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The oldest and longest ghost train („Geisterbahn“) in Vienna’s amusement park (famous for its ferris wheel) is said to make place for some kind of „new, modern attraction“. Therefore, we hurried up to fetch a ride in one of the old, small carts that have seen better times, where barely two people fit in. The mechanism pull the small cart with a sudden lurch forward and off we go speeding towards a sculpture of a monster ready to swallow us. In the last moment, the cart veers to the side with a jolt towards another beast threatening to grab us. Another jolt sideways and the play repeats itself over and over: skeletons, opening coffins, burning stakes, the deafening noises screeching in the background – a spectacle reminding one – a spectacle reminiscent like the Brexit debates in the House of Commons.

Will the United Kingdom survive that horror trip?
Still hoping for a „happy end“ is

Oliver Schuster



Spontangebrennen — a new Austrian governmentese buzzword, denoting a sudden malfunction or breakage in one of the supply lines of water, in power, gas or telephone lines or also of a sanitary sewer. It happened today when an underground water supply pipe burst and water had to be cut off in our quarter. Digging crews were brought in immediately to repair the damage; water was provided to the affected ones by a water truck. People lined up with cans and buckets reminding one of scenes around the end of World War II.



Emergency supply: People from around line up for water.

If there is no water

Experience with a burst pipe

In a large city few people expect a sudden interruption of water supply at their home. But one recent day this is what occurred around lunch time when water stopped coming out of the faucet; instead, on the street in front of the apartment building a massive water fountain broke through the pavement in a gusher.

What now? Call the emergency phone number at the waterworks? Well, no: There are easily accessed emergency numbers in case of brown out or black out, or if your gas supply stopped. But for water problems? Nope, there is no quick way to find a phone number for the water department at the website for the city of Vienna ... though it says: „In case of problems with the public water supply network and its branches, including problems with your water meter,

„Vienna Water’ maintains an emergency service“. But, no contact given, not even a phone number.

In the meantime, water flows down the street and around the cars parked on it. Finally two fire engines show up and block traffic access to



the street. The water torrent loosens dirt and pebbles from under the pavement making the street slippery and treacherous. After approximately half an hour the water outflow stops: main water supply was turned off at the nearest point which however even deprived a couple of blocks above the

water breakage of water supply. People found out that the water pump of a nearby park was not affected and rushed to it with their water cans. At least some water to flush their toilets. One doesn't want to think about a concurrent power failure knocking out all the elevators in the apartment buildings; people would have to haul their water cans upstairs — apartment buildings in our area can be up to five stories high — on foot.

**Caution! „Spontangebrechen“
(sudden malfunction or breakage)**

After that didn't take not long for a work crew to show up with their equipment. They started to remove the broken pieces of asphalt. Parked cars were pulled on flatbeds and moved out of harm's way. Slowly gawkers from the surrounding apartments assembled. The crew quickly worked with pick axes to remove the asphalt and get to the point where the pipe broke. People who were watching them started to discuss how long it possibly could take to have it repaired. The crew, digging the hole and securing the side walls with heavy planks wouldn't say: they could speak only broken German if at all. Even if they had they weren't yet deep enough to get to the breakage. The on-lookers did notice a couple of vans with foreign license plates, one from Slovakia, one from Hungary — the borders to these countries are only a distance of 60 km (approximately 37 miles) away. The van with the Hungarian plates also bore an inscription: „Katasztrófa elhárítás“; the first word was easy to understand even for non-native speakers. One could assume

that the city has on call (cheap?) emergency work crews from those two countries.

Not only the city. At construction sites it's not unusual to see small trucks and vans with foreign number plates, most commonly from Poland (P), Hungary (HU), Czechia (CZ), but



also from Slovenia (SLO) and Croatia (HR = Hrvatska) and from time to time from Serbia (SRB = Srbija) or Bosnia-Herzegovina (BIH).

Interestingly enough, in most cases despite being from different countries the workers don't have great difficulties communicating with each other; if they are from different countries bro-

Corrosion of waterpipe
made out of ductile cast iron.

Wiener Wasser
(Vienna Waterworks) as distributor informing the inhabitants.



Workers for Wiener Wasser (Vienna Waterworks) digging to find the break.



ken German pronounced with a heavy accent can do. Also, it seems that for manual work, language knowledge is of lesser importance.

Anyhow, after a while they reached the break: the cast iron pipe had rusted and finally broken.

Then, word passed around that a water tank truck would arrive „within the hour“, very much to the relief of everyone. Actually, on all the apartment building entrances, notices had been pasted that due to „SPONTANGEBRECHEN“ (sudden emergency) regarding the water system such a water tank truck would arrive as quickly as possibly — according to the notice, that service would be provided until midnight.

The expression „Spontangebrenchen“ (sudden emergency) was not something one could find in the estab-

lished German dictionaries, some of the older people probably had to try to guess what it should mean a sudden breakage of a water supply pipe. It may be debatable whether „sudden“ was needed to be mentioned when it comes to such a breakage.

It’s amazing how the bureaucratic language has to make such an effort to come up with such convoluted new expressions, to underline their image of competence and sovereignty. Bottom line: the work crew managed to repair the pipe, water supply was restored by nine P.M, and the next morning the dig was filled and already covered with asphalt for the traffic to flow smoothly through the street. □

Stainz is a market town of nearly 9000 inhabitants located to the south of the capital of the province of Styria, about half an hour per car, on the well maintained Federal Road #76. Driving into town one arrives at the beautiful main square (Hauptplatz), most likely in place of the village green in olden times, surrounded by typical rural small houses reminiscent of centuries ago. There are cafés, restaurant, village taverns, bakeries, butchers next to quaint little stores ... favorably comparing to the thoroughfares of larger towns with its boarded-up and long closed and deserted small shops.

An Archduke as the Mayor of the Town

On a hill above the town, a former monastery of the Augustinian Canons Regular. Emperor Joseph II, eldest son of Empress Maria Theresia, had most of the monasteries secularized among them also Stainz's monastery; 1784, ownership was turned over to the imperial state. Lacking the support of the monastery's clerics, it slowly deteriorated till 1840 Archduke Johann bought building and real estate for 250 000 guilders (very roughly, US\$ 6 million in today's money). He had the building renovated as a castle; he also introduce modern (for its time) methods of agriculture and forestry in the area. The Archduke was a very unconventional person, a maverick within the imperial family: he married a commoner, Anna Plochl, daughter of a postmaster in Upper Styria. In 1850, the grateful burghers of Stainz elected him as their mayor.

In Stainz castle there is a „universal“ museum, in remembrance of the Archduke called Joanneum, with exhibits related to agriculture and to hunting. Even today, the castle is still in possession of the descendants of the Archduke, who were ennobled after the Archduke's marriage receiving the title Counts of Meran.

Archduke Johann travelled extensively, among other destinations also to England, in those days the foremost industrialized country, where his visit inspired him to introduce excavations of iron and metallurgical processes. In 1840 he founded the Styrian Institute for Mining in Vordernberg, today University for Mining, Metallurgy and Materials in the nearby city of Leoben. He also launched the idea of a railway line from Vienna to then Austrian Triest, across the Semmering mountain pass, the world's first true mountain railway still in operation today.

Schilcher Weinstraße

Impressions from a trip to West Styria



„Flask Train“ (Flascherzug) from Preding to Stainz

You could call it „little sister“ of the railway line across the Semmering mountain pass: the narrow-gauge train between Stainz and Preding. The train is still pulled by a real steam locomotive, the whole distance of 11.4 km (about 7.1 miles). The line's operation was started in 1892, mainly to carry freight: wood and pumpkin seed oil (for which the area is famous).

After a while, passenger transportation was added, mainly for people who wanted to consult the healer Johann Reinbacher who lived in a farmer's building called Höllerhof which led to his nickname „Höller Hansl“. People from all over Styria and even farther places made the pilgrimage to „Höller Hansl“; they took the main train line



king the consistency of their urine; then, he prescribed them different types of herbal tea which he had concocted out of herbs collected in the surroundings. In the heydays, up to 500 people visited him in the hope to be cured of their various ailments. They all had with them their urine in little flasks (Flascherl) so that the railway line was given the moniker „flask train“ (Flascherzug).

The train had to stop its operation in 1980, because of lack of business. But Stainz town had other ideas: attract tourists with this quaint train and its steam locomotive ... built in Romania in 1986.

During summer, the train is filled with tourists being entertained with a harmonica player, and offered „sturm“ (grape juice in the process of fermentation to wine) made from the area's „Schilcher“ grape variety.

*Touristic attraction in Styria:
Steam train »Flascherzug«*



till Preding station and then changed to the narrow-gauge railway line to Stainz. „Höller Hansl“ had gained popularity because he claimed to be able to diagnose people just by chek-

Der Schilcher

The flasks that in previous times the people took with them to have their urine diagnosed have given way to a different kind of bottle: the wine this area is famous for, called „Schilcher“. It's pressed from red grapes „Blauer Wildbacher“; its color can vary between light pink and deep red. It is said that the name „Schilcher“ was derived from the verb „schillern“ (to fluoresce), to reflect the color of it. Production is limited to the southwestern part of Styria, made from grapes only of the same region, falling under the European Union's PGI („Protected Geographic Indication“).

The landscape in this part of Styria is known for its rather steep hills and their vineyards, generally surrounded by forests. At one end of a row of grapevines one still can discover a solitary rose blooming.

It is not so much for enjoyment of the people walking through the vineyards but rather as an early indicator of downy mildew which attacks roses earlier than grape vines. The vine grower then gets an early sign of potential infestation and can start spraying the vines early with pesticides to prevent damage to his vineyard.

However, a new application available on the internet, VitoMeteo, showing risk diagrams based on weather prognoses indicating to vine growers what the outlook is going to be for the next seven days, as well as twice-daily measurements in representative growing areas, thereby giving the growers a head start to prevent disease of their plants.



Harvest of Schilcher grapes near Marhofberg





Scarecrow – Klapotetz

To scare away birds a common sight in Styrian vineyards are, sometimes huge, mechanical scarecrows called „klapotez“, a loanword from the Slovenian language ... Southwestern Styria borders Slovenia.

Klapotz means „Klapper“ (rattle or flapper): the vertical rotor blades operate a system of clappers to scare away the birds. To balance to contraption, on the other end a broom-like device is mounted.

Every year, before the grapes are ripe, family and friends put up the Klapotetz and that's an occasion for a small celebration. After the harvest, at the latest around Martini Day (November 11) the Klapotetz is taken apart and stored for the next season. □

Impressum



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