

Memphis Democrat

German Travelers Stop in Scotland County on Walk Across America

By Chris Feeney

July 18, 2007



Germany is quite a ways away from Memphis, Missouri. But each day Dr. Detlev Henschel and his partner Katrin Frommhold get a little closer to home. Each day they get about 23 miles closer, as that is the distance Detlev strives to cover as he attempts to walk across the United States.

The trek began March 17th in Santa Monica, CA, as Henschel wished to take in the historical routes across the nation, beginning with one of the most famous, Route 66. The German adventurer hoped to travel from sea to sea across the American continent, using ancient trails and famous routes such as the Santa Fe Trail and the old Pony Express route. He crossed the Mojave Desert via the Old Spanish Trail and toured the Indian Nations on the Zuni-Hopi Trail before starting north.

In all, the planned route will cover nearly 5,000 miles and is expected to last nearly nine months.

By the second week of July the travelers had found their way to Scotland County, Missouri. In 17 weeks, Henschel had walked more than 2,000 miles.

They came to the region for a number of reasons.

“To be honest it is the shortest way from St. Joseph, MO, to Detroit, MI. It was on our route, letting us hit Thousand Hills, which really caused muscle aches in my arms because of stick (Nordic) walking the rolling hills, 300 feet up, 300 feet down,” Henschel stated. “Plus we thought Scotland County, Scotland whiskey...”

With Frommhold following the walker in an RV, the team plans its route with camping sites at the end of each day's trek. One of the Missouri targets for the travelers was 1,000 Hills State Park in Kirksville. Another goal was the Battle of Athens State Park. Henschel hoped to be able to ford the Des Moines River after viewing the Civil War Battle site.

However the thunderstorms that had followed the travelers across much of Missouri, prevented this little swim, forcing the team to add another day of walking to get to the closest bridge into Iowa.

The team stopped in Scotland County and camped at the Catfish Place in Arbela.

“After a wonderful night on the Catfish RV park on Highway 136, with the croaking frogs, I met quite early in the morning a bunch of people in Granger where I was looking for Johnson Road leaving Scotland for Fox Valley Lake” Henschel said.

The locals were able to point the international traveler in the right direction, impressing yet another positive example of rural America upon the walker.

“On my way through the county a few people stopped and asked if I needed help, water or a lift,” he stated. “I had chats with farmers about the crops, hunting and the weather all the time. It is wonderful to walk through a country where people have time.”

The couple hopes to find more stories like this as they strive to reach Newfoundland, Canada and the Atlantic Ocean by November.

While Detlev does the walking, Katrin is busy documenting the trip via video, photography and writing. She is busily working on a book regarding the team's previous adventures walking in Australia and Japan.

While there may be a book in the works regarding the American journey, the two hope to return to Germany and spread the news of what they found in the United States.

“Americans are not the people like in Washington D.C. and New York City. You always have only the Desperate Housewives, Ally McBeal and Sex in the City people from television and in the news, that we over seas always get to see,” Henschel said. “My advice for tourists - get a travel guide from America and don't go to any of the places named in there. The rest is the real America, which is worth it to explore.”

The traveler has documented many of his meetings similar to the one in Granger, in a weekly diary of sorts that can be found on his website www.detlev-henschel.com.

“We have met hundreds of interesting people on this trip, several are listed in our diary in short, but there were two of real importance,” Henschel said. “The first was near Kingman, AZ. One morning I walked coming from Oatman into Kingman and a hitchhiker came from the other direction. We stopped and talked. He was heading up to Seattle and had no money (I had none on me as well) and he asked me, if I had breakfast already. He got two doughnuts for free and had one left if I would like to have the other

one. The rest of the day was quite unimportant to me after that.”

The second special encounter was in Soledad Canyon, CA.

“We were ending up the day at a campground where we parked our van next to a group of middle-age partying guys,” Henschel said. “Immediately they invited me for beer, so I joined them around the table. I told them my mission, but avoided drinking, as walking 23 miles with a headache would not be so good. When I left they told me that I was their hero and that they really would like to join me. I realized that one had only one leg and one was in a wheel chair. They were all Vietnam vets.”

The guys at the sawmill in Granger told Henschel they hoped his book would be available in English, as well as German. Who knows, maybe the hospitality of Scotland County will make it into print as well.