Steam behind the Iron Curtain – East German Railways in the 1980s

In 1985 I was 14 years old and I had never been abroad. Up until then our family holidays had usually been to Scotland or Wales and typically involved visiting castles, climbing mountains and getting drenched by rain. I was therefore rather surprised when my dad suggested a trip to Germany. And he didn't mean West Germany, but the rather trickier East Germany, then still under Communist rule. He had learned that steam trains were still in use there, though in decline, and he wanted to see them while we still had the chance. Being a railway-focused holiday, it was to be just the two of us, and he planned a three-week itinerary covering most of the areas where steam was believed to still be in use. In those pre-internet (indeed pre-computer) days, organising the trip must have been quite difficult, but my dad liked challenges of this sort. I was not aware of any problems in obtaining permission to visit, so long as we provided information on where we would be staying each night. My dad spoke hardly any German at all, so I don't know how he managed to book each of the six different hotels.

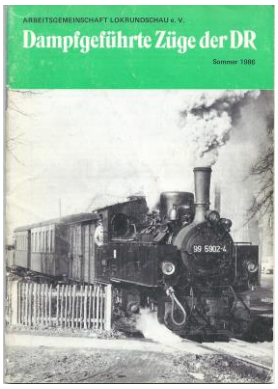
We set off in mid-July, by train to Dover, ferry to Ostend then an overnight Couchette train to Hamburg. My dad had a dislike of flying, although he never admitted to this being a fear. However, as his only experience of flights was during his military service in the late-1950s, it seemed a little unfair. I was happy enough, as it gave me a first look at railways in various western European countries. Before leaving we had bought the Platform 5 stock books for West Germany and the Benelux countries, so I had lots of numbers to jot down. By contrast, we were not aware of any similar books for East Germany, the only publications being a booklet listing remaining steam workings, published by a West German railfan group. We did later obtain some German-language books about trains in the East, while following reunification, stock from the East was included in books published in the UK.

The aim was to see main-line steam at work, like this class 52 heading a freight near Bischofswerda. *All photos by Thomas or Graham Young*

After a change of train in Hamburg, our first crossing of the Iron Curtain was between Lubeck and Rostock and predictably it was rather a time-consuming affair. Border staff came through the train checking everyone's paperwork. The actual border was quite a sight, with a broad swathe of cleared 'no-man's land', several layers of fences, armed guards and watch towers. We expected the return crossing to be stricter, as the authorities were naturally more concerned about people trying to leave the country than those trying to get in.

Most East German cities and many of the towns had tram networks, and Rostock was no exception. The trams here were rather vintage-looking 4-wheelers, which we later found were also used in many other towns, often alongside larger types. The Rostock fleet however included some unique articulated trams, with a short central section suspended between two 4-wheel cars.

It was while photographing some of these trams that we had our first brush with the authorities. A policeman approached us and was clearly unhappy about our activities. We were ushered to a nearby police station where our papers and bags were checked while a translator was sought. Few East Germans that we met spoke any English, presumably because Russian became the official second language after the division. Eventually we were told that photography of security buildings was not permitted, and the police station just



The photo that nearly got us into trouble. An articulated 4-wheel tram with trailer heads towards the station in Rostock.

happened to be in the background when we were photographing trams! We were let off with what I presume was a caution of sorts.

A few miles outside of Rostock is the small town of Bad Doberan, Bad translating as Bath or Spa. Bad Doberan was the terminus of a narrow gauge (NG) branch that ran to the coast at Ostseebad Kuhlungsborn. At the time there were ten distinct NG networks remaining in the country, although two were freight only and two others (the Harzquerbahn and the Selketalbahn) were joined up to form the HSB (Harzer Schmalspurbahnen). At the time of our visit, all lines were still operated by Deutsche Reichsbahn (DR – the state railway company). The Bad Doberan line was unique in having a track gauge of 900mm. All others were 750mm, apart from the metre-gauge HSB.

A 2-8-2 tank loco was on a passenger train in the station when we arrived, our first East German steam loco. As with all other steam locos, the livery was black with red running gear. For a person used to UK steam locos, with their generally clean lines, German steam would always look a bit 'untidy', with various pipes, levers and gubbins on the outside of the boiler. All narrow gauge steam locos were grouped together in class 99, sub-classes derived from the stock number being used to distinguish different types. The Bad Doberan locos were class 99.23, although this in fact covered a pair of 0-8-0 tanks as well as three of the 2-8-2s. With time for a snack we visited the station buffet and had another bit of language difficulty, my dad ending up with something that appeared to be raw mince and raw egg!

The special feature of the Bad Doberan line was that it ran along the roads of the town, including the main shopping street. Despite the lack of road markings, warning signs or traffic lights, the system seemed to work quite well, and we photographed a few passenger trains in this unexpected environment (the line was one of several to have no freight traffic).

Back at the main station, a pleasant surprise was the sight of our first standard gauge (SG) steam loco, a class 50 2-10-0 shunting a freight train. This was a lucky catch, since the allocations in the north of the country were in serious decline and were to disappear within a year or so. The loco was one of about 200 pre-war class 50s rebuilt as sub-class 50.35 in the 1960s, being fitted with new boilers and distinctive Heinl feedwater heaters atop the smokebox. The other main steam loco class still in use was the 52, also a 2-10-0 but built during the war to an austerity specification. Again, 200 were rebuilt as sub-class 52.8 in the 1960s. We did see a handful of original (unrebuilt) 50s and 52s along with some of the larger-boilered class 44 2-10-0s, the latter mainly being used as static steam generators or heating units at various sheds. Although the class 50 and 52 locos were broadly similar, the allocations were kept separate. Class 50s were to be found in the North West, West and South, while 52s were generally in the East. There were isolated pockets of each type elsewhere, along with a small number of class 41 2-8-2 locos in the South West, and there were a couple of locations where you

750mm gauge 2-8-2T number 99 2322-8 crossing the square in Bad Doberan.

Our first main-line steam sighting was of 50 3691-8 shunting wagons at Bad Doberan.

could (if very lucky) see locos of more than one class.

One more interesting loco seen at Bad Doberan was a Kof shunter. These diminutive diesel locos were mainly built before the war and hence could be found in both East and West Germany. All the DR examples had a black livery, unique to diesels since most other shunters were orange.

According to my notes (which were less detailed later on), our train back to Rostock was 50 minutes late and hauled by loco 112 326. Punctuality and reliability on DR was generally good, and the only other serious issue I can remember was a diesel-hauled passenger train breaking down (q.v.).

The 112s were centre-cab Bo-Bo locos, rather similar to BR's Clayton class 17s. Class 110s appeared identical, while we had also seen locos from classes 118 (somewhat like a BR Warship or DB V200) and Russian-built 132s. Later in the trip I was looking at the various numbers I had noted and I realised that 110s and 112s never appeared with the same number (eg 110 123 and 112 123). I surmised that perhaps the 112s had been renumbered from 110s, retaining their last three digits. This turned out to be correct, the change being in connection with the fitting of more powerful engines in the 1970s. There was also a third variant

My dad has a look at one of the tiny Kof shunters of class 100 at Bad Doberan. Note the painted stock numbers, and the height difference compared to the van coupled behind. The coaches on the right are narrow gauge.

Four of the five main classes of diesel loco were centre-cab 110/112s (above left), 'Warship' 118s (above right), Romanian-built 'U-boat' 119s (below left) and Russian-built 'Ludmila' 130/131/132s (below right).

with yet more power, these becoming class 114. A similar situation seemed to apply to the class 118s, this class also being unusual for coming in either 4-axle or 6-axle configuration. Many of the 4-axle class 118.0 locos were later given new engines as class 118.5 by adding 500 to the serial number. Slightly confusingly, the 6-axle 118.2 locos became 118.6, with 400 added, while the 4-axle 118.1s were not changed.

All main-line DR diesel locos carried red livery with white or cream relief, although the shade of red and amount of relief varied. They also carried cast numberplates on the ends and sides, apart from some of the Russian-built locos which appeared to have painted enamel numberplates. A huge number of plates must have been made when the computerised number system was adopted in July 1970. Under this scheme, numbers such as V180 154 were changed to 118 154-4, where the final digit was a calculated 'check digit'. The new system was very similar to that adopted by DB in West Germany a couple of years earlier, except that DR chose to classify diesels in the 1xx range and electrics in the 2xx range, while DB had done the opposite. Another difference was that steam locos retained their existing 2-digit class numbers. Thus 50 3501 simply became 50 3501-9. DB steam locos had been given 3-digit class numbers by adding a leading 0, and thus had their serial numbers truncated from 4 to 3 digits (as in 38 3711 becoming 038 711-8).

Several other classes of diesel loco were seen later in the trip, including classes 119, 120, 130 and 131. All four classes were imported, whereas the 110s and 118s were home-built. The 6-axle 119s were my favourite; broadly similar to the 118s but more angular and mean-looking. 200 of these locos were built at the charmingly named "23rd August Locomotive Works" in Bucharest, Romania between 1976 and 1985 but were somewhat unreliable in service and were often to be seen parked up at sheds. The 120s were rather dumpy 6-axle locos intended for freight and based on the M62 model which was used in large numbers in the USSR and other Eastern Bloc countries. These were all built at the "October Revolution Locomotive Works" in Luhansk (now in Ukraine), as were the larger 130/131/132 series.

Most diesel locos had hydraulic transmission and were fitted with steam train heating equipment. Exceptions were the Russian-built types, these all having electric transmission and (on the class 132s) electric train heating. Shunting locos were also mainly diesel hydraulics, including most of the Kof (class 100). Classes 101 and 102 were 2-axles loco, while 105 and 106 were 4-axle, all being painted orange. The distinction between the similar class 105 and 106 locos was a mystery at first, it eventually being learned that the 105 series was simply started once construction of class 106s had reached 106 999.

Electrification of main routes was being expanded during the 1980s, and was expected to reach Rostock the year after our first trip. For the time being, all services were diesel-hauled, including the regular shuttles to the nearby docks at Warnemunde. These utilised sets of push-pull fitted double-deck coaches. Twin deck coaches were common in many parts of East Germany, and not just in the urban areas. For example, we made the rather rural trip between Halberstadt and Wernigerode on numerous occasions and it was double-deck as often as not. I did like the double-deckers, especially the view from upstairs. The down-side was that the windows only opened a little way. Most other coaches had large opening windows, either the familiar half-pane pull-down type, or a curious arrangement where the top third folded down on the inside, and both were sufficient to get your head/arm/camera out if you were so inclined.

The Rostock double-deck sets were unusual for carrying a blue and white livery, not totally dissimilar to BR's corporate scheme. Most DR coaches were a plain dark green, with cream around the windows on express versions. There were other variations, including orange/cream express coaches, a blue and yellow scheme seen in some places, and brown/white double-deckers in Leipzig. Buffet and restaurant cars were normally dark red with Mitropa branding, though sadly I don't recall that we ever got to experience one of these. The trains were always free of litter and graffitti but often tended to be a little grimy, both inside and out.

There was a very standardised design of (single-deck) passenger carriage across DR, this having totally flat sides and no discernible gutter at the join with the roof. Doors were normally in vestibules at each end and usually had a folding section somewhat similar to those on BR's prototype XP64 carriages. Since many station platforms in East Germany were barely above rail height, steps up into the carriage were required. The folding doors including an

Rostock double-deck coaches were in a non-standard white and blue livery.

Some of the Dresden sets had vestibule sections fixed to the bogies.

Double-deckers in Leipzig were non articulated and also had an unusual colour scheme.

One of the ubiquitous 'Reko' coaches, seen at Bischofswerda. Note the folding doors and close coupling.

ingenious arrangement whereby the floor over the step-well was attached to the door, and folded upwards when the door was opened. On some coaches, the doors were nearer the centre, dividing the interior into three saloons. There were also 2- and 3-axle variants, these normally having large sliding doors at the right-hand end of each side. All of these types were referred to as Rekos (reconstructed), apparently because they had new bodies mounted on older underframes. Notable features of the Reko coaches were the large windows in the gangway doors (providing an excellent view of the loco or of the receding track) and the very close couplings – a rake of Rekos could look like one continuous carriage from a distance. Very few other types of coach were seen, just some with a curved tumblehome between the bogies and additional doors at the centre. There were also a few odds and ends dumped in yards or in departmental service.

The only steam we expected to find in the North East of the country was the NG line from Putbus to Gohren on the island of Rugen, and this was visited on our second day. Although to the common 750mm gauge, this line had a couple of unique loco classes, the 99.46 0-8-0 well tanks and the 99.48 2-8-0s. As with the Bad Doberan line, services were passenger only, with users being a mixture of locals and visitors to the seaside. Returning to the mainland at Stralsund, among many locos noted in the large sheds was something numbered 142 004-1, which looked otherwise just

The 0-8-0 class 99.46 locos on the Putbus line were unique in being well tanks. Note the NG wagons on the right, and SG coaches in the background.

like a common 132. We later discovered that six locos of this type had been built in 1976 with considerably more powerful engines. Also seen were some 4-wheel railbuses of classes 171 and 172. Fewer than 200 of these were built (along with a similar number of trailers) and it is interesting to note that these were the only diesel multiple units in use in the whole country. One of the class 175 TEE express units had been retained for charter use and a handful of older railcars were dumped at depots, but use of multiple units in general was very limited, the majority of services being loco-hauled. Class 171 and 172 railbuses could be found on minor branch lines across the country, while some other lines were worked by diesel shunters hauling 2/3-axle coaches. We didn't see any examples of the latter practice but it must have offered a rather sedate ride. Note that the DR system grouped all diesel-powered rolling stock (and accompanying trailers) in 1xx class codes, whereas DB used 6xx, 7xx and 9xx classes for diesel units.

Rare as DMUs were, EMUs were even less common, at least geographically. Berlin had a huge fleet of 3rd-rail DC units, but otherwise there were just seven overhead DC electric railcars, used on two separate isolated branch lines.

After staying the night in Sassnitz on Rugen (the most northerly town in East Germany) we spent all of the next today travelling almost the whole length of the country via Berlin to reach Dresden in the south, not far from the border with Czechoslovakia.

Along the way we saw our first electric trains and also a few aircraft. I was quite interested in planes at the time, and these were types that you definitely would not see anywhere in the west. I was able to identify SU-25 attack jets, MIG-23 fighters and MI-24 Hind helicopter gunships. Despite our earlier experience, I risked taking a photo of a flight of four Hinds passing overhead – I seem to recall we were in a deserted carriage at the time. Changing in Berlin,

The view from our hotel room in Dresden, taking in the main station and several tram routes.

we only had time to grab a snack before boarding a train destined for Budapest and formed mainly of Hungarian coaches.

Although there was little in the way of steam in Dresden itself, it served as a convenient base for exploring the south east of the country. To be found here were four NG lines and some significant outposts of main-line steam. Dresden was of course famous for having been extensively bombed by the allies in WW2. Much of the city centre had been rebuilt with modern architecture, generally rather bland, concrete boxes. Of the historical buildings that remained, some had yet to be restored, and this was one of the few places where tourists were a common sight, albeit mainly domestic ones. We were to stay in a new-build hotel overlooking the magnificent Hauptbahnhof (Hbf - Main Railway Station) with its terminal tracks and through lines at a higher level, all under a triple-barreled roof. From the rather cramped room we could also see several tram tracks, most of the trams in Dresden being of the bogie Tatra T4D type. These could be found in several cities and ran in pairs or triples, the rearmost being an unpowered trailer car. The non-driving end of each car had wraparound windows and a standing

A class 242 electric at Dresden, with a newer class 243 on the right.

There were well over a thousand of these 0-8-0 diesel shunters, numbers filling class 106 and spilling over into class 105. This pair at Dresden Hbf carried 'duty' plates 'Regina 16' and 'Regina 13'.

area inside, offering a brilliant view. One curious aspect of the Dresden trams was that, although they were operated by the municipal transport organisation, the cars were numbered in a series that seemed to be common with DR trains. For example, the bogie Tatras were class 222 with class 272 trailers, while a few older 4-wheel trams were in classes 213 and 214 with class 264 trailers. Even odder was a departmental works tram numbered 201 113-4. Berlin trams also had pseudo-DR numbers.

There was not a huge variety among the classes of electric locos. Classes 211 and 242 were boxy Bo-Bo locos built in the 1960s and early 1970s. The class codes for electric locos followed the traditional German practices as used for steam locos. Express passenger locos had the lowest class codes, then mixed traffic locos, freight locos, tank locos and so on. Thus the 211s were geared for higher speeds, albeit only 120 Km/h (75 mph) while the otherwise identical (and more numerous) 242s were limited to 100 Km/h (62 mph). Despite this, the 242s seemed to be handling most of the passenger trains around Dresden. It is interesting to note that, despite the division of Germany, there was initially still some co-ordination between the two railway companies and there was perhaps an expectation that the country would be reunited in the future. Thus the new DR electric locos were classified as E11 and E42 to follow on from DB types E10 and E41. Computerisation saw the former change to 211 and 242, and the latter to 110 and 141. DR also had two classes of newer electric loco. The 250 Co-Co freight loco had been introduced in 1974 and construction of the fleet of 273 was only completed the year before our visit. The mixed traffic 243 type was still being built and was not yet common in Dresden. Later in the trip we noted examples numbered up to 243 125-3, mainly around Leipzig, while construction continued until 1990 for an eventual total of 650 locos.

There were also two older classes of electric loco, both built during or before WW2. Class 244 Bo-Bo and class 254 Co-Co locos were to the 'bonneted box' layout. A total of about 85 had been inherited by DR upon its formation, of which about 20 of each remained in service in 1985. These all retained the traditional green livery (which had been replaced by red on newer electrics during the 1970s) though we only managed to see a handful.

Our first outing from Dresden was to the far south east of the country, where class 52 locos were still common. Zittau was about as far as you could go in Germany, with Poland to the East and (then) Czechoslovakia to the South. In fact the meeting point of the three borders was just a mile or so from the town centre. We had seen some CSD (Czech Railways) railcars on the way from Dresden, while we later crossed into Poland briefly while travelling to Gorlitz. These borders were much more relaxed than the last one we had crossed, comprising just small marker posts painted with the colours of the respective flags.

Also en route to Zittau we had seen several class 52 locos at work, and more were noted in the station and in the adjoining shed. Among these was 52 5137-6 banking a passenger train hauled by another 52. This was the only un-rebuilt 52 we were to ever see working.

A pair of class 52.8 locos on shed at Zittau.

Freight trains passing through included some hauled by CSD diesels, including hooded T466 and 'snorkel' T478 classes. As if that wasn't enough interest, Zittau was also the terminus of a steam-worked NG line. Running south towards the border and splitting at Bertsdorf into two branches to Oybin and Jonsdorf, the latter two villages were often referred to with the prefix Kurort (indicating a resort), as they were both originally mountain health spas. The line was to the common 750mm gauge and used chunky pre-war 2-10-2 tank locos numbered in the 99.17 series. More of the type were built in the 1950s and could be found on several other networks. We also saw 99 4532-0, an even older and unique 0-8-0 tank loco transferred from a closed line to act as Zittau station pilot.

The Zittau narrow gauge line was one of several to use these standard 2-10-2 tank locos.

We had a ride on the line to Kurort Oybin and back in carriages typical of most NG lines. These had verandahs at each end, on which it was pleasant to ride on warm days, with just a metal bar to stop you from falling off. Inside was also rather basic, particularly the toilets, where you could sometimes see straight down to the track below. At the junction of Bertsdorf, some trains divided and on later visits we managed to photograph simultaneous parallel departures. These also occurred at two locations on the HSB (q.v.), and they were perhaps arranged as much for the benefit of photographers as anything else. Also on a later visit we found an old diesel railcar locked inside the engine shed at Bertsdorf. One of a small number of NG railcars, this one was withdrawn in 1968 but was retained as museum stock. It still carried its pre-computer number VT 137 322. The Zittau line had some scheduled goods workings, as far as Olbersdorf (where there was a rail-served timber yard). However, I don't recall that we saw any freight.

My dad eventually managed to photograph one of the industrial electric locos on a visit in 1992.

After returning to Zittau we took a train to Gorlitz, hauled by a class 110 diesel but again banked by a 52. There was more steam action there, both working and on shed. Also present was unrebuilt 50 0072-4, one of a pair used here as heating locos. Gorlitz had a

Gorlitz. Hard to believe this was taken in the mid-1980s!.

small tram network and a rather antiquated feel to it. My favourite photograph looks more like 1950s Glasgow than 1980s Germany, and it shows a cobbled main street with surprisingly tall buildings on both sides and barely any traffic on the road. People have a preconception of communist life as being rather drab and there is some basis to that. Towns had noticeably fewer road signs than in the west and barely any adverts. Even the shop window displays were somewhat muted, while the choice of products inside was usually rather limited. Food shops in particular seemed very poorly stocked, both in quantity and variety. Some surprising things were more widely available and at very reasonable prices. I was studying design at the time and I found some good quality drawing equipment and stationary at a fraction of the prices of equivalents in the west.

Some of the larger cities also had shops that sold goods from the west (I seem to recall that these were called Intershops). However, you had to pay using western currency, which was impossible to obtain unless you had friends or relatives on the "other side". We had been required to change all our money when crossing the border so we, like most people, could not use these shops.

As well as briefly entering Poland, our train to Gorlitz had passed an industrial railway serving a mine. Such lines were not unusual, and they were usually run by blue versions of the standard DR diesel shunters, or by fireless steam locos. This line however was overhead electric with Bo-Bo locos that had a large pantograph on each bonnet. As such they looked similar to those used on the Harton Colliery railway in Newcastle.

Back in Dresden, we spent the next day exploring the city, including the transport museum of course, while the day after that we visited one of the two nearby NG lines. This was the Radeburg to Radebeul line, which you could get to by either tram or train from Dresden. We decided to take the lengthy tram ride to Weisses Ross, where the two lines crossed. From there, we rode the NG line to the terminus at Radeburg, then back to the main-line interchange at Radebeul. Along the way we met one UK steam enthusiast and also a small group of Australian 'Gricers'. Motive power was more of the 99.17 2-10-2 tank locos, with an older 0-10-0T out of use in the station yard. On this line we saw our first narrow gauge freight trains, and it soon became clear that NG wagons were not generally used. Instead, standard gauge (SG) wagons were loaded onto adaptor wagons, which comprised not much more than a very low chassis with rails on top. Because the SG wagons overhung at each end, the adaptor wagons were coupled using long bar couplings, while they were loaded using simple end-on, roll-off

At Weisses Ross, the Radeburg narrow gauge crosses a Dresden tram route.

At the Radeburg terminus, a standard 2-10-2T shunts SG wagons on transporters.

A class 250 rushes a long freight through Radebeul.

One of the passing loops on the Kirnitzschtalbahn.

loading docks. The wagons did look rather precarious but the system evidently worked and was also to be seen on several other NG networks.

Returning to the main-line, we took a double-deck train back to Dresden then stayed on as it travelled south along the banks of the River Elbe. This line continued into Czechoslovakia but we got off at Bad Schandau, crossed the river on a bridge and walked through the small town to the terminus of the Kirnitzschtalbahn. This was an unusual and rather rundown tramway that had been built to take visitors to the Lichtenhain Waterfall, some 5 miles away up a winding sylvan road. The antiquated 4-wheel tram cars in their unique yellow livery ran either in or alongside the road. I don't remember the waterfalls in particular, though we did have an hour to pass before returning to Bad Schandau. Also on the Elbe but closer to Dresden was Loschwitz. Here we once again crossed the river on foot, then had a ride on a funicular railway.

Finding a place to have dinner was sometimes a problem. In big cities like Dresden there was more in the way of choice but even there we sometimes ended up eating in the hotel. There were restaurants, but many of them were rather boisterous in the evening. In smaller towns, things got very quiet after dusk. Breakfast was another matter, and the larger hotels usually laid on a generous continental buffet with cereals, fruit, cheeses, cold meat and bread. It was often possible to sneak some of this out to keep for lunch. Perhaps my favourite food was Bockwurst; a hot sausage sold from small stalls such as one underneath the railway at Dresden Hauptbahnhof. There it was served on a square of cardboard with an optional squirt of mustard. Lovely! There was also a 'Milch Bar' or two in most towns, these always making me think of 'A Clockwork Orange'.

Parts of the Freital Hainsberg line were very picturesque, including this passing point at Rabenau.

The slightly precarious appearance of SG wagons on NG transporters.

Unrebuilt 50 1002 was stored beside the platform at Nossen.

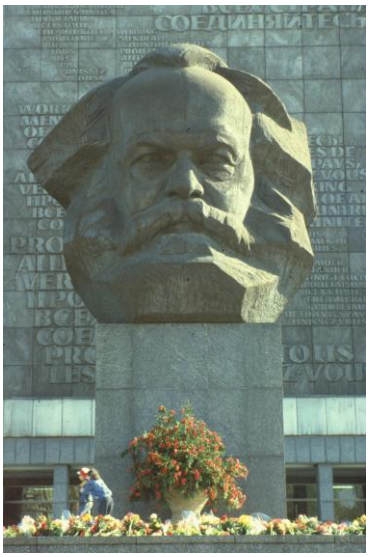
In the shed opposite were some live class 50s, and a rare 110.9, sadly hiding its more interesting end.

We visited the other nearby NG line the next day, this running from Freital Hainsberg (south west of Dresden) to Kurort Kipsdorf in the hills near the Czech border. This was the longest NG line we had ridden on so far, with a length of 16 miles. As the average speed on most of these lines worked out to about 10 mph, the trip took an hour and three quarters each way. It is easy to see why a visit to one of these lines could take up most of a day! Motive power was once again the chunky class 99.17 2-10-2 tanks, while freight (which ran as far as Schmiedeberg) was again mainly SG wagons on transporters. Having said that, there were several vintage NG bogie vans to be seen on this line, one of which was loaded onto a SG transporter wagon. We saw these transporters at various locations through the trip, including some rigid 4-axle wagons used to carry NG steam locos.

The next day we left Dresden and briefly visited Meissen (of pottery fame) before reaching Nossen. This had a steam allocation but was not on a major route, and I seem to recall having a long wait for our next train. It was not all bad though, as the engine shed – complete with a half round-house – was right alongside the station platform. One class 50.35 was in steam, though did not move, and there were two others parked up. More interesting was the presence of an unrebuilt 50 with the old 'Wagner' smoke deflectors (most locos had the smaller 'Witte' variety). This was clearly out of use, and had had its numberplates removed, though 50 1002 had been painted on. There were fewer than a dozen unrebuilt class 50s remaining at the time and most were stored or in use as heating locos.

Another interesting loco seen in the shed at Nossen was 110 970-1, a seemingly normal looking 'Clayton' but painted orange and with a very high number. Thirteen locos of this

sub-type were built in 1982 specifically for departmental duties. The main difference was that a power take-off was provided at one end, to transfer power to track machines such as ballast cleaners. Unfortunately the loco was in the round-house and only its plain end was visible. This would be a convenient point to mention the class 111, of which there were 37. Again similar to the core class 110, the 111s were intended for heavy shunting work and had ballast in place of train heating equipment. Built in 1981/1982 and painted orange, they were allocated to various major depots but we only ever saw two examples.



We eventually got underway from Nossen and reached our next city; Karl-Marx-Stadt, since reverted to its original name of Chemnitz, but referred to by us at the time as KMS. I always remember this as being the most noxious part of East Germany, in particular the nearby cities of Glauchau and Zwickau. The air quality in many built-up areas was a bit dubious. Firstly, there were the ubiquitous Trabant cars. Although car ownership was low – and I don't remember ever seeing a traffic jam – the vehicles that were in use tended to be a bit pungent. More significant was East Germany's reliance on Lignite for much of its industry and power generation. Also known as Brown Coal, this had a lower carbon content than normal coal, and its burning resulted in a slightly sulfurous odour. Germany was – and still is – the biggest user of Brown Coal in the world, although it is also common in Russia, the USA, Australia and various other places.

That's me in the upstairs saloon of a double-deck train in Karl-Marx-Stadt.

For contrast, here is my dad in a 4-wheel coach being hauled by a class 110.

Although some of the railway lines through KMS were electrified, it was one of very few cities in East Germany that also saw regular steam traffic, both passenger and freight. Adding to the attraction for us was the presence nearby of two NG lines, and of an outpost of a unique class of SG steam loco. Because of this, we were to be based in KMS for four nights.

On the first day we passed through Glauchau and Zwickau then onwards to Aue. Although a relatively small town, this had a largish engine shed, with a half round-house which could be clearly seen from passing trains. Biggest surprise was the sight of unrebuilt 50 1849-4 working through the station with a freight. As with the 50 at Nossen, this had Wagner deflectors, and it was officially a museum loco. We then headed onwards to Johanngeorgenstadt, near the border. This was one of several lines that used to continue into what was to become Czechoslovakia, although it was much more common for lines that crossed the East/West Germany border to be truncated. On our return journey our diesel hauled train paused at Antonsthal for much longer than scheduled. It soon became clear that the

The round-house at Aue with class 110 and 118 diesels.

Steam rescues diesel. A class 50 drops back after pushing our failed diesel into Aue. Alongside is a class 101 shunter.

86 1001 shunting at Crottendorf. The wagon appears to have no brakes at all.

Riding the mixed train back to Schlettau.

diesel loco had failed and in due course 50 3600-9 arrived from the North, ran past, then coupled up to the rear of our train and pushed us onwards to Aue.

The next day we returned to Aue (via a different route), then headed east to Schlettau. A branch ran from here down to Crottendorf, and although only 4 miles long and with just 6 return trips a day, it was well worth a visit. The single engine used on the line was a class 86 2-8-2 tank loco, a class once common around Aue but now with only one remaining in scheduled use. 86 1001 was the class pioneer, built in 1928 and another example of a "Traditionslok" (technically preserved but still in active duty). 86 1501 was the reserve loco and, when we visited the line again in 1987, we found 86 1056 also in use. Trains were mainly mixed, comprising 4-wheel coaches and goods wagons, the latter being shunted during the layover at Crottendorf. Travelling with us on this occasion was a large group of western steam fans on a guided tour, including

The Wolkenstein line appeared to be defunct, with some of their transporter wagons loaded onto a SG transporter wagon.

The Cranzahl ine was still working, though this 2-10-2T was loaded onto an SG transporter, perhaps for a trip to works.

some English. Railway enthusiasts were a very rare sight, though we did meet a handful from Holland and West Germany at other locations.

Only a couple of miles from Crottendorf was Cranzahl, the terminus of another of the 750mm NG lines. However, we could not fit a ride on both lines into a single day so we returned the next day. There were in fact two NG lines that branched off the main-line south from KMS, but that at Wolkenstein was said to be freight only. This line was allocated just 3 class 99.15 Meyer articulated steam locos built before 1921 and we had learned that it was due to be closed completely within a couple of months. However, when we called at Wolkenstein there seemed to be nothing working on the NG. In part compensation was 50 3646 shunting an SG goods train, while a curious sight in the yard was an SG transporter wagon carrying 2 NG transporter wagons!

We continued south to Cranzahl, then had a ride on the 10 mile NG line down to Kurort Oberwiesenthal, yet another 'resort' destination in the hills along the border. As with several other lines, the power was provided by 99.17 2-10-2 tanks and the trains included passenger, goods (SG wagons on transporters) and mixed services. At the terminus was another group of enthusiasts, quite possibly the same that we had seen the day before.

The next day we left KMS and made for Leipzig via Glauchau and Gera. The latter town was one of only a handful of places were class 41 steam locos could be seen. Having been rebuilt in the 1950s, these looked outwardly similar to the class 50.35 engines, but they were in fact 2-8-2s, with slightly larger driving wheels and a higher top speed. We were only able to photograph 41 1125 arriving with a passenger train from Jena, but we returned the following year and spent a bit more time in the area, seeing several more class 41s, and also lots of the Russian-built class 120 diesels. The latter locos were mainly used for freight, and were uncommon in

Class 41 locos worked trains between Gera and Jena. 41 1150 was seen at Jena in 1986.

The Russian-built class 120 freight diesels were common at Gera.

Gera had modern Tatra KT4 trams as well as older 4-wheelers. Note the light road traffic, and the lack of traffic lights.

many areas.

Gera was typical of many large towns in East Germany in that it still had extensive freight marshalling facilities. A short walk out from the station we found a bridge which crossed over a large goods yard that seemed busy with lots of different wagon types – block freight trains were rare, most being mixed. Most towns also had a loco shed, but Gera was special as it had two, one on each side of the goods yard, and each with a half round-house. It would appear that one was dedicated to freight locos, with the other for passenger ones. And of course most towns had trams, and Gera's were of interest due to their bright orange/cream livery and for the mixture of old 4-wheelers and modern Tatra KT4 types.

For now though we were headed to Leipzig, and this was a real eye-opener. The main station was almost unique in being a full terminus, with no through lines. But what set it apart was the scale. There were 26 platforms, all covered by a high, six-barrel vaulted roof. The concourse was huge and airy, with wide arches towards the platforms. It was like King's Cross on steroids. There were also carriage sidings and parcels platforms, plus large loco sheds a bit further out, and most lines were electrified. If you walked to the end of any platform, it was tracks, wires and trains as far as the eye could see. However, if you walked to the end of

It was almost impossible to photograph the whole of Leipzig station. This is a composite of three separate images.

Inside the grand concourse

Rails, wires and trains as far as the eye can see. The driver of newish 243 239 gives it a polish in 1987.

any platform, you would also attract somebody's attention. It has to be said that militaristic uniforms were everywhere in East Germany, and it was sometimes hard to tell the railway staff from the police from the soldiers. We were approached on numerous occasions while photographing trains, and we had enough German to get the gist of "Fotografieren ist verboten". I suppose we must have missed some photo opportunities as a result but we did OK, and fortunately never had any more incidents like the one Rostock.

The trains at Leipzig Hbf were very mixed, from locals to international expresses. Haulage was equally varied, including the 1960s electrics (211 and 242), the modern electrics (243 and 250) and all the main types of diesel loco apart from the 120s. The coaches included a lot of double-deck sets (non-articulated versions being more common here), and various non-standard colour schemes.

There were no named locos in East Germany. However, there were two forms of adornment to be seen on some engines. Firstly, a handful of locos (of various types) carried FDJ plaques, having been 'adopted' by the Freie Deustsche Jugend. Translating as 'Free German Youth', this was a state-run youth movement, membership of which was – as Wikipedia succinctly puts it – 'nominally voluntary'! The other individualisation was nameplates hung on each end of shunting locos at major

My dad was more successful in getting to Leipzig Engelsdorf shed on a solo visit in 1988. Present were class 254 pre-war electrics, some class 52.8 , and a large-boilered class 44 in use as a heating loco.

stations. These showed a name and a number and were believed to be akin to duty numbers. Examples seen included 'Regina 16' at Dresden, 'Riese 14' at Halberstadt and 'Rispe 13' at Erfurt. The names always seemed to start with the letter R, perhaps because shunting locos were referred to as Rangiersloks.

Away from stations we were generally left alone, and I reckon this might have been because of our fashion, or lack of it. Think 1980s 'Man from C&A'! East Germans were normally quite well dressed, often with bright colours, but somehow still looked 'plain'. It seems that we blended in quite well, the only clue to our tourist status being our cameras. Ironically, during the 1985 visit I was still using my first SLR camera, a second-hand Praktica. Praktica was based in Dresden and was one of very few East German companies whose products could be found in the west.

Leipzig was the biggest city we stayed in, and the city centre felt quite modern, with wide roads, traffic lights, pedestrian footbridges etc. There was more traffic than seen elsewhere, but also more trams, including four-track sections at stops near the station. Most of the trams were bogie Tatras as found in Dresden and elsewhere, but there were also 4-wheel trams, either like those in Rostock or of a wider-bodied type not seen anywhere else. We stayed in another modern, 'International' hotel, and I think it was here that we saw our only non-enthusiast Brits, with a UK-registered truck parked outside.

There was steam at Leipzig with a number of class 52.8s shedded at Engelsdorf. However, being used only on freight workings, they were not going to be seen from the main station. Instead we headed back to Dobeln (previously visited en route from Dresden to KMS) to photograph more class 50.35s. We had also planned to take a taxi from Dobeln to Mugeln (q.v.) but there didn't seem to be any! Back in Leipzig we spent the evening walking several miles in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to find a place to view the large engine sheds.

The next day we were to head generally west towards the Harz mountains, but we started by taking a train east to Oschatz. This was the terminus of another freight-only NG line, worked by Meyers as per the Wolkenstein line. Fortunately the Oschatz line was found to still be in use, and it was quite strange seeing 70-year old NG steam locos sharing a station with modern SG electric locos on express trains. Having said that, we also saw one of the pre-war class 254 electrics pass through on a freight. Even though it was a Sunday, there was a steady flow of trains, both passenger and freight. The NG operations were interesting, with an arriving freight train pausing to receive an extra loco from the station, before engaging in some complicated shunting. The line out of the NG station was uniquely mixed gauge, to allow SG trains to access a nearby factory. We returned to Oschatz in 1986 and 1987, and on the latter trip we also took a bus to the other end of the NG line at Mugeln, where we photographed four of the Meyers (two in steam) at the quaint loco shed.

After bouncing back through Leipzig (where we glimpsed a pre-war class 244 electric working passenger stock out of the station) we continued westwards to Halle, double-headed by an unusual

The narrow-gauge Oschatz to Mugeln line featured a stretch of mixed-gauge track (left) and used Meyer locos with the cylinders on both 'bogies' being towards the centre.

Several of the massive 2-10-2 tanks rest at Wernigerode shed, along with one of the ancient Mallet locos. The shed building was demolished after our first visit, though this actually made photography easier.

class 211 + 243 electric loco combination. There was no scheduled steam at Halle but it looked like an interesting place. Huge goods yards, two large engine sheds, a works dedicated to diesel shunters and railcars, and yet another tram system. One of the electric locos on shed stood out from the rest, as it was mainly white with stylised red stripes along the sides. This was evidently the prototype 243, built in 1982 and initially classified as a 212. We returned to steam territory at Halberstadt, where at least eight class 50s were seen. After a brief look at the town – which featured one of the smallest tram networks in the country – we continued on our final leg to Wernigerode, strangely in the same set of coaches that had brought us from Leipzig. The line through Wernigerode continued onwards to Ilsenberg, and had originally extended into what was now West Germany. Although it had the feel of a branch line, it was still busy with passenger and freight services, the former including local trains (often formed of double-decker stock) and long-distance ones to Magdeburg, Halle and Leipzig.

Wernigerode is now well-known to railway enthusiasts as being the northern end of the Harzquerbahn (HSB) NG system. This was the largest of the NG lines, both in track gauge (1000mm) and in distance covered. Two previously isolated networks had recently been re-joined and now totalled over 60 route miles. With the added attraction of SG steam relatively nearby, this was to be our base for the last seven days of our trip.

Our hotel was some way from the station, and as we studied the town map outside the station, an English-sounding chap asked us if we were staying at the Hotel Zur Post. This was Steve, who was also doing a 'grand tour' to see the remaining steam. He showed us the best walk to the hotel, along narrow streets of ancient, timber-framed buildings. The town had apparently had at least one major fire in the past but it looked in fine condition now, with all of the buildings fully restored and brightly painted. The Hotel was also a very old building, which made a change from the more usual concrete box. However, it was somewhat lacking in 'mod cons', such as showers, or baths for that matter. I seem to recall we had to share a bathroom with several other guests. On the plus side, the restaurant was excellent and it was there that we met another three steam fans from the west. It was good to be able to exchange news and tips on where best to see the trains.

The primary motive power on the HSB was a fleet of 18 class 99.72 2-10-2 tank locos. These were quite different to the class 99.17 2-10-2 tank engines on the 750mm gauge routes. As well as being somewhat larger, they seemed better proportioned and were very impressive-looking machines. The prototype had been built in 1931 but most dated from the mid-1950s.

After a day exploring Wernigerode and its stations (the NG loco shed was right beside the platforms), we had a very long excursion back towards the centre of the country. Passing through Halberstadt and Oschersleben we reached Magdeburg. This was one place

The line also had a couple of these 0-6-0 tanks, used for shunting and light duties.

Three steam-hauled freight trains were (just) visible at Brandenburg.

This example was working hard to get its long coal train underway.

More class 52s were at the coaling stage. Note the tub tenders distinctive to this class.

Brandenburg was modern but ironically felt a bit down-at-heel. The trams ran on metre gauge track.

In Brandenburg station was one of the rarer B-B class 118 diesels, with a 110 at the other end of the close-coupled Reko coaches.

Class 105 shunters were simply a continuation of class 106, and 105 162 was one of the last, having been built in 1982.

where all three main types of steam loco (classes 41, 50 and 52) could technically be seen, though workings were limited. We did note a 41 on a passenger train but our objective for the day was Brandenburg, not far from Berlin. An isolated batch of class 52.8 locos was based here for freight workings. In a couple of hours at the station we saw several steam-hauled freight trains, including a spell where three were present. Steam was also in evidence at the coaling stage beside the station, while a loco shed on the opposite side contained only diesels. We had a quick look around the small town but it was rather grim. Modern blocks of flats, modern trams (albeit unusually running on metre gauge track), lots of undeveloped land and lots of soldiers. Back to the station, it turned out that we had more time than we thought. The train we had planned to catch actually ran on Mondays *and* Fridays only, not Mondays *to* Fridays. The next train was not for two hours but fortunately we were able to make it all the way back to

Wernigerode, albeit not arriving until nearly 11pm.

The next day involved another long trip, including a ride on one of the oddest railway lines in the country. We started by taking the HSB southwards from Wernigerode. The first section of this line is very picturesque, through the town (including some on-street running) then climbing through wooded hills and including possibly the only tunnel on a NG line. Gradient posts showed that a lot of this section was at 1:30. We got off at Drei Annen Hohne, which was a junction station but the branch from here was off limits to us. It originally climbed even higher to near the summit of the Brocken mountain. From there you could see into West Germany, and the location had been taken over by the military as an observation and 'listening' post. As a result, the train service had been cut back to end at Schierke, though for security reasons normal passengers – and especially tourists – were not allowed to travel on the line at all. Since reunification the line has been restored to the summit station and has become a major tourist attraction.

Instead we headed off on foot through the woods. The trails were well marked with signs and maps and we soon reached the tiny village of Konigshutte – which we jokingly translated as King's Nose. Here we found a standard gauge railway passing over the houses on a bridge. It had overhead electric wires but it appeared impossibly steep to be a mainline route. We had found the Rubelandbahn, a unique line electrified at 25kV (50Hz) – the same as standardised upon by British Rail. Most lines in Germany were wired at 15kV (16Hz), though sources differ as to whether the alternate voltage was selected due to the gradients or to act as test-bed for future electrification. Special motive power had always been needed to serve the various mines and industries in the area, with huge class 95 2-10-2 tank engines used until the wires went up in 1964. The 15 new electric locos were similar in appearance to the contemporary classes 211 and 242 but

One of the special class 251 locos runs round at Konigshutte.

Running through wooded hills, the Rubelandbahn was twisty and scenic.

The severe gradients were most visibly apparent at the switch-back in Michaelstein.

One of the Mallets had been repainted green and was used with vintage coaches as a 'Traditionszug'.

Seen at Wernigerode in 1989 was one of the standard gauge 4-axle class 110 diesels modified as a narrow gauge 6-axle class 199.

were longer with three-axle bogies and large sandboxes for each wheel. They were classified as 251s in the freight series, though they also worked the passenger services.

We followed the line as it descended, and there was a gradient post that seemed to show 1:27. We later learned that sections of the line were as steep as 1:17. The line also included a kick-back at Michaelstein station, where locos on passenger trains had to run around – goods trains generally had a loco at each end. We eventually found Konigshutte station and, while we waited in a curious little booking hall, 251 010-5 arrived and ran around. On departure we followed the route that we had walked along, and it was remarkable watching the rooftops drop rapidly away as we climbed past them. Horizontal speed, perhaps unsurprisingly, was low at about 10mph. After a while, the gradient changed, and it was all downhill from there on. It was still very steep, as shown by the photo of the two diverging tracks at Michaelstein.

The Rubelandbahn ended at Blankenberg, a terminal station shared with diesel services from Halberstadt. There were also exchange sidings and (of course) a loco shed, with a round-house nestled in the triangle of lines formed by a cut-off used by through goods trains. As with many loco sheds, a couple of 'dead' steam locos were present (class 50s) along with most of the 251 electrics that were not out working on the line. More steam was seen as we took a diesel-hauled train to Halberstadt then another double-decker back to Wernigerode

The next day was August 1st and we once again started by heading south on the HSB. After the scenic climb already described, the remainder of the route to Nordhausen was a bit dull, being flatter and more open. The speed of the train did pick-up as a result, and the ride was hairy at times. Even so, the 37 mile journey took just under 3 hours. At Nordhausen we saw 199 301-9, one of very few NG diesels in use, all of which were shunters. As an aside, the 199 classification was expanded in 1988 when it was planned to replace most of the class 99.72 steam locos used on the main sections of the HSB with converted SG class 110 diesels. The SG Bo-Bo bogies were replaced by NG Co-Co ones, and the 10 resulting locos were renumbered in the range 199 861 to 199 892. They somewhat towered over the NG coaches, with the bonnets at the same height as the carriage roofs. It is not known whether any infrastructure – in particular the single tunnel – required modification, but fortunately it was decided to retain most of the steam locos as it was recognised that they were an attraction in their own right.

Nordhausen had a SG round-house, though it appeared out of use. We

Waiting at Gusten while our class 41 took on water. The folding doors on the Reko coaches are apparent, as are the steep steps and the fold-down windows.

boarded a diesel-hauled train for the ride to Sangerhausen, where the shed contained at least one each of class 41 and 44. The 41 later coupled to coaches that formed our next train, a speedy ride north through Sandersleben to Stassfurt. Although less than 40 miles in distance, there was a scheduled stop of 45 minutes at Gusten, during which the loco took on water. Here we met another enthusiast, who turned out to be East German. We bought some prints off him and promised to keep in touch by letter. Stassfurt shed was interesting as it contained a pair of class 44s and also two class 03 pacifics. These had also been rebuilt with new boilers but all had been withdrawn by the early 1980s, and this pair had disappeared within a year of our sighting. From Stassfurt we took a secondary line to Blumenberg, where a bossy stationmaster told us off for taking a photograph of a railbus in her platform, then onwards to Halberstadt and Wernigerode.

The following day was another round trip, but this time travelling clockwise. I was getting a bit bored of the Wernigerode to Halberstadt route, but this was the only way to start. We then awaited the arrival of a train from Berlin which was to take us to Thale. Steve had advised that this duty had been worked by steam recently and, although it arrived behind a diesel, this was replaced by a class 50.35 off Halberstadt shed. Thale was only 17 miles away but was a very interesting place. A terminus station, surrounded by factories and overlooked by high hills, all the tracks ended at a turntable instead of buffer stops, thus simplifying the turning and running round of locos. We noticed that there seemed to be a cable car going up the nearby hills so we set off to explore. It turned out to be a chair-lift, with single seats and just a fold-down bar to keep you from falling out. We had a ride on it anyway, and the views from near the top were amazing. The station was clearly visible, and the adjoining factory turned out to be a massive complex, with a couple of fireless steam locos working within. We had passed quite a few of these engines

Most stations were well looked after, though the staff at Blumenberg did not like us photographing this class 171 railbus.

at various locations, and there seemed to be a standard design with cylinders under the cab and a green livery. They did come in 0-4-0 and 0-6-0 variants though. The ride back down on the chair-lift was a bit scarier but offered even better views.

The next train out of Thale was hauled by a class 110 diesel, and we took this as far as Quedlinburg. There was an unidentified pacific steam loco here, in partly stripped condition, perhaps following use as a stationary boiler. The town itself was interesting, with lots of ancient-looking houses. It was nice to see that building work mainly seemed to be making good the existing architecture, rather than replacing it with new construction. Another diesel-hauled train, this time formed of a mixture of 4 and 6 wheel coaches, took us down to Gernrode, where we had planned a 2 minute connection to ride on the Selketalbahn. Our train arrived 5 minutes late but fortunately the connection had been held. Trains on this section of the HSB were mainly hauled by six ancient class 99.59 Mallet locos (built between 1897 and 1918) though there was also a unique 2-6-2T (99 6001) dating from 1939 and a pair of 0-6-0Ts from 1914 used for shunting and light freight. The

A fireless steam loco, similar to the ones seen working at Thale.

Although essentially just the end of a small branch line, Thale was served by long-distance trains, with three in the station together at times. The line of the chair-lift can just be made out on the hill in the background.

The view from the top of the rather hairy chair-lift at Thale. The station can be seen far below, along with part of the vast factory complex.

99 6001, the unique 2-6-2T, lays a smoke screen over Genrode station as it makes a spirited departure.

Equally impressive, 99 7234 starts the climb out of Eisfelder Talmuhle with just three wagons in tow.

22-mile trip to Steige was scheduled to take two hours and the line was not particularly notable scenically. At Steige we changed to a 99.72-hauled train for the short run down to Eisfelder Talmuhle on the main HSB. There was supposed to be a double-headed coal train departing shortly after our arrival, but the train had already been split into two shorter trains. These left in quick succession, leaving the station empty but swathed in smoke. We had time for a short walk in the woods before our northbound train arrived to take us back to Wernigerode.

We had made plans for the next day, but things did not quite work out. Firstly, we had found a model shop in Wernigerode, and I had decided to buy some aircraft kits. However, the shop was shut. Shop opening hours in East Germany were somewhat restricted but this was a Saturday morning! Our other aim was to visit a place called Spiegelsberge on the southern edge of Halberstadt, where the tram lines crossed the railway to Blankenburg, ideally in time to see one of the scheduled steam-hauled freights. It turned out to be a very long walk, but when we arrived we could see a class 50.35 in the distance. It seemed to be doing some shunting in sidings further up the line, so we waited. And waited. Nothing doing. Ironically we did photograph a 'steam train' on the level crossing, but it was a road 'Dotto' train of the type often used on seafront promenades. Quite what this was doing in a small industrial town remains a mystery.

Not the 'steam loco' we had hoped to see at Halberstadt Spiegelsberge!

That was our last day in East Germany (for now). The following morning we took trains via Halberstadt and Magdeburg to Stendal, then crossed back into West Germany. I have no memory or notes about the crossing itself, so it must have been relatively straightforward. We had a short break in Hannover, then took an express to Hoek in time for the overnight ferry to Harwich and (eventually) home.

We ended up making two more 3-week trips in the two following years. The 1986 trip revisited many of the same locations but was rather ambitious in that it started with a week spent working our way through Switzerland, Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. For 1987 we kept to Germany but had a night in the West at each end. Then my dad did two shorter solo trips (I was busy with A-levels), even though scheduled SG steam had ended in late 1988. Finally he visited twice more in the early 1990s.

So 1988 was the end of an era for German steam, but far more significant changes took place in 1989 and 1990, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the two countries. It

would perhaps be more accurate to say that the West re-absorbed the East, as the former was over twice as big and with nearly four times the population. Not surprisingly, many of the previously state-run industries in the East turned out to be unviable when compared to those from the West. There was widespread rationalisation and many facilities were closed down rather than being modernised. This had a knock-on effect on railway traffic, in particular freight.

The DR company was kept as a separate entity for a few years, though all rolling stock was renumbered into the western scheme at the beginning of 1992. Thus, for example, electric loco 242 001 became 142 001 and diesel 120 001 became 220 001. There were some cases where a simple change of initial digit would have conflicted with existing classes. The 110/112/114 diesels became classes 201/202/204, while the 118s became 228s. 211 electrics were reclassified as 109s and 250s as 155s. The 251 electrics became 171 to reflect their non-standard voltage, while diesel shunters were changed to various new 3xx class codes. All existing numberplates were removed and replaced with painted-on numbers.

The new Germany invested huge amounts of public money in the former East, modernising remaining industries and improving roads and infrastructure. However, in terms of railway operations, the decline was dramatic. Freight disappeared from many minor lines, and an increasing number of passenger services were turned over to multiple unit operations. I have recently revisited many familiar locations as an armchair traveller, using Google Maps. Places like Bautzen and Gera often retain much of their tracks, loco sheds and so on. But most of the tracks are empty and the sheds derelict.

Reductions in requirements meant that the oldest and least reliable locos were able to be withdrawn quite soon after reunification. Surprisingly though, some former East German types have proven to be acceptable and remained in use in quite large numbers across both sides of the country over 30 years later. These were primarily the newish class 243 and 250 electrics, but also the Russian-built class 132 diesels. Other unexpected changes include the de-electrification of the steeply-graded Rubelandbahn (apparently the inability of the class 251 locos to control power-doored coaching stock was a factor) and the conversion of the Quedlinburg to Gernrode line from SG to NG as an extension of the HSB.

This rare single-deck push-pull driving coach was seen at Halberstadt.

We did meet some jolly East Germans, though it has to be said that alcohol was often a factor! This chap at Halberstadt was carrying just a folding ruler. The engine sheds can be glimpsed in the distance.

Looking back on our trips, I now think my father was very brave to undertake them. So many things could have gone wrong, and our slightly arrogant attitude of not bothering to learn the language could have made any problems much harder to sort out. Ironically, even as technology now means we can be more prepared for adventures of this sort (for example using on-line maps, timetables, hotel bookings and even translation services), I think people have become more averse to taking risks. For instance, I would not feel comfortable taking my daughter to a place where we could not speak the language. Increased information also

A class 50 at Quedlinberg, with one of the distinctive spherical water towers in the background. The two uniforms strolling towards us no doubt asked to see our papers.

means the fun of finding things out as you go (as we had done with the DR diesel and electric trains) has been lost.

I am very glad to have had these experiences, though I was too young to fully appreciate them at the time. My only real regret is that we did not take more (and better) photographs. Film was fairly easily available in East German, and their Orwo products seemed to be of reasonable quality. However, our SLR cameras did not always produce great results, especially as my Praktica did not even have a light meter. I reckon that we achieved a roughly 33/33/33 split between photos that were good, just-about-usable and rubbish. On later trips my dad brought a second-hand 8mm cine film camera with him, and the results with this were even more disappointing. The picture quality (when held steadily) was fair at best, while the sound always seemed to be dominated by wind hiss. Still, it was nice to have the occasional night of cine and slide shows with my dad over the years that followed.

The notes that I took during the trips varied enormously. Sometimes I would just write down the loco numbers, with no details about locations, workings or even dates. At other times I would make a note of everything, including the subject and exposure details for each photo taken, and the time at which we passed through every station. I also sometimes made a journal of sorts, noting some of the more interesting events. These helped with writing this account, but it would have been nice if I had been more consistent.

Fortunately I hung on to all of my notebooks through several house moves. Digging them out and looking through them recently has helped with the details for this article, as well as bringing back many happy memories from over 35 years ago.

The small Halberstadt tram network included this curious reversal point surrounded on three sides by ancient buildings.

Table 1. Quantities of each DR loco class in use as at 1988. Figures in brackets show UK (BR) equivalents, though the comparisons are not really fair since BR made much greater use of multiple units.

Class	Qty
41	5
50	86
52	153
86	5
SG Steam Total	***249***
99 (NG)	89
All Steam	***338 (3)***

Class	Qty
100	297
101/102	534
105/106	1095
Diesel Shunters	***1876 (536)***
110/112/114	819
111	37
118	337
119	197
120	366
130	69
131	69
132	678
142	5
Main-line Diesels	***2577 (1554)***
199 (NG)	9
All Diesels	***4462 (2090)***

Class	Qty
211	92
242	275
243	240
244	23
250	260
251	15
254	14
All Electric locos	***919 (235)***
All locos	***5719 (2328)***