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# The Northern Scot

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## TRAVEL

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### Full steam ahead for fairytale trip



Halberstadt town hall

The Hartz area of Germany used to be on the front line between East and West Germany, which has maybe saved it from being horribly redeveloped. The towns are remarkably preserved, timber framed old buildings in winding streets, just like some old film set where you expect Count Rudolph to appear on a horse at any minute.

We get off our modern HEX ([www.hex-online.de](http://www.hex-online.de)) train at Quedlinburg station, to see a gleaming black steam tank engine from 1939 at the other platform taking water. This was the 10.30 departure to Hasselfelder on the metre gauge Hartz network, a branch opened from Gernrode (8.5 kms) in 2006 to provide more connections. It would have to be sampled later.

First we went to our hotel, the Schlossmuhle ([www.schlossmuehle.de](http://www.schlossmuehle.de)), which is a converted mill, and is superb value for money and high quality. The afternoon was spent going round Quedlinburg, a UNESCO status town, with streets that look like they are straight from a fairytale – well worth a visit.

([www.quedlinburg.de](http://www.quedlinburg.de)). The next day we went to Wernigerode, just under an hour away by train. The station there, like all of them, is very well kept, with a good shop and facilities all in first-class order. For lunch we went and explored the town, finding many excellent and good priced restaurants.

Again, the town is fascinating, just like out of a fairytale, and worth spending much more time there.

([www.wernigerode.de](http://www.wernigerode.de)) The Travel Charm Hotel right next to the incredible Rathaus (Town Hall) is splendid ([www.travelcharme.com/gotisches-haus.de](http://www.travelcharme.com/gotisches-haus.de)) and our meal there was served with classic style. The whole town is immaculately clean, quaint, with surprises around every corner, keeping me busy snapping away, and the pedestrianised streets were filled with shoppers. It really was like going back in time – small shops, no sign of a supermarket, stalls selling local produce in the market square, and friendly people.



Wernigerode .... well worth a visit

We walked through the town back to the main station and caught a train to nearby Halberstadt which we explored before returning to our base at Quedlinburg, 121 metres above sea level (masl). The next day we caught a steam train to the top of the Brocken Mountain, where the station is at 1125 masl and the actual summit is at 1142 masl. This is in a beautiful National Park. We joined the steam engine and its three coaches. It was an odd feeling to be on a regular, daily, service train, but pulled by steam, something that I have not experienced since 1967. I was busy with the camera, despite the steady rain.

At Alexisbad a branch goes off to Herzgerode, and we descended for quick photographs, then on again to Stiege, which is amazing. Once the station stop was accomplished, we set off, ran slowly round a very tight loop, back through the station and off again in fine style. The next stop for us was Eisfelder Talmuhle where we had to change. Lots more photographs, steam everywhere, loads of people, and then we were off to Drei Annen Hohne, on a long train pulled by one of the huge magnificent engines.

At Drei Annen Hohne we changed again into the train to the summit. Even though the weather was bad, the unspoilt forest, twisting rivers and hills showed that this is a beautiful countryside. The rain and mist became worse. The long train forged on regardless, up through the forest, twisting and turning – the line actually goes round in a circle to gain height – and finally we arrived at the Brocken.

There the snow was hurtling past our eyes horizontally, the mist and cloud was so thick you couldn't see 10 metres. We had reservations in the large block building that had been the military listening post, now a hotel, but we couldn't find it. Eventually we located the café part. There was an option to go to the top to the observation tower, but not much point as the visibility was getting worse. Pictures showed that the views from here on a good day are magnificent.

After hot tea and cake, we returned to the station and our train. Steam engines were shunting around, but difficult to see them or hear them. We went back down to Drei Annen Hohne and caught the train through the 70 metre long tunnel down to Wernigerode, in the growing gloom of an October day. The network is mainly a tourist line now, and to ride in two axle end-balcony coaches and be able to get on and off at will, without being chased by rail staff, with windows that open so that you can photograph everywhere (although on our trip this was done sparingly due to the weather of course) is a liberating experience.



#### Traditional entertainment in Halberstadt

The locomotive and coaches are spotless, and the buffet cars are also wonderful, producing tea and sandwiches, sausages (of course) and their own chocolate and wine all the time. The stations are very photogenic, and the staff are all helpful and very professional. The railway is a freight carrier, and a commuter service using the most modern tram – trains as well. The railway has a wonderful collection of historic vehicles too (see [www.hsb-wr.de](http://www.hsb-wr.de) for more details).

There are many offers for inclusive trips, groups, family tickets and so on. Combine this railway interest with the fascinating towns and the great scenery, and one can see why 1.1 million people ride the trains and visit the area each year. It is thoroughly worth a visit. I did not know that Germany held such an attraction. The quality of hotels and food is excellent and the prices were very favourable – a big plus with the pound being so low these days.

