



Holstein Thrills

Scooping in Northern
Germany April 2006
By Gazza.

Holstein Thrills - 2006

It was time to return to Germany and explore more of its varied beer culture but, more importantly, it was time to go before the world cup kicked off and thousands of illiterate yobs proceeded to run riot through various cities chanting “Ing-er-land” (adding an extra syllable to our country’s name, as is their want) and ruining our welcome for months, or even years, to come. So, as you can probably realise from the introduction, we weren’t there for the *fußball* but for a quick weekend away before all that nonsense began!

A particular piece of luck was that we wanted to visit the northern *lander* of Schleswig-Holstein and be based in the ancient [Hanseatic](#) port of Lübeck so [Ryanair’s](#) route to Lübeck-Blankensee airport was particularly attractive – and at £36 return each even more so – and although we had to go from Stansted at least it avoided us having to trek down to the horribly-located Bristol airport and fly to the huge international airport at Hamburg. The only problem was, as usual, the drive across to Stansted in the wee hours of the morning but, as we’d not flown from there for a good five months, I assumed it would feel like exactly that long since we’d driven the A14...

Friday 14th April 2006.

Early morning, STN.

Wouldn’t feel long, eh? As we headed across past Huntingdon it all seemed so familiar to us, as if we’d only done the journey a few weeks before... what is it about the A14 that saps the soul so much? Why is it so crushingly repetitive and mind-numbing? I don’t pretend to be any sort of philosopher but my sixth sense tells me that it’s a combination of flat landscape and the lack of anywhere remotely interesting on the way across – well, that and we go that way so much in the middle of the night! Maybe next time we fly from Stansted we should do the M25 just for a bit of light relief?

Enough moaning about trunk roads, I know you don’t want to hear it, so let’s suffice it to say we arrived at the [pachydermic](#) car park at 03:20 to find it buzzing with normals dragging huge container-like suitcases on wheels across the carpark towards the bus stop and chattering in that annoyingly chirpy way people who don’t fly very often do... sorry, I know that last bit sounds extremely conceited and self-aggrandising, but to be sat on the bus in a near-comatose state after the A14 has had its way with my brain close to a gaggle of middle-aged normals clad in beige t-shirts gibbering about how they’ll get “an outside seat” or how much they’ll have to pedal before laughing uproariously isn’t my idea of fun at 03:30 in the morning... call me a miserable bastard, but there you go!

The terminal was just as busy although, unsurprisingly, the queues for flights to such destinations as Tenerife and Gran Canaria were taking the brunt of the cod-eyed council estate escapees in random “Ing-er-Land” clothing accompanied by immense suitcases no doubt stuffed with cornflakes, baked beans and brown sauce; I’d love someone to explain to me just why wearing clothes that basically say “please rip me off, I’m a dim-witted foreigner” when going abroad makes any kind of sense?

We managed to check in with our preferred sequence numbers 1 and 2 for the flight, having slickly persuaded the check-in Ada to open it early for us, and quickly scarpered through customs to avoid the queues as well as the stag parties dressed as fairies and, more surreally, Paddington bears! After taking transits 2 and 3 to gate 31, which was reasonably quiet and relaxed, we festered until departure time where time passed slowly until, thankfully, our flight was called and departed on-time and after an uneventful flight we were soon descending into Lübeck through thin breaking cloud which promised a good day ahead.

A stress-free transfer experience.

We were soon through the relaxed passport control and, after following the signs for the exit, we found ourselves in the arrivals hall within ten seconds – this was a *very* small airport! We acquired some euros from a cashpoint and made for the bus stop across the carpark but, guttingly, as we opened the doors of the arrivals hall a bus pulled away from the stop which meant we'd have to wait half an hour for the next one as it was a bank holiday, meaning a 30-minute frequency rather than a 20-minute one. Undaunted, as it was still only 09:00, we had a quick coffee in the airport restaurant before trying for the next bus into town. As we stood at the stop everything was quiet apart from the birds; no sounds came from the airport, no traffic passed, and over the road was just one bar and then fields and woodland! How rural, I thought to myself, as the bus rounded the corner and slowed to a halt in front of us.

We paid the driver our €2.15 each and had a total choice of seats – the bus was empty – so we enjoyed our personal transfer into town as the bus travelled along country roads and then into the outskirts of the city. I'd expected the route to call first at the bus station but, strangely, we swung around the ringroad and crossed the river before cutting across the city centre, giving teasing glimpses of some glorious architecture, before re-crossing the river and finally stopping at the bus / train station some 500 metres outside the centre where we alighted.

After a brief spell of geographical stupidity we located our hotel (we couldn't check in yet but knew we had enough time to see where it was) and bought a bottle of beer from a corner shop for the room that night as it sounded like a micro-brewery beer - Mecklenburgische Brauerei Lübz von Raven Pilsener – (it's actually owned by Carlsberg and was predictably bland and, strangely for Germany, over-sweet!) before stocking up on supplies of the other reason we'd come to Lübeck – Niederegger marzipan – from the shop at the bus station. We also bought some breakfast in the form of some superb cheese-coated salad rolls and, bizarrely, an Easter cake in the shape of a hare called an *Osterhaas* from the bakery in the same location; things were looking surreal already!

Hanseatic splendour.

We took a walk into the centre of town past the shiny new tourist information office thence via the impressive 14th century Holstentor – or it would have been impressive if it wasn't clad in scaffolding and draped with passable images of itself – before admiring some exquisite [Hanseatic](#) salt warehouses alongside the river. It's a good sign of having travelled a bit when things from different places start to knit themselves together and make sense as in the stepped gables we were now appreciating; when I'd first seen them in Gent and Brugge I'd assumed they were a Belgian thing but as we'd subsequently seen them in Tallinn and now Lübeck (and having read about the other Hanseatic cities such as Gdansk and Riga) it was good to see how the tendrils of architecture have spread throughout the cities of Europe over the years! See, I'm not just a beer bore but also an architecture bore now...

We spent most of the day wandering around the compact egg-shaped island of a city, gawping at the gorgeous old castellated buildings, before returning to the hotel to check in which proved to be an interesting experience in itself! The bloke behind the desk was a very strange character indeed who spoke English with an accent that I couldn't really pin down and was extremely animated and over-friendly in his ways... of course, I love a character, but I think he had too much of it for his own good! We found our room overlooking the bus station to be adequate with all necessary facilities including heritage creaky beds and floorboards; I wondered if the Hanseatic cities all had collapsible beds (after my episode in Tallinn) but after sitting heavily on all parts of the bed I declared it safe and fit for purpose!

We headed out again to see yet more of the city, including the stunning Markt with its associated town hall and church – and some hideous 1960's monstrosity to ruin the experience – before having a coffee in the [Niederegger](#) shop and café. For those unfortunate souls who

haven't sampled this pinnacle of marzipan making let me explain a few things to you about this most superb of confectionary items. Real marzipan is not made in the UK – or at least very rarely – as, like our chocolate, the pitiful excuses for confectionary our producers churn out are of poor quality and laced with additives and too much sugar. German marzipan on the other hand, and Lübecker marzipan in particular, has a very high almond content resulting in a cakey, nutty and totally delicious taste experience which all lovers of confectionary should try – you can even get it in Tascos these days!

Walking into the Niederegger shop was akin to the proverbial “boy in a sweetshop” (that's a pretty poor analogy as it was a sweetshop) with all conceivable shapes and sizes of marzipan arrayed on shelves which seemed to stretch for miles around the room; we roamed the shelves with amazement, choosing items to take home, and with difficulty tore ourselves away for more sightseeing... one surreal thing was every large window on the outside of the shop contained a full-size marzipan model of a famous person or thing (such as a Trabant) giving a date of the depicted event and declaring that Niederegger was in fact older than all of them!

We saw some amusing things during our wanderings, including a very graphic sign in a church which indicated - in no uncertain terms - that dogs weren't to shit in the vicinity of the building, as well as a sign on a bridge limiting tanks (the big metal things used in wars) to 60kph! By 18:00 we were flagging, having walked what must have been four or five miles along most roads in the city, and decided a beer was in order so we headed off to [Im Alten Zolln](#), a bar which Fudge had recommended as being the best in the city, where I was hoping for a few scoops!

The scooping begins!

Im Alten Zolln had a lot going for it; we hadn't seen many bars during our extended wanderings around the city, it had an impressive Hanseatic exterior, and it was far enough from the centre that it wouldn't get wedged with tourists. We soon found a table in the gloomy half-light inside and studied the menu to see what was on offer although I'd already seen six taps as we entered which promised a few scoops! We chose the Haake-Beck krausen (the local's unfiltered version of Becks from Bremen) and Einbecker Urbock and found both to be decent although the fact we were dying of thirst from all our trudging around probably bumped up their respective scores by a couple of points; I'm not usually a fan of ImBev beers but the Haake-Beck was a fair brew with some lemony hop character and a yeasty finish, and the Einbecker – well, I expected more, to be honest, but Sue likes toffee-ish beers more than I do so she polished off that one!

There was a beer on the menu called “Dübels Brücker Dunkel” so I tried to extract the gen from the affable barman as to what it actually was without much success; he simply smiled and said it was “secret” and made “for them” so I gave up and ordered one plus a Jever Pils. I didn't know what to expect from it but I was a bit disappointed to find the dunkel thin, caramelly and having a short burnt sugar finish which gave it a rating of “very average”! (I've done some research and reckon it's from St Pauli of Hamburg, owned by Carlsberg) whilst the Jever was a distinctive, bitter, grassy brew with a tasty, grassy and bitter finish and a lot better than I thought it would be.

The plates of food emerging from the kitchen were starting to indicate to us that maybe we should indulge in some sustenance, but we'd already decided that it would probably be best to eat in the brewpub as we've had so many great meals in them all over Europe so, gazing longingly at the delicious-looking fodder, we paid up and headed off for Bräuberger, Lübeck's only brewpub, for the one beer on offer there plus, hopefully, some gut-busting German food!

The food-scooping brewpub.

We walked back into the centre of Lübeck and within ten minutes we were inside the brewpub which had It's copper on prominent display in the middle of the floor and some random copper pipework snaking off to destination unknown in the floor; I'm always a bit suspicious when I see

this sort of thing as I can't see when the place would be quiet enough to allow brewing to occur... I soon ascertained that only the one regular beer was available, the Zwickelbier, so we indulged ourselves in two large ones of that and sat at our barrel-table to see what it was like.

The beer was fairly hazy and amber in colour and seemed to be drawn from a wooden cask sat on the bar, although I was suspicious – several brewpubs in Germany (no names...) have fake wooden casks perched on the bar from which beer is dispensed in what is basically a misleading fashion, so I needed more evidence before I'd accept it as "from the wood". Once I'd tasted the beer, however, I was more convinced of its provenance as it displayed a soft, woody, malty aroma and a smooth subtle toffee-malt flavour with hints of chewed matches... we finally got the confirmation when, as the cask ran dry, the barman unfolded an amazingly well thought-out slide device on the stairs and proceeded to slide a new cask down it, then used the block and tackle which I thought had been for show to hoist the wooden beastie into position...

"That's how much I know" I thought, ruefully, as I finished off my beer.

We'd been studying the food menu with limited success; it seems to be a principle of all guide books, even the otherwise decent [Rough Guides](#), that whatever food item you need to look up in the menu reader section won't be featured – you'll be informed of the translations of all manner of other irrelevant foods like roasted intestines, poached brains or deep-fried bollocks but local dishes? No chance, mate! We tried asking the waitress what a certain dish was with limited success as she only spoke a small amount of English so, 25% certain what we'd be getting, Sue had something which included steak and I went for a total scoop - a Lamb Haxe!

Another zwickelbier soon arrived which I set about with gusto as I was getting into this soft yet complex brew the more I drank of it. Next came the food and we saw that we'd been partly right in our translation of Sue's meal – yes, it was steak, but there were four of them from different animals (though unfortunately no winners). My lamb haxe was huge and unbelievably tender to the point of the meat physically dropping from the bone when lightly prodded whilst Sue's steaks were excellent, especially with the rich beer gravy and dumplings, but when you're in Germany at a brewpub what do you expect? I don't think we've ever been let down by food in brewpubs (or any other pubs, come to that) so we munched happily and drank contentedly, glad that it was "service as normal"!

Our food finished, we had the luxury of one more beer to wash the excellent victuals down before paying up and wandering the short distance back to the hotel over the river Trave and past the Holstentor, happy with our first day, but with more scooping potential to follow by way of our visit to two brewpubs in the northeast of Schleswig-Holstein in the morning.

Saturday 15th April 2006.

"That saved us a walk!"

We were up early for the 09:05 train to Neustadt-in-Holstein where my research indicated we'd find the Klüvers Brauhaus alongside the harbour, although I wasn't quite sure where the rail station was; if it was where I hoped it wasn't then we might be in for a fair old walk to begin our days' scooping campaign...

With Lübeck station right behind our hotel it was only a minute's walk to reach it, although it is in the process of being totally rebuilt and everything is currently concrete and hazard tapes; we bought our Schleswig-Holstein *Lander* ticket from the ticket machine (27€) which would take us anywhere in the area, including Hamburg, until 03:00 the next day; Lander tickets are good value if you do a bit of travelling and, even better, up to five people can use one ticket so the more the merrier is the rule! We trooped down some temporary stairs to our train and secured

ourselves a decent seat to see the scenery as we travelled along the coast to Neustadt whilst the train filled up at an alarming rate around us.

We departed on-time and the journey was very pleasant with the train running close to the shore of Lübecker bay most of the way. The sun was out, the sky was blue, and even the students on board the train were slagging off crap beer; as we passed a bar located on the end of a station whose name I forget, one of the disaffected youths opposite us burst into a torrent of abuse against the Duckstein beer on sale there! (I reckon this is fair enough as, although I've never tried the stuff, it's brewed by Feldschlösschen Braunschweig – owned by Carlsberg - so I think we can safely assume it's going to be rubbish!)

As we approached Neustadt I was a bit worried about where the station would be located; if it was where I thought it was we were in for a walk of about a mile although I'd not revealed that to Sue for obvious reasons! However, my wishes were granted as we swung right off the mainline and towards the centre of town where we stopped at a small dead-end station with an attached line of bus stands – this looked a lot more sociable! When we emerged from the train and found a convenient map it seemed as if we'd struck the jackpot as the brewpub was only a five-minute stroll over the harbour, although now we had a new problem; we were so early it didn't open for around twenty minutes! I felt very smug at this lucky escape as we strolled off past a huge grain silo towards the centre of town to see what we would find there...

The biggest bunny I've ever seen.

We stopped for a minute to admire the view of the brewpub in its pretty location alongside the harbour before pressing on over the bridge into the centre of Neustadt. The town seemed very busy for a Saturday but the reason soon became clear as soon as we entered the main square – there was an Easter market and fair in progress and it seemed as if all the townspeople had turned out for the event. After trolling around the various stalls and wishing we could buy some of the delicious-looking cheese to take home we arrived at a stall which didn't seem to be selling anything unless it was mammoth rabbits! The biggest bunny I've ever clapped eyes on was hopping around in a disinterested fashion on a pasting table whilst locals stroked his fur and tickled his enormous ears; I hoped he wasn't for eating but a sign behind him told me (via my dodgy translation) that he was a show rabbit and definitely not standing by for consumption!

With the time now approaching eleven we mooched back down the hill towards the brewpub which, for a gut-wrenching minute, we thought was closed as all that seemed to be open was an ice cream stall located at one end of it! I asked how we could find the brewpub and was pointed in the direction of the entrance cunningly hidden behind a huge sign for Klüvers Brauhaus... ah well, observation has never been my strongest attribute, so in we went and found it empty apart from the barstaff bottling beer into litre swingtop bottles and applying labels; this was a good sign, I thought, although I hadn't yet seen the brewplant. What an old cynic, eh?

We were warmly received by the staff, who seemed relieved to be granted an excuse to stop labelling bottles, and we quickly obtained a the gen as to what beers were available; pils, dunkel, weiss and a seasonal which was described as "stark" so, deciding to leave the wheat beer as we had an appointment with a bus in only an hour's time, glasses of the pils and dunkel were quickly ordered. As the beers were poured I was full of hope for the pilsener as, hopefully, we'd be able to sample a proper north-German example of the style; okay, the Jever we'd imbibed the previous night had been decent enough, but I was after an unfiltered hop-monster!

Pure Quality.

The beers soon arrived and I noticed that it wasn't only Berlin whose dunkels were pale – this one was a similar deep copper colour and toffeeish in aroma – so I left it to Sue who prefers that style of beer and picked up the pils, full of trepidation. It was a hazy yellow colour with a huge

billowing head but the unmistakable aroma of citrusy hop had already begun to percolate out from its frothy prison and it smelt good! Unable to wait any longer I took a long sup from the glass and swirled it around my mouth to get the full flavour experience, whereupon my whole oral cavity gave the impression of being roughly slapped around by a large hopbine wrapped in a lemon! To say I was delivered far more than I expected would be putting it mildly and I gibbered away to Sue about this superb brew, suddenly wishing we had an extra hour there!

I took another swig of the pils and tried to put the beer's superb flavour into words. The huge head had by now subsided allowing the glorious lemon jelly aroma to burst forth to the atmosphere, and what an aroma it was – hops, citrus, sweet malt and a glorious freshness which just implored me to drink more. The flavour followed on pretty much in the same vein with an intense dry, mouth-puckering bitterness, citrusy hop, freshly-baked bread, a slight yeastiness, and then a long, dry, bitter and malty finish which lasted for ages and begged me to have another gulp of this glorious beverage – which I did, of course.

I reluctantly swapped glasses with Sue – who was alarmed how little of the pils remained in the glass – and started on the dunkel. I must admit I had preconceptions although I always try to blank out such things when tasting beers, but the beer simply backed up what I originally thought about Northern German dunkels; too toffeeish, not enough bite. Don't get me wrong, it was a decent beer and I'd drink it again now, but compared to the divine nectar which had been the pils it never really stood a chance – maybe I should have gone for the dunkel first?

Our glasses were drained and we still had 40 minutes to wait for our bus to Eutin so, without any hesitation, I ordered another pils and a glass of the "starkbier" just because it was an Easter special and, therefore, a huge winner! The sociable barman informed me that it was a "doppelbock" and, upon plonking the glasses in front of us, declared "enjoy!" before returning to his bottling duties. I picked up the glass of the dark red brew and nosed it, not knowing what to expect, but one sniff later I knew that this was one hell of a beer!

I took an exploratory swig and this time it wasn't a lemon-covered hop smacking me in the face but a treacle toffee soaked maltsack; this brewery certainly didn't go along with the usual German predilection for safe, balanced beers! The aroma was rich, fruity and malty which led into an explosion of flavour on the tongue – malt, chocolate, treacle toffee, caramel and liquorice all made themselves known alongside some spicity notes. The finish was mellow and very long with alcohol and dryness becoming more prominent over the malty, chocolatey and toffeeish flavours. I was stunned – two superb beers from one little brewpub, some of the best I've had in a long time, and the day had only just begun!

By now our time was running out so we finished off the beers, both superb, and admired the shiny stainless steel brewplant on the way to the toilets before paying up and leaving. The sociable barstaff wished us well and I asked, in my best German, how strong the Doppelbock was, which brought a smile to the barman's face.

"Ahhh, the starkbier! You like it?" he beamed with a sense of pride.

"Yes, it was excellent!" I enthused, "how strong was it?"

"8.5%!" laughed the barman, "a serious beer!"

With that we said our goodbyes and crossed the bridge back to the bus station where, according to the German railways website, a bus to Eutin should arrive saving us going back into Lübeck for another train back out in basically the same direction!

A bonus at the bus station.

We were back at the bus station, or "transport interchange" as it would be called in these days of using large words when little ones would do, with ten minutes to spare for the 5518 bus to Eutin. Whilst we made use of the toilets so as to dispose of the by-products of the excellent beer we'd just consumed I had a peek at the little kiosk there and it looked for all the world like a scene

from the Czech republic with a bloke sat behind a small window selling all manner of fags, beers and assorted tat whilst blokes sat on chairs or leant against the kiosk swigging bottles of beer.

For those who have never been to Czech or never noticed this obsession they have with kiosks, let me explain the principles. Czechs never like being more than 10 metres from any point selling beer, this is well known, so to satisfy this requirement you'll find little kiosks everywhere – on every platform at train stations, in the street (not actually in it, obviously, but alongside it), in any spare hole between buildings, and even temporary ones which can spring up like mushrooms anywhere at all. These kiosks all sell bottles of beer (usually industrial slops but some do have local stuff) for around 20p which keeps the locals happy - and, presumably, pissed – at all hours of the day; I've seen some kiosks surrounded by people going to work at 04:00 who just happened to stop off for a beer whilst doing so... culture, eh?

I predict that, if man ever gets to Mars, when the spacecraft touches down and the be-suited astronauts gingerly step down onto the sulphur-encrusted landscape, the first thing they see won't be some google-eyed alien with a plasma ray-gun but some Czech bloke glowering at them from behind the tiny window of his kiosk grunting "Pivo, Pivo!"

My quick glance into the kiosk told me that there were two winners in there; Achtern Diek Landbier and Dithmarscher Urtyp from the [Dithmarscher](#) Brauerei in Marne, out on the west coast of Schleswig-Holstein, so the transaction was quickly made and the bottles were in the bag before Sue returned; it's all that practice in Czech that did it, honest Guv! The bus soon arrived, amusingly indulging in a spot of road-rage with a car which had chosen that very moment to drive the wrong way around the bus station, so we got on and paid for the journey; I hadn't been sure if our lander ticket would be valid but, even now we knew it wasn't, this move would still only cost us a couple of quid and, more importantly, save us a good hour on the original move which would have been to take a train back into Lübeck for one back out to Eutin!

After a brief thrash along deserted lush green country lanes we arrived at Eutin station and set about locating the main square on which the brewpub was located. This proved to be a tad more difficult than it should have been, mainly due to us reading the signs wrong, but we were soon there and very relieved to see the brewpub open – I had been unable to find any opening times for the place although I'd assumed it would be open on a Saturday afternoon!

Beware of the Nordsee Krabben.

St. Michaelis Bräu turned out to be a rather nice pub with the customary brewing kit on show in one corner and waitresses hurtling around at a great rate of knots serving up mugs of beer and plates of delicious-looking victuals. We found a table and, on reading the menu, immediately decided we were ravenous so ordered a mug of each of the three beers available (Pils, Rotbier and Tafelbier) along with huge [cast-iron pans](#) of "Schlemmerpfanne" (Pork fillets with fried potatoes, mushrooms and ham) and "Braumeisters Fischpfanne" which contained three types of fish, fried potatoes, a delicious tangy sauce, small shrimps and a fearsome giant prawn sat astride it complete with a scary-looking pincer – this would be the Nordseekrabben we'd seen on the menu then!

After dismembering this formidable crustacean I felt safe to polish off the food which was, as is usual in German brewpubs, superb and it soon became apparent that Northern German dishes have more vegetables than their contemporaries in other areas, i.e.; they actually have some! Sue's *pfanne* was equally delicious so, our hunger quashed, we turned our attention to the beers; the pils was golden with a lovely full-bodied dry "Northern" bitterness (but nowhere near as bitter as the example in Klüvers!) and a long, nutty, balanced finish. The Rotbier had an intense toasty caramelly and burnt barley flavour with a dry treacle-toffee finish overlaid with some perfumey hops – very interesting indeed – whilst the Tafelbier was hazy and amber with a rich, malty, bitter flavour and a delicious "grain sack" finish.

Time was marching on and we still had to squeeze in a visit to Hamburg that day, so we paid up and plodded the short distance back to the station, comfortably replete with beer and nordsee krabben. As we left the pub, however, some cabaret was laid on for us; a brat in a pushchair with shopping bags festooned on the handles suddenly lurched over backwards to the consternation of the family – and brat – but amusement of most other people present! The sun had come out in full force whilst we'd been in St. Michaelis Bräu and, as we stood on the platform, it mercilessly blazed down from azure skies onto my bald spot – I could almost feel it cooking under the unrelenting solar barrage of UV rays! A quick application of sunbloc later and I was feeling much happier whereupon, as if it were sulking because I'd spoilt it's fun, the sun flounced off behind some clouds like a ten-year old taking his cricket bat home!

Our train arrived a few minutes late and we piled aboard for the half-hour run back to Lübeck where I assumed we'd have to change trains for Hamburg but, fortuitously, ours carried on to that very destination so we remained in our seats for another 45 minutes! It seemed as if it were a day for amusement value at the expense of others as, somewhere along the way, the heavy doors to the vestibule slid open and a normal appeared, making both Sue and I sit up in amazement as he looked a lot like Brian Francis from Cardiff (as if one Uncle Knobby isn't enough!). I don't think it was him, however, as he wasn't mumbling about "tits" and, as a bonus nugget of entertainment, got his bag stuck in the doors as they closed behind him - and it was a very commodious bag, requiring the doors to be opened to their full extent before he could retrieve it with much muttering and cursing in German!

Hamburg.

After the peace and quiet of the north Hamburg seemed, by comparison, like a riot of sounds, people and traffic. We left the huge impressively-roofed station (after a bit of confusion over exits, as per normal) then walked along Mönckebergstraße to the town hall where we sat and studied the maps and gen we had with us. We had enough time to do a bit of sightseeing before we launched into the three brewpubs so we decided to have a look at the famous [Nikolaikirche](#) (the world's tallest building from 1847 to 1876); this is famous as there's only the massive bell tower remaining as the rest was blasted to pieces during a British air-raid in July 1943 – paradoxically, the church had been built by Briton [Sir George Gilbert Scott](#) 80 years previously, and what had taken him 18 years to build took his countrymen but an hour to destroy in a particularly ironic piece of evidence of the futility of war.

As some of you will know I'm not a massive fan of lifts and their ilk but, looking at the monstrous tower thrusting skywards and the crumbling walls surrounding it, we decided that ascending the tower would be a great way of getting to grips with a city which we'd have all too little time available to explore owing to the scooping frenzy of the morning. At the base of the tower was a little kiosk inhabited by a jovial-looking lady who sold us two tickets to the top (and back, thankfully) so we boarded the lift which had just descended from the heights of the tower and I resolved to be brave!

As the lift smoothly ascended the tower, the glass walls giving a hair-raising view of the tower's interior masonry and the views beyond, I eyed the height indicator with concern as it clicked along to 75 metres – this was pretty high for a lift although I suppose being able to see the interior of the tower and the precipitous views magnified the height somewhat; I'm sure some of the tall buildings I've been in have had taller lifts than this one. Eventually we reached the observation platform close to the top and stepped out gingerly although once looking out over the city the spectacular views overtook my fear of just how high up we were! We were treated to a magnificent panorama of the *Altstadt* and *Speicherstadt*, the warehouse city, which looked interesting and was our next call being conveniently on the way to two of the city's brewpubs.

After a good gawp at Hamburg from the lofty heights of the Nikolaikirche we took the lift back down to terra firma and wandered over to the dockside and the *Speicherstadt*, which is the world's largest self-contained warehouse complex with a deliciously Victorian array of canals and cobbled streets connecting all the towering brick edifices together. The whole area is under protection from development which also means that the buildings can't be altered resulting in being able to see (and we did) the original winches and pulleys fitted to the eaves being used for their original purpose of hoisting goods through doors several storeys into the air. The whole area gives the feeling of being not a stuffed museum but a living, working one and is so popular with the city's inhabitants that some of the warehouses further to the west are being converted into flats and suchlike although how they got around the protection orders isn't mentioned!

By this time we were feeling the pace a little so stopped off for a reviving orange juice and superb piece of cherry *torte* in the old power station, now in use as a museum and tourist office as well as containing scale models of the future plans for the area, before pressing on along the cobbled lane towards the first brewpub of the afternoon; as we walked, our shoes clattering on the cobbles, I half expected to see lines of men in flat caps, smoking the German equivalent of woodbines, arriving for work in the warehouses such was the unspoilt nature of the buildings we were passing but instead we only saw the present-day vans of the current inhabitants which wasn't half as interesting but far more realistic.

Two into one doesn't go.

We soon reached our first target, the Hanseat Bräuhaus on Zippelhaus, just over the canal from the Speicherstadt and it immediately looked a bit false; surely those huge copper vessels in the window couldn't really be used for brewing beer for just this one pub? We ventured inside, eyeing the copper vessels and pipework with some apprehension, and when we found the bar it all became clear; we knew the pub was linked with the Groninger Bräuhaus immediately behind on Ost-West Straße by a passage, but after seeing the bar it was clear that they shared something much more intimate than that – a brewery! Two beers were available, Hanseat Weiss and Groninger Pils, which more or less concluded that the two places were one and the same and I reckoned I knew which one brewed, and is wasn't the one we were in at that point...

A glass of both beers was quickly received and we tucked into them thirstily but, sadly, neither beer was anywhere near the quality of the beers we'd imbibed a short while ago during our morning scooping trip to the north-east of the region, and I'd even go as far as to say they were very poor examples of brewing and certainly not what I expect from Germany after our recent experience. The weiss was thin, sweet and clovey with some banana sweet tastes (anyone remember those bright yellow foamy bananas which, as kids, we used to buy for a penny from the corner shop in that blissfully ignorant age when we knew nothing about artificial additives?) with a slightly bitter finish and, if I'm honest, was one of the worst wheat beers I've ever drunk! The Pils, badged as being from Groninger, was very deep amber – more of a Vienna than a pils to me – with, again, a thin malty taste with some phenols and vague hints of toffee and bitterness giving another very poor brew.

We forced down the beers and moved around the corner to the Groninger Bräuhaus which was more obviously a "proper" brewpub with some open fermenters full of bubbling wort visible through windows behind the bar, although the blatantly fake wooden cask the beer was being dispensed from (you could see daylight through the staves!) wasn't a plus point. The same two beers were on sale here but, as a final check, I asked the waitress if both pubs brewed; she confirmed my suspicions by informing me that all beer was from Groninger, so we ordered two glasses of the pils to see if it was better than the example we'd suffered ten minutes previously – predictably, it was exactly the same, so we indulged in the decent hot buffet being served alongside the bar which included some excellent *Bratkartoffeln* and *Leberkäse* to wash it down.

In the kingdom of the blind the one-hopped brewer is king.

There was one more brewpub to scoop although I wasn't very hopeful of anything worth drinking, as it was a member of the Albrecht chain which produces very average beers – or at least the one we'd visited thus far had, and reports from others reinforced this opinion. Nevertheless, we reasoned, we may as well take a look as - owing to the piss-poor beer of the last place - we now had a while longer in town to fill than I'd anticipated and the brewpub was situated right behind the town hall which was vaguely on the way back to the station and our train back to Lübeck.

We soon arrived at Albrecht and if I'd not seen photos of it on the net beforehand we would by all accounts have walked past thinking it just another office block like the rest of the bland modern buildings all around! Inside the unassuming exterior, however, lurked a reasonable attempt to create a homely *Bräuhaus* atmosphere inside a modern concrete structure with the usual suspects such as hopbines, big copper kettles and scrubbed pine tables arranged around the place. We found a table close to the hulking coppers and studied the menu; the usual Albrecht beers, Kupfer and Messing, were available plus a seasonal – which, just as it had been in Berlin, was the weiss! Ah well, at least we didn't have to have two rounds...

The beers soon arrived and, I must admit, were a lot better than I'd been telling myself they were going to be; Messing was a hazy pale beer, surprisingly bitter, with citrus, hop and resin bursting out of the glass, leading to a solidly malty body and a rich, malty, bitter and lemony finish – in fact, this was a very good example of a Northern German pils albeit with some unusual flavours lurking alongside the usual suspects. Kupfer was less of a star than its stablemate although it still managed to pack lots of toffee-like dryness and some maltiness into its flavour and I think it would have scored higher if we'd tried it first.

Our scooping done, we paid up and wandered back to the station where we partook of some mouth-puckeringly refreshing orange juice before climbing aboard the train for the 45-minute trip back to Lübeck. Once back at the construction site labelled a train station we only had a two-minute stroll back to our hotel where, in usual fashion, we had some “room bottles” to scratch, namely the two [Dithmarscher](#) beers from the little kiosk at Neustadt's bus station. The excellent labels on the bottles unfortunately belied the inoffensive contents, however, with both beers being very pale, dry, slightly grassy and grainy brews with little character to distinguish between them, so into the book they went and that was it – our scooping was done for another trip!

Sunday was spent wandering around the bits of Lübeck we'd not managed to cover thus far (and some bits we already had) although the drizzly conditions didn't help a lot. The rain eased around 12:00 so we celebrated with a Niederegger frenzy at their shop, buying all manner of marzipan bars and shapes, before taking a final look at the superb town hall then catching the bus back to the tiny airport, whose departure lounge transpired to be a large tent with no shops – cheers then – although we did indulge in a huge baked potato which came with various vegetables and salad items first.

Ryanair did us proud as usual and we were back in Stansted 15 minutes early for the mind-numbing drive back to Worcester and home although, by now, my mind had switched to my forthcoming Argentina trip which was now only 6 weeks away...

Conclusions.

[Schleswig-Holstein](#) isn't really a destination for the beer scooper with only a very small number of brewpubs and a few larger concerns to go at, although the beers some of them do make are spectacularly good - in particular those from Klüvers Brauhaus in Neustadt-in-Holstein. If you're purely after scoops then I'd look at somewhere like Berlin or Bayern as there are far more beers to fill your book with there, but if you want to see some scenery and historical towns as well as

drink a few decent beers then this area may well be worth a go, especially now Lübeck's airport is well served by cheap Ryanair flights.

[Lübeck](#) is a beautiful town with many original Hanseatic buildings remaining and rewards a day's wandering immensely. Unfortunately it only has one brewpub, Bräuberger, and that only brews one beer so you can see you're not going to fill your scoops book up overnight here! It also seems to be short on decent bars for some reason (although we saw some promising ones along Große Burgstraße on the Sunday) with only one real recommendation – and even that is a good ten-minute walk from the brewpub!

[Hamburg](#) is a fascinating city, almost flattened during WW2, and mostly rebuilt in drab fashion although the *Speicherstadt* is an essential visit and the area around the *rathaus* repays a ramble. The rail station is a glorious example of Victoriana with its arched roof soaring over its many platforms giving a huge impression of space and airiness and, as usual in Germany, the concourse is full of food stalls selling snacks and suchlike although bars are a bit thin on the ground and, of those we saw, we wouldn't bother with any of them. With a journey time of only 45 minutes to Lübeck and trains at least every hour a visit can help to bump up your beer score although, as I've said previously, the two brewpubs aren't the best in Germany and there's not that much else around to go for, partly caused by the omnipotence of the local Holsten brewery which is owned by Carlsberg with obvious implications for the quality.

All that said, the area is well worth a quick weekend away if you're not simply after the scoops and want to see some historical towns and cities although, if you were desperate, there would be enough to do with [brewpubs](#) in Kiel and Schleswig amongst others, all reachable on trains from Lübeck which is also a mecca for lovers of sweet things; if you like marzipan then [Niederegger's](#) shop and museum, just behind the town hall in Lübeck, is a must - this is real marzipan, made almost entirely with only sugar and almonds, and makes most other marzipan taste like the sweet, mass-produced crap it is.

Schleswig-Holstein is also a cheap region to get to by air; our flight was only £36 return all-in so, overall, a weekend in the region is a cheap and interesting trip away which will show you a side to Germany you might not have seen before – vegetables with food, oversize prawns and all!

Thanks to Chris Fudge who supplied loads of gen about the various bars and brewpubs in the region and also to [Paul Harrop](#) for his gen and also for not being too annoyed when I managed to scoop the only brewpub he hasn't yet been to in the area!

Hotel Gen.

We stayed at the [Stadt Lübeck](#) at Am Bahnhof 21 which can be found between the ZOB (bus station) and rail station at Lübeck. The price varies but hovers around EUR63/night for a double with breakfast; old-fashioned is one comment which springs to mind although it was decent enough and the breakfast was "help yourself". I'd recommend it as much for the sociable location as the price.

Getting there and getting around there.

The main city of the region, Hamburg, has a major [international airport](#) – meaning it's mainly used by flag carriers and thus usually unsuitable for those of us who wish to pay bugger-all for our flights. [easyJet](#) go from Bristol, however, so at least it is reachable by budget carriers and more may follow. Lübeck-Blankensee is the easiest entry point, nevertheless, as it's tiny [airport](#) is served by [Ryanair](#) from Stansted and Prestwick from which flights can be had for as little as £35 return if you book in advance – sometimes even cheaper when their frequent offers are on although, as usual, midweek flights are the ones which get discounted to 1p or suchlike. The

bus service into Lübeck from the airport - [No.6](#) - is frequent (every 20 mins, every 30 mins Sundays and holidays) and easy to use (pay the driver, change given, €2.15) and run by the local authority, see the website [here](#), and it's only about [4 miles](#) from the centre of town.

Unfortunately for lovers of rail-based public transport neither Hamburg or Lübeck have tram systems although [Hamburg](#) has a proper U-bahn running below it's streets. Lübeck has a comprehensive bus service which has it's ZOB (terminus) 25 metres from the rail station, out to the west beyond the river, but easily walkable from the centre – or brewpub - in ten minutes. Rail services within the region are reasonably frequent but can be a little “folksy” in their operation and also a little expensive, although the Schleswig-Holstein “[Länder](#)” ticket, available from ticket machines for €27 or ticket offices for €29, allows up to five people to travel throughout the whole region until 03:00 next morning and makes economic sense if there are a few of you and you're doing a few trips around the various brewpubs. There is also an efficient bus service linking many of the towns which can help considerably; for journey planning, see the excellent [HAFAS](#) system which includes buses, trains and just about any other mode of transport you can think of.

Hamburg is a major hub on the [DB](#) (German railways) network and you can catch trains to almost anywhere in Germany – and beyond – from there making a visit to the region possible as an add-on from, say, Düsseldorf or Berlin or even from further afield; Brussels for example. See [HAFAS](#) for a pan-European journey planner that works!

Recommended Brewpubs and Bars.

As I've already stated, Schleswig-Holstein isn't really the place to come in order to fill your scooping book with juicy winners, although there are beers to be had – some with a bit of effort - and a number of them are excellent brews too. The following list is all the brewpubs and bars we visited on our trip and, as is now customary, a short annotation of how to get to each one and a bit of useless wittering about them to fill a bit more space of my 250mb server allocation which I'm determined to use somehow...

Lübeck

[Bräuberger zu Lübeck](#), Alfstraße 36. Fri 17:00 onwards, Sat 18:00 onwards, Sun closed.

- Easy to find in the *Altstadt*, this brewpub produces just one beer – zwickelbier (unfiltered) – but it's a decent drop and, to make amends for only increasing your tally by one, serves it from wooden casks which are most amusingly slid down the stairs on a foldaway ramp then lifted onto the bar with block and tackle. Inside is somehow relaxing yet boisterous at the same time with three levels of drinking; the basement seems to be the most popular and there is a food dispensary on the top floor which sends out some excellent meals. There are rumours of other beers sometimes appearing although we didn't see any on our visit.

- From the rail or bus stations, cross the large roundabout and follow signs into the centre. Cross the river and canal via the Puppenbrücke (bridge with statues on it), past the Holstentor (big red twin-tower), turn left along the riverside, and Alfstraße is second on the right with the brewpub being a short distance up the road on the left.

[Im alten Zolln](#), Mühlenstraße 93.

- One of the only “pubby” places we found during our stay in Lübeck, this excellent bar has separate rooms and a decent selection of beers available from it's six taps including unfiltered versions of the local Becks beer amongst others. The food looked delicious too although we

didn't eat there. The landlord is sociable but won't tell you who makes the house dunkel, although I have strong suspicions it's St Pauli (Carlsberg) in Hamburg,

- Mühlenstraße stretches from close to Markt all the way over the Kanal-Trave to the south-east of the *Altstadt* and is a major thoroughfare containing all manner of shops and restaurants as well as, almost at the river, this cracking little place. Simply head out of town along the road and you'll find the pub on the left at a road junction after about 400 metres.

There were some decent-looking bars along Große Burgstraße although it was Sunday so we couldn't check what they were like! Try **Cafe Prinz** for Flensburger Pils and Dunkel, or **Alterburg** at No.19 for Budvar *vom fass*.

Neustadt-in-Holstein.

Klüvers Brauhaus, Schiffbrücke 2. Open from 11:00.

- Fairly new brewpub (2004) with a lovely location smack on the waterside of this quiet little harbour yet only five minutes from the rail station or town centre. Modern and clean in design, with a stainless steel brewery much in evidence, this place produces some of the best German beers I've had with the pilsener being a classic of the North German style and the seasonal Doppelbock being a classic brew in my humble opinion. Also bottles it's beer in swingtop 1-litre bottles or small kegs to take away! Very sociable staff and superb beer, what more could you possibly want?

- Take the bus or train to Neustadt's terminus. Walk towards the big silos, turn left, and then right at the T-junction and walk over the bridge across the canal. The brewpub is visible on the right on the opposite side of the harbour – an easy five minutes from the stations.

There is also a **kiosk** at Neustadt ZOB (bus station) which sells a few bottled beers including Dithmarscher from Marne and Jever alongside a few others.

Eutin.

St Michaelis Bräu, Am Markt 11.

- Very popular brewpub, and rightly so if our visit was anything to go by with good beer and top-notch food all for very reasonable prices. They brew three regular beers and also do the odd seasonal too, such as winter or Easter brews. A large white building on Eutin's attractive main square, this brewpub is one of my favourites I've visited in Germany for it's all-round excellence of beer and food along with it's sociability.

- Find Markt and the brewpub is situated on the left-hand side (if coming from the station). Eutin's rail station is about 300 metres away; follow the signs to the centre, cross a road, carry on up a shopping street and you suddenly emerge onto Markt. The ZOB – bus station – is only a few metres further on past the rail station and you can catch the bus here from Neustadt if you time it right – see HAFAS for more details.

Hamburg.

Bräuhaus Groninger, Ost-West-Straße 47 and **Hanseat Bräuhaus**, Zippelhaus 4. From 17:00.

- These two places allegedly both brewed independently of one another in the past but are now firmly in the same stable, selling both beers in both bars. Hanseat is more of an upmarket eating place with a bar whilst Groninger is very much more of a “pub” in character and – more importantly – houses the brewery which is visible around the bar. The beers were very average on our visit and not half as interesting as the nearby warehouses!

- The two buildings back onto each other in the south of the city near to the *Speicherstadt* warehouse area. Take a U-bahn to Messberg, then walk west along Ost-West-Straße until you reach the Groninger on your left. Alternately, from the Rathaus, follow Bergstraße south until you hit Ost-West-Straße then turn left and Groninger is 150 metres on your right.

Bräuhaus Joh. Albrecht, Adolphsbrücke 7.

- A decent attempt has been made in creating a lively, relaxed pub atmosphere inside a hideous concrete city-centre building although you need to look carefully or you’ll miss it as it doesn’t look anything like a pub! The large copper vessels are centre-stage behind the bar and produce some decent beers; a pale and dark plus a seasonal is the usual script.

- Very centrally located next to one of the many canals in the centre just northwest of the hulking *Rathaus* and so, theoretically, easy to find. Take a U-bahn to Rathaus and you’re only a few minutes away but it’s more difficult to find than it may seem so be patient!

Gazza’s beers and pub of the trip.

More difficult this time owing to the high quality of most of the beers consumed during the trip, although a clear winner has definitely emerged in the brewing stakes!

- 1) Klüvers Brauhaus (Neustadt) Doppelbock 8.5% - Magnificent brew; a mighty monster with velvet gloves! Intense toffee, treacle, malt and chocolate but all in balance. Superb.
- 2) Klüvers Brauhaus (Neustadt) Pils – Just how a North German pils should taste; really bitter and hoppy with huge citrusy hop flavours and aromas and a crisp dryness.
- 3) St Michaelis Bräu (Eutin) Rotbier 5% - Dark brown beer with an intense roast caramel aroma and taste. Some perfumey hop present along with sweetness and more roast grain.

Pub of the trip - St Michaelis Bräu (Eutin) for it’s all-round quality of food and beer.