

The German Camping Club (1953)

Abstract

The economic upswing in West Germany in the 1950s enabled the return of tourism, which had largely ground to a halt during the final years of the war and the postwar period. With a growing number of Germans motorized, the popular new forms of tourism included “camping” in the pleasant countryside.

Source

The letter carrier brings mountains of new membership forms, circulars are duplicated and sent out, triptiques and carnets are compiled, preorders are taken for the promptly sold-out bumper stickers, pennants, and camping guides, member and newspaper files are completed, and thousands of inquiries are answered. More and more sporting goods stores are applying to become authorized consultants. The shelves are heaped with campground registers from all over Europe, guidelines for developing campgrounds, and a model of campground rules. Two dozen binders can barely contain the correspondence from the first four months of this year. The two large rooms and a staff of seven have long since ceased to be sufficient. This, then, is the office of the German Camping Club in Munich, Ainmillerstraße 25. The German camping movement is gathering around its green-black flag with a tent in the large “C.” Close collaboration with the automobile clubs goes without saying. The expansion of the organization in local clubs is making daily progress.

The whole thing is run with a sure hand by Dr. Eckart, chairman of the club and one of the oldest and most experienced pioneers of the German camping movement (how he does this on the side, being a businessman, is his secret). It all came about like this: the year was 1947, when two American officers he did not know and an English civilian contacted him. What was the matter with German camping? Something had to be done, and quickly, and no one was better suited than Eckart. After a few detours, this became the new start. Only a year later the club was founded, and shortly thereafter, when other German sports were still living in involuntary obscurity, it had already been accepted into the International Camping Association Paris, which today comprised 27 national clubs.

The German club had barely been born when the entire world starting writing to it with an average “daily output” of fifty letters. First question: “Where in Germany can one camp?” Unfortunately one could not, at least not at the sort of campgrounds that foreign fans of camping were used to. Eckart immediately began, systematically but without funds, to create campgrounds in the face of the usual foot-dragging and ignorance. Letters were sent to 2,200 West German communities. A questionnaire was included. “Inquiry sheet for campgrounds” it was called, and there was nothing it did not ask about. Five hundred communities answered back, with the Black Forest responding in a particularly friendly and receptive manner. In early 1953, the Club issued the Camping Guide with information about nearly 200 recognized sites. By now there are about a hundred more. Incidentally, it should be noted that France has around 3,000 sites, among them a great many superb private sites. It should further be noted as an aside that contrary to a widely held view, it is not America that is the home of the camping movement, but England. Germany, thrown out of the development by the war and by a period in which people were not particularly enamored of individual hiking, is now connecting up again. But the individuals with the urge to separate themselves are now invariably bunching together into new masses on the campgrounds. At least they are masses of like-minded people, which plays a certain role.

The campground in Lindau was created in the middle of last year. At this time it is the pride of German camping fans. Until September, they were counting an average “occupancy” of one thousand people a

day. The city of Munich is hoping to equal the Lindau site in comfort with the campground on the Isar, which is scheduled to open at Pentecost. Ninety thousand marks have been budgeted for it. A commission has scouted the terrain on Lake Constance. A buffet, a milk bar, the most modern sanitary facilities, showers, gas stoves for cooking are, alongside campground security, the least that Munich wants to offer, as well. On the Baltic Sea you can find campgrounds with rental tents. And there are lots of other things going on within the German camping movement. Sporting goods stores are exhibiting entire camping sets on ruined plots in the big cities. A wandering preacher of the camping movement is criss-crossing town and country, and wherever he shows his film about a summer with car and tent, he has a full house. Many communities are already publishing their own tent brochures. A thick guide "Munich-Naples" lists the nicest campgrounds located along the way. In short: in Germany, too, we are at a turning point to a new era of tourism, which has long since begun in other countries.

German industry has clearly recognized the goal. For the next years it expects an impetuous uptrend, which will raise the German camping movement to at least the level of other European countries. In addition to old firms, who with a good dose of idealism did pioneering work in this area for decades and in the early days often had to endure ridicule, new ones are stepping onto the stage. The result will be tougher competition. The sight of one of the large international campgrounds shows the novice that a new consumer need is emerging here. Tents of every description and color, sometimes in adventurous combinations, shape the picture of a peaceful army camp of the twentieth century. The spectrum ranges from the tiniest one-man tent to the three-wing tent for families of six, including a car garage, battery-driven refrigerator and multi-burner propane gas stove, from the simple *Zeltbahn* tent to the pyramid and trapezoid-shaped tent, all the way to the Laplander cottage and the Indian wigwam.

[...]

Source: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 1, 1953; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann and Georg Wagner, eds., *Das gespaltene Land. Leben in Deutschland 1945–1990. Texte und Dokumente zur Sozialgeschichte*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 1993, pp. 335–36.

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