

Off the Tourist Track

Bitte ein Bitburg

By Barrett Baker



The prospect of going to Germany in February for Fasching — Germany's version of Mardi Gras — presented both excitement and some trepidation for me.

On the plus side, it was an exciting opportunity to interact with another culture while the mood was festive and the celebrations were virtually unlimited. On the potentially negative side, most of the revelry would be outside (because a parade anywhere else just wouldn't make sense) and my grasp of Deutsch was rather limited. Fortunately, the weather was unseasonably warm, and my wife (who was born in Germany) was fluent in the language and customs.

The most memorable stop on this particular trip was the city of Bitburg (or Bit Castle in English) in the Eifel region of Germany, located near the Luxembourg border. Bitburg was created approximately 2,000 years ago as a



Photo by Barrett Baker.

The center area of the town of Bitburg, Germany is part of a castle that dates back to 330 A.D. It now serves as a public area for shopping and dining.

stopover for traffic from Lyon (France) through Trier to Cologne. The Roman emperor Constantine expanded the settlement to a castle around 330 A.D., the central part of which

forms the town's center today. Bitburg is also home to one of Germany's most famous beers (aptly named "Bitburger") — sustaining one of the country's three largest breweries and the

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But our mission that particular morning, known as Women's Thursday, was to storm the mayor's office as the women in town were symbolically given the key to the city for the next six days of celebrations to come — an annual tradition of the city's Fasching celebration. The festivities included the introduction of Bitburg's Court — the "king and queen" who represented Bitburg at other towns' celebrations throughout the Fasching period — several speeches, a ceremony where the city's flag comes down and the women's flag, consisting of a large pair of boxer shorts with men's neckties stapled to them, were run up the flag pole, and a cocktail reception to honor the city's women.

Following the pageantry at the mayor's office, we had an opportunity to walk the cobblestone streets of the city. The center "castle" portion of town was permanently blocked to through traffic, allowing patrons to walk freely among the many shops and restaurants. There was also a park nearby that was within the busy streets of the city. I could imagine sitting on a park bench there on a warm summer afternoon, watching the swans as I enjoyed hand-made ice cream from one of the local merchants.

But this was Fasching and there was still much to do. As I reluctantly bid "Tschuess" to this wonderful city, I took solace in knowing that I would be back someday. And maybe I'd get that ice cream after all. ♦

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