do that often and I returned to the bar for another (larger) glass and we sat, contentedly supping the tasty, malty brew as the Herrenhäuser brewery loomed over the pub, dominoes clicked quietly and all was well with the world.

### ***One-trick circus.***

As much as we'd have liked to sit in the brewery tap and drink the excellent pils all evening, unfortunately this was not possible as we wished to visit the sole brewpub in Hanover. As good as the Herrenhausen pils was I wasn't going to miss this and so, reluctantly, we supped up, paid up (I'm sure the landlord thought I was German, which means I must be saying some of the phrases right at last!) and headed off into the drizzle which lay like a swirling misty blanket over the city. We watched the city's firemen putting up the Xmas decorations whilst we festered for the tram before our swift journey to Kröpcke after which we walked along Schmiedestraße towards Brauhaus [Ernst August](#) (named after a 17<sup>th</sup> century figure from the city) where any chance of us missing the pub were quickly dispelled by the scorching green lights outside giving it the appearance of a UFO about to blast off - well, it looked like the one in some crap SciFi film I had the misfortune of seeing ten seconds of a few months back...

Inside all was far mellower and dimly-lit, but despite the physical bulk of the place it was pretty well filled with happy-looking Fraus and Frauleins getting stuck into huge litre *Maß* glasses of the sole beer produced and demolishing the customary gigantic plates of comestibles - this all looked par for the course with German brewpubs and predictably, by this time, we were utterly famished! One look at the menu was all I required to choose a portion of Grünkohl with Kasseler ham, Bregenzwurst sausage and bratkartoffeln - I was determined to eat at least four portions of Grünkohl during the trip, one for each day we were in Germany, and with the

brewpub advertising the dish as “Frisch und lokal” (fresh and local) I was off to a blinding start! Sue ordered some steaks – unfortunately no winning animals – and so, along with two glasses of the homebrew, we were now set for the evening!

The beer, Hanöversch (4.8%), was a strange brew and difficult to pin down to a style as all good American beer-lovers are compelled to do. I, however, simply decided it was a local variation of Helles and got stuck into it; cloudy orange/golden in colour, it was yeasty and malty in the aroma and flavour with an increasing Seville marmalade character hop character into the long, orangey, bitter, malty finish – a very drinkable and complex brew which only just missed out on a four-star score. The food was just as delicious and the Grünkohl had all the lovely iron and concentrated “green veg” tastes that I was after and, predictably, was a huge Germanic portion with the already gigantic plate piled high with pig products and vegetables; after ten minutes of hard munching I’d only just finished the mountain of provisions aided by copious swigs of the marmaladey beer – this is how brewpubs should be! The toilets contained the scourge of European conveniences, a “toilet troll” (a cleaner who lurks in the little lobby by the door and expects half a Euro or so as a tip for cleaning said toilets) but, being a rather tight-fisted old git, I managed to sneak into the bogs and get away without paying...

### ***Scooping in a cupboard.***

Our food and drink consumed, we set off for quick wander around Hanover’s old town. We passed several bars with very average beer lists before, just when I thought we’d be out of luck in finding any winning beers, we reached the Schankwirtschaft Barfuß on Holzmarkt – a bar badged with signs from the local Härke regional brewer – and we needed no more asking to pile inside. What we hadn’t realised, however, was the tiny proportions of the single room within; barely 10 metres long by five metres wide and almost completely panelled with wood and beer adverts. Only one beer was available - Härke pils - which we consumed at a tiny wooden table which we had to climb over to sit at! The beer was another decent local brew and had a malty, grainy taste overlaid with a reasonable amount of bitterness and hoppiness, fading to a rich and very malty aftertaste with a grainy, warty dryness.

We did contemplate another round of this lip-smackingly hoppy brew but, realising we had an early start in the morning, resisted and wandered back to the tramstop for a quick leap to Thielenplatz passing en-route the amusingly named “Alles fur Hund” pet shop. Inside the hotel I thought we’d got summat for nowt and attempted to exchange a voucher which promised a free drink for booking on the internet, but I was firmly told that these vouchers were only for the use of those who had booked via the hotel’s website and not – as we had – via the much cheaper [hotel.de](http://hotel.de)! Ah well...

Ensnared in our quarters we fished out the “room beers” we’d acquired for just this occasion and launched into them before the time got on too much; we didn’t want to be knackered on the second day of a potentially arduous scooping campaign! Gilde pils (4.9%) was first up – we’d bought it before we knew just how atrocious the brewery’s products were – and found it to be another slightly industrial dry, chemically beer with little to recommend it. Yet another Gilde beer was next, Lindener spezial (5.1%) but surprisingly this wasn’t too repulsive, having a reasonably dry and fairly malty brew with some bitter hop (tasting more real than the other two we’d tried thus far) and a balanced finish; not the best beer I’d had all year, but certainly better than the other two Gilde abominations by some considerable margin.

Finally we cracked open Einbecker Dunkel (4.9%) and found it to be a sweet, caramelly, deep

red fluid, far too sweet and toffeeish for me, with bags of sickly caramel increasing in the cloying finish. The scoops consumed (with considerable relief!) we got some much-needed doss in preparation for our early morning trip out to Goslar the following day – to say I was whipped up about this move would be a striking understatement – and I spent another ten minutes going over my gen to confirm that I'd got everything correct; it's a lot better than counting sheep!

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2006.**

### ***The spiritual home of Gose.***

We didn't need to be at the station as early as I'd originally thought so we were spared the customary early start and, once we'd figured out that in order to have a shower we needed to turn the hot water on in our room via the stopcock (!), we were quickly showered and sorted. Outside all was grim with the low cloud and drizzle from the night before still hanging over the city and making for a miserable day; I'd hoped for a bit of snow on our visit or, at the very least, for clear, crisp weather but thanks to global warming the whole of Europe was basking in unseasonal temperatures of 10°C or so, hence the rain and no snow!

We took full advantage of Hanover hauptbahnhof's excellent food options so, by the time we boarded our train to Goslar, we were in possession of numerous butties and cakes to fortify us during the hour's journey. I'd even found a stall selling [leberkäse](#) on the concourse and so had indulged in a "spam butty" as Sue called it – those who know what leberkäse is will know what she's talking about! The journey passed without incident and we were soon alighting at Goslar where the rain was, if anything, even worse than that we'd left behind in Hanover...

I shan't bore you (as if I haven't already) with the details of our walk around Goslar except to say the place, even in continuous drizzle, is absolutely gorgeous and feels like a film set it's so perfect. Most roads are cobbled, the buildings timbered and twisted with age, and the whole feel is of a perfectly preserved yet still lived-in town; it's certainly one of the prettiest places I've been to and would recommend it to anyone for a day's wandering. Obviously our reasons for being there weren't totally confined to gawping at the architecture and so by 14:00, with the rain showing no sign of abating (by this time it had been joined by a blustery gale), we checked into our ancient and characterful hotel deep in the cobbled backstreets of the lower town. It seemed as if we were the only people staying - as the whole place was in darkness - but the proprietor was pleased to see us and quickly allocated us a large room overlooking the cobbled lane to the front. We spent some time drying our clothes and sorting out gen before braving the elements once again and heading off into the drizzle in the hope of scooping a few beers.

With the rain at last relenting, we took advantage of the remaining daylight and walked around the bits of Goslar we'd not yet seen. One amusing shop we noticed was a musical instrument outlet (electric guitars etc) called "noise r us" and, on a different note, there was a large military parade on the grounds next to the Kaiserpfalz (Imperial palace) with a seemingly never-ending stream of soldiers being bussed in to march around the field – I don't know what it was all about as I couldn't translate the sign which, had I been able to read German, would undoubtedly have told me. We also found a supermarket hidden in the depths of a little shopping centre and acquired four "room beers" for the evening; we could have bought quite a few more but we had a very early start in order to connect with the [baby kettles](#) at Wernigerode so I reasoned four should be quite enough.

## ***Gose-licious!***

Our first call was to check out the alleged Brauhaus Wolpertinger; I was almost certain it didn't brew itself but, as we had plenty of time, it wouldn't hurt to check it out. The pub was concealed down a narrow alley which led into a surprisingly large courtyard monopolised by the impressively proportioned bar which looked fairly old and welcoming; I went in for a quick recce and saw no sign of a brewplant so asked the barman for some confirmation as to the origin of the beers. I must admit that I expected to be fobbed off with some story that they were brewed there but, straight out, he told me the beers were all from Binding in Frankfurt which prompted a quick exit on my part – I don't want to drink large brewery beers when there are brews from much smaller concerns available close by!

With this non-brewing brauhaus ruled out it was time for the *raison d'être* of our visit, to sample the Gose brewed (allegedly!) by Brauhaus Goslar, and to hopefully find some Grünkohl to increase my iron-laden vegetable consumption tally. Our first call was Die Butterhanne, a rather posh-looking bar alongside the Rathaus, where I hoped to find both versions of Gose *vom faß* ripe for ticking. There was good news and bad news on the menu as dark Gose was crossed out; when I asked the waitress if it was available she confirmed that it wasn't but that Goslar Weihnacht beer was available instead; I didn't need any second bidding and we were soon in possession of glasses of Weihnachtsbier and helles Gose.

Having scooped the two Goses in Leipzig I didn't really know what to expect from the Goslar example although, from what I'd read, it wasn't particularly sour and certainly not as traditional as the ultimate example of the style brewed by Bauer – unfortunately! I took a swig from the glass and swirled it around my mouth trying to glean the full spectrum of flavours from it; a hazy amber/yellow beer, it was distinctly wheaty in aroma and taste with spicy hops, a prickle of sourness, then a sociable dryish, hoppy and still wheaty aftertaste. If I'd tasted this blind and not know what style of beer it was supposed to be then I'd probably have been more impressed than I actually was, but knowing that it was billed as a Gose imparted a twang of disappointment that the brewery hadn't made it just a touch more sour and acidic as, the way it was, it was just another fairly good helles-type beer and not really a Gose as such.

The Weihnachtsbier was orangey/amber and fairly sweet although not cloying with a spicy and hoppy taste then a sweetish, malty, bitter finish; it was a characterful beer, a little sweet for me, but was Sue's beer of the evening and was certainly ample compensation for the dunkel Gose not being available. The bar itself seemed to have an obsession with a woman stirring a buttertub whilst caressing her arse – not a thing you'd really expect a butter maker to do in these health & safety conscious world, so I hope she had some disposable gloves on...

Our next stop was just across the street. The König van Bayern (king of Bavaria) is a bar run by the Bavarian Kaltenberg brewery and situated down in the gothic cellars of the rathaus; to access it you need to clamber down several hefty flights of steps seemingly into the bowels of the earth. Inside, rather than the dark candlelit catacombs we were expecting, we found a bright, busy bar with beer and food being whisked around by the efficient waitresses; we were already feeling hungry and the sight and smell of this food only increased our slavering...

## ***Three winners and a plate of Grünkohl, bitte.***

Grabbing the first empty table we came across we studied the menu and I saw – with glee – that Grünkohl was a "seasonal" dish here and on the beer front I required three beers; the dunkel,

Spezial hell and the strong Ritterbok beer! All in all a pretty good result, but we had a slight quandary with regards to the food as we'd planned to eat in the Worthmühle, an apparently hellfire restaurant serving draught Gose, for our last call of the evening. We quickly resolved the problem by deciding to share a plate of Grünkohl in our current location and then have a full meal each later on – and as we were both ravenous by this time it seemed like a good plan!

We had the two weaker brews as a starter and they were decent enough beers although the dunkel was too caramelly and sweet for my taste - even though I've had a lot worse - and the Spezial hell was a pale, hoppy, well-bodied beer with nutty malt and more bitter hops. Our shared plate of Grünkohl came with the usual kasseler pork steak, bregenzwurst and bratkartoffeln and was plenty for both of us to feel reasonably full after stuffing ourselves for ten minutes, and all for the give-away price of €7.50 – what a bargain! The final scoop arrived during the meal so was left to settle for a while as we demolished the mountains of delicious food; that was two portions in two days on the Grünkohl scoresheet and I was hopeful of scooping another later on that evening; I'd be looking like Popeye by the end of the trip, I reasoned, if I kept this pace up!

Our final winner, Ritterbock, was a decent attempt at a strong dark brew. It had tastes of malt, toffee, caramel and some dryness and despite being 9% it wasn't excessively alcoholic on the tongue yet gave some hints of it's potency; just the way it should be, in my opinion! With our ticks (and Grünkohl) consumed it was time for our next visit of the evening, and this one was a bit of a strange one in that it was a restaurant which just happened to serve a house beer from Goslar brauhaus.

It was only a couple of minutes to the Kaiser Klee yet we were in two minds whether to enter; it looked enough like a café-bar to make us think it would be OK to simply have a beer yet it also gave off an image of not really wanting to encourage that kind of behaviour... we hadn't come all the way here to give up at the doorstep, nonetheless, and so in we went and bagged a little table where I felt convinced that drinking would be tolerated. We needn't have worried as the waitress was friendly enough and didn't say a word when she discovered it was only a couple of glasses of beer we were after and not a full meal and so, shortly afterwards, we had the house beer in front of us ready for scooping – result!

The winning brew was cloudy, yellow and very malty in taste with, predictably, lots of yeastiness then some attractive fruity hops led into the full malty finish, giving a very drinkable beer with a lot of flavour which may improve up to a four-star rating by less yeastiness. The beer didn't last long and so, our mission fulfilled in this pub, we paid up and were off along the lane towards our food stop of the night – and we were hungry again! (Bet you could have predicted that).

### ***All-round quality.***

We were soon at the Worthmühle, an old mill building converted into a restaurant, which strung itself along the banks of the cute little stream which flows through Goslar, looking particularly attractive even in the omnipotent drizzle which was still falling, albeit nowhere near as heavily as it had been during the daylight hours. Inside was fortuitously quiet and we sat in a little table by the bar yet separated from it by a kind of wooden frame; this gave the impression of being more secluded than we actually were but already I was impressed with the pub – the floor continually changed height and gradient as the building's previous incarnation as a mill was still manifest in the layout, the old water wheel race was clearly visible and the whole conversion had been done with a lot of sympathy for the fabric of the building and an eye to keeping it looking as old

as possible... they had certainly succeeded in all their aims in my opinion!

Unfortunately I was due for another wipe-out on the beer front as here, as in the Butterhanne, *dunkel Gose* wasn't available so I had to make do with the *helles* version instead (no other seasonal scoops were offered as a replacement here!) whilst we also scooped the smallest glass possible of Hasseroder, the local-ish InBev beer from Wernigerode, as it seemed churlish to flag a winner when we could drink it so close to the brewery. With our food ordered too – Grünkohl for me, obviously – I turned my attention to the half-litre of Gose in front of me and found, amazingly, that it tasted almost nothing like the one we'd had in the Butterhanne! It was far maltier and fuller in body with less hop, bitterness and almost zero sourness so even less like a Gose than the example we'd had earlier, but despite being like a square peg in a round hole style-wise, it was a lovely, rich, malty and bready beer with delicious grainsack and malt flavours and was even Sue's beer of the evening!

Obviously I'd have preferred a tongue-curlingly sour proper Gose but, even though I was confused at the apparent wildly variable quality of the Goslar Brauhaus products, I had to concede that it tasted rather nice – which was more than could be said for the Hasseroder pils! This was a very bland, more or less tasteless, dryish pale fluid with an almost total lack of character and interest but I suppose that's what you get for drinking InBev shite – “Will I never learn”, I ruminated, realising that this was the second time in two days I'd been desperate enough to buy an InBev “beer” only to regret it immediately after!

Now I know I go on and on about how good German pub food is but, believe me, the feast we were served in the Worthmühle surpassed almost every other German meal we'd eaten this far in our visits to the country. I don't know how to describe just how it was so good, but just imagine a combination of great ingredients, perfectly cooked, in large portions and you'll be most of the way to understanding; no matter how good the Grünkohl had been earlier, how this somehow surpassed it and moved German food onto a new level in my estimation. Looking back now maybe the fact that it's a restaurant, not a pub, may have contributed to the superlative quality of the comestibles... I don't know for sure, but I do know that that mountainous plate was one of the best meals I've eaten for a very long time.

### ***Not so nice weather for pigeons.***

Feeling incredibly replete, yet satisfied, we finished off the beers and paid the surprisingly small bill before waddling off along the stream towards our hotel and, hopefully, yet another pint of Gose to finish off the evening in a town I'd wanted to visit ever since I first heard about the beer a mere five years previously. As we passed a working watermill we spied a large group of pigeons camped out for the night all over the wheel and rafters and those outside were looking as utterly dejected as only pigeons sat out in the rain can, and made us wish we'd brought them some lumps of bread to cheer them up a bit!

Luckily for us – and the pigeons – the drizzle had almost blown itself out, having deposited countless gallons of water on the region, and was being ushered away by a brisk warm wind; this was precisely what I hadn't wanted as it meant there would be no snow up on the Brocken when we took the little kettle up there the following morning... ah well, nothing we could do about this now, it was simply bad luck with the weather on our part!

Five minutes later we were back at the hotel and being served two half-litres of *helles Gose* by the sociable landlord. After two completely different glasses of the beer thus far I didn't know

what to expect from this one, but I certainly didn't think it would be as sour as it was; this tasted sublime to me and I wore a huge grin as I supped at the dry, bitter, sour yet still rather malty brew with vigour – if only Goslar's Gose was this consistent it would be a potential five-star beer for me! After a quick timecheck, however, we quickly decided that we'd better retire for the evening as we had four bottles still to tick in our room and an early morning planned, so we made our excuses and took our glasses up the crooked stairs to our room where the bottled were patiently waiting to be scooped...

### ***Mr Hankey der Weihnachts poop...***

Reluctantly draining my glass of Gose (and some of Sue's too!) and reflecting on just how interesting a beer style it can be if done properly, we broke open the first of our bottles; Wernesgrüner Pils Legende (4.9%) was a winning brewery and wasn't too bad a beer either with a fairly rich malty taste but let down by a chemically bitter finish with more maltiness, although overall it wasn't too bad and, the more I drank, the less chemically the finish became – although this is probably more me getting acclimatised to hop extract than the beer improving!

Einbecker Brauherren (4.9%) was next up and showed me yet again that some brewers generally make decent beer whatever they try their hand at. This was a good example of a hoppy German pils, quite a rare style in my limited experience of the country, and was very pale with a resinous, flowery, hoppy aroma and taste (hops, not hop oils!) before a malty flavour balanced with yet more flowery, bitter hops and finally a bitter, malty and well balanced aftertaste.

Martini (the German brewery, not the repulsive Italian wine stuff) Nörten-Hardenberger Export (5.2%) was a perfect example of all that I both like and dislike about German beers in a curiously bipolar way; on the plus side it had all the necessary flavours such as malt, bitterness, hop, herbal notes and was well balanced, whilst on the negative face it was just another average, reasonably well-balanced, safe, unexciting, no-risks-taken, crowd pleasing beer which, whilst not being unpleasant in any way, was simply too unexciting to get more than two points.

Yes, there was nothing wrong with the beer, but that was part of the problem to me – I'd almost rather have a beer with flavour and/or balance faults every now and again than every beer being a middle-of-the-road crowd pleaser which, in Germany, is 50% of what you will find with the other 49% being bland industrially-produced junk and the final 1% being the interesting, quality beers which, sadly, are only too rare in a country obsessed with the shackles of a useless Rheinheitsgebot, a toothless guideline which somehow allows hop extract to be used in beers which can claim to be brewed to the law, and in my opinion encourages blandness at the expense of innovation; what the German brewing industry needs is a monumental kick up the arse and, for some reason, this isn't coming from the hordes of new brewpubs which feel content to brew the "holy trinity" of helles, weiss and dunkel for some reason known only unto themselves.

The final bottle was a confusing beer; Wöltingerode Wölfti-Bräu (5%) was allegedly – according to the label - from Vienenburg although I have recently found out that it is contract-brewed by Kolberg of Altenau. We had lots of expectations for this bottle, including it being of the elusive 1% I mentioned above due mainly to a hefty dollop of sediment skulking in it's murky depths, but sadly it was quite disappointing and fairly insipid with a civilized maltiness but fading out to a bland toffee aftertaste with, sadly, none of the elusive character which I was after, although the final glass of Gose of the night had come perilously close to this nirvana...

The highlight of the evening TV-wise just had to be South Park dubbed into German, but to make it even more amusing the [episode](#) was the one where Kyle thinks Mr Hankey (if you don't know what I'm on about you really should watch this classic of comedy) is real and contains the classic song "Kyle's mum's a bitch" – but it's even funnier when translated into German and I shan't even mention the hilarity caused by "Mister Hankey, der Weihnachts poop"...

**Friday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2006.**

***Alles an bord des autobus.***

We were aiming for the 07:42 train out of Goslar and so had done ourselves out of breakfast in the hotel in the process; despite our reasonably late night we didn't feel too bad and even managed to grab a quick glass of juice as we passed through on the way out of the door. The rain of the previous day had been replaced with a bright stillness and, for a second, I wished we could do the whole Goslar day again in decent weather but I suppose that will have to wait until we revisit this delightful place again at some point in the future; I don't know when we'll get the time to go back, but I'm maybe we could combine a Leipzig and Goslar trip in a few years to see how the Gose revival is getting on!

After a stroll through the lovely timberly centre of Goslar we arrived at the train station with plenty of time to spare – we even had enough time to buy a bagload of breakfast goods from the bakery over the road – before I bought our tickets from one of the unbelievably useful ticket machines on the platform. These devices are truly amazing and have seemingly endless functionality including supporting multi-languages, allowing you to print timetables between any two stations, to check prices and times, and obviously to buy tickets (including *Länders*) using cash or a visa card; could they be any more useful? What's even better is that almost all stations seem to have them and they're easy to spot, being red and 8 feet tall!

I already knew, from the excellent DB [hafas](#) website, that the apparently simple move of getting to Wernigerode wasn't simple any more as the train was replaced by a bus between Ilsenburg and Wernigerode due to extensive engineering works. Forewarned is forearmed, however, and the move went well with a slick change onto the bus at Ilsenburg; as we left the train there were two buses waiting with the destinations clearly labelled on the front... somehow I couldn't see this happening back in the UK! The bus took a mere 15 minutes to deposit us at Wernigerode's train station with a quick flypast of the Hasserode brewery out of the edge of town, which unnervingly resembled some kind of chemical factory with it's huge silos, spidery pipework and brutal modernist architecture.

With a blazing sun firmly ensconced in the cloudless sky it looked like the perfect day to climb a 1,100 metre mountain aboard a narrow gauge steam train and so, when the [Harzer Schmalspurbahn](#) opened it's doors at 08:45, we were straight in like whippets down a rabbit hole eager to part with the €24 return each for the 100-minute slog up to the summit of the Brocken. £16 may seem a bit steep for a simple run up and down a mountain but, I reasoned, it's not every day you get to do narrow gauge trains up 1 in 32 gradients and, besides, I've paid more money for things worth a lot less and probably will many times more in the future!

***Ein kleine dampflok herauf den berg.***

Our train was already in and waiting and so, after a futile hunt for a toilet around the platforms (they don't have one, apparently – sorry?), we gave up and boarded the cute little buffet car which was as close as we could get to the loco due to the brake van being directly behind it. To sit in the buffet I assumed we'd have to buy something, despite the train being virtually empty, and so I eased our conscience at finding the best seat on the whole train - a curved padded one with table! – by procuring two coffees from the slightly plastic machine behind the buffet counter via the buffet Ada, who seemed satisfied that we could stay in our seats after said purchase.

I shan't bore you with the details of the ascent save to say the little engine made lots of "chuff chuff" noises as we crawled up the snaking and precipitous track whilst liberally depositing lumps of still-burning ashes all over me as I attempted to record the event on camera from the open vestibule of the third coach. The weather at Drie Annen Hohne (the junction where the Brockenbahn leaves the Harzquerbahn) was still bright and clear but, as the little engine hauled us up the ludicrously steep rails, mist and cloud began to close in and by the time we'd reached the summit of Brocken it was all we could do to see the engine through the 60mph gale and swirling mist! The promised view was completely blotted out by the clouds below and so, not wishing to partake of the other attractions on the mountain (chiefly walking around with daft bobblehats on judging by the majority of the train's disembarkees), we strolled along to the rear of the train and bagged some good seats from which to observe our downward progress.

The trip back took 135 minutes due to a connection at Drie Annen Hohne where we had to leave our steed of the last two-and-a-half hours and change onto another train, still steam-hauled, back into Wernigerode. One interesting even occurred at the halt of Schierke, halfway down the mountain, when we realised that the station possessed three station cats and that they were all pure black and extremely cute but, unfortunately, their location on the main platform prohibited me from testing out their sociability during the brief stop there. We also witnessed, at the same station, a huge seminar of what must have been around fifteen walky-dorky types all dressed in random shades of beige!

Whilst at Drie Annen Hohne we witnessed an event which is not manifested anywhere else in the world today, the passing of three steam-hauled trains on scheduled passenger services, with trains to Brocken, Nordhausen and Wernigerode all departing within ten minutes of each other. This is an event which makes those who like steam engines go all misty-eyed with the romance of it all, but which – despite appreciating the interest of it all – didn't excite me as much as a classic 1950's ALCo hood unit or a whistling English Electric beast and didn't make as much smoke or noise as either would!

### ***The smallest tram system I've ever seen / Die kleinste Straßenbahn.***

Our plan was to catch a bus (in lieu of a train) to Halberstadt where we could hopefully scoop the town's brewpub and ride one of the smallest tram systems in Germany - a mere couple of kilometres long - and still threatened with closure for some ludicrous reason; look, Halberstadt, your public transport is superb! Don't reduce it to our level by closing the tram system, how about investing a bit of money in it and keeping it for the future, you short-sighted muppets? Despite being in a hurry to get to Quedlinburg, our base for the night and apparently another gorgeous half-timbered town, we just had to make time for Halberstadt's trams and brewpub as I had no idea if we'd be along this way again for many a year; it's not really on the way to anywhere (apart from Wernigerode and Quedlinburg) and so we might never get the chance to scoop the brewpub and trams if we didn't do it then as they might not be there should we return at some point in the future...

The bus dropped us off outside Halberstadt's slightly dreary station and immediately it was obvious that we were in the East by the bleak Socialist architecture and general tired look of the place; it's a difficult thing to describe but when you see both the old East and West within a reasonable timeframe then the differences stand out – the way the grids stand proud of the road surface which itself is concrete not tarmac, the concrete prefab *panelácky* tower blocks, the lack of investment in many buildings; these are the obvious things but there's something else, something which fifteen years of unity has failed to sweep under the carpet, a strange indefinable feeling of being in a piece of a failed experiment which has confined the local population to a lifetime of inadequate services and underinvestment in basic requirements – and nothing seems to be being done about it.

Two trams were sitting in the halt beside the train station and so, after buying our group tickets (which we didn't need to do as our Länder tickets would have sufficed, but I wasn't 100% sure) we jumped aboard No.165 on line 2 to Herbingstraße where we could change for line 3 – or at least we would have been able to had it been a Saturday or Sunday which were the only days this service appeared to operate; cheers then! Thanks to this blow-out we had a fifteen-minute fester for car 164 which we took to the end of the line, via the acceptably timbered yet still tired-looking *Altstadt*, at Sargstedterweg and back out again as far as Hoherweg where we took car 162 on line 1 to it's terminus at Friedhof and then back – via the line we'd not yet done at Fischmarkt – to the hauptbahnhof and that was it, the complete system (except the short stub of line 3) cleared in just over an hour!

### ***The totally out-of-place brewpub.***

Rejecting a bus to the brewpub (from the ZOB, or bus station, opposite the hauptbahnhof you can catch Nos11,12 or 15) on the grounds that it wasn't far and actually finding, waiting for and catching the bus would probably take longer than simply walking, we set off along the perimeter of the bus station and thence along the road that led from it. A mere couple of minutes later we arrived at the Hotel Heine, looking slightly opulent and out of place in the wasteland of concrete around it, but couldn't see a brewpub anywhere until we noticed the street heading left just after it was Groß Ringstraße and there, a hundred metres further on past the hotel's be-fountained gardens, was a new-looking structure with "Heine-Bräu" displayed upon it.

The promise "*Wir haben ein neues bräu für Sie!*" (We have a new brew for you!) on the window was too good an offer to resist so in we went and bagged a compo-like table at the end of the bar. A quick look around convinced me that this was the strange combination of a hotel's conference centre and brewpub, something which I don't think I've ever heard of before and is certainly a strange amalgamation! Three beers were available; a helles, Schwarzer Friedrich dunkel and the seasonal Urtyp, so we scooped a glass of the two regular brews and continued to take in our slightly surreal environs.

First up was the Helles, a hazy golden brew, malty and slightly bitter, quite well balanced with an interesting bitter, herby, maltsack finish which went down very well indeed. The dunkel wasn't really to my style as it had the deep red, brown sugar and caramel characteristics I'm not a big fan of but it was also rather simplistic and plain which didn't really help it's cause. The final scoop, Urtyp (original), was a copper-coloured beer with a smooth toffee and malt flavour which unfortunately faded quickly to a thin, bland malty finish – early promise unfulfilled!

Down in the basement beside the toilets was the lagering room and also a poster displaying a

list of seasonal beers – including Gose! Paul Harrop had told me that Heine-Bräu had brewed for Brauhaus Goslar in the past (and may still do) so this may simply be a hangover from that contract; unfortunately no Gose was available on our visit, although the Helles was being sold in large stoppered bottles from fridges behind the bar. Our scooping completed we paid up and headed for the station where we could take the 17:01 to Quedlinburg, but what we hadn't anticipated was the shambles in getting to the platforms: getting to the central (main) platform involved a long walk along the track before crossing via a temporary path to the destination which, overall, took three times as long as it should have done; we were very glad we'd left enough time...

### ***“Call that a train?”***

Our train arrived on-time but I wasn't impressed by its appearance at all – it resembled a very plastic tram and was totally unsuitable for the number of passengers wishing to use the service it was forming – but we had no option so squeezed aboard, finding seats next to the toilet (I was amazed it had one!), glad that this would only be a 20-minute trip. A large crowd of annoying student-types boarded just before we set off and proceeded to squeal and shriek in a particularly irritating manner throughout the journey until we were contemplating flushing them down the chemical toilet one by infuriating one; fortunately for them we arrived at Quedlinburg just in time to prevent this unfortunate procedure occurring.

Most of the train's cargo disgorged itself onto the platform and so, assuming they knew which way to go better than we did, we followed them over the river and into the centre of town. I'd booked us into the Hotel Zum Bär, smack-bang on Markt, mainly for its proximity to the brewpub but also as it had the distinction of being a tool of the Stasi, the East German secret police, and consequently suffered a massive drop in trade after the *Wende* but has now built itself back up as one of the major hotels in the town. I'd managed to get a double B&B for €70 which, considering how posh it looked, was a bit of a bargain as I'd reckoned that by this point in the trip we'd be a knackered and some luxury would be very welcome.

The walk into the centre wasn't particularly far but, as we were indeed getting a touch jaded, it took longer than it should have done although we did stop at a shop to stock up on winners for the room. I can tell now, looking at what I bought with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, that “roverbrain” was setting in as the two beers were from a dodgy commissioning company and I've no idea who brews them – although, judging by the taste of them, it's some huge industrial factory which puts cost before character when deciding the character of the finished products. I've since put the episode down to experience and part of life's rich tapestry and have vowed – even when under the influence of roverbrain – always to examine bottles carefully in the future!

### ***Chav Centrum.***

We were soon checked into our very sociable and sumptuous hotel where we were allocated a room in an annexe across the courtyard which was ringed by delightfully haphazard buildings with not a matching pair amongst them! After a spot of relaxation to ease the onset of roverbrain we set off across Markt in search of some beers to scoop; we knew that the Lüdde brewpub was just along the street from us but we were saving that for our nightcap with it being just a stumble away. The first thing we noticed was something not often seen in Germany; bored kids! The square and surrounding streets were home to little groups of kids doing what bored kids the world over do – moping around, being loud and annoying and spoiling the environment for other people by their twattishness – but we carried on with our wander

regardless.

The town looked as attractive in its half-timbered way as it could under the orange glow of streetlights and I was glad we had some time in the morning to have a proper peruse in daylight before we set off on the next leg of our gargantuan Harz tour. Quedlinburg may have been a delight to look at but it didn't seem to possess many pubs – which was, after all, the main reason for our visit – and so we trudged along the deserted lanes with increasing desperation in search of anywhere which might just, possibly, have some scoops on sale...

Eventually, after a fair bit of fruitless searching, we chanced upon the *Weinkeller zur Altstadt* at Bockstraße 10. Despite it being empty - apart from the entire being occupied in a game of cards around a table in front of the bar - we were so desperate by this time we'd have checked out anywhere, so in we went! In the manner of many German bars there was a little "compo" seat next to the bar where we could perch and watch the goings on in the pub (admittedly not a lot apart from a rather half-hearted game of cards) and use the bar as a table; I don't know why we think this is a good idea but we seem drawn to pubs with this feature... maybe it's the novelty of being able to sit at the bar without being in the way as we would be back home had we done this on barstools!

### ***Nice town, not so nice beer.***

Before we sat down I'd checked the beers and, despite them being Kostritzer, I'd realised that we didn't exactly have a plethora of choice in the current locality so we'd decided that a swift half of this would be in order. It wasn't until we were ensconced in our little seat that Sue noticed the beers weren't Kostritzer, they were actually Krostitzer from Krostitz (funnily enough); dreadful, that was a bit of a bonus! We were soon in possession of halves of pils and schwarzbier - after hesitantly interrupting the staff's card game - and supped thirstily from the glasses. The pils was a fairly bland brew with a slight trace of bitterness that increased in the finish whilst the schwarzes was slightly better; a deep brown beer, it possessed a sweetish caramel/toffee taste although it was distinctly one-dimensional and could do with a lot more character in our opinion.

The beers scooped, we paid up and left the staff to their game of cards; they didn't look too hopeful of any more custom wandering through the door and barely looked up as we left. Our circuit of the *Altstadt* complete - and finding ourselves back at Markt - a quick decision was taken that we'd best head off to the brewpub and give ourselves the luxury of an early night in what promised to be a very comfortable bed indeed! This may sound a rather lightweight way of conducting oneself when out scooping and, ten years ago, I'd have been the first to agree with that statement but at that that moment, with my advancing years showing (and a couple of days scooping behind us) it seemed like a great idea!

So Lüddebräu it was, and we were soon walking into the cavernous interior; from the outside it looked like all the other beamed houses surrounding it but, once through the door, it became clear that this was a much bigger place than I'd given it credit for – and not half as attractive either, resembling a kind of converted factory with the brewing kettles stuck right in the middle of the floor. Once we'd claimed our seats at the bar, however, I began to feel slightly more charitable towards the pub and grudgingly admitted that it might not be a low-beamed little wood-panelled bar but it did have an industrial openness about it – and I've been in a lot worse in my time!

Three beers were available; Knutterforz schwarzbier, Pils and the amusingly-named Pubarschknall (which apparently means fart-arse-bang) low-alcohol dunkel. First, however, there was a more pressing matter to attend to – our bellies needed filling! As soon as we'd walked in my choice had been made, as a hand-written blackboard by the door had proclaimed the virtues of the pub's seasonal dish which just happened to be Grünkohl; my third portion was duly ordered, whilst Sue went for something more steak-like. Looking at the menu, I suddenly realised that Pubarschknall contained saccharin and E150 caramel – cheers then! I can handle caramel in small doses, but saccharin? No thanks! With the chemical beer flagged we ordered our two remaining scoops and awaited developments on the food front to satiate our rumbling bellies.

The pils was surprisingly good; it had a subtle grainy aroma and flavour, was fairly bitter in character, and had a good fresh, hoppy, bitter aftertaste balanced with sweet maltiness. The schwarzbier wasn't as accomplished, unfortunately, with its plain caramelly flavour blotting out any hints of fruit and malt underneath an all-consuming tide of E150 – but at least there was no saccharin to poison my insides! The food soon arrived and was as competent as usual for a German brewpub albeit not in the same class as our feast the previous evening, although that had admittedly been some of the best food we'd had in a pub ever... saying that, the kasseler chop was particularly smoky, tasty and downright delicious so we munched happily until our plates – and glasses – were empty.

With no more scoops to get in the book – unless we wanted to drink low-alcohol beer contaminated with saccharin, which obviously we didn't – it was time for our early night to catch up on some of the doss we'd lost that morning by our 06:00 start from Goslar and so after paying the modest bill we were off into the drizzle, skidding on the cobbles, until we reached our cosy yet enormous room. The two bottles I'd erroneously purchased earlier were opened and tasted but, by this time, I'd worked out that a major cock-up had occurred and I should never have bought these dodgy rebadges; ah well, a lesson learnt and less than £1 wasted I suppose... most of the Meister pils and Wüllner's Bräumeister went down the sink as we didn't particularly feel like drinking rebadged industrial swill, giving us a much earlier night than we'd planned for, but were we complaining?

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2006.**

***Another day, another tram system.***

Our lie-in was much appreciated and we finally abandoned the bed when, reluctantly, we had to go and take advantage of our inclusive breakfast. This was surprisingly good with plenty of warm items such as boiled and scrambled eggs, tiny little frankfurters, and lots of proper orange juice; we took full advantage of this veritable feast to tide us over for as long as possible before checking out and going for our promised wander around Quedlinburg.

The town was as beautiful as all the guidebooks and websites had declared it to be; like Goslar, Quedlinburg was spared damage in WW2 and its buildings are mainly original with over 1600 being on UNESCO's historic register. Strangely, as we walked away from Markt towards the station the prettiness of the streets increased with every step, and soon we were strolling along cobbled lanes flanked by multicoloured timbered houses which warped and leant over the road alarmingly. I'd never guessed the Harz region could be so amazing architecturally and, although I think I marginally prefer Goslar for its compactness, a visit to the district is a must for

anyone who loves timbered buildings. We didn't have time to walk around Wernigerode or any of the other towns locally so may have to revisit the area again when a few more brewpubs have opened!

The buildings sadly degenerated into modern identikit ones as we neared the station, although as a bonus we were treated to the arrival and departure of a tiny kettle with two equally tiny carriages in tow. I bought our Schöneswochende ticket from the amazingly useful ticket machine on the platform (after a few attempts where it flatly refused to accept my VISA card, which temporarily posed a major problem as we didn't have enough cash to pay for the ticket) before taking the hideous plastic tram/train contraption back to Halberstadt where we changed for a regional double-decker up to Magdeburg. This move had been added to the plan fairly late on as I'd discovered a new brewpub situated in the grounds of the old Diamant brewery in Magdeburg and I wanted to get this in the book – and the city's tram system, obviously...

The train was filled with football fans wearing blue attire (1<sup>st</sup> Magdeburg FC) and we soon realised there was a game on in Magdeburg when we saw the station was crawling with coppers! We quickly made our way to the tram stop where, after some deliberation, I bought a tram dayticket for us; I'd thought Schöneswochende tickets (all Länder tickets, actually) entitled you to free travel on local transport but I'd been told the opposite at one of our recent station visits, so we decided not to risk being hossed and so chugged out the required €7 or so for our rovers – which we needn't have done, as it happens, but we know next time!

***“Bloody hell, there's a real one!”***

We occupied ourselves for an hour or so by scooping some of the city's tramlines, including one of the loops, although the lack of any heritage rolling stock soon bored us. Magdeburg was about as different from Quedlinburg as I could imagine with the main street being a parade of Stalinist brutality, concrete and the odd old building which presumably survived the pounding the city received during WW2, but in its way it was a very interesting place and still undeniably Eastern Europe in character which, in itself, isn't a terrible thing and makes a change from the identikit consumerist facades of many Western cities.

As we stood on a tram station at some obscure point of the network waiting for a tram to yet another terminus, I was suddenly sent into gibbering crank mode for there, passing on another route, was a triple Tatra T4 tram, the first “proper” vehicles we'd seen thus far – this just had to be done! I'd assumed that, in common with many other cities, Saturdays aren't that good for scooping the heritage vehicles as the reduced weekend service means the operators can get by using just the plastic new trams almost all cities are inevitably infested with these days, so was this a one-off or something more interesting like a whole route of real trams? It was time to get back into the centre and find out...

Ten minutes later we were at the Altermarkt stop “deckchairing” (waiting around, basically!) for the real tram's reappearance. As we'd no idea what route it was working on we resigned ourselves – despite the pan-pipe players close by making an appalling noise – to a lengthy fester, but within five minutes I spotted the tell-tale headlights of a Tatra approaching; result! The tram squealed over the pointwork into the platform and we saw it was working route 1, one of the longest, so with the day looking a lot better all of a sudden we leapt aboard the refurbished T4 and off we went to the terminus and back: what else did you expect? On the way we saw the route was almost entirely worked by proper trams and, even better, we could take one all the way to the door of the new alleged brewpub – but first it was time to have a look

at the Weihnachtsmarkt which was open for business, close to Altermarkt.

### ***Another portion of Grünkohl in the book...***

Most of the Christmas markets we'd seen had been in the process of being erected but, happily, this one was doing a roaring trade in all manner of yuletide goodies and so, like the good consumerist clones we are, in we went to see what delights we could indulge in. As anyone who has been around a German Weihnachtsmarkt will tell you they are very different to the shite home-grown markets we have inflicted on us back home; the stalls are all wooden sheds bedecked with festive greenery and the merchandise on sale isn't generally tat, more handcrafted goods and proper food! We followed our noses until we arrived at a huge log cabin which rendered us speechless; Grünkohl with all the trimmings was being doled out from a huge pan to an eager queue of hungry-looking locals – this was just what we needed, after all it was at least three hours since we'd eaten last!

A few minutes later and we were each wrestling with a bendy paper bowl full of Grünkohl and bratkartoffeln (mine had a sausage nestled within too) which threatened to tip the delicious-smelling meal onto the floor at any second; luckily we claimed a table near to the stall and proceeded to demolish this unforeseen feast with gusto. It wasn't the best Grünkohl I'd had during the trip so far, but that's diminishing what was a perfectly decent meal by comparing it to the other pub-cooked dishes which, as well as being better, were also three times the price so as an unexpected treat it did us very nicely, thank you very much, and then for pudding we raided the crepe stand across the way which we only do if our two personal choices are on the menu; Sue's marzipan and my nutella! Mmmmmmmmm, nutella...

We then took a tram down to Domplatz to have a look at Magdeburg's cathedral which survived the war when all around perished – somehow. It's a pointy dual-spired gothic construction and very attractive it is too, although the associated Domplatz is a bleak expanse of concrete paving slabs which does nothing for the appreciation of the church, especially on a dull afternoon in November, so after the obligatory photos we headed for a café at the far end of Domplatz with the intention of warming ourselves up with a swift espresso.

### ***A short historical interlude.***

Sue commented at the time that it was probably the first time we'd ever been able to afford an espresso on a cathedral square and, I'm guessing, it's probably the last time for the foreseeable future! Thanks to the general cheapness of Magdeburg we were able to indulge in our coffee without it breaching our arbitrary "rip-off" gauge of €2 a cup and so, sufficiently warmed up, we set off for the Alte Diamant brewpub via a run on another Tatra T4 – a quality way to get to a brewpub, but narrowly beaten in the "getting there in style" award by the possibility of getting a baby ALCo to the airport station in Monastir, Tunisia, which is simply outrageous!

The expected Tatra whisked us along to Neustadt Friedhof where I was fervently hoping I'd read the city map correctly back in Worcester where everything had seemed so easy... as we got off the tram things suddenly didn't look as promising and, for a moment, I was concerned I'd made a monumental cock-up in the map reading department. We crossed the road where, to my intense relief, we saw a Lübeckerstraße roadsign and then, on the front of a derelict and crumbling building, a tiny brass plaque which read "Alte Diamant Brauerei" – I can still remember the feeling of total relief which swept through me on seeing that sign!

The story of the Diamant brauerei is so typical of many of the Eastern German breweries which were sold off to the big asset-stripping multinational brewers after the *Wende*. It was flogged off (or privatised to use the correct term) to the Bavaria St. Pauli Brauerei (owned by Carlsberg) who initially invested in the plant and even celebrated the brewery's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary before things all turned sour and the site was closed in 1994 to much local anger at the way they had been used by the multinational but, despite the protests, that was it – brewing ceased and everyone thought that was the end of the matter. Wind forwards ten years and we find the site in the possession of a property developer (how very capitalist!) who, with a compassion not normally seen in such people, decided he wanted to revive the brewery; not the full thing, obviously, but a new-wave brewpub which could resurrect Magdeburg's once proud brewing heritage albeit on a smaller scale than the 500,000hl which the brewery produced in it's heyday under the DDR.

Many of the original buildings from Diamant still remain and they are deliciously ornamented with spiky castellations all over the place - this brewery was built in the times when buildings were supposed to look good as well as do a job – but these were presumably in too poor a state of repair to use as yet and so a single-story modern building was erected to serve as a brewery and café. I suppose the main buildings have survived as they are far enough from the centre to have avoided destruction and - hopefully - will now be restored for new uses as they are simply too attractive to be demolished and replaced with modern concrete eyesores...

The brewers in this tiny new enterprise are also unusual – not young men full of idealism but retired ex-workers from Diamant itself! These men apparently moved to other breweries when Diamant closed and, after retiring, have decided to help and restart production on the original site of Magdeburg's famous brewery; I wish them all the best with their enterprise and hope that, eventually, they are able to move into a restored part of the original brewery which would really mean brewing had restarted in Magdeburg... but in the meantime, where they are is fine by me!

### ***One of the newest scoops in Germany – in my big orange book!***

Enough of this gibbering, on with the report! The bar itself is named, somewhat surreally, "Croc-o-Deal" but isn't as shite as the name would have you believe and is actually a sociable, relaxed café-bar as seen in countless other cities within Germany – except the others don't have a micro-brewery out the back! We commandeered a table and I approached the bar with some trepidation; would I be able to find out if the beer was on, and would I be fobbed off with some industrial lager instead? I needn't have worried as the barmaid, despite speaking no English, stoically listened to my halting questions in German and affirmed that yes, the brewery was out the back and, yes, the beer on draught was brewed there!

Once I'd ascertained the beer was actually brewed on-site I quickly put in my order for two glasses of it, which the barmaid brought over to our table once she'd topped it up, and I was impressed by the very democratic prices too, with a half litre costing a mere €2.50. So, there we sat, in a brewpub not yet in the German beer guide, watching proper trams pass along Lübeckerstraße, listening to a very eclectic music mix on the stereo (including Chumbawamba!) and enjoying this massive scoop. The beer itself, Magdeburger pils, was a slightly hazy (which kind of proved it wasn't a multinational product) yellow beer with a lovely grainy, malty aroma before a malty and gentle hop flavour with fruit and an increasing bitterness in the finish – a good brew but lacking a bit of hoppy bite in my opinion, being closer to a Dortmunder than a pils in style, but it must have been good as we had three rounds and you don't get a much better recommendation than that.

Eventually we reluctantly paid up and headed off into the darkness, stopping to examine an old painting of the original brewery in the entrance which made more sense of the remains on view, before catching a Tatra back to the hauptbahnhof for the train to Braunschweig. I'd been there previously when I visited Fletch there back in 1991 whilst he was on his placement from University but hadn't drunk much apart from beers from the city's two large brewers, Feldschloßen and Wolters, so was now determined to scoop the two brewpubs in as well as anything else which might show itself on the ticking radar. Before boarding the train, however, I managed to scoop two winning bottles of beer from the Chinese shop at the bottom of the steps leading to the platforms; everyone's a winner, that's true!

Before all that, however, we had to survive the football twats on the train; thinking about the move now maybe we should have left Magdeburg an hour earlier, but we'd probably still had some footy twats on the train – you can't win when football is involved in my experience! To be honest, the handful on our train weren't as bad as I thought they might be; yes they had the occasional sing, but they mostly kept to themselves and, amusingly, one even fell down the stairs from the upper floor of our double-decked train but sadly didn't seem to be injured...

### ***Call that a tram service?***

Once outside Braunschweig's hauptbahnhof I was struck by how much the city had changed; I didn't recognise anything at all and I certainly didn't know where our hotel was despite it being supposedly just outside the station... we soon found it, clad in scaffolding, immediately opposite the tram stops and so hurriedly checked in as we had quite a bit to do and already time was marching on – and, as usual, we were hungry again and I was getting cold turkey from not consuming Grünkohl during the past couple of hours!

Within fifteen minutes of checking in we were back out of the door and heading for the city centre via a tram – so that's yet another tram system in the book! Unfortunately for us, Braunschweig's tram system transpired to have a fairly crap service and modern plastic trams (with a few older GT6's) which, when combined, gave a less than acceptable experience as far as us seasoned tram connoisseurs were concerned. However, as we were only using them to get into the centre and not trying and scoop all the lines in some desperate frenzy of book-filling, we decided that they would have to do and so got onto the first one which lurched into the tram station outside the hauptbahnhof for the short trundle into the centre.

The plastic tram conveyed us to the city centre with little difficulty and so off we went in search of the first of the city's two brewpubs. I had some suspicions about them as they were both owned by the same company; surely this gave the potential for brewing in one and then lugging the kegs a few hundred metres down the road to the other and claiming the beer was brewed there too? Maybe it's just the old cynic in me talking, but I've been around the beer scene long enough to know that places which claim to brew aren't always telling the full story – and sometimes are blatantly lying; we'd hopefully find out soon enough which side of the fence these were on...

### ***The bar with many attractions.***

As we trudged along Schilde towards our first brewpub of the evening, Schadt's, I noticed a bar named the Hopfen Gartchen (if you can't decipher this then you've obviously never been to Germany – it means Hop Garden!) which wasn't bedecked in the colours of the city's two larger

breweries – Feldschloßen and Wolter’s – but in those of the smaller regional Herforder; this was an unexpected scoop and couldn’t be refused so, grasping the opportunity of winners, we burst into the strangely old-fashioned bar and quickly located our preferred seat which, as you should have realised by this point, was of the predictable “compo” variety tucked in alongside the bar!

The barmaid caught my attention immediately – not for her beer pouring ability but, more prosaically, for her curvaceous buttocks barely concealed behind supple leather trousers – but obviously I dispelled these thoughts from my head immediately and ordered our beers. From adverts on the bar we’d discovered that Herforder’s Weihnacht (xmas) beer was available and, as an even bigger bonus, so was Frankenheimer Altbier and so that was our first order sorted with the Herforder pils kept in reserve just in case we had the time, inclination or desperation to get it into the big orange book later on!

The Weihnacht was first and a very attractive brassy colour it was too, although this was arguably its most interesting characteristic; the flavour was sadly bland with lots of toffee, sweetness and some fruitiness (strange for a lager!) before gently trailing off into a bland toffee softness with little else of interest going on save for the tiniest hint of spiciness, maybe cinnamon, which nudged its score up to 2½. I was expecting more of the Altbier, being an ale, so was happy when it fulfilled its promise with its mid-brown colour, dryish taste with hints of liquorice, caramel, bitterness and malt and then a complex, subtle aftertaste with all the constituent flavours melding together in a restrained yet pleasing way, giving a score of 3.

Tempting as it was to have another round and scoop yet more of Herforder’s beers we were conscious of the time and so, when the locals began to sing-along to “La Cucharacha” on the radio, we decided it was time to leave them to it and pressed on with our march towards Schadts. We soon found it ensconced in a rather hideous low-rise concrete housing block in the centre of the city but it wasn’t the pub’s exterior aesthetics we were there to audit and so in we went to see what beers would be available but, more importantly, if any Grünkohl was on the menu as I was beginning to get serious withdrawal symptoms from lack of green leafy vegetables – I hadn’t broken wind within the last half an hour and was worried that my digestion had seized up through lack of stewed iron-laden leaves...

### ***I get my fix.***

We settled into a table in the side room of the brewpub just in front of the gleaming copper kettles and studied the menu; I was elated to see my desired dish prominently displayed within the list of food options and, interestingly, being hailed as “lokal Braunschweiger bläukohl” which, despite being theoretically a different colour than that to which I had become accustomed, sounded rather delicious particularly when I saw it came with the regulation bratkartoffeln, smoked Bregenzwurst and Kasseler chop! We ordered our food – this was my fifth portion of the trip – and sat back with our two beers to await events.

Three beers were available although, as is the norm, I’d flagged the weizenbier due to neither of us liking the stuff and so had to make do with the predictable Märzen and Pils. I think it’s fair to say that had we not suffered the appalling Gilde fluids in Hanover right at the start of the trip these beers would have won the wooden spoon hands down; the pils was a cloudy golden beer with some bitterness but mainly a cloying maltiness with a hint of bitterness towards the finish whilst the Märzen exhibited a cloudy deep amber face to the world but tasted of little except some watery malt – at this point I was wondering if we’d made the right decision as, should the food be as bad as the beer, we might be struggling to finish it for the first time ever in Germany!

I needn't have worried as, despite their beer being decidedly sub-par, Schadt's delivered big-time in the food stakes; to be honest, it was one of my top five meals I ate in the whole of 2006; one of the others was in Goslar, so with two of the three in one trip I think I can safely assume that the Harz region is a bit of a hotspot for food, especially at Grünkohl time! My plate was laden to breaking point with mounds of delicious fried potatoes and kale, so much so that the Bregenzwurst came on a separate plate along with the Kasseler chop, but it wasn't the quantities which impressed me the most (although I wasn't about to complain) but the gorgeous flavours of the individual items of the dish – it was simply superb, so why the bloody hell was their beer so crap if their food was of this good quality, I wondered?

Our hunger sated but our thirst for good beer not we continued with our trawl of the city's pubs and headed for Schadt's sister bar, Zum Löwen, where we hoped the beer would be better than that which we'd endured at Schadt's. The building itself was far more attractive than the bland flats we'd just left, being situated in an 18<sup>th</sup> century former orphanage, but what of the beer? Well, inside we managed to find yet another "compo" seat by the bar and ordered the two beers available which were suspiciously the same as those we'd scored not 30 minutes before but, not being cynics in the least, we asked for a glass of each without a qualm that they might simply be the same beers...

Happily, as we drank them, it became clear that the gleaming copper vessels behind the bar weren't simply there for decoration but were being put to a more useful purpose – producing beer, and much better beer than was being made across the city! The Pils was hazy, pale and reasonably hoppy with a restrained bitter finish, whilst the Märzen possessed a reddy/amber colour and a decent yet slightly bland malt taste leading to a soft toffee and very mellow finish which I'd like to have had a touch more bite to it – but, notwithstanding these comments, it was much better than Schadt's version! I have read recent reports that Zum Löwen has closed in early 2007, so if you visit be aware you'll have to make do with the Schadt's stuff!

By this time, after three days of solid scooping, travelling and generally eating more than was good for us, we were pretty well exhausted and so decided to return to the hotel as the time was nearing 22:00 and we'd exhausted the obvious beery attractions of the city. We made our way to the Rathaus tramstop but, much to our exasperation, we almost missed the tram back to the hauptbahnhof as we were accosted by some Germans on a stag night, dressed in the obligatory silly uniform, who tried to persuade us to sub them some money by buying syringes full of lurid liquid from them which they insisted was vodka... when our tram squealed into the station I quickly handed over a Euro, grabbed the proffered syringe, and we just made it onto the tram before the doors closed! Safely inside we examined the hypodermic whose filling, under the full glare of the interior lights, looked even more unappealing and artificial and so the syringe and its contents was relegated to the nearest bin untouched...

Back at the hotel we had the small matter of the two beers to drink that I'd bought at the station shop in Magdeburg so, fading fast, we made haste with their consumption. Gotha Oettiger Export (5.4%) was an amber brew, malty and soft, with a mellow and very drinkable flavour and although it lacked a bit of oomph it was still a good, solid, easy-drinking yet tasty beer. The other, Colbitzer Heide-Bock (6.8%) unfortunately wasn't as good as I expected, as its sociable nutty and malty flavour and long biscuity finish was, whilst decent enough, not really complex or powerful enough for a beer of its ABV. With the beers finished, and the trip's scooping at an end, we crashed out immediately for some very well-deserved doss.

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2006.**

***The final moves.***

Our last day was spent by waking up way too early before taking the tram into Braunschweig's surprisingly picturesque (and also well-hidden) centre for a good walk around, followed by the tram back to the hauptbahnhof where we were just too late to allow a photo of the huge kettle on a plinth outside before a train to Hanover. I grabbed a quick Burek before boarding the train and I appreciatively munched the cheesy snack as we left Braunschweig behind, passing the two large breweries of Feldschloßen and Wolters side-by-side, both obviously in production, with the Wolters plant having been bought from InBev very recently and now independent again although I'm not sure such a large plant can sustain itself in today's brand-obsessed German beer market and may well go the way of the increasing number of medium-sized traditional brewers who are closing their doors every year.

Back in Hanover we did a few last tram moves and found a "tram nutter" as we waited at the hauptbahnhof station; we were stood waiting for the next tram when someone walked past quite close muttering something in German which, obviously, we didn't understand. We watched him do the same to a few other people who looked far more alarmed than we had (presumably they'd understood what he said!) as they sidled away from this strange character. We did a No.10 tram to it's terminus and back out again but, on our return, the tram nutter had gone: I've no idea what it was he was saying, but I'd have liked to know as whatever it was seemed to cause uneasiness to those he mumbled to! We were also subjected to our first ticket check of the week as we passed the station but the advice Braunschweig station staff had given us about the Länder tickets being valid was proven to be sound and the pass was accepted without question.

Our time up, a quick S-Bahn to the airport was in order before passing through the very desperate security – I had to remove my boots again – although there was a decent shop airside where we could indulge in some shopping for random drinks; I bought some Black Forest fruit schnapps which looked very nice on the box with pictures of this and that succulent fruit but, when we sampled them at home, they turned out to taste of industrial alcohol, rotten rubber and peardrops – ah well! Our Air Berlin flight was on-time, the plane a scoop, and we were back in Stansted slightly early but still didn't make it home much before midnight.

It was on this trip – well, during the drive home - that we decided to concentrate on closer airports and only use Stansted as a last resort as both of us were getting very sick of the long journey and the A14 (We've now got flights booked up until May and although most are from Luton we've not had to return to Stansted yet!) and so, with a bit of luck, you may have read your last tale regarding us and the A14 – but don't hold me to that!

***Conclusions.***

Now that was one full-on long weekend! Each night in a different location is difficult to do, and a lot more tiring than a single-base trip, but essential as we wanted to cover as much of the region as possible and I think we did a pretty decent job of that. The snow I was hoping for didn't materialise owing to the unseasonably warm temperatures prevalent at the time but we still enjoyed the little train up the [Brocken Mountain](#) even if we could hardly see our hands in front of

our faces due to fog at the top!

The [Harz](#) region is famed for its unspoiled timber-framed towns and I can categorically say, based on our experience of just two of them, that this praise is fully justified; [Goslar](#) and [Quedlinburg](#) are both gloriously ancient and survived the destructions of WW2 unscathed owing to conveniently placed hospitals and, to a native of Cheshire where black and white buildings are common, it was like a home from home albeit with much older houses. [Hanover](#) isn't the nicest city but is the easiest way into the region with [Air Berlin](#) flying daily from Stansted and, as a bonus, it has a couple of large brewers and a brewpub just to ease you into the region's beery ethos. [Braunschweig](#) isn't technically part of the region, neither are [Halberstadt](#) or [Magdeburg](#), but they are worth visiting to see their respective attractions and brewpubs and – of course – to scoop their tram systems!

Of course the major beer attraction of the region is Gose, drunk in its city of conception, but unfortunately the story is better than the facts; there is debate as to whether all (or any) of the Gose from [Brauhaus Goslar](#) is actually made there and that which is found varies from a rich, malty beer bearing little resemblance to the style to a passable version with adequate sourness and lactic character, leading credence to the argument that it's made in various breweries – some of the bottles reportedly say "brewed in Braunschweig" on them, and the beer inside is allegedly from Schadt's. Despite these strange findings the beer is well worth trying and, if you get a decent version of it, you're in for a respectable example of the style.

Add together the region's decent beer culture, [heritage steam trains](#), easy access from the UK and the North of Germany and also the unspoiled and picturesque towns then you have a very attractive region for a long weekend away either on the beer trail or not – the region works just as well as a holiday destination as a beer-break. Add to the mix a comprehensive and generally excellent public transport network which we used to get around for four days without a single problem or hiccup and you have the recipe for a quality trip.

Germany never ceases to surprise and impress me with the various regions feeling like separate countries and having distinct characters (and food, and beer styles) of their own and the Harz, with its ample amounts of all things which make Germany good, ranks very highly on my list of places to recommend to beer scoopers looking to explore this fascinating country. With the help of the new [GBG to Germany](#) it's all suddenly become a lot easier, so what are you waiting for? Get out there!!! We scooped almost 40 beers in four days and could have had so many more if we were desperate... which I'm not, obviously...

### ***Getting there, getting around there and staying there.***

The Harz region is part of the wider [Niedersachsen Länder](#) (similar to a UK county) and borders the region of Sachsen-Anhalt to its west although the border is unnoticeable in practice until you reach the Stalinist towns of Magdeburg and Halberstadt. The major city, and easiest arrival point from the UK, is [Hanover](#) which is served by [Air Berlin](#) from Stansted (as well as Glasgow, Belfast City and Manchester) daily; in addition to Air Berlin, [HLX](#) fly into Hanover from Newcastle and Manchester, whilst the more expensive [FlyBE](#) go from Southampton and Birmingham. It's also possible to reach the region from Paderborn/Lippstadt airport too, also via Air Berlin from Stansted, Bournemouth, Manchester, Belfast and Glasgow.

Getting in from the [flughafen](#) (airport) to the centre in Hanover is done via the half-hourly S5 trains which cover the 7 miles in a mere 15 minutes. Buying the correct ticket is the difficult bit,

the red tickets from machines on the platform are for one day (called a “pass”, a “card” is for two or more days) with the flughafen in zome “Umland”. This means you require a 2-zone ticket for a day of unlimited tram scooping which costs for 1 person €4.80, or a group of up to 5 people €9.60. You can also buy simple singles into the centre but that means no tram scooping...

[Hanover](#), [Magdeburg](#), [Braunschweig](#) and [Halberstadt](#) all have tram systems and day tickets can be bought for all of them from machines on the stations (beware, most take coins only) although the [Länder](#) or [Schöneswochende](#) (happy weekend) tickets should also be valid on all public transport – although we heard conflicting views on this from station staff and so it’s probably best to try and check yourself before believing me! Saying that, the times we had them checked on trams they were accepted without question and so they may indeed be valid, although I’m still not totally sure.

Transport between the cities and towns is also easy using the good train services which connect virtually all of them, although beware that some services in the south are operated by HEX, a private company part of Connex (so beware!), and it’s actually cheaper to buy your ticket on the train from either the machine onboard or the guard than get it in advance. You can check all the information about connections from anywhere in Europe to the area via the superb German HAFAS website [here](#).

We stayed a night in Hanover, Goslar, Quedlinburg and Braunschweig in vastly different styles and qualities of hotels; all were booked through the excellent [hotel.de](#) website which somehow manages to wring superbly low rates from hotels all over Europe, sometimes even cheaper than on the hotel’s own websites... you can even have a confirmation by SMS! I’ve used the company ten times over the last few years and not yet been let down; highly recommended.

The [Cityhotel Am Thielenplatz](#) in Hanover is a five-minute walk (or short tram ride on the two rare overground routes 10 and 17) from the station and is best described as functional rather than opulent but served our purpose adequately enough – and it was pretty cheap too! Facilities are limited but we got a smallish room and an ensuite which was also quite pokey but all was clean and everything worked (in a fashion – the room’s hot water was inexplicably turned off via a stopcock on the wall!). There are plenty of better – and more expensive – hotels in Hanover, but if all you need is a bed for the night then you can do a lot worse than here.

[Hotel Gosequell](#) on the ludicrously pretty alley of An der Gose right slap in the Altstadt of Goslar was our base for the night there and, despite it being a good fifteen minute walk from the station, I’d recommend it as a slightly eccentric and historic place to stay. The owner is a genial old bloke who speaks decent English (much better than my German...) and, even better, they serve draught Gose at the bar – and it was the best example we had in the town too by quite a considerable margin. It’s slightly above our usual budget at around €65 B&B a night for a double but was well worth it both for the location (the hotel is from the 15<sup>th</sup> century) and the chance to say you’ve drunk Gose *vom faß* in your hotel!

[Zum Bär](#) right on the Markt in Quedlinburg was our touch of luxury for the trip, coming in at €70 B&B for a double, but was well worth it as it was by far the nicest hotel we stayed in and exuded the grandeur of hotels costing a whole load more. The breakfast was also superb as was our room in one of the many little houses off the main courtyard and I’d recommend this hotel to anyone after that little bit of luxury for a bargain price. It’s allegedly cheap as it had Stasi (secret police) connections during the Communist era and is only now regaining it’s reputation.

Our final destination was Braunschweig where I booked the [Mercure Atrium](#) right opposite the station for a bargain price of €35 room only for a double; despite the hotel being out of the action I'd chosen it as we needed to be close to the station for an early getaway. As is normal with the Mercure chain (part of [Accor](#), who also run the more famous Ibis chain) the rooms are well furnished, worth a lot more than you normally pay for rooms of such standard and are extremely comfortable – the bed in this particular example was particularly soft and reluctant to give us up...

### ***Beer Gen. (scores in brackets for beers/pubs)***

#### **Hanover.**

You can do a lot worse than read Ron Pattinson's [guide to the city](#), although be warned that Hanover isn't really a scooping mecca and you have to do a bit of graft to get your tally up to anything approaching a respectable level. The two brewery taps are at opposite sides of the city and are a fair tram ride out but there are some bars in the reconstructed centre which offer beers such as Einbecker.

#### **Gilde Brauhaus (InBev), Heinrich-Heineplatz 1. 11:00 onwards.**

U-bahn Altenbekenerdamm is less than 25m away; the huge castellated brewery is obvious, but the brewery tap is actually on the opposite side of the road and not really a tap in my definition of the word.

A strange choice for the brewery tap, but who are we to question InBev? A comfortable multi-roomed bar selling only one draught beer – Gilde Ratskeller pils – which won the award for the worst beer all week with some considerable aplomb; don't bother unless you're desperate!

#### ***Beers:***

Gilde Ratskeller Pils (4.9%) - One of the worst beers I've had the misfortune to consume in the last few years; a very poor chemically-bitter fluid with a contrived metallic taste, more chemically bitterness and a taste of malt essence in the thin aftertaste. (0)

#### **Herrenhäuser Braustubchen, Markgrafstraße 1. 10:00 onwards.**

U-bahn 4/5 to Herrenhäusermarkt and the bar is 50m away; continue in the same direction as the tram and the bar is opposite the brewery on your left.

A simply superb little bar, a relic from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and one of the finest brewery taps I've had the fortune to get to. It's all clicking dominoes and dice, the murmur of conversation, and you get the feeling they don't get a lot of tourists in here although the landlord put up with my appalling German with great benevolence. Whatever you do in Hanover get yourself here and experience what may not be around for ever. The pils is superb, too.

#### ***Beers:***

Weissbier (5.5%), bottled - A hazy beige colour and more in the Northern German style of a dry, grainy and slightly wheaty brew with hints of bubblegum and a dry finish. (2)

Pils (4.9%) - A revelation with its rich malty aroma, excellent grainsack flavour with fresh hops and gentle hoppy dryness in the finish which ended long, lingering, malty and bitter finish. (3.5)

**Brauhaus Ernst August**, Schmeiedestraße 13, open from 08:00 until 03:00 !

Situated in the city centre; you can't miss it, especially at night with those green lights!

This brewpub makes only one beer, called Hanöversch, but sells a huge amount of it during the exceedingly long opening hours. The other beer on offer, lüttje lage, is almost certainly the same stuff with a shot of korn but I can't verify this as I didn't have it.

*Beers:*

Hanöversch (4.8%) - a cloudy orange/golden brew, yeasty and malty in the aroma and flavour with an increasing Seville marmalade character hop character into the long, orangey, bitter, malty finish. A very drinkable and complex brew which only just missed out on a four-star score. (3.5)

**Schankwirtschaft Barfuß**, Holzmarkt.

In the old restored part of Hanover, this bar is only five minutes from the brewpub.

A tied house of the Härke brewery of nearby Peine, scooping in this tiny little place is like drinking in a wardrobe! Only one beer available on draught, but it's a good 'un and the place is well worth a glass or two to see just how small pubs can be! We had to climb over the table to actually sit at it...

*Beers:*

Härke pils (4.9%) - Another decent pils with a malty, grainy taste overlaid with a reasonable amount of bitterness and hoppiness, fading to a rich and very malty aftertaste with a grainy, warty dryness; another good regional pils beer. (3)

*Other beers consumed from bottles:*

Gilde pils (4.9%) – from a supermarket. Bought before we knew just how atrocious the brewery's products were and found to be another slightly industrial dry, chemically beer with little to recommend it, but thankfully marginally better than the appalling Ratskeller. (1)

Gilde Lindener spezial (5.1%) – from a supermarket. Surprisingly this wasn't too repulsive, having a reasonably dry and fairly malty brew with some bitter hop (tasting more real than the other two we'd tried thus far) and a balanced finish; not the best beer I'd had all year, but certainly better than the other two beers by some considerable margin. (2)

Einbecker Dunkel (4.9%) – from a supermarket. A sweet, caramelly, deep red fluid, far too sweet and toffeeish for me, with oodles of sickly caramel increasing in the cloying finish. (1)

### Goslar.

The original home of Gose, a slightly sour beer nowadays with the very Belgian addition of coriander seed and the slightly less obvious salt, which is the obvious draw but there are quite a few other decent bars serving other beers. The Brauhaus Wolpertinger is owned by Oetker and doesn't actually brew with the beers coming from Frankfurt according to the barman and there is also doubt that Brauhaus Goslar actually brews its own beers with the production rumoured to be from Schadt's in Braunschweig...

**Die Butterhanne**, Marktkirchhof 3. From 11:00.

Opposite the big church, just off Markt, across from the König van Bayern cellar bar.

Strange place which looks more like a restaurant or posh café than a pub although it has a fake copper behind the bar and tries to give the impression from its literature that the Gose is brewed there – it isn't as far as I know! The staff didn't seem too happy about us sitting there with only beers and no food, but bollocks to them: that's what we do!

*Beers:*

Brauhaus Goslar Gose Hell (%) – A hazy amber/yellow beer, distinctly wheaty in aroma and taste with spicy hops, a prickle of sourness, then a sociable dryish, hoppy and still wheaty aftertaste. This beer varies tremendously, lurching from a soft, cuddly Märzen-style brew to a reasonably sour and acidic beastie – but you have no way of knowing which you'll get! (3)

Brauhaus Goslar Weinachtsbier (%) - Orange/amber and fairly sweet although not cloying with a spicy and hoppy taste then a sweetish, malty, bitter finish. A characterful beer, a little sweet for me, but still reasonably interesting. (3)

### **König van Bayern**, Markt 1.

In the cellars of the town hall, make sure you pack your Davey lamp. Lots of steps!

A bar run by the Bavarian Kaltenberg brewery, this surprisingly bright and bustling place serves excellent food as well as the full range of Kaltenberg beers including the rare Ritterbock.

*Beers:*

Dunkel (%) - Too caramelly and sweet for my taste - although I've had a lot worse! (2)

Spezial hell (5.6%) - Pale, hoppy, well-bodied beer with nutty malt and more bitter hops in the tasty and quite complex finish; surprisingly good for a standard helles. (3)

Ritterbock (9%) - A decent attempt at a strong dark brew, It has flavours of malt, toffee, caramel

and some dryness and despite being 9% wasn't excessively alcoholic on the tongue yet gave some hints of it's potency; just the way it should be, in my opinion! (3)

**Kaiser Klee**, Gemeindehof 6.

Up the narrow alley close to Markt, not that easy to find unless you have a map and a good sense of direction – which obviously rules me out.

Another café-like establishment and this one is so un bar-like we stood outside for a while deciding whether they'd allow us to just drink a beer without some food! We were welcome despite not eating, however, and it seems to be a sociable little place with the benefit of a house beer from the local Brauhaus Goslar.

*Beers:*

Brauhaus Goslar Kaiser Klee Gold (%) - Cloudy, yellow and very malty in taste with, predictably, lots of yeastiness then some attractive fruity hops led into the full malty finish, giving a very drinkable beer with a lot of flavour which may improve up to a four-star rating by less yeastiness. (3.5)

Worthmühle, Worthstraße 4.

Situated where Worthstraße crosses the river, only 100m off Markt.

In a lovely spot by the river and opposite a watermill on a street just off Markt, this is unashamedly a restaurant but it's worth saving yourself up for a splurge in here as the food, on the evidence of our visit, is absolutely excellent; they also list both Goses from Goslar on their menu but only the helles was available. The whole experience is of a rambling old place with a great deal of character and a chef who knows what he's doing!

*Beers:*

Brauhaus Goslar Gose Hell (%) - Far maltier and fuller in body than the Butterhahne example with less hop, bitterness and almost zero sourness so even less like a Gose, but despite being like a square peg in a round hole style-wise it was a lovely, rich, malty and bready beer with delicious grainsack and malt flavours. (3)

Hasseroder Pils (4.8%) - This was a a very bland, almost tasteless, dryish pale fluid with an almost total lack of character and interest but I suppose that's what you get for drinking InBev shite – will I never learn? (1)

Hotel Gosequell, An der Gose 23. Open evenings only.

Situated right in the Altstadt on a ravenously pretty little cobbled lane a good mile from the station, but so is much of the rest of Goslar.

A superbly characterful hotel-cum-restaurant which was originally the 15<sup>th</sup> century guild of chefs and inside displays evidence of it's age with large beams and rustic décor. The bar serves the

local (?) Gose vom faß and it was the best example I had all evening. The accommodation was comfortable, the service friendly and the beer good – what more could you want?

#### *Beers:*

Brauhaus Goslar Gose Hell (%) – More like a proper Gose! Dry, bitter, sour yet still rather malty brew with lots of character – if only Goslar's Gose was this consistently tongue-curling and complex it would be a potential five-star beer for me! (4)

#### *Other beers consumed from bottles:*

Wernesgrüner Pils Legende (4.9%) - A winning brewery and not too bad a beer either with a fairly rich malty taste but let down by a chemically bitter finish with more maltiness, although overall it wasn't that poor and, the more I drank, the less chemically the finish became – although this is probably more me getting acclimatised to hop extract than the beer improving! (2)

Einbecker Brauherren (4.9%) – This showed me yet again that some brewers make decent beer whatever they try their hand at. A good example of a hoppy German pils, quite a rare style in my limited experience of the country, and was very pale with a resinous, flowery, hoppy aroma and taste (hops, not hop oils!) before a malty flavour balanced with yet more flowery, bitter hops and finally a bitter, malty and fairly well balanced aftertaste. (3)

Martini Nörten-Hardenberger Export (5.2%) – The perfect example of all that I both like and dislike about German beers in a curiously bipolar way; on the plus side it had all the necessary flavours such as malt, bitterness, hop, herbal notes and was well balanced, whilst on the negative face it was just another average, reasonably well-balanced, safe, unexciting, no-risks-taken, crowd pleasing beer which, whilst not being unpleasant in any way, was simply too unexciting to get more than two points. (2)

Wöltingerode Wölti-bräu (5%) – Allegedly, according to the label, from Vienenburg although I have recently found out that it is brewed by Kolberg of Altenau. We had lots of expectations for this bottle, due mainly to a hefty dollop of sediment skulking in it's murky depths, but sadly it was quite disappointing and fairly insipid with a civilized maltiness but fading out to a bland toffee aftertaste with, sadly, none of the elusive character which I was after. (2)

#### Halberstadt.

#### Heine-Bräu (Halberstädter Brauhaus), Groß Ringstraße 10.

A mere five-minute walk from the station; follow the road left, along the side of the bus station, and then follow Kehrstraße south away from the station for a short distance until the imposing hotel Heine appears on your left. Turn immediately left after the hotel and you'll find the strange modern Brauhaus just along Groß Ringstraße – it's the place which looks like a conference centre – and actually is!

We weren't filled with confidence on the way to the brewpub as the slightly desolate air of Kehrstraße wasn't exactly inspiring. However, the hotel is a lot posher than you'd imagine for a

neglected town such as Halberstadt and the brewpub is likewise posh, although it's more like a conference centre with a few brew kettles added as an afterthought. It didn't quite work for me as the atmosphere was a touch formal – far more formal than the surroundings suggested – and the beers weren't that great, but it was definitely an unexpected place to have a brewery and a very worthwhile stopover on our way to Quedlinburg. A wide range of seasonals are promised by a rather vague poster down in the lagering area, including a Gose – although several people reckon this is (or was) brewed for Brauhaus Goslar so is (or was) the same as theirs...

*Beers :*

Helles (%) - A hazy golden brew, malty and slightly bitter, quite well balanced with an interesting bitter, herby, maltsack finish which went down very well indeed. (3)

Dunkel (%) – This wasn't really to my style as it had the deep red, brown sugar and caramel characteristics I'm not a big fan of but it was also rather simplistic and plain which didn't really help it's cause. (2)

Urtyp (original, %) - A copper-coloured beer with a smooth toffee and malt flavour which unfortunately faded quickly to a thin, bland malty finish – early promise unfulfilled. (2)

Quedlinburg.

**Weinkeller zur Altstadt**, Bockstraße 10.

Situated close to Markt in the backstreets.

A cosy little place which seems to be more of a restaurant than a bar although, there being no custom apart from ours, we were permitted to drink without eating! To be honest I'd not bother making a special journey, but if you're around Markt then it's worth a scoop or two.

*Beers :*

Krostitzer pils (4.8%) – A fairly bland brew with a slight trace of bitterness that increased in the finish, not very exciting at all. (1)

Krostitzer Schwarzes (4.9%) - Slightly better; a deep brown beer with a sweetish caramel/toffee taste although it's distinctly one dimensional and could do with a lot more character. (2)

Lüddebräu, Blasiistraße 14.

Close to Markt, easily found in the winding cobbled lanes thereabout.

Being one of the early new-wave brewpubs, and situated in a historic building, you'd expect the place to ooze character... well, it sort of does, but mainly in an industrial way – it's like drinking in a factory! Very busy on our visit, the food was decent enough, but the beer wasn't as good as I'd hoped and we flagged the Pubarschknall as it contained various chemicals not in keeping with any purity law... Not bad, but there's not a lot of competition in town!

*Beers :*

Pils (4.9%) - Surprisingly good; it had a subtle grainy aroma and flavour, was fairly bitter in character, and had a good fresh, hoppy, bitter aftertaste balanced with sweet maltiness. (3)

Knuttenforz Schwarzbier (4.9%) – Not as accomplished, unfortunately, with its plain caramelly flavour blotting out any hints of fruit and malt underneath an all-consuming tide of E150 – but at least there was no saccharin to poison my body! (1)

Pubarschknall (1%) – Low-alcohol dunkel containing, according to the menu, E150 and Saccharin – erm, no thanks!!! We didn't bother, hence no score... (0)

## Magdeburg.

Alte Diamant, Lübeckerstraße 127.

Take tram No.1 towards Lerchenwuhne (you could also use trams 8 or 9 to Neustädter See, but these are plastic whereas No.1 is solidly real Tatra T4's!) and alight at Neustädter Freidhof, six stops from Altermarkt. Don't be put off by the busy road and general dereliction of the area as a cracking brewpub awaits; simply find the large dilapidated house across the road and, following the track to its left, you'll soon see the "Croc-o-Deal" café-bar in amongst the original Diamant brewery buildings. The brewery is right at the back but can't be seen.

Not the place you'd expect to brew, but the story of this new micro (see text in the main report) is heartening and I can confirm the beer is decent too. You can sit in the slightly surreal café, sup beer for ludicrously cheap prices, and watch trams pass along Lübeckerstraße. The old print of the brewery hanging by the entrance is fascinating.

*Beers :*

Magdeburger pils (?%) - A slightly hazy yellow beer with a lovely grainy, malty aroma before a malty and gentle hop flavour with fruit and an increasing bitterness in the finish – a good brew but lacking a bit of hoppy bite in my opinion, being closer to a Dortmunder in style than a pils, but it must have been good as we had three rounds and you don't get a much better recommendation than that! (3)

## Braunschweig.

**Hopfen Gartchen**, Schilde.

In the north of the city centre, close to the Alte Waag tramstop and the Schadt brewpub, this little bar serves beers from the local-ish Herforder brewery and is well worth a stop on the way to the brewpub – and, on our visit, the beers were better too!

A strange place, this – definitely a locals' pub (evidenced by them all singing along to the radio during our visit) but none the worse for that with a creditable range of beers served from the brass taps on the bar. A hideous 1960's building outside, but pleasant inside.

*Beers:*

Herforder Weinacht (5.8%) - A very attractive brassy colour it was too, although this was arguably its most interesting characteristic; the flavour was sadly bland with lots of toffee, sweetness and some fruitiness (strange for a lager!) before gently trailing off into a bland toffee softness with little else of interest going on save for the tiniest hint of spiciness, maybe cinnamon, which nudged its score up a touch. (2.5)

Frankenheimer Altbier (4.8%) – This had a mid-brown colour, a dryish taste with hints of liquorice, caramel, bitterness and malt and then a complex, subtle aftertaste with all the constituent flavours melding together in a restrained yet pleasing way. Not bad, but even better when you think it's from Warsteiner! (3)

### Schadt's Brauhaus, Marstall 2 / Höhe 28.

Situated just north of Burgplatz, on the corner of the two roads mentioned.

This very 1960's concrete building houses the usual gleaming copper brewkettles of a German brewpub although its location under a low-rise block of flats isn't the best I've ever encountered on my travels. The beers were poor on our visit but the food was excellent.

#### *Beers:*

Pils (4.8%) - A cloudy golden beer with some bitterness but mainly a cloying maltiness with a hint of bitterness towards the finish. (1)

Märzen (4.8%) – A seasonal winter beer, this exhibited a cloudy deep amber face to the world but tasted of little except some watery malt. (1)

### Zum Löwen, Waisenhausdamm 13.

Sister brewpub to Schadt's, situated to the south of the main square.

Housed in an ex-orphanage from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this was a much more attractive building – both inside and out – than Schadt's. Unfortunately, it closed at the end of 2006 for reasons unknown.

#### *Beers:*

Pils (4.8%) – A hazy, pale and reasonably hoppy brew with a restrained bitter finish. (2)

Märzen (4.8%) – This had a reddy/amber colour and a decent yet slightly bland malt taste leading to a soft toffee and very mellow finish which I'd like to have had a touch more bite to it personally, although it was far better than the Schadt's version from up the road. (2)

#### *Other beers consumed from bottles:*

Gotha Oettiger Export (5.4%) - An amber brew, malty and soft, with a mellow and very drinkable

flavour and although it lacked a bit of oomph it was still a good, solid, easy-drinking yet tasty beer. (3)

Colbitzer Heide-Bock (6.8%) – Unfortunately, this wasn't as good as I expected as it's sociable nutty and malty flavour and long biscuity finish was, whilst decent enough, not really complex or powerful enough for a beer of it's ABV. (2)

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