

Translation of Travel article in Berliner Zeitung 18.12.04

<http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2004/1218/reise/0041/>

Translation drafted by Angela Skrimshire and edited by Wolfgang Floitgraf

Author: Ina Pachman

HUNSRÜCK

Between Fiction and Reality

On the track of the “Heimat” films

The lady on the staff of the Tourist Information Centre in Morbach is still amazed to this day. “They came from America, even from Australia. Just to see Schabbach and the house where Edgar Reitz was born.” She could press into the hands of the travellers from afar brochures about the Mittelgebirge with footpaths, bridleways and cycle tracks. She could recommend to them accommodation at farms and vineyards, tell them something about the Celts and the Romans. But there was no guide to the “Heimat” film locations. The Americans must have been astonished at that. Back home they would have laid out a route to the scenes – all entirely genuine! – even before the film was ready to broadcast. A tour to Schabbach, to the castle ruins at Baldenau, to Lucie’s villa, Eduard’s mayor’s house, to Simmern or another of the 45 places.

I am thinking of Maria. Of her face, the smile in her eyes, and I can hear her calling little Anton, Ernst and Hermann, her nestling. Maria is one of the few memories from television that have lodged in my head, which I can recall as required, to show an image of my mother’s generation. An image of a woman who was so strong when it was a question of her own children’s wellbeing, and so kind and humble, too. 20 years ago Maria Simon was the leading character in Edgar Reitz’ family saga “Heimat”. She brought into our Brandenburg living room a piece of Germany about which I knew no more than that Schinderhannes had lived in the forests there, and which I learnt of from that rhyme that presumably was not in my geography book: “Mosel, Nahe, Saar and Rhine enclose the Hunsrück all around”. But Schabbach made a big impression. This village, that in the first of the eleven parts of “Heimat”, could easily have been in the Brandenburg region, was then in the later postwar episodes quite different from my own Heimat, shown in films called “Ways over the Land”, or “Chronicle of the March (of Brandenburg)”. Schabbach lay in an inaccessible part of Germany.

There is no Schabbach. The Hunsrück village is a compilation of several places that really do exist. Gehlweiler is one of them. There stands the house of the Simon family, with the smithy and the barn, where Maria lived with her sons, with her parents-in-law and her brother- and sister-in-law. A plaque saying “Paul Simon Foundation, Detroit, USA” beside the front door refers to the fact that it is an original Hunsrücker slate-shingled, half-timbered house, built in 1773. This plaque is the sole relic of the filming in the eighties, and only to be explained by true “Heimat” fans, who remember that Paul, Maria’s husband who went away to Detroit, had brought it. Also no one suspects that, behind the door with the little handwritten sign “Simon’s Smithy”, horses could still be shod, so completely is it equipped. There is no indication there that for 16 hours of television Edgar Reitz had made Schabbach and the house, number 26 in Gehlweiler’s Main Street, into the “Middle of the World”.

One might think that the Hunsrücker people would want to be left alone among themselves with their memories of the times when “Heimat” and 20 years later “Heimat 3” were filmed. All the same: when the the Hunsrück Tourist Board was set up in 1998 the slogan evolved, “Heimat is Hunsrück”, meaning the film too. But it was only with the current television broadcast of “Heimat 3” that the Hunsrück was first noticed from the tourist point of view as the scene of the chronicle. There are bus tours with Eva-Maria Schneider, who played Marie-

Goot in the first series and can still recite her lines today. And not only her. Wherever she turns up she is recognised. In Morbach a woman comes up to her with an old photo of a Marie-Goot Schell. In the film, explains Eva-Maria Schneider, she herself was supposed to be born a Schell. “And I really was born a Schell” says the woman with the photo. The two look at each other meaningfully: “Our Edgar!”.

Helma Hammen too will conduct bus tours. Twenty years ago she was to be seen as a girl of easy virtue in the first “Heimat” series, and for the third she spent two long years casting extras. 2,478 Hunsrückers collaborated as extras in “Heimat 3”. She is a guide to the Günderrode House above Oberwesel-on-Rhine. Just as in earlier years the house in Schabbach was the meeting place of family and neighbours, so too for the new generation is this half-timbered house. A type of building common to both East and West Germany, it lies above Oberwesel-on-Rhine, in the most beautiful spot in the world, as Hermann and his wife Clarissa think. Heimat can also mean a house, says Edgar Reitz. Geographically, it stands just on the border of the Hunsrück, in the film only a stone’s throw away from Schabbach, but turned towards the outside world. “What Hermann originally thought of as a significant demarcation, looking towards the Rhine Valley and its culture”, explains Edgar Reitz in an interview, “fades away more and more over time, and changes into a gradual return to the Hunsrück.” For him the Rhine symbolises the current of History, it is a river that from Switzerland through the Netherlands to the North Sea connects the peoples – with all the darker sides of the modern world.

The tourist sees it from a boat trip on that most German of all rivers. The sights of interest on the bank to left and right are extolled over loudspeakers. The full tourist programme, Heine’s Loreley inclusive. Passing the Schönburg, there is a flashing glimpse of the Günderrode House between the trees. So enchantingly still. Yet up there in the garden pavilion you can hear the drone of the boats’ engines. Ceaselessly, day and night.

There remains the journey back into the Hunsrück. Perhaps to the “Twin trees” in Mannebach, the symbol of everlasting love and the tree where Hermann dreamed. Two trees, that stand so close to each other that their crowns look like a single tree. A romantic little place. Or to the graveyard in Sargenroth, in which the people of Schabbach have also found their last resting place: Maria, Eduard and Lucie, Marie-Goot, Hermann’s brothers Ernst and Anton. Their graves are just as well cared for as the others, the real ones.

Information:

Hunsrück-Touristik GmbH, Tel.: 06504/95 04 60.

Internet: www.hunsruecktouristik.de

| See also: <http://www.heimat123.de/heimtour.htm>