West Wiltshire Rail Users Group

Annual General Meeting, 1st March 2023 Bethesda Baptist Church, Gloucester Road, Newtown, Trowbridge

1. AGM

2. From West Wilts to Sicily by (Inter)Rail

Agenda

- 1. Apologies for absence.
- 2. **Minutes of AGM 8th March 2022**. Copies are available on request from group secretary as advised in April 2022 Newsletter (No. 143) Adoption of minutes.
- 3. Report by Chairman for year 2022 Adoption of report.
- 4. **Report by Membership Secretary and Treasurer** including accounts for year to 31/12/2022 Adoption of report.
- 5. Proposal for subscriptions for the year commencing 1st January 2024. Due to increasing costs of room hire, printing and postage, the committee are recommending that subscriptions be increased to £8 (single) and £10 (couple / family) Approval to Increase subscriptions.

WWRUG Profit and Loss Account 2022

£ 179

£ 65

£ 1883

	Newsletter	£ 151
	Publicity/Promotion	£ 17
		£ 256
		£ 250
Opening Balance		

Subscriptions

Income

Deficit

Closing Balance

WWRIG Membership **93** as of December 31st 2022

WWRUG Membership 93 as of December 31st 2022

Accounts checked and verified as a true and fair record

Agenda (2)

6. Election of Officers and Committee

Chairman: Richard Cowell

Treasurer and Membership Secretary: Rob Brown

Secretary: John Baxter

Publicity Officer: Vacancy

Committee: Rosemary Buchan, Graham Ellis, Horace Prickett, Ruth Vincent.

Re-election of officers (en-bloc)

- 7. Update on proposals in new May 2023 Timetable including MetroWest.
- 8. **Any Other Business**. And date of next meetings

West Wiltshire Rail Users Group - Chairman's Report for 2022

One might have hoped that with Covid being pretty much behind us now, 2022 would be a much better year for our train services. The government ran an excellent promotion in Spring 2022, offering cut price tickets on certain routes when booked in advance to encourage people back onto the trains. I took day trips to Penzance, Ebbw Vale, and a short break in Newcastle where I sampled the efficient Tyne and Wear metro. With inflation being higher than it's been for years, many of the rail unions have been arguing for pay rises for their members. With the government digging their heels in, this has led to numerous strikes with few or no trains on strike days. Unfortunately, this will not help in encouraging people back onto the railway and has likely negated any good done by the promotion. This is just one of the many threats to our rail services and passenger facilities that we have been faced with during the year. Since the demise of the Rail Franchising system, the government through the DfT now directly control the train operating companies under National Rail Contracts, the latest one applicable to GWR runs to 583 pages! Unfortunately, this means that there are severe restrictions limiting GWR and SWR on how they can operate. We are constantly hearing that "the current level of public expenditure on the railways is unsustainable" and "we need to get best value for the taxpayer". To this end our ticket offices are threatened and even long-distance services through our area are operated using unsuitable ex-suburban trains, often with too few carriages.

We endeavour to keep members informed of our campaigning and during the year circulated four newsletters (one more than in 2021!) and arranged four public events – three public meetings and a guided tour. The first of these was our AGM at the Swan Inn in Bradford where an unfortunate double booking relegated us to the cellar bar. Although cosy, attendance was such that everyone was able to get in and formalities were followed by a talk by John Baxter on progress with the S&D at Midsomer Norton.

In early May I attended a meeting with representatives from SWR and Network Rail along with other stakeholders in Salisbury where we were updated on efforts by SWR to improve both performance and the wider customer experience on the West of England line, and given an opportunity to air concerns. This was followed in August by a very informative visit to the SWR and NR joint operating centre in Basingstoke.

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The start of the new timetable in May brought another disappointment with the withdrawal of through GWR services to and from Brighton. I wrote stating our objections to Andrew Murrison MP who did reply but unfortunately only re-enforced our concerns that the government are looking to achieve savings anywhere and everywhere they can. Committee member Ruth Vincent rode on the last train which was well patronised and the occasion marked by GWR.

Later in mid-May, Graham Ellis escorted members and friends on a guided tour of Melksham, focusing on buildings and features relevant to the railway and transport in general. Sadly, this was not well attended - probably not helped by the train service through Melksham which lived up to its unreliable reputation.

At our July meeting in Westbury, Mike Sutton gave us a talk on his life on the railway, including many amusing anecdotes and showing how much the railways have changed over the years.

In August we wrote to both our local MPs expressing our serious concerns about threats to ticket offices at our local stations, both responded and Michelle Donelan wrote directly to Mark Hopwood (GWR's MD) echoing our concerns.

Finally, in November in Trowbridge, Niomi Pritchard, Jon Morgan and Ben Scott from GWR presented us with a performance and information update which gave members an opportunity to talk directly to managers from GWR.

At regular intervals during the year, we are invited to 'dial in' (normally Zoom) to stakeholder meetings with GWR. We don't always like what we hear, but this does give us the opportunity to hear plans first hand, and to ask questions via online chat. We will continue to campaign vigorously on behalf of our members, fighting cuts to services and facilities, and look forward to the extra trains which are promised under the MetroWest program.

Richard Cowell, Chairman, February 2023

Update – services from May 2023

- * Bristol to Westbury local services up from 1 to 2 per hour
- * One service calls at Freshford and Avoncliff
- * That's in addition to Cardiff to Portsmouth service

- * One train every 2 hours (continues) to Weymouth (slight increase)
- * One train per hour continues to Warminster and usually to Salisbury
- * Most of these extras call at Dilton Marsh
- * Cardiff to Portsmouth remains hourly
- * More services to be 4 car class 158 trains

Stop press – these are WoE funded changes

- * Early Westbury to Swindon train cancelled
- * Loss of Saturday afternoon service
- * Extra evening train added Westbury to Swindon and back
- * Through Summer Saturday train Swindon <-> Weymouth

Stop Press information – looks like the Westbury ↔ legs at least are all year

- * No great changes on services via Taunton?
- * No great changes on services to London via Newbury and Reading?
- (Early morning Plymouth superfast now runs via Chippenham and Bath)

Further afield

- * Bristol to Gloucester up from 1 to 2 trains per hour
- * Extension to Worcester up from 1 every 2 hours to 1 every hour

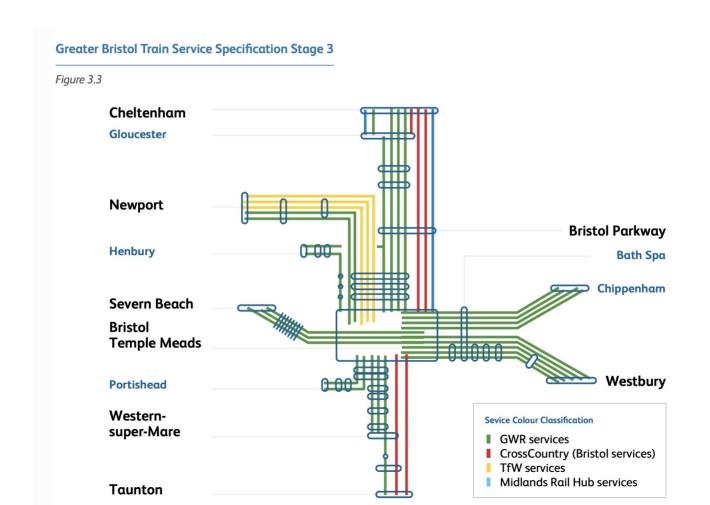
Reliability issues Capacity issues

These are draft plans put by CWR to NR for validation

STOP PRESS - 16:00, 1st March 2023

Now NR Validated and with DfT for final sign off

The shape of things to come?



From West Wiltshire to Sicily

Last October and November, I took advantage of 50 years of Interrail's 50% discount and bought myself a two month first class global pass for €439 ... and at 12:30 on 11th October I joined a 747 at Melksham Station

That's 158 747

158-747 ... first change Chippenham, and the start of a Golden trip around Europe - a dozen countries, over 160 trains.



... first change Chippenham, and the start of a Golden trip around Europe - a dozen countries, over 160 trains.



I would tell you hardened travellers here of overcroweded train, breakdowns and cancellations across Europe. Of rail replacement buses, difficulties finding hotel, boring journeys and curly-edged sandwiches. I have a couple of problems with that:

- 1. Everything was pretty good for the most part, so I only have a few such stories.
- 2. My wife is in the audience and I want to persuade her to come along on a similar trip this summer.

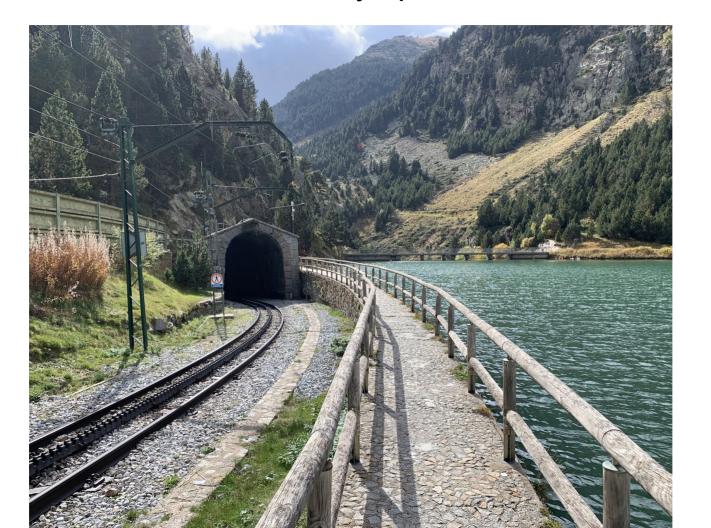
Day 1 - Melksham to Paris and onwards onto the couchette. Change at Chippenham, Paddington, Farringdon, St Pancras, Paris Gare du Nord and Montparnasse. Awake the next morning, we climbed past Andorra to the end of the line at Latour du Carol



Trains of three different gauges come together at Latour. All three are electrified. I changed from the 4'8" French system to the 5'3" Spanish train towards Barcelona, but only as far as Ribes



... where I took the rack railway up to Nuria - 24 hours from home



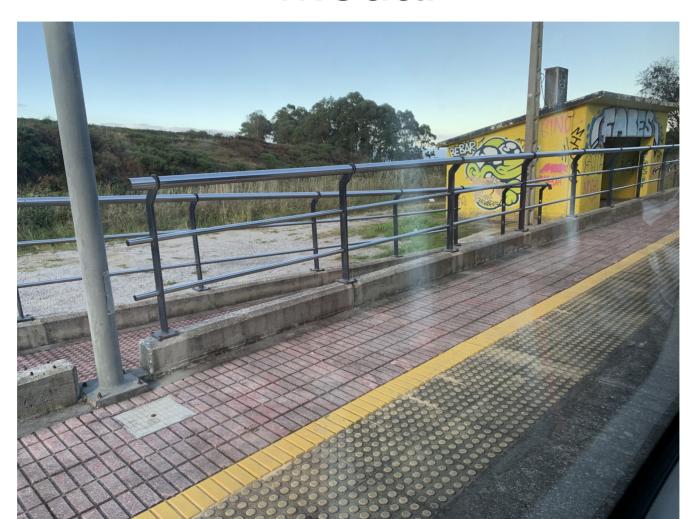
I do hope you're not looking forward to a day by day recounting of my travels - because you're not going to get it.

I'm going to pick out some place. Talk about features of travel. Look at some things we could learn from here in the UK.

Seven sections!

1. Places have the most interesting names

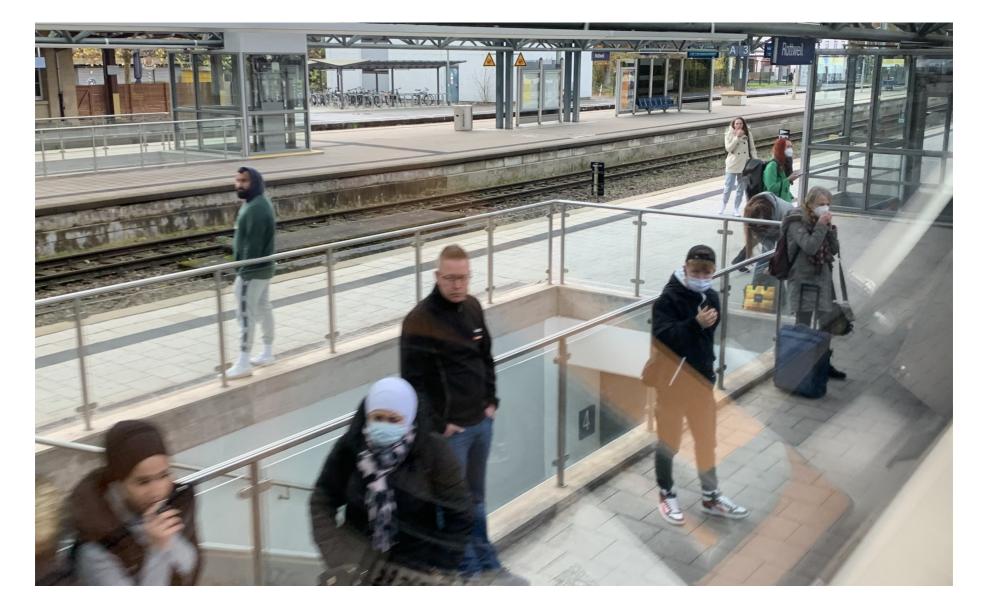
Medal



Singen but not in the rain







Sweti Daniel



2.	International	services	are thin
		00.1.000	

Klangenfurt → Malibor



Passau



Aachen → Belgium



Basel → France



Faro → Seville



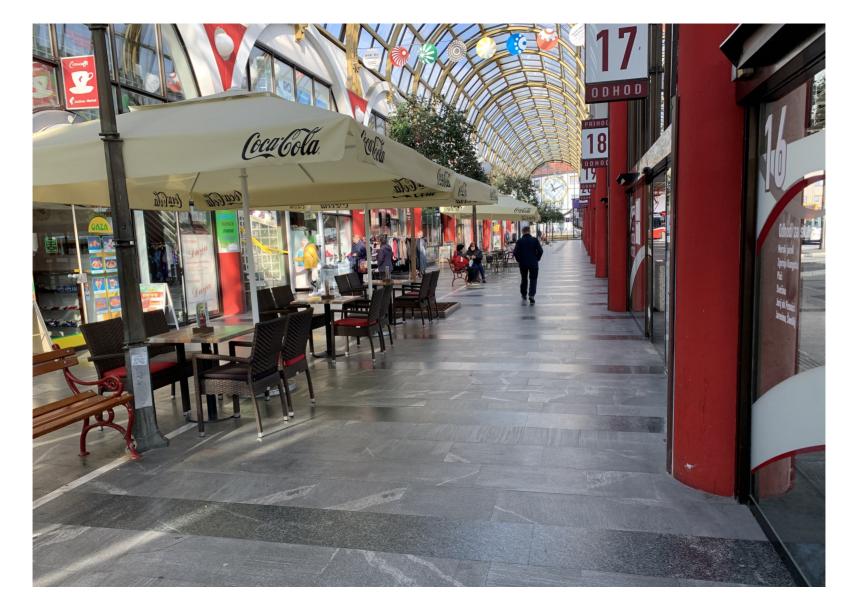
Cherbourg



3. Thoughts of people - Maribor and Dresden

Aerial bombing of Maribor by allied forces during World War II was one of the most tragic episodes in the history of the city. Although the bombing was aimed at annihilating Nazi industrial facilities and paralysing the city's roads, it was the civil population that suffered the most. People were losing their property, roofs above their heads and their loved ones. Whole families, from old men to newborn children, were trapped under the rubble of their own homes.

Between 7 January 1944 and 12 April 1945, there were 29 air raids, in which 1518 allied airplanes dropped almost 16,000 bombs, which completely devastated or badly damaged 47% of the city's buildings. In bombings, 483 people lost their lives, 60 of which were children.





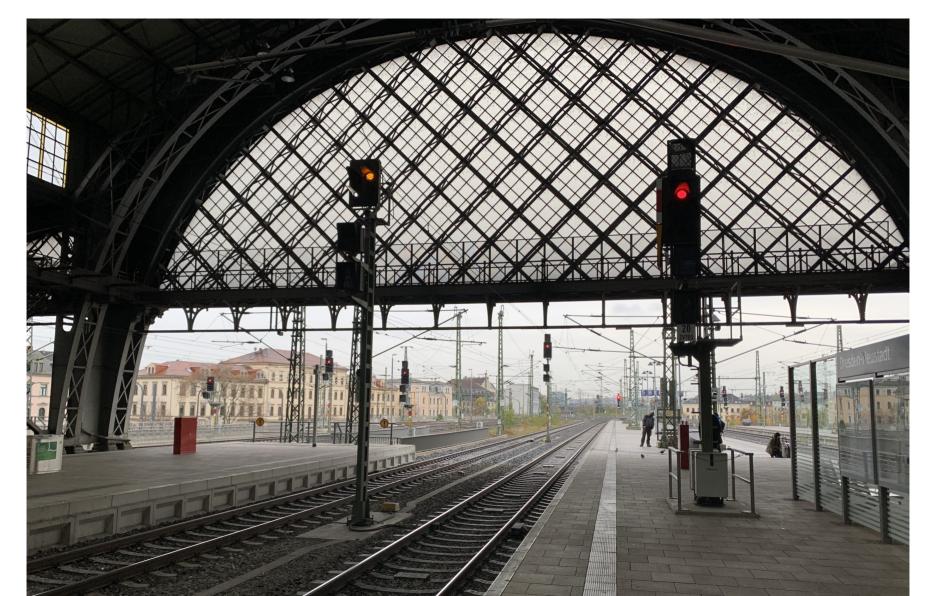






Dresden





4. Beautiful Places

Cobh



Enniscorthy



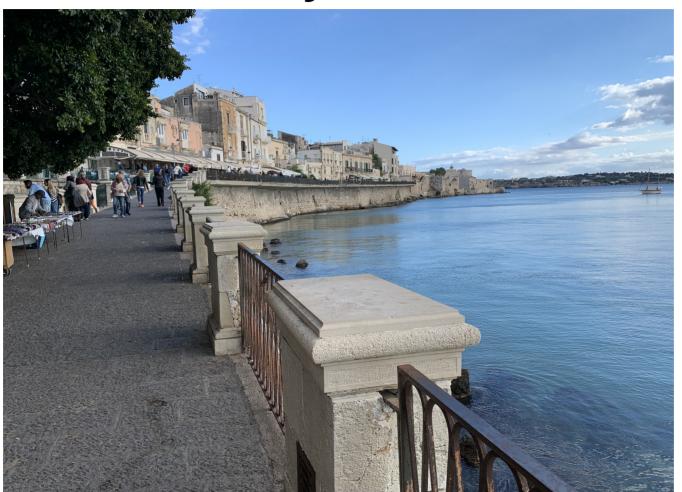
Paris







Syracuse





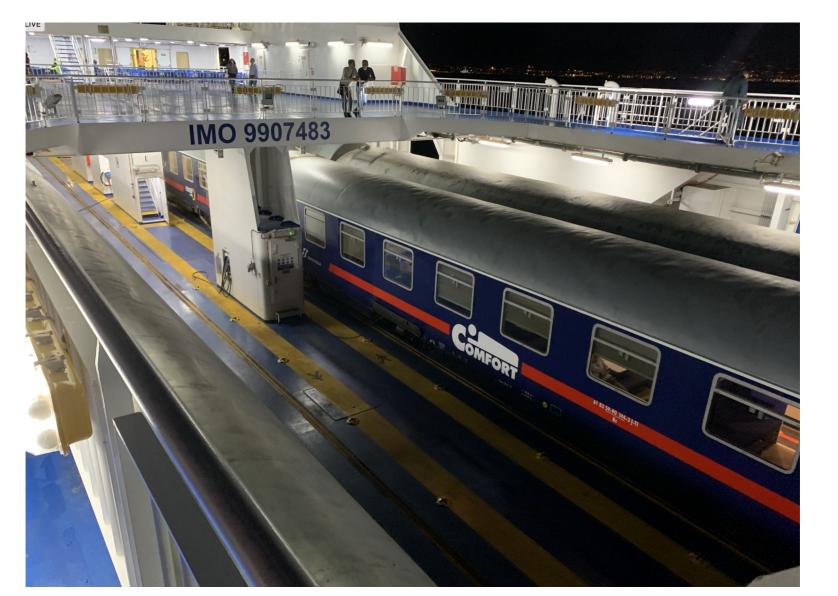
5. 168 "Interesting" trains - or are they all trains









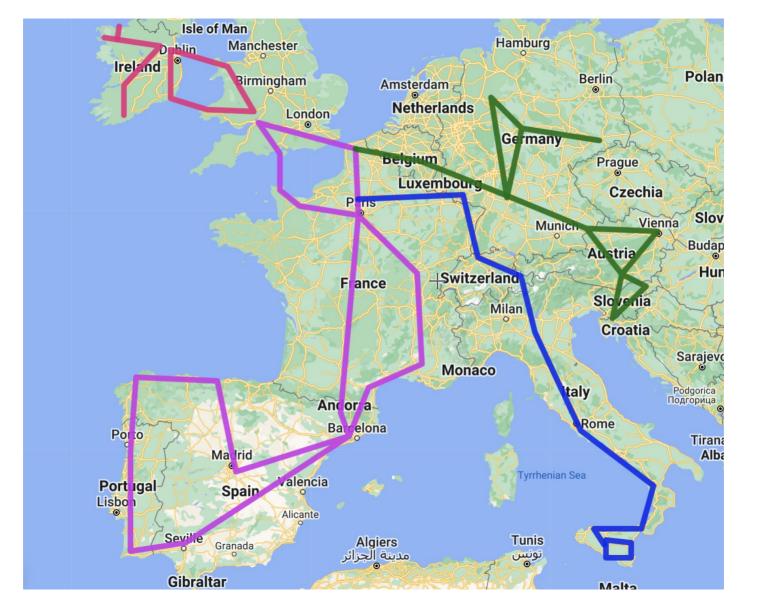






6. Back and forth

- * To Paris on Eurostar (France, Spain, Portugal)
- * Back from Cherbourg with Brittany Ferries
- * Holyhead to Dublin with Irish Ferries (Wales and Ireland)
- * Back from Rosslare with Stena
- * Bristol to Catania with Easyjet (Italy, Switzerland, France)
- * Back from Paris on Eurostar
- * Stanstead to Dresden with Ryanair (Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Belgium)
- * Back from Brussels on Eurostar



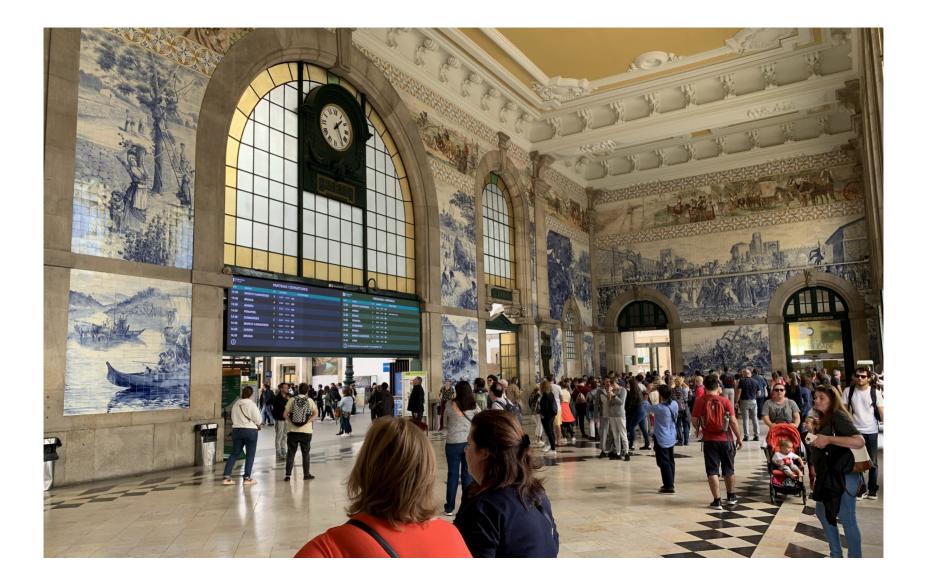
In case I run out of things to say











7. So what did it really cost?

Interrail - 32 days so €14 per day

6 Extra UK exits and entrances at €75 each

"Reservation" fees - say €250 in total

Food and lodging - say €70 per day for 28 days

Extra rail trips, bus, coach - say €250

Yikes - that's between €3,000 and €3,500

(I could probably have halved the food and lodging bill sharing hostel rooms)

Final legs – great to be home



Would I do it again?

Yes

- I would love to have Lisa as company. Other friends ok for a day or two.
- More in summer with longer days
- Longer to see places and to enjoy that company.
- I don't think that Dublin Dockland or Middleton would be Lisa's cup of tea
- Return to Sicily, Sarjevo and The Brocken in summer, and places on the way
- And I would love to see ... the list is almost endless
- Journeys anew. Narvik & Bodo, Poland & Prague, perhaps to and thru Turkey