

021106 Velo Tour of Luxembourg: Ride to Vianden

I awoke on Tuesday, October 16 from a good night sleep at the hostel in Echternach and joined my French roommate in going down to the breakfast hall. Despite being in a dorm room with eight beds, we were the only ones in the room that night. Actually, the other dorm rooms on the hall were empty which meant lots of space. There was a group of students who greeted me with "bojour"s as I entered the room, but otherwise the hostel was not very busy. The hostel itself was in a castle like building a minute's walk from the center of town and so was very convenient. I breakfasted with my French friend on rolls, cheese, meat and coffee. At the end of the meal, the hostel staff also brought me more rolls and bread with which to make sandwiches for my ride. I had opted to buy the bag lunch along with my nights stay. The lunch also had juice, an apple and chocolate. Dinners can also be bought at the hostel, but I had decided to dine in town. All together, my bill for breakfast, lunch and a nights stay in the center of town was €17, not a bad deal. I put my sandwiches together and wrapped them in wax paper, cleaned up my place, washed my dishes and then gathered my things together for the days ride.

If I were to ever go back to Luxembourg, I would definitely plan to spend more time in Echternach. The town draws lots of tourists due to its beautiful hiking trails through the surrounding forests, but I was eager to start on my days ride to Vianden which lay about forty kilometers north. I rode through the center of the little town and down to the rivers edge where I would pick up the cycling trail to Vianden. There was not a route marker in sight, but this time it mattered little since I only had to keep the river to my right for the entire ride. During my planning, I had expected my ride from Echternach to Vianden to be the most beautiful part of the ride. The route followed the course of the River Sure which divides Luxembourg from Germany. However, the trail was next to a road on the Luxembourg side and of course there was a road on the German side which also ran next to the river. So although it was a nice ride, it was not as beautiful as the ride that I had made the day before.

Outside of Echternach, I came across a memorial at the point where the 5th US Infantry Division had crossed the river into Germany. During the course of the day, as I rode past towns or houses in the hills of the valley which the river ran through, I wondered what it must have been like to have lived here in the early forties. To have your modern house of the time sitting here on the hill with a view of the houses of your invaders a short distance across the river. Or to have been in the military as the soldiers worked there way through the pastures or past peoples houses as the armies played tug of war with the towns. It is very easy having never lived in a country where I war was being waged to think that war is something done in far off lands, even if we can watch it on the television. I remember seeing scenes from the war in the former Yugoslavia where soldiers were clashing in what was the Olympic stadium. Wars weren't supposed to be something that happened in countries that were modern enough to host the Olympics. Yet even in the European country, soldiers still crept past houses or modern cities were laid waste. I don't know if any of this makes sense as you read it, but it is a bit of an eye opener to be in a place where horrible battles were fought and to see that it is no different than home.

I decided to take a detour from the cycle route to visit the small town of Beaufort. The town has a castle from the 12th century that was described as being worth the

trip. Plus I could follow another cycle route the four kilometers to Beaufort and then back down to continue my ride. I turned up the road leading to the town and was confronted by a steep uphill climb. A few other cyclists came up the hill behind me, but they soon turned back. Whatever, how long could this hill last? It lasted the entire four kilometers to Beaufort as the narrow road climbed back and forth up the tall hill. I was so worn out by the time that I actually reached the town that I could no longer care about seeing the castle. But, I rode through the little village until I found the small valley where the castle lay. It was really nice and sort of the way that you would expect the ruins of a castle to look like. It was made of gray stone bricks with a large, circular tower in the front, turrets and slotted windows. The ruins were much more intact before the war, but of course the castle had been bombed at some point. I opted not to go inside the ruins because it had started to drizzle and I did not want to bother with taking my bags off my bicycle. But, it was worth the long ride up the hill to see the castle.

I managed to get my bicycle back out of the valley where the castle lay and up into the town, but not without my bags deciding that it was a good time to fall off of the bicycle. After the long ride, I was not amused. The ride up the hill had taken so long that it was lunch already and so I ate my bagged lunch in a little park outside of town. As I rode I saw lots of markers for the myriad of hiking trails which crisscross through the forest. The hikes must be beautiful.

I rejoined the main cycle route to Vianden and later came to a point where I crossed the river and then continued north along a cycle path instead of along the road. The path wound through the hills and past apple orchards and cow pastures with lots of Limousine cattle. After a few hours more I came upon the town of Vianden

Vianden is a beautiful, small town in the Luxembourg Ardennes. The town is nestled between the wooded hills of the valley of the Our River and overlooked by a beautifully restored chateau built upon a promontory which rises above the rest of the town. The chateau is breathtaking to look at and during my stay, I never got bored of just staring at the beautiful structure rising above the town. The massive chateau dates back to the 11th century with subsequent additions in Romanesque and Renaissance styles. The chateau was once the home of the counts of Vianden who ruled over the surrounding lands. The town itself was also home to Victor Hugo during his exile from France in 1870 and the town has not been shy to celebrate his stay.

After I entered the town, I endeavored to climb the cobblestone road leading up to the chateau. The road was narrow and was closely lined on each side by two story buildings containing lots of shops, restaurants and homes. I finally got to the top where I found the youth hostel right outside the entrance to the chateau. I could look back to see the town spread out before me as well as the remains of the city walls which used to encircle the town. I had arrived around 15:00 which was too early for the hostel to open. But, just as I parked my bicycle, rain began to pour down. This was the thunder and lightning kind of rain so I nimbly got my bags off of my bicycle and climbed the stairs to the entrance of the chateau where I would wait out the storm. The work of restoring the chateau had begun in the late 1970s and was still progressing as I wandered through the rooms. The rooms have been tastefully furnished with furniture from the period as well as displays of armor and artwork.

Although it was quite nice, the stunning view of the outside of the chateau is much better than the rooms inside.

The city is located near a dam which offers tours of the facilities which of course was high on my to do list. However, after the long ride and the rain, I did not want to put my bags back onto my bike and go back down the hill again. Instead, I poked around the town for a while and had a tea until the hostel opened. The women who ran the hostel were a jolly sort and very nice. I checked into the dorm room and for €2.5 more, the woman gave me the room for my own. It obviously was not the busy season and although there were other guests, they had all booked the double rooms for the night. I put down my address in Denmark on the registration form and the hostel woman was very excited because there was a Danish woman staying in the hostel as well and she promised to introduce us. I stored my bicycle in the basement of the hostel and ascended to my room. I had a beautiful room with large windows and an amazing view of the chateau next door. The deal simply could not be beaten.

After a shower and a stretch I set out on the town in search of dinner. I perused the menus and decided on a restaurant that had a special on German fare. However, I could not find the advertised special on the menu inside and so after waiting for some time for the waiter, I decided to leave. I am glad that I did because I found a great restaurant where I had a delicious French dinner accompanied by a Belgium Duvel. I happily made my way back to the hostel and had a great nights sleep.

I awoke the next morning and went down to the common room of the hostel for breakfast. I sat down next to a nice couple from Belgium in their 30s who were in Luxembourg for a holiday. The husband had just finished his Ph.D. defense in computer science and to celebrate, they had decided to come to Luxembourg for a few days of hiking. The Luxembourg hostels offer a three day hiking package which includes all meals, stays in hostels and maps. So, the couple had chosen three hostels and were hiking between the three of them. The hostel also offers a similar cycling package which includes a bicycle as well as room and board, but I had not taken advantage of the package. The Belgium couple saw my guide book to Belgium and Luxembourg and they were excited because they had never seen a guide book to their country before. I asked them where they would recommend visiting in Belgium and they responded that the city of Bruges should not be missed. We talked about Belgium for a while and I decided that I would have to give the country another chance at some point.

I gathered my things together and prepared to check out of the hostel. I chatted with the woman working at the hostel and she asked if I would not rather spend another night in Vianden. I seriously considered this for a while because the town is so very nice and everyone who I had met had been very friendly. My plan was to go to the museums in Diekirch, but I had not made up my mind where I would go to spend the night. I considered making the trip to Diekirch and then returning, but opted against this plan. But, if you ever go to Luxembourg, Vianden is a must see.

Suddenly, the woman behind the counter remembered that I was living in Denmark and with a good deal of excitement she led me into the dining hall where the woman from Denmark was eating breakfast with her boyfriend from Australia. The Danish woman started chatting in Danish and asked if I was cycling to which I said that I

was, but then switched to English, much to the disappointment of the woman from the hostel. She had not realized that I was just studying in Denmark and had had been excited to have two Danes hanging out in her hostel. After chatting for a time, I bid farewell to everyone and pointed my bicycle down the steep road leading out of the town.

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